Foster Care: Envisioning the Future

A Discussion Paper - February 2017

Social Workers in Foster Care
(SWIFC)

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1 - Introduction

1.1   Introduction to *Foster Care: Envisioning the Future*

This Document - *Foster Care: Envisioning the Future* - gives an overview of the current views and concerns of social workers in relation to foster care in Ireland. It is the product of consultation and discussion initiated by SWIFC, the Social Workers in Foster Care special interest group (SIG) of the IASW (Irish Association of Social Workers). The role of social work in the development and delivery of alternative care is therefore a primary focus of the document.

The initial impetus for the development of *Foster Care: Envisioning the Future* arose at the AGM of the Social Workers in Foster Care (SWIFC) in Waterford in August 2014. The need to publish a document highlighting social workers' views and experiences in respect of foster care in Ireland was identified as a priority. It was felt that SWIFC has enormous collective experience and ideas as to what needs consideration and / or needs to change in the care system. The SIG group set out to consult with relevant stakeholders and to capture and record those ideas and experiences. This document goes some distance towards achieving this objective.

Foster Care: Envisioning the Future reflects a range of views and opinions on the relevant issues. The aim in producing this document is to promote further debate and discussion, not only within the social work profession, but also with the various other stakeholders involved in the provision of alternative care in Ireland.

This document highlights many of the complex issues impacting on the provision of foster care in Ireland today. Such issues arise from several sources and therefore require a thorough and broad analysis in order to build effective solutions on the best way to sustain and develop this most valuable resource for children in need of alternative care.

This document reflects on and recognizes the progress made over the past twenty years in the development of many aspects of the current foster care services. It is our view that, in no small measure, the establishment of a Working Group in October 1998 by the Minster of State at the Department of Health and Children (DoH&C 2001) was a key factor leading to the progress that has been made.

A key point of this document therefore is that SWIFC is recommending to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs that she establish a new *Working Party on Foster Care* to review and progress further the provision of foster care in Ireland.

SWIFC recommends that the terms of reference for a Working Party on Foster Care should provide for a review of the current situation in respect of foster care under the following headings: **Law; Policy; Resource Allocation and Utilization and Best Practice.**

1.2   Background and Methodology

SWIFC members were invited to attend a series of consultation meetings to contribute to the process of compiling this document. Information and views were shared and debated. Reports on the outcome of the meetings were circulated to SWIFC members with feedback and further comment sought. At the request of the committee, the SWIFC chairperson along with Dr Valerie O'Brien, SWIFC and University College Dublin was tasked with drawing together the substantial material gathered. The material was synthesised and structured

into a draft document. A number of iterations ensued which were reviewed and amended by the editorial committee before the final draft was agreed and submitted to the IASW[1] Board.

This document aims to capture current thinking in social work at a time of major change in child welfare, and identifies both the challenges and strengths involved in current foster care policy and practice. It reflects on the changing environment within which the care system operates, and the implications of this for social work practice, with particular regard to social work ethics and values.

Foster Care: Envisioning the Future should be seen as a document that will initiate and contribute to the dialogue and debate that SWIFC thinks needs to be occurring. The document is structured under the following headings:

- Social Work and Alternative Care
- A Changing Environment and the Impact of Stressors
- What is Working Well?
- What Needs to be Addressed?
- Envisioning the Future: Recommendations for On-going Discussion.

1.3   Alternative Care

Alternative Care has become the accepted umbrella term for the types of care arrangements available for children who are in the care of the State. It is conceptualised in this document as a 'process of parenting children in State care'. It includes Residential Care, Special Care as well as the family based options of Foster Care and Relative /Kinship care. These terms are used throughout this paper, though the main emphasis is on foster care. Foster care is the most prevalent form of care provision in the Republic of Ireland. Foster care with relatives or relative / kinship care refers to the placement of children within the family or kinship network. This type of care has seen a steady growth over the past two decades with 28% (n = 1772) in 2016. (See comparative table below).

Profile of Population of Children in Care *
Total Number of Children in Care in the State = 6,329 at the end of Q3 2016;

Foster Care General;   = 4,133 (65%)

Foster Care with Relatives;   = 1,772 (28%)

Residential Care General;   = (312) 5%

Residential Care Special;   = (9) <1%

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*Source - Tusla Integrated Performance and Activity Report Q3 2016 – See Appendix 1 for more detail.

1.4   The Changing Service Delivery Environment

The changing environment is considered from the perspective of 'change drivers' currently influencing the provision and delivery of the child care services - in particular foster care and other types of alternative care. The ideological and policy factors driving change, as well as the implications for the delivery of alternative care of the establishment of a designated single agency - Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, are considered. In addition, changes in the organization of social work departments are explored, and particular attention is paid to structures and arrangements for the recruitment of foster carers and the provision of ongoing supports to them.

Stressors on the relationships among the various stakeholders in the provision of alternative care are documented. The position of social worker is given particular attention. Positive aspects of the structural changes are also considered. Legal provisions relating to child care are explored, and their practical implications are appraised. The establishment of the 'after care service' for children in care transitioning into adulthood is noted and this principle is welcomed.

The document is informed by a number of recent publications and policy documents and references are included at the end. The important reference documents include the IASW publication '*Call for Change'* (Children and Families SIG 2011); O'Brien and Cregan 'The Future of Foster Care – a Change Agenda' (*Social Work in Ireland,* 2015*),* the *Practice Handbook for Alternative Care* (Tusla, 2014b). The publication close to going to press of Alternative Care Strategy (Gharabaghi, 2016), a scoping document in respect of alternative care commissioned by Tusla (McLean and Tuite, 2016), IFCA Consultation on Support (O'Toole, 2015) and IFCA / Tusla interim report Gibson and Bond (2016)
were also utilized. It is also noted that the development of an 'Alternative Care Strategy' is underway in Tusla, but at the time of going to press no draft document was available.

Foster Care: Envisioning the Future, A SWIFC Discussion Paper, concludes with recommendations on how foster care services might be advanced in the interests of children in need of alternative care. The social work profession sees itself as having a pivotal role to play in the development and delivery of quality alternative care services.

2 - Social Work and the Provision of Alternative Care

2.1   The State's Responsibility for Alternative Care

The State assumes an onerous responsibility for the care of the child in circumstances where the parent/s, for a wide variety of reasons, are unable, unwilling or are not considered capable of carrying out their parental responsibility.

The manner in which the state carries out its responsibilities is a major issue for the child in its care. The State must find an acceptable alternative to the care provided by the parents and, through the Child and Family Agency, the state assigns the social work profession a key role in discharging its responsibility.

The influence of the social work profession in the development of foster care is described by O'Brien and Cregan:

> "............*the policy of preferring family-based care (foster care), first set out in the 1954 Boarding Out Regulations, was also slow to develop in Ireland. However, the reassertion of the policy in the Task Force on Child Care Services (1980) has been successful (Considine and Dukelow, 2009) and Ireland now has the distinction of sharing a lead position with Australia in the provision of such care (Thoburn, 2010). Social workers have been pivotal in delivering this achievement. There is evidence of a widespread commitment to the idea that foster care is the 'only really good care for children' (Horgan, 2002, p, 35), but social workers continue to advocate the need*

Foster Care is acknowledged to be an essential resource for the child protection services. Developed and supported by the social work profession, foster care provides an invaluable resource for the protection of vulnerable children. If foster care provision fails or is compromised, the Child and Family Agency's ability to protect children fails or is compromised in turn.

Tusla's practice handbook (Tusla 2014b), acknowledges the key role of the social work profession in developing and maintaining an effective, functioning care system. It notes the changes in regulation of the profession via CORU and HIQA in recent years. It re-affirms the principle that effective social work requires that 'relationship' and 'building trust in relationships' is central to achieving good outcomes.

2.2   Centrality of the Child

Social work, in practice and in its ethics and values, give primacy to the needs and interest of the child. This principle of 'the best interests of the child', now enshrined in legislation and reflected in Social Work professional ethics and practice, is sometimes in conflict with resource management and business processes within the Agency. Managing this tension is central to the work of social workers and service managers.

Social work is now undergoing a rebalancing process in its relationship with foster carers, from a previous emphasis on support for foster care providers, to one wherein supervision of the placement is now more central than hitherto. The new emphasis on standardised procedures and paperwork has contributed significantly to this recalibration.

The social work profession holds that a strong relationship between foster carers and social workers, characterised by mutual trust and a shared commitment to the needs of vulnerable children, is central to enabling collaboration and accountability on both sides. The profession strives to ensure that social work values and ethics continue to be central to this work.

3 - A Changing Environment and the Impact of Stressors

3.1   The Changing Environment

The overall child welfare and protection system is experiencing inordinate change at this time. This changing environment has many dimensions: cultural, social, legal and political. This document seeks to identify the influences which are at play, and the implications of these changes for the delivery of an effective, child centered alternative care system.

The context or environment for the delivery of the care system is influenced by managerialism, allied with increased centralization, and an on-going process of reorganisation. In addition, statutory inquiries on child abuse and the ensuing media attention are changing the way policies are developed and implemented. National and European policies and directives also impact on services, including the alternative care system. Also significant are changing social values such as recognition of children's rights. In addition, the effort of practitioners (via professional organisations and research institutions) impact to ensure good practice and high quality services for children in care.

The re-organisation needed for child welfare and protection recommended in the report of the PA Consulting Group in 2009 was a very significant development in creating the current context for the delivery of Health and Social Services in the State. The report proposed, among other changes, the setting up of a separate Child and Family Agency (PA Report 2009). We are of the view that the extent and implications of this major change are yet to be fully recognised and realised.

An important factor in prompting such reorganisation was the need to respond to the child protection agenda. This agenda gained prominence in light of media attention and government reports (Buckley and O'Nolan, 2013; O'Brien 2014) when economic and political pressures demanded greater levels of accountability, as well as justification of expenditure in line with central government policy.

As a consequence of increased centralisation, local controls diminish and local priorities are relegated in favour of National or European priorities / directives. The changes in expectations of statutory social work, especially in child protection and alternative care provision, can appear to be led more often by agency reputational considerations and defensive practice, rather than by the social work values of equity, social justice, client's self determination and professional ethics which prioritise 'the best interests of the client'.

Greater levels of economic prosperity, and evolving social values influenced by more liberal attitudes across Irish society, also play a major part in changing the context within which social workers have to respond.

3.2   Standardization and Professional Autonomy

Efforts to create greater central control of service delivery have been under way, even before Tusla was established, in an effort to create greater standardization of service and the provision of a consistent child welfare system across the country. While efforts to create such consistency are to be welcomed, a number of major concerns had been expressed by social workers.

There are concerns that the negative features associated with overly procedural-driven systems identified elsewhere, (Munro, 2011) do not appear to have been recognised adequately by the new organisation.

Standardisation of policies, procedures, protocols and practices within fostering and children in care across the country is progressing. It is crucial that as part of this process initiatives developed at local levels need to be identified and harnessed. Local initiatives /policies could be circulated nationally and used on an interim basis where there have been delays in finalising a National Policy. For example, in some parts of the Mid-west, a Regional *Safe Care* policy in the investigation of serious concerns and allegations in Foster Care has been in operation for some years and it is believed that the national implementation of this policy on an interim base would be very helpful. On-going structured consultation with practitioners could inform constructive policy, and leave room for local practices that respond to local needs and contexts. Greater balance is needed in managing the demands of a central policy and maintaining a flexibility to respond to local variations in need.

Another area of concern relates to the dangers of failing to maintain linkages with the Health Service Executive (HSE). For example, under the new management arrangements emerging since the establishment of Tusla, the management of important support services for children in care such as medical, psychological and mental health services remain with senior HSE managers who no longer carry direct responsibility for children in care. The unintended effects of this development increases the likelihood of children in care not receiving the

priority access demanded by the National Standards in Foster Care (2003) to these essential services.

Measures to avoid such a scenario require Tusla to establish protocols that are both proactive and vigilant in ensuring priority access to essential service is ensured. Experience on the ground suggests that previously well-established formal and informal multidisciplinary connections (IASW, 2011) are being lost progressively. This in turn results in reduced access by children in care to these services.

3.3 Managing the Tensions

Great strides have been made by Tusla but there are concerns that Tusla's overuse of managerialism, market language of 'business processes and efficiencies' and the dominance of proceduralism, is somewhat at variance with the ethics and values of Tusla's own mission statement (Tusla 2016). While the benefits of standardisation and efficiencies can contribute to the more effective use of resources, serious deficits are inevitable if attention is not paid to the type of relationships it aims for and also its impact on staffing. There is a need for a more realistic appraisal of the available levels of consistent, well-trained and flexible staff to meet the organisation's stated objectives. There is evidence that adequate staffing is simply not in place to respond to an ever-increasing workload (See Staffing Activity report in Appendix A), and this is having an impact.

The following quotation portrays many social workers' experience.
> *"There is a diverging gap between available resources and increasing demands which is widening at a greater rate than is safe or sustainable." .... "Our role and remit has actually expanded, as pressure to implement standards has increased, --- so, as the job expands, the resources decrease." (IASW Poster Presentation, 2013)*

The impact of dealing with austerity measures alongside coping with the increased demands on the service is a major stressor. There is no doubt that these stressors, amongst the others outlined above, have had and continue to have an impact on the working environment and on the relationships between social workers and foster carers. It is well accepted that a good working relationship between social workers and foster carers constitutes a critical component in contributing to a successful placement for the child. Yet the level of flexibility to apply professional discretion has reduced in light of increased proceduralism and diminished resources, thus impacting on the professional discretion available to address the needs of foster carers, their family members and the foster children in their care.

With stronger central governance, the Child and Family Agency, Tusla can provide greater direction through national policies and procedures. However, in a drive towards achieving parity of access for service users, valuable professional discretion in decision-making has been compromised. It is essential therefore to temper national policies with provisions that enable professionals to exercise the flexibility to meet the diverse individual needs of clients. For example, increasing expectations around health and safety standards for foster family homes may have the unintended consequence of compromising the non-institutionalised family dimension of foster care that has served children and the State so well over the years. While it is impossible to argue against health and safety considerations such as restrictions on smoking in the home or keeping potentially dangerous family pets, a degree of discretion is nevertheless needed to ensure that prospective foster carers are not lost in a sea of tick-box bureaucracy or over regulation.

While striving for balance remains a critical issue, in the meantime, social workers have identified a number of areas that are currently working well as part of SWIFC's consultation process.

4 - What is Working Well?

4.1   Introduction

Concerns about the pressured working environment are moderated by a recognition amongst practitioners and other stakeholders that much is working well in the Alternative Care system. The following issues have been identified as being among the current achievements:

- Foster Care is increasingly recognised and valued as the essential service for children who need alternative care, and is acknowledged as the backbone of the child care services.

- Ireland can be proud that so many children in the care system have access to family based care.

- The establishment of a dedicated agency, Tusla/Child and Family Agency has the potential to create alignment and clarity of purpose.

- The Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA), an organization open to all parties that have an interest in foster care, including social work professionals, plays a vital role in influencing the Care System

- There is greater access to statistical information and evidence of a growing commitment to research relating to alternative care. (Gharabaghi, 2016, McLean and Tuite 2016)

- The *Alternative Care Practice Handbook,* a standardised reference has been published. (Tusla, 2014b)

- The development of a new *Alternative Care Strategy* is underway in Tusla

4.2   Delivering Foster Care - The Changing Context of Inspection and Greater Public Attention

There are many examples of significant progress being achieved by the application of good standardised practice within departments (HIQA, 2015)*.* HIQA inspections and reports have made a valuable contribution to the experience of care for many children. They are designed to measure compliance with the National Foster Care Standards. However, it is important to retain focus on how the different measurements relate to quality of outcome for the child. It is also worth reflecting on the assertion that "too great a focus on outcomes at the expense of process, may militate against real progress for children." (O'Brien and Cregan 2015, p92)

There is a growing recognition of the value of foster care as a resource for the child protection system. Media attention, particular newspaper articles, documentaries and current affairs programmes, some of which dwell on the negative instances of poor practice within foster care, can also serve to highlight the importance society now places on having properly monitored and supported good quality foster care services in place for vulnerable children in need of protection.

It is recognised that the task of developing and supporting a foster care service is a nuanced and sensitive undertaking with many dimensions. One practitioner describes foster care as:

> *'Organic and like a fragile flower, susceptible to the environmental and social conditions in which it exists'.*

If we are to take this analogy, time and energy has to be devoted to tending to the growth and development of foster care. For example, having invested considerable time and effort in

recruiting foster carers, it is very important that appropriate levels of support and supervision are made available to retain them as they are a precious resource. It is essential to sustain foster carers in providing high levels of quality care to children. Many of the children can present challenging behaviours following the traumatising circumstances which brought them into care. Numerous HIQA reports highlight the importance of both support and supervision for foster carers. Social workers agree, and emphasise that it has to be resourced properly. Long term benefits to the child care system will accrue from this. Supporting the fostering service should be viewed as an investment, with valuable long-term returns over time as well as immediate gains.

4.3   The Review : A Useful Mechanism to Provide Support and Supervision

The publication of *The National Standards for Foster Care* (Department of Health, 2003) was an important development and provides a good structure for the service. The review process for foster carers outlined in Standard 17 "Foster carers participate in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide high quality care and to assist with the identification of gaps in the fostering service", is one standard that warrants particular attention. These reviews offer an important opportunity for both the foster carers and for the Agency service to recognise good practice and address shortcomings, training needs or the need for additional supports. However, regular reviews have still to become the norm in many areas. It is important to acknowledge that Foster Carer reviews do occur in a timely manner in a number of areas. Where it has happened, it has occurred against a backdrop of restrictions on staffing levels. Contributors to this document highlight the importance of having adequate social work staff to carry out this important function.

4.4   The Irish Foster Care Association

The Irish Foster Care Association, (IFCA) set up in 1981 by both Foster Carers and Social Workers, has proven to be a valuable resource for the foster care service. IFCA has played a pivotal role in influencing successive governments towards progressive developments in all areas relating to foster care including legislative, financial, educational (training programmes) and promotional awareness of foster care on a National and International stage. IFCA plays a vital role in promoting partnership between social workers and foster carers. Joint training initiatives between SWIFC and IFCA, and IFCA and Tusla have proven very effective on a number of levels. It is important that the Child and Family Agency support its staff to build effective working partnerships with IFCA both at national and local level. However, the recent cuts in Tusla's allocation to the local IFCA branches could be interpreted as a disregard for the important role played by the local element of this voluntary organization, notwithstanding Tusla's commitment to supporting IFCA at a national level.

4.5   Tusla/The Child and Family Agency

Contributors to this discussion document view the establishment of Tusla/Child and Family Agency as a progressive move and in a generally positive light. The hope was that it would create greater clarity of purpose for child care services, notwithstanding what are perceived as certain shortcomings in its design. In the first instance, it is now suggested that as the new agency is bedded down, there is a need to review the outcomes that have been achieved and to consider what further changes are called for. Such a review could be part of the remit of the Governmental Working Party proposed in this document.

The impact of an increasing number of new and reworked policies on the relationships between management, social workers and service users generally, and foster care in particular needs careful evaluation. It is acknowledged that the development of a number of policies and procedures was overdue and necessary in the main, but evaluation of the new policies needs to be built-in from the outset. The evaluation / review process needs to include meaningful

consultation with both the carers and professionals on the ground, who have been tasked with operating them.

The *'HSE Foster Care Committees Policy, Procedures and Best Practice Guidance for the operation of Foster Care Committees'* (HSE[2] 2012) is an example of how this type of development can be achieved. This development was generally welcomed as it offered a clear practice guideline at a national level as to how committees and assessment processes are to function. It is understood that a review of the document is under way. A second major initiative underway within Tusla, as indicated above is the development of an *'Alternative Care Strategy'.* At the time of going to press, there is no indication as to when this strategy will be available. Tusla however did make a number of documents commissioned by them available to SWIFC (Gharabaghi, 2016; McLean and Tuite, 2016). The documents have been beneficial to the development of this discussion document.

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[2] HSE was the organization in place prior to the establishment in January 2014 of the Child and Family Service –Tusla. Many documents were published or circulated under the auspices of the HSE - Health Service Executive agency.

5 - What Needs to be Addressed?

5.1   Availability and Utilization of Resources

The IASW 2011 paper, A *Call for Change,* (IASW 2011) highlighted the chronic pressure on the child protection and welfare services, and identified areas that called for immediate attention and remedial action. SWIFC shares these concerns, and highlights in particular

> *'the major responsibilities for the state is to provide comprehensive supports for children in care; all children have an allocated social worker; children in care need well supported placements that fit their needs; Children coming into emergency care need appropriate services' 'a full and adequate aftercare service for all children leaving care; Equitable levels of high quality service delivery by social work departments nationwide' (IASW, 2011 p5).*

Failure to address these deficits result in increased pressure on the fostering service, and on the staff involved. This, in turn, compromises the capacity of the child protection and welfare services to meet the additional demands on it. Creating a high quality service demands personnel, experience and sufficient time to allow practitioners reach well thought-out, thorough and evidenced decisions. Particularly in this age of financial constraints, encouragement and support for such practice is needed to ensure economic considerations do not compromise the quality of service available to the children in state care who require it.

The current Foster Care service cannot be taken for granted and needs to be resourced and developed on an on-going basis. Existing carers currently play a key role in recruitment of new carers. They do this, not only by participation in formal Tusla information events, but frequently promote foster care through "word of mouth" or personal recommendation. The relationship between retention of existing carers and carers' role in recruitment needs to be given greater acknowledgement. Support is crucial to both these activities. Foster care, which is essentially based on voluntary participation, will diminish and struggle without reaffirmation and encouragement. In the current climate of increased placement demands, additional attention is required if this important family based provision is to be adequately developed and maintained.

5.2   Organization and Structure Issues aimed at Mitigating Staff Burnout

How the working environment is structured and organised has important implications for the effectiveness of a service and the capacity of the workers. Social workers have expressed concern for some time about the level of burnout among their members. While various efforts, both within Ireland and internationally, have been made to respond to the challenges that the ever more complex and emotionally demanding levels of work creates, little progress has been made in containing the problem. While it is acknowledged that the shortage of qualified social workers has contributed to these difficulties, it is also believed that the manner in which workloads are organised within the agency can make a significant difference and merits careful examination and consultation. Retention of social workers in the service remains a major goal of Tusla in a context where more experienced workers often choose to leave.

The extent to which Social Work departments are organised on a highly specialised basis or a completely generalised one, has long been a subject of debate (Trevithick, 2014). How service delivery is organised can have important impact on the potential effectiveness of a service. There are clear benefits to workers having a wide range of skills and awareness of the challenges involved in all aspects of the service being delivered. However, having more detailed knowledge and time to focus on a specific area of the work can have particular advantages. Whether that be in

the area of child protection and family support, (currently the domain of the Child and Family Teams) or supervision of children in care and foster family recruitment and support (currently pursued by foster care teams), merits careful and detailed consideration.

5.3   Professional Performance

It has been suggested that a pragmatic response to competing demands calls for some rotation of caseloads to achieve work mix while not abandoning specialist provision. In assessing the benefits of any such organisation of work, it is essential to evaluate the success of such arrangements on the outcomes achieved for the child / client.

A number of studies (Triseliotis et al., 2000, Sinclair et al., 2004) have suggested the need to both ring-fence specialist provision, while also offering a general response in providing carers with support, supervision, and training. It has been recognised that if the focus of work is too broad then efficiency suffers, since there tends not to be enough time to be effective in any area. Some flexibility is necessary in adjusting staffing arrangements in order to achieve an optimum balance.

The rationale for the assignment of social workers needs to be made explicit, with its benefits acknowledged and its deficits recognised. It should include, whenever possible, consideration in deployment of particular interests and skills possessed by workers in order to achieve maximum buy-in. It is, however, crucial that key anchor personnel are retained within departments while maintaining flexible assignment of staff in order to preserve corporate knowledge and continuity for clients with familiar key personnel. This approach respects the principle of keeping the client needs at the centre while taking account of requirements to retain well-motivated workers.

Creating more flexible models of working could also contribute towards the potential to provide a supportive Social Work service outside office hours. There is an urgent need to offer such a service if Tusla is to be able to match the supports currently offered to foster carers by the private sector.

It is argued that social workers need to experience an adequate level of work satisfaction if their performance and energy levels are to be sustained. It is therefore proposed that, on the one hand, staff should be afforded an element of individual choice to pursue professional interests / preferences in the field, while recognising the demands and constraints involved in service delivery. A concerted effort on the part of the Agency is therefore necessary to cultivate greater opportunities for enhancing service delivery by enabling individual career planning, providing opportunities for building a culture of collegiality and highlighting the place of consultation within and between teams. Staff retention is a critical component in the delivery of a stable and quality service.

5.4   Standardization & Centralization

Standardization, as discussed in Section 2.2, can make a positive contribution to clarifying and creating a common understanding of the purpose of particular functions and procedures. In recent years a range of new standard operating protocols, policies and procedures have been developed and many of these are to be welcomed.

 While it is acknowledged that there are many positive aspects contained in the protocols, there also exists a need to examine the implications of such procedures on professional and ethical practice.

One such protocol to illustrate this point is the work that was undertaken to establish a *Central Register of Foster Carers* to capture foster placement availability. This protocol has progressed across the country but it is not clear what impact this has had on individual children. In many

instances, children have been taken into care from centres of high population and have been transferred to more distant locations, as a direct result of this new protocol.

Another example of the tension between professional and managerial practices is associated with new technology and, in particular, with electronic information systems. Administrative processes and the use of new systems for data storage and accessibility are being introduced progressively. While such systems contribute to efficiency in practice, they may also have professional and ethical implications, which do not appear to be acknowledged adequately. For example, the application of confined categories offered in dropdown lists are designed to accommodate database measurement. On the one hand, they are presented as a means of improving productivity and measuring outcomes better. On the other hand, such approaches can lack sensitivity in reflecting accurately the nature of some complex cases.

The increasing use of technology in the production of reports and the processing of foster carer applications has raised concerns in respect of privacy and confidentiality issues.   In light of social work ethics, and data protection legislation, concerns have been raised about information storage systems and access to personal data.   There is a need for even clearer protocols around the compilation and storage of personal information.

5.5   Recruitment of Foster Carers

A critical area that cries out for attention is the recruitment of foster carers. A severe shortage of suitable placements is reported in many areas. However Ireland is not alone in this trend, as Gharabaghi *et.al.* (2016 p. 41), point out: *"In recent years, recruitment of regular foster families has proven challenging in most jurisdictions".*

 It is essential to review how this critical deficit of placements is being managed at present. Firstly, there is an intrinsic relationship between the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the emergence of the role of the private sector in foster care provision. (See 5.6 below). There are instances of 'outsourcing' to private providers of core social work functions. For example, there are areas of the country where Tusla recruitment campaigns are pursued and, when applicants come forward, there are few social workers immediately available to undertake the assessments. One of the methods managers have adopted in some areas to deal with this situation is to seek the assistance of the private sector. These private sector companies employ temporary social workers to undertake the assessments on behalf of Tusla.

However, this does not solve the fundamental problem of social work staff shortage, as the Child and Family Agency/Tusla has subsequent difficulty in assigning a link social worker. Of the 4,523 on the panel of approved foster carers, 497 (17%) were without an assigned link social worker, according to the most recent statistics available (See Appendix 1).

Social workers in foster care assert that recruitment, training, and assessment of foster carers are part of a continuum of relationship building that is an essential component of an effective fostering service. The 'matching process' i.e. the placement of children in foster homes is informed by the knowledge arising from this working relationship between social workers and foster carers. This relationship is diminished by being fragmented, but can be significantly enhanced by being part of a continuous, integrated process. This is consistent with best practice as outlined in the *Alternative Care Handbook* (Tusla, 2014b p 40). The handbook states that it is good practice that the assessing social worker becomes the fostering social worker/link worker. In this way there is continuity of relationship, communication, and trust.

Secondly, the impact of the shortage of foster placements presents itself in many forms. One such consequence is that the most urgent placement demands take priority over the very important long term placement planning. For example, a child in "temporary" short term placement may be waiting for a long term placement but when a suitable match becomes

available it can be necessary to direct a child in need of more urgent placement to that home rather than the child for whom the placement had been matched. It is acknowledged that long term placement planning can be very difficult in an environment of chronic shortage (McLean & Tuite 2016).

Such chronic shortage of foster homes is not helped by the persistent gap between presenting need and available resources, factors which continue to be of major concern. HIQA inspection reports regularly highlight the number of foster parents without fostering social workers to supervise and support them. As previously stated, 17% of foster carers were without a link social worker in the third quarter of 2016 (See Appendix 1). International research suggests that foster carers who are without a link worker are more likely to drop out of foster caring (Sinclair et al., 2004). This deficit has clear implications for the retention of foster carers.

5.6   Private Sector Provision

Recent years have seen an increase in the use of private agencies to provide foster placements, and the important role played by the private sector is acknowledged. There are many advantages in the flexibility which the private sector enjoys that enables them to respond to the Child and Family Agency's need for placements. In the most recent information available from Tusla, (Q3 2016) there were 512 Children in private placements nationally (see Appendix 1). The development of such placements in addition to Tusla's own efforts to recruit must be welcomed. The question arises, however, as to why the Child and Family Agency has not invested the resources in creating a service capable of performing at an equal level to that of the private sector? Understanding the current strategy pursued by the Child and Family Agency would help reassure those within fostering departments how the current shortage of placements can be effectively addressed. The implications for Tusla's budgets in respect of funding placements sourced from the private sector remains a concern and a recent examination of this area in the media raises questions to the rationale for Tusla's practices in this regard (Irish Times, Sept, 2016).

Now that the Child and Family Agency/Tusla, has been established, there are concerns that the Alternative Care Services themselves might separate out from the Child and Families Services in order to facilitate a more autonomous development. Might the rationale for autonomy that resulted in the establishment for Tusla extend to other elements of the child welfare service and, if so, is there a danger of too much splitting? What would such an agency look like? What benefits would result? On the other hand it is suggested that greater control and accountability can be achieved by maintaining the development and management of placements within the same agency (Sinclair et al., 2004). It might be asked, how important is the overlap of responsibility and detailed knowledge of the challenges and strengths of one part of the service on the other? Similarly, to what extent does the capacity of alternative care to respond to fulfilling placement demand influence child protection practices?

Many social workers are keenly aware of the potential dangers of commercial or financial influences conflicting with 'the best interests of the child'. Where the Child and Family Agency approve funding for a placement provided by a private agency, the permanency and attachment needs of the child must be protected; therefore long-term funding to support the best placement for the child should first be secured where necessary. There is an important debate needed among all stakeholders, and society in general, to explore the parameters of contracting-out the provision of foster care placements.

In sourcing placements for children with complex needs, many areas within Tusla have looked to the private sector to deliver a service. These high support or treatment foster placements have become a significant feature internationally with, for example, Ontario in Canada reporting
> "*well over 50 organizations provide approximately 4000 treatment foster care beds that can be purchased by public authorities on a per diem basis.*" (Gharabaghi, 2016 p.42)

A significant number of social workers within SWIFC, have suggested that, in tandem with purchasing placements from the private sector, it may make sense for Tusla to expand its own therapeutic provision to include a range of enhanced support foster care placements. Such a development may well be necessary in order to address the increasing number of children in the care system with particularly complex needs. (Pearce, 2016; Tusla, 2016b) If properly established, such a development could achieve greater placement stability with better outcomes for children, while having the potential to be more cost effective over time.

5.7   Legislation and Court Proceedings : An Intrinsic Aspect of Alternative Care

Legislative provisions and court proceedings relating to Child Care raise many issues for practitioners in the field of child welfare and protection, including the care system. The Court Reporting Project, (Carol Coulter, 2014) has been of great benefit in cataloguing the range of challenges facing the District Court in respect of family law proceedings. It also allows for an enhanced understanding of the different pathways into care. It draws attention to the inconsistencies that exist around the country. Reports of this nature can help illustrate variations in practice and help to ask critical questions. For example, can different conclusions in two broadly similar circumstances be both valid? What are the factors accounting for the differences and what systems of accountability are in place to ensure justice for all?

There are changes in care proceedings that are placing more pressure for foster placements. It is becoming more common for social workers to request placements from their foster care teams in preparation for making applications to court. Given that such placements are often not required subsequently, this practice creates additional demands on a system already under great pressure. However concerning this might be, it is still considered to be a minor issue compared with the major challenges presented by some processes experienced by many social workers, parents and children in the course of care proceedings.

The role of the Guardian ad Litem (GAL), and the means by which the GAL is appointed, have caused uncertainty, stress and delay for children, birth parents, social workers and foster parents. Clarity is required about the role of the GAL, and the extent to which it overlaps with other professionals' responsibility for advocacy, assessment and representation of the best interests of the child? How can such an additional service be best structured to ensure proper accountability, consistency and line management? SWIFC recommends that the Guardian ad Litem service should be regulated and more importantly that the role of the GAL be clearly defined.

It has been questioned also whether the practice of Guardians using independent experts or engaging direct legal advice is a sustainable extra expense. This was highlighted in an extract from the Irish Times interview in 2013 with the then Minister for Children, Francis Fitzgerald who suggested that it was

> *"…not going to be sustainable from a child protection point of view if all our money is going on legal costs". …."It does mean changing the management of cases and giving more training to social workers who are going into court; more support for them, a bit more focus on the work they're doing. The adversarial system is not working and we are getting huge inconsistencies."* (Irish Times, 2013)

The issue of unrestricted repeat appeals of court orders and directions is another matter of concern to social workers. The following comment from a practitioner illustrates this concern:

> *"It is difficult to see how the organisation of our current court decision-making process represents the best way to meet the needs of vulnerable and traumatised children. Adjournments and ever repeated returns to court; protracted, adversarial challenge,*

layers of representation of the child and repeated assessments, all lead to prolonging the process and delaying the child's need for predictability and permanency." (SWIFC, 2015)

The importance of permanency is widely recognised as essential if children are to benefit from the loving care and security offered by a stable foster family placement. It is regrettable that, when the Child and Family Agency successfully secures such a valuable resource, a child's ability to maximise the potential benefits which it offers may be diminished due to the shortcomings of our legal system.

Social workers have struggled with what many see as the lack of a child-centered court system and, while some limited initiatives have occurred, the overall adult-centered agendas clearly predominate. There may now be a window of opportunity to address this long-standing deficit in the light of the passing of the 31st Amendment to the Constitution, promoting the rights of children. A revision of child care legislation therefore would be of critical importance in terms of how it might strive to radically tip the balance in favour of children's right for prompt and well-informed decisions which profoundly affect their long-term wellbeing.

In an earlier submission made by SWIFC through the IASW (2008) to the *Commission on the Constitutional Amendment on Children*, concerns were expressed that caution had to be exercised in order to avoid the trap of accepting the stated views of a child as an accurate expression of what they really feel, as opposed to what they believe professionals or other adults want to hear. It was recommended at that time, that appropriate training in child protection and child development should be a prerequisite for all those charged with the task of advising decision-makers in relation to children. O'Reilly asserted in 2012 that there is evidence that considerable progress still needs to be made in this area. We are of the view that this situation has remained largely unchanged.

5.8   Decision-making in Child Care:

Social workers are keen to ensure that decision-making is evidence based, informed by social work ethics and values, and utilises professional expertise. In the course of this consultation, many social workers expressed concern that various cultures can develop in an organisation that may militate against such decision-making. For example, there is a trend noted in some areas towards an over emphasis on reunification or a push to ensure contact between children in care and their families. It is, of course, imperative that both these goals are central to care planning. The importance of the child's family of origin cannot be stressed enough as an integral part of identify formation for children in the care system. Ongoing contact when it is in the child's best interest is central to best practice in foster care.

However, an over emphasis on reunification and high levels of contact even when there is strong conflicting evidence, may be connected to what Dingwall *et al*. describe as, the eternal "rule of optimism" (Dingwall *et al.,* 1983). This tendency can place too great an emphasis on the need for children in the care system to re-establish connections with their family of origin to the exclusion of their connections to foster carers or other positive attachment figures. This type of practice can have very serious and negative implications for a young person's ability to understand that returning home may not be in their best interests. (Gharabaghi, 2016) This can be compounded where birth families and the agencies working with the families have been unable to resolve the dysfunctional conditions present at the time the young person originally entered care. Many young people can be exposed to extreme emotional pressure from parents or family to return to their family of origin in these situations. The increased emphasis in both policy and practice guidance in respect of 'listening to the child's voice' and 'participation of children in decision-making' should be embraced more by social workers.

5.9   Leaving Care

The establishment of an enhanced 'After Care' service is to be welcomed. It is believed that this service, currently at varying stages of development across the country, needs to be fully integrated with the foster care service. It needs to be driven by the social work values of dignity, social justice, equity and assisting service users in achieving social inclusion and reaching their full potential.

Section 45 of the Child Care Act 1991 enables a health board to support those in care from the age of 18 to 21 if satisfied as to his [her] need for assistance, or to complete the education programme in which he [she] is engaged. The wording of this statute, of course, also allows a "health board" **not** to support those referred if it so decides, and where resources are very limited, only those services which statutory agencies are required to provide may get priority.

It has been recognised for some time that this legislative provision is an inadequate basis for such an important service. The service must strive to normalise the transition process of young people in the care system reaching adulthood. A structured State service needs to replicate, as far as possible, the task all parents shoulder in respect of their children's transition to adulthood. Surely the State carries an even greater responsibility when dealing with such a vulnerable group in society, whose birth parents have, as O'Brien and Cregan (2015) put it, "been disqualified from parenthood" by the State?

Proper legislation to require the state to provide the necessary support service is long overdue. This should, where possible, facilitate the foster carers, who have parented the young people throughout their childhood, in continuing the important task of parenting through this critical and sometimes hazardous phase. Given that this is a transition that every young person has to navigate, the arrangements to support this process should be similar for care leavers as those experienced by any young person, thus normalising it as much as is possible. While it is recognized that not all foster children attach to their foster parents, many foster parents continue to have a strong bond to their foster children and demonstrated the extent of this bond over many years. Greater attention needs to be paid to preserving and supporting this bond when transition plans are being made. Too often foster carers report being marginalized in arrangements made between the young person and Tusla.   This needs to be reviewed with greater recognition of the benefits given to preserving the foster carer / young person relationship. This action will, we believe, enhance the potential long-term support system that foster cares can continue to provide for the young person as they age into maturity.

It must also be recognised that young people who have been cared for within the residential sector will, in many cases, require a different model of transition, given the more structured nature of residential care. This is a development that is needed urgently.

5.10   Preventing Family Breakdown

Preventative interventions have always been key to social work practice and ethics, and thus prevention is seen as a cornerstone of this discussion paper. In the document "Call for Change" the IASW Children and Families Special Interest Group(SIG) sets out a number of requirements that they believed could provide a framework for minimising the risk to vulnerable children. The first two requirements were for "*changes to protect vulnerable children and families by enabling social workers provide early intervention and preventative services alongside adequate community support services*" and secondly they called *"...for social workers to be able to prioritise the relationship-building and direct work with children and families which is vital in protecting children."*

The Children and Families SIG expresses skepticism as to whether the drive to produce national standards and procedures would succeed in achieving the real changes needed to

address the severe problems they encounter and they insist that a greater focus on *"forms and processes do not protect children"* (IASW 2011 p.4).

While many areas identified within the *" A Call for Change"* document continue to be of concern to social workers, there have been a number of significant positive legal and constitutional developments (such as *the Child and Family Agency Act 2013* which established Tusla and the passing of the 31st amendment to the constitution). These changes offer new avenues for progress and are to be welcomed. As a profession, social workers now have an opportunity to work together with other stakeholders in developing the services needed by the families and children we serve. It is hoped that this paper, by promoting discussion and debate, can contribute to this process.

HIQA reports indicate that improvements have been achieved in some areas and this also is to be welcomed. However it would also be helpful to have a more comprehensive understanding as to the specifics of what has been achieved. For example, to what extent have resources improved since Tusla was established? Has access to psychological and medical services for children in Care improved? Can a case be made for establishing centers of excellence which are in addition to existing provision, and not at their expense? Has the national structure for services improved equitability or is there any evidence that might indicate "striving for" national service equality has had the unintended consequence of deterioration of service in previously well performing areas? In effect, could attainment of the lowest common denominator be claimed an achievement in the quest for equitability? These questions could be addressed by the proposed Working Party on Foster Care, which is strongly advocated for by SWIFC arising from this document.

Footnote on SWIFC

The origins of the special interest group on Foster Care (now SWIFC), can be traced back to a desire among a group of Social Workers to highlight the importance of the distinctive character of Foster Family Care in providing an alternative for children who could not remain with their birth family. At an early stage in the formation of the Special Interest Group in Foster Care, a colleague suggested that our efforts might be better spent addressing the serious inadequacy in respect of family support services, thus enabling children to remain with their family of origin and consequently alleviate the need for foster care placements. Much has changed over the intervening years following the many pleas and determined efforts to improve family support services, some more successful than others. However the demand for foster care placements is greater now than ever before. The reality is that circumstances can result in any family encountering a transient crisis when, for a limited period, alternative care is the only option. But regrettably, the sad truth is that for other children, some families are dangerous and potentially lethal for the most vulnerable in their midst. (Dale et al. 1990)

6 - Envisioning the Future:

Recommendations for On-going Discussion

6.1   Conclusion

This paper contains the views of 'SWIFC – (Social Workers in Foster Care) on the current state of social work and the alternative care system. It offers a basis for future discussion, information sharing and debate among social workers and other stakeholders in the Care system. It outlines views on the changing environment within which services for children now operate. It identifies a range of the change drivers at play that are impacting on social work relationships with the various stakeholders.

The paper explores the implications of the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of children's services from the HSE to a central national agency (Tusla). It reflects SWIFC members' views on what is currently being achieved and what needs attention. In the document, particular attention has been paid to the arrangements currently in place for foster care recruitment, retention and support; the need to provide a more robust aftercare service which aims to build on existing young person and foster carer relationships, and certain legal provisions relating to child protection and care proceedings which are currently challenging to foster care.

The paper concludes with a range of recommendations that are intended to provide a basis for discussion between the various stakeholders. SWIFC priority goal is aimed at influencing a change agenda in the delivery and development of foster care services. Fundamental to this is the need for a Government-mandated Working Party to take on the task of reviewing foster care policy, the legislation, resources and best practice. This is seen to be a necessary step in addressing the challenges faces by the fostering service, and the concerns raised in this document, *Foster Care: Envisioning the Future.*

6.2   Recommendations

6.2.1   Call for Working Party to Review Foster Care

- In the first instance, SWIFC/ IASW are calling on the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to set up a *Working Party* to review and progress the provision of foster care in Ireland.

- The terms of reference for the Working Party should provide for a review of the current situation in respect of foster care under the following headings – Law; Policy; Resource Allocation and Utilization and Best Practice.

- SWIFC /IASW recommend that, while the following issues should be included within the remit of the Working Party, a number of these issues need urgent attention.

6.2.2   Law/ Legislative Issues
- Revision of Child Care legislation is necessary to take account of the Constitutional insertion in favour of children's rights.

- The provision of after-care services for children who have grown up in foster care should be placed on a statutory footing. The after-care service should be fully integrated with the foster care service, and should be driven by social work values.

6.2.3 Policy

- Ireland has built a positive international reputation in terms of being able to provide family-based services for the vast majority of children in state care. This non-institutional dimension of family care needs to be balanced against a risk-averse, health and safety culture in society.
- A new service delivery model needs to be developed for managing kinship care which takes account of the particular characteristics of relative care.
- Research evidence should underpin decisions that affect children's long-term wellbeing.
- National policies should enable professionals to offer a necessary level of flexibility to meet local needs and deal with local conditions. A schema of accountability should be put in place to account for practices that do not fit with standardised processes.
- A number of innovative policies have been developed at local levels. These should be identified and endorsed as interim measures, until such time as centralised policies are developed.
- Relationships are the cornerstone of an effective foster care system. Provision should be made to ensure that relationship-building remains key.
- The need to set up support and advocacy services for birth parents of children in care should be prioritised.

6.2.4 Resources

- Examine the arrangements for undertaking all aspects of the social work service.
- Examine the trends of the Child and Family Agency investment in the support and development of its own foster care services compared with that of the private sector.
- Examine workload allocation within the Agency with the aim of reducing stress levels, creating a more effective and supportive working environment in light of incidents of burnout among social workers.
- Develop complementary Local and National Foster Recruitment strategy, which can meet the requirements of the *National Standards in Foster Care* (D.o.H, 2003).
- Agency needs to establish protocols to ensure that necessary access to services required by the *National Standards in Foster Care* (D.o.H, 2003) are prioritised.

6.2.5 Values

- A more inclusive approach is required as part of a dynamic model of managing kinship care.
- The Agency should review 'A Call for Change' Discussion Document published by IASW in 2011.

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The Extracts below are copied from Alternative Care Performance overview pp. 4 - 6 of Tusla's Q3 2016 Integrated Performance and Activity Report - available at: http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q3_2016_Integrated_Performance_and_Activity_Report_Final.pdf

ALTERNATIVE CARE SERVICE

Children in Care

➢ 6,329 children in care at the end of Q3 2016; 63 fewer than Q2 2016

➢ 517 children in private placements; 10 fewer than Q2 2016

➢ 94% (n=5,973) of children in care had an allocated social worker (against a target of 100%); no change from Q2 2016

➢ 356 children awaiting allocation of a social worker; down 18 on Q2 2016

➢ 93% (n=5,885) of children in care had a written care plan (against a target of 90%); up two percentage points from Q2 2016

➢ 98% (n=3,921/4,001) of children in care aged 6 to 15 years (inclusive) in full time education

➢ 93% (n=981/1,051) of children in care aged 16 and 17 years in full time education

Aftercare

➢ 1,920 young adults (all ages) in receipt of aftercare services at the end of Q3 2016; 23 more than Q2 2016 and highest number for period Q1 2015 – Q3 2016

➢ 34% (n=359/1,051) of children in care aged 16 and 17 years had a preparation for leaving care and aftercare plan; up one percentage point on Q2 2016

➢ 36% (n=376/1,051) of children in care 16 and 17 years had an allocated aftercare worker; up two percentage points on Q2 2016

➢ 152 young adults were discharged from care by reason of reaching 18 years; 87% (n=132) had an allocated aftercare worker.

➢ 88% (n=131/149) of those eligible for an aftercare service were availing of a service.

Adoption

➢ 620 applicants awaiting an information and tracing service at the end of Q3 2016; down 198 (24%) on Q2 2016 and fewest number awaiting for the year to date *(waiting list includes 240 applicants that transferred with files (13,600) from St Patrick's Guild to Tusla in May 2016)*

➢ All services meeting the target of eight weeks or less from time of application to provision of non identifying information

➢ 39 adoption assessments (domestic, inter-country, fostering to adoption) completed during Q3 2016 bringing the total for the year to date to 146

➢ 17 applications for step-adoption received during Q3 2016 bringing the total for the year to date to 47.

4

Foster Carers

➢ 4,523 approved foster carers on panel (all types minus Brussels II) at the end of Q3 2016; 10 more than Q2 and highest number for period Q1 2015 – Q3 2016

➢ 78% (n=1,204) of relative foster carers approved against a target of 80%; up from 76% in Q2

➢ 83% (n=2,459) of general foster carers had an allocated link worker against a target of 90%; down from 85% in Q2. Some 497 awaiting allocation; up 51 on Q2

➢ 76% (n=921) of approved relative foster carers had an allocated link worker against a target of 85%; down one percentage point from Q2. Some 283 awaiting allocation; up eight on Q2

➢ 348 unapproved relative foster carers; 34 fewer than Q2

➢ 300 (86%) of the unapproved relative foster carers had a child placed with them for longer than 12 weeks; 80% (306) in Q2

➢ 70% (n=209) of unapproved relative foster carers with a child placed > 12 weeks had an allocated link (social) worker; 63% (n=192) in Q2. Some 91 awaiting allocation; 23 fewer than Q2

REGULATION & SUPERVISION OF EXTERNAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Early Years Services

➢ 4,562 EYS nationally at the end of Q3 2016; 77 fewer than Q2 2016

➢ 242 EYS inspected during Q3 2016; 1,539 EYS inspected January – September 2016

➢ 61 complaints received in respect of EYS during Q3 2016; 155 received January – September 2016

➢ 0 prosecutions of EYS taken by the Agency January – September 2016

Children Educated In Places Other than Recognised Schools
School Year 2015/2016

➢ 1,213 children on the register for home education at the end of the academic year 2015/2016

➢ 4,795 children (approx) attending 44 independent schools at the end of the academic year

➢ 398 applications made under Section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 for home education during the year; 1,230 applications for education in independent schools

➢ 407 assessments for home education carried out during the year; six assessments for education in independent schools

➢ 319 children registered for home education during the year; 1,042 children registered for education in independent schools

➢ 127 children awaiting registration for home education at the end of the academic year

5

Non Statutory Children's Residential / Foster Care Services

➢ 88 private residential centres registered with the Agency at the end of Q3 2016; three fewer than Q2 2016

➢ 16 centres were due an inspection; all received their inspection

➢ 28 voluntary residential centres registered with the Agency at the end of Q3 2016; no change from Q2 2016

➢ Two centres were due an inspection and both received their inspection

➢ 7 non-statutory foster care services; 4 services received a monitoring visit during Q3 2016

EDUCATIONAL WELFARE SERVICES

Educational Welfare Services

➢ 3,751 new individual children worked with between September 2015 and August 2016 (academic year 2015/ 2016); 234 worked with during September 2016

➢ 528 school attendance notices (SANs) issued in respect of 366 children under Section 25 of the Education (Welfare) Act 20001 during the academic year 2015/2016; 101 SANs (63 children) issued in September 2016

➢ 121 summonses issued in respect of 91 children under Section 25 of the Act during the academic year 2015/2016; 19 summonses (13 children) were issued in September 2016

HUMAN RESOURCES OVERVIEW

Human Resources

➢ 3,555 (WTE) employed by the Agency at the end of Q3 2016; down 62 on Q2 2016

➢ 286 new staff came on to the Agency's payroll (January and August 2016)

➢ 199 staff left (incl. retirements) the Agency (January and August 2016)

➢ 143 staff on maternity leave at the end of August 2016

➢ 285 agency staff employed by Tusla at the end of August 2016

➢ 5.46% absence rate (August 2016); highest rate recorded since January 2016

➢ 133 courses run by Workforce Learning and Development in Q3 2016; 1,588 attendees

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Finance

➢ The financial outturn for the year to date (Sept 2016) is an over-spend of €2.244 million

➢ Pay costs are under-spent against budget by €2.242 million

➢ Non pay costs are over-spent against budget by €3.392 million

➢ Key area of over-spend is private residential and foster care costs at €2.575 million over Budget

➢ 45% (€9.746 million) of legal expenditure year to date on guardians ad litem (GALs), including GAL's solicitors and counsel.

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