

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board approved scrutiny review report
– Status: for submission to Cabinet and the Children and Young People's Services Directorate's Departmental Leadership Team (DLT) seeking consideration and responses to the Fostering scrutiny review report and its findings and recommendations.



APPENDIX

A SCRUTINY REVIEW OF FOSTERING

"Calderdale – a caring and supportive Council"



**FINAL REPORT OF THE
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY BOARD**

APRIL, 2019

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FOREWORD

Councillor Colin Raistrick, Co-Chair
Councillor Ashley Evans, Co-Chair

In 2018 Calderdale Council's Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board decided to appoint a cross-party scrutiny review group to look at Fostering at Calderdale Council in terms of what we were doing well and what more we could do or should be doing to improve the fostering service.

We held our first meeting in November 2018 looking specifically at some extensive background information that provided us with evidence and insight as to the current position of the fostering service at Calderdale Council. We also agreed our methodology and ways of working including our approach to the review and evidence gathering as part of our research.

During the course of our review, we have looked closely at how all parts of the fostering service have been working and in particular at outcomes. In doing so, we have identified some aspects which we feel are working well and others where we suggest improvements can be made. In undertaking our review, we have also taken evidence from a variety of sources, including two focus group sessions listening to the views of foster carers and Children Looked After (CLA/Care leavers).

The scrutiny review group's findings are detailed in this report and we have made a number of findings and some recommendations aimed at improving our fostering service.

During the course of the review, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) undertook an unannounced inspection of Calderdale's children's social care services between 12th and 23rd November, 2018. Our findings and recommendations very much reflect the OFSTED's comments in relation to Calderdale's fostering service.

We held several meetings during the course of this review and we would like to personally thank our fellow elected members on the review team for their dedication, support and commitment. In addition, we have received valuable support and insight from key officers in the Children and Young People's Services Directorate. In particular, we mention Julie Jenkins, Anne Tully, Sadie Mulkeen, Claire Brodie, Janet Green and Victoria Gibbs who have supported us through meetings and provided us with a wealth of useful documentation. We are pleased to present our report on fostering at Calderdale Council.

Councillor Colin Raistrick, Co-Chair, Fostering Detailed Scrutiny Review Group.

Councillor Ashley Evans, Co-Chair, Fostering Detailed Scrutiny Review Group and Chair, Children and Young People Scrutiny Board.

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2018, the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board decided to undertake a scrutiny review on fostering at Calderdale. The review's key objectives were to examine the sufficiency of foster carers, the quality and cost effectiveness of the service and then report back with our findings and recommendations.

Draft terms of reference for the review were also approved by the Scrutiny Board in September, 2018 and this (Task and Finish) Review Group was set up to take a more detailed look at Fostering at Calderdale Council and in particular, what more as a Council that we could do recruit more Foster Carers.

There was very keen interest from many councillors on the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board to become involved in this review work and the Board chose to appoint four councillors to serve on the review group: Councillors Colin Raistrick and Ashley Evans (to also co-chair the review group), along with Councillors Stephen Baines and Anne Collins.

Evidence gathering included two specific focus group sessions, (focusing on foster carers and Children Looked After (CLA/Care Leavers)). In addition we held several review group meetings to inform our research and deliberations in this matter.

This report, which sets out the main findings from our review on fostering at Calderdale, also contains a number of recommendations we have made for consideration by the Directorate and Cabinet and other bodies as appropriate.

Councillors Baines, A Collins, Evans and Raistrick

Fostering at Calderdale Council detailed Scrutiny Review Group

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WHAT EXTRA WE CAN DO? – OUR TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1	That Officers examine a wider range of strategies and initiatives to try to increase the number of foster carers recruited, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Meetings with community sports groups, parent and friends associations, faith groups; ❖ Targeting the recently retired and people made redundant and jobseekers, particularly those from the caring professions; ❖ Visiting local businesses especially the large businesses; and also exploring the Council as a Fostering Friendly employer; ❖ Improved use of social media.
Recommendation 2	That support is offered to potential foster carers between the expression of interest and actual recruitment in order to reduce the drop off rate.
Recommendation 3	That, wherever possible, the number of expensive external placements are kept to a minimum by increasing the provision of internal places, including residential places for some young people with complex needs.
Recommendation 4	That increased consistency of support carers should be provided especially for the most vulnerable young people.
Recommendation 5	That work is undertaken with experienced foster carers to develop a 'buddy' system which could offer support and advice to newer recruits and help to improve the ways in which the emergency and out of hours services operate.
Recommendation 6	That the much valued induction training involves other family members in order to enhance their skills and involvement in the process.
Recommendation 7	That staffing levels are reviewed, and adjusted where identified, to take account of any efficiencies in the operation of the fostering service whilst ensuring that caseloads remain manageable.
Recommendation 8	That foster carers are given advice and support to allow them to keep a young person in placement post 16 without financial loss.
Recommendation 9	That the team ensures effective and sensitive liaison is made with the Pathways Team in order to better prepare young people for leaving care and good future relationships with the foster care family.
Recommendation 10	That Officers look for and provide details of examples of best practice elsewhere in working with schools and placements, including costings and proof of outcomes for Children Looked After (CLA) placed in such settings; and thereafter look at and report back on the feasibility of working with local schools, with suitable facilities, to secure some places for some of Calderdale's Children Looked After (CLA).

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BACKGROUND

1.1 Working Party Objectives

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board agreed to establish this detailed scrutiny review group during the 2018/19 municipal year. The work began in September 2018, when the terms of reference for the review were agreed and the overall review objectives focused on the sufficiency, quality and cost of foster care at Calderdale including identifying and making recommendations for improvements in the way the Council supports, recruits and retains foster carers.

In undertaking our work we took a pro-active approach to our research and evidence gathering, including substantial reading of background documentation; the recommendations of the Narey and Owers' review of fostering in England and central government's response thereto; focus group sessions and review group meetings and the judgements made in the recent OFSTED report.

1.2 Review Group Membership

The councillorship of the detailed scrutiny review group was Councillors C Raistrick (Co-Chair), Councillor A Evans (Co-Chair), and Councillors S Baines and A Collins

1.3 Background and Evidence Sources

This Scrutiny review was established by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board.

During the course of our review, we received and read a considerable amount of background information and evidence from the directorate and were informed by national policies and documents, along with the OFSTED inspection of the Council's children's social care services which happened during November, 2018 whilst our review was underway. We thank all of those who made a contribution to this review, especially the foster carers and the Children Looked After (CLA) / care leavers who met with us or responded to our questionnaire, along with the invaluable support from our Scrutiny Support Team.

2. OUR REVIEW WORK – RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE GATHERING

This section outlines how we approached our tasks, reports on the several meetings we held; describes the evidence we received and our developing thinking.

Setting the scene: developing our methodology and ways of working – our first meeting – 12th November, 2018

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- 2.1 We focused at our first meeting on 12th November, 2018 on developing our methodology; agreeing future meeting dates, reviewing our terms of reference. We determined who we wished to see; what we wished to see and when to see them, in order to structure the work we needed to undertake to carry out the review.

Counting the costs: receiving and considering a full breakdown of the total costs of Calderdale's Fostering Service – meeting held 29th November, 2018

- 2.2 Janet Green, the Council's Finance Manager (Adults and Children's Services) provided us with a detailed report which gave a comprehensive financial breakdown of the costs of Calderdale's fostering service.
- 2.3 The report highlighted the specific breakdown of areas of spend in the service and we drilled down into each of these specific cost areas, considering what more we could do as a Council to meet our review objectives: the sufficiency, quality and cost effectiveness of foster care at Calderdale.
- 2.4 "Critical friend" financial challenge was given by us to the Director and the Fostering team management, exploring each aspect of the costs of the service and spend attributable and performance, including outturn and weekly unit costs.
- 2.5 We found that fostering placements were sourced from two different places that of in-house provision where the council recruits its own foster carers and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) where the agency recruited foster carers and the Council purchased them. The financial report provided more detail on the purchased independent fostering service including the purchase process; why the Council purchased foster care placements; and financial information relating thereto, including: spend and activity and range of placement costs.
- 2.6 Details of the in-house fostering service were also provided to us including the In-house fostering schemes; foster carer fees and allowances; mainstream fostering; and connected carers; along with mainstream fostering spend and activity; and connected carers spend and activity.
- 2.7 We enquired of Officers' what they felt the Calderdale fostering service could do better? Suggestions included an improved out of hours service; further development of foster carers linked to the payment for skills rates; and increasing the training and support offer that the Council can provide.
- 2.8 The White Rose Framework and the re-commissioning of services were also raised, with the current arrangements for fostering due to run until August, 2019. Central Government's plans concerning the future of Fostering Panels was also raised and discussed.

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An Inspector Calls: Key findings of the OFSTED Inspection report (in relation to the Fostering service) – meeting held 10th December, 2018

- 2.9 During the course of our review, the Children and Young People's service received an unannounced OFSTED inspection of children's social care services between 12th and 23rd November, 2018.
- 2.10 We were informed that the format of previous OFSTED inspections in relation to fostering at Calderdale had, up to 2011, been an annual inspection. In 2011, the regulations changed and fostering became part of OFSTED's overall inspection. In 2015, the authority was inspected under the single inspection framework and was rated "good" at that time.
- 2.11 The 2018 Inspection involved the OFSTED Inspector meeting with the Service Manager, Children Looked After and the Fostering Manager. Included in the inspection were meetings with team members, checking documentation, speaking with practice managers and a number of foster carers. OFSTED also looked at complaints and compliments and read recent fostering panel minutes as part of their inspection.
- 2.12 The OFSTED report, including within it, reference to the Fostering service can be accessed via the following hyperlink:
<https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50045446>
- 2.13 The Children and Young People's service self-identified during the inspection the following developmental activity for 2019/20:
- To try to increase the diversity of the Fostering Panel to be more representative of all Calderdale's community, with a focus on young people, recruitment from ethnic minorities and males.
 - A developmental activity plan would be drawn up and developed.
 - More recruitment of foster carers.
- 2.14 We had a more in-depth discussion around the fostering service following the OFSTED reports formal publication at our 23rd January, 2019 review group meeting.

Feedback and Discussions: progress of the review to date, matters arising and the draft Cabinet budget proposals for consultation (specific focus – Children and Young People / Fostering) – meeting held 8th January, 2019

- 2.15 At this meeting, we took some time to assess the progress of our review; discuss ways forward on some matters arising; and determine whether we were in a position at this point in our review to contribute our thoughts on the costs of the Fostering service as a response into the budget process and the cabinet's draft budget proposals for consultation.

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2.16 We reflected on some of the matters we had heard that had been raised during following a focus group session in private with some Children Looked after (CLA) / care leavers. The review group subsequently raised these matters with the Children and Young People's services Director and the Fostering Team management and received assurances, clarification and further feedback at the meeting held on 23rd January, 2019 (see below).

2.17 The review group was also aware that the draft Cabinet budget proposals for consultation would be announced in mid-January, 2019. Members felt and determined at this meeting that the best course of action in terms of this review, would be to include any financial recommendations for the Fostering service, in this report at the conclusion of this review.

Joiners and Leavers: How many foster carers have we recruited and how many have left the service over the past three years?

2.18 As part of our review and evidence gathering, we enquired and received information on the net overall number of foster carers (joiners and leavers) from Calderdale Fostering Service over the past three years. For those who had left we delved further into the reasons, which included, amongst other reasons, some people who had retired and some who had left the area.

Bringing it all together: Meeting held 23rd January, 2019

2.19 The main focus for consideration at this meeting was for us to provide feedback and have a discussion with the Children and Young People's Service Directorate Officers' on matters raised during a focus group discussion with Care Leavers / Children Looked After (CLA); feedback and discussions on the published OFSTED inspection in relation to the fostering service; and for a focus group session with Foster Carers to be agreed.

Focus Group sessions (meeting in private) – Children Looked After (CLA) / Care Leavers (December, 2018) and Foster Carers (January, 2019)

2.20 In addition to the several meetings we held as part of our review as outlined above, we also held two specific focus group sessions, one with some Children Looked After (CLA) / Care Leavers in December, 2018, the other with some foster carers, in January, 2019 as part of our evidence gathering for this review.

2.21 We received some very powerful and often emotive feedback from those who attended the sessions in relation to the fostering service itself and individual's experiences of being fostered and/or a being a Calderdale care leaver.

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2.22 We also received a summary of responses from 10 young people still in foster care. (Anonymised) quotes from two young people about their experiences of foster care are also reproduced below:

"Child X says he likes living at Relative Y's house and he now does some washing/drying up as part of preparing for independent living one day".

"Child V says its fine living in a fostering family and that social workers do talk to him when they visit and also Child V says he can always speak to his Foster carers – Adult Y and Adult Z as well".

2.23 We also heard from the Children and Young People's Service's Director and the Fostering Team management in response to matters raised with us when we undertook these focus groups sessions and received assurances, clarification and further feedback on these matters.

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3. OUR REVIEW WORK – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As outlined in the introduction to our report the approach we used for our research and evidence gathering included two specific focus group evidence gathering sessions. In addition we held a number of review group meetings and to inform our research and deliberations in this matter.

FINDINGS

- ❖ ***We found that shortage of foster carers is a national problem and that a significant amount of work had been done locally to try and increase the number of internal foster carers and connected carers, including advertising and special events.***
- ❖ ***We found that the use of independent foster carers in Calderdale has reduced as follows: 59 (2017), 51 (2018) and possibly 40 by the end of March 2019.***
- ❖ ***We found that the retention rate of foster carers in Calderdale is good and that foster carers are supportive of the 'payment for skills' system introduced last year and understand why connected carers prefer to remain on the lower rate of payment.***
- ❖ ***We found that some costly external placements are necessary for safeguarding reasons, the placement of siblings and to ensure continuity until the young person leaves care.***
- ❖ ***We echo the findings from OFSTED which reported that the local authority provided good preparation and training for foster carers, offered regular support for them during placements and that the intervention of the Calderdale Therapeutic Services to help carers and young people with complex needs was well valued.***
- ❖ ***We found that the opportunity for young people to remain in foster care post 16 and possibly until they reach age 25 presents a logistical problems for some carers both in terms of funding and taking further new placements.***
- ❖ ***We found that there is evidence that the quality of the fostering services had improved over the last 5 years and there was a significant difference in the responses received from those young people who had left care and those who were currently in care – whose responses were very positive about the care they were receiving.***
- ❖ ***We found that the team of social workers was reasonably stable, their workloads were being managed effectively, and that they felt well-supported in their roles.***

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- ❖ ***We found that foster carers felt the need for more consistency of respite foster carers and some improvement in the emergency and after hours provision was necessary.***

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 – That Officers examine a wider range of strategies and initiatives to try to increase the number of foster carers recruited, including:

- ❖ Meetings with community sports groups, parent and friends associations, faith groups;
- ❖ Targeting the recently retired and people made redundant and jobseekers, particularly those from the caring professions;
- ❖ Visiting local businesses especially the large businesses also exploring the Council as a Fostering Friendly employer; and
- ❖ Improved use of social media.

Recommendation 2 – That support is offered to potential foster carers between the expression of interest and actual recruitment in order to reduce the drop off rate.

Recommendation 3 – That, wherever possible, the number of expensive external placements are kept to a minimum by increasing the provision of internal places, including residential places for people with complex needs.

Recommendation 4 – That increased consistency of support carers should be provided especially for the most vulnerable young people.

Recommendation 5 – That work is undertaken with experienced foster carers to develop a 'buddy' system which could offer support and advice to newer recruits and help to improve the ways in which the emergency and out of hours services operate.

Recommendation 6 – That the much valued induction training involves other family members in order to enhance their skills and involvement in the process.

Recommendation 7 - That staffing levels are reviewed, and adjusted where identified, to take account of any efficiency in the operation of the fostering service whilst ensuring that caseloads remain manageable.

Recommendation 8 – That foster carers are given advice and support to allow them to keep a young person in placement post 16 without financial loss.

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Recommendation 9 – That the team ensures effective and sensitive liaison is made with the Pathways Team in order to better prepare young people for leaving care and good future relationships with the foster care family.

Recommendation 10 – That Officers look for and provide details of examples of best practice elsewhere in working with schools and placements, including costings and proof of outcomes for Children Looked After (CLA) placed in such settings and thereafter look at and report back on the feasibility of working with local schools, with suitable facilities, to secure some places for some of Calderdale's Children Looked After (CLA).

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Appendix 1

Councillorship of the Detailed Scrutiny Review

Councillor C. Raistrick (Co-Chair)
Councillor A. Evans (Co-Chair)
Councillor S. Baines, MBE
Councillor A. Collins

Councillorship of the Scrutiny Board (2018/19)

Councillor A Evans (Chair)
Councillor A Collins (Deputy Chair)
Councillor S Baines, MBE
Councillor Mrs G Carter
Councillor S Courtney
Councillor J Ford
Councillor D Foster
Councillor C Machell
Councillor S Patient
Councillor C Raistrick

Co-opted Members

David Gott – Roman Catholic Church
Shelagh Hirst – Church of England
Youth Council
Parent Governors

(Scrutiny support to the work of this review group was provided by Paul Preston, Scrutiny Support Officer, Legal and Democratic Services)

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Appendix 2

Evidence was given or provided by:

The Departmental Leadership Team (DLT), Children and Young People's Services, Calderdale Council

Julie Jenkins, Director, Children and Young People's services

Victoria Gibbs, Assistant Director: Early Intervention and Safeguarding

Anne Tully, Service Manager, Children Looked After (CLA)

Sadie Mulkeen, Fostering Team Manager

Foster Carer and Children Looked After (CLA) / Care Leavers - Focus group sessions – December, 2018 and January, 2019

Claire Brodie, Interim Service Manager Children Looked After

Janet Green, Finance Manager (Adults & Children's Services), Finance Service

Michael Holgate, Account Manager, Services for Schools

Craig Chew-Moulding, Business Partner, Transformation

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Appendix 3

References and Bibliography

- Notes of all meetings of the Fostering at Calderdale detailed scrutiny review - held by the Scrutiny Support Team, Room 10, Halifax Town Hall
- OFSTED – Calderdale Council – Inspection of Children's social care services report (Inspection dates 12-23 November, 2018)
- Calderdale Fostering Service – statement of purpose (version: revised April, 2017)
- Calderdale Fostering Service – statement of purpose (version: revised April, 2018)
- Extract of Staying Put Policy (with links to related Chapter and guidance) - (undated)
- The Fostering system in England – evidence review (Research report – Executive summary (July, 2017)
- Foster carers handbook (June, 2017)
- Rees Centre (Research in fostering and adoption, University of Oxford, department of education), Recruiting fosters carers (August 2016)
- Foster Carers, payments for skills scheme (version: 10) – period 1st April, 2018 to 31st March, 2019
- Department for Education – Government response to children and young people in foster care (undated)
- Department for Education – the Fostering system in England – evidence review – research report – executive summary (July, 2017)
- Document: State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016
- Annual report of Calderdale Borough Council fostering Panel – 1st April, 2017 – 31st March, 2018 (dated: May, 2018)
- Foster Care in England – A review for the Department of Education by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers (February, 2018)
- Kinship care (friends and family care)

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- Fostering with Calderdale Council – Recruitment Strategy 2018-2020
- Child Friendly Leeds: Supporting enrichment – opportunities for Foster and kinship families (undated)
- Leeds City Council – Scrutiny Board (Children's and Families report) – Support for Foster Carers (dated 15th March, 2018)
- Extract - Education Select Committee recommendations (undated)
- (Former) People Scrutiny Board report - Sufficient placements for Children Looked After by Calderdale Council (dated 26th July, 2017)
- Calderdale Cabinet report – second quarter budget monitoring report, (dated 5th November, 2018)
- Fostering scrutiny additional information - contextual background to the young people interviewed (arising from focus group session held 11th December, 2018)
- Outcomes for children in kinship placements –information document
- Virtual School Report for Corporate Parenting Panel – (dated December 2018)
- Looked After Children Health Report - 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018
- OFSTED Inspection review report - Nov 2018
- Costs of the Fostering service report – dated 29th November, 2018

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Appendix 4

Glossary of Terms Used in the Report

- CMBC – Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
- DLT – Department Leadership Team
- IFA's – Independent Fostering Agencies
- OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

Any enquiries or requests for background information,
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