

The background of the slide features a large, light blue outline of the coat of arms of the Government of Yukon. The coat of arms consists of a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a sailing ship on wavy lines representing water. The top-right quadrant shows a bison's head facing left. The bottom-left quadrant shows a cross. The bottom-right quadrant shows a beaver. Above the shield is a crown with four points, each topped with a flower. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the text "A NE FOR A".

Agenda Item 6

Moving Closer to Home – Family Based Care

Falkirk Council

Title: Moving Closer to Home – Family Based Care
Meeting: Education, Children and Young People Executive
Date: 13 September 2022
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report accompanies a presentation that will be provided to the Education, Children and Young People Executive on the work undertaken by the Children's Services Social Work Family Placement Team to expand community-based placements for those children in need of care and protection who cannot be cared for at home.

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Education, Children and Young People Executive is asked to note:-

- (1) the progress of the Closer to Home Strategy to increase capacity of family care placements in Falkirk;**
- (2) the content of this report which accompanies a presentation to Committee.**

3. Climate Change

- 3.1 Having consulted the energy and climate change team, outcomes of this report will have no affect on either the organisational or national climate change targets.

4. Background

Where children can no longer live safely at home, every effort is made to keep them within their wider family network and, where this is not possible, provide them with family-based care. A key project in the Closer to Home Strategy is expanding our community-based placements for those children in need of care and protection.

4.1 Closer to Home

The Closer to Home Strategy seeks to shift the balance of care so that 90% of Falkirk's children who are looked after away from home live in community-based placements, in line with the national average.

4.2 Kinship Care

When a child is unable to remain safely in the care of their parents, the priority is to establish whether there are wider family members or a close friend who can care for the child.

4.3 Foster Care

Where there are no kinship options for children, Foster Care options are explored. Foster Carers offer a family-based placement to the child in the community.

4.4 Recruitment of Foster Carers

A central pillar of the Closer to Home Strategy is to increase the number and capacity of Falkirk Council Foster Carers. By having more of our own Foster Carers, we will be able to reduce the number of children living in residential care and our reliance on external agencies, with the associated costs.

A milestone of adding an additional 45 internal placements for children in alternative family-based care has been set from 01 April 2021 – 30 March 2025. Whilst our ability to recruit foster carers over the past few years has been extremely challenging due to the impact of the pandemic, we nevertheless managed to recruit 7 in 2021.

For the first time in two years, an in-person open evening was held in March 2022. In recognition of the growing importance of social media we have revamped our website and to drive up enquiries. In addition, we have recruited a part time Communications Officer to promote awareness and create opportunities to highlight the need for foster carers.

A recruitment calendar has been developed highlighting key events throughout the year as well as more regular localised opportunities to engage with members of the public to raise the profile of fostering.

Extensive publicity was generated during Foster Care Fortnight which took place from 9 – 22 May. Articles were published in local newspapers with Falkirk Council Foster Carers describing their role and encouraging others to consider becoming Foster Carers.

4.5 Retention of Foster Carers

Falkirk Council provides high quality support to Foster Carers and this is a crucial aspect of retention.

4.6 Therapeutic Support

Kinship and Foster Carers are being provided with specific therapeutic training to increase their awareness of how to care for children who are showing emotional distress.

4.7 Communication

The Service is developing creative and innovative ways of maximising publicity, to encourage more expressions of interest from individuals to become Foster Carers.

4.8 Unaccompanied Children

Falkirk Council along with other authorities in Scotland now have a responsibility under the National Transfer Scheme to meet the needs asylum seeking children and young people, we are currently providing accommodation to 6 young people, the majority of whom are placed with external foster carers.

The Home Office has announced the Homes for Ukraine Scheme for unaccompanied children and young people who have made an application under sponsor arrangements for safe passage to the UK without the need for an accompanying adult. The Family Placement Team will be required to undertake assessments of prospective sponsors in Falkirk under private fostering arrangements. Where a sponsor arrangement breaks down and no alternative can be found, Falkirk will be required to accommodate the child.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Carers and Adopters will be consulted during the summer of 2022 over the development of the Family Placement Team Service Plan for 2022-2027.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

In line with increasing the numbers of Foster and Kinship Carers, there has been an increase in the total cost of fees and allowances paid. However, this has been offset by savings in the reduction of cost for residential placements.

6.2 National Minimum Fostering Allowance

The Scottish Government has made a commitment to set a National Minimum Fostering Allowance. There are ongoing negotiations with CoSLA. Should the minimum be set above Falkirk Council's Fostering Allowance this will have significant financial implications as the fortnightly allowance will increase for all Falkirk Foster Carers. Currently Falkirk Council sits mid-table when benchmarked against other local authorities

6.3 Resources

The Family Placement Team is staffed by dedicated staff and there is commitment to increase the capacity of the team by 1 Social Worker for every

additional 10 Foster Carers above the baseline figure of 2018. This investment has been built into the Medium-Term Financial Plan which underpins the Closer to Home Strategy.

6.4 Legal

There are a number of legislative Acts that requires the local authority to carry out its duty to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children in need of care and protection.

6.5 Risk

Failure to increase family-based placements may result in poorer outcomes for Falkirk's children over their lifespan.

6.6 Equalities

Foster Carers are required to meet children's religious and cultural needs.

The Service aims to recruit more Foster Carers who have the skills to care for children with disability and/or complex needs.

6.7 Sustainability/Environmental Impact

There has been no sustainability assessment completed as part of compiling the report.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Family Placement Team is central to our ambition to shift the balance of care from external residential placements for children looked after away from home to family-based Kinship or Foster placements in Falkirk.

7.2 The report and accompanying presentation outlines the different strands of work the Family Placement Team has progressed in line with the Closer to Home Strategy to ensure we achieve our ambition of ensuring sustainable services and better outcomes.

Director of Children's Services

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Appendices	None
List of Background Papers	None