

From: Andy Pallas, Executive Director – TACT  
To: Corporate Parent Committee  
Subject: TACT Peterborough Permanency Service Update

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## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. The TACT/Peterborough permanency service commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and this report seeks to provide the committee with the progress so far.

## 2. Fostering Service

- 2.1. At the end of September 2017, 142 children were placed in permanency service foster placements, 16 with connected persons or family and friends foster carers and 100 with independent fostering agencies (IFAs). This equates to 61% of all foster placements being made within the service and 39% are made with IFAs. This split has remained at a similar level since April, but the aim is for the percentage and numbers to increase on the permanency service side of the ratio and this is dependent on recruitment (see Section 3).
- 2.2. There are currently 118 approved carer households of all descriptions. This figure is ten less than in April due to carers resigning primarily through ill health and changes in family circumstances. Two have gone to other agencies, one to a neighbouring authority and one to an IFA. These are normal levels for churn for any fostering agency, the issue for the service to address is how to achieve a net increase of carers.
- 2.3. There are 90 mainstream carers households approved and now only five of these on hold. There are eight connected person households approved formally and five temporarily. There are seven link carers, four respite carers, two supported lodgings carers and two private foster carers.
- 2.4. Out of the sixteen bed spaces available at the end of the month only two out of the fifteen carer households with spaces were willing to take children over the age of eleven. There are five children the service is currently seeking placements for; three will be placed within the service.
- 2.5. There are a reduced number of variations and exemptions within the service compared to the position on 1<sup>st</sup> April.
- 2.6. Two carer households have joined the service since April, one recruited prior to the service starting and the first through TACT at the September panel. These are white British carers, short term, one child, 0-18, they will be focusing on older children, over ten years of age.

## 3. Carer Recruitment

- 3.1. 173 enquiries have been received since April 2017. We have undertaken over fifty

initial visits, with twenty-five attending Skills to Foster courses that run monthly.

- 3.2. There are currently nine households under assessment at various stages in the process, all due to attend panels before January 2018. All are looking to be approved for children 0-18 and out of eight couples six are white British, one English and Philippine and one Polish. There is one single female carer under assessment.
- 3.3. With ten carer households planned to be at panel before January 2018 and others in the pipeline we still believe we are on target for fifteen carer households to be approved by the end of March 2018.

#### **4. Adoption**

- 4.1. Adoption enquiries are holding up despite neighbouring authorities seeing reduced interest in adoption. 35 enquiries were received in September and six households are confirmed from these as attending the October information session. Ten families are currently being assessed.
- 4.2. Five households (one single adopter and including one couple coming back for a third time) were approved as adopters in September and two matches were also made. Six adoption orders had been made up to the end of September.
- 4.3. There are 19 children in adoptive placements and three children linked, the year-end figure is predicted to be approximately 25 adoptions, the same as last year. The throughput is slow because of capacity within the court system and carers are waiting significant lengths of time after applying for orders for the final hearing to be held.
- 4.4. Four of the nineteen children currently placed are or were under FFA arrangements, and two are being adopted by their foster carers.

#### **5. Special Guardianship**

- 5.1. In the six months since April 1<sup>st</sup> fourteen children have been placed with eleven different families under special guardianship arrangements. Three Child Arrangement orders have also been made concerning children from two families.
- 5.2. All reports have been completed and filed within timescales and all the recommendations of positive reports have been accepted the courts.
- 5.3. The fourteen children placed under SGO orders in six months suggests the service will meet the target of thirty in the year. Work continues to be undertaken reviewing carer households where SGOs may be an appropriate option.

#### **6. Family Group Conferences**

- 6.1. The service provided 18 conferences in respect of 35 children between April – September 2017.
- 6.2. Currently matters are progressing for eleven children from three families and twelve children from eight families are waiting for conferences to be arranged.

- 6.3. Capacity clearly remains the predominant issue especially as we would wish to push conferences further forward to be held earlier in the process thus increasing demand further.
- 6.4. Emerging issues / trends / themes - there has been an increase in referrals of 166% for the first quarter, and the number of conferences arranged increased by 100% compared with Q1 in 2016/17. When conferences have been held they have prevented admissions into care.
- 6.5. Evidence of impact / outcomes - some very positive comments have been received about how the service has helped families move forward with conferences making a real difference to them and most would recommend them to others in similar situations. This quarter nine conferences involving seventeen children have been held and all plans have resulted in family members caring for the children concerned.
- 6.6. What is working well? Unborns are being referred earlier, still given priority but less born just before the FGC. 100% of service users who responded felt that the FGC's had been a help to them. The challenge is to enable FGC's to take place at the point of the first child protection conference rather than once legal proceedings have been commenced. We need to replicate the success of the service with unborn children with other cases
- 6.7. TACT have increased capacity to undertake conferences by 100% employing two staff to undertake these and plan to add more staff to the service to minimise waiting time for families. The need to develop administration support for the service is also acknowledged and the Family Rights Service are being used by TACT to help develop the service using DfE innovation funding

## **7. Stakeholder Engagement Foster Carers**

- 7.1. The 24/7 Out of Hours Support line commenced at the start of October.
- 7.2. The take up of training by foster carers has been impressive. Over half the training courses have been full. Courses run have been on Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, CSE, Adolescent Development, On Line Safety, Safer Caring, and Attachment. It is encouraging to see more representatives of carer households (over 80 of the current 118 have attended) as foster carers start understanding training isn't an option, but essential for all wishing to acquire knowledge and develop their skillset.
- 7.3. TACT has funded events for carers and young people during the school holidays and a successful BBQ at Peterborough Rugby Club on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July organised by the Foster Carers Committee with 170 individuals attending, 17 from kinship arrangements. Several Councillors were also present together with staff from the permanency service. Special thanks went to members of the committee, those who manned the BBQ and Jess the young people's participation worker for their involvement in making the day so successful.
- 7.4. Half term events for carers and children have been arranged. The Christmas Party has been booked for 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2017. Carers and children have turned out in great numbers for events at Wicksteed and Bounce over the summer.

- 7.5. Carers have been identified to participate in a 'Buddy Scheme' and all new carers recruited into the service will be designated a buddy.
- 7.6. Foster carer committees have continued to take place regularly, with the service supporting and fully participating in this. Foster carer representatives are involved in working parties with staff from the Permanency service and PCC reviewing the Foster Carer Handbook, the including the foster carer payments structure and Staying Put.

## 8. Young People's Participation

- 8.1. TACT funded young people's activities during the summer holidays to the tune of £2,000. This is money outside of contract monies gained from charitable sources and providing value added for the local authority. A course was run on Skills for Independence for young people over a few days in the summer holidays. This involved speakers from different fields, young people being involved in group exercises around budgeting and practically on how to manage their accommodation. Certificates were awarded at the end of this well received course and it will be run on a regular basis in the future.

## 9. Innovation Fund

- 9.1. Work is on-going in relation to the various work streams funded through the innovation fund, external funding that will be focused on areas of service complimenting the overall objectives of the service.
- 9.2. **Strength based assessments** – can be based on adopter activity days, possible use of short videos, start with residential cases. A short term working group has been established with representatives from the service, PCC, children's participation workers, foster carers and adopters.
- 9.3. **Contact** – mediation work to support positive contact. 2 meetings have taken place with the mediation service to outline the scope of the proposed service.
- 9.4. **Life story work** – a project to offer life story work and books to all children in long term care/permanency Sandra Nelson is leading on this.
- 9.5. **Mindfulness** – in collaboration with Adoption Plus, groups for carers have been set up. There will be four annually, the first of which will take place in January 2018.
- 9.6. **Attachment groups** – paid through ASF. An adoption group commenced in October with 7 families attending.
- 9.7. **Fostering changes** – being joined up with early attachment work, Sandra Nelson and Sue King are leading on this.
- 9.8. **Prep groups** – joined up groups for all permanency groups. Sandra Nelson is leading on this.

- 9.9. **Attachment aware city** – getting this into schools, Members of the service, Dee Glover, Virtual head, and 2 adoptive parents are attending the AUK conference in November on attachment in schools to spearhead this project.
- 9.10. **Parallel Parenting** – two tranches of training have taken place with staff and five identified carers. Conversations now need to take place with PCC colleagues familiarising them with this new service and starting to identify children and families that this service will be appropriate for.

## 10. Ofsted

- 10.1. Sue King (HOS) has her interview date on November 1<sup>st</sup> in respect of her application to become the Registered Manager of the Fostering Service (an IFA) and of the TACT adoption service (a VAA). Andy Pallas will retain these responsibilities until this process is completed. This will be an opportunity to clarify further with the Ofsted how they will be viewing the service.
- 10.2. The service is represented on the PCC Ofsted Implementation group and the action plan in relation to the PCC audit of the fostering service prior to the change of management is being worked to and the recommendations from the recent Serious Case Review have been incorporated into this.
- 10.3. The Form F transfer updates because of foster carers having to change registration from the Peterborough fostering service to the new TACT Peterborough service are well on the way to being completed with extra panels having been held to consider these 118 reports.
- 10.4. From inheriting a position where a number of all foster carer annual reviews were out of timescales, all are now up to date and within regulation. The service staff have performed excellently to achieve this and should be commended for their efforts.

## 11. Staffing

- 11.1. The management team of the service is fully in place led by the head of Service Sue King and supported by Andy Pallas Director of Children's Services TACT. The three Consultant Social Workers have thematic leads in fostering, adoption, special guardianship and family group conferences and manage the three teams of Permanency social workers supporting all carers whether adoptive, foster or special guardians. A fourth Consultant Social Worker is being added to the service as numbers of staffing within the service have increased and we wish to keep supervisory spans within established TACT norms.
- 11.2. One member of social work staff has left the service due to their partner relocating elsewhere in the UK, however, there have been no exits due to the change in model of service delivery. The number of agency staff that the service inherited have gradually been reduced in planned and phased way in order that continuity be provided to service users.

- 11.3. All the teams have now had team days and have participated in developing service plans.

## 12. Finance, YTD – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017

- 12.1 There are 2 key features to date in reviewing the finance position for the new service. The most significant is the elevated level of placements, which are currently around 375. A figure of 375 equates to a rate of 78 per 10,000; the most recently released figures for children looked after indicate that the average among Peterborough's statistical neighbours has increased over the last 12 months to 82 per 10,000. This means that while our numbers are higher than we would want them be, they remain below the average of other similar authorities. That said, the lowest rate is in Sheffield at 50 per 10,000, with Medway at 61 per 10,000.

- 12.2 The contract with Peterborough identifies that where numbers are higher than 365, (the original predicted highest level of CIC), it would be unreasonable to expect TACT to cover all additional associated costs. Pressures are currently being mitigated within the service, and a joint approach to reducing numbers in care is being actioned across children's services and with TACT. Numbers need to reduce back down to around 360 by achieving positive exits from the care system before the end of the year and if possible, sooner, or the risk of funding pressures become more significant for both partners.

- The other feature relates to the contract commencing slightly later than had been planned, and so some scheduling issues have become apparent in terms of the savings plans from the original contract, but these will balance out as the contract continues over the next year.
- 12.3

- Overall, for the five months ending 31 August 2017, there has also been an investment of £579k by TACT in relation to staffing. This is due to two reasons: (i) an increase in some management capacity and (ii) the other being the seven-agency staff that TACT had inherited at the start of the contract that were not provided for in the budget. TACT could not let go of these staff without compromising the quality of the service and so have incurred £189k in respect of agency staff costs in the first five months. These staff are either being converted to permanent staff or their contracts have ended, with the last ones anticipated to finish by Christmas 2017.
- 12.4

- 12.5 TACT has been awarded an Innovation Programme Grant by the Department of Education (DfE), to support the commissioning out of PCC's fostering, adoption and permanency service to TACT. This funding can only be offset against staff costs and only in relation to certain projects that were part of the Innovation bid such as parallel parenting. TACT will use this to offset against some of the increased staffing costs where they relate to these projects.

We have seen a drop in CIC numbers to 376 by the end of September and plan that this trend will continue. TACT will, with unfettered determination: (i) recruit

12.6 and upskill more carers and (ii) divert children from IFA's and residential placements. This is amongst the other well-rehearsed strategies to contain the placement rise.

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