

COST & VOLUME FOR FOSTERING

Ambitious Scrutiny Report - March 2015



BACKGROUND

The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the performance of the Cost and Volume contract for Fostering following submission to Cabinet on 9th December 2014.

Plymouth City Council has commissioned fostering placements from independent fostering agencies through a Cost and Volume framework agreement since 2007, being joined by Devon County Council and Torbay Council in 2008, 2010/11 and 2014. Plymouth City Council is the lead commissioner. The Cost and Volume framework commits providers to high standards of care, but does not provide any guarantee of business. Providers also have to submit detail of their prices for placements, which become part of the contractual arrangement so that if a placement is required, the key elements of quality and price are already in place.

The Cost and Volume frameworks were re-tendered during 2014, with contract award taking place at Cabinet in December 2014. The contract is in place from 1st February 2015 until 31st March 2017. Seven independent fostering agencies were awarded a contract:

- Action for Children
- Blue Sky Fostering
- Five Rivers
- Foster Care Associates
- National Fostering Agency
- Pathway Care
- Regional Foster Placements

82 Plymouth children and young people in care are currently placed in independent fostering agency placements. Of these, 88% are placed with the Cost and Volume providers.

To be able to participate in the tender process, providers had to be graded at least Good by Ofsted, or be able to provide an action plan for improving from Adequate to Good. Providers graded inadequate were not eligible to take part. The table below shows the current Ofsted performance of the successful providers.

Agency	Status of organisation	Number of Plymouth children placed	Ofsted performance – last full inspection
Action for Children	Charity	4	Outstanding (2011)
Blue Sky Fostering	Private	0	Outstanding (2013)
Five Rivers	Social Enterprise	15	Good (2014)
Foster Care Associates	Private	21	Outstanding (2013)
National Fostering Agency	Private	13	Good (2011)
Pathway Care	Private	16	Good (2011)
Regional Foster Placements	Private	2	Good (2011)

An additional requirement of the new contract is for the seven fostering providers to increase their local carer numbers by 20% during the period of the contract. The purpose of this is to help Plymouth City Council to place more children and young people locally in a family based placement (as long as it is safe and appropriate to do so) and avoid uprooting them from positive influences in their lives. This should also reduce reliance on residential placements that are a distance away from Plymouth.

SCRUTINY OF PERFORMANCE

There are a number of measures in place to monitor the performance of the Cost and Volume contract:

Peninsula Children's Commissioning and Procurement Partnership:

All seven fostering providers contacted under Cost and Volume are also approved by the Peninsula Commissioning and Procurement Partnership to provide placements for the five far south west local authorities – Somerset County Council, Devon County Council, Torbay council, Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council.

The Peninsula authorities carry out site visits to all providers on a rolling basis, including the independent fostering agencies. In addition, there is a suspensions protocol in place which allows the local authorities to suspend providers from taking any further business from the five local authorities if there are significant concerns about their performance. Providers will not receive any new referrals until an improvement in performance is evidenced. In practice, suspensions are most commonly used for situations where providers have been graded inadequate by Ofsted or where there is evidence of sustained quality concerns, for example a number of LADO referrals have been made. To date none of the fostering agencies have ever been suspended.

Incident Reports:

Independent Fostering Agencies are required to formally notify local authorities and Ofsted of events and incidents regarding children placed with their carers. These include the death of a child, concerns about those working in the fostering service, a serious illness or accident, the outbreak of any infectious disease which requires notification, involvement or suspected involvement in Child Sexual Exploitation, a serious incident where Police are called to the home, a serious complaint about the foster carers, and any child protection enquiries relating to a child placed with foster parents. These reports are sent to social workers, Commissioners and Ofsted. Commissioners read all reports across agencies to spot any trends and escalate any concerns as required.

Group provider meetings:

Provider meetings with the Cost and Volume providers are held four times a year at Windsor House. All seven agencies are invited, as well as representatives from Social Care and Commissioning for Plymouth, Devon and Torbay. The meetings offer an opportunity to discuss good practice with the providers as a group and share any issues that are arising. At the most recent meeting on 26th February issues discussed included how foster carers manage children going missing and the use of stability meetings to maintain placements.

Individual provider performance management:

All providers are required to send a data return to Commissioners three times a year – please see Annex A for a copy of this document. This covers a large amount of information on carer numbers, incidents and any issues with the internal performance of staff. This information is sent by the agency in advance of an individual meeting with commissioners where the data is scrutinised and any other issues discussed.

Pricing:

All independent placements are regularly scrutinised by Children's Resource Panel. They are also kept under review through the monthly Placement Review meetings between Commissioning and Children's Social Care and as part of day to day business as usual by the Commissioning Team. The new Cost and Volume contract requires providers to be much more transparent about the services included in the placement price, and gives the opportunity to remove or add additional support, based on the individual needs of the child.

Partnership working with Children's Social Care:

Key to all of the above is effective partnership working between the commissioners and Children's Social Care. A commissioner is co-located at Midland House with the social work teams at least two days each

week and social workers and commissioners work together to raise and address any issues with placement providers as they arise. Urgent issues will be tackled immediately to ensure that children are safe. Communication with the providers is also crucial – fostering providers have commented on how responsive they have found the Cost and Volume local authorities to be in responding to concerns and issues. Provider feedback tells us that providers view the Cost and Volume contracts as a positive way of working closely together to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people in care.

In conclusion, the Cost and Volume contract is currently performing well but will continue to be scrutinised closely.

Emma Crowther
Commissioning Officer
March 2015

Cost & Volume Performance Monitoring Framework

All Contract Monitoring Information To Be Supplied tri-annually

Provider details_____

Date completed (covering the _____ to _____ period)	Devon Period 1	Devon Period 2	Devon Period 3	Plymouth Period 1	Plymouth Period 2	Plymouth Period 3	Torbay Period 1	Torbay Period 2	Torbay Period 3
All figures for this section to be taken from a snapshot on the last day of the relevant period.									
I Carers									
Ia No of approved carers in each local authority									
Ib Total number of placements offered by those carers									
Ic Total number of placements currently under retainer/singleton occupancy									
Id No of children currently in foster placement within the relevant local									
Ie Number of children currently in parent and child fostering placement within the relevant local authority									

If No of children currently in placement outside the relevant local authority boundary									
Ig No of children currently in parent and child fostering placement outside the relevant local authority									
Ih Maximum no of actual placements available (this figure is the number of spaces that are standing empty and are available) bed									

Date completed (covering the _____ to _____ period)	Devon Period 1	Devon Period 2	Devon Period 3	Plymouth Period 1	Plymouth Period 2	Plymouth Period 3	Torbay Period 1	Torbay Period 2	Torbay Period 3
All figures for this section to be taken from a snapshot on the last day of the relevant period.									
2 Education									
2a No of children in mainstream education									
2b Number of children with a current PEP									
2c No of children in other education – PRU, home tuition etc									
2d No of children with any unauthorised absences in this period									
2e Number of children not in education, employment or training									
2f Number of children in placement younger than school age									
2g Number of children									

(1) looked after for over 2 years (total) (2) looked after for 2 years who have achieved recognisable milestone qualifications such as SATS, GCSE's, A Levels, NVQ									
3 Health									
3a No of young people registered with a dentist (not counting parent and child)									
3b No of parent and child placements exempt from registering with a dentist									
3c No of young people who have been seen by dentist in the last 12 months (not counting parent and child)									
3d No of parent and child exempt from being seen by a dentist									
3e No of young people registered with a General Practitioner (count all fostering and parent and child placements)									
3f – number of children in placement who have received a visit from their social worker in line with statutory timescales									
Date completed (covering the _____ to _____ period)	Devon Period 1	Devon Period 2	Devon Period 3	Plymouth Period 1	Plymouth Period 2	Plymouth Period 3	Torbay Period 1	Torbay Period 2	Torbay Period 3
All figures for this section are to be based on the whole period. 4 Stability (respite placements do not contribute to those figures)									

4a Total number of placements ended in the period									
4b No of placement endings that were planned									
4c No of placement endings that were unplanned/ breakdowns									
4d Total number of placement moves in the above period (including within the agency respite not counted)									
4e No of moves (including within the agency) that were planned									
4f No of moves (including within the agency) that were unplanned.									
5 Internal Performance Management – carers and staff									
5a No of carers de-registered of their own volition									
5b No de-registrations instigated by the provider									
5c No of investigation/disciplinary procedures into staff and foster carers									
5d No of dismissals of staff									

6 Critical Incidents									
6a Total no of notifiable events under Schedule 7 Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 in the above period.									
6b Total number of children where there has been a notifiable event.									
6c Number of records of notifications sent to each local authority and to whom.									
Date completed (covering the _____ to _____ period)	Devon Period 1	Devon Period 2	Devon Period 3	Plymouth Period 1	Plymouth Period 2	Plymouth Period 3	Torbay Period 1	Torbay Period 2	Torbay Period 3
All figures for this section are to be based on the whole period.									
7 Feedback									
7a Total number of informal complaints received in the above period									
7b Total number of formal complaints received in the above period									
7c Total number of informal compliments received in the above period									
7d Total number of formal compliments received in the above period									
8 Expressions Of Interest									
8a Number of requests for expressions of interest received in the period									

8b % or number of expressions of interest returned (number of prospective placements offered)									
8c % or number of responses which resulted in placements									
8d % or number of responses where LA feedback received via email or phone									
9 Training									
9a No of foster carers within agency that have received training within the last monitoring period									
9b Names of training courses delivered during monitoring period									
Reporting periods for the monitoring information are :									