

The Highland Council
ADULT & CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE
22 MAY 2013

Agenda Item	16.
Report No	ACS/55/13

Intensive Fostering Service
Report by Director of Health and Social Care

Summary

This report describes the main elements of the proposed Intensive Foster Care resource, and makes recommendations about the criteria for carer applicants, including support and fee payments.

1 Background

- 1.1 A small but significant number of looked after children require to be placed with trained and highly skilled full time professional foster carers. These are children and young people whose early life experiences have impacted on their social and emotional development, to the extent that caring for them is an exceptionally challenging task. These children are currently placed with Independent Fostering Agencies or in specialist residential units across the country.
- 1.2 The intention of establishing an Intensive Fostering Service is to retain more of these young people within Highland.
- 1.3 The Highland Council's investment in the continuous improvement of looked after children services is underpinned by the understanding that prevention of harm, provision of early help and protective, reparative care are the constant keystones of getting it right for every child.
- 1.4 For children who have experienced abuse and neglect, it is a challenge to achieve the right outcomes. The trauma of maltreatment and a young person's coping responses, can prevent or disrupt the experience of safety, comfort and predictability in the relationships on which he or she depends. The secure and attuned attachment, on which every aspect of development and future life chances depends, is not always available.
- 1.5 Early interventions with very young children offer the best prospects for recovery – developmentally, they have the shorter distance to travel. Older and more traumatised children require more thought, more time and more effort to find themselves in a safer place:
"Those who can stay with and touch these children, emotionally and psychologically, have the capacity to heal young minds. If relationships are

where things developmental can go wrong, then relationships are where they are most likely to be put right” (Howe 2005)

- 1.6 It has not been possible to achieve stable and fulfilling placements for some children within the Highland area using existing resources. Up to 50 children and young people are accommodated in residential and fostering placements outwith the authority.
- 1.7 A snap shot at 30 April 2013 indicates that caring for 10 children aged between 9 and 12 years, placed in residential and in foster placements out of authority, incurs a weekly cost of just over £30,000, which does not include the costs of travel and accommodation for social workers and families. This is in excess of £3000 per child per week.
- 1.8 The majority of these placements are not short term and include several children who have disabilities. While the positive developments sought through investment in universal and targeted services take time to accrue, the Highland Council is likely to have responsibility for children in similar circumstances for a considerable time to come.
- 1.9 As part of a strategy to reduce the growing costs of children being placed out of authority or with independent foster care providers, the proposal for an Intensive Fostering resource in Highland was agreed by the Adult and Children’s Service Committee in April 2012.
- 1.10 Funding of £0.5m over a period of two years was agreed for the development of this new resource. This enabled the recruitment of staff, and planning to take place on the details of the scheme, and the particular support that would be required by both children and carers.
- 1.11 Examination of similar schemes in other local authorities in Scotland, including the Specialist Foster Care Scheme that has been established in Highland for a number of years, enabled the strengths and challenges of these schemes to be considered and proposals developed for the new model.

2 The Children and Young People

- 2.1 Some children cannot live with their own family and need a permanent secure base that does not involve adoption. In circumstances when there is no prospect of return to the safe care of the birth family, there may be a need for creative and challenging work to support family contact, even though those relationships cannot provide security for the child.
- 2.2 The children and young people who will be considered for this scheme, will have the highest level of complex needs, which are often expressed through the most difficult behaviour. These “hard to place” children may already have had a number of different family experiences and may presently be living in a residential setting. Usually they will have experienced multiple placement moves including foster placements which have been unsustainable and have broken down.

- 2.3 They will all have difficulties with attachment. Most will have experienced abuse and neglect, resulting in trauma related problems from their exposure to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Some children will require care because of complex disabilities. A number of children will display behaviour which poses a risk to themselves and others. Some children will require a placement without other looked after children in the household.
- 2.4 The majority of children will be of primary school age, and they may remain Looked After until they are 18 years old. Some placements will be permanent. Others may be specifically task centred providing intensive supervision and support at a particular period of a child's life.
- 2.5 However, while the children are likely to be at the younger end of the age range, this resource needs to be available for children of all ages, including adolescents.

3 The Carers

- 3.1 Applicants will be resident in The Highland Council area and will be specifically recruited to provide foster placements for children whose needs cannot be met within the Council's mainstream fostering placements.
- 3.2 Carers could reside in any part of Highland, though the consideration of applications will require to take account of the needs of those children who require placement at any time. Careful consideration will be given to those applicants who live in areas where the infrastructure of resources required to support the child and carer may be limited.
- 3.3 It will be a condition of recruitment that the main carer will not have other paid employment. The carer must be available for the child and participate fully as a partner to the plan for the child.
- 3.4 The carer must have adequate accommodation so that the young person will have their own bedroom
- 3.5 The process for selecting the carers will be rigorous and detailed, including a formal interview. Recruitment will be 'general', but will also incorporate a 'profile approach' to recruiting for specific children. This parallel approach has proved to be successful in the past.
- 3.6 The applicants will be assessed and approved as Foster Carers under the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and the Family Placement National Standards, and will be approved for a minimum of two placements.
- 3.7 Once approved, the carers will be self-employed and will be responsible for paying their own National Insurance, Income tax and for making their own pension arrangements.
- 3.8 Carers will be expected to undertake an extensive preparation course, and will

be given the opportunity to have a placement in a residential unit for young people.

- 3.9 Applicants will require a qualification in child care equivalent to HNC/SVQ Level 3 or be willing to undertake study to achieve a similar qualification within a year of their approval, or have significant relevant experience (for example, experience of looking after and caring for children who have additional needs in a residential setting). A qualification or skills in counselling would also be advantageous.
- 3.10 Applicants should have the potential to develop or have the skills to provide reparative care to the children who display the most challenging behaviour as a result of the impact of traumatic experiences. The nature of the care is such that it will require carers to function and respond somewhat differently than when parenting their own children.
- 3.11 The carers should have a good understanding of attachment and child development and be skilled in understanding the needs of children who have experienced neglect and abuse. They will need to be able to demonstrate that they can deal appropriately with challenging behaviour and anxiety. The carers must have a commitment to continuous learning through experience and from training.
- 3.12 Any other children living in the applicants' household will usually be at least 12 years of age. The applicants' family composition and existing commitments must be able to cope with the challenges the children in placement will present on a daily basis. Measures must be in place to support birth children with this, including good resources external to their parents.

4 Support to Carers

- 4.1 There will be dedicated staffing support within the scheme for carers, providing regular and frequent contact, including access to staff when required. Carers will have close communications with the service, and be provided with training, personal and peer support.
- 4.2 The carers will receive a significantly enhanced fee, 52 weeks per year and an allowance for each child in residence. The enhanced fee structure will be linked to the child's needs.
- 4.3 Carers will be offered a maximum of 5 weeks respite per year, to reflect the intensive and challenging task they undertake. The Intensive Fostering resource will have the potential to recruit a carer who would provide carer breaks for others, and be known as a dedicated Short Break carer.
- 4.4 Successful placements will result in changes in the intensity of some children's needs in the longer term. Review processes will monitor the status of an intensive care placement over time. This will give carers and the Fostering Service opportunities to consider any additional placements.

- 4.5 Existing carers can apply to the scheme provided they meet the criteria, and they will be replaced by continuous recruitment of people coming forward to become foster carers.

5 Staffing

- 5.1 To support the new scheme, it will be necessary to dedicate a number of Fostering & Adoption social workers to recruit and train intensive foster carers, and provide them with a higher level of on-going support.
- 5.2 In June 2012, the Committee agreed the creation of four local Fostering and Adoption teams with one additional Team Manager and 1.5 additional social workers. This included additional management capacity, to ensure proper support and supervision of staff and the developing resource, and also to link with Education and Health professionals, whose involvement and commitment will be essential for a successful scheme.
- 5.3 A dedicated Intensive Fostering Social Worker will be the link worker for all carers recruited to the scheme. The worker will be experienced in recruiting and supporting Foster Carers and will be responsible for assessing all applicants for the scheme.
- 5.4 The Social Worker will be located in one of the existing Fostering teams and be managed by a Fostering & Adoption Team Manager. The worker will specialise in the development of the Intensive Fostering resource whilst also being part of the larger, Highland wide, Fostering and Adoption Service. This will ensure they have an overview of the future resources required and the children who are likely to need this service, to inform future recruitment.
- 5.5 In addition, a Social Care Worker will be recruited to create flexible but consistent capacity to provide additional planned and crisis support to both the child and the carers.
- 5.6 Carers and professionals will also work closely as a team around the child, involving a range of critical professionals in Education, Psychological Services, Health, Social Work, Disability Services and CAMHs.
- 5.7 Carers within the Intensive Service would also have access to the other various supports across the Fostering and Adoption Service.

6 Implications

6.1 Resources

It is proposed that Highland Council pay an annual fee of £31,413 (HC9 point 38) to an approved carer in the Intensive Fostering resource.

Carers will also receive a weekly allowance related to the age of the child. There will be birthday, Christmas and holiday payments each year, plus reimbursement of appropriate additional expenses incurred. These various

costs would be in the region of £8000 p.a..

On-going training and development for each carer will cost approximately £2000, with £5000 annual costs for recruitment and advertising.

Accordingly, the annual cost of 10 children each placed with a carer in the Intensive Fostering resource would be around £0.46m plus recurring staff costs of £0.12m.

This total of £0.58m, compares with the sample of 10 children aged 9-12 years in placements with independent fostering providers and external residential placements, costing more than £1.5m each year.

It should be noted that it is envisaged that this level of support would sustain 10 children in 10 placements. The same number of children in fewer placements, would cost less. Additional numbers of children would require additional resources, which could be available via further savings.

6.2 Risk implications

This is an intensive scheme for children with high level needs, and it requires significant support, and close management and monitoring.

6.3 Legal Implications

The scheme will require to comply with regulations relating to looked after children and will be inspected by the Care Inspectorate.

6.4 Equalities Implications

The scheme will provide a local service for many of Highland's most vulnerable children, keeping them close to family and their home communities.

6.5 Climate Change Implications

None

Recommendation

Members are asked to agree the details of the Intensive Fostering Service, as set out in this report, and recommend the changes to staffing establishment to the Finance, Housing & Resources Committee.

Designation: Director of Health and Social Care

Date: 14 May 2013

Author: Alison Gordon, Resource Manager, Fostering & Adoption