

Good Practice Guide to Recruitment



2021 V.2

AFA Cymru
National Fostering Framework



National
Fostering
Framework
Fframwaith
Maethu
Cenedlaethol



Recruitment of Foster Carers

A guide to good practice for Local Authority Fostering Teams

This guide is intended to provide an outline approach to the behaviours, mindset and actions that will enable us all to create a consistent, effective, and positive customer experience for Local Authority foster carers, from their first step and throughout their journey with us.

The practice recommendations included in this guide are based on detailed analysis of performance data across all Local Authorities in Wales; feedback collated from applicants to foster and those recently approved; and exploration into the leadership, structure, systems and process of some of the best recruiting services across the UK.

This guide has been produced by the National Fostering Framework in partnership with AFA Cymru. It is endorsed by the key stakeholders who govern and lead on the work of the National Fostering Framework on behalf of Welsh Government.

The contents of this document should be considered as guidance. This guidance has been produced at the request of staff and services across Wales. It is important to acknowledge that the recruitment and retention of foster carers is an area of continuous development. We will continue to strive to learn from each other, and the people which we serve, to continually enhance our services and deliver improved outcomes. As with all aspects of local government service delivery, service models and structures are for services themselves to determine, according to local resources and demands.

“I remember feeling like I was making one of the biggest decisions of my life and I had no idea if it was the right thing to do.... Within a few minutes of my first call to the fostering team, I felt reassured, in safe hands and I was certain that the fostering journey was for me. I’ll never forget that first phone call.”

Consultation – Key Messages

The journey to becoming Foster Wales has been a whole team approach from the very beginning. We have only been able to reach this point because of the valuable insight of each and every stakeholder who took the time to share their experiences, views, perspective and ideas.

The greatest insight of all came from those at the heart of our services, the people who are living the fostering journey - applicants, foster carers, children and young people.

For those who offered first-hand experience, they shared rich information, which forms the foundation of the good practice recommendations within this guide.

Individual staff, working in a variety of capacities told us about what was working well, what they were worried about and the things that they would like to do differently.

Some services went the extra mile, they shared in great detail how they had transformed their service and produced excellent outcomes in the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Whatever your role is, or has been, on our journey to becoming Foster Wales, we are thankful for your support, insight and commitment.

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WHY we are doing this: the challenge we face, together

Local Authority Fostering is facing a recruitment challenge; put simply, there are more children in need of foster placements than there are approved foster carers.

It is estimated that across Wales we need to recruit 550 new foster carer families every year to keep up with the increase in numbers of children who need that care and support, whilst also replacing foster carers who retire or don't take on a new placement. Recruiting more high-quality foster carers into Local Authority fostering will help us create the best possible matches between families and children through increased choice and flexibility.

All of this is set against a hugely competitive marketplace, which is populated by a number of effective commercial organisations who have dedicated, trained marketing expertise in recruiting new foster carers. The Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) are able to focus effort and expertise in finding new foster carers who are then made available to Local Authority fostering teams at a considerable cost.

The big step forwards we have taken to face that challenge

Local Authority Fostering Teams across Wales have decided to take action, to significantly increase the number and range of foster carers recruited directly to Local Authorities and reduce our reliance on the commercial sector.

This requires Local Authority fostering and recruitment teams across Wales to think bigger, to combine our efforts and expertise to create a significant national impact on awareness that fostering is an option, and that fostering with your Local Authority is the best option.

We have created a single, consistent brand for Local Authority fostering across Wales that will enable us to build familiarity and authority, to become a natural first step. We will support that with an ongoing national advertising and marketing campaign to

raise awareness that fostering is a great thing to do, that almost anyone can do it, and that the best way to do it is with your Local Authority fostering team.

By working together, we will make a national impact across Wales by emphasising the advantages of our dedicated local expertise and community roles. To help create this national impact we have rebranded Local Authority Fostering as Foster Wales.

We are Foster Wales

Foster Wales clearly communicates that we are a fostering services provider, operating across Wales with a national purpose. It offers the scale and sense of authority that we want to create.

It also easily extends and adapts to create a local name for each Local Authority fostering team across Wales, whilst keeping them connected to the national picture.

Why do we do what we do?

The success of Foster Wales is built on us all living and breathing our collective purpose:

“Working Together to Build Better Futures for Local Children”

That is what we are here to do; it is our sole focus, it speaks directly to the altruistic nature of foster carers and it sets us apart from the commercial sector, who naturally have additional priorities and goals.

We are a collaborative of fostering experts, within our own Local Authority, with the other fostering teams in our region, and with every dedicated fostering expert in Wales. We work together.

But we also work closely with our foster carers. We are all part of one team, and we provide all the support and development opportunities needed to create positive outcomes for the children in our collective care.

The importance of customer focus

For this to work, for us to be able to achieve our goals and significantly increase the numbers of foster carers that we recruit and retain in our Local Authority, we must adopt a consistently high standard of customer focus.

It is critical to remember that first impressions count. It is a huge step for anyone to pick up the phone, or send an email, to ask about starting the journey to becoming a foster carer. It is a moment of truth, and it is vital that we make the first impression a positive one. That they feel they are in the hands of a positive, passionate, flexible, dedicated expert.

This is what we are competing against - a commercial sector that is tested, trained, and fine-tuned in their efforts to make the most of every lead. This is achieved by:

Making it easy for potential carers to make contact.

Being flexible in the options provided for that first contact 'moment of truth'.

Responding quickly to that potential foster carer making that first, tentative step to reach out.

Being tenacious in capturing that moment of truth and turning it into a fostering journey.

Using language that is positive, upbeat, helpful. "Yes, you can. Yes, we will".

We have to do just as well, if not better, in order to make the most of every lead that our national campaign and our local activities create for us.

Creating a new lead takes time, effort, resource.

We cannot afford to lose a single lead, to waste a single opportunity.

We cannot afford to be anything other than customer focused.

HOW do we become more customer focused?

Some Local Authorities have already gone through a rigorous process of observing the commercial sector, testing new approaches with our own foster carers, learning what works, understanding what we need to do in order to maximise every lead, nurture every contact, to ensure as many successful application journeys as possible.

To create as many approved new foster carers as we can

There are steps and changes we can make to our Practices, Policies and Processes that will all make a huge difference, many of which are described later in this Good Practice Guide.

But it takes more than just those three Ps; this is not just about **WHAT** we do. It is much more about **HOW** we do it.

Foster Wales is built on five values, or behaviours, that make us who we are and will enable us to be more customer focused.

Foster Wales is **Powerful**, by being **Surprising** and **Forward Looking** whilst remaining **Dedicated** and **Real**.

These are not just words to stick up on a wall and become forgotten.

These are fundamental drivers that inform and influence the way we need to think, speak, and act every minute of every day.

We must change public misgivings around Local Authority, make more of our strengths and adapt to address our weaknesses. We need to challenge some of the negative myths and increase awareness of the different ways people can foster, and the diversity of people who can become foster carers.

But we cannot overpromise. We must remain honest and authentic and paint a real picture of the genuine possibilities of foster care across Wales, with all of its diversity and local character.

We need to make more of our specific expertise; we are real people, trained to provide the best outcomes for children and their foster carers. It's what we do. It's what we've always done.

And we must react to the changing dynamics of modern life, recognise that one size does not fit all, and tailor our service to adapt to those needs.

We must adapt to the needs of our customer, not expect them to fit in with our priorities.

**Everyone who works for Foster Wales,
in every Foster Wales team across the country, is**

**Powerful
Dedicated
Real
Surprising
Forward Looking**

Be Powerful

Every child who needs a foster home is in our care, we have legal responsibility for them. Every potential foster carer has a desire to give something back, to help build a better future for those children. We have the power to make that desire a reality.

When they make that first call, they are taking a tentative step into the unknown. They are taking a risk; they will be feeling curious, cautious, exposed, nervous.

We have the power to calm those nerves, to provide reassurance, to be on their side from the first second. To understand their concerns, and for our every action to focus on managing them.

This is a moment of truth. We have the power to capture it and turn it into a journey. But the first step on that journey is critical. We must make the most of every enquiry, we cannot afford to miss a single opportunity. We must...

Be Dedicated

Deciding to become a foster carer is a huge step, a leap into the unknown.

From the minute we receive their initial enquiry, it is our job to provide the reassurance and confidence that they can do this, and we are the right people for them to work with.

We must be dedicated to making the most of their moment of truth and making them feel like they are in safe hands from that moment forward. We must be committed to responding the same day, in a way that works for them.

“I felt like I was like speaking to an expert, every question that I asked, they knew the answer and they told me things which I hadn’t even thought of! I remember feeling like I trusted this person and I quickly understood why fostering for my Local Authority was the only way for me to go.”

We must use that first contact to find out:

- when we can come and meet *them* in their home, either in person or via video call?
- When do *they* want to talk to us?
- what time works for *them*, on what day?

We must respond to *their* needs, not expect them to fit in with our availability.

We must offer a consistent service every day; we do not make empty promises at the beginning and then underdeliver, we are focused on supporting every step of their journey. We must...

Be Real

We're not a big, distant corporation.

We're real people, active in and connected to their community. We can talk to them about real life 'round our way'; we live in the same places they do, use the same shops, the same schools.

We have knowledge and understanding of the specific opportunities or challenges in our local areas, so we can always provide relevant conversation, build natural connections, and offer timely support.

We must be accessible and approachable, speak in natural, plain language that offers expertise and authority but doesn't blind people with jargon or acronyms.

We can provide real clarity on the process of becoming a foster carer, the support and training they will receive, the types of children and young people who need a foster carer, how almost anyone can be a great foster carer.

A lot of this information will challenge their misconceptions, make it feel very possible, flexible, diverse, and inclusive. In many ways, it will...

Be Surprising

There are too many false myths about fostering. About the types of people who can, or more crucially can't, foster. About the types of children who need fostering, a narrow picture of distress and disruption. Much of the language used about fostering is negative, focused on damaged children, neglect, drugs, abuse.

We know there is so much more to it than this, so it is our job to surprise them. To tell them about how flexible fostering actually is. Let them know about the different types of foster placements there are, from overnight stays to looking after children and parents together.

Help them see how diverse fostering is, how almost anyone can foster irrespective of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or marital status. How this is about families, sibling groups, growth, and opportunity. How, first and foremost, this is about **building better futures for local children.**

It's our job to blow the conversation open and reflect the energy, diversity and delight that comes from fostering.

There are negative perceptions of Local Authority too. That we're slow, under pressure, too busy, too stretched. That we are stuffy, stuck in the past, out of touch. 'The Council'.

It is our job to change that perception. We need to be quick, responsive, positive, energetic. To respond more quickly than they might expect, in a positive, upbeat manner that is all about the potential, reassuring and calm.

And while it is true that we have a long history, and our Local Authority is a very established organisation, we must change the perception that we're stuck in the past. With fostering, the most important step is the next one, so we use the experience of our past to...

Be Forward Looking

Creating a better future for a local child, and a better fostering experience for the people who care for them, is all about turning the page and helping them write the next chapter in their story.

To help people move forwards we need to look to the future, to work as a team with each other and our wider carer communities to build a better tomorrow for the children who are in our care today.

And that has to come across in the way we behave and communicate too. We must move on from methods and attitudes that anchor us in the past and distance us from our audience. We must embrace a fresh, positive approach.

We are an engaging, open, and modern organisation ready to work with contemporary, outcome-driven, and progressive foster carers. We're in touch, responding at the pace they expect.

We respond with pace, because we want to help them make a difference and the right time is now.

We want them to see that fostering can work for them, so we adapt to their needs and priorities, not the other way around.

We want them to be excited about the journey, so we respond with enthusiasm and empathy.

We want them to feel reassured about the next steps, so we talk them through the process and explain our dedicated expertise and support.

We want them to know that by fostering with the Foster Wales team, they are working with us to build better futures for local children.

WHAT we need to do: Practices, Policies and Processes

Practices

As described in this guide, the essential ingredient to successfully engaging with potential foster carers is a customer focused approach that is centred on them, their needs, their priorities.

So how can we achieve this?

Being customer focused requires us to look at the process from the customers view and create a journey which is entirely focused on their needs. So, we need to consider things like:

First impressions

The first experience prospective foster carers have when they first contact Foster Wales at our Local Authority, will reflect on the whole fostering service. If they have a really positive first impression when they contact us, and experience a quick, positive, engaging, and open response, they will naturally assume that we will provide a good service throughout their journey. First impressions count, and last.

Getting the tone right

During that first call, a lot of in-depth, personal information is gathered about someone who cannot see you or has never met you, so be as friendly and natural as possible. Take your time, do not rush and crucially, don't create the impression that you are busy or running out of time. There is no such thing as taking 'too much' time at this critical moment in their journey with us.

Your tone will go a long way to creating a positive first impression and will help them get to know you and your local Foster Wales team as they start to build a sense of trust and familiarity.

Using simple language and avoiding “jargon”

The processes and terms that we use every day are familiar and meaningful to us but will probably mean nothing to a prospective foster carer. It is really important to be conversational, talk in simple language, and avoid jargon and acronyms.

At best it may confuse people, at worst it could result in them not taking their interest any further which means we lose a lead.

For example, this could mean language like:

- asking people if they are calling about an initial enquiry, rather than asking if they're interested in finding out more about fostering
- discussing the type of “placements” we need rather than talking about children, their stories, and their needs
- explaining about the “form F” rather than the careful assessment processes you will be going through in order to get their journey off to the right start

How they feel

Put yourself in their shoes. It is likely that the person is nervous and has decided to contact us after a lot of soul searching and conversations with friends and family. Be mindful of this and tread carefully, ask questions and spend more time listening than talking. Reflect back on what they tell you, which will help to show that you truly respect their decision to get in touch, and value their time.

Some examples are contained in the following diagrams. This is not meant to be prescriptive but is hopefully useful as a starting point to shaping your own customer-focused enquiry management strategy.

A Customer-Focused Approach to Recruitment Requires



They need...	So we must...
A Quick Response	Take calls or respond to emails when they come in; this is their moment of truth, so respect their choice and be there for them. If someone makes contact by phone, email, or enquiry form, we must respond the same day. This is what our competitors do, and we cannot afford to be any less dedicated, any less urgent. Give them your full attention and as much time as they need. The few minutes you invest now can translate into years of powerful foster care, so take your time, and give it to them.
Reassurance	Prepare for enquiries, be clear on your role, feel comfortable explaining the process and the opportunities in clear, simple, positive language. Be prepared to answer a variety of questions, have information to hand if you need clarification. Listen to, acknowledge, and respond to any concerns and worries, reassure them that these are to be expected. The decision to foster is a significant, life changing experience. Provide high levels of reassurance until they are clear on expectations.
Encouragement	Be energetic and positive about fostering, give examples of how it would work for the specific applicant. Listen to their story, ask conversational questions about their current circumstances and life experience Explain how diverse and inclusive fostering is, give real life examples Identify their strengths and support them to see how they will be relevant to their fostering journey.

Confidence	Explain the training and support they will receive, your Core Offer, your fostering community, your skills and experience in fostering, your services for children, support groups etc. What will your Foster Wales service do to instil confidence? Why is your Foster Wales service the best option for their fostering journey?
Honesty	Provide a balanced, realistic picture; fostering is rewarding for them, their family, and the children they will meet. It also comes with a level of responsibility which can at times be daunting and provide challenges. So, offer insight and clarity on the expectations of being a foster carer. What is it really like to foster with your Foster Wales LA service? Provide examples of how it has impacted on lives in your Foster Wales LA service, the positive outcomes that have been created Talk about the realities of fostering in your community, the kinds of children who are currently in need of foster care, the sorts of children or young people that might be right for them
Informed decision making	Be transparent, advise applicants of the ways in which children become looked after and the difference between Foster Wales and commercial providers – help them to make an informed decision, for the right reasons. Challenge myths and provide clarity based on real examples. Have some statements ready to reflect ‘what our foster carers say about us’.

Once you have asked all the right questions and gained a good understanding of who they are and what makes them tick, it's important to end the call appropriately. Wherever possible, we need to....

Always be closing (booking that initial visit!)

Always offer prospective applicants a home visit within five working days of the initial contact unless the applicant asks for a visit on a specific date beyond that window. Remember that it is possible they might also be speaking to other fostering services at the same time. How quickly do you think they will be arranging a visit? Can we afford to be slower?

If you feel there could be a problem fitting in a home visit within five working days, you must discuss this with your manager to avoid a delay.

Some applicants might not feel ready for a home visit at this early stage. It's important to listen and respond to their needs, so in this case make a plan to call them back at a time that works for them or invite them to attend an information evening where they can take a further tentative step and find out more.

It's vital to arrange this call back or follow up event straight away, rather than leaving it up to the prospective applicant to call you; this keeps the momentum up, keeps you on the front foot, and keeps them engaged with your Foster Wales service.

“I fostered with an IFA before transferring years later to my Local Authority. I had absolutely no idea of the difference between the two and nobody told me about these differences when I applied. I still cannot believe how quickly the IFA staff member arrived at my house; they came out the same day! I was not sure if I was ready to take the next step, but I was, and they made it so easy for me. By the time the LA called me back a few days later, I was already signed up to the initial IFA training and I felt like I had made a commitment, it was too late.”

Processes

Whilst recognising that every Foster Wales team will have slight differences in terms of the team structure, team members, their skills and experience, it is so important for us all to benefit from the improvements that come from working in a way that is consistent with best practice, that is built on testing and learning.

The process journey below is based on a programme of testing, reflection, adaptation, and data analysis. It provides a useful starting point for every Foster Wales service as we evolve and improve our ability to make the most of every new enquiry from a potential foster carer.

Initial Contact Electronic / Face to Face Event

What to Collate	What to Provide	Follow up actions
• Brief information, a telephone number and/or email is a must in order to have a way to respond. Collating both will ensure that you have what you need to maximise opportunities for follow up • For events have a postcard size easy to complete info card, don't be tempted to ask too many personal questions in public - set a date to call • Consider GDPR and ensure that you have a consent system in place	• An automated response system is a must for all electronic enquiries - ensure that the message says when and how you will get back to them. • If this first contact takes place at an event, the postcard could tear in two, one side for you and one for them. Both sides confirming the date of follow up and making a commitment. • Brochures can be a great way to showcase your offer when handed out in public	• Create and add all enquiries to an 'enquiry email group' until they are either approved or 'opt out' of follow up messages • Schedule email merges at critical peak times • Schedule email merges to advertise open events/ virtual event • Having the systems in place to support the above is essential. Consider making best use of post panel processes and checks and monitoring for any 'opt out' requests

Telephone Contact

Directly into the service / Call backs

What to Collate	What to Provide	Follow up Actions
• This stage is detailed and will provide information for the assessment if you decide to accept the applicants and proceed to assess • You need to ask the right questions to know if the applicant is right for fostering and to ensure that all regulatory requirements can be met. An example proforma can be found in the appendix	• Time and privacy to take and consider the information fully • As much detail as possible about the task and how your service supports its foster carers • A date for a home visit, ensuring that all household members will be present. An example prompt card can be found in the appendix	• Any usual local practice preliminary checks • Schedule a call back date and time (if no HV) and ensure this is logged • Add contact email to 'enquiry' group • Send a brochure (if not already received) along with a personalised letter to confirm when and who will be undertaking the home visit

Initial Home Visit

Face to Face / Virtual

What to Collate	What to Provide	Follow Up Actions
• As full a picture as possible of the whole family, the whole house and garden • Take time to explore the views and feelings of everybody in the household • Record as much detail as possible to inform the ongoing assessment. An example pro forma can be found in the appendix	• As many examples of how fostering works and the realities of the task • Information in relation to opportunities which your service provides for applicants to speak with approved foster carers • Detailed information about the process and usual duration to approval in your service • Transparency - share the record of your visit and seek their agreement	• Leave details of how to contact you if they have further questions • Ensure that a decision is made in respect of proceeding to the next stage within 48 hours, this should be provided in writing and over the phone • Provide the details and dates of preparation to foster training • Ensure a robust procedure for any enquiry closures which considers the reputation of the service

Initial Enquiry process and procedure

Every question asked of prospective applicants is done so for a reason and is useful information that is recorded, monitored, and evaluated. This information helps to assess that the service's messages and recruitment campaigns are reaching the right people, so it is vital you complete it all as fully as possible.

Even if a prospective applicant does not meet the eligibility criteria e.g. doesn't have a spare bedroom – you must still take down basic information e.g. at least their name, address and contact details to allow you to keep a record of who has contacted the service should things change for them in the future. All prospective applicants should receive an information pack, unless there are any concerns that would preclude this. Finding out where they heard about us is also critical to feed back into our campaign and marketing plans.

Preparation to Foster Training

The process of becoming a foster carer is heavily weighted in a need to gain information, to learn about the role and to really understand the impact that fostering could have on them. Opportunities to attend a thorough preparation training course should be provided as soon as possible after the home visit. This training reinforces for applicants if this is the right decision for them and it provides essential opportunity for reflection and peer learning.

If this is provided too late in the process, it can result in wasted time, energy, and financial resource invested into applicants who are yet to know for certain if this is right for them.

High quality pre-approval training is available in Wales and services should explore the benefits of securing this professionally delivered resource. Investing in accessible, timely, comprehensive and high-quality training will ensure that your service is preparing applicants robustly and demonstrating a commitment to them.

Structures, Systems and Resources

Much thought has been given to the ideal service structure for service delivery to be able to be at its best. Messages from research are clear, building well resourced, resilient, experienced, child centred, and highly responsive services is critical to achieving good outcomes for children. Foster Wales is much more than just numbers of enquiries and approvals, it's about the difference that we can make for children when our services and staff have the skills, experience, and right environment to be at their best.

Messages from research

In 2020 a good practice guide was published based on the findings from a UK-wide study of 52 case reviews concerning 98 children who had died or experienced serious harm while living with foster carers, adopters, or special guardians. This study was the first of its kind, spanning a 12-year period between 2007 – 2019 with 75% of the children in the study living with approved foster carers in England and Wales. It identified reoccurring themes in relation to the selection and assessment of carers; support and supervision; and the systems and practices of services.

High level key messages along with practice recommendations are summarised below.

Recruitment, Assessment & Approval – Key messages

- *The need for rigorous assessments that have a safeguarding focus*
- *Assessments undertaken by skilled professionals who understand the expectations of the role; are able to work authoritatively with potential carers; ensure open and honest exchange; apply critical appraisal and effective analysis; whilst upholding professional curiosity at all times*
- *Services ensuring that supervision is afforded to assessors from experienced staff, suitably trained with access to appropriate resources*
- *Panels with members who are skilled, experienced, and suitably trained to enable them to exercise their function robustly, ensuring sufficient scrutiny of information during the approval process*

Translating into practice

The Foster Wales way is deeply rooted in a ***whole team approach***. We believe that a *whole team approach* provides the best possible structure to deliver on outcomes and to meet the key requirements identified from research. When supervising social workers hold responsibility for both the assessment of applicants and the supervision of approved foster carers, they are provided with opportunity to develop the most robust understanding of the task. This knowledge and experience can be applied across both elements to translate into child centred, flexible and resilient foster carers.

Combine this with skilled supervisors, systems for quality assurance which run throughout every layer and a rigorous foster panel, you create the perfect environment to achieve best practice and deliver good outcomes for children.

The whole team approach also supports the delivery of **relationship centred** practice, a key factor for delivering improved outcomes. During the fostering assessment process applicants invest significant time in developing a trusting relationship with a social worker. They share intimate details about their childhood, personal life, their strengths and vulnerabilities. The assessing social worker ascertains knowledge of the family which is critical for matching and meeting ongoing support needs.

Wherever possible we should avoid severing the relationship between the assessing social worker and the newly approved fostering family. Services which enable this relationship to be maintained for at least the first 6 months post approval, and ideally longer are likely to provide the best possible start for newly approved foster carers and therefore the best fostering placement for a child.

Social workers who assess fostering households and are then also tasked with the ongoing support role are highly likely to invest more into their role. Knowing that you will be tasked with working with these applicants once they are approved increases aspirations to ensure that the applicants are prepared and ready to be their best as foster carers.

Try to achieve.....	Try to avoid.....
A service where newly-approved foster carers and their households are supported by the same social worker who took them through the assessment journey	A service operating in sections which pass applicants from one section to another and so on. Resulting in different workers, reduced relationships, lack of continuity, knowledge and trust.
Why.....	Why...
• Good matches are made when social workers know the strengths, vulnerabilities and inside functioning of a family. • Foster Carers place increased levels of trust in a social worker that they respect and have developed a relationship with, they are more likely to believe that they can care for a certain child or take on a specific task. • Quality and meaningful support can be provided when foster carers need it the most, right at the start of their journey. • The assessor knows all of the important factors which can make a difference, they are best placed to know what to say and what to do, to nurture newly approved foster carers.	• Building relationships takes time, it can rarely be achieved in the short transition between the day of foster panel and first fostering match. • Expecting newly approved foster carers to change social worker at the same point as asking them to step into the unknown of caring for their first looked after child can feel daunting and anxious • Gaps in allocation can mean that in reality newly approved foster carers do not have the support they need when they need it the most. • A newly allocated worker will need time to learn the family norms, personality, support mechanisms and critical matching factors. • Service pressures can mean that newly allocated staff do not have capacity to read the Form F assessment.

Foster Wales aspires to deliver a service with people at the heart of what we do. We want to move away from practice norms which suit service need and move towards delivering quality for children and foster carers. For some foster carers, changes in worker and being supported in the very early stage of approval by workers who do not know them well enough to match, support and nurture can result in early resignation. Foster Wales is about retention and recruitment; they go hand in hand.

If your service is structured in a way where mainstream recruitment and assessment is undertaken in isolation, and/or by a small number of staff it may be more likely to be open to vulnerabilities. These include pressures on capacity, responsiveness and robustness, along with limitations in preparation for the task ahead. Resilience comes in numbers and from a team with shared understanding, goals and values. Foster Wales seeks to grow this area of service provision and for some this may require a reconfiguration of staff to ensure the ability to meet demands.

Questions to Consider

- Do we have a team of skilled and experienced professionals who understand the expectations of the fostering task, work with authority, honesty and professional curiosity at all times?
- Do we have a structure which ensures that these staff are available (on a rota or similar basis), all day, every working day to answer and respond to initial enquires promptly, with expertise, customer focused approach and professional judgement?
- Do we have capacity for these experienced staff members to undertake initial (home) visits within 5 working days of the initial contact or as soon as possible?
- Do we have high quality, competitive, regularly scheduled pre-approval training for applicants to access within a few weeks of their application or sooner if possible?
- Do we have capacity to allocate and complete assessments within 4 – 6 months, by staff members with a robust knowledge of the task, who uphold our values and prepare applicants fully for the task ahead?
- Do our caseloads facilitate quality, meaningful, person centred practice to be undertaken in both the assessment of, and supervision of foster carers?
- Does everyone in the service have access to regular, effective supervision from experienced and appropriately trained staff?
- Do we have enough panel capacity to respond to the demands within timescales?
- Are our panel members skilled, do they engage in professional development, and afford rigor to the task, is panel membership diverse and representative of the voice of the child, care experienced and foster carers?
- Do we have quality assurance mechanisms in place at every stage of the process? Are these understood, reviewed and updated regularly?

Capacity

Many services have acknowledged the impact that connected persons/kinship fostering can have on the ability to meet demands in mainstream fostering and most have taken action to address. Court timetabled work will always impose competing demands and the separation of these areas of service delivery is reported to work well, with proven benefits and improved outcomes all round.

The table below demonstrates two **mainstream only fostering service structure options**. These are examples of how capacity and demands could be best met and ways to ensure resilience in teams. Both options consider the same number of staff as an in-put, they deliver differing outputs based on configuration and use of resources.

RESOURCE AVAILABLE AND TASKS	OPTION 1 – Separate assessment and support functions	OPTION 2 – Whole team approach
10 full time social workers	- 7 staff dedicated to supporting an average of 17 households each - 3 staff dedicated to recruitment and assessment, each completing 5 full assessments every 6 months	- 10 staff dedicated to support and recruitment with caseloads of 12 households to support and each completing 2 full assessments every 6 months
Capacity to support households	120	120
Capacity to respond to enquiries and initial visits	1 full day in every 3 Shared between dedicated recruitment staff	1 full day in every 10 Shared between all staff
Capacity to assess and approve households	30	40

This example structure demonstrates that a whole team approach can support an increase in productivity and outcomes, with valuable additional assessment capacity being achieved.

When it comes to identifying the best structure for your LA, every Foster Wales service will have differing demands, resources and targets to consider. The ultimate aim is to ensure that you are able to achieve your goals. Making best use of the experience, knowledge and connections available as part of Foster Wales is a great place to start when it comes to service planning.

Staff Qualifications

The importance of suitably skilled, experienced and qualified staff has been identified throughout this good practice guide. Further clarity and regulatory information can be found in the AFA practice note on Fostering Staff Qualifications. [Fostering - AFA Cymru](#)

Leaders who promoted and developed a resilient, whole team approach to responding to enquiries and recruitment reported that this was the key factor to achieving best outcomes, the data also reflects this message. Interested applicants will not wait until someone returns from leave or until the sole responsible staff member for recruitment is available. They will contact the next service on their list.

For staff to feel confident to perform the recruitment role they need to have in-depth knowledge and experience. It is much harder to offer the same level of reassurance and insight when assessing and preparing a fostering family if you have not supported a fostering family through the types of complex and challenging situations which they will be expected to face.

*Rarely can anything replace the authority provided by experience and insight. It empowers staff to be able to offer honest **powerful** responses; afford **real** and reassuring examples; convey the **dedication** of the team and the community of foster carers; **surprise** and excite applicants; ultimately to demonstrate without question that your service is **forward looking** and the service of choice for them.*

Independent Assessors

The potential for significant growth in recruitment of foster carers has never been more real than it is now. Along with this comes the need to consider the impact on services and our capacity to respond. With this in mind we reached out to practitioners to explore what works well and what triggers worries in relation to allocating assessments to independent assessors.

INDEPENDENT ASSESSORS

What works well	What are the worries
• Can be cost effective in terms of number of assessments if all proceed to approval/completion • Can offer a degree of flexibility that may not be routinely available from in house staff • Independent viewpoint outside of organisation can promote fair and balanced view and not be influenced by organisational factors • Does not impact on support capacity	• Consistency and quality of assessment may vary/ be reduced as assessors are external to the service and organisation • Additional quality assurance is often needed – impacting on capacity • Access to supervision, support and training can be limited/restricted/not provided or accepted • Investment, commitment and understanding of Foster Wales values and behaviours is unlikely to be upheld or as strong as in-house staff • Often undertake work for multiple organisations and have no reason to afford loyalty to the LA • Continuity for applicant, service, and the ability to offer a customer focused approach is removed or restricted • Lack of accountability for content of assessment and preparation of applicant • Requires additional administrative support • Access to LA systems and equipment is restricted • Data security considerations for the use of personal devices to undertake assessment work can create barriers • Not dedicated to the fostering service, may not be available as and when needed • Unknown skillset, baseline knowledge and understanding of fostering expectations

Quality Assurance & Monitoring

Ensuring quality and maintaining standards, whilst also managing increasing demands on your service is likely to be a welcome but significant challenge. A number of suggested processes, systems and mechanisms for monitoring could be considered.

- **Appointing a senior practitioner or equivalent graded post** to oversee the recruitment section of the team is well established practice in many LAs. This post holder can ensure the good practice standards are embedded and upheld. They can ensure consistency in practice, afford supervision and guidance, hold decision making responsibility for continuing or closing down applications /assessments. Provide oversight and responsivity to key performance data collation and analysis. This oversight is critical when taking forward a whole service approach to recruitment and assessment.
- **Creating or embedding standard templates for supervision and oversight.** Quality assuring all aspects of recruitment and form F assessment is a great way to ensure good practice is achieved, maintained and understood. We've included some example templates at the end of this guide.
- **Building in routine opportunities to obtain feedback**, such as questionnaires or electronic feedback at each stage of the recruitment process ensures learning and development for the service. This extends past recruitment and into retention. Undertaking exit interviews when foster carers leave the service can provide a wealth of insight whether they are in the early stages of enquiry or many years into their fostering career.
- **Staff induction, ongoing learning & development.** Our Foster Wales behaviours and values need to be understood internally to be able to be delivered externally. Staff should be afforded a robust induction programme with regular opportunities for ongoing professional learning and development. Significant safeguarding responsibilities are attached to the recruitment & assessment of potential foster carers for vulnerable children. Attending initial, and refresher form F assessment training regularly should be considered a minimum requirement.

Fostering Regulations

This guide is intended to identify what constitutes good practice in relation to the recruitment of foster carers. The following section will outline the main regulatory requirements and expectations connected to this task. Full practice guidance in respect of **assessment** and **foster panel** can be accessed here [Fostering-Panel-regs-Good-Practice-Guide AFA](#)

Two sets of regulations apply to Local Authority Fostering Provision

- **The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018.** As amended by the Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2019/545 These are issued under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB(W)A 2014) with an accompanying Code of Practice.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2018/1339/made/data.pdf>
- **The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.** These are issued under SSWB(W)A 2014 and are applicable to both Local Authority and Independent Fostering Service Providers.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2018/1333/made/data.pdf>

Initial Enquiry/ Registration of Interest

There is no reference in the regulations to the process by which interested people make their initial enquiries and the service responds. However, it is clearly essential that sufficient information is shared and gathered at the Initial Enquiry stage to enable an early, mutually agreed, assessment of suitability.

At this very initial stage, services should provide factual advice to applicants about fostering and what would be expected of them and the service in terms of assessment and support. This should be in the form of an information pack or an online resource that applicants can access, alongside a discussion with a member of staff.

If the staff member is not a social work practitioner with experience of fostering, clear guidelines in respect of expectations and limitations should be in place. Services must be able to satisfy themselves as to why they do not require this initial assessment stage to be undertaken by a qualified, experienced social worker.

Eligibility Considerations

There are very few eligibility criteria to be a foster parent set out in regulations:

- Age 18 or over with no upper age limit
- No person, or member of the person's household should have been convicted or cautioned of specified offence.

Unlike adoption there are no set criteria for domicile or habitual residence in the British Islands, although if an applicant is unable to evidence settled status, this will affect their ability to provide stability for long-term fostering in the same way as in adoption.

Services should ensure that any additional eligibility requirements, specific to their Local Authority are produced in line with the need to promote fostering as a positive choice. These work best when they are not unnecessarily restrictive, positively reflective of diversity and consider all parties who enquire to foster with the service, be they mainstream or connected persons.

Initial Visits (Home Visits)

It is essential that suitably qualified and experienced practitioners undertake Initial Visits as they will be gathering and sharing critical and relevant information that they will need to consider, analyse and decide or make recommendation upon.

regulation 29 (2) of The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018 states.... a person is not fit to work at the service unless— (b)the person has the qualifications, skills, competence and experience necessary for the work they are to perform

This aspect of service delivery (*work to be performed*) is considered a social work assessment task.

The new two stage process does not change practitioners existing responsibilities to ensure that principles of openness and honesty apply, and good decisions are made based on information, which is gathered, shared and analysed.

These visits should be conducted in an applicant's own home. If applying as a couple, both applicants should be present for the full discussion and if possible, any existing children in the home should be met.

Decisions to Proceed or Close

It is important to remember that at this point and at Stage 1 of the assessment, we are considering applicants who “may be suitable” to foster and practitioners should ensure that they collect and share relevant information for this stage of the process. The fostering services provider is eligible to consider whether the applicant’s “offer” is compatible with its recruitment objectives and may decide not to assess or may refer to another service. In reality, this is unlikely to happen in light of the current need to increase foster service provision in all areas. Closure decisions made at this point should not be based on a predicted approval status. It is common for applicants to be unsure about their fostering abilities at this point and any expressed preferred age range or approval restrictions should be noted and explored thoroughly as part of the full assessment process.

Agreement about whether or not to decide to assess at this stage should be made at Senior Practitioner/Team Manager level and they should be involved in notifying the applicants. A decision to refuse to consider an applicant for Stage 1 of the assessment process should only be made where there is clear evidence that applicants are not safe or suitable to care for children and that no reasonable fostering services provider would consider them suitable to foster.

It is not acceptable to undertake any checks before Stage 1 process has commenced and without the explicit consent of the applicants.

Fostering services providers should have a series of pro formas, these should include:

1. A letter following Initial Visit notifying that the applicants are not eligible or suitable, providing clear reasons for decision.
There also needs to be clear evidence of decision making on file / system.
2. A letter following Initial Visit notifying that the applicants are suitable to proceed, providing the dates for the next preparation training.
3. If an Initial Visit is positive apart from some key practical details which would prevent an assessment starting, the fostering services provider should send a letter suggesting that applicants return after a period of time in which the applicants will have altered an element of their life necessary (e.g. work on the house or move; cessation of smoking). The letter should say that the service will contact the applicants again after the agreed length of time if they themselves are not contacted.

Terms of Approval

One of the critical factors to consider when striving to achieve a robust and resilient foster carer workforce is the terms on which foster carers are approved. To offer the best possible placement options requires child focused, wide terms of approval. This approach enables the best possible matches to be made, provides opportunity for growth in skills and abilities, and streamlines the service to make the best use of the resources available at any one time. It's another opportunity to uphold consistency and transparency for everyone involved.

Children need foster carers who can say “yes” to caring for them; foster carers who are well prepared; well assessed; and with approval statuses which *enable* the team to make the call and complete the match, in the first place.

Terms of approval should reflect a full and thorough assessment which concludes on three main factors

1. The ability to provide permanency, or short-term / task centred care
2. The skills and ability to care for a particular age range of children
3. The capacity to care for a particular number of children up to a max of 3

What does this mean in practice?

It is best to try to limit the variety of specific types or terms to the two primary and most frequently recognised **short-term** (task centred) and **long-term** (permanence). When services introduce a range of ‘types’ in practice it can mean that access to foster carers can be limited or restricted due to the label placed upon them, rather than their skill set or availability.

- Short-term – this is considered to be a standard term for everyone approved to foster. It's about the task, from an hour's day care, an overnight stay, or for some years. Respite, short-breaks, support care, they are all types of fostering which come under the term ‘short’ and by using the generic term, you ensure that vacancies can be accessed, and matches can be made.
- Long-term – this term is for those households who have been assessed to provide permanency for children. It requires an added dimension of

assessment and analysis to evidence the significant commitment, it is not to be applied casually. In contrast to mainstream fostering the vast majority of connected persons assessments will explore applicant's ability to provide permanency from the start due to the needs of the child being known and the pre-existing relationship which exists. This is less common for new mainstream applicants; however, the applicant's motives may be clear from the start.

Specialist Tasks

If your service operates any specialist schemes which require additional assessments to be undertaken, such as Parent & Child placements, these can also be reflected in the foster carer's approval status if the assessment criteria have been fulfilled. Specific training and advice is available in respect of this specialist area, as there are many complicating factors to consider. The approval status should make clear if this additional task is undertaken alongside usual fostering provision OR as an alternative when no other children are placed. Guidance would recommend the latter option as matching factors and risks can become too great to mitigate.

Age Range

Many services have moved towards a comprehensive approach when it comes to considering age range approval in fostering. They assess (and most importantly prepare) all applicants against their ability to provide foster care to children and young people aged 0-18 years, often highlighting a preference or significant matching factors. This approach acknowledges that in reality an age means very little in the matching process, as the functioning age and chronological age of children can be two different considerations. It also reflects that household dynamics can change over time, birth children grow older or are born, employment commitments increase or reduce, matching factors can change day to day.

For those foster carers approved to provide long term care, the age range by definition of the task must be 0-18 years. Services must also consider the requirement to provide care past the age of 18 years, under When I'm Ready arrangements. These conversations should be held very early on to ensure stability can be provided according to our Welsh context and expectations.

When services embed practice expectations to assess against wide approval statuses for those who offer short term provision, it facilitates matching and provides room for growth and development. When households are assessed and approved in line with a wide age range, they are not only available to consider all options, but they can also offer ad hoc care to children outside of a specified 'comfort zone' to grow their confidence, supporting robust and resilient practice. **The critical factor is to ensure that thorough assessment has been undertaken and that the evidence in the report reflects the approval status recommended.**

Children in the home

The age of children (birth/step/fostered/adopted) already living in the home is another factor which influences recruitment practice and is sometimes used to place unwarranted age restrictions on families right from the point of enquiry. Some foster carers cite this restriction as the primary reason for choosing to foster with an IFA, over an LA, as the LA would only approve them for children younger than their own. There is a need for further research in respect of this practice as much of the historic research contains conflicting findings. Some research findings from 2015 onwards identify that we should consider moving away from outdated 'norms' and remove these unnecessary restrictions. There is evidence of stable matches being formed with all ages of children, those aged close together or far apart, older and younger. Studies have also found (unexpectedly) that the more children living in a foster household reduces the likelihood of placement disruption.

Ultimately the key message to factor into our practice is that stability is achieved by good matching, underpinned by clear child focused policy and procedure, which is based on communication, planning and consultation with children and adults.
Restrictive terms of approval do not create stability.

Gender

Current guidance advises that the best approach to take is one which assumes that foster carers are approved (and assessed) to care for all genders. If your service does wish to cite this specifically in terms of approval the CoramBAAF practice note (PN70)

states it is better to use the term “any gender” rather than “either gender”, as this will not exclude non-binary trans young people. Matching factors may preclude a foster carer for caring for a specific gender at certain times or the foster carers may demonstrate a specific skill set or preference. The service can make best use of these factors without excluding children or young people.

Capacity

The numbers of children able to be cared for within the foster carers home is assessed on both skillset and space. Usually, the number of available bedrooms is the pivotal factor, and it is important that this is reflected, along with identifying if there would also be space for siblings to share. The regulations allow for a maximum of three unrelated children to be placed, this would require three separate bedrooms to align with good practice.

Examples of suitable wording

1 child (2 if siblings), aged 0-18, short-term or long-term

In this example the foster carers have one bedroom available to foster which is also large enough to accommodate two children comfortably if they are siblings. They have demonstrated their ability to care for a wide range of children on both a task-centred basis and to offer permanence.

2 children (or sibling group), aged 5-18, short-term

In this example the foster carers have two bedrooms available to foster and both rooms are large enough to accommodate bedroom sharing. This means that pending bedroom sharing a sibling group could be placed over the usual limit of three. The carers use a vape and therefore cannot be considered as suitable to care for children under five years. They also evidenced their ability to undertake task-centred fostering only and have the skills and ability to support transitions but not permanence at this time.

Whatever approach your service chooses to take, it's important to keep in mind that a foster carer's initial terms of approval cannot not be changed without a full annual review and presentation back to panel, followed by a decision maker endorsement. It's in everyone's best interest to consider a forward-thinking approach to assessment, preparation and approval of foster carers.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to every foster carer and fostering professional who contributed their time to the development of this publication. We are hugely grateful for your insight and honesty. It would not have been possible without the expertise of Matt Clark at Narrative Edge and Sarah Thomas at AFA Cymru, who worked in partnership with the Regional Development Managers and Regional Marketing Officers representing Local Authority fostering services in Wales.

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The Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru (AFA Cymru) is a Welsh charity that promotes good practice across the breadth of permanency planning for children and young people. It also offers advice, training and consultancy to professionals and members of the public to support best practice.

References and Further Reading

[Adult-Health-Reports-practice-note.pdf \(afacymru.org.uk\)](#)

[Creating stable foster placements: learning from foster children and families who care for them - Social Care Online \(scie-socialcareonline.org.uk\)](#)

[Fostering-Panel-regs-Good-Practice-Guide-final-2020.pdf \(afacymru.org.uk\)](#)

[AFA-fostering-qualification-of-staff.pdf \(afacymru.org.uk\)](#)

[LD-Framework E-1.pdf \(afacymru.org.uk\)](#)

[Making good assessments | CoramBAAF](#)

[ENG-Preparation-to-Foster-2021-Dates-002.pdf \(afacymru.org.uk\)](#)

[Safeguarding Children living with Foster Carers, Adopters and Special Guardians: Learning from case reviews 2007–2019 | CoramBAAF](#)

[Safeguarding Children living with Foster Carers, Adopters and Special Guardians: A guide to reflective practice | CoramBAAF](#)

[The Fostering Panels \(Establishment and Functions\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[The Local Authority Fostering Services \(Wales\) Regulations 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Undertaking checks and references in fostering and adoption assessments | CoramBAAF](#)

[Undertaking a fostering assessment in Wales | CoramBAAF](#)

Appendix - Example Templates

The templates below are created as examples for use according to local need. They can be adapted or modified as required.

- 1. Initial Enquiry template**
- 2. Initial (Home) Visit template**
- 3. Recruitment strategy template**
- 4. Key Performance Indicators**

Initial Enquiry template

Client record No:	
Brief Reason not to send Pack:	

Enter LA Logo here

INITIAL ENQUIRY TO FOSTER

Date of Enquiry		Name of Person Completing Form	
What language would you want to receive communication in?			
Written communication	English ☐ Welsh ☐	Verbal communication	English ☐ Welsh ☐
How many spare bedrooms do you have?		Accommodation: Privately Owned ☐ Private Rented ☐ Social Rented ☐	
1. Personal Details		Applicant 1	
	Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐	Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐	
First name(s)			
Surname			
Any other previous names			
DOB			
Address			
Postcode			

Do you live	Within..... (Name of LA) ☐ If not name of local authority:	
Telephone No. (Daytime/Evening)		
Email Address		
2. Marital status	Applicant 1	Applicant 2
Marital status		
Length of relationship		

3. Own children	Applicant 1				Applicant 2			
Do you have your own children	Name	Living at home?	Gender	DOB	Name	Living at home?	Gender	DOB
4. Work / experience	Applicant 1				Applicant 2			
Current Occupation								
Availability to Foster								
Relevant qualifications								
5. Transport	Applicant 1				Applicant 2			
Do you drive & have access to a car?								

6. Health	Applicant 1	Applicant 2
Are you in good health? <i>(Record current health conditions. Are they taking any medication?)</i>		
Do you smoke/use electronic cigarettes?		
7. Pets		
Do you have any pets? If yes, provide details		
8. Statutory checks	Applicant 1	Applicant 2
Have you had any previous involvement with Social Services?		
Do you consent to us carrying out internal database checks?		
9. Criminal convictions	Applicant 1	Applicant 2
Do you have any criminal convictions /pending? Provide details		
10. Interest in fostering	Applicant 1	Applicant 2
Why do you want to foster?		

Have you previously applied to Foster? If yes with whom?		
If you are transferring, what is your current approval status? Provide name of IFA/Local Authority		
11. Fostering role		
Have you thought about	Full time ☐ Part time fostering ☐ Sibling groups (2 or more spare rooms) ☐ Children with disabilities ☐ Parent & Child Placements ☐ Other ☐ Unsure ☐	
<i>Explain different types of fostering</i>		
12. How did you hear about Foster Wales (enter LA name.....)?		
Radio ☐ On-line advert ☐ IFA Transfer ☐ Social Media ☐ TV ☐	Local Newspaper/magazine ☐ Website ☐ Other (specify): Recruitment Event ☐ Which event: Recommended by another LA Carer ☐ Friend ☐ Internal Staff ☐	
Foster Carer's name:		
13. Information pack		
Would you like the information pack posted or emailed	Posted ☐ Emailed ☐	
14 Equal opportunities	Applicant 1	Applicant 2

<i>(advise them that they don't have to answer)</i>		
What is your gender?	Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐	Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐
Do you consider yourself to be.....	Heterosexual/straight ☐ Gay, Lesbian, Homosexual ☐ Bisexual ☐ Transgender ☐ Prefer not to say ☐	Heterosexual/straight ☐ Gay, Lesbian, Homosexual ☐ Bisexual ☐ Transgender ☐ Prefer not to say ☐
Ethnic origin		
Religion		
15. Decision making		
Decision	Proceed to HV ☐ Counsel out ☐ Other Actions	
APPLICANT WISHES TO ATTEND NEXT INFORMATION EVENING? YES ☐ NO ☐		

RECRUITMENT ACTIVITY LOG

Name of Applicant: _____

ID No: _____

SSW Name: _____

Date & Signature	Activity – e.g. tel call, home visit etc.	Details

Initial (Home) Visit Template

Add Maethu Cymru / Foster Wales LA logo here

INITIAL VISIT FORM

SSW NAME:

DATE OF VISIT:

- Explain who you are and your role in the service.
- Explain Foster Wales..... (add LA Name) is Local Authority and the benefits of fostering with an LA not IFA (Core Offer)
- Offer opportunity for any questions

Initial observations:

Household members present:

PERSONAL DETAILS	1 ST APPLICANT	2 ND APPLICANT
Current surname <i>(last name or family name)</i>		
First name(s)		
All previous names <i>(if applicable)</i>		
Date of Birth		
Present address		

Telephone number		

Significant previous relationships

Explain the need to contact ex partners for references

Any issues/concerns. Do they know addresses/details etc

Record response:

About your home and locality

What are the family's current sleeping arrangements?

Do own children share a room or need to share a room to be able to foster

Discuss and record response

Health and Safety

Ask to look around the home and garden

***Any obvious hazards? Do you own any weapons/ firearms? Ongoing building work?
General cleanliness? Explain the need to complete a full H&S check. An electrical
safety report & gas certificate is essential
Discuss and record response***

Do you have any pets? YES/NO

***Explain the need to complete a pet assessment. Do the applicants have any
concerns about this? Record response***

Do you hold a current driving licence and have access to a vehicle?

You would be required to have an insurance policy that includes business.

***Discuss the requirements to transport children to school, contact, appointments,
activities etc.***

What is your current occupation?

What are your current working hours/ proposed working hours when fostering?

Will your work commitments impact your availability to Foster. Will a reduction in

working hours have a financial impact? Provide details of how this will be managed.

Lifestyle and Activities

Discuss do they own a caravan? E.g Attend religious activities/ events / children's clubs, sporting activities.

How will fostering impact on this and how will your family fit in with the needs of children looked after?

What experience do you have of looking after your own, or other people's children?

What activities do you do as a family? How do you spend weekend time? Attitudes to discipline? How do you discipline your own children?

Discuss and record response

What impact do you think fostering could have on your family?

e.g. school age children, adult children and grandchildren, sharing parents, jealousy, impact of allegations, safe care, eg can't share a bed with a parent if birth child is unwell

Have you discussed fostering with your immediate and wider family?

Discuss family responses.

What support networks do you have locally? How often do you use them?

Practical and emotional support. Availability of significant adults both evening and daytime that may provide care e.g. school pick-ups, overnight stays, emergency support. Explain assessment process/ checks that must be carried out.

Discuss and record response

What is your attitude towards a multicultural society and diversity?

Discuss gender/race/disability/sexuality/gender identity/ substance misuse – Give examples of scenarios e.g. a child is unsure of their sexuality, etc. How does the Applicant demonstrate flexible/inclusive attitude?

Motivation to foster

Discuss applicants reasons to foster. How long have they wanted to foster for? What has prompted them to come forward at this time?

Applicants understanding of foster carer role?

Explain issues of abuse/neglect/behaviour and question how they will deal with this.

Consider own children in this discussion, effect on them, ability to change lifestyle/routines

Working with parents and professionals. Discuss and record response (confirm training will be given)

Literacy levels in relation to foster caring role?

Ability to complete recordings/are applicants computer literate? Do applicants have own I.T. equipment. Commitment to attend meetings and ability to contribute, Discuss and record response (confirm training will be given)

Have you had any training, or do you have any qualification, that you think might be relevant to fostering?

Are applicants aware that they have to attend Preparation to Foster training, provide details of the LA requirements. Give approximate length to panel details and inform applicants that they will need to be flexible for Form F assessment sessions? Are there any known difficulties with this?

We have a duty to make sure that fostered children are not placed with people who may harm them in any way. For this reason we have to carry out extensive

checks on anyone who applies to become a Foster Carer. We need to check that people are who they say they are, and that they have not committed any offences against children.

These checks will be initiated early on in your assessment.

Your children

Name of child	Date of Birth	Do they reside with you? If no provide address details.	Name & address of current school

To the best of your knowledge, have you or any of your children/family ever been involved with social services? (tick relevant box)

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, please fill in details below

Name	Date of Birth	Name of Local Authority/Council	Addresses

Health

	1 st Applicant	2 nd Applicant
Do you have any current health/ medical issues? <i>Explain the need for a full medical physical and mental health wellbeing, how stress is managed?</i> Please provide the name and address of your current GP		
Do you smoke/ use electronic smoking devices? <i>Explain carers who smoke cannot care for under 5's</i> Record response		
Do you consider yourself to have a disability? <i>Record details and any effect on ability to foster</i>		
Are you at present attending the doctor for any reason?		
Do you have any treatment/ medication prescribed regularly by the doctor?		

Cautions and convictions.

Have you, or a member of your household, ever been cautioned, had a criminal conviction or been the subject to a criminal enquiry? If so, please give details below. (The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 does not apply to people who will have access to children, so even minor offences, or those which took place a long time ago must be disclosed).

Name	Date of caution/conviction/enquiry	Details

Have you, or a member of your household, ever been disqualified from caring for children?

Name	Date of caution/conviction/enquiry	Details

Please ensure that the applicants have read and understood the content of the home visit record and wish to proceed to the next stage.

Applicants signature.....Date.....

Applicants signature..... Date.....

SW Notes -

Explain that the applicants will receive confirmation letter in the post.

Give training dates verbally and follow up in writing.

Give an idea of assessment timescales and what the assessment involves:

-weekly home visits/ Health & Safety checks/CRBs/AH's

Confirm that applicants can contact you with any further questions.

SSW Assessment of home visit:

Proceed to training? Yes/No

Any other actions required?

Manager/Supervisor Comments

SSWDate.....

Recruitment Senior/ Team Manager Date.....

INSERT SERVICE LOGO

Foster Wales
(INSERT NAME)
Recruitment & Retention
Strategy
(insert date from) (insert date to)

INSERT AUTHOR/DATE

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Introduction

This recruitment and retention strategy outlines Foster **INSERT SERVICE NAME** approach to ensure the sufficiency of in-house foster carers to meet the needs of children looked after in **INSERT SERVICE NAME**. It also outlines the actions undertaken and those planned to ensure foster carer retention. The information contained within this strategy relates to mainstream fostering and does not reflect connected persons fostering provision.

This strategy forms part of a range of strategies to improve placement choice for **INSERT SERVICE NAME** children and young people including (insert strategies here)

Aims and objectives

- Review what is working well and reveal any concerns or challenges
- Inform the direction of recruitment over **INSERT TIME PERIOD** - how, when, who, what and where
- Maximize the number of children looked after who can be placed in **INSERT SERVICE NAME** provision
- Help us understand the needs of children who require foster care
- Ensure we are recruiting foster carers with the right skills and abilities to meet the range of needs of our children
- Ensure our recruitment process is as efficient as it can be
- Ensure our recruitment strategy aligns with the overall placement strategy of **INSERT SERVICE NAME** and the overall Child & Family Services Business Plan
- Ensure that **INSERT SERVICE NAME** is financially effective and supports sustainability
- Planning and reviewing the support & development opportunities that we offer to foster carers to ensure that we retain the carers we recruit

The strategy has been split into two parts:

Part 1	Analysis
Section A	Foster carer recruitment performance
Section B	Meeting the needs of children looked after
Section C	Foster carer retention and support

Part 2	Strategy /plans
Section A	Recruitment plans
Section B	Retention plans
Section C	Financial impact

Part 1: ANALYSIS

Section A: Foster Carer Recruitment Performance

Recruitment performance

Year	Enquiries	Households Approved		Max no of placements approved for	Termination of approval households	Max number of placements lost	Net loss /gain of placements	Net Loss/gain of households
		New	Transfers					

Enquiries *(Refer to Foster Wales KPI monthly returns and part 5a of the NFF data set)

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Have enquiry numbers increased or decreased?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Has the service experienced a net loss or gain in households/ available placements?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Any other significant messages or findings?
- Is your marketing targeted in a way that attracts applicants able to meet the needs of your looked after children, or do you receive large numbers of enquiries from unsuitable applicants?

Initial Visits *(Refer to Foster Wales KPI monthly returns and part 5a of the NFF data set)

Year	Initial visits completed	Initial visits completed within 7 calendar days of initial enquiry	Initial visits completed outside of 7 calendar days of initial enquiry	Initial visits closed

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

Of the initial visits completed outside of 7 calendar days of the initial enquiry:

- How many were at applicants' request?
- How many were due to service capacity issues?
- How many were due to a national holiday period?
- How will your service address any capacity issues?

Of the initial visits closed:

- How many initial visits were closed due to applicant withdrawing?
- How many initial visits were closed due to a service decision not to proceed?
- Are there any emerging themes, for example service consistency of quality assurance of applicants to proceed to the assessment stage?

Assessments *(Refer to Foster Wales KPI monthly returns and part 5a of the NFF data set)

Year	Number of full assessments completed in 6 months	Number of full assessments completed outside of 6 months	Number of assessments closed prior to completion

Of the number of full assessments completed outside of the 6 months:

- How many of these were outside of service control?
- How many of these were due to service capacity issues?
- How will your service address any capacity issues?

Of the assessments closed prior to completion:

- How many were due to the applicant withdrawing?
- How many were due to service decision to close?
- Are there any emerging themes?

Approvals *(Refer to Foster Wales KPI monthly returns and Part 5c of the NFF data set)

Year	Number of new foster carer approvals made during the year.	Number of new placements available as a result of these approvals

- Are your approval rates increasing/ decreasing?

- Are new available placements increasing/ decreasing?
- Are there any emerging themes?
- If approvals are decreasing what plans do the service have to address this?

Conversion rate

Conversion rates demonstrate how effective your messaging has been and the ability to translate enquiries into approvals as well as determining the key points when conversion rates vary.

The table below demonstrates our conversion rates over the past three years.

Insert Year	Enquiries	Initial Visits	Pre-approval Training	Assessments Allocated	Approvals
Number					
Conversion rate from Previous Stage (%)					
Conversion rate from Initial Enquiry (%)					
Insert Year					
Number					
Conversion rate from Previous Stage (%)					
Conversion rate from Initial enquiry (%)					
Insert Year					
Number					
Conversion rate from Previous Stage (%)					
Conversion rate from Initial enquiry (%)					

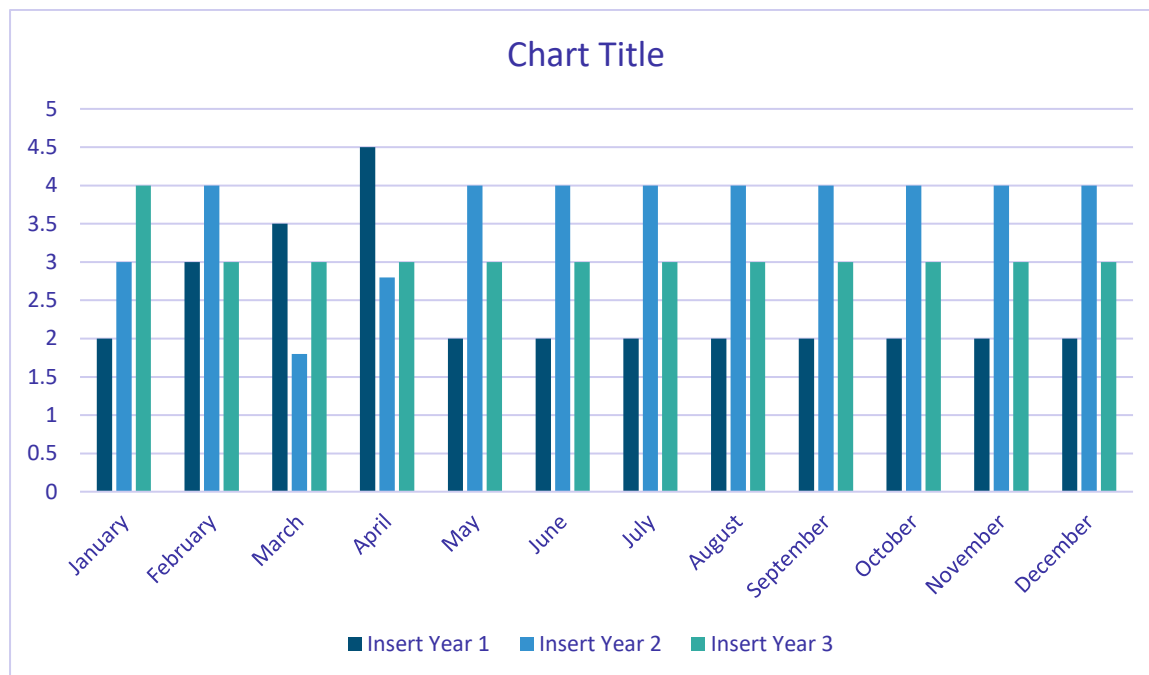
Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Consider and compare against current national conversion averages (National Fostering Framework Annual Performance Report and/or other available information e.g. The Fostering Network)
- Have your conversion rates changed and at which stage of the process?
- What might be the reasons for this?

- Do you need to recommend change or action?
- Connect your conversion rate to marketing activity
- Consider the enquiry journey and any areas that may need to change
- Any other significant messages or findings?

Enquiries generated by month

The graph below (EXAMPLE) demonstrates the number of enquiries the service has received over the INSERT DATES



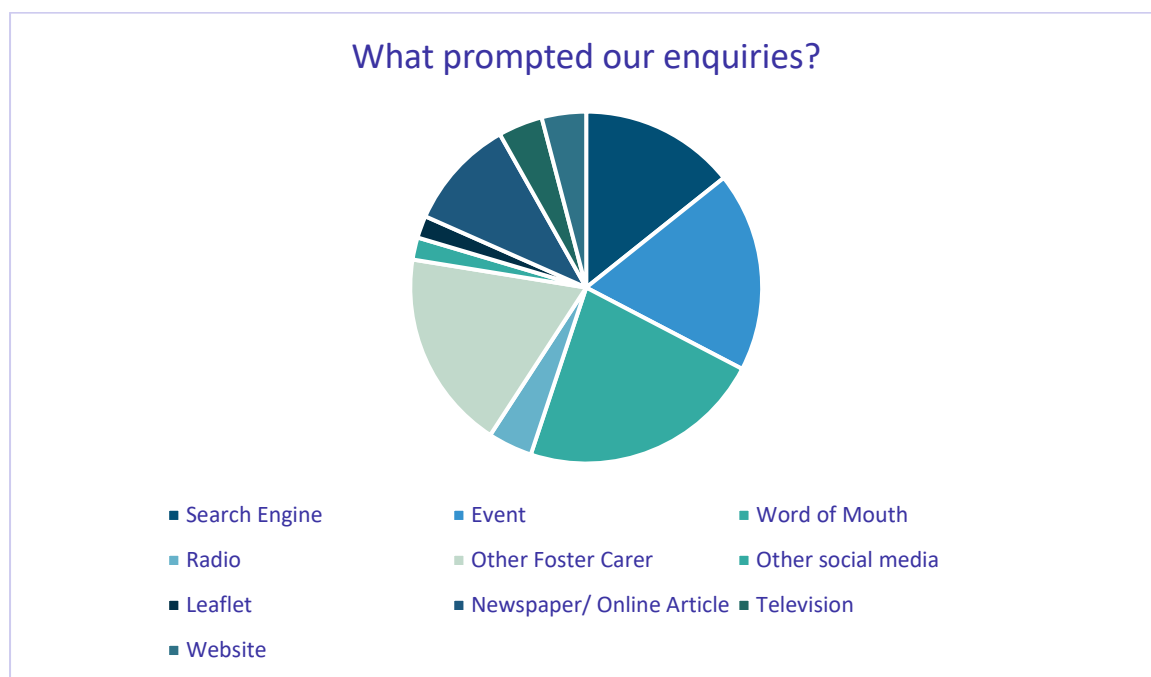
Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Are there any peaks/troughs and are these where you would expect them to be?
 - Do the peaks correspond with marketing activity?
 - What might be the reasons for this?
 - Any other significant messages or findings?
- EXAMPLE IN RELATION TO GRAPH ANALYSIS**
- *May – Foster Care Fortnight (heightened promotion around foster care, locally and nationally)*
 - *June and July – follow on from Foster Care Fortnight*
 - *September – ‘empty nesters syndrome’ (many people want to wait until their children leave home to proceed with fostering, and September is a month when many go away to university or start new jobs so they can afford to move out of the family home)*
 - *November – Children in Need (heightened media interest around children that are vulnerable and need help)*

Source of enquiry

To understand what recruitment activity has been effective and generated enquiries, information on the source of enquiry is vital, particularly as this will feed into the recruitment strategy for the period ahead. Combining the period **INSERT YEARS**, the pie chart below demonstrates the main sources of enquiries.

Identify the **MAIN** sources of enquiry only (**EXAMPLE BELOW**)



NUMBERS AND SOURCE OF ENQUIRIES.

Source	Number
Search engine	
Radio	
Leaflet	
Website	
Event	
Other Foster Carer	
Newspaper/ online article	
Word of mouth	
Other social media	
Television	
Other	

*This is not an exhaustive list, edit in line with your service enquiry sources

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- What is the most effective source(s) of enquiry?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Is there evidence that some activity needs to change?
- Do you need to recommend change or action?
- Any other significant messages or findings?

EXAMPLE ANALYSIS

With word of mouth providing one of the highest source of enquiries, it provides evidence that we are retaining existing foster carers well who recommend us to friends or family. Foster carer involvement in recruitment activities was an important part of the campaigns. For example, blogs posted on the webpages; TV and radio interviews; meeting applicants at open evenings, meet and greets, and preparation to Foster training. We have received positive feedback from applicants about meeting approved foster carers and it also provides an intrinsic reward to approved foster carers showing that they feel valued. Involving foster carers in recruitment campaigns will form part of our future plans.

It is also important to mention that most people who enquire about fostering have been thinking about becoming a foster carer for several years so it's vital that there is a constant drip-drip of promotion so that the awareness of fostering for our service is maintained at a high level for when people decide that now is the time to enquire.

Current Situation: Fostering Provision

The table below reflects the approved household provision at the end of each financial year.

Year	Total number of fostering households	Of this total approved for Parent & Child	Of this total approved for short breaks	Of this total approved for Children with disabilities

***INSERT any other specific schemes**

Approvals

The table below reflects the NEWLY approved household provision at the end of each financial year.

Year	Total number of fostering households	Of this total approved for Parent & Child	Of this the total approved for short breaks	Of this the total approved for Children with disabilities

***INSERT any other specific schemes**

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Has the total number of households increased/decreased?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Have approval numbers increased/decreased?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Do the approvals reflect the targets set in the last strategy?
- Any other significant messages or findings?

Fostering journey

This section should explore the following:

- The length of time taken to approve foster carers for the service
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Any targets for the future?

EXAMPLE ANALYSIS

Looking into the new approvals during this financial period, from the date of allocation to approval nine (70%) of the assessments have been completed within the team target of 4-6 months. Three of the assessments took between 7-10 months due to complexities within the assessment and one assessment had taken 19 months from allocation to approval. This assessment had experienced two breaks in the assessment process due to complexities identified within the assessment and significant additional assessment time to resolve and proceed to panel.

We continue to strive towards a 4 - 6 month assessment period for all applicants. Capacity issues within the team have been resolved with the appointment of new staff to fill vacant posts and therefore the journey time of assessments should continue to be within expectations.

The fostering journey also considers the type of applicant that we receive contact from, the response they receive from us, the resource they can offer, our ability to provide a consistent worker, customer focused approach and our efficiency in counselling out or assessing.

We have received some feedback from applicants in reference to the stage at which discussions should take place in relation to their potential approval status and we are

reviewing our processes from this feedback. An in-depth analysis of the fostering journey is a recommendation for further work as a result of the findings within the recruitment strategy.

Placement availability *(refer to part 3 of the NFF dataset)

The table below reflects the total placement provision available and utilisation within the service as at the end of the financial year.

Year	Max no. of full-time approved placements	Placement utilisation		Blocked placements - carer continues to foster (placements which are no longer an available resource due to the reasons below)				
		Short term	Long term	Adoptions (by foster carer)	SGO	WIR	Solo placement use	Foster Carers On hold

The maximum number of placements available is rarely a realistic figure to base availability upon.

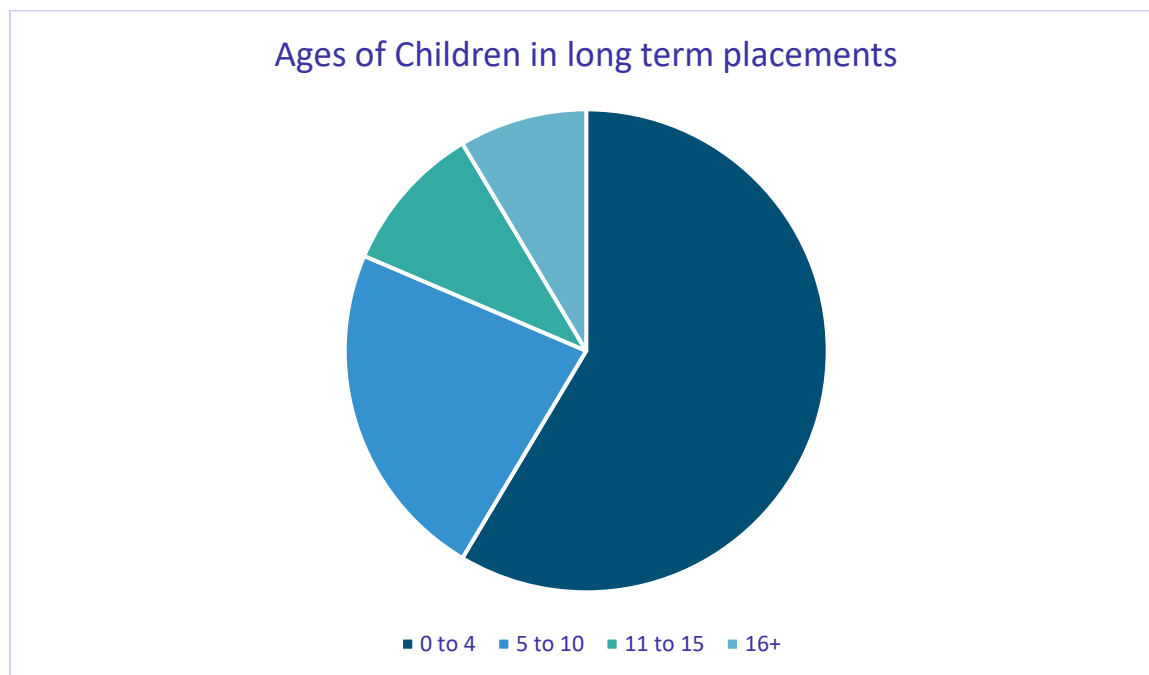
We actively approve carers to be able to care for sibling groups where they have one bedroom which is suitable for children to share. This results in a placement availability figure of two, whereby the actual bedroom space may be used by only one child. Maximum capacity reflects where this can be used to accommodate siblings, pending matching processes. There are also other reasons why placements may be unavailable or blocked as detailed within the chart above.

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Does placement use reflect high or low numbers of long-term placement usage? This might reflect strength in placement stability and achieving permanency for children however the placements will not become available again as they would for short term use.
- What does this mean for future recruitment and placement availability? Think about the transitions which may or may not happen in the next three years.
- Have high numbers of placements been blocked?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Any other significant messages or findings?
- How many unoccupied available placements does your service have (please refer to part 3 of NFF dataset)?
- What are the reasons for unoccupied available placements?

Our recruitment targets need to reflect the current use and loss of our available provision. Further breakdown into the long-term use of our placements is provided below.

Long-term placements



EXAMPLE ANALYSIS

From the pie chart above we can see that there is a high number of children looked after aged between 5-9 years who are receiving a long term foster care service. The impact of this on the service is that these placements will be fully utilised for a minimum of 10-15 years pending WIR provision.

From the data we have collated in respect of the current placement use almost half of the approved placements within the service are utilised for long term fostering arrangements. This will need to be reflected in future recruitment campaigns to ensure that we continue to recruit this type of resource.

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL placement utilisation *(refer to part 1b of the NFF dataset)

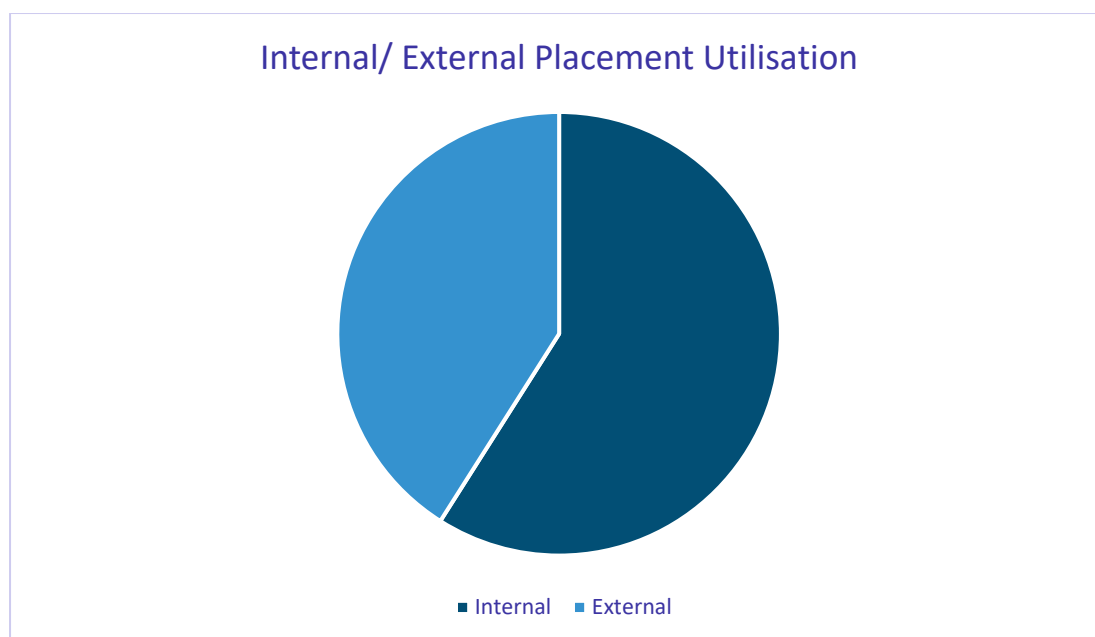
The table below shows the percentage of children placed internally and externally with foster carers over the past three years. A continuous aim for the service will be to increase the number of children that are placed in suitable internal provision.

Year	% of children in foster care that are placed internally	% of children in foster care that are placed externally (in all external placements)	Total Foster CLA population

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Is the use static over the three years or can a pattern of change be identified?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- What does the percentage split demonstrate in relation to recruitment targets?
- What factors have contributed to the above, consider matching/placement utilisation/transitions/variations or exemptions in approval status
- Any other significant messages or findings?

EXAMPLE DIAGRAM TO REFLECT % SPLIT

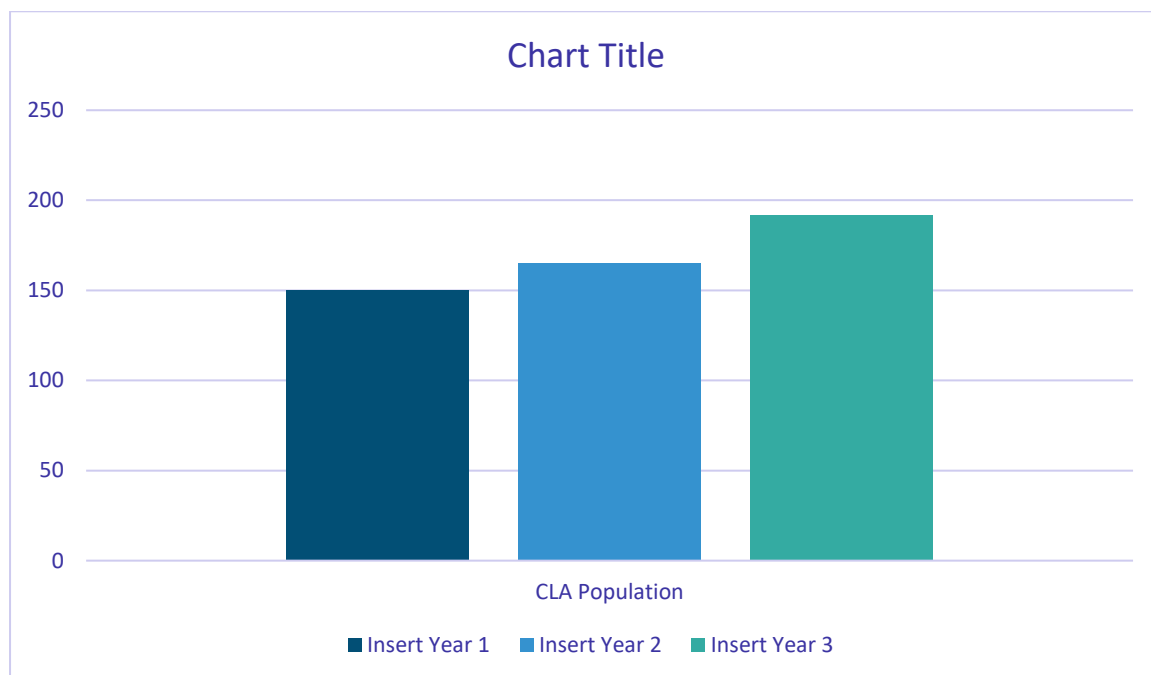


Service Demand over the past financial year

The CLA population in general foster care **increased/decreased*** by (INSERT %) in comparison to the previous year.

*delete as appropriate

EXAMPLE GRAPH



Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Are numbers increasing/decreasing?
- What might be the reasons for this?
- Does this identify any specific recruitment targets?
- Any other significant messages or findings?

Children placed internally

*(refer to NFF data set part 1a static placement use) As at (insert date) there are **INSERT NUMBER** of children and young people placed internally with our service. Below is a table which shows the age ranges of these children.

	Less than 1 year	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-15 years	Over 16 years	TOTAL
Female						
Male						

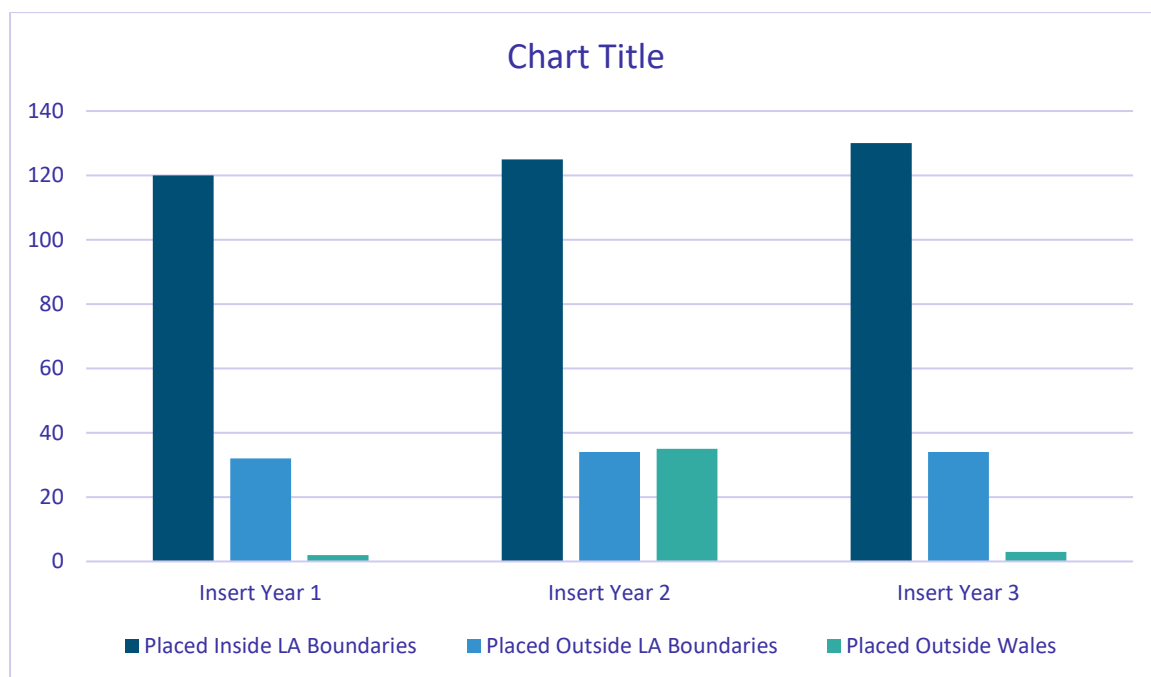
Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How many children were placed within placed within other Welsh LA boundaries?
- How many children were placed outside Wales?
- How have placements been utilized over the past year? Do any age groups stand out?

- What does this mean for recruitment targets?
- Any other significant messages or findings?

Foster placements by location as at (INSERT DATE)

EXAMPLE GRAPH



Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Are children more or less likely to be placed within the LA boundaries in an internal or external placement?
- Does recruitment practice need to change to reflect a need to grow internal placements within the LA boundaries?
- Any other significant messages or findings?

Current Situation: Analysis of Service Demands (Insert Year)
--

The table below reflects the service activity within Foster **INSERT NAME** over the last year and is an indication of the current demands placed upon the service. This helps us identify gaps within our in-house provision and set appropriate recruitment targets for the coming year.

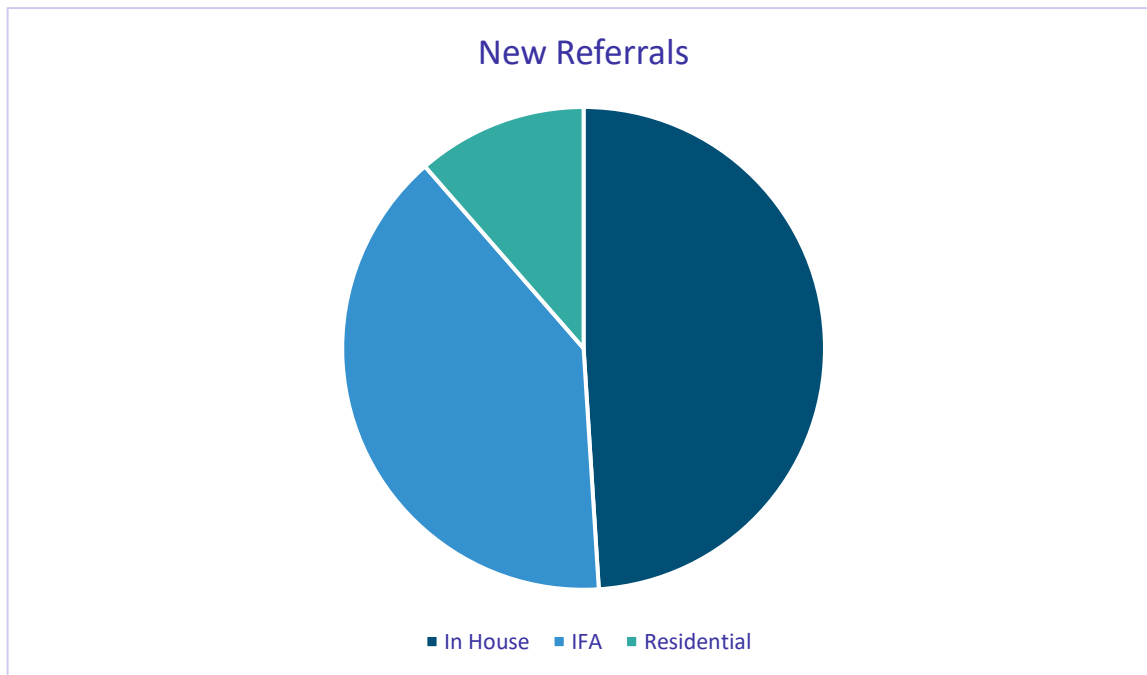
*(refer to Foster Wales KPI monthly returns)

	Total no. of referrals	Total referrals placed	No. of children placed in house	No. of children placed in IFA (commercial)	No. children placed in 3 rd Sector (nonprofit)	No. of children placed in another LA	No. of children placed in residential	No. of PAC placements			Total children returned from IFA	Total children returned from Residential
								IH	RES	IFA		
April												
May												
June												
July												
Aug												
Sept												
Oct												
Nov												
Dec												
Jan												
Feb												
Mar												
TOT AL												

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Was the service able to meet demands for foster placements or were children placed in alternative provision not in-line with their care and support plan? E.g. in residential/IFA etc.
- What percentage of referrals convert to placements?
- What percentage of placement requests were met within the service own provision and what percentage were met in other provision?
- How much resource is required to ensure this skilled work results in the best match for the child?
- What are the gaps to convert into recruitment targets?

EXAMPLE CHART



A more detailed breakdown of the new referrals placed in-house during **insert date** is provided below.

*(refer to part 1e NFF dataset)

	0-4 years	5-10 years	11+ years	TOTAL
New Referrals				

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Are there higher demands for certain age groups?
- Are there higher demands for certain genders?
- What are the gaps and demands to convert into recruitment targets?

Sibling Groups placed during INSERT YEAR *(Refer to part 2 of the NFF data set)

	Siblings Placed Together	Siblings Placed Apart	Total
Placements made according to the placement request			0
Placements made not according to the placement request			0

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Did the service meet all of the demands to place sibling groups together where requested?
- What are the gaps and demands to convert into recruitment targets?

Children Looked After returned from a residential setting to foster care provision

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How many children returned from a residential setting to the service over the past year?
- Description of circumstances, why they were placed in residential and why they returned? (e.g. returned from parent and child, against care and support plan, awaiting assessment of needs etc.)
- Exploration and analysis of the services ability to meet demands and needs of those children who require provision to step down from residential. (e.g. does it demonstrate that the service is effective in returning children with complex needs from residential settings to foster carer settings? What would need to happen to improve this?)

Current Situation: Analysis of IFA Use (Insert Year)
--

*(Refer to NFF data set parts 1b, 1d and 4)

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How many placements were made in IFA provision during the year?
- How many of these were due to lack of in house resources?
- How many children were placed within placed within other Welsh LA boundaries?
- How many children were placed outside Wales?
- How many of these were new referrals?
- How many of these were placement moves?
- Were any of these moves a result of securing a better matched provision within an IFA?

- How many of these moves to IFA's were due to placement breakdowns?
- What are the messages regarding placement stability?
- Explore why you could not meet the needs of these young people within your own carer profile.
- How many of the requests were for PAC placements or children with complex needs?
- What were the complex needs?
- What plans are there to provide in house carers with skills to meet the needs of more complex children?
- Messages for targeting recruitment?

The table below provides a further breakdown of these placements.

Age range	0-4 years	5-10 years	11+

Current Situation: Analysis of Residential Use (Insert Year)
--

*(refer to NFF data set Part 1b and 1d)

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How many children were placed in residential provision during the year?
- How many placed with residential were not in line with their care and support plan i.e. because of lack of resource?
- How many children were placed within placed within other Welsh LA boundaries?
- How many children were placed outside Wales?
- How many of the requests were for PAC placements or children with complex needs?
- Explore why you could not meet the needs of these young people within your own carer profile.
- What were the complex needs?
- What plans are there to provide in house carers with skills to meet the needs of more complex children?
- Messages for targeting recruitment?

Current Situation: Analysis of Parent & Child Placements (Insert Year)
--

*(Please refer to Part 1d of the NFF data set)

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How many PAC placements were made in total?
- Are PAC placement needs increasing or decreasing?
- How many were placed with in house foster carers?
- How many were placed with IFA's?
- How many were placed with residential?
- How many children were placed within placed within other Welsh LA boundaries?
- How many children were placed outside Wales?
- How many placed with IFA and residential were not in line with their care and support plan i.e. because of lack of resource?
- Do your PAC approved carers also have a mainstream approval status which means that some of this provision is not always available.
- Messages for growing in house PAC provision?

Current Situation: Analysis of Provision for Children with Disabilities
--

The following tables provide further information in relation to the total number of children with a disability that are currently placed in the care of the Local Authority.

	Inside County	Outside County	Outside Wales	Total
Placed in-house				
Placed in IFA				
Placed in residential				

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How many CWD placements were made in total?
- Are CWD placements needs increasing or decreasing?
- How many were placed with in house foster carers?
- How many were placed with IFA's?
- How many were placed with residential?
- How many placed with IFA and residential were not in line with their care and support plan i.e. because of lack of resource?
- Do your CWD approved carers also have a mainstream approval status which means that some of this provision is not always available.
- Did the foster carers have a specific approval to reflect their ability to care for children with disabilities?
- Messages for growing in house CWD provision?

Respite Provision for Children with disabilities

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How are you meeting the current demand for respite provision for families of CWD?
- Messages for growing respite provision in order to meet demand?

Section B: Foster Carer Retention and Support

*(Refer to NFF data set part 6)

During **insert financial year**, there were **insert figure** terminations of approval within the service, which is **insert percentage** loss of carers. The Fostering Network Benchmark Report (2015/16) states that just under 13% has consistently been the average for the proportion of foster carers leaving services.

Year	Number of Terminations of Approval	Percentage

Reason for Termination	Insert year	Insert year	Insert year
Long Service			
Ill health/ Bereavement/Relationship breakdown/ Relocation			
Change of Career			
Transfer to other Local Authority			
Transfer to independent third sector organisation			
Transfer to independent commercial organisation			
WIR/Supported Lodgings arrangements			
Special Guardianship Order made			

Adoption Order made			
Concerns/ Complaints/Allegations			
Child Returned Home			
Fostering did not meet expectations			
Totals			

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- Has the percentage of terminations of approval increased or decreased?
- What are the main reasons for foster carers terminating approval during the past year?
- How does this compare to previous years?
- How many foster carers reported dissatisfaction with the service and for what reasons/?
- Are there any actions to take or changes to be made?

Retention activities

We recognise that foster carer retention carries equal importance to recruitment activities, which is why constant attention is needed towards improving retention and the support provided to our fostering families.

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- What retention methods have you employed?
- Have these been successful?
- How have you consulted with your foster carers?
- What support package do you provide? Example below:

Allocated Supervising Social Worker / Daily dedicated duty officer

Comprehensive training calendar including access to the QCF and confidence in care course / Fees and allowances / foster carers support line / Newsletter / Peer / buddy support scheme

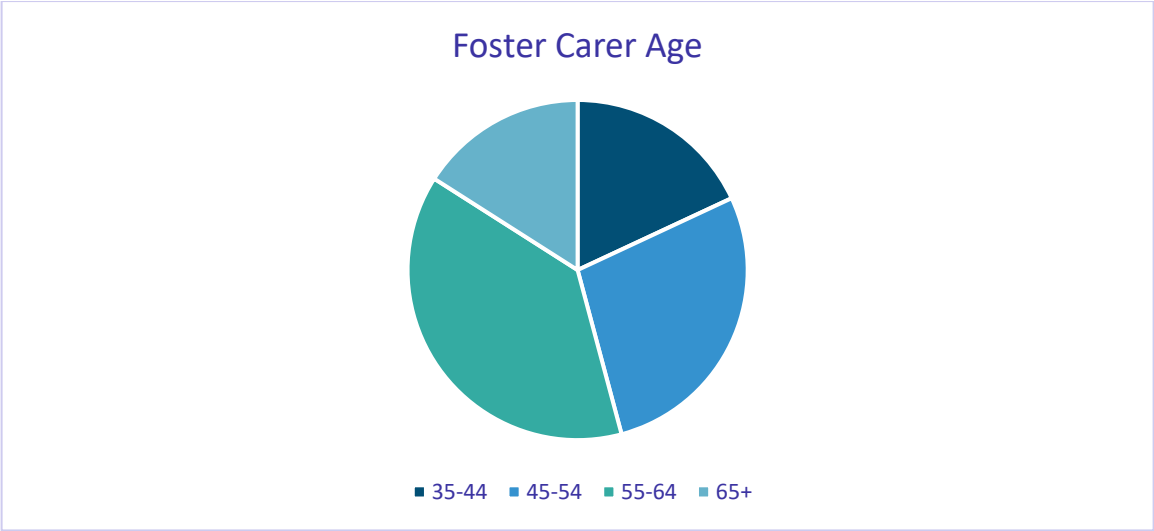
Participation and support groups: foster carer; men who foster; mates who care; and 1,2,3

CADW/MAX/PTL cards / Annual consultation day / Social events – Christmas party, Easter, Summer, Autumn

Foster carer population and profile

To support and retain foster carers, a full understanding of the **insert name** carer population and profile, as well as their motivations and values is required. The graphs below help us understand the age range of our carer population and where they live.

Foster carer population by age – example pie chart



Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- What age group is the largest proportion of foster carers?
- What age group is the lowest proportion of foster carers?

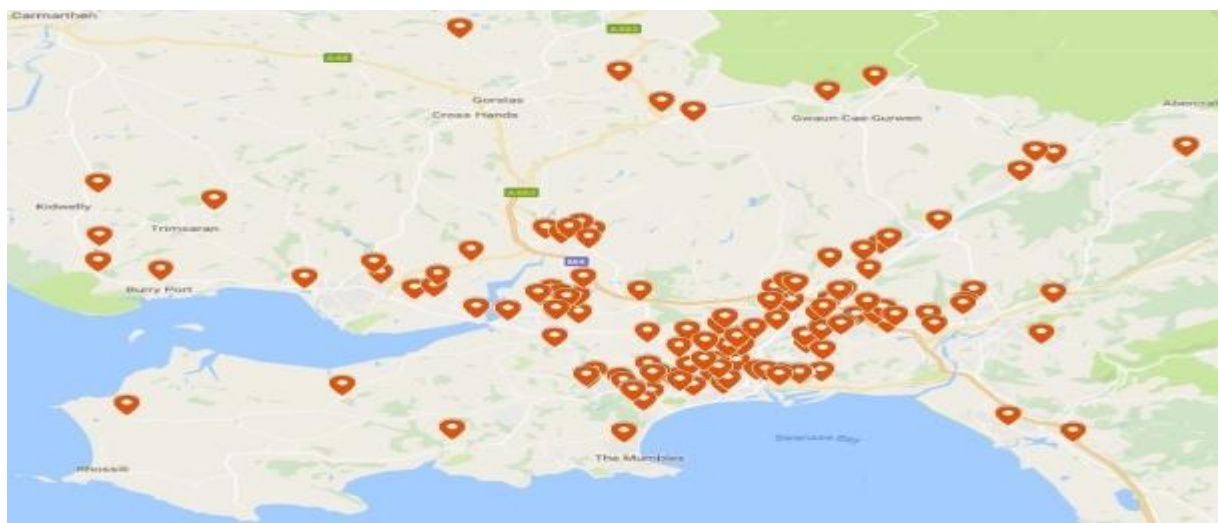
Below is an age breakdown of those carers approved in insert year.

21-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65+

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- What are the key messages?
- Why do carers choose to foster with the service?
- What does this show in relation to recruitment needs?
- How will you use this information to inform recruitment campaigns?

Foster Carers by Location



Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- How many in house carers reside outside of the Local Authority boundary?
- Is there evidence of increased populations of foster carers within specific areas of the LA?
- How does this information inform future recruitment needs?

Section C: Meeting the Needs of Children

Placements

Placement stability is a key factor in meeting children's needs. The table below shows the number and reasons for moves over the last financial period in both **insert name** and IFAs.

Reason for move	Insert LA name Insert figure and percentage into each cell of the table	IFA Insert figure and percentage into each cell of the table
Carer gave notice		
More appropriate placement identified		
Planned move from emergency placement		
Young person's choice		

Carer – personal circumstances		
Change in care plan		
Long term matched move		
Planned move to Family and Friends placement – still CLA		
Total		

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- **Analysis on planned moves/ long term matched moves. IFA vs in-house?**
- **Analysis of carer notice being given. IFA vs in-house?**
- **Percentage of children placed within in house provision vs IFA's?**
- **Responsiveness to placement instability. In-house vs IFA's?**
- **Resources available to support stability within your LA?**

Quality of assessments and placements

Information to inform this section might be obtained, for example, from CIW inspections; outcome data for your children looked after (e.g. education indicators, health indicators, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire scores); placement stability data; feedback from your children looked after and their families, feedback from foster carers, including exit interviews, views of supervising social workers, children's social workers and independent reviewing officers; views from the education sector and CLA nurses; feedback from fostering panels, recommendations from the IRM, records of complaints and compliments, examples of good practice etc.

Part 2: STRATEGY

Section A: Recruitment Plans (Insert years from and to)

Recruitment targets

The recruitment targets identified for **INSERT FINANCIAL YEAR** are based on current and predicted service need, the profile of the children that we couldn't place during insert previous year and the Local Authority's placement sufficiency strategy. Our targets are also reflective of the local authority's strategic financial planning and are aligned to the child and family service improvement program.

Placement type	Recruitment Target
Children with complex needs	
Parent and Child	
11+	
Sibling groups (2 or more bedrooms)	
CWD	
UASC	

Recruitment plan (**INSERT YEAR**)

The recruitment strategy **insert year** will consider the evidence provided by the Fostering Network (Who Cares and Why?)

The Fostering Network together with the Department for Education, commissioned research into the intrinsic values and motivations profile of newly approved foster carers (Why Foster Carers Care, Part 2). Of the key findings: "81 per cent of recently approved foster carers are what has been coined 'Pioneers', compared to 73 per cent of all foster carers."

Pioneer' values set

The recommendation from the market research was that: 'The target audience should be people who have a Pioneer values set and ideally have experiences of working with

children or teenagers, and/or have their own personal circumstances such as exposure to foster caring in their own upbringing.”

This research provides a valuable insight into the Pioneer target market. Pioneers who may be interested in becoming foster carers are people who:

- Are motivated by an intrinsic desire to ‘do the right thing’ and to contribute to improving society
- Are often the first to respond to a call to action in the local community on the basis of moral imperative – something that must happen because it is the right thing
- Are likely to be concerned with, and active, in the local community
- Are between 18 and 50 years’ old
- May have worked in residential units, as youth workers, or other caring professions.
- Are open minded, calm in the face of challenge, reflective and level headed
- Are experienced. Those who foster aged 11+ need the capability, capacity and experience of looking after young people. Those who work with children and teenagers, or people who have their own children will be better prepared for the challenges that they will face in fostering

This group are:

- Likely to be motivated by the outcomes they can deliver rather than being motivated primarily by financial gain. This makes things like the support available a primary consideration when choosing between being a foster carer for a local authority or independent fostering agency
- Motivated by social concepts such as social justice, challenge and reward, pedagogy and applying vocational skills

The market research into foster carers motivations, together with the analysis of the looked after population, will enable Foster Swansea to follow an evidence-led, motivations based approach to recruiting foster carers.

Key messages that will resonate with the Pioneer target market and drive them to action are:

- The identifiable rewards in looking after foster children, particularly helping individuals to grow and overcome barriers
- The challenge, hard work, and ordinariness of the people who are foster carers
- A narrative that reassures them that the pathway of becoming a carer, and the rewards meet the initial motivation
- The breakdown of family relationships, destabilising the environment for the child, will resonate strongly with Pioneers and therefore encourage them to act
- The experience, greater support, and benefits of the local authority over independent fostering agencies
- The first hand experiences of foster carers

INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY NAME campaign (INSERT DATE)

- How do you plan to attract potential foster carers?
- What sources of media will you use?
- Will you be undertaking regional as well as local recruitment activity?
- What times of year will you be undertaking specific campaigns? For example
Campaign period 1: January - New year, new start
Campaign period 2: May - Foster Care Fortnight
Campaign period 3: September – Empty nesters / Have you got room to foster?

In addition to these campaigns, there will also be extra promotion at the following times to link with national awareness raising campaigns. For example:

- March - LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week
- October – Sons and Daughters' month
- November – Children in Need.

Communicating the campaigns

Methods that are used to communicate the campaigns and generic promotion will mainly focus on the highest performing methods in the previous financial period, as well as utilise promotional methods that are free.

The most successful methods for (Insert LA) are (Insert most successful methods from page xx).

Promotional tool	How will you utilise these tools?
Social media	
Facebook advertising	
Google Ads	
Events In person	
Online Events	
Press releases	
Staff intranet	
Corporate website	
Sponsorship	
Leaflets/ Flyers	
Radio/ TV	
Word of Mouth	
Other Foster Carers	

Newspaper/Online Articles	
Billboards/Digital Screens	

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- What channels yield the most enquiries?
- What other communication methods are effective in promoting insert name to ensure that there is a drip-drip flow of promotion to help build brand awareness?
- Why do you plan to utilize these recruitment methods in the way you have described?
- What resources/ staffing capacity do you have to support these methods?

Section B: RETENTION PLANS (Insert Year)

It is recognised that the retention and development of the foster carer workforce is equally as important as recruitment of new carers.

Activity	Examples	How will you utilise these activities?
Support groups	Men who care, under 5's, teenagers, sons and daughters, newly approved, PAC.	
Communication	Newsletter, Facebook Group, Email, Letter	
Mentor/ Buddying Scheme	Pioneer carers, mockingbird	
Foster carers support line	Out of hours support, duty line	
Social events	Summer event, Christmas party, theatre trips	
Discounts for foster families	Leisure cards, Max cards, Cadw	
Consultation	Events, questionnaires, surveys	
Appreciation	Events, Cards, Gifts, Acknowledge good practice	

Incentive Payments	Council tax discount, retention payment	
Learning and Development	L&D Framework, AWIF, E-learning, resource bank	
National Core Offer		
Regional Core Offer		
Memberships	Fostering Network, AFA Cymru, Coram BAAF	
Add any other relevant activities		

Analyse the findings and consider the following questions:

- What was your net loss/ gain of foster carers during (INSERT YEAR)
- What activities are effective in contributing to foster carer retention?
- How do you embed consultation with foster carers into your retention activities?
- Why do you plan to utilize these retention methods in the way you have described?
- What resources/ staffing capacity do you have to support these methods?

Section C: FINANCIAL IMPACT (Insert Year)

Recruitment and retention budget proposal for insert year/s

Total budget = £

Allocation	Budget	Share of budget
Recruitment		
Retention		

Recruitment breakdown

	COST	
Promotion Examples	Insert year	Insert year
Rebranding		
Website		
Marketing materials POS Material (Design and Print)		

Radio promotion		
Print advertising		
Recommendation Fee		
Online advertising – Google Ads		
Online advertising - Facebook		
Online Advertising - Press		
Campaigns		
Adverts/infographics		
Sponsorship		
Content Development (Filming, Photography, Podcasts)		
Translation		
Contingency		
TOTAL		

Retention breakdown

	Cost	
Activity Examples	Insert year	Insert year
Support groups		
Communication		
Mentor/ Buddying Scheme		
Foster carers support line		
Social events		
Discounts for foster families		
Consultation		
Appreciation		
Incentive Payments		
Learning and Development		
National Core Offer		
Regional Core Offer		
Memberships		
Include other examples as relevant		
Total		

Evaluation

A robust system of monitoring and evaluation will be developed to ensure that marketing activities deliver the established objectives.

There are a number of activities and reports which will be compiled to monitor marketing implementation, effectiveness and budget expenditure. The effectiveness of the marketing activity will be measured by the following outputs:

- Press coverage achieved
- Number of hits to the website
- Views to any videos produced
- Number of interactions on Facebook and Twitter
- Facebook advertising analytics
- Google Ads analytics
- Number of enquiries generated and the spend attributed to each promotional method
- Number of de-registrations
- Results of consultations/survey
- Number of word of mouth recommendations
- Approval rates
- Retention rates
- Conversion rates

Conclusion

Recruiting and retaining a diverse, skilled, active and motivated pool of foster carers which meets the range of needs of children in care remains a challenge. The effective recruitment and retention of foster carers is the responsibility of everyone working within the fostering service. A consistently high profile is required in order to recruit more carers. Quality campaigns should utilise the experience of carers and get them involved as they are best people to 'sell' Foster [insert name](#).

It is essential that we employ an effective marketing and communication strategy to achieve our goal of increasing the number of foster carers across the [insert local authority area](#).

Include:

- Examples of good practice
- Feedback
- Learning and Development

What actions will you take to improve your recruitment objectives

Foster ([insert name](#)) continues to face competition from commercial agencies who have healthy marketing budgets, producing sleek marketing materials and generating professional fostering brands.

We need to ensure that prospective carers are attracted to Foster (insert name) straight away

which reinforces the need for a national rebranding to compete successfully against the commercial agencies. In order to do this, we need to promote, at every opportunity, our unique points of difference over the commercial agencies. These include:

- **Availability of Children-** All children are placed by the local authority and we will always place with our own foster carers in the first instance.
- **Strong links with Childcare Teams -** Childcare social workers and Fostering social workers work for the same organization which enhances communication.
- **Not for profit - (INSERT NAME)** do not operate for a profit, unlike commercial agencies.

Our local and regional campaigns will need to address our targeted recruitment needs, whilst aligning to the national brand.

The recruitment and retention strategy will need to be flexible as requirements change. Some activities will be conducted in an ad-hoc manner

Central to any fostering service's success is the actual 'product'. This involves anything we offer and expect from people when they embark on a career in fostering. The proposition for foster carers needs to be as attractive as possible. It is imperative that the fostering service offers a whole range of support and services. By implementing this and the methods included in this strategy we will have a greater opportunity to attract and retain foster carers.

1. Key Performance Indicators

Foster Wales KPI Monthly Return

Month:

No Initial Enquiries Received				
Sources of Enquiry	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
No Initial Visits Completed				
No Initial Visits Completed Within 7 Calendar Days Of Initial Enquiry				
No Initial Visits Completed Outside 7 Calendar Days of Initial Enquiry				
Reason for Completion Outside 7 Calendar Days of Initial Enquiry	At Applicant's Request	Service Capacity Issues	National Holiday Period	
No Closed Initial Visits				
Reason for Initial Visit Closure	Applicant Withdrew	Service Decision Not To Proceed		Total
No of Full Assessments Completed Within 6 Months				
No Full Assessments Completed Outside of 6 Months				
Reason for Full Assessments Completed Outside of 6 Months	Outside of service control	Service Capacity Issues		Total
No Assessments Closed Prior to Completion				

Reason for Assessments Closed Prior to Completion	Applicant Withdrew	Service Decision To Close	Total
			0
Number of NEW Foster Carer Approvals			
Number of NEW Placements offered as a result of these approvals			
Number of children placed into LA foster placement provision this month			
Number of children placed Commercial IFA LA foster placement provision this month			
Number of children placed 3rd sector (non profit) LA foster placement provision this month			