



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S AND LEISURE SERVICES
 COMMITTEE ON 19 APRIL 2023**

**SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT - INSPECTION OF FOSTERING,
 ADOPTION AND ADULT PLACEMENTS MARCH 2022**

BY: CHIEF OFFICER HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE MORAY

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to the Education, Children's and Leisure Services Committee following an earlier report presented on 14 December 2022 regarding the inspection of Placement Services (fostering, adoption and adult placements) by the Care Inspectorate in March 2022. The Education, Children's & Leisure Services Committee requested that an update report be provided, in advance of the move to the Integrated Joint Board, regarding the progress of the Service Improvement Plan. Members are asked to scrutinise and note the information contained within.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Education, Children's and Leisure Services Committee in terms of Section III (D) (2) of the Council's Scheme of Administration with regard to exercising all the functions of the Council as Social Work Authority within the terms of relevant legislation with regard to child support and protection, looked after children, fostering, adoption and young people leaving care.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee scrutinise and note the outcome of the improvement work following the inspection of fostering, adoption and adult placements in March 2022.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Fostering, adoption and adult placements are inspected on a regular basis by the Care Inspectorate with the previous inspection being undertaken in March 2019. The inspection in March 2022 was delayed as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.

- 3.2 For information, adult placements is a service where young people remain in the same placement when they turn eighteen. This provides continuity and stability for young people and supports better transitions from childhood to adulthood.

4. **OUTCOME OF THE INSPECTION**

- 4.1 The Care Inspectorate provided initial verbal feedback on 18-March-2022. Placement Services were provided with the draft inspection reports with an opportunity to provide feedback to the Care Inspectorate prior to final publication.
- 4.2 The final reports are attached for the Fostering Service (**Appendix 1**) and the Adoption Service (**Appendix 2**).
- 4.3 The gradings provided by the Care Inspectorate were as follows:

| Quality Indicator | Fostering | Adoption | Continuing Care |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|-----------------|
| 1.1 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 1.2 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 1.3 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| 1.4 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 2.2 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| 3.2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 5.1 | 3 | 2 | 4 |

- 4.4 The Care Inspectorate use a Six-Point Scale for grading as follows:

| Grading | Description |
|---------|--|
| 6 | Outstanding or sector leading |
| 5 | Major strengths |
| 4 | Important strengths, with some areas for improvement |
| 3 | Strengths just outweigh weaknesses |
| 2 | Important weaknesses - priority action required |
| 1 | Major weaknesses - urgent remedial action required |

- 4.5 The feedback from the Care Inspectorate was positive in relation to the staff team and their commitment towards vulnerable individuals and families. It highlighted that the voice of young people was heard and carers had a good relationship with social work staff. The Care Inspectorate also highlighted examples of particular good practice in adult placement services.

- 4.6 The Care Inspectorate identified that there was a culture of change in the service and that it knew itself well and was clear about the areas that needed development and improvement. The Care Inspectorate acknowledged that Placement Services and, more widely, Children's Services was going through a period of change and undertaking a programme of transformation.
- 4.7 However, there were a number of significant areas where the feedback was poor and where, overall, Placement Services did not improve on its previous inspection.
- 4.8 There was a focus on inconsistent compliance with processes and procedures which was resulting with delays in the permanence planning for children. In the fostering team there were delays in progressing fostering assessments and inadequate training for carers. It was identified that the team lacked depth of experience which was amplified by recent high staff turnover. In the adoption team the work with concurrency (fosters carers who then adopt) did not reflect the best practice model and post adoption support required significant development and improvement.
- 4.9 In addition to this, the Care Inspectorate highlighted that the recent changes in senior management and the amount of interim management posts had resulted in uncertainty and drift in service development.
- 4.10 The Care Inspectorate identified that it would be seeking an update on progress which is likely to be in early to mid-2023.

5. DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

- 5.1 As outlined in the report for the Education, Children's & Leisure Services Committee on 14 December 2022 the outcome of the inspection was not unexpected. Quality assurance work was already underway prior to the inspection in recognition of this. However, following the inspection a formal Service Improvement Plan process was commenced which has been supported by a fortnightly working group meeting. This is an ongoing project whose scope ranges beyond the 'Requirements' and 'Areas for Improvement' identified by the Care Inspectorate.
- 5.2 The working group reported to the Care Inspectorate in June 2022 on the 'Requirements' identified in the inspection reports. Following this, a review was undertaken of the 'Requirements' and 'Areas for Improvement' identified in the inspection reports in January and February 2023. This review was included in the Service Improvement Plan where a summarised version is attached to this report (**Appendix 3**).

- 5.3 The Red Amber Green (RAG) rating definitions within the attached Service Improvement Plan are outlined below. The RAG rating has been necessarily cautious as there is a significant difference between an action being implemented and it being embedded. As such, actions have only been RAG rated as green if there is good evidence of it being embedded.

| RAG Rating | Definition |
|------------|--|
| Red | Area shows no or limited progress |
| Amber | Area shows progress but not fully embedded |
| Green | Area shows good progress and is embedded |

- 5.4 The key areas of improvement activity are summarised as follows:

Management stability

- 5.5 There are no longer interim roles within Children & Families and Justice Social Work. The previous interim Team Manager for Placement has returned to her substantive role as Senior Social Worker for adoption and kinship care. There is, therefore, currently a vacancy for a permanent Team Manager where there is an active recruitment process. The appointment of a Team Manager in Placement Services is central to the ongoing improvement work where swift recruitment is critical. This has had an impact on progress and previous recruitment adverts produced limited number of applicants. We have now looked to address this, alongside the wider challenges to recruitment across the department, and have created a recruitment plan. This issue is pertinent across children and families social work nationally and it is recognised that there are plans on a national basis to tackle this issue. However, these will not provide solutions in the short term.

Recruitment and retention of staff

- 5.6 Following the inspection in March 2022 a number of members of staff left the fostering team. As noted above, this is within the context of national challenges in recruiting and retaining social work staff, particularly in the areas of work with children and families. This situation created pressures for the service and has had an impact upon the ability to progress some development work. However, notwithstanding this, significant development work has taken place. There has been a steady recruitment process in the fostering team where it is expected to be fully staffed by May 2023.

Training and induction for staff

- 5.7 The retention of staff has been supported by an improved Placement Services training schedule and induction process. The training schedule for 2023/24

has been completed and will be tracked on a monthly basis. The Policy Team has also a significantly improved training programme which sits alongside the Placement Services training schedule. The identification of training is supported by all staff having had an annual appraisal.

- 5.8 The progress of Life Story Work has not been as rapid as had been hoped. There are in-house practitioners providing support and guidance alongside newly purchased resources. A short life working group has been established to embed current progress and identify future developments and actions.
- 5.9 The induction process has been refreshed with the support of the Policy Team. There is an improved core induction for all staff in Children and Families & Justice Social Work. This is supplemented by specific induction activity for staff from Placement Services.

Processes and procedures

- 5.10 There has been considerable work in reviewing and re-writing the processes and procedures in Placement Services. This has been collated in operational documents for the teams and an updated LAC (Looked After Child) Manual for all of Children & Families and Justice Social Work.
- 5.11 Household Safer Caring Plans are in place for all foster placements. The Young Person Safer Caring Plans have been completed for all those assessed as high risk. The remaining Young Person Safer Caring Plans are to be completed in the next 3 months. This has been a significant amount of work as previously Safer Caring Plans were not consistently in place. The staffing capacity in the fostering team has resulted in this task taking longer than intended. However, this work is nearing completion where the understanding that Household Safer Caring Plans and Young Person Safer Plans are required is embedded with staff.
- 5.12 Unannounced visits for foster carers has also been a challenge as a result of staff capacity although good progress is being made. The staff in the fostering team fully understand the need for unannounced visits where this has been part of development sessions. Currently, 65% of foster carers have received an annual unannounced visit which demonstrates significant progress. There is a schedule in place for the remaining unannounced visits to be completed by the end of March 2023. Unannounced visits are a standing item at every supervision and are monitored via a tracking spreadsheet.
- 5.13 A monthly Tracking Meeting is now in place to have oversight of data spreadsheets. It was apparent that although a large amount of data was being collected this sat across a number of spreadsheets which were not being scrutinised effectively. The number of spreadsheets has been streamlined

where there is monthly monitoring by the Service Manager, Team Manager, Senior Social Workers and Business Support Manager.

Fostering & Adoption Panel

5.14 All 'Requirements' have been fully implemented and embedded.

Permanence planning

- 5.15 Following the inspection there was a refresh of the Permanence & Care Excellence (PACE) process which seeks to identify barriers to effective permanence planning and how these can be resolved. The PACE working group has reviewed the data and aims and is now tracking specific projects which are intended to improve permanence planning. This is work over a long time period where the impact of the projects upon practice and data will not be evident for a number of months.
- 5.16 Alongside the PACE working group there is the Permanence Tracking Meeting (PTM) and the Placement Oversight Meeting (POM). These two groups track the progress of individual young people thereby avoiding drift in permanence.
- 5.17 Together, these three meetings are providing valuable information and, at this stage, have identified processes and individual cases where immediate action has been required. The long term impact upon practice will not be known until we have had fuller evidence over the next few months.

Training for foster carers and adopters

- 5.18 There was an area of improvement identified by the Care Inspectorate on providing carers with improved training on child protection and managing challenging behaviour. In addition to the current online training, Morag Martindale (Self-Regulation Behaviour Management) and Kate Cairns training suite, means carers now have access to online child protection training and in person Behaviour Support Strategies (BSS) training as needed. There is current exploration of introducing training by Dan Hughes (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Acceptance) for managing challenging behaviour. This is starting with adopters and will move to include foster carers. It has been identified that carers can join in person training run by Cala (in-house children's residential provision) where appropriate.
- 5.19 There are now more comprehensive training options for carers. Training for carers is being tracked via a spreadsheet and subject to monthly monitoring.

Concurrency or dual approved foster carers/adopters

- 5.20 The Care Inspectorate highlighted that concurrent carers (fosters carers who then adopt) were not being supported as foster carers when undertaking the fostering task prior to adoption. This has now been fully rectified and reflected in concurrent carers now being described as dual approved foster carers/adopters.
- 5.21 Overall, there has been good progress in most areas in meeting the 'Requirements' and 'Areas for Improvement' identified by the Care Inspectorate. There are no areas RAG rated as red where the areas requiring improvement can, in part, be attributed to staff shortages through 2022 and 2023. However, Placement Services is approaching full staffing capacity where the Service Improvement Plan working group is anticipating more rapid progress.
- 5.22 The 'Requirements' and 'Areas for Improvement' identified by the Care Inspectorate will be subject to a second review process in late July 2023.
- 5.23 The Service Improvement Plan is an ongoing project where the working group will continue to meet on a fortnightly basis. It will now have a broader focus and will support improvements in areas not specifically identified by the Care Inspectorate, but where performance data, national policy developments and carer feedbacks points to areas requiring attention.

6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The work of Placement Services is underpinned by the Children's Services Plan with particular attention to Priority 4 "The outcomes and life chances of looked after and care experienced children and young people are improved". This links in, and is consistent with, the wider Corporate Plan for Moray Council.

The work of Placement Services is sighted on and committed to upholding the principles of keeping The Promise and the UNCRC Incorporation Bill. It is seeking to develop its role in line with The Promise and the importance of children's rights particularly in regards to having a good childhood and to hear the voice of children, young people and their families. There are no contraventions of child's rights to consider as part of this report.

(b) Policy and Legal

Placement Services has statutory procedural guidelines in accordance with Scottish Government guidance and regulations.

(c) Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no specific risk implications associated with this report.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications associated with this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio-Economic Impact

There are no equalities/socio-economic implications associated with this report.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impact

None.

(i) Consultations

Interim Head of Service, Panel Advisor, Chief Officer Health and Social Care, Equal Opportunities Officer, Senior Human Resources Advisor, Principal Accountant, Legal Services Manager and Committee Services Officer.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The purpose of this report is to request that the Committee scrutinise and note the outcome of the improvement work following the inspection of fostering, adoption and adult placements in March 2022.**
- 7.2 Placement Services is undertaking a process of learning and improvement via the Service Improvement Plan overseen by the associated working group. This work has been supported and reinforced by the inspection in March 2022 of fostering, adoption and adult placements.**

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