The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the University of Aberdeen crest. The crest is a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a castle tower. The top-right quadrant shows a stag's head with a cross on its forehead. The bottom-left quadrant shows a three-masted sailing ship on the sea. The bottom-right quadrant shows an eagle with its wings spread. Above the shield is a crown with four floral motifs. Below the shield is a banner with the motto 'ANE FOR A'.

Agenda Item 11

Foster Carer Recruitment

Falkirk Council

Title: Foster Carer Recruitment
Meeting: Education Executive
Date: 26 March 2019
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report outlines proposals to support a significant increase in the number of local foster carers, in line with the Children's Service's Closer to Home Strategy.

2. Recommendation

2.1 The Education Executive is asked to approve:

- (i) **proposed changes to the existing Falkirk Council foster carer Payment for Skills scheme and staffing structure as detailed at paragraphs 4.6 and 6.1 to attract local people to foster for the Council.**

3. Background

- 3.1 At July 2017, there were 14,897 children looked after in Scotland; 5252 were cared for by foster carers (Scottish Government Children's Social Work Statistics). Within Falkirk, 137 children were placed with foster carers. While Falkirk has fewer children looked after at home than other areas, proportionately more children looked after away from home in Falkirk are cared for in a residential setting, with consequential financial implications. Children's social care is recognised as a complex field and it is an area of budget overspend which largely relates to our over reliance on external residential children's houses and external foster care provision along with the costs associated with continuing care

Closer to Home

- 3.2 In 2017, Children's Services undertook a Strategic Service Review of the Children & Families Social Work service. The review gathered and analysed both external and internal pressure areas and drivers, benchmarked our provision against other Councils, and considered best practice across the country. The output of this comprehensive review resulted in the five year Closer to Home Strategy, launched in November 2018. The Strategy, attached in appendix 1, is a major transformational change programme governed by and reporting to Council of the Future Board.

- 3.3 The key principle of the Closer to Home Strategy is to improve outcomes for care experienced children and those on the edges of care. The overarching aims are to improve outcomes for children and young people by reducing reliance on external accommodation and building on the strengths and capacities of families, thus reducing costs. The Strategy includes a number of projects which support the changes required to shift investment from expensive intervention measures, such as externally purchased care, to investment in earlier and local provision, delivered in partnership with other agencies and Third Sector organisations.
- 3.4 Children and young people do best when brought up within the environment of their own family wherever possible. Where parents are unable to provide direct care, every effort should be made to maintain the child or young person within the family network. When it is assessed as necessary to provide alternative care, this should be provided locally, as close to home as possible. To achieve this goal and bring the balance of care provision within Falkirk more in line with other Councils, a dedicated focus on foster carer recruitment and carer support is required with the aim of substantially increasing the number of Falkirk Council foster carers. Increased provision of foster care is one of the Closer to Home priorities.
- 3.5 As a Council, Falkirk has an excellent record in retaining foster carers, with many providing care for up to 20, 30 and 40 years. Our carers are often the best recruiters, attracting new carers from within their own families, friends and neighbours. Our carers value the support and training received and provision of fees when they do not have a placement. Another crucial factor is their determination, as Falkirk residents, to provide care for local children.
- 3.6 Although retention of carers is strong and the Council consistently recruits a minimum of 5 new carers each year, our carer population is ageing and current recruitment rates only maintain a standstill position of around 60 households. The Council is not managing to attract sufficient new enquiries, and many local residents are attracted to voluntary and independent providers who provide more dynamic advertising and quicker responses to enquiries.
- 3.7 To meet demand for placements and the goals of the Closer to Home Strategy, the Council require to attract a minimum of 30 additional foster carers over the next 5 years. To achieve this, a dedicated and competitive recruitment focus and marketing strategy is in development.
- 3.8 Along with Procurement colleagues, a quick quote tender process was progressed to recruit a marketing firm to take this forward, maximising use of social media and ring-fenced recruitment capacity. It is a key component of Closer to Home to ensure services are sustainable in future. Part of this work includes ensuring that the fostering team develop the marketing skills to continue this work beyond the contract period supported by an additional 0.5 FTE recruitment support post at a cost of £26,000 per annum.
- 3.9 The Council of the Future Change Fund supported this work with an investment of £50,000.

Current Provision for Children looked After Away From Home

- 3.10 Falkirk Council has 23 places in local children's houses, 10 provided in Council run establishments and 13 placements which are contracted with external agencies. Additional residential placements are spot purchased. Additionally, the Council currently has 63 foster carers providing for 103 children, with an additional 37 children cared for in local externally purchased foster placements via our framework contract with 5 external fostering agencies.
- 3.11 The Council framework contract with fostering agencies, and the contracts with 2 external local agencies for residential provision, have assisted in managing demand and keeping children closer to Falkirk but still incur greater costs than placing a child with a Falkirk foster carer. A residential placement can cost from £3,500 and on occasion in excess of £5,000 per week, an external foster placement costs approximately £850 per week, while a level three Falkirk Council fostering placement cost under £400 (excluding management costs). Spend on external placements has continued to be a significant contributory factor in the Children & Families overspend.

4. Considerations

Carer Recruitment

- 4.1 The geographical position of Falkirk between Glasgow and Edinburgh means that Falkirk Council is a prime recruiting ground for many private and voluntary fostering agencies. Figures from Scotland Excel show at least 150 carers in the Falkirk Council area are not Council foster carers. The reasons for people choosing to foster for other agencies vary, but include the marketing power of those agencies, how payment schedules are presented, and the limited knowledge of the public about the role of the Local Authority in fostering.
- 4.2 Recruiting foster carers is a complex process, appropriately governed by regulation. Due to the complexity and importance of the role, the assessment process requires to be thorough and detailed. The assessment must be undertaken by a suitably qualified Social Worker and takes approximately 100 hours to complete; it involves checking references, PVG membership, health checks and a home study. When someone applies to become a carer, they are assessed and, if suitable, approved by a formal Panel and the final decision is made by an appropriately qualified person known as the Agency Decision Maker.
- 4.3 An increase of carer capacity by 30 carers or approximately 45 children, added to the current level of 5 carer retirements per year, means 55 new carers require to be recruited over 5 years.

Fees

- 4.4 Falkirk foster carers commit to undertake a range of tasks as part of their caring duties. The Council provides specific and high quality support and training. These matters are detailed in our Payment for Skills Scheme. For each child placed, carers are paid a fee related to their level of skill and an allowance designed to cover the day-to-day costs of looking after the child. Progression up the skill levels is dependent on evidencing enhanced skill.
- 4.5 Suitably attractive fees are an important part of recruiting and retaining carers and being competitive with external agencies. External agencies often pay a higher fee. Falkirk has 3 fee levels, which have been static for over 10 years and are at the lower end of those paid by other Councils and voluntary agencies.
- 4.6 To competitively attract new carers and retain current carers, we are seeking to amend our Payment for Skills Scheme to provide more appropriate and flexible care which meets the needs of the children requiring care. The new scheme will incorporate:
- Three new skill levels; the first two covering entry and progression skill levels, with a third bespoke level for carers able to offer enhanced care to more complex children such as those able to return from residential school.
 - Bespoke packages linked to the needs of the child are being piloted, with initial success in returning younger children from residential school settings, improving outcomes for the children and obtaining best value for the Council.
 - An increase in fee payments to £150 per week per child for Level 1 carers and £200 per week per child for Level 2 carers. This would bring Falkirk fees in line with that paid by other agencies, and reflects a reasonable annual income to attract people to foster for the Council. This is calculated as costing the Council an additional £321,000 per annum compared to existing fee levels. This will be offset over time by the savings made by placing children in local Falkirk placements.
- 4.7 A detailed breakdown is provided in the table below.

Average Number of Placements	Current Fee	Proposed Fee	Additional Costs Compared to Current Costs Per Annum	
No. of Young People	£/Per Week	£/Per Week	£'000	
Level 1 carer	8	60	150	37
Level 2 carer	30	100	150	78
Level 3 carer	79	150	200	206
TOTAL	117	-	-	321

- 4.8 Use of bespoke carer packages for complex children, particularly those who could be brought back from residential care, will cost from £60,000 to over £100,000 per year per placement, varying dependent on the specific needs of the child and carer. A residential placement costs from £180,000 to £250,000 per year. Any child able to be brought back from an external residential placement will therefore result in significant savings to the Council.
- A simplification of the current finance processes, such as provision of initial clothing, consolidating holiday payments and moving to payments in arrears, to increase accuracy and reduce the work related to payments. This will also realise a saving of approximately £11,000.
 - Implementation of a revised Supported Carer System being developed to meet the demands of continuing care.

Carer Support

- 4.9 Carers receive a high quality of support, which includes dedicated time from a supervising Social Worker, time off, and payment of fees for 6 weeks when no child is in placement or the carer is unavailable. Time off is important, but can mean a child needs to move to an alternative carer. This is not in keeping with the goal of relationship based and child centred practice which is at the heart of Closer to Home. Children both locally and as part of the national Independent Care Review have also told us that this aspect of care does not facilitate their sense of belonging and they would like to see it changed.
- 4.10 To improve the child's experience, the Service now asks carers, wherever possible, to identify a family member or friend who will care for a child while the carer is having break.
- 4.11 Carers can currently take up to 35 leave days over a year, which is double that provided in most other Local Authorities and agencies. It is of note that the majority of our carers do not use all their allocation. In consultation with carers, we are seeking to reduce time off incrementally to 21 days. This is more child centred and commensurate with other agencies. The option of special leave for emergency situations and unpaid breaks will remain. The savings realised from this reduction would be £31,000 per annum.
- 4.12 A permanent home for children is a crucial aspect of both the Closer to Home Strategy and the Scottish Government's priorities. Almost a third of our foster carers have permanent placements, providing stability and long-term security to the children they care for. Carers and staff recently worked together to agree different expectations for such placements, more in keeping with the long-term nature of such arrangements.

Bespoke Placement

- 4.13 This approach has been tested in Falkirk, and a methodology for calculating the skill payment has been developed. While more costly than a standard foster placement, such provision is in keeping with the Closer to Home

Strategy, better meets the needs of a child, is significantly cheaper than residential provision and allows the child to remain in their local area.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The proposals in this report have been the subject of consultation with relevant staff including Children's Rights staff, and have been considered by foster carers who have committed to work with us to develop this work. The Champions Board young people have also given their views on what fostering should look like in Falkirk. Benchmarking comparisons have also been undertaken with other Councils.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

At the budget meeting in February 2019 Council agreed to invest an additional £0.837m investment to drive the shift in the balance of care from external to internal and local provision with the largest element of this relating to increase in foster care provision. An incremental increase in staffing is proposed as carer numbers increase by 4 FTE posts by 2021/22.

This will be supported by the 0.5 FTE marketing recruitment post referred to in paragraph 3.8.

The savings that will result from increased foster care provision will allow 45 more children to be cared for in local fostering provision over five years rather than in more expensive external out of area provision. This shift in balance of care is projected at £5.543M over the period of the Medium Term Financial Plan, i.e. 2019/20 to 2023/24.

6.2 Resources

Support and supervision of additional foster carers will increase pressure on the Social Workers in the Fostering Team. Benchmarking across Scotland and redesign of current work means the team can absorb some additional capacity but, if successful, by April 2020 the team will have reached capacity.

Increased resources to maximise the use of digital methods of communication with foster carers and in recruitment activity will assist with efficiency and maximise use of time. Council of the Future staff have assisted in taking this work forward.

6.3 Legal

There are no legal implications to the proposals in this report.

6.4 Risk

Continuing the placement of children out with the Council in expensive external placements, and the added implications of Continuing Care which allows young people to remain in their care placement until their 21st birthday, is a financial risk to the Council. Current projections indicate that the cost of Continuing Care to the Council for 2018/19 is £1.9M.

6.5 Equalities

There are no equality issues arising from this report. However, both Children's Rights staff and Champions Board young people have noted the rights issue related to placing children out with the Council area.

6.6 Sustainability/Environmental Impact

No sustainability assessment is required for this report.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 An increase in foster carer capacity is central to the success of the Closer to Home Strategy and improving outcomes for Falkirk children. Additional foster carers are required to meet the need for placements for Falkirk children who require alternative family care.
- 7.2 Currently, the number of local children and young people needing a foster placement outstrips the placements available from Council foster carers, resulting in the Council purchasing placements from external agencies. This costs significantly more than internal provision, and placements are often not within the Falkirk Council area.
- 7.3 This report proposes focused work on recruitment of local carers by making Falkirk Council an attractive and competitive option for residents interested in being a foster carer. Amendments to the Payment for Skills Scheme, and flexibility to develop specific placements to meet individual need, will allow children to remain in their home area. Expanding capacity within the Service, and maximising the use of social media and technology, will result in a Service in keeping with the Closer to Home Strategy, resulting in a better, more local and more cost effective service to children and their families.

Director of Children's Services

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Date: 28 February 2019

Appendix

Appendix 1 Closer to Home Strategy overview

List of Background Papers

None



Closer To Home - better outcomes, sustainable services

Falkirk Council

Our Ambitions

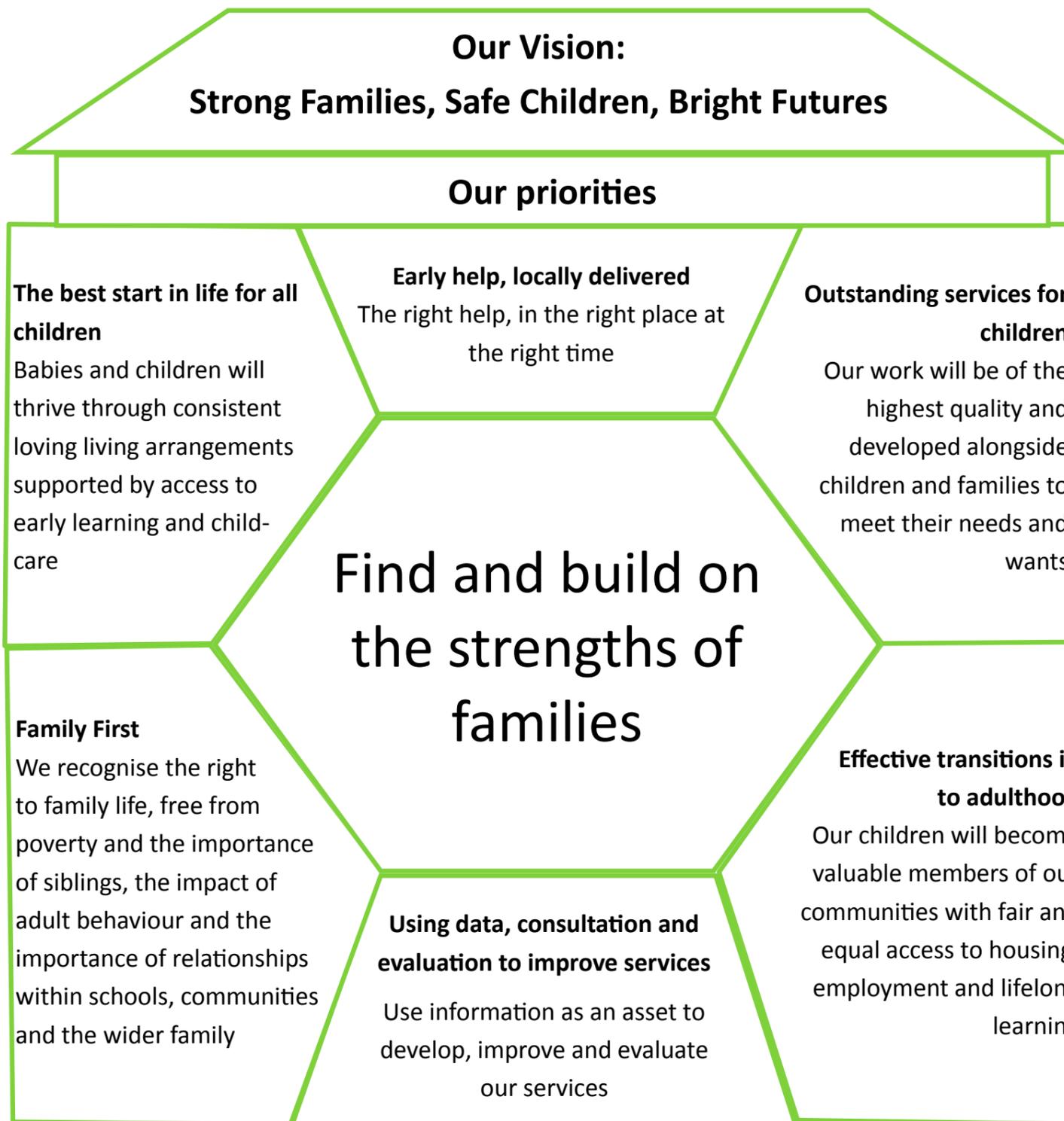
1. Safely reduce the number of children looked after away from home
2. All our children, including the most vulnerable, will achieve in learning, life and work
3. Families will be central to decision making and planning for their children

Our Approach

1. Support families to care safely for their children at home or within the wider family network.
2. Identify risk and provide support as early as possible to minimise any child's exposure to harm.
3. Identify local care placements where children can't remain safely within their own family.
4. Support children, young people and families for as long as needed.
5. Search for and build on the strengths of families and allow them to flourish.
6. Children attending local schools
7. Provide our workforce with the time and tools to make and sustain trusted relationships with families.
8. Nurture children's development with increased early learning and childcare provision.
9. Work in a timely, innovative and solution focussed manner to prevent relationship breakdown within families.
10. Our vision, strategy and plans will be consistent with our partners and the wider council
11. Target services to narrow the attainment gap and enable our children and young people to realise their potential through and beyond school
12. Know what we have done and how it has made a difference
13. Our children will be included and engaged in all aspects of life and their wider community

Falkirk Council Children's Services:

A 5 year strategy to deliver better outcomes for children and young people who are on the edges of care or care experienced



Phase 1 - Closer to Home Projects

Family Support Services

- Falkirk will have less than 10% of looked after children in residential placements

Foster Carer Recruitment

- We will recruit an additional 30 foster carers over the next 5 years

Supported Accommodation Options for Care Leavers

- Care leavers will have more housing and support options enabling good transitions to adulthood

Procuring for the Future

- Targeted services will be developed and commissioned to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people

Family First Approach

- By offering financial support, the Council aims to empower families to make the right choices

Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE)

- Permanent placements will be found for children who require it

Best Practice in Child Protection Systems

- Best practice in child protection and risk management arrangements

Children's Services Related Projects

Additional Support Needs Redesign

- Working with families and partners to meet the changing needs of young people in Falkirk schools.

Early Learning and Childcare Expansion

- Opportunities provided by early learning and childcare expansion will be fully maximised to engage with families of very young children

Social Work Information System (SWIS) Replacement

- The replacement Social Work Information System will free staff to spend most of their time with families.
- Use local and national data to evidence interventions, improve our service and engage with our communities
- Understand the experiences of services users and actively consult with them to develop and improve

Closer to Home

How we'll know we've made a difference

Closer to Home—Measures for all ages

- No of children looked after away from home
 - What percentage of looked after children had more than one placement in the last year?
- How much does my council spend on providing residential accommodation for 'looked after children' (£ per child per week)?
- How much does my council spend on providing fostering/family placements for 'looked after children' (£ per child per week)?
- How many 'looked after children' are being cared for in foster/family placements rather than residential accommodation?
 - % of children in kinship placements
 - % of children in out of authority placements

0-5	5-12	12-16	16-21	21-26
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of eligible 2 year olds in nursery • Nursery development milestones • Adoption milestones • Health milestones • Wellbeing indicators • Professional outcomes (e.g. no of children with access to LA Psych) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance rate of children in Primary school • Attendance rate of LAC in Primary • School exclusion rates • Educational milestones • Wellbeing indicators • What percentage of children are meeting developmental milestones? • Free school meal uptake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance rate of children in Secondary school • Attendance rate of LAC in Secondary • What percentage of children are meeting developmental milestones? • Free school meal uptake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of young people participating in learning, training or work • No of YP opting in to continuing care • % completing 6 years of secondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancy sustainment rates • % of LAC in Adult Services • % in Criminal Justice • % uptaking aftercare service

