



National Fostering Framework

Phase Three Report

2017 – 2018



National
Fostering
Framework
Fframwaith
Maethu
Cenedlaethol

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1. Introduction

Introduction

Developing a national framework for fostering services (NFF) is one of the major work strands of the work programme designed by the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group.



It recognises that we need a system in Wales where every fostered child and young person is:

- provided with security and stability in their foster home
- helped to make and maintain relationships
- supported to stay until they are ready to leave
- helped to reach their potential.

Similarly, every foster carer deserves to be:

- respected as a professional child care colleague
- given all the information they need to care for each child properly
- be fully involved in decision making
- empowered to make appropriate day-to-day decisions concerning the children in their care.

The aims of the NFF are:

- improvements in permanency planning for children and quality of placement provision
- a more cogent and compelling strategic intent for fostering services
- increased collaboration and co-operation by all key stakeholders
- sector-led improvements
- greater transparency about the performance of fostering services and efficient use of resource areas
- economies of scale, where appropriate, with a respect for localism
- more shared services planning and commissioning
- consistent use of best practice models for recruiting and supporting foster carers across all sectors
- closer links to research and evaluation.

Introduction

When work on the National Fostering Framework (NFF) began in 2015-16, it was anticipated that the programme would take at least five years. Year One (2015-16) involved developing a First Thoughts Paper and extensive consultation with key stakeholders. Year Two (2016-17) involved scoping the overall shape and functional model for the NFF and further consultation about how it should operate. Year Three (2017-18) was seen as the first year of a three-year implementation programme.

Over the past year, the NFF has delivered its Phase 3 Work Programme for 2017-18. The work has been overseen by the NFF Steering Group, with membership from all key stakeholders. In addition, a smaller Grant Monitoring Group has ensured prudent expenditure of the £400,000 grant from the Welsh Government. As in previous years, providing a public account of that work by means of this Phase 3 report is seen as an important means for us to communicate what has been achieved, to describe the next steps and to take responsibility for implementing the Framework in accordance with our stated aims.

It was recommended during Phase Two of the NFF that it might be appropriate for its national or co-ordinating functions to be undertaken through a close working relationship with the existing central team of the National Adoption Service (NAS) as Central Team. This proposal is currently being considered within the ongoing independent review of the arrangements for the NAS. In the meantime, there have been increasing ties between the work undertaken by the two organisations, both strongly grounded in local government.

The financial support for the NFF work programme provided by Welsh Government for the past three years will be provided next year by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

We have been successful in securing the funds needed to allow appointment of six Regional Development Managers with a responsibility to develop a work programme for each of the regions in Wales, reflecting their priorities but also assisting delivery of the overall change. These priorities have been identified in part from the national performance framework information that all local authorities collected for 2016-17. They are in the process of completing the framework for 2017-18; we will begin then to be able to identify any emerging patterns or trends. It is important that each region takes strategic and operational ownership of their work programme to gain the benefits from delivering some aspects of our fostering services on a larger scale but without losing strong ties with all that is happening with each local authority area. This report contains an account from each region about progress made.

This report describes in detail the progress made in achieving some of the other ambitions which the NFF has sought to take forward. Significant milestones have been reached in:

- exploring how we can create an All Wales brand for Local Authority Fostering
- adopting a National Approach to Commissioning
- providing a Best Practice Guide to Kinship Care
- establishing a national framework to steer post-approval training for foster carers.

We need to celebrate these achievements and to acknowledge the good work that is being done. However, there is growing awareness also about how intractable some of the problems are and how big is the scale of the change needed. To move on successfully, we must be very sure that the work of the NFF is strongly grounded in realistic and well evidenced conclusions about 'what works' at local, regional and national tiers. It means also securing genuine and sustained commitment from a wide range of stakeholders, holding together the 'coalition for change' that now exists and commands much support..

For these reasons, the NFF has already planned how to focus its work for 2018-2019. The emphasis must be on providing responsive, sustainable, flexible, innovative and affordable services through co-production. Success will depend upon service integration across organisational boundaries and effective partnership arrangements. All agencies and organisations will need to have a competent and confident workforce which is skilled, responsive and professional, operating within an environment of shared learning and collaboration. We must help to ensure that the voice of the child/young person and their families is not only heard but acted upon to improve services.

We are aware of the need to continue driving forward our work programme with energy so that we can maintain momentum for long-term, sustainable change through the co-operation and support of all stakeholders. Priorities for 2018-19 are:

- helping Regional Development Managers to take a lead role in establishing and delivering regional work programmes, with priorities aligned with the evidence from the national performance framework for fostering services and the other major initiatives being promoted by the NFF;

- maintaining the capacity and infrastructure needed to provide the co-ordination and leadership required for the work programme from the ADSS Cymru Lead Director and Head of Service, the NAS Director and central team, the 4Cs, and the third sector;
- consolidate implementation of the national performance framework across all local authorities and independent fostering agencies;
- creating an all Wales brand for local authority fostering and establishing a marketing strategy at regional and central levels for the brand;
- developing an implementation plan for the Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care;
- continuing work on harmonising fees and allowances for foster carers;
- working to implement a national training framework for foster carers.

Philip Evans, Ministerial Advisory Group

ALL WALES HEADS OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The All Wales Heads of Service have adopted the action plan from the Ministerial Advisory Group to Improve Outcomes for Children as their work plan. The development of a National Fostering Framework sits within this work plan. Heads of children's services recognise the need to increase the numbers of foster placements available to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of looked after children in recent years.

If implemented successfully, the National Fostering Framework will, increase placement choice, increase placement stability and in turn improve outcomes for looked after children. We are now in Phase 3 of the implementation programme, greater momentum is now needed if the benefits of a National Framework are to be realised.

To aid the momentum of the NFF work programme Regional Development Managers with a lead responsibility have been appointed in each of the six regions. A work programme for each region has been developed reflecting the particular priorities for each region. These priorities have been identified in part from the national performance framework information that all local authorities collected for 2016-17. Authorities are in the process of completing the framework for 2017-18, we will then begin to be able to identify any emerging patterns or trends. It is important that each Region takes strategic and operational ownership of their Regional work programme to gain the benefits from delivering some aspects of our fostering services on a regional basis.

Tanya Evans, NFF Lead Head of Service

NFF AND THE NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

The National Adoption Service (NAS) has continued to support the development of the NFF. Although it is not intended that fostering services are re-organised into a collaborative service in the way that has happened for adoption services there is much learning from the development and the implementation of NAS that is relevant. Additionally it was recommended during phase two of the NFF that it would be appropriate for any national or co-ordinating functions for the NFF would be best attached to the existing NAS central team. This proposal is currently being considered within the independent review of the arrangements for NAS that is ongoing.

The NAS Director has continued to provide advice and support to the NFF programme by engagement in the Strategic Steering group, stepping in. To chair where necessary as well as supporting the project manager and linking to the media and marketing work stream. The NAS performance and business manager undertook the data collection and production of the first suite of NFF performance reports with the project manager. Together with the support of the NAS host local authority they have created and recruited to the NFF performance manager post.

Suzanne Griffiths, Director of the National Adoption Service

Membership of the NFF Steering Group

The NFF Work Programme for 2017-18 has been overseen by the NFF Steering Group, with membership from all key stakeholders. In addition a smaller Grant Monitoring Group which has ensured prudent expenditure of the Welsh Government Grant and compliance with the grant requirements.

SOG Membership	Organisation
Phil Evans, Chairperson	Ministerial Advisory Group
Clr Huw David	Bridgend County Council
Clr Geraint Hopkins	Rhondda-Cynon-Taff County Council
Naomi Alleyne	Director of Housing & Social Care, WLGA
Stewart Blythe	Policy Officer, WLGA
Tanya Evans	Head of Children's services, Blaenau Gwent & Chair of AWHOCs
Elizabeth Lockwood	Welsh Government
HuwGwynJones	Welsh Government
Suzanne Griffiths	Director of Operations, National Adoption Service
Ann Batley	Head of Children's Services, Rhondda-Cynon-Taf
Kathy S'Jacob	AFA Cymru
Jon Day	Social Care Wales
Maria Boffey	The Fostering Network
Colin Turner	The Fostering Network
Karen Benjamin	Manager Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's)
Debbie Jones	Voices from Care
Chris Dunn	Voices from Care

SOG Membership	Organisation
Dr Carolyn Sampeys	Designated Doctor, Looked After Children/Safeguarding, Public Health Wales
Dr David Williams	Welsh Government, CAMHS
Helen Kirkaldie	CAMHS, Aneurin Bevan HB
Dr Alyson Rees	CASCADE, Cardiff University
Marian Hughes	Head of Children's Services, Gwynedd
Craig McCloud	Head of Children's Services, Flintshire
Jonathan Jones	Welsh Government, Education, Supporting Achievement& Safeguarding
Stefan Smith	Head of Children's Services, Camarthenshire
Julie Thomas	Head of Children's Services, Swansea
Pam Clutton	CIW
Jane Moore	Project Manager , National Fostering Framework (NFF)

Introduction

The Strategic Steering Group has promoted the increased collaboration between all key stakeholders, created opportunities to influence the development of the NFF and provided the overall strategic co-ordination of all the elements of the work programme.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE NFF GRANT MONITORING GROUP

Name	Organisation
Phil Evans	Ministerial Advisory Group
Suzanne Griffiths	Director of the National Adoption Service
Tanya Evans	Head of Children's Services & NFF Lead Head of Service
Huw Gwynn Jones	Welsh Government
Stewart Blythe	Welsh Local Government Association
Rachel Evans	Head of Children's Services, Vale of Glamorgan
Jane Moore	Project Manager NFF





2. The Work Programme 2017-18

Phase Three: 2017-18

Priority Task	Work Required
Create capacity for an extended National Adoption Service central team, in partnership with the 4C's, to provide co-ordination and leadership required	• Create a Grant Monitoring group to agree how capacity can best be created, to exercise oversight of grant expenditure and generate monitoring reports • Agree continuation of ring fenced funding post 2017-18 • Develop a vision for the coming together of the NAS and the NFF • Establish a consultation programme and an implementation plan for the vision • Develop communication plan to inform all stakeholders of Phase Three work programme
Establish regional work programmes, as part of the Regional Partnership Boards' overall work. The national performance framework for fostering services to be used to determine regional priorities.	• Engage with Heads of Service and Regional Partnership Boards to agree governance arrangements for the regional work programmes • Agree arrangements for the appointment of part-time team managers or equivalent in each of the regions to lead on the regional work programmes
Implement the national performance framework across all local authorities to help shape regional and national/central priorities.	• Create capacity within NAS central team to take this work forward in 2017-18 • Draw up jd/person spec to appoint to part-time performance post 2018 onwards • Appoint to post

Priority Task	Work Required
Create an all Wales brand for local authority fostering. Establish a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand	• Create capacity within NAS central team to take forward this work in 2017-18 • Draw up jd/person for the part-time marketing post 2018 onwards • Appoint to post • Agree specification for creating the all Wales local authority fostering brand
Increase capacity within the regions to respond to additional foster care enquiries	• Work with Heads of Service and regional leads on capacity required within each region to improve response to fostering enquiries • Draw up jd/per spec for 6 SW posts or equivalent • Appoint to posts
Develop a national approach to commissioning fostering services, including a needs analysis and placement commissioning strategies in each region	• Agree a work plan with the 4Cs
Develop consistent standards and a Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care and an implementation plan	• AFA Cymru to develop a proposal for taking this work forward • Proposal to be agreed by GMG/SSG
Continue work on harmonising fees and allowances for foster carers	• Establish a group with regional representation to develop a work programme
Develop a national training framework for foster carers	• Establish a task and finish group to develop the national training framework • Develop a consultation programme for the national training framework
Maintain arrangements for programme management, including the SSG meetings, a Grant Management Group, production of reports and translation costs	• Agree governance arrangements for Phase Three 2017-18 • Establish a Grant Monitoring Group • Appoint NFF Programme Manager



3. Regional Work Programmes

Regional Work Programmes

A major part of the NFF work programme for 2017-18 has been the development of the regional approach to some aspects of fostering services. To assist in this process part of the Welsh Government Grant was used to appoint NFF Regional Development Managers in the six regions. The table below shows the local authorities in each region, the lead Head of Service for each region and the Development Managers.

Regions	Lead Head of Service	Regional Development Manager
North Wales: Gwynedd, Ynys Mon, Wrexham, Flintshire, Conwy, Denbighshire	Marian Parry-Hughes	Non Davies esgaireithin@aol.com
Mid & West Wales: Powys, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion	Stefan Smith	Sue John-Evans srjohn-evans@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
Gwent: Monmouth, Newport, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent	Tanya Evans	Nina Kemp-Jones nina.kemp-jones@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
CwmTaf: Rhondda-Cynon-Taff, Merthyr	Ann Batley	Zarah Newman zarahanewman@yahoo.com
Cardiff/Vale: Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan	Irfan Alam	Leon Goddard leon.goddard@cardiff.gov.uk
Western Bay: Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend	Julie Thomas	Sarah Thomas sarah.thomas@swansea.gov.uk

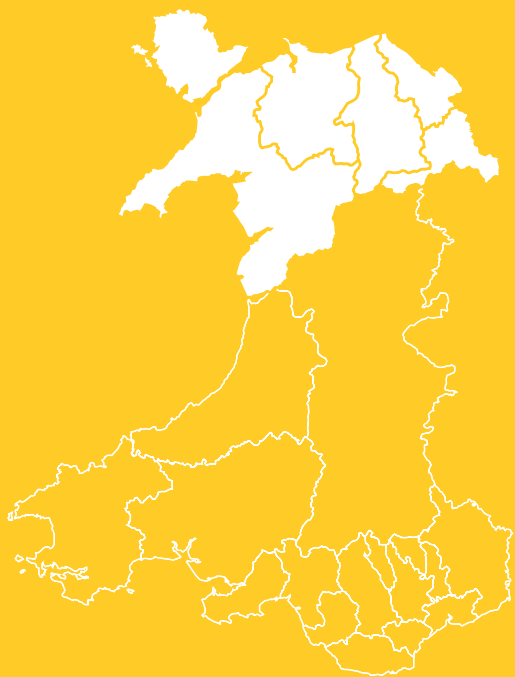
Each of the NFF Regional Development Managers have taken the lead role in the development of a NFF Regional Work Programme, that is updated on a bi-monthly basis.

The section below is the contribution from the Regional Development Managers detailing their Regional Work Programmes and the approach taken in each of their regions.



North Wales

Non Davies
Regional Development Manager



An analysis of the data provided by individual authorities to the Care Inspectorate Wales for its Thematic Fostering Review of January 2018 indicates that there are 1,335 children and young people cared for regionally, thereby signifying an increase since the March 2017 figures. Performance information being collated July 2018 provides another opportunity to inform a regional understanding of levels of need and provision.

The majority of the children and young people are placed in foster care provision comprising of kinship (connected person) care, local authority foster care placements and independent provider placements. There is a significant and growing cohort of children and young people who are placed in Placement with Parents' arrangements. The placement composition pattern is a critical consideration in better understanding current needs and strategic future provision development. It is evident that diminished assessment capacity in relation to mainstream carers is a factor in the numbers of children placed with independent fostering providers.

Each and every child or young person has his or her own unique life experiences, his or her own fears and concerns and his or her own hopes and aspirations for their future. The most significant factor in realising those aspirations is a positive fostering experience.

Each individual fostering agency is greater than the sum of its parts. An important factor in this is the commitment and creativity of the individuals within it. Successful implementation of any regional development is dependent on harnessing this constructively to achieve best consistent practice and economies of scale without losing the local and individual essence.

I am commissioned on a part time basis to implement the National Fostering Framework (NFF) programme across the region. I am involved in many other complementary initiatives and I hope that I bring some added value to the role.

I work closely with the two designated Heads of Children's Services' leads for the NFF, being accountable to them and the HOCS group. There is an established regional Fostering Managers' group which meets monthly with identified leads for respective national NFF work streams. There is a regional group of Marketing & Recruitment Officers and established links with the regional Training Officers and Managers' Group in relation to the National Learning & Development Framework. Regional Performance and Finance Groups are being established in order to inform strategic planning. We are working closely with a Residential Provision scoping programme in order to inform needs' analysis and strategic future provision.

There is regional representation at all NFF national groups and practice and development from the region has made a significant and effective contribution to the national agenda.

The region shares the footprint of the Safeguarding Board, the Judiciary and CAFCASS Cymru, the Health Board, Police, Probation and the Adoption Service. We are building on proven capacity and willingness to work together and my role has been one of consolidation, drawing together and identifying, determining and progressing priorities. The regional Development Programme has been developed collectively including through consultation with foster carers.

The regional Social Care & Wellbeing Services Improvement Collaborative undertook a Regional Fostering Project in 2015 which dovetailed with the NFF work streams and led to many developments conducive to the implementation of the NFF including the development of regional Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 templates and the adopting of regional policies.

Regional Conference

The first regional fostering conference was held on 20 March 2018 (116 delegates) which was a combination of formal presentations and a range of six workshops reflective of the NFF workstreams. The Conference Evaluation Report is positive and concludes that it met its set objectives including:

- To involve key stakeholders in the regional implementation of the NFF
- To identify priorities for the regional development programme
- To provide consultation opportunities including for the National Learning & Development Framework

It is positive to note that the comments on the delegate evaluation forms and the views gleaned directly from the 'Next Steps' concluding session echoed with the priorities identified within the Regional Development Programme plan.

Profile of Need and Placement Commissioning Strategies

An identified priority was to analyse the profile of the children and young people looked after; to analyse their pathways into care and their permanence and placement outcomes including levels of unplanned endings and disruption. Work has been ongoing in this regard and a regional Development Day with full HOCS' attendance was held on June 14 2018 to consider this aspect further wherein the need to ensure a corporate ownership of the NFF was highlighted – both within and across authorities.

An aspect that may need to be better understood is the routes out of care including revocation of Placement with Parents' arrangements and Special Guardianship Orders and the support and service provision required to effect these outcomes.

Each local authority has its own individual Placement Commissioning Strategy, a proportion of them formatted within the Children's Commissioning Consortiwm Cymru (CCCC) Placement Commissioning Strategy template. Other authorities are in the process of reconfiguring their strategies into this format in order to provide consistency and to inform regional commissioning needs and opportunities which may include parent and child provision, shared breaks and residential provision for complex needs.

Kinship (Connected Person) Care

Kinship care provision is a growing population; a regionally agreed Kinship assessment assists with meeting the demands and standardising the approach. The figures show that a significant and increasing percentage of foster carers assessed regionally are kinship carers and the court driven timescale has impacted on the capacity to assess mainstream foster carers. Standardised and consistent pre – approval training for kinship carers is being developed regionally. The implications for support (foster carers, practitioners and panels) are also a factor in a small percentage of these arrangements wherein an assessment of capacity to change is undertaken alongside an assessment of suitability.

Kinship carers attended the regional conference and participated in all of the workshops including the 'Models of Support for Kinship Foster Carers' and the consultation on the Learning & Development Framework.

Practitioners, managers and foster carers contributed to the national Kinship Care Good Practice Guide, which will be launched at a regional conference held in association with AFA Cymru and to include kinship carers as guest speakers on October 11 to celebrate Kinship Care.

Marketing, Recruitment & Retention

Whilst this is a shared function in some authorities, other authorities have dedicated recruitment expertise which the region, as a whole has benefited from. There is a very active Recruitment & Marketing subgroup attended by all the authorities. There is a regional strategy in place including a shared website and the regional 'Recruitment' group continues to inform and indeed at times lead the national marketing strategy. A 'Review of Recruitment 2017 & Plans for 2018' presentation was the focus of the April meeting of the NFF Fostering Managers' Group and the regional strategy was updated on 13 June 2018 and includes the 'Fostering Friendly Authority' and 'Council Tax Deduction' initiatives.

Assessment Capacity

It is evident that the capacity to assess mainstream foster carers has been impacted by the competing demand of court directed kinship assessments. The understandable 'diversion' of resources to meet this need has an impact on the agencies' ability to ensure a streamlined foster carer approval process from enquiry to approval (thereby increasing the risk of 'losing' potential carers) and reduces the fostering stock making it more likely that placements need to be outsourced. An audit of regional assessment activity models has been developed and circulated in order to provide a baseline upon which to consider opportunities for regional development.

Harmonising Fees and Allowances

Previous regional work (May 2017) adopted a decision to harmonise schemes in the first instance. There is an agreed need to develop a model that reflects skills for complex cases including effective models of support and one that clarifies the relationship with the National Learning & Development Framework and the Marketing & Recruitment Strategy. There is a significant regional contribution to the national agenda.

National Learning & Development Framework

To ensure a shared understanding between fostering and training colleagues a regional meeting was held with Training Managers/Officers and Fostering Managers. A training provision audit was undertaken including cost allocation. Analysis of the audit and a further collective consideration at the NFF Development Day (14 June) concluded that there was an opportunity to align the L & D framework with the SW First Three Years in Practice programme and to build on joint training opportunities with the North Wales Adoption Service. It was also agreed to scope the potential for shared education and social care training in areas such as Attachment, Self – Harm; Autism (Autism Strategy) and ALD (Act 2018). Further liaison with the regional training managers to agree ownership and actions is ongoing.

Fostering Panels

Whilst we consider the implications of the forthcoming regulatory proposals we are keen to consider the possibility of potential regional developments including:

- member central list to ease quorum challenges
- recruitment, induction, training, support and evaluation of panel members.
- An audit of regional Fostering Panel arrangements to provide a baseline has been developed and circulated.

Draft Fostering Services (Fostering Services Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2019

- The current consultation on the proposed regulations and forthcoming consideration of kinship care will have implications. A regional response is being prepared which includes consultation with practitioners, fostering panels and independent panel chairs.

Conclusions

There are many complex variables involved in the implementation of the NFF regionally including the forthcoming fostering regulations and the ongoing work with corporate partners within and across authorities. The developing of the profile of the CLA population and an analysis of need alongside court and permanence outcomes as well as work in respect of foster carer recruitment, retention, assessment capacity will also inform the implementation. What is evident is that these developments cannot and should not be undertaken in a vacuum devoid of other relevant aspects and that a shared understanding and ownership including from corporate parents and partners is essential in ensuring its success.



REGIONAL WORK PLAN: NORTH WALES 2017-18

Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
Continue established regional work.	Consolidate and draw together established regional work: - policy/guidance development - strategic corporate partners within and across agencies	Heads of Children's Services Group -designated NFF leads. NFF Regional Fostering Managers' Group NFF Regional Recruitment & Marketing Group NFF Regional Development Manager	Ongoing NFF Fostering Managers' Group meeting monthly. NFF Marketing & Recruitment Group meeting regularly. Representation at all NFF national groups. NFF Regional Performance and Finance groups established. Formalised links with relevant others including regional Training Managers/ Officers	Shared regional footprint with Safeguarding Board; Health; Police & Judiciary. Ongoing proven capacity and willingness to work regionally. Development of regional policies; protocols and templates including: SSWB(W) A related – Assessment & Eligibility Tool; Part 4 CSP; Part 6 CSP; Pathway Plan; Practitioner Guidance Parts 4 and 6; When I'm Ready and Assessment Format. Regional policy development ongoing including Special Guardianship Policy; Pre – Approval Kinship Assessment; Review of Foster Carer Continued Suitability.
Develop an approved Regional Development Programme with identified priorities.	Consideration of historic/current regional and national policy and practice context Inform the DP through the Fostering Managers' Group Consultation with stakeholders including foster carers via regional conference Secure approval of HOCS group. Ensure ownership of the DP via Development Day	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers' Group HOCS Group	April – June 2018.	Regional Development Programme presented to the HOCS group 27 April 2018. Full approval with identified priorities of DP secured at regional NFF Development Session with full HOCS representation 14.06.2018
Ensure corporate response/ responsibility and ownership of the NFF	Raise awareness within and across the LAs including children's services; planning; performance and commissioning; elected	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers' Group HOCS Group	June – October 2018	Placed on 10 July Fostering Managers' Group Meeting agenda

	members; fostering panels; education and health Regionally – health, police, probation, judiciary, YOTS, Safeguarding Board			
Convene regional NFF Conference for Foster Carers and Fostering Managers and Practitioners.	Organise and deliver first Regional Fostering Conference. National and regional guest speakers with six workshops reflecting NFF Themes including Life Journey Work Framework; Models of Support Kinship Care; Attachment in Education; National Training, Learning & Development Framework; Well-being CLA; Marketing, Recruitment & Retention.	NFF Fostering Managers' Group with Gwynedd taking lead role. Supported by AFA Cymru. Regional Development Manager	20 March 2018	Conference held (126 delegates). Conference Evaluation Report completed with positive feedback. Set Objectives Met: • first regional opportunity for foster carers to meet. • To provide information about the NFF • To involve key stakeholders in the regional implementation • To ensure a shared understanding and ownership • To inform and identify priorities for the regional development programme. • To provide consultation opportunities including for the National Learning & Development and LJW Frameworks; Marketing & Recruitment.
Consider models for increasing assessment of suitability capacity, in order to redress the current imbalance vis a vis kinship and mainstream assessment.	Audit current situation and identify pressure points. Audit to include role specification i.e. task and placement type i.e. kinship/mainstream. Explore development of regional model to include support and supervision of assessors and quality assurance.	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers HOCS Group	April – October 2018	Identified as a designated priority at the NFF Development Day 14.06.2018. Required actions highlighted and assigned in Development Day Feedback & Action Plan report. Placed on 10 July Fostering Managers' Group meeting agenda.
Develop costed options, actions and return of investment analysis, for building capacity to assess and develop new foster carers and reduce reliance on IFAs.	Benefits costs analysis – Informed by relevant research and studies To build informed business 'invest to save' case (based on numbers of CYP cared for by IFAs and comparative IFA /LA placement figures at NFF Phase 2 Report p.11) to evidence need for additional capacity	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers Finance Group HOCS Group	April – October 2018	To be considered further by HOCS group

Analyse the pathways into care and the associated support/ services/ skills needed with predicted metrics so that the right number of corresponding foster carers can be recruited/ supported/ developed.	Analysis of the CLA cohort profile of need Informed by the NFF Performance Report 2016/2017; 2017/2018; CIW Thematic Fostering Review 2018; National Population Assessment – Regional Plan 2018 – 2023 Analysis of pathways into care and of permanence and placement outcomes e.g. Placement with Parents; kinship; revocation; SGO Analyse ‘unplanned endings’/ disruption patterns and causes. (122/739 2016 – 2017) Dovetail with children’s services and corporate partners Dovetail with the Residential project and consider potential for developing appropriate alternatives e.g. therapeutic fostering. Explore potential for third sector partnerships in order to meet needs.	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers HOCS Group NFF Performance Group Residential Project Lead	April – October 2018	Development Session 14.06.18 focused on Needs Analysis and Placement Commissioning Strategy. Anonymized analysis of the individual LA data submitted to the CIW Thematic Fostering Review (App 1 to Development Day Briefing document). Analysis of regional messages from disruption completed. Meeting with Residential project Lead arranged for 3 July 2018.
Conduct a regional needs analysis and placement commissioning strategy.	Analyse regional Data – Performance Report 2016/17; 2017/18; CIW Thematic Fostering Review Analysis of messages from disruption across region Consider models including Children’s Commissioning Consortiwm Cymru ‘commissioning care & support services’ template’	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers Group HOCS group. NFF Performance Officer Regional Performance Group NFF Marketing, Recruitment & Retention Group Children’s Services’ colleagues	April – August 2018	Initial priorities identified at National CCCC commissioning conference 30.01.18 Development Session 14.06.18 focused on Needs Analysis and Placement Commissioning Strategy. Anonymized data analysis conducted to inform NFF Development session 14.06.18 and individual authority PCS planning. Conclusion – proportion of LAs currently have individual PCS in the form of the CCCC template. Others have the information available in a different format. All LAs will reconfigure their PCS in the same template to provide consistency and facilitate a regional PCS.

	Regional Priorities identified at national commissioning conference Developing a shared understanding of successful outcomes Consider individual authorities' needs analysis and Placement Commissioning Strategy Develop regional Placement Commissioning Strategy in areas of specific need e.g. Parent & Child; complex needs; short breaks Explore potential for sub-regional Explore potential for third sector partnerships in service development Informed by/Liaison with IFAs Develop robust market position statement			
Develop the regional Marketing & Recruitment strategy. Continue to inform the national Marketing & Recruitment Strategy.	Priorities identified: • Develop common definition of what constitutes an 'enquiry' (variance in regional 2016/17 Performance Report). • Establish 're-visiting' of earlier enquiries mechanism • Retention challenges and reasons for losing carers. • Continue to inform the national marketing strategy – Narrative Edge • Develop the concept of 'fostering friendly' local authorities regionally	NFF Marketing & Recruitment Group Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers	April – October 2018	Established Regional recruitment policy & practice including shared website Regional strategy updated 13 June 2018. Significant contribution to national agenda including response to Phase 1 Narrative Edge Report (May 2018). Workshop delivery at national and regional conferences (March 15/20). Review of recruitment 2017/2018 report presented to NFF managers' group 19 April 2018.

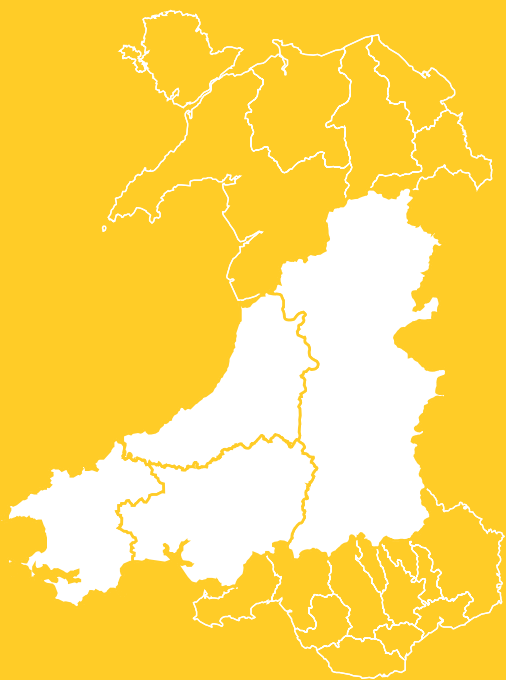
	• Dovetail with the L & D and Harmonisation of Fees & Allowances' aspects.			
Implement Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care. Liaise with children's services and corporate partners including judiciary.	Need for standardised training identified (Skills to Foster for Kinship Carers) Regional input into development of National Best Practice Guide Launch of Best Practice Guide. Consultation – what matters to kinship carers? Consultation with foster care panels including independent panel chairs Working with third sector in supporting carers. Consider regulatory changes, identify implications and respond accordingly	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers	June – October 2018	Pre – Approval Kinship Training being developed regionally. Good Practice Guide Launch Event to be held for practitioners, managers etc.... Kinship event for FCs to be held on 11 October 2018. 'Models of support' for Kinship Care workshop delivered to 38 delegates at regional conference CP Assessment format previously agreed with judiciary and widely used Matter placed on Court User Forum Matter for discussion at regional Independent Panel Chairs' forum
Respond to forthcoming regulations and Code of Practice consultation.	Consider the implications for policy, practice and the implementation of the NFF.		Consultation Period ends August 2018	Local, regional and national consultation sessions arranged July 2018.
Harmonising fees and allowances for foster carers. Develop an outline model for fees that reflect skills needed for complex cases along with effective models of support.	Consider relationship with the Training, Learning & Development Framework Consider relationship with Marketing & Recruitment strategy	NFF Managers' Group including representation on national group. Marketing & Recruitment Group Harmonising Fees National Group representative	Ongoing	May 2017 regional decision to harmonise schemes in the first instance Continue to contribute to the national work stream. National Report issued May 2018.
Implementing the National Training, Learning & Development Framework for foster carers	Consult on the National Training, Learning & Development Framework Consider the regional implications and the potential for increased regional dovetailing.	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers Regional Training Managers and Training Officers' Groups HOCS group	June – December 2018	Consultation workshop delivered twice at regional Conference. Feedback to inform national developments. Meeting between Regional Training Managers/Officers and NFF Fostering Managers 24 April 2018. Training provision audit developed and completed regionally.

	To ensure a shared understanding between fostering and training colleagues. Establish a baseline of current training provision and arrangements including cost allocation. Aligning of L & D framework with SW First Three Years in Practice Scope the potential for shared education and social care training in areas such as Attachment, Self – Harm; Autism (Autism Strategy) and ALD (Act 2018). Scope the potential for developing the FC role to mentoring and providing support.			Initial analysis completed. Development session 14.06.2018, feedback report with actions placed on 10 July FM meeting including liaison with identified sources of good practice. Progressing links with Education to be considered by HOCS
Implement the national performance framework across all local authorities to help shape regional and national/central priorities. Analyse regional performance data to identify areas of development to feed into the regional Development Programme.	Develop a shared understanding of successful outcomes and how to measure them Ensuring corporate parenting/ multi-agency response and responsibility.	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers NFF Performance Group NFF Performance Post Holder	June – December 2018	
Identify models of support for young people aged 16 + and how they could be implemented	Regional work on When I'm Ready including corporate ownership e.g. housing Positive Pathways' initiative Particular vulnerability of young parents Lobbying – Community Charge initiatives; savings etc... Work with third sector partners	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers Leaving Care Teams NFF Finance Groups CLAYP Forums	June – December 2018	Regional WIR policy completed. Development Manager to progress asap.

Identify models and options for shared care/respite	Conduct an audit of current provision and levels of unmet need Consult and agree on priority development	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers Regional Disability Teams	June – December 2018	Areas of unmet need include provision for under 8s and home – based provision. Audit to be developed and circulated
Consideration of foster care panels.	Comparative analysis (similar to NWS development previously) Potential for member central list to ease quorum challenges Consider models for regional recruitment, induction, training, support and evaluation of panel members. Consultation with foster care panels Consideration of training needs in particularly complex areas of kinship assessment of suitability to foster alongside capacity to change, Respond to forthcoming regulatory proposals and identify implications.	Regional Development Manager NFF Fostering Managers Agency Decision Makers Independent Panel Chairs Forum	June – December 2018	Fostering Regulations and Code of Practice consultation – local, regional and national opportunities. Discussion at Independent Panel Chair's Forum

Mid & West

Sue John-Evans
Regional Development Manager



I was appointed as the NFF regional fostering lead for Mid and West Wales on 11th December 2017, on a 6 month secondment, this is now extended, until December 2018. I am accountable to Heads of Service for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys. A key focus of work is to enable full stakeholder engagement with staff, foster carers and their families, inclusive of children experiencing care, with the aim of gaining positive and sustainable change and improved outcomes for children and young people. Also, to work towards a model of a single fostering service working together collaboratively in a cohesive and open manner and identifying a clear focus, priorities and resources.

In order to achieve this the primary task was to meet individually with the fostering managers across the region, establishing a working relationship and creating an opportunity to discuss the important key drivers and challenges, as identified by each local authority. This quickly moved on to establishing monthly regional fostering manager meetings which had not previously taken place. The meetings proved to be of significant benefit and were welcomed by the managers, who recognised similarities with the fostering challenges commonly faced by authorities across the region. The group quickly formed a close rapport, which is based on an ethos of sharing and learning. Together, we soon learned that we each county had similar requirements, and we have worked closely to develop a regional approach to our NFF work plan. I also meet on a quarterly basis with regional Service Managers.

I met with Heads of Service in May 2018, and will continue to meet monthly as of September and will continue to meet monthly as of September 2018, to further develop the NFF agenda across the region.

The key areas for our region are currently:

- To establish a collaborative regional model by sharing good practice and creating joint working opportunities, and prioritising monthly fostering manager meetings.
- To embed the NFF Performance Framework across the region, encouraging robust data collection. Regional Performance Management meetings to be set up to look at the systems around what and how we collect our data.
- Sharing Marketing and Recruitment good practice and considering the merits of a regional approach inclusive of a regional website to increase the number of foster carers and improving placement stability.
- To consider the impact of any increase in enquiries on assessment capacity.
- Working towards the Harmonisation of Fees and Allowances across the region.
- Explore and consult as a region on a variety of work streams regarding e.g. Kinship Care practices, are looking towards development of a best practice guide.
- Post approval Training, regional consultation was undertaken, looking towards development of a best practice guide.
- Combine a regional foster carers post approval training programme-available to all foster carers.
- Set up a regional Skills to Foster programme –available to all new applicants.
- Quality Assure Skills to Foster within the region-sharing good practice.
- Sharing good practice around policies and procedures and foster carer handbooks.
- Develop a regional Foster Carers Handbook.
- WIR-regional consultation in April 2018, looking towards development of a regional best practice guide.
- Consider a Recruitment and Assessment Best Practice Guide-standardising templates and systems.
- Develop a regional approach to mentoring and consider regional training for mentors.

- Consider opportunities for regional retention events, first event, planned for September 2018
- Sharing, learning and developing a regional approach to supported lodgings
- Developing a Parent and child regional forum, where good practice is shared, with a view to having a regional parent and child best practice guide
- Establishing regional fostering panel forums for panel chairs, advisors and administrators
- To ensure full engagement of managers and senior managers with the process of change, via regular meetings

One area agreed upon by all four counties is that fostering panels should remain local, due to the geographical distance across the region. As with any change system there are challenges and for our region it's the large geographic area involved and how to logistically and inclusively not only manage the distance, but also the cultural differences.

It should be recognised that not all of the counties are moving towards a regional approach at the same pace and with the same level of enthusiasm, though the majority have embraced the NFF agenda. As a brief analysis to date, in a short space of time we are now openly sharing and learning, meeting regularly, collaborating and consulting, planning and recognising our shared experiences including the benefits and the inherent challenges, whilst looking forward with a positive approach to developing a regional model of fostering in many streams of our work.

I look forward to continuing the NFF programme and working towards measures commensurate with building sustainable fostering services, whilst also recognising the importance of individual cultural needs and differences. I feel the benefits of sharing and developing regional good practice guidance will be beneficial in standardising foster care practice and improving outcomes for children.

A report was presented to Heads of Service in May 2018.



REGIONAL WORK PLAN: MID & WEST WALES 2017-18

Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
Working towards a model of regional collaboration by sharing good practice. To consider the positives and possibilities, for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys in joint working towards a regional approach to planning and delivery of services.	Co-ordinate monthly meetings with the regions fostering managers and quarterly meetings with Service Managers, and attend bi-monthly meetings with Heads of Service	Sue John-Evans –Regional Managers. Service Managers, Heads of Service	Ongoing	Establish working relationships and arrangements with managers, prioritising monthly regional managers meetings, and quarterly Service Managers, to attend bi-monthly Heads of Service meetings. Update work plan monthly, gaining signatory from Heads of Service. Managers to cascade information to their staff, mentors and carers; also to their service managers and Heads of Service Next Regional managers meeting 08.08.18. To gain consensus, ongoing commitment and ratification across the region as to the mid and long term goals.
To move towards a NFF regional consultation process inclusive of all stakeholders to plan/promote and consult. To include all those involved in the planning delivery and receipt of fostering services across the region.	Develop a bi -lingual electronic questionnaire. Helping to raise awareness and feed into the NFF agenda.	Sue John-Evans	July 2018	Developed a stakeholder consultation-an electronic questionnaire in English and Welsh. To be e-mailed to all stakeholders July 2018 To include foster carers young people social work staff panel members corporate parents and significant other professionals involved.
To meet with the National, Regional Managers Group quarterly, where good practice developments are shared and developed.	Working in Partnership to develop and deliver the NFF agenda at a regional level with direction from senior regional managers.	Jane Moore and regional leads Heads of Service	Ongoing	Ongoing regular contact to learn and share national developmental ideas and progress. To disseminate information to fostering managers.
Identify key NFF tasks and priorities within the region -follow up on identified action points within given timescales	Panels – currently to remain at a local level Marketing and Recruitment – To share good practice ideas and consider the merits of developing a regional brand/logo/website / marketing strategy in the future Policies and Procedures – to share good practice across the region, looking to develop a regional foster carer handbook	Sue John-Evans Fostering Managers. Heads of Service Sue John-Evans and managers	March 2018 Sept 2018 Ongoing – meetings quarterly Ongoing	Panels-regional group feel currently Panels are to remain local. Establish regional forum, of Panel Chairs, Advisors, first meeting 04.09.18 Marketing and Recruitment- initially sharing good practice. Workshop Forums on-going. Policies and Procedures, and Foster Carers Handbook to move towards a regional model, currently sharing good practice .A regional managers workshop is planned for August 2018.

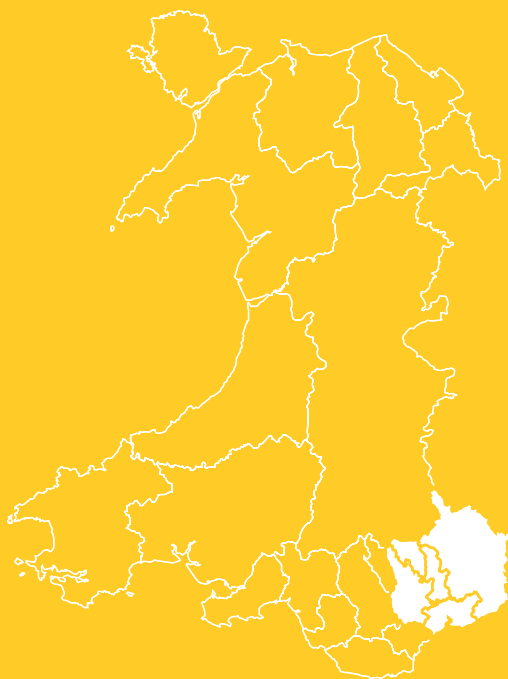
	Fees and Allowances – Harmonisation as per NFF across the region. Training – Pre and Post Approval include combining a regional programme, to include ideas re, Induction Framework Kinship Care – explore current regional practices When I'm Ready (WIR) – share practices from across the region, looking to develop a regional good practice guide Regional Parent and Child Forum Regional Supported Lodgings Forum	Sue John-Evans and Supported Lodgings staff	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing	Harmonisation of Fees and Allowances First Thoughts Paper due for consultation, Regional Fostering managers workshop arranged 10.07.18 Training-Post approval regional consultation undertaken on 26.2.18 Looking at developing a regional approach to post approval training to include the new induction framework and foster carer e-learning Kinship care – consultation planned for 28.09.18-facilitated by AFA CYMRU-develop a regional good practice guide WIR-consultation workshop 25.04.18- Regional policy to be drafted. Regional Parent and Child Forum set up for 11.07.18 working towards sharing and developing a regional approach. June 2018-sharing good practice and policies Regional Meeting 28.06.18
Performance Framework-using performance management information	To promote and embed the NFF Performance Framework across the region. To develop robust data collection and monitoring. Reduce duplication of requests to streamline information gathering.	Sue John-Evans Fostering Managers Child Care and Fostering. Performance Managers/Staff Regional Fostering Leads	Ongoing Ongoing	Fostering Managers meeting monthly to discuss fostering performance management in each L/A.A performance management group set up first meeting 21.06.18. Snr managers to instigate data collection/analysis within child care teams as a predictive tool to improve needs led recruitment and matching.(Linking to commissioning strategies). To develop a Recruitment and Assessment Good Practice Guide-ongoing progress.
Foster Carer Mentors	To research current local practices, and consider developing a regional mentors group. Provide induction and training to mentors, and utilise the mentors to co-deliver the New Induction Framework across the region.	Sue John-Evans, Fostering Managers	Ongoing	Establish a regional working group, to share good practice and develop recruitment, training and support mechanisms within the mentoring service, strengthening the fostering services. To set up a regional mentors group.

Skills to Foster Training; QA measure each I/A to observe others content and delivery, also linking with Voices from Care.	To share information working towards the standardisation of material; and develop links with a view to co-delivering Skills training.	Sue John-Evans and Fostering Managers	Ongoing	Sharing course dates across the region. Staff observing training in different local authorities Managers to co-ordinate and liaise with staff, and Voices from Care. Sharing Skills materials to standardise the training across the region.
Sharing Placement Stability Strategies, and the following forms; Foster Carer Supervision, Annual Review, Placement Support, Matching and End of Placement. Plus Recruitment -Initial Enquiry and Assessment Tools.		Sue John-Evans and Fostering Managers	Ongoing	To be shared electronically and discussed in detail in monthly regional Fostering Managers meetings
To consider how we can develop our systems e.g. gateway portals and new pathways to receive any increase in referrals across the region.	Consult with N. Wales and South East England-re current working models. To link with marketing, housing re, council tax postcodes and IT for system development. Development of a regional fostering website and national fostering website.	Sue John-Evans, Fostering Managers, HOS	Ongoing	To learn from current good practice models in developing our own regional system; or individual I/a systems. To share findings with our regional IT Advisors and Marketing and Communication Groups. To project a Stronger message of "Local Authorities Working Together" and "Not for Profit" Any decisions on regional recruitment would need to go through the heads of service for any final arrangements through SLAs etc
Explore financial Implications for each local authority-looking at commissioning of services and if SLAs are required.	To discuss as part of regional managers group	Sue John-Evans, Regional Fostering Managers, HOS	March 2018	To discuss and explore as part of managers group and develop commissioning strategies.
Plan for a regional fostering retention event	Planning as a work stream of regional managers group	Sue John-Evans and Fostering Managers	Sept 2018	Carer retention and continuing with the ethos, "valuing our carers" event- Working in partnership with National Trust Houses across the region

Mapping out Policies and Procedures across the Region. Working towards a regional foster carers handbook and a regional approach to policies, procedures and protocols.		Sue John-Evans, Fostering Managers, HOS	July 2018	Ongoing exercise
Proposal at Heads of Service level for consideration to set up a Regional scrutiny Committee	Proposal communicated to Snr. Managers-Meeting HOS	Sue John-Evans. HOS	7th Sept 2018	Awaiting outcome of discussion in September 2018
To discuss ideas re. regional therapeutic resources and co-funding/delivery within the region	To develop discussions at a snr managerial level	Sue John-Evans, Fostering Managers and HOS	Ongoing with Fostering Managers.	For further discussions and clarification on what this might look like and consultation with HOS before any consideration is given to this development. This has a financial commitment and whether this is an area HOS would wish to follow for their authorities.

Gwent

Nina Kemp-Jones,
NFF Regional Development Manager



I am seconded on a full time basis to the role of National Fostering Framework (NFF) Regional Development Manager for the Gwent area. I took up my post on 6th November 2017. I report to the Heads of Children's Services for Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Newport and I am responsible for leading the development and implementation of a regional work programme for fostering services.

Some of the main elements of my role include;

- analysing the regional information that emerges from the national performance framework to inform and shape the regional priorities and generate plans for improvement,
- ensuring that key stakeholders are involved in developing and implementing the regional work programme including foster carers and young people who are or have been fostered to ensure that their views are reflected,
- promoting delivery of the NFF across the region and attending national meetings to represent the region.

Working across the region for the past 6 months, I have been struck by the positivity across the sector for the NFF, the recognition from practitioners, managers and service users that changes are needed and an acceptance that this will mean doing things differently.

The attached regional work programme sets out our priorities as; exploration of fostering services on a regional basis, scoping out potential for regional panel arrangements, outlining a regional marketing approach, developing common policies, harmonisation of fees and allowances, exploring a common regional training framework for foster carers, using the performance information to identify regional priorities, developing a consistent approach to kinship work and the local authorities generating placement commissioning strategies which can be aggregated to a

regional strategy.

An identified priority for our region has been to explore the development of fostering services on a regional basis with the aims of improving outcomes for children and young people and delivering sustainable fostering services for the future. A key task of my role has been to produce an options report for Heads of Service outlining different models of regional working. This ranges from implementing elements of regional working such as common policies, regional panels and training to the development of a full regional fostering service. The report details potential benefits, challenges and implications of each model.

The work included consultation across the region with foster carers and children and young people via a survey which was promoted online, at foster carer support groups and through children's social workers. I also facilitated a consultation group with young people experiencing care or who have previously experienced care. A consultation workshop for all fostering staff in the region was held in February 2018 where a SWOT analysis of the options was undertaken and this also provided an opportunity for staff to share their views, which fed into the report.

The Heads of Service are currently in the process of discussing and considering the options contained within the report, which I presented when I met with them in April 2018.

I meet monthly with the 5 placement team managers across Gwent to update and progress implementation of the regional work programme. The managers had already established good working relationships and regular meetings to share developments and good practice. Work had already begun to develop a regional handbook in electronic format and regional policies including 'When I am Ready' and 'Shared Lives'. Ongoing work includes detailing existing policies across the region, risk assessing the impact any

Regional Work Programmes

changes to policies will have for individual local authorities, agreeing a mechanism for sign off and review of regional policies and ensuring that any changes to policies are fully cascaded and communicated to staff and service users in each local authority.

I also meet regularly with the NFF Project Manager and other Regional Leads where we update each other on regional developments and work programmes and align with the NFF work programme.

I have joined both the NFF Media and Marketing and Harmonisation of Fees and Allowances groups where I represent the Gwent region and contribute to the national work.

A current regional marketing initiative taking place in Gwent is a radio advert on Capitol FM which clearly gives the message of 'fostering local children for your local council.'

We are continuing to use the NFF Performance Framework template to gather performance information and work has begun across the region to collate information for the financial year 2017/2018. This work will also seek to address gaps in information, ensure that the 5 local authorities are interpreting and collecting information consistently and embed the performance framework into WCCIS systems.

A session to consult on the NFF Post Approval Training Framework produced by AFA Cymru was held in February which included fostering staff, fostering panel chairs and members, workforce development staff and foster carers. This produced a number of good practice ideas which will continue to be explored and developed.

Work has started with regards to a regional pre-approval training calendar, learning from and following a similar model to that of our colleagues in North Wales.

Kinship foster carer has consistently been a key issue presenting challenges across the region. An initial scoping paper has outlined regional variations and common themes. It is recognised that further work is needed around kinship and this remains a regional priority.

A session with AFA Cymru who produced the Kinship best practice guide for the NFF is also soon to take place with team managers and senior practitioners across the region to discuss the guide in supporting and enhancing existing local and regional structures and developments.

Moving forwards, the attached regional work programme identifies our current priorities as;

- Improving the collection, consistency and analysis of performance information and embedding data collection systems into WCCIS,
- Continuing to develop common policies and a regional handbook for foster carers, including mechanisms for agreement, implementation and review,
- Developing a regional training calendar for pre-approval training,
- Further scoping and developing regional approaches to kinship work.



REGIONAL WORK PLAN: SOUTH EAST WALES (GWENT) 2017-18

Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
Exploration of fostering services on a regional basis	Produce an options paper for Gwent HOS exploring models of regional working Consult with foster carers, children and young people, placement teams and stakeholders about what a regional fostering service could look like	Nina Kemp-Jones (Development Manager)	Completed	Options report completed and presented to HOS on 9th April 2018 Regional Workshop for staff held 1st February 2018 and fed into options report Information re NFF, regional working and online survey prepared and shared at 4 foster carer support groups Online survey promoted in March for 3 weeks – responses received and fed into options report Consultation group with children and young people held 28th February 2018 and fed into options report Attending event to consult with sons and daughters March 2018 – cancelled Completed exercise with Team Managers February 2018 and fed into options report
Panels	To scope out potential for regional arrangements	Kevin Munro (Blaenau Gwent Team Manager)	Completed	Scoping paper completed and fed into options report
Marketing and Recruitment: To work on a Gwent wide basis to explore a Local Authority based marketing approach.	Scoping paper to be produced to outline what a regional marketing approach could look like	Andrea Yeo (Torfaen Team Manager) Neil Jones (Torfaen Head of Communications)	23.03.18 Outstanding	Regional meeting held 07.02.2018 attended by NKJ, AY, NJ Meeting with North Wales March 2018 attended by NKJ NFF national meeting attended – 15th March 2018 by NKJ Information from above meetings and other information fed into options report to scope a regional approach Scoping paper not yet completed
Regional common policies and procedures	To continue to develop and implement common policies and procedures across the Gwent Region to provide a regional electronic handbook	Angela McErlane (Monmouthshire Team Manager)	Ongoing	Common framework agreed Priority policies discussed and agreed between Managers Meeting to be arranged between Monmouthshire and Torfaen in the first instance to work on priority policies Shared Lives and WIR being taken through sign off procedures in each LA Consideration to be given to business support needs to produce electronic version

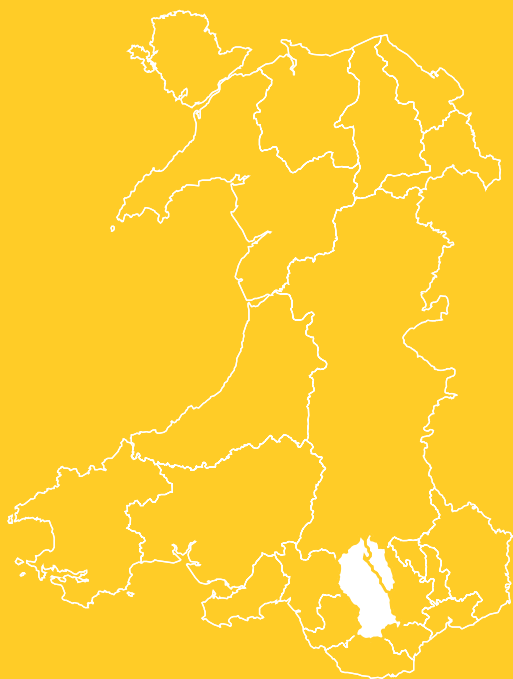
	Scoping exercise to be undertaken to establish Each local authorities list of policies A gap analysis of the current policies across the region What are legislated policies and what are good practice guidance Agreement of a sign off, review and update mechanism A risk assessment regarding the impact any changes to policies will have Consideration of how any adapted policies are fully cascaded and communicated to staff and service users in each local authority	Nina Kemp-Jones (Development Manager)	Ongoing	Requested list of all teams policies on 12/04 to be sent by 04/05 Caerphilly list received
Harmonisation of Fees and Allowances: In line with the NFF, to explore how this could be achieved across the Gwent Region	Represent Gwent Region on the NFF group Send out NFF consultation questions to foster carers Respond to information needed for the NFF group NKJ to undertake a piece of work to feed into the options paper re potential models of fees and allowances across the region Progress towards harmonisation of fees and allowances across the region	Nina Kemp-Jones Nina Kemp-Jones/TM's Nina Kemp-Jones/TM's Nina Kemp-Jones Nina Kemp-Jones/ Commissioners/HOS	Ongoing Completed Completed Completed Ongoing	Continued attendance at NFF Harmonisation of Fees and Allowances group and contribution to paper/proposal NFF consultation questions sent to all foster carers in the region, responses received and data collected NFF Regional table completed Calculations undertaken to identify alternative regional payment structures, meetings held with BG finance 20 & 26.02.18 and 27/03 and work fed into options paper Meeting arranged with TE, NKJ and commissioner from each LA for 07/06/18
Pre and Post Approval Foster Carer training: To explore a common regional training framework for foster carers across Gwent	Consultation to take place on the draft training framework	Nina Kemp-Jones WFD, Foster carers, panel chairs, fostering staff	Completed	Consultation event on the NFF draft training framework held for the Gwent Region 28.02.2018

Pre-approval training	Work towards a regional pre-approval training calendar	NKJ and fostering teams	Ongoing	Meeting arranged for 27/04/18
Performance Framework: Use the Performance Information to identify regional priorities and embed the performance framework into WCCIS	Initial analysis of performance information	Nina Kemp-Jones (Development Manager)	Completed	Information presented to regional managers on 29/11/2017
	Identify gaps that need to be filled		Completed	Work undertaken to feed into meeting below
	Establish what we want to collect regionally and when	NKJ and fostering teams	April 2018	Meeting arranged with performance representatives from each region for 27/04/18 Above meeting will inform of the need to update
	Ensure robust and accurate systems in place to collect the information			
	Update Performance Information in the Options report		May/June 2018	Foster Swansea TM contacted and information update near completion
Kinship: To explore and develop a consistent approach to Kinship work across the Gwent Region	Establish current regional practice for the completion of viability and connected persons assessments	Catherine Hywood (Newport Team Manager)	Completed	Completed and scoping paper and information fed into options report
	Collate existing guidance/policy from each local authority.			
	Scoping exercise to identify roles and responsibilities in each local authority.		Completed	Information fed into options report
	Liaise with legal representation and courts on a regional basis –			
	Regional meeting to be arranged at the request of HHJ Mifflin (Caerphilly not included)–		Meeting to be arranged by Newport legal – requested by HHJ Mifflin asap	Meeting not going ahead
	Circulate NCC guidance for completion of Viability and Connected Persons assessments		Completed	NCC guidance circulated
	Draft guidance to be finalised by end of February.			
	Consideration of Regulation 26 assessments – thresholds and links with connected persons assessment			Information fed into options report

	Collate existing guidance/policy from each local authority. Scoping exercise to establish current practice in each local authority. Half day workshop to be arranged for TM's and SP's across the region with AFA Cymru re the Best Practice Guide Scoping paper/action plan re kinship to be further analysed and developed	NKJ NKJ	To be arranged Ongoing	
Placement Commissioning	Each LA to work with the 4C's to undertake a needs analysis and produce a placement commissioning strategy which can then be aggregated up to a regional strategy	All LA's	By July 2018	Ongoing

Cwm Taf

Zarah Newman
Regional Development Manager



I have been appointed on a part time temporary basis to the Cwm Taf Regional Co-ordinator post until a full time co-ordinator can be appointed. I report to Heads of Service from both Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authorities and Fostering Team Managers and Service Managers via a monthly meeting.

I also meet with other Regional Co-ordinators on a monthly basis facilitated by the NFF Project Manager. This meeting is used to feedback on progress in regional work, to be kept abreast of national work and to share good practice.

There is a high level of motivation and commitment to the implementation of the National Fostering Framework in the Cwm Taf region and it is felt by all involved that there would be additional value in undertaking implementation on a regional basis.

The Local Authorities in Cwm Taf have a sound history of collaboration, for example, commissioning training on a regional basis, piloting the Fostering Wellbeing project, so we have a good foundation on which to take this work forward.

One of the first tasks we have undertaken is to identify our priorities:

1. Improve recruitment and retention of foster carers across the region
2. Identify the learning from the Fostering Wellbeing project and what can be translated into regional practice
3. Develop a local performance management framework that enables reporting nationally and tells us what we want to know locally
4. Scope the potential for a Cwm Taf fostering panel
5. Adapt the Post Approval Training Framework to meet local needs
6. Embed the AFA Cymru Best Practice Guidance for Kinship care

Meetings with key individuals such as team managers and trainers have begun to take place to scope what we are currently doing well, what we would want to improve on and whether this is something that regional collaboration could add value to. For example, the national performance indicators are collected by both Local Authority areas and each area collects local data in addition to this. Developing a regional data set could be used to inform future regional commissioning.

Cwm Taf has been piloting the Fostering Wellbeing project and the initial feedback has been very positive. Final feedback from this will be available soon so we can identify what we have learned from the project and then we can consider how this could be implemented on a regional basis.

To develop a fit for purpose performance management framework for fostering across the region we are using the NFF indicators as a basis. Performance management information is collected differently across the region so we first need to understand what is collected, what it tells us, who it is reported to and at what frequency. Then we can

consider whether what we currently collect tells us what we need to know and if not, what would inform service development and delivery more effectively. What we are keen to avoid is developing a data set that is too onerous for managers but tells us what we need to know.

Both Local Authorities are keen to scope the potential for a Cwm Taf fostering panel that will have a pool of panel members that can be drawn from. The first step in this process is to consider learning from elsewhere in the establishment of joint adoption panels and ensure that regulations enable this to take place. The second step is to consult with existing panel members and chairs and use their feedback to develop a role profile for panel members and chairs. We are also considering what training for members and chairs would be required if a decision is made that a Cwm Taf panel is a possibility.

Training for foster carers is already delivered on a regional basis. A consultation session with AFA Cymru regarding the Post Approval Training Framework is taking place in April where feedback will be given by foster carers, supervising social workers and team managers and trainers on the framework to AFA to inform further work.

A session on Kinship Care will also take place in April 2018 facilitated by AFA Cymru. It is clear from discussions in this region and with other regions that kinship care presents a lot of issues for Local Authorities and panel members. A regional task and finish group for Kinship care has been created comprising operational managers and staff. This task and finish group will be responsible for embedding the Best Practice Guidance for Kinship Care authored by AFA Cymru and in developing a Cwm Taf approach with aligned processes and procedures. This work will feed into other priorities such as the scoping of the potential for a Cwm Taf panel and the Post Approval Training Framework.

A report will be prepared for cabinet members in both Local Authority areas by the end of March setting out the priorities and progress made to date.



REGIONAL WORK PLAN: CWM TAF 2017-18

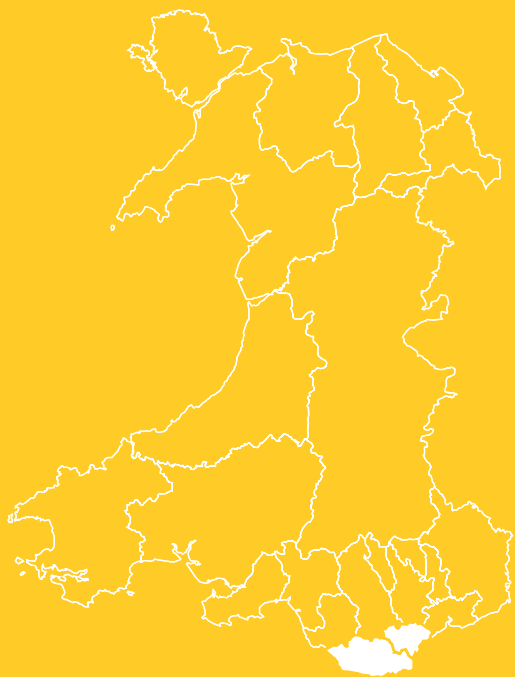
Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
Improve recruitment and retention across the region	Task and finish group to consider what we do well and what we want to improve on. Develop regional fostering brand and marketing strategy that is aligned with commissioning strategy and needs analysis (who are we targeting). DVDs of foster carer stories have already been developed.	Task and finish group	Regional front door to be in place by April 2019.	Rachel Gray (MTCBC) and Sian Hickman (RCTCBC) are leading on branding and marketing. Linked recently with Narrative Edge the company doing the work on a national level. The 4Cs are in the process of completing commissioning strategies for RCT and Merthyr. This will give us a clearer understanding of what models of care are needed and therefore where we need to target recruitment for mainstream carers. Foster carer DVD stories already completed by RCT and Merthyr. Visit to OSP cancelled by them 2 days before. Further date arranged for June 18th. Anne-Marie Browning, Head of CLA, RCT accompanying co-ordinator. Visit to Foster Swansea also cancelled by them. Further date being arranged. First thoughts paper drafted for June meeting of Cwm Taf NFF group.
Identify the learning from the Fostering Wellbeing project and what can be translated into regional practice	Task and finish group and project manager to consider project findings/learning and what this means for regional implementation. Consultation to take place with regular cohort of foster carers and others. Task and finish group to engage with education and health and invite them to become part of the group with the aim of increasing their engagement. Develop practice handbook for supervising social workers which	Task and finish group, Operational group for Wellbeing project	01/09/18	Further work is needed to understand what role the pioneers will take on and practical arrangements such as accommodation and equipment are still being scoped.

	will help them transition to coaching/mentoring style of working. Task and finish group to develop detailed implementation plan.			
Develop a local performance management framework that enables reporting nationally and tells us what we want to know locally	Task and finish group to consider national performance indicators. Meet with performance leads in RCT and Merthyr to establish what we currently collect and how this is achieved. Task and finish group to consider what other data they need in a regional data set.	Task and finish group and Performance Leads from RCT and Merthyr	September 2018	Further work needs to be undertaken in May and June due to the availability of the performance management leads in March and April. The visit to OSP will help to identify what they collect at the front door to inform marketing strategy. Data already provided to 4Cs re commissioning strategy will inform way forward as well.
Develop a regional fostering panel	Task and finish group to develop role description for panel members and chairs. Consult with colleagues who currently sit on fostering panels in each area to gather their views on regional panel. Co-ordinator to observe panel meetings in both areas. Task and finish group to develop first thoughts paper for June meeting of Cwm Taf NFF group.	Task and finish group	April 2019	Arrangements made to observe both MTCBC and RCTCBC panels in June 2018. Consultation to take place with members and chairs at the same time. Role Descriptions completed and sent to task and finish group members for consultation. First thoughts paper to be considered at June meeting. WG Draft consultation on regs and guidance is out and one of the suggestions they are considering is either having a pool of panel chairs and members that can be drawn on or to have regional panels. Meeting arranged for 6/7/18 to pull response together.

Adapt the Post Approval Training Framework to meet local needs	Meet with Training providers in each LA to consider what is already being delivered and how this fits with the Training Framework. Meet with teams that are supporting foster carers/providing training themselves, to consider what is currently being delivered and how this fits with the Training Framework and identify what they would want to see in a regional training programme.	Task and finish group, colleagues involved in the development and delivery of training for foster carers in the region and foster carers.	Framework to be implemented by September 2018.	Discussions have been held with training provider and they don't see any reason that implementation can't be achieved by September 2018.
Embed the AFA Cymru Best Practice Guidance for Kinship care across the region	AFA Cymru to deliver Kinship care session to include practice guidance and case scenarios about barriers/difficulties being encountered. Establish separate kinship care task and finish group to align processes and practice and develop a Cwm Taf approach. Consult with kinship carers and practitioners. Identify ongoing training needs for practitioners and kinship carers. Embed AFA Cymru best practice guidance.	Kinship care task and finish group.	Process and practice guide to be completed by September. Roll out between September 2018 and January 2019.	Existing processes and guidance in both areas being reviewed; AC from RCT and HJ from Merthyr will complete a review of the best practice guide against existing guidance and identify any gaps by the next meeting of the group on June 8th. AFA Cymru delivered the kinship care session on the morning of May 29th. Separate feedback sheet from the event will be available for June meeting of Cwm Taf NFF group. Need to decide where kinship care and SGO carers fit within the development of fostering services.
Harmonise fees and allowances	Cwm Taf Regional group to join task and finish group with other regional representatives Agree how we will take this forward on Cwm Taf basis as part of discussion re developments in first thoughts paper	Cwm Taf NFF Co-ordinator	April 2019	New task delegated by the National NFF Steering group to regional NFF groups. Cwm Taf NFF Co-ordinator has attended one meeting. Neil Griffiths, RCT Finance also sits on the group and has done a lot of work on this already. Suggest that he lead on this work for Cwm Taf.

Cardiff & The Vale

Leon Goddard
Regional Development Manager



CONTEXT

The context for foster care in Cardiff and The Vale of Glamorgan is similar to that across Wales and the UK, with difficulties recruiting the number of foster carers needed to deal with increasing number of looked after children. This is further complicated by the financial challenges both Local Authorities face, the increasing age profile of carers that means many people are no longer able to continue to be foster carers and the tight legal framework and timescales staff operate under, and must comply with, as part of their job.

A specific challenge facing Cardiff Council (CC) and The Vale of Glamorgan Council (VoGC) is that the majority of foster carers the Councils use are employed by Independent Fostering Agencies. This creates pressures in relation to the high cost of these placements and the way that these organisations support their carers, which is different from each other and from the local Authority.

New Fostering Model (NFM)

The key element of the RDP will be the design and implementation of a New Fostering Model.

PURPOSE

- The Regional Development Plan aims to help CC and VoGC develop an improved and more regional approach to fostering. It is not a work plan for the Regional Manager.
- All aspects of this Plan will support the creation and delivery of the new Fostering Model

REGIONAL WORK PLAN: CARDIFF AND THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCILS 2017-18

Stage 1 – Deliver joint marketing approach and brand

This will involve a series of changes to ensure; i) the current marketing and branding reflects a joint approach and ii) the future marketing and branding approach is as good as it can be. As the marketing approach aims to raise awareness and encouraging people to become foster carers this stage will, where relevant, also include key aspects of the practice and processes in relation to recruitment and retention.

Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
Deliver a regional marketing approach and a regional marketing brand	Analysis of the current strategies in Cardiff and the Vale	Project Team JB	August 2018	An agreed Regional Marketing Brand
	Development of a regional vision		September 2018	A Regional Marketing Strategy
	Consultation and engagement to develop the strategy and plan		December 2018	A Regional Marketing Plan
Align resources to the Regional Strategy	Consultation and engagement to develop the website	Project Team JB and PO CC Comms Team CC Web Team VoGC Comms Team CC and VoGC HoS	August 2018	Website requirements document
	Consultation and web testing		November 2018	Regional Website
	Development of marketing brand and materials		December 2018	Regional marketing materials

Stage 2 – Offer to foster carers

This will cover all aspects of what foster carers can expect to receive as a local authority carer. This will broadly cover:

3. Carers fees and allowances
4. Other financial benefits for carers
5. Training
6. Support

As the offer aims to encourage carers to join the LA and remain as foster carers with the LA, where relevant, this stage will also include key aspects of the practice and processes in relation to recruitment and retention.

Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
Deliver a Regional Offer for Foster Carers	Review of the current recruitment processes Analysis of the current offers in Cardiff and the Vale Benchmarking of offer incentives Development of Cardiff and the Vale USP Engagement around corporate parenting responsibilities including as examples: – The Golden Hello – Council Tax incentive – Contract clauses – Commercial bidding – Reporting and Analysis	Project Team JB and PO	October 2018 September 2018 August 2018 October 2018 April 2019	To Be Recruitment Process Cardiff and Vale Offer
Develop a robust training and support package for all Foster Carers	Review of all training opportunities across Cardiff and the Vale Training needs analysis Confirm training opportunities to be included in the offer Review of other support opportunities Develop a regional support package for Foster Carers	Project Team JB and PO Regional training team Fostering teams	December 2018 December 2018 January 2019 December 2018 April 2019	Training and Support package for Cardiff and the Vale where appropriate

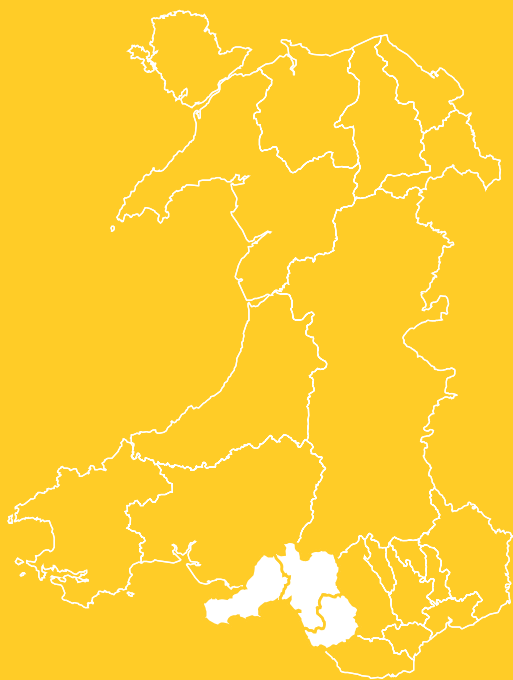
Stage 3 – Internal delivery

This will cover all aspects of how each LA operates in relation to fostering and not just those directly involved, but Officers and Members across each LA. This is necessarily the final stage on the basis that 'form must follow function' and each LA must ensure its internal functions support the delivery of the Joint Fostering Strategy in the best way it can.

Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
The Business Model	Analysis of current in house provision	Project Team PO	August 2018	Business Model options appraisal
	Benchmarking of Business Models		August 2018	Recommendations Catalogue
	Development of business model options for Cardiff		August 2018	
	Consultation and engagement on business models		September 2018	
	Development of preferred business model option	Project Team	December 2018	Implementation plan
	Implementation of Business Model	Cardiff Fostering	April 2019	
The Service Infrastructure	Analysis of current resources and structure	Project Team PO	August 2018	Structure Options
	Options appraisal for service structures and resources	PO	September 2018	Implementation Plan
	Implementation plan for resources and structure of the service	Project Team Cardiff Fostering	December 2018	

Western Bay

Sarah Thomas
NFF Regional Development Manager



CONTEXT

The Western Bay region as it currently stands encompasses the Local Authorities of Bridgend, Neath & Port Talbot and Swansea. The demographics across the region in relation to Looked After Children and Fostering provision are reported within the recent performance report published in November 2017, this data has informed the production of this work programme for the region.

The regional work programme for Western Bay is underpinned by the wider phase three National Fostering Framework Work Programme produced in November 2017. The work programme identified nine priority work streams including; The introduction of a national performance framework; Creation of an all Wales brand for local authority fostering and establishing a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand; Increasing capacity within the regions to respond to additional enquiries following the marketing activity; Improving the national approach to commissioning of fostering services including inter-authority arrangements; Developing consistent standards and Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care; Harmonising Fee's and allowances for Foster Carers; and the development of a National Training Framework for foster carers.

Within Western Bay the regional development work undertaken to date has not been managed within a distinct post. The work programme outlined below will commence in June 2018 when it is expected that the region will have appointed to this full time position.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this work programme is to outline the priority areas for the region to consider in order to create increased harmonisation across the fostering services within the Western Bay region. The work programme will reflect the national priority areas identified above and consider the significance of these at a regional level. The work programme is a working document which will be subject to continuous review and at each stage will consider the National, Regional and Local context and developments.



REGIONAL WORK PLAN: WESTERN BAY 2017-18

Priority Task	Work Required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe	Outcomes/Update
Conduct a full review and scoping exercise for fostering services across the region	Review of Fostering Teams and service structures. Full review of all resources, identification of strengths and limitations across the fostering teams within the region. Produce a report to reflect What's working well? What are we worried about ? What needs to happen? Produce an options appraisal to consider any areas for efficiency or improvement. Consultation with all stakeholders.	Lead – Regional Development manager Engagement – Fostering teams, managers, senior managers, Foster Carers, wider service. Support – NFF Programme manager	September 2018	Recognition of areas of best practice across the region and the opportunity to expand this work. Reduce repetition, identify potential efficiencies. Opportunity to improve outcomes for looked after children and foster carers. Build upon regional working relationships. Identify short and long term regional work programme tasks from this scoping. Refine Performance measures for the region.
Developing the strategic use of Regional Performance Information	Establish a regional working group to review the PI, Quality Assure the 2016/17 information, ensure accurate recording methods are in place to continue the collation of data and introduce monthly western bay performance review meetings. Consider outputs, outcome measures and correlation with current work to develop a single system for recording (WCCIS)	Lead – Regional Development Manager (when appointed) Engagement – Individual fostering team managers – JLJ, JG, DL, KG & ST Performance Information officers from each LA. Support – Performance Manager NFF (when appointed)	June 2018 to identify relevant staff, dates and then monthly.	Expected outcomes from this work would include effective use of the data comparison and identification of areas for improvement/sharing good practice within the region. This data will also feed into the development of a regional Recruitment & Retention strategy and Placement strategy. Refine Outcome measures to capture meaningful data including - Outcomes for children - Placement sufficiency - Quality of service - Sustainability of service
Development of a regional Strategy for the Recruitment & Retention of Foster Carers	Establish a working group to review the current individual LA strategies. Produce a comparison report to inform the priority areas for harmonisation and highlight "quick wins" for the region.	Lead – Regional Development Manger Engagement – Business Development/Marketing officers for each LA – JO (swan), NPT and BCBC	Identify relevant staff for the working group by end June 2018	Expected outcomes would include improved recruitment and retention of foster carers across the region along with the potential for harmonisation in this area. Increased Range of Foster Carers with the skills and abilities to care for a diverse range of identified needs. Increased numbers of children cared for within western bay in-house resources.

	Produce a longer term strategy which encompasses the service needs across the region. The strategy must include consideration of Branding and design across the region and the "fit" with the national All Wales Fostering Brand under development. Work on harmonisation of fees and allowances to be considered within the retention review. Ensure that Western Bay considers the relevance and importance of Local strategies/ initiatives and research into best practice.	Recruitment and retention leads for each LA – KB (Swansea) AD (BCBC) and NPT LA Central Communication teams Support – NFF marketing lead	Initial comparison report by the end of September 2018 Final regional strategy by the end of November 2018 A full consultation with stakeholders would be expected as part of this work.	Reduced numbers of children cared for in residential settings. Improved foster carer retention. Ensuring a skilled foster carer workforce. Utilisation and maximisation of resources, skills and abilities. The strategy will identify any areas requiring improved capacity, practice and systems to enable change and include an options appraisal. A seamless National, Regional and Local approach to Recruitment and Marketing.
Development of a regional Fostering Placement Commissioning Strategy	Establish a working group to review each LA's individual placement strategy. Identify areas for potential collaboration and complete an options appraisal for the region to streamline commissioning. Specific focus to be given to improving the use of the Inter-Authority placements under the 4 C's protocol. Explore the potential for fostering services to develop innovative projects to safely maintain and support children to remain at home.	Lead – Regional Development manager Engagement – Fostering Team Managers, Placement Finders and Commissioning leads across each LA Support – 4C's/NFF Programme Manager	Identify relevant staff for the working group by end June 2018 Initial comparison report and options appraisal by the end of September 2018	Expected outcomes would include increased use of inter-authority placement vacancies and the implementation of improved systems for this. Increasing capacity with in-house resources. Supporting the safe reduction in LAC Strengthen Long Term fostering as an option for permanence across Western Bay.
Implement the Welsh Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care	Review the guide in line with current kinship practice and policy across the three LA's.	Lead – Regional development manager	Options appraisal to be completed by November 2018	Expected outcomes would include improved consistency across the region. Identification of areas for collaboration and improving capacity for this area of work.

	Undertake a consultation process with staff and service users. Options paper to be produced to consider potential opportunities to harmonise practice and improve in this area. Consideration to the potential amends to regulations must also form part of this work. Consider the relationship between Kinship fostering and special Guardianship within this work.	Engagement – Fostering team managers and staff from each LA with responsibility for Kinship care, Supported Care Planning, Legal teams across the region Support – AFA Cymru /NFF Programme Manager		Ensuring that children are only placed in formal Kinship fostering arrangements when needed and that Children Fostered within their families are achieving good outcomes. Ensuring children achieve permanence within their natural families earlier.
Review and plan for the implementation of the National Training Framework for foster carers	Establish a working group to review the national training framework in line with current practice in each LA. Highlight gaps/areas for further consideration and recommendations for the final framework. Include recent outcomes from consultation with stakeholders in each region. Include any resource implications for consideration and prepare an implementation plan.	Lead – Regional Development manager Engagement – LA training leads, fostering TM and staff. Support – AFA Cymru/TFN/NFF Programme Manager	Dependent upon final framework. To be completed before the end of the financial year 2019.	Improved training calendar for all carers to access across the region. A national plan for training and development for all foster carers. Improved frequency and accessibility of training. Financial sustainability through a regional approach. Improved skills and resilience of Foster Carers. Increased capacity to look after children with complex needs. A reduction in placement breakdowns, resignations and Foster Carer allegations. Improved recruitment of foster carers through improved training. Good outcomes for children as a result of quality attachment training.



4. National Performance Framework

National Performance Framework

The NFF Strategic Steering Group agreed for the performance framework to be completed by all local authorities for the year 2016/17. This Report covers the returns from all 22 local authorities.

We recognise the tremendous amount of work that staff across Wales have completed to complete their local authority return. Their achievement means that for the very first time we have a far better understanding of our fostering services across Wales, we know about the volume of work that is carried out in most aspects of fostering services, the challenges facing different authorities, and most importantly the areas where we can learn from one another. The aim of this performance framework is to help us in the drive to improve services for children & young people in foster care and their foster carers.

As anticipated not every local authority has been able to complete every aspect of the performance framework, it has been important for us to learn what we can all collect, the information that most of us can collect and the information that we all struggle to collect. Work will continue with the regions during Phase Three 2017-18 on reviewing the framework and collectively we will make decisions about forthcoming years.

The information comes with a couple of health warnings: each local authority return has been accepted, no quality assurance checks have been conducted over and above those carried out by each local authority prior to submission, and not every

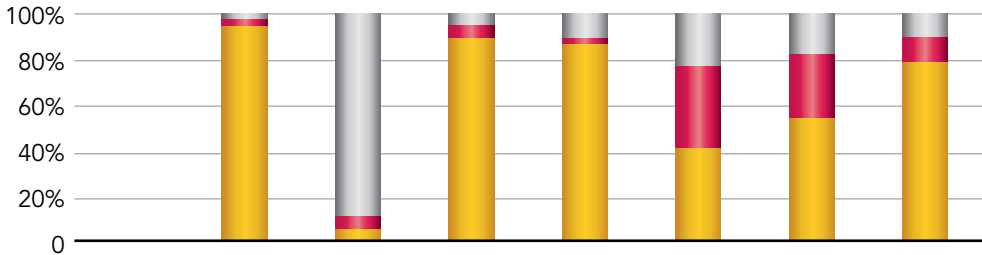
local authority has been able to complete every section. We would therefore ask you to read this report to and absorb the key important messages emerging and not to concentrate on the fine detail of the figures. This is our first attempt at doing this- we will get better!

The key messages from this information will be included in the next NFF Communication Bulletin. Please feel free to forward this report on to your colleagues.

Work has been completed on the production of a report for each region to help inform the NFF regional work programmes.

ALL WALES INFORMATION

All Wales Foster Placements as at 31.03.17



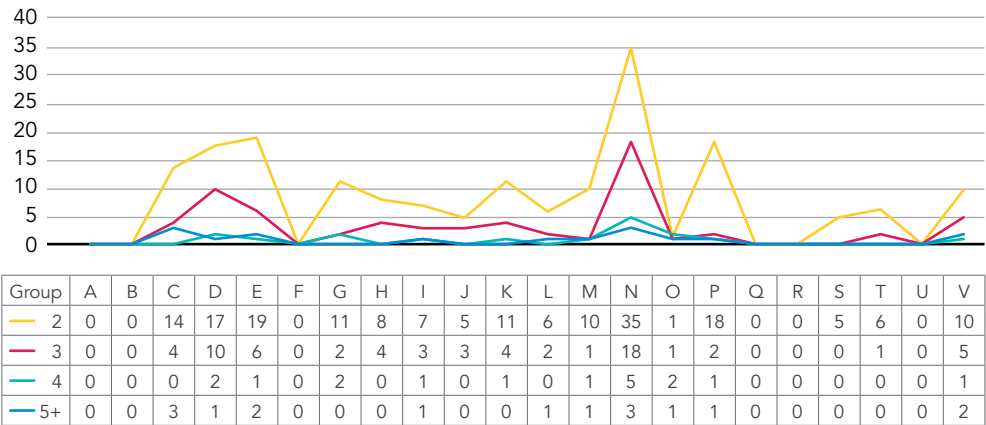
	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Kinship FC	Kinship carers s26 SS&WB	Third Sector FC	Commercial FC	Total LAC Fostered
Outside Wales	69	17	41	17	38	160	342
Within Wales	70	1	50	2	61	213	397
Within LA	1,793	1	664	135	69	463	3,125

Part 1 Foster Placements

As at 31.03.17, 3,864 of LA's LAC placed within foster placements:

- Use of LA's own foster carers range from 12% to 70% and all Wales average is 37%; and
- Use of Commercial IFA range from 3% to 50% and all Wales average is 22%.

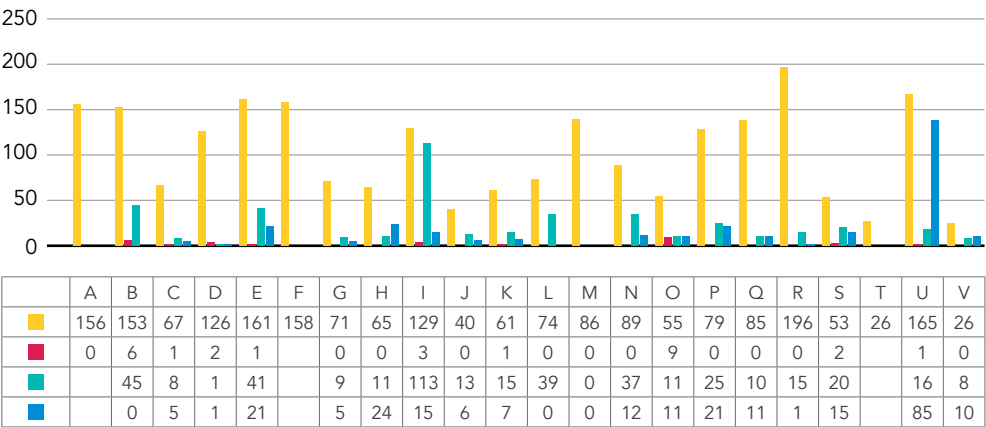
Placement Requests for Groups of Children by LA during 2016/17



Part 2a Group Placement Requests

Requests for placements for groups of children during 2016/17 totalled 282.

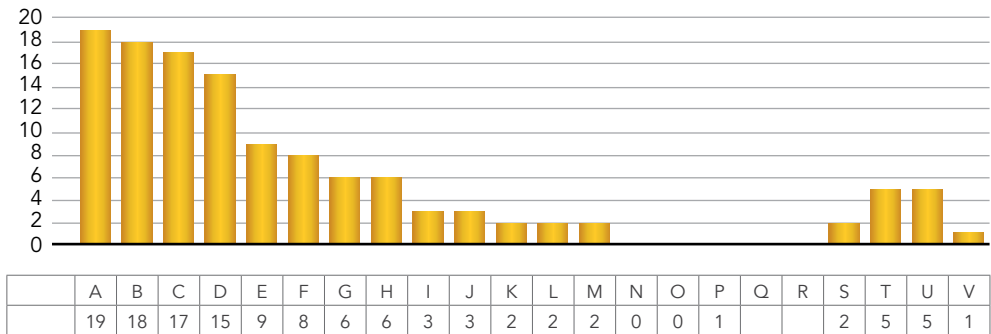
Approved Foster Care Places by LA as at 31.03.17



Part 3 Approved Foster Places with General Foster Carers

2,834 approved fostering places as at 31.03.17.

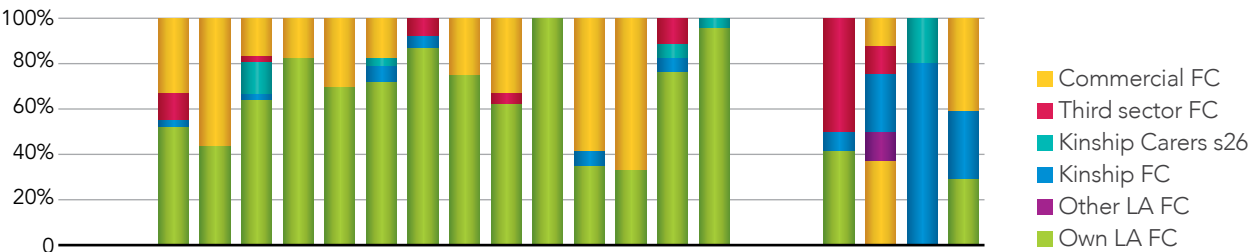
Parent and Child Placements by LA during 2016/17



Part 2b Parent and Child Placements

124 parent and child placements were made during 2016/17.

Unplanned Endings by LA during 2016/17

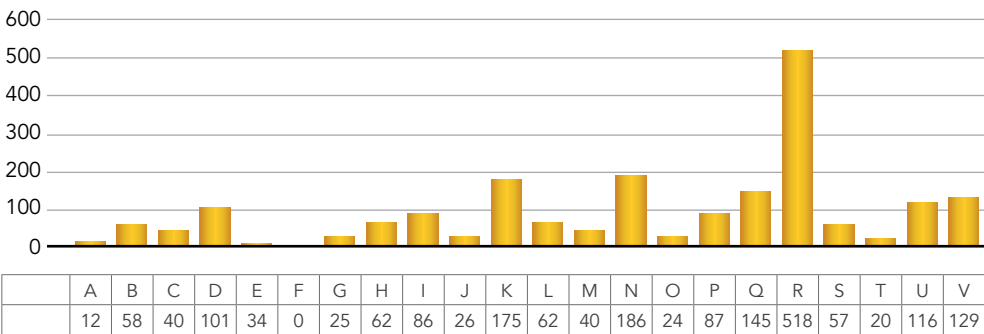


	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
Commercial FC			14	9	6	5	9	5	0	1	8	0	10	2	0	0			0	1	0	7
Third sector FC			5	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	0			6	1	0	0
Kinship Carers s26			0	0	5	0	0	1		0	0	0	0	0	1	1			0	0	1	0
Kinship FC			1	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0			1	2	4	5
Other LA FC			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0	1	0	0
Own LA FC			22	7	23	23	20	20	33	3	15	17	6	1	13	23			5	3	0	5

Part 4 Unplanned Endings

365 unplanned endings during 2016/17.

Initial Enquiries by LA during 2016/17

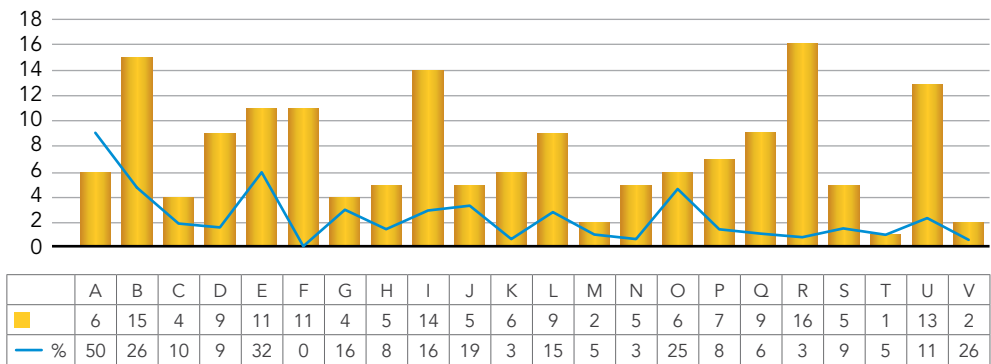


Part 5a Initial Enquiries

Of the 2,003 initial enquiries during 2016/17, 4% (n=73) were from households that had previously fostered through other organisations.

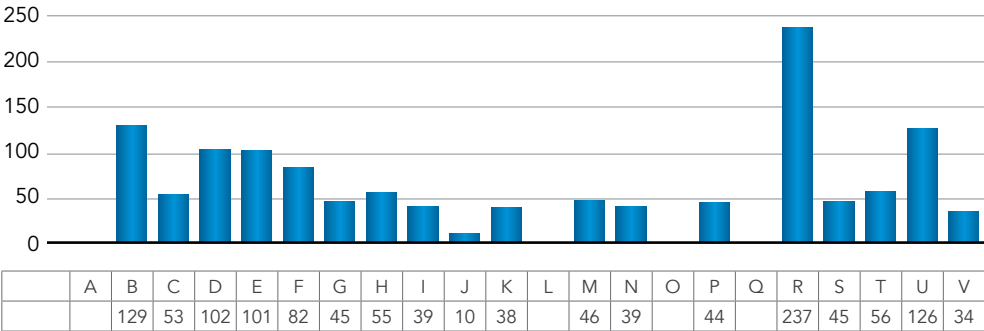
Approvals
Conversions (percentage)

Approvals and Conversion Rates from Initial Enquiry by LA during 2016/17



Of the 165 fostering approvals during 2016/17, 15% (n=25) were from households that had previously fostered through other organisations. Conversion rates from initial enquiry range from 2% to 50% and all Wales average is 8%.

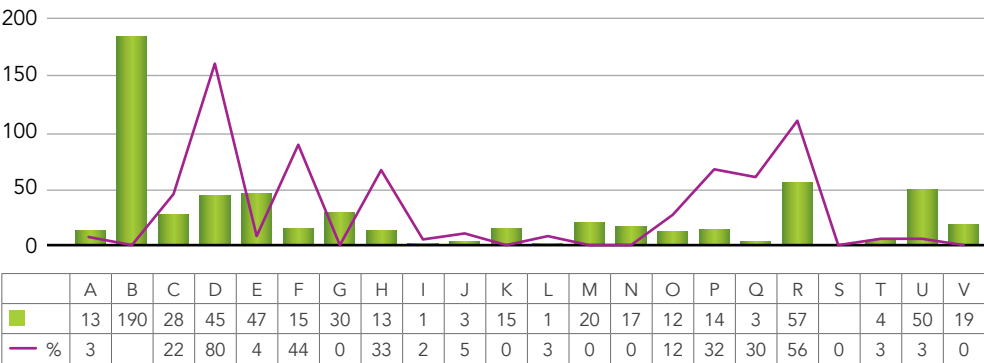
Kinship Viability Reports completed by LA during 2016/17



Part 5b Kinship Carers

1,281 kinship viability reports completed during 2016/17.

Kinship Assessments completed by LA during 2016/17

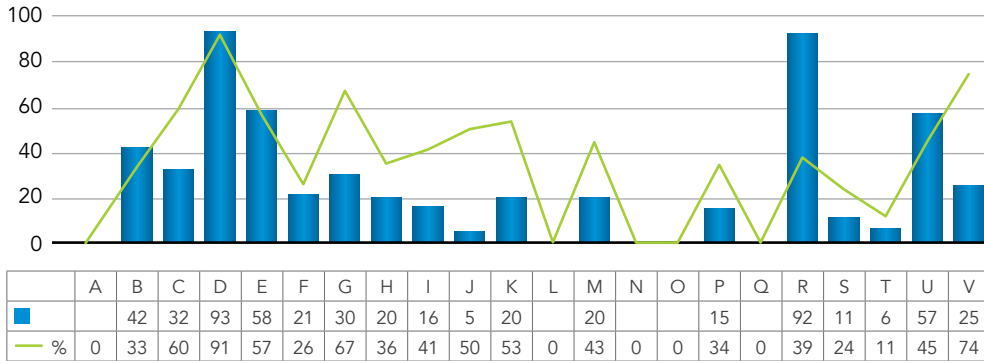


606 kinship assessments completed during 2016/17.

Conversion rate range from 3% to 67% and all Wales average is 47%.

■ Total
— Conversions

Positive Viability Reports completed and Conversion Rate from Viability Reports completed by LA during 2016/17

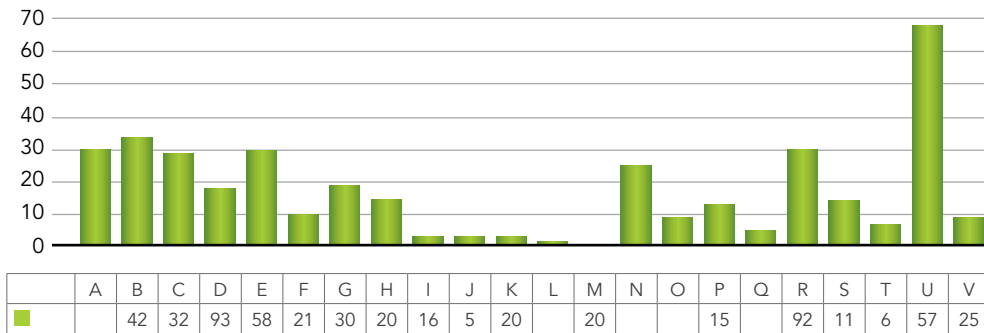


563 positive viability reports completed during 2016/17.

Conversion rate ranges from 11% to 91% and all Wales average is 44%.

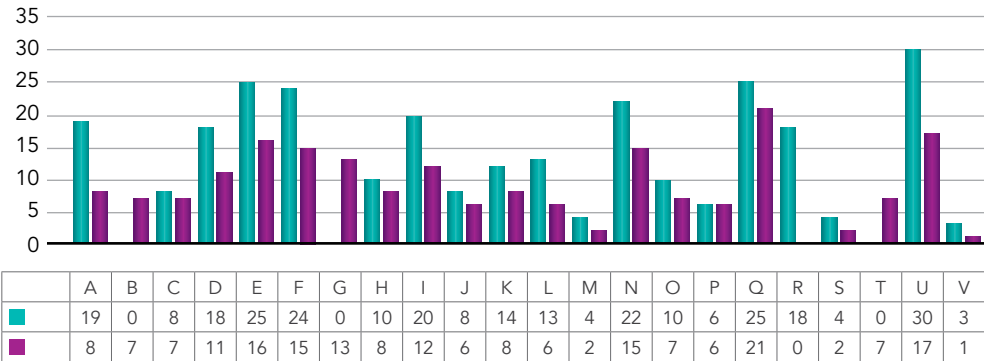
■ Total
— Conversions

Kinship Places made available during 2016/17



373 kinship places made available during 2016/17.

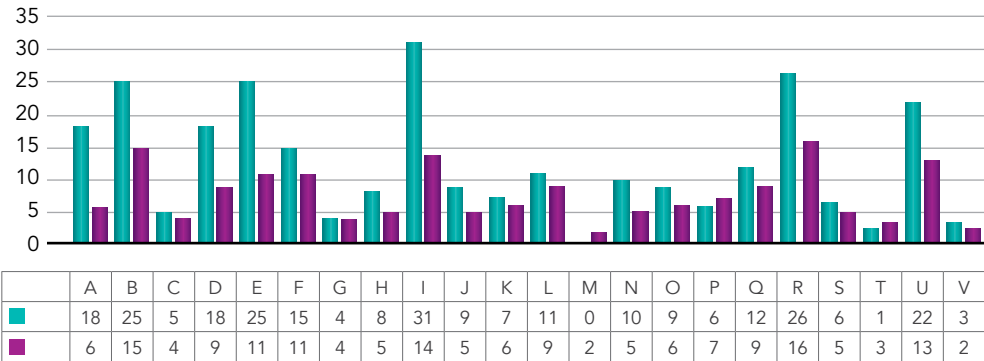
Foster Care Placements & Households lost from the service by LA during 2016/17



Part 6 Retention

281 fostering placements and 195 households were lost to the service during 2016/17. Please note 3 of the LA's were able to provide number of households but not corresponding number of placements.

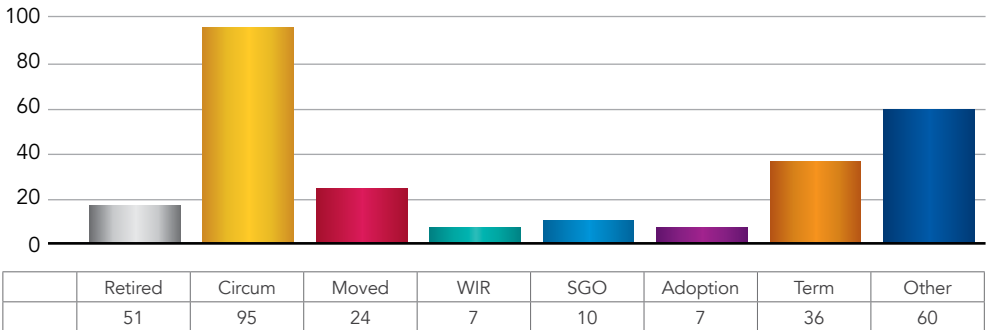
Foster Care Placements & Households approved by LA during 2016/17



Part 7 Recruitment

271 foster carer places and 167 households were approved during 2016/17.

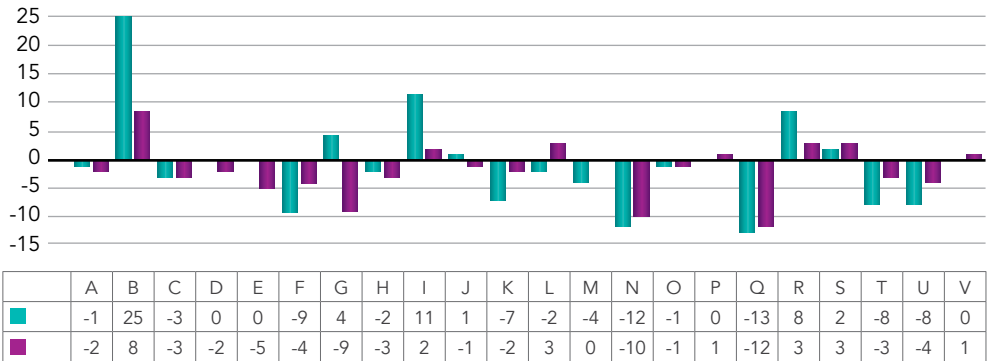
Reasons Foster Carers left the service during 2016/17



Reasons' Glossary:

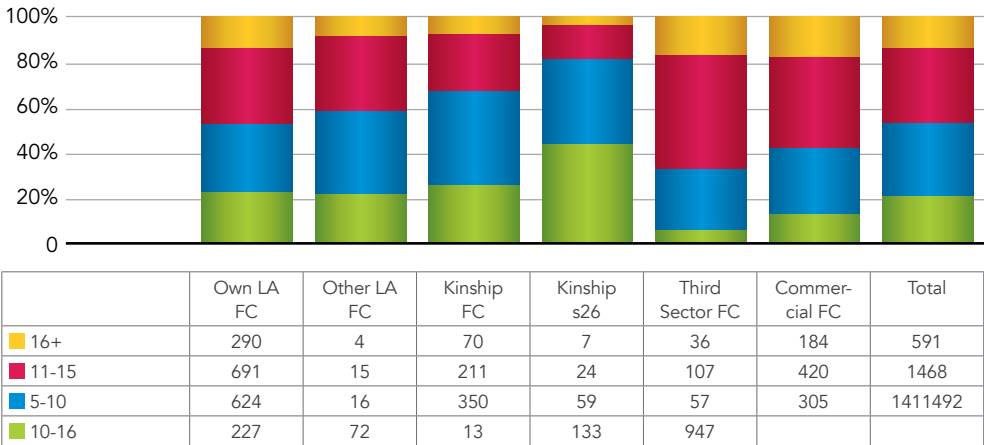
Retired; change of circumstances; moved to another provider; WIR placement; SGO; adoption; approval terminated; and other.

Gains & Losses of Foster Care Placements & Households approved by LA during 2016/17



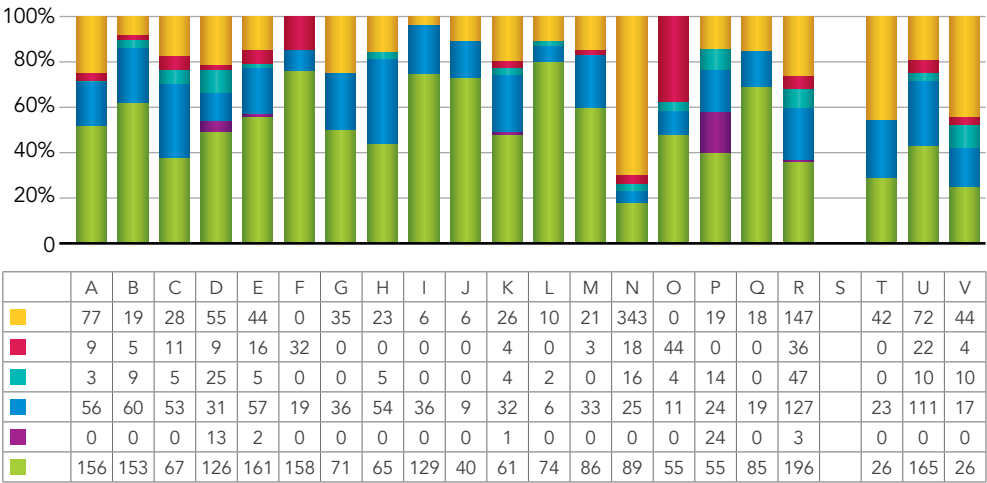
This graph shows the net gains and losses of foster care places during 2016/17. However, the data from some LA's is either incorrect or incomplete so the data cannot be relied upon without further quality assurance.

Age Profile of Children as at 31.03.17



Part 8 Age Profile

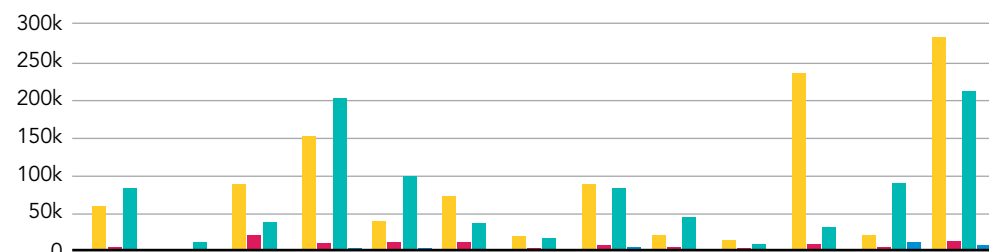
Types of Foster Care Placements by LA as at 31.03.17



4,333 looked after children were in fostering placements as at 31.03.17. 47% with own foster carers (n=2,044) and 29% with independent foster carers (commercial and third sector) (n=1,248).

- Commercial FC
- Third sector FC
- Kinship Carers s26 SS&WB
- Kinship FC
- Other LA FC
- Own LA FC

Cost of Recruitment and Retention 2016/17



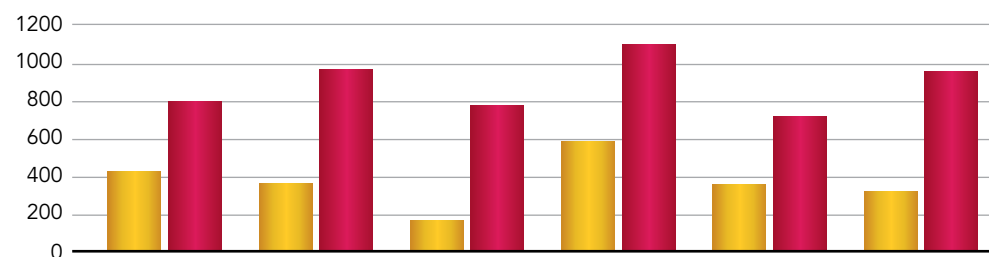
	A	B	C	D	G	H	K	L	N	O	R	S	U
£	60,063	300	92,984	153,24	39,844	74,010	16,225	92,213	20,294	11,884	237,34	19,378	277,21
£	3,337	12	18,597	8,514	9,961	9,251	2,318	8,383	2,029	1,320	9,129	3,230	12,601
£	84,019	11,274	42,697	207,03	100,37	37,274	15,548	84,857	45,448	7,026	34,542	92,918	218,89
£	609	84	678	1,882	1,498	654	283	1,347	575	128	203	1,896	1,520

Part 9a Cost of Recruitment and Retention

Of the LA's able to provide cost data for recruitment and retention there is a significant variance.

- Cost of recruitment
- Cost per place recruited
- Retention costs
- Cost per carer retained

LA & IFA Unit Costs 2016/17

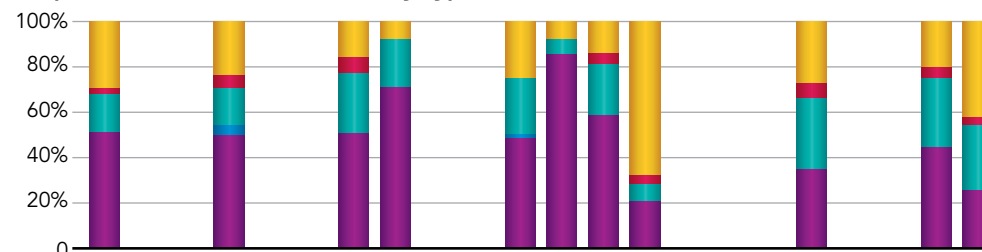


	A	G	H	K	R	U
£	60,063	300	92,984	153,24	39,844	74,010
£	3,337	12	18,597	8,514	9,961	9,251

6 LA's were able to provide both own and commercial foster care unit cost. The difference in cost is significant.

- LA Unit Cost
- IFA Unit Cost

Proportion of Foster Care Places by Type of Provider 2016/17



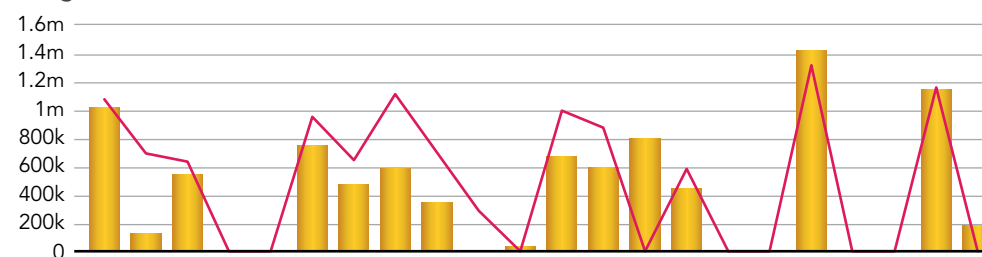
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
%	29	0	0	24	0	0	16	8	0	0	25	8	14	68	0	0	0	27	0	0	20	42
%	3	0	0	5	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	0	0	0	7	0	0	5	4
%	17	0	0	17	0	0	26	21	0	0	25	6	22	8	0	0	0	31	0	0	30	28
%	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
%	52	0	0	50	0	0	51	71	0	0	49	86	59	20	0	0	0	35	0	0	45	27

Part 9b Foster Carer Weeks

The graph shows the dependence on the commercial sector by some LA's.

- Commercial IFA
- Third sector IFA
- Kinship FC inc s26
- Other LA Carers
- Own LA Carers

Budgets and Staff 2016/17



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
£																						
%																						

- Total budget
- FTE



5. All Wales Brand

All Wales Brand for Local Authority Fostering

This report aims to provide direction for Workstream 4 of the National Fostering Framework, exploring and offering recommendations relating to strategy, resource and costs to deliver and maintain an 'All-Wales' brand positioning and marketing campaign for Local Authority fostering across Wales.

The aim of the campaign is to create a unified brand message and voice for Local Authority fostering organisations across Wales that adds strength and consistency to their marketing within their communities. It will provide a 'better together' strategic direction and set of communications tools that will raise awareness of Local Authority fostering across Wales and empower LA fostering organisations to engage with and attract foster carers in their regions, while creating a point of difference to the private sector providers.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local Authority Fostering is facing a recruitment deficit; put simply, there are more children in need of help, love, support and shelter than there are registered carers to provide it.

On average 10% of all foster carers 'attrite' each year¹, and in Wales alone 281 fostering placements and 195 households were lost to the service during 2016/17.² It is estimated that across Wales we need to recruit 550 new foster carers and families every year³ to cope with the growth in children who desperately need that care and support, whilst also replacing those carers who retire or cease to take on new placements.

This is a sector-wide issue, so is a reality for both Local Authority fostering services and the Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) who also recruit new carers to look after the children who are placed under Local Authority care. The IFA sector is very strong at recruitment, with dedicated resource and expertise purely focussed on making themselves front and centre in the marketplace and presenting an obvious and immediate option to prospective foster carers who may not now or understand the difference between Local Authority and IFAs, and the different roles and motivations at play.

While the IFAs undoubtedly play a role in recruiting new carers, their presence also presents challenges to the sector. While Local Authorities are not for profit and entirely focused on the wellbeing of the child and their carers, the IFAs are commercial organisations with shareholders and staff to pay. Any child placed with a foster carer via an IFA necessitates a payment from the Local Authority both to the carer, but also to the IFA. Whereas if Local Authorities are able to place children directly with foster carers, they only need to pay the carer.

With finances under continuous pressure, and all budgets including recruitment activities needing to be utilised as efficiently and effectively as possible, there is clearly a case for better empowering Local Authority fostering to recruit new carers directly, thus enabling Local Authorities to focus their budgets on paying those willing to give up their time, homes and hearts to care for children, rather than additional intermediaries. This is demonstrated by in table 2a.

Table 2a⁴

2014/15	Costs	Number of Placements	Average cost of placement per year
Local Authority Foster Care	£51,320,599	2,200 children	£23, 327
Foster Care Provision from the Independent Sector	£52,271,037	1,205 children	£43,378

¹ The Fostering Network 'Age of Fostering' p2

² NFF Communication Bulletin No.2 Winter 2017 p3

³ www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/all-about-fostering/recruitment-targets

⁴ NFF Phase 2 Report p11

As well as the financial benefit of enabling more foster carer recruitment to be done directly by Local Authorities, there are also clear and emotional benefits to the people who matter most; the children who need their care and support. Local Authorities are just that; local. They are proven to be more committed to placing children within their local area, which supports emotional continuity with friends, school, family etc.

In 2015, 1,040 out of 3,405 in foster care were placed outside of their Local Authority boundaries⁵

- 330 of these were Local Authority placements, 710 IFA.
- 710 out of 1,205 IFA placements outside of Local Authority boundaries = 59%
- 330 out of 2,200 LA placements outside of Local Authority boundaries = 15%.
- Therefore, a child is **four times more likely** to be placed outside of LA boundaries if placed via IFA rather than LA

Increased dependence on the independent sector would mean increased placement costs for local authorities, more children and young people being placed outside their local authority area, more children remaining at home at greater risk of harm.

Ultimately, it increases the likelihood that local authority fostering services will become unsustainable.

To address this trend, it is proposed that we take action to increase the number and range of general foster carers recruited directly to Local Authorities as defined by the 'National Fostering Framework Workstream 4: Create an all Wales brand for local authority fostering. Establish a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand'. This describes the creation of a consistent national brand positioning and marketing awareness/attraction campaign that includes

- All-Wales brand strategy and purpose for Local Authority fostering
- Centralised national website 'front door'
- Centralised national website social media strategy
- Centralised national PR strategy
- Visual ID
- Branded toolkit of comms resources that can be tailored to become relevant locally

This would be supported and delivered by the recruitment of a centralised marketing and recruitment team responsible for raising awareness of Local Authority fostering across Wales and generating leads that can then be converted into new Local Authority foster carers. The centralised marketing team would then be responsible for the initial contact with that lead, managing the initial conversation and information delivery to get them to a point where they are ready to talk to a local social worker. They would then pass the leads on to a LA social worker in their community for conversion and matching.

As specified in the National Fostering Framework Phase 2 Report, this would provide "An integrated approach which allows us to benefit from opportunities of working on a bigger scale... without losing the advantages of localism".

This approach would :

- increase the range of foster carers that each Local Authority has to call on in their area and increasing their ability to provide the care that children need
- remove the pressure of recruitment of new carers from their own workloads, enabling them to focus on what they are trained to do, maximising the effective use of their own time and expertise for the benefit of children and their foster carers
- reduce pressure on Local Authority budgets. It is estimated that every placement made directly with a Local Authority rather than an IFA creates a saving of £17,000, so the proposed investment in centralised recruitment of foster carers into Local Authorities will create significant savings as demonstrated in table 2b. This will enable more children to be cared for within the same budgets.

Table 2b⁶

Increased number of placements in local authority provision	Potential savings
10 places	£170,000
30 places	£510,000
50 places	£850,000
100 places	£1,700,000

⁵ NFF Phase 2 Report p13

⁶ NFF Phase 2 Report p12

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. EXISTING LOCAL AUTHORITY RECRUITMENT MARKETING RESOURCE ACROSS WALES

Recommendation: We create a new, centralised recruitment marketing team for All-Wales Local Authority Fostering

A survey completed by 77% of Local Authority fostering teams across Wales identified that little or no resource is specifically dedicated to marketing activity, such as recruitment of new foster carers. Over half of the Local Authorities have no-one dedicated to recruiting new foster carers, with nearly 40% having just one person focused on this very pressing challenge. This creates a specific problem when trying to compete for share of voice against IFAs who are presenting and managing a very professional marketing presence.

Trying to equally arm each of the LAs with a standardised level of resource, expertise and budget dedicated to recruitment marketing for new foster carers that will enable them to compete with IFAs at a local level is impractical from a cost and recruitment perspective. Similarly, expecting people trained and expert in one area (child services) to take ownership of recruitment marketing and go toe-to-toe with the expertise and financial resources of the IFAs is unrealistic.

It is therefore not the recommendation of this report that we look to add specific recruitment marketing resource into each Local Authority. Instead we should create a new, centralised recruitment marketing team for All-Wales Local Authority Fostering, focussed on providing the specific

expertise and activities where the IFAs are strong:

- Digital marketing
- Website
- Social media
- Lead generation and nurturing

2.2. PROPOSED ROLE OF CENTRALISED RECRUITMENT MARKETING RESOURCE

Recommendation: that awareness and lead generation for Local Authority fostering is owned and managed by a new centralised team

This central recruitment marketing resource will use a clear 'all-Wales' brand vision and messaging presence for Local Authority fostering, that speaks directly to the personal motivations and local pride of prospective foster parents and makes them aware that fostering with their LA is the natural, and best choice, for them and the children they wish to help.

They would run central campaigns aimed at raising awareness of LA fostering across Wales and generating leads. They would then be responsible for the initial contact with and nurturing of that lead, managing the initial conversation and information delivery to get them to a point where they are ready to talk to a local social worker. They would then pass the leads on to a LA social worker in their community for conversion and matching.

As specified in

2.3. PROPOSED OWNERSHIP OF CAMPAIGN ELEMENTS ACROSS CENTRAL/REGIONAL/NATIONAL

Recommendation: The new dedicated centralised marketing team own the development and implementation of the All-Wales brand and recruitment campaign for Local Authority Fostering.

This would include, but not necessarily be exclusive to:

- Brand positioning
 - Key purpose/vision statement
 - Messaging framework
- Visual identity
 - Guidelines document
 - Tone of voice
 - Campaign templates that can then be regionalised
- Website
 - Must be platform responsive – more cost effective than creating and maintaining a separate app
- Campaign strategy
- Social lead
- PR lead
- Digital marketing lead
- National Events lead (eg Eisteddfod, Royal Welsh)
- ATL advertising lead
- Asset creation lead (digital and print)

They would then collaborate with the Regional/Local Authority resources to aid their development of the following within the All-Wales brand framework and identity:

Regional ownership and adaptation/creation of:

- Own websites with visual integration and shared links to national 'foster'
- Own ATL/local media campaigns and events as they see fit adapting national template

Local focus on:

- Conversion of leads and matching of great placements
- Identification of hard stats around supply vs demand of care families, surplus, deficits etc that will enable the national campaign to flex and focus in specific areas when necessary



2.4. CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

Recommendation: NFF creates our own brand/marketing framework for Wales as opposed to buying into the North West of England's 'You Can Foster' campaign.

The goal is to create a centralised campaign and recruitment marketing resource that delivers a consistent national campaign while staying relevant to the specific needs of each local area. To quote the NFF Phase 2 Report, it provides "An integrated approach which allows us to benefit from opportunities of working on a bigger scale...without losing the advantages of localism".

It is important that this has a clear and distinct identity that speaks directly to the motivations and drivers of our target audience, including their desire to make a difference to their local community, their altruistic nature and sense of Welsh pride.

This need for relevance at a local level, that speaks directly to the motivations and local pride of Welsh foster carers, is a key rationale for creating our own brand/marketing framework for Wales as opposed to buying into the North West of England's 'You Can Foster' campaign.

2.5. RESOURCE COSTS

Recommendation: NFF invests £127k-£146k to recruit 3x new FTE and retain consultancy support from Narrative Edge to provide the expertise and ownership required to recruit sufficient new foster carers into Local Authority fostering

2.5.1. Marketing Manager (1x FTE)

- PR/Social Media/Digital allrounder who can manage web, search and PR agencies day to day and advertising when required
- £36k-£42k salary plus 30% on costs
- £47k-£55k total pa

2.5.2. Application Officers x2 FTE

- Dedicated enquiry management/lead nurturing resource
- Managing that initial conversation in response to first contact, either over the phone or via email
- £24k-£28k basic salary per FTE plus 30% on costs
- £62k-£73k total pa

2.5.3. Consultancy Support

Ongoing support from Narrative Edge consultancy on a retained basis to:

- support recruitment
- provide strategic direction
- coaching and mentoring of core team
 - First 6 months – 1 day a week (£500/day x 24 = £12k)
 - 6-12 months – 2 days a month (£500/day x 12 = £12k)
 - £18k total (one off)

2.5.4. Alternative Options

The alternative option would be to recruit a dedicated Marketing and Recruitment Manager into each Local Authority. Out of the 17 Local Authorities who responded to the Marketing and Recruitment Resource Survey, 58% said they currently had no one dedicated to the pressing task of recruiting new foster carers, with 48% stating that no-one was even addressing this issue on a part time basis. If we aggregate this up to the universe of 22 Local Authorities, this makes at least 13 Local Authorities who would need this dedicated resource.

Basing the salary for a hybrid local-level Marketing Manager/ Lead Manager resource at £32k and factoring in on-costs of 30% to bring the cost to £42k, this would require a total investment of £546kpa in resource alone (£42k x 13 Local Authorities). The recommended centralised approach therefore represents a saving of between £400k-£419k on resource, and that is before we include campaign costs for 22 separate local campaigns compared to the lower cost and increased clarity and efficiency of one centralised national campaign.

This means the case for a single centralised resource focused on recruitment marketing and lead management, delivering a centralised brand and awareness campaign to attract new carers into Local Authority fostering, is compelling.





6. National Approach to Commissioning

National Approach to Commissioning

Recommendation 5

Develop national arrangements for commissioning all placements regardless of sector but building on the work of the 4C's

Recommendation 5 continues to be progressed by the NFF in conjunction with the 4C's team: the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru. For those who are unfamiliar with the work of the 4C's they are a Looked After Children's placement commissioning resource for 15 South and Mid Wales Authorities and provide contract management of the All Wales Fostering Framework and All Wales Residential Framework for 22 signatory Authorities with independent fostering and residential providers.



The two key priorities from the Phase 2 Work Programme which have been the focus of our work in Phase 3 are:

1. Every Local Authority to have a robust placement needs analysis.
2. Every Local Authority to have a placement commissioning strategy and where appropriate this should complement a regional placement commissioning strategy.

The stated ambitions in 2017/18 for this workstrand were:

- a) Build the momentum of the work programme and its 2 key priorities of needs analysis and placement commissioning strategies.
- b) Engage with independent providers, both the commercial and third sector providers on the development of a national commissioning approach, the issuing of market position statements, barriers and incentives to market development and opportunities for co-production.
- c) The 4C's Young Commissioners Group, which has won a number of awards for its participation work, will be consulted to ensure young people's views influence the work programme. The work led by Voices from Care with young people in Phase One on what makes a good placement will also be referred to.

A Second National Commissioning Conference

Following on from our Conference and workshops in Phase 2 a second National Commissioning Conference was held in January 2018 in Llandrindod Wells. Again, we were pleased with the high attendance and engagement; with all 22 Local Authorities across Wales nominating delegates, and with key partners from the Steering Group also attending.

The morning session of the Conference focussed on the launch of a template Placement Commissioning Strategy (PCS) and a suite of supporting guidance. We revisited the intended benefits from using a template and discussed both the format and content of the document.

The afternoon session was a practical workshop introducing the Regional NFF Leads as facilitators of a session to consider how the template and guidance would fit with the Regional Work Programmes plus an exercise to consider 'where do we start?' and 'how does this relate to my organisation?', with the end result a scoping exercise for progressing implementation in each Local Authority. Overall feedback from the event was very positive.



The Template Placement Commissioning Strategy (PCS)

The template was developed at the request of Local Authority children's services commissioners. With their input a user-friendly template with prompts, suggestions and key guidance has been produced which will hopefully be a positive support for each Authority.

The template is an editable document and can be adapted for each individual Local Authority to make it fit for purpose. It is not intended to be prescriptive and it is each individual Local Authority's decision whether they use the tool in its entirety, in part or use an alternative local format. The key message always being the two priority outcomes should be a robust needs analysis and a clear strategy rather than a compliance with a particular format.

The strategy has 4 key sections.

- Section 1: The background and context
- Section 2: The data, facts and feedback
- Section 3: The analysis, gaps and options
- Section 4: The decisions, planning and strategy

Since its launch in the Conference the vast majority of Local Authorities and Regions have made a commitment to use the template which is pleasing.

4C's are assisting several member Authorities with completing the PCS during 2018/19. The intention is then to produce and publish Market Position Statements to communicate clearly with the external market.

Engagement with Independent Providers

4C's continues its day to day work alongside independent fostering providers and independent residential providers through a programme of workshops, forums and individual meetings to consider placement sufficiency and market growth. Much of this work with fostering providers has fallen within our day to day responsibilities during 2017/18, rather than to progress specific areas of NFF activity and while the Regional NFF Leads shape their own plans.

Meetings with all NFF Leads and the 4C's team are diarised to ensure we support each Region with its priorities moving forward plus 4C's can facilitate commissioning relationships between the Leads and the independent providers as necessary.

The alliance between the charitable fostering providers; Action for Children, Barnardo's, TACT and SFS, has continued to develop with the launch of the Charitable Fostering Providers Cymru at the Senedd in 2017. These charitable providers are working together to produce their own programme of work and are keen to see the progress made by Local Authorities on their PCS to enable future exploration of the benefits of a closer commissioning relationship. 4C's will support with this as required.

Young Commissioners Group

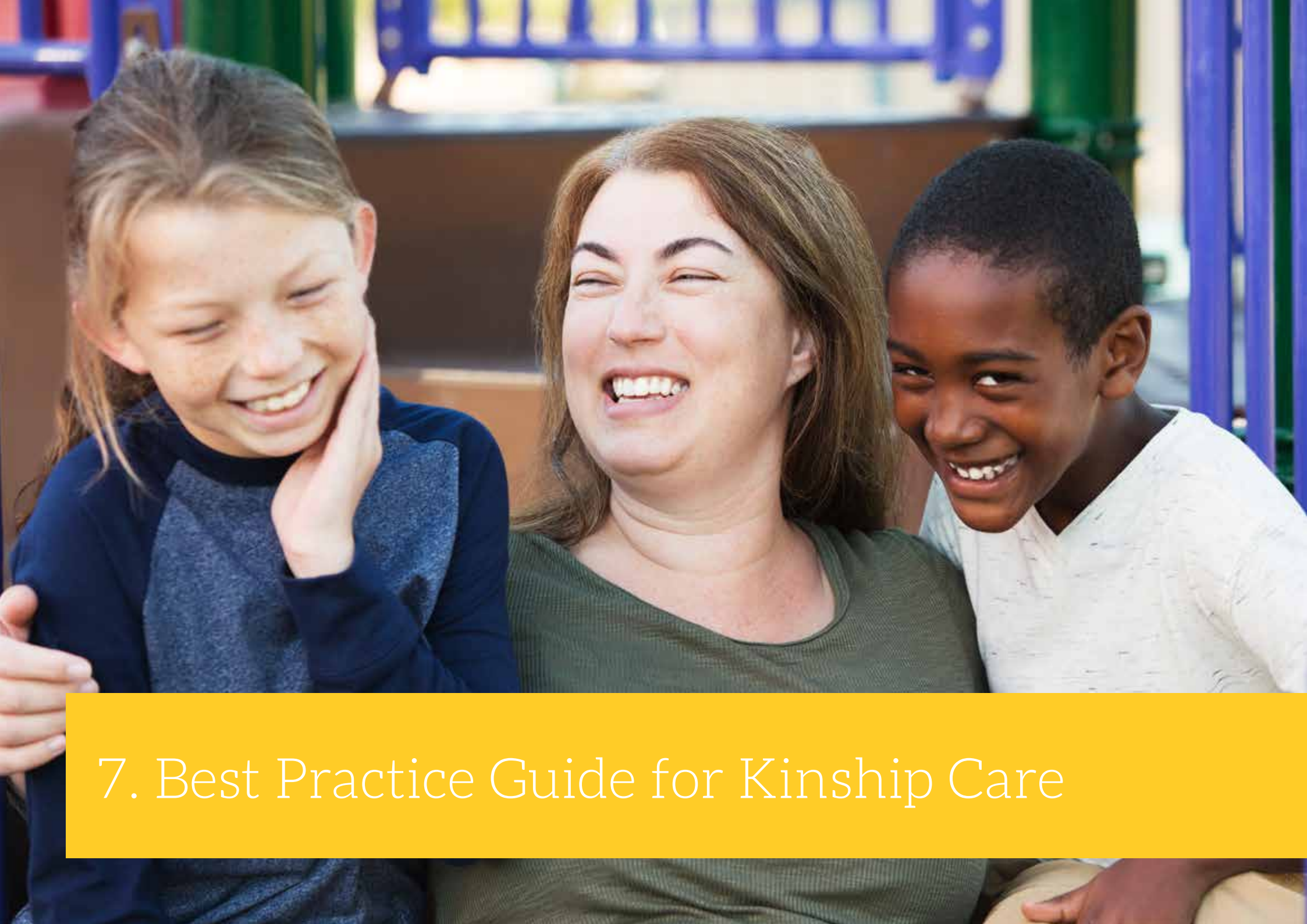
The main focus of the consultation and participation sessions with our Young Commissioners during 2017 and to date in 2018 has been regarding residential placements rather than fostering placements, however, themes and learning's from these events are relevant in some instances across placement type.

In particular we have continued to hear from our children and young people how placements close to their local area which support continuity of access to education or enables ongoing contact with positive peers and a support network is very important to them. This links with the focus on local sufficiency in the PCS and will be particularly relevant for certain Authorities and Regions.

With the assistance of Local Authority and independent providers we have also extended the reach of our outcomes focussed survey across fostering and residential placements to a younger age group during 2018 with a pleasing return rate.

Future Direction

4C's will continue to work closely to support Local Authorities, the Regional NFF Leads and the NFF to achieve its long term goals.



7. Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care

Assessment and support of Kinship Foster Carers

This guide has been drawn together with the assistance of practitioners across Wales and by family members who have been through the assessment process themselves.

Our thanks go to all who have contributed their expertise and time so generously and in particular to Professor Joan Hunt from Cardiff University.

Please note that during the course of this guide we use the expression 'family members', which encompasses not only family members but also friends and members of the family's social network.

The term 'kinship' is used in same sense as the term 'connected persons'.

INTRODUCTION

The assessment of family members or close friends as a kinship foster carer for a child who cannot, or may not be able to, remain with their birth family is one of the most complex assessments a social worker can undertake.

Phase 1 of the work to develop a National Fostering Framework (NFF) within Wales identified kinship foster care as one of the key issues that was concerning practitioners across the country. In the final report Recommendation 7 states

'Ensure greater consistency in the use of kinship foster care for children who are looked after.'

In order to follow this recommendation through, under phase 2 of the NFF, AFA Cymru brought together practitioners, kinship carers, independent reviewing officers and children's guardians to gather information from across Wales. The content of the guide is informed by the good practice and lessons learned from those events as well as from research, case law, serious case reviews and inspection themes.

This is a guide to the assessment of family members, friends and other members of the family's social network as kinship foster carers; however there is necessarily reference to special guardianship as the two assessments are often undertaken concurrently when the child is either in the pre proceedings process or the subject of care proceedings. The guide does not purport to be 'guidance'. Its principles are based in current case law, current research and findings from serious case reviews.

*I don't like being
"done too"*

*I'm not a carer,
I'm his grandmother*

*I've brought up a whole
family without being
assessed*

The most recent research, referenced in the guide, considers kinship placements in the context of special guardianship, but the lessons learned in respect of assessment and support are as relevant for fostering as they are for special guardianship.

Applicants for mainstream foster care generally approach fostering agencies after having thought for a long time about becoming a foster carer, prepared the way with their own family and made practical arrangements for a change in their way of life.

In contrast, potential kinship carers are generally asked to consider becoming foster carers at a time of extreme emotional crisis within their family. They are asked to trust the very people who may appear to have created the crisis, discuss every element of their personal lives and expose themselves to the scrutiny of panels, social workers, lawyers and the courts. If they do not engage with this process they run the risk of losing their child relative to another member of the family, adoption or mainstream foster care.

Social workers are charged with the task of engaging and assessing family members who might blame them for the interference in their family, or alternatively the lack of earlier intervention.

This guide aims to help the practitioner to establish good practice in relation to kinship assessments. It is only through the completion of full and robust assessments that recommendations and decisions can properly be made in the child's best interests, both at foster panel, with the decision maker, and in the family court.

The relationship built up with potential kinship carers needs to be based on mutual respect and honesty. Family members consistently reiterate the importance of being treated with respect and empathy during the process. They also point to the importance of knowing what the problems are in the family from an early stage.



2.0 THE EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF KINSHIP CARERS

Key Points

- Early identification of family members is essential.
 - Family members often indicate that they wish they had been involved at an earlier stage in order to support the parents.
 - It enables time for the kinship assessment to be properly undertaken.
 - It provides time for family members to adjust to the new situation and what is being asked of them, thereby facilitating their engagement with the assessment process.
- A well organised systemic approach to work in the pre PLO phase, involving operational childcare teams, legal departments and fostering/ kinship teams, helps to create a focus on the identification of family members.
- Family group conferences or family meetings are an effective way of involving family members in the care plan.

2.1 Engaging family members in the task

The early identification of family members in the child's timeframe is crucially important. It enables local authorities to comply with the Public Law Outline timescales (once care proceedings have commenced) whilst also having sufficient time to undertake an assessment.

It also gives potential kinship carers the maximum available time to assimilate what is happening in their family, recover a little from what is often the shocking and painful news that a child in the family has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm and adjust their thinking on what has happened.

This has been termed as:

'a journey from disbelief to an understanding of permanency'.

Jenny Frost, Team Manager, Flintshire

Prospective carers are then in a position to think clearly and objectively about whether they, or other members of their family, are able to provide alternative, permanent care and to make an informed decision.

The early involvement with family members, at the child protection/s47 enquiry phase, or even earlier, has the capacity for facilitating an easier relationship with them if the child's circumstances require an escalation into the pre proceedings protocol.

Family members are consistent in expressing a view that the earlier they know of problems, the better. The shock to family members may be lessened and, if the child's social worker has used the process well, family members concerned may feel more able to see themselves as part of the team supporting the child.

If there is no early involvement, family members who are only identified through the pre-proceedings protocol or even during care proceedings, report feeling rushed and confused, which can lead to an understandable defensiveness. This in turn hinders a full and robust assessment process.

The principle of early involvement has been highlighted in CSSIW's (now CIW) report: The national review of care planning for children and young people subject to PLO pre proceedings, December 2016. Recommendation 3.3 states:

'Arrangements should be in place to ensure that there is engagement with families at an early stage to agree what permanency options are available. This should include ensuring that families fully understand the need to nominate carers within the family'.

Good Practice:

- Raising the topic of alternative family members at pre – PLO meetings
- If likely to be entering the PLO process, making an early referral to the fostering team/assessment team

2.2 Family Meetings

Good Practice:

Local authorities across Wales have different ways of involving family members at this early stage. Some convene formal family group conferences; others use 'family meetings' arranged by the child's social worker or team manager. Local authorities using 'Signs of Safety' use 'family network' meetings at an early stage.

North Wales has a policy which facilitates a family group conference or meeting at a very early point, preferably prior to the child being made subject to a child protection plan and no later than eighteen months after a child protection plan has been made, but there is no plan as yet to seek to remove the child. All formal family group conferences held in Wales involve a social worker from the statutory sector.

The form of the meeting matters less than the intention to make connections with family and close friends. A family group conference or meeting provides family members with the opportunity to know, at an early stage, that there are difficulties with parenting the child and for the child's social worker to raise the profile of safeguarding concerns, amongst extended family, at the earliest opportunity.

It is at this stage that family members may be able to provide support to the parent(s). It also provides the local authority with a clearer picture of who may be available to care at a later date and up to date information for a genogram.

Whilst 66% of local authorities surveyed in 2016 (NFF, Phase 2 AFA Kinship report) indicated that they held some form of family meeting often or occasionally, a small number indicated that they had no mechanism for getting family members together to discuss the protection plan for a child, and their involvement with that plan.

Research in Practice (2015c) found that the use of family group conferences was variable and that potential carers may not come forward/be identified until care proceedings are well underway (RIP, 2016).

Good Practice:

Considerations for a family meeting – a brief checklist

Why have a family meeting?

- For family members to be able to learn about and focus on the child's needs
- For family members to be able to begin to think whether they can meet this child's particular needs
- For family members to feel more of an integral part of the planning process for their child relative
- For the child's social worker to get a sense of who is in the family and begin to assess family dynamics

When should a family meeting take place?

- Where possible a family meeting should take place at the s47 Children Act/child protection enquiry stage, where the meeting is primarily to look at support in maintaining the child at home under a child protection plan. Family members are, therefore, aware from an early stage that the local authority has concerns about the care of the child. This makes the transition from

child protection to pre proceedings protocol or the commencement of proceedings less of a shock or surprise.

- Where no earlier meeting has taken place, one should be convened as soon as the decision is made to go into the pre proceedings protocol, in order to identify possible alternative carers, whether they have the support of the family or whether there are competing prospective carers
- When proceedings have commenced if there has been no opportunity to have a meeting before, or if family members or close friends have made themselves known to the local authority at a late date, a family meeting should be arranged

Once one family meeting has taken place and the extended family is used to the structure and process, it may be reconvened at later dates to address different issues, for example contact arrangements.

Matters for consideration at a family meeting

- How to identify the people to invite
- Venue for the meeting
- Child care
- Who to chair the meeting
- Preparation of participants for the meeting
- Ensuring that the meeting focuses on the needs of the child
- Being clear with family members what you are seeking to achieve in having the meeting
- Some practitioners have urged caution with a system which is wholly family led in identifying possible alternative carers. Family dynamics may be such that the most able carers in the family have been excluded from family discussions and may not be informed of

the family meeting. This is where a genogram which has been completed in less stressful times may come in useful.

2.3 Confidentiality

One of the factors which may hinder early engagement is the lack of clarity on whether birth parents' confidentiality may be breached if local authorities contact and involve family members in planning or assessments.

Best practice and the data protection principles dictate that consent is sought and obtained from the birth parents during the course of work with them. However, where that consent is not forthcoming, in some cases it may still be in the child's interest to contact family members.

When the matter is in care proceedings, then a direction from the judge may be requested and granted. However, that option is not readily available in any pre proceedings work.

Current local authority practice varies, with some regarding the contacting of family members against the express wish of birth parents as being unlawful. Others have regarded the information as the child's rather than the parent's and have therefore felt able to contact possible kinship carers.

Practitioners need to be aware of the data protection principles determining practice in this area and each decision must be made taking into account the individual circumstances of each child and family. It is important to seek legal advice before contacting family members or friends without the consent of the parents.

3.0 THE TEMPORARY APPROVAL OF A RELATIVE FRIEND OR OTHER CONNECTED PERSON

3.1 Regulations 26 & 27 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015

The above regulations came into force in April 2016 along with the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It repeals and replaces regulation 38(2) Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Schedule 5 of the regulations sets out the matters that must be taken into consideration when assessing the suitability of a 'connected person', under regulation 26, to care for a child. Paragraphs 156 to 165 of the Part 6 Code of Practice provide further guidance.

In some cases, where there has been pre proceedings work undertaken and a family group conference or meeting has taken place, the local authority will have some pre existing knowledge of and relationship with the family member(s) concerned.

However, many of these placements are made in an emergency, where a child needs to be looked after by the local authority and the alternative would be to place with approved foster carers with no connection with the child.

Schedule 5 provides a long list for consideration. The following three domains capture the principal strands of Schedule 5 and set out the most important matters for consideration when this section is being used as a matter of urgency.

Good Practice Matters for Immediate Assessment

1. The existing relationship with the child
 - How well does this person know the child?
 - Is the child familiar with the home and other members of the household?
2. The ability to protect the child from harm
 - This will necessarily include an understanding of what the child has experienced, and the proposed carer's proximity to and relationship with birth parents. This family member may be in a state of shock when realising what has taken place within the context of their own family and the assessment at this stage will need to focus on their ability to work with the local authority's care plan and agree to any restrictions on and arrangements for contact.
 - The proposed carers' and members of the household's own experiences of physical or mental health problems, domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems or learning disabilities. Do these experiences prevent the proposed carer from providing safe and nurturing care at this stage?
 - PNC checks
 - Suitability of living environment
 - Proximity to those who may harm/undermine the placement
 - Ability to work with professionals/engage with the assessment
3. The practicalities of the proposed placement
 - Sleeping arrangements
 - Availability of prospective carers to meet the needs of the child (work/other family commitments)
 - Arrangements for getting to and from school/nursery

- Contact arrangements
- GP/existing medication/health care needs
- Proper written information for the carer to have which sets out the status of the placement with them/delegated authority
- Information on the assessed needs of the child (if available)
- All other CLA considerations (visits etc)
- A 'script' for the carer to explain to the child, in age appropriate terms, why s/he is living with them

4.0 VIABILITY ASSESSMENTS OF PROSPECTIVE KINSHIP FOSTER CARERS

4.1 The purpose of Viability Assessments

Current case law (Re R (A Child) [2014] EWCA Civ 1625) has held that, in completing its welfare analysis at the end of care proceedings, the local authority does not have to take every single possible assessment and show its 'workings out' at the final hearing.

In Re R the Court of Appeal held:

'The (PLO) process of identifying options which can be discarded at an early stage in the proceedings itself demands an appropriate degree of rigour ... but re B-S does not require that every stone has to be uncovered and the ground exhaustively examined ... nor is there any basis for assuming that more than one negative assessment is required before a potential carer can be eliminated.'

We know, therefore, that in identifying options there has to be 'rigour', but having identified an option as being unrealistic through a rigorous process, then there should be

no need to complete a full assessment

Although within care proceedings it is for the court to decide which options should go forward, if the viability assessment is robust and properly evidenced as being unrealistic, it is less likely that a full assessment will be directed, so saving both the local authority and the court time and money and the prospective carer time and possibly greater disappointment at a later stage.

4.2 Initial filtering

In some instances it may be abundantly clear at a very early stage that a family member who puts themselves forward to care is unsuitable and that even a viability assessment is not required. Such circumstances may include:

- An offence against a child (depending on context/time lapse/nature of the offence)
- A proven (and recent) inability to work with the local authority
- Where there has been significant involvement with the local authority and there is evidence that no work can be done to improve parenting capacity or lessen risk
- A family member whose age will probably preclude them from caring for the child for their minority (and where a 'legacy' carer is not identified or appropriate)

Where there is a large number of family members putting themselves forward in respect of one child or group of siblings, the local authority should attempt, through family group conferences, family meetings or discussions, to identify who would be the best (and most realistic) options to put forward to the court for viability assessments.

With good quality work, the applicant may be helped to rule themselves out, and may be relieved to be able to do this.

It is for the court to decide whether to rule a prospective

carer out at this first filtering stage if there are current care proceedings, but if a robust argument can be made and adequate information provided on the particular grave concern for suitability, then that should be sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they are not a 'realistic option'.

This form of filtering assessment should only be used in circumstances where the evidence is very clear. Where there is any doubt as to whether they are a realistic option, a viability assessment should be undertaken.

4.3 How long should a viability assessment take?

It is recommended that viability assessments are undertaken in 2 – 4 weeks. This is in line with current policy and practice in Wales.

4.4 Who should undertake viability assessments?

It is good practice to involve both the child's social worker and the family placement/fostering social worker. This is to:

- Combine their knowledge of the family in order to gain a different perspective and insight in the family situation.
- Ensure that the family are not placed in the position of having to give information that is already known to the department.
- Bring an additional element of expertise in assessment which the child's social worker may not have, i.e. the assessment of suitability of carers/ knowledge of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003.
- Introduce an element of independence for the family.
- Provide an analysis which focuses on the child's needs and whether these family members appear to be able to meet those needs sufficiently to proceed to a full assessment.

Where there are two assessors involved, clear lines of accountability need to be developed to ensure that there is

no overlap of work and prospective carers do not have to go over the same ground twice (unless that is deemed necessary). Time should therefore be taken to plan the work if it spans the two teams, ensuring that there is good communication and that joint reviews are integrated into the work.

Good Practice

- In North Wales, both the child's social worker and fostering social worker undertake the assessment.
- In Neath Port Talbot, the child's social worker undertakes the first visit. An audit of strengths and weaknesses then takes place, followed by a possible joint visit with the fostering social worker to focus on particular issues.

4.5 How to approach a viability assessment

It is important for the practitioner, when embarking upon a viability assessment, to bear in mind:

- There should be an acknowledgement of the shock and distress a family may be experiencing.
- The assessment should be conducted in a spirit of openness, positivity and honesty in exploring whether these family members may be able to care for the child/ren concerned.
- This is the start of an educative, two way process. Providing information, which has parallels with the "Skills to Foster" pre-assessment training for mainstream foster carers has been highlighted as a critical factor in establishing a stable placement (Wade, 2014). Because of the unplanned nature of the majority of kinship placements, this educative process needs to start early and continue throughout the whole of the assessment process. This factor was also noted as important in the

CSSIW report, 2016.

4.6 What should viability assessments contain?

Across Wales local authorities have developed their own formats for viability assessments, some of which are approved by the relevant local family justice board. Benchmarking across the country has shown that these formats cover broadly the same areas to be analysed. The Family Rights Group has also produced a guide for viability assessments, 'Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment: A Good Practice Guide, 2017', which has been endorsed by the President of the Family Division, Lord Justice Munby. The domains covered in the guide do not differ greatly from the domains covered in the Welsh formats, but it provides useful guidance on particular areas, particularly for those practitioners inexperienced in undertaking viability assessments. The good practice guide is available on the FRG website.

Each family setting and child are unique so this list is not, and can never be, exhaustive. Practitioners will have to use their skills in assessment to identify whether there are other areas which may be relevant to each individual assessment. As is always the case in social work, the gathering of information alone is not sufficient for an assessment; it is the analysis of this information in the context of the applicant's wish to be considered as prospective carers for the specific child/ren that is critical.

Good Practice

Matters to be covered in viability assessments

- Reason for proposed placement
- Motivation
- Accommodation, including proposed sleeping arrangements for the child
- Health of prospective carer and members of family/household
- Smoking
- Any history of domestic violence
- Any substance/alcohol dependency
- Consensus on part of all family/household members to engage with the full assessment process/care for the child(ren)
- Prospective carer's experience of caring for children. Any local authority concerns about this
- How well do child and prospective carer(s) know each other/quality of relationship
- Prospective carers' understanding of what is being asked (in terms of permanency and protection)
- Analysis of family dynamics, insight of family members into possible problems, family members' support of the idea of reunification
- Impact of placement upon prospective carer and family/household
- Working relationship with LA and other agencies and ability to engage with the LA's care plan and to keep information confidential
- Compatibility of child(ren) with any pets in the prospective placement
- A list of positive and risk factors

4.7 Viability Assessments and the Social Worker's Evidence Template

The most recent version of the Social Workers Evidence Template, Ministry of Justice, February 2016, usefully outlines areas to be considered in a viability assessment. Although it has not been formally adopted by some Welsh local authorities, it provides useful guidance:

'Section 6: Analysis of the evidence of wider family and friends capability

6.1 Analysis of the evidence of wider family and friends capability to meet each child's needs, including analysis of the evidence of any capability gap and whether/how this can be bridged in the child's timescale.

Key considerations for a viability assessment

1. The genogram and ecomap should routinely identify those relatives who are already protective contacts for the child. Both the genogram and the ecomap should be comprehensive and inclusive.
2. Risky contacts should be excluded from consideration through a robust filtering process

This prima facie viability – for being a permanent carer – should be extended by three further tests – before a full assessment is carried out.

3. The three additional viability tests are:
 - a) That the carer understands in broad terms the needs of the child subject to proceedings
 - b) That the carer understands the level and type of care the child will need throughout their childhood as a consequence of their experiences
 - c) That the carer expresses an authentic willingness to be part of the team around the child until matters are fully resolved.'

4.8 The Analysis of Viability Assessments

The following domains are considered as being the most important to consider within the final analysis at the end of the viability assessment process:

1. The risk posed to the child if placed with prospective carers, both in respect of the carer's capacity to protect the child from any harm posed by parents and any harm arising from the care provided by the prospective carers themselves
2. An ability to work with the local authority to deliver the care plan for the child
3. An ability to start to see the child's needs separately from the needs of the parents
4. Can any gap in capacity be addressed by the provision of training and/or support, within the timeframe for the child?

5.0 FULL ASSESSMENTS OF PROSPECTIVE KINSHIP FOSTER CARERS

A good assessment needs to:

- evaluate, evidence and balance the strengths, vulnerabilities and risks of a placement and its appropriateness for the child/ren in question;
- inform, educate and prepare carers for the task which lies ahead, both immediately and in the longer term;
- develop viable plans for contact with parents, siblings, both sides of the extended family and significant others;
- identify the support needs of both child and carer and how those could be met.

The following points are taken from a Practice Tool prepared by Professor Joan Hunt (Hunt, J. (2015) Assessing and Supporting Family and Friends Care, Research in Practice. The challenges for a kinship assessment are:

- establishing trust and rapport with carers who may have negative views of social workers or are defensive and fear losing the child;
- gaining an in depth understanding of the background/life story of the prospective carers
- working with carers who may understand the need for assessment but not for such extensive investigation;
- assessing the capacity to protect of carers who may not have been fully aware of the extent of the family's problems and need time and help to come to terms with what has happened and deal with their own feelings of guilt, shame, anger and loss;
- assessing complex dynamics across the whole family system;
- helping carers achieve a realistic understanding of the potential challenges and impact on their lives;
- identifying both immediate and longer term support needs;
- completing the assessment within short, and in care proceedings, often truncated time-scale.

Professor Joan Hunt goes on to quote:

'A further challenge is conducting a robust assessment which is also a more positive, supportive, and less alienating experience for carers than has often been reported (Doolan et al, 2004; Farmer and Moyers, 2008; Hunt et al, 2008; Wade et al, 2014). To this end it is argued that assessments should be conducted collaboratively, in a spirit of enquiry, treating carers with respect and sensitivity, valuing their unique

insights and knowledge and focusing on family strengths and the assistance needed to address any deficits (Doolan et al, 2004; Hunt, 2009; Pitcher, 2001; Simmonds, 2011). It cannot be over-emphasised that assessment needs to be grounded in an understanding that it is not a matter of taking a snapshot picture of the carers' current abilities but an interactive, dynamic, process during which change may occur in the carer, the social worker's perspective on the carer, or both. Making preparation an integral part of assessment assists this process and is likely to lead to better outcomes for children and reduced strain on carers (Wade et al, 2014). If handled sensitively it may also allow some carers to take the difficult decision not to proceed.'

When researching special guardianship assessments, Wade (2014) reported that while most special guardians felt that the assessment was sufficiently thorough in terms of assessing their suitability, some suggested that the process had been a bit one-way and that social workers hadn't given them the opportunity to consider the implications of the order for them.

5.1 Assessing a proposed carer's capacity to meet the child's needs and their capacity to change

The following domains are regarded as the most critical.

1. The prospective carer 's' history, personal attributes and attitudes

- Their own background and experience of being a child/attachment patterns. Their capacity to reflect on this
- Current and past relationships
- Their own experience of being a parent to their own children. An ability to accept where things may have gone wrong in their own parenting (if it did)
- Any local authority's worries for those children/ evidence of change
- Their relationship with any children of their own – do they intend to have more? If single might they enter into a new relationship?
- Their capacity to put the child(ren) first in their thoughts and identify the child(ren)'s current and future needs
- Their resilience/stickability during challenges in the past
- Are they aspirational for their family members? Will they be for this child?
- Look to evidence and not just self reporting; a range of sources needs to be used to triangulate the evidence

2. The child/carer relationship

- Take account of research showing that placements with grandparents create more placement stability (Farmer and Moyers, 2008 and Hunt et al, 2008) and that a pre-existing relationship is a protective factor (Wade et al, 2014)
- Observe the relationship (if there is one). Spend time with carer and child together
- Undertake direct work with the child – what is his or her understanding of and feelings toward the proposed placement (age appropriate)?

- If there is no relationship consider introducing the child to the carer
- Is there enough capacity on their behalf to build on the relationship/love the child?
- Plan introductions before any final order is made and consider using the menu of orders available to the court (ie under interim care order or short term child arrangements order before care order or special guardianship order made) to move the child to the placement before the final order is made.

3. The carer's understanding of the task and impact upon their life

- It may take time to gain an understanding of what has happened and what is required
- Recognise strengths and work on those
- An acceptance of what has happened and the effect upon the child
- Being able to agree and work with a 'script' in relation to life story telling
- Being able to work with the local authority in telling difficult information and help the child make sense of their own life
- What is their understanding of the nature of permanence? Being able to accept the implications for their life course (ie this two year old will be with you when they are 7,12, 17 etc)
- Being able to see another's perspective
- Will they become a 'parent' – how do they see their role in relation to birth parents
- Managing contact and any potential conflict connected with relationships with the birth family
- Ability to accept support and ask for it when needed
- A proper understanding of the differences between being a foster carer and a special guardian or having a child arrangements order

- If they are to be a foster carer, an understanding of the expectation of the local authority (reviews/delegated authority/recordings etc)

4. Motivation and commitment

- The carer needs to understand why they are motivated to put themselves forward. Is it obligation, guilt or pressure from parents? If so, that will have implications for the child. The motivation needs to be, or become, free standing, unconditional and in relation to the child him or herself. Do they love this child/have the capacity to love?
- Carer needs to understand the concept of permanence for this child (as above)
- Carer needs to understand that the child's experience will have an impact on the child's behaviour and/or development
- How the carer's age and/or health affects their ability to provide care both now and in the future – linked to the concept of permanency
- Contingency plans

5. Family dynamics

If it is a joint assessment, ensure that both prospective carers are assessed, as one may prove to be a more, or less, protective factor than the other

- Look at the family history
- An understanding that there will be a shift in priorities and, in the short term at least, other family members' needs, including children, will need to come second to the child placed. Consider the feelings of/effect upon existing children in the proposed placement
- Observe the whole family together/hold a family meeting. Observe whole family system and, where

necessary, look at how the family could be helped to work better

- There needs to be an acceptance, by all significant family members, of the history leading to the child being cared for by the wider family. This should not be critical, but be honest and non judgemental
- What family support will the carers be able to rely on?
- Need to triangulate the evidence/test out the information provided

6. Relationships with birth parent(s)

The text in italics below is taken from Cheshire East Borough Council v PN & Ors (Flawed Local Authority Assessment) [2017] EWFC 20

'One of the key issues (if not the key issue) to be addressed when assessing the viability of family members is the ability of each of those adults to protect the child against the identified risk of harm'.

An assessment of risk/ability to protect is not about "road safety, stairgates and a loud Jack Russell" but about "the central question of the ability of the (prospective carers) to protect the child against the clearly identified risk of harm presented by (parent(s))"

Prospective carers must know the "precise nature of the risk of harm" and "each of those being addressed must be the subject of a comprehensive evaluation of their understanding of and attitude towards that risk in order to establish the extent to which they have, or do not have, that capacity."

- The child needs to know that the carer is able to protect him or her from the birth parents
- Is the carer able to resist a collusive relationship with birth parents?

- Is everyone clear about the benefits/disadvantages of continued contact with birth parents?
- Will they be able to place restrictions on/facilitate contact?
- Will birth parents accept them becoming a 'parent' to the child?

5.3 Obtaining enough time, within proceedings, to be able to undertake a robust kinship assessment

A number of serious case reviews have highlighted the problems in undertaking assessments that are lacking in robustness. Although these are all SCR's related to children who were killed or seriously assaulted by their special guardians, the same principles apply to the assessment of kinship foster carers:

Keegan Downer (Birmingham), Child A and Child B (Oxfordshire) and Child J (Nottinghamshire), have highlighted the following dangers in relation to the shortness and inadequacy of a kinship assessment:

- No pre existing relationship with the child(ren) (all three SCR's). The carers identified were remotely related to the children and did not know them
- The need for a robust assessment where risk factors are not underplayed and lack of child care experience is not underestimated, when the children concerned have specific and additional needs (ie the question needs to be asked 'can this person meet this child's needs?') (all three SCR's)
- The need for an enhanced DBS check (with Keegan and J there was no DBS check on file and both would have contained relevant information)
- The need for robust references from more than one

source and the referees interviewed (J)

- Too much reliance on self reporting in the assessment (Keegan and J). Not enough triangulation of evidence/ reflection in the assessment
- Underestimating the impact of carer's past experiences as a child (all three SCR's)

Of course a fostering assessment requires an enhanced DBS check (and this is now also the case with the Special Guardianship (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018, where an enhanced DBS check is required). However, the points made in relation to the referees, relying on self reporting and consideration of past childhood experiences are very relevant to a fostering assessment.

Timescales

The current regulatory framework acknowledges that assessments for the suitability to become foster carers require a reasonable period of time.

Regulation 26 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 allows for the responsible authority to approve a relative, friend or other person connected with the child as a local authority foster carer for a temporary period not exceeding 16 weeks.

However, the pursuit of the 26 week timetable imposed by the Public Law Outline, and, in some cases, the pursuit of the completion of a set of care proceedings in an even shorter period, has led to practitioners reporting that they are being directed by the courts to undertake assessments in very short periods of time.

How can practitioners avoid, if possible, being provided with a timescale that does not allow for a full and robust assessment?

The case for obtaining sufficient time for an assessment

If early identification has been a priority, with family group conferences or meetings taking place, that may prevent the sudden appearance of an unexpected family member or friend. However, even with the best practice and early intervention, possible kinship carers can, and do, 'emerge' late in proceedings.

In *Re S (A Child)* [2014] EWCC B44 (Fam), the President held that a context in which an extension of the 26 week timetable may be necessary is where 'a realistic alternative family carer emerges late in the day'. The court, therefore, has the capacity to weigh the disadvantages for the child of delay against the need for a robust assessment of a realistic family carer.

In the more recent case of *Re P-S (Children)* [2018] EWCA Civ 1407, the President, again in the context of a special guardianship assessment, held

'There can be – there must be – no question of abbreviating what is necessary in terms of fair process, and necessary to achieve the proper evaluation and furthering of the child's welfare, by concern about the possible impact of such necessary delay upon the court's performance statistics.'

What to consider?

Practitioners need to be mindful of the following possible implications for short assessment periods and bring these factors to the attention of the court where appropriate:

- 1) An assessment of a proposed family member's capacity to care for a young relative for the rest of their minority is one of the most complex of all assessments – far more complex than mainstream fostering and adoption assessments, which are rarely completed in less than six months.
- 2) There is little or no time for family members to assimilate information and reflect on it if timescales are too short.

- 3) The relationship the assessor necessarily has to build with the carer cannot be created within a short and pressurised time frame. In a good reflective assessment process the work is based on the trusting relationship developed between the assessor and the assessed so that the carer can explore their feelings of doubt, anger and anxiety over the proposed placement, as well as look forward to the positives. A shortened assessment that does not have time for both support and challenge will be a weak assessment.
- 4) Checks and references are compromised by a short assessment. Practitioners tend to wait to interview referees later in the process where vulnerabilities may have emerged and they can be tested out with the referees. If interviews have to take place as soon as the assessment is started or shortly after, this is another safeguard lost.
- 5) Family members who put themselves forward as carers are sometimes involved with the reasons for and circumstances surrounding the child's removal. This does not mean that they are unable to provide good enough care, but there needs to be the opportunity to demonstrate a capacity to change. A short assessment denies some prospective carers with that opportunity to make the necessary adjustments to lifestyle or parenting pattern.

If a practitioner has not had the opportunity to undertake a full and robust an assessment in the circumstances and in the time provided, then they should identify in their evidence where the shortfalls lie and the possible implications for making an order for the placement of a child under these circumstances. Detailed reasons should be given to the court as to why a full assessment cannot be undertaken in the timescale, what needs to be completed and a reasonable timeframe given for the completion. It is then for the court to decide whether to grant the extra time requested.

6.0 THE ROLE OF FOSTER PANEL AND DECISION MAKER

Under the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, as amended, it is for the panel and decision maker to make a recommendation and decision respectively as to whether a prospective kinship carer is suitable to be a foster carer for a particular child or sibling group. This recommendation and decision is based upon all the checks, including an enhanced DBS check and references required by the regulations and a detailed assessment from the medical adviser, based on information from the applicants themselves and their GP.

The process of making a decision whether to approve an applicant as a foster carer is subject to the guidance set out in the case *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* [2009] EWHC 328 (Admin).

The regulations do not differentiate between mainstream and kinship foster carer approval. The terms of approval remain the same – that under regulation 28 there has to be a completed assessment of suitability and the foster panel has to consider the application.

The difference for kinship foster carers lies in the terms of that approval. Under reg 28 the fostering service provider must decide on terms of approval and specify, in writing, those terms of approval, which will be that they are approved as suitable to be a foster carer for a named child/sibling group.

A concession is given to a kinship foster carer under reg 27 where a foster carer who is a relative of the child may not be deemed as automatically unsuitable if they have been found guilty of a number of offences.

Panels and decision makers struggle with applying the full force of the regulations and scrutiny of 'suitability' for a kinship placement, particularly where the child has already been placed under reg 26 CPPCR(W)R 2015.

Panels and decision makers are helped with this process if they concentrate on the individual needs of the child(ren) concerned, for these carers are only being assessed and approved to care for this particular child. The strengths of the existing relationship, knowledge of and contact with family members and remaining within the wider family, may be balanced against the vulnerabilities of the carers compared with mainstream applicants.

It is possible to apply an amended set of competencies for a kinship foster assessment, which take into account the individual needs of this child as opposed to the needs of a hypothetical looked after child in a particular age range. Competencies are not set down in regulation or guidance and local authorities may devise their own in order to assist assessors, panels and decision makers as to whether this particular carer is suitable as a foster carer for this child/sibling group.

The approval of a kinship carer as a foster carer is an administrative decision – it lies with the local authority, not the family court. However, the case of *re T (A Child)* [2018] EWCA Civ 650 held that, although the court cannot dictate to the local authority what its care plan should be, the court can expect a high level of respect (by the local authority) for the court's assessment of risk and welfare, leading in almost every case to those assessments being put into effect (that is approval of an applicant kinship foster carer if the court assesses favourably). Also the local authority cannot refuse to provide lawful and reasonable services that would be necessary to support the court's decision (that the applicant is suitable) if by doing so it would either breach the article 8 rights of the family concerned or its decision making process was unlawful on public law grounds (i.e. if it was unreasonable not to provide a particular level of service).

7.0 PREPARATION, TRAINING AND SUPPORT

7.1 Pre-approval training

One of the major challenges in assessing family members as kinship carers is providing the level of training required to equip them to become suitable to be approved as foster carers under the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, within far shorter timescales than those approved as mainstream foster carers. Practitioners need to be creative in thinking how the rudiments of a preparation course can be shared with prospective kinship carers. Assessment tools already used by practitioners in assessing mainstream carers may easily be adapted for use with prospective kinship carers.

7.2 Post-approval training

Should post approval training be undertaken along with mainstream foster carers? Some kinship carers' experience of integrated training is positive, with mainstream carers embracing the family circumstances and providing positive reinforcement. Other experiences have not been so positive, with carers feeling judged as family members rather than accepted as foster carers. Some carers experience meeting together with mainstream foster carers as 'overwhelming'.

This does not mean that it is either desirable (or indeed feasible) to provide completely separate and discrete training and support for kinship carers, but integration needs to be managed carefully, with support at the start built in, and perhaps some education provided to mainstream carers in preparation for mixed groups.

What doesn't work:

- The word 'training' itself can be off putting – can another name be identified?
- Attending a training event can be very intimidating, particularly if a carer feels anxious about being judged
- A misunderstanding of what training is for – 'I have brought up my children and didn't need training for that'
- Lack of time/other commitments/geographical distance from the training venue

What does work:

- support events
- Peer mentoring
- Informal one to one training
- Some training needs to be for kinship carers only (If training is to be shared with mainstream carers, kinship carers need to be teamed up together for the training)
- Online training specifically for kinship foster carers would be an excellent component of a training package and could be used to provide audio as well as written information.

Good Practice

The Top Six Training Topics for Kinship Carers

Kinship carers need to be clear that the following training (plus other areas not identified here) are relevant to them, will be time well spent and will provide useful information, as well as the opportunity to meet socially with other carers.

1 Attachment and trauma and the rudiments of PACE.

Understanding why children behave in a particular way and strategies for dealing with the behaviour (this would probably be best undertaken for kinship carers in a discrete session as discussion will inevitably turn to the trauma that the child has suffered). This is a topic, not just a day's training – the subject needs to be looked at in different stages of development and consider secondary trauma

2 Life journey work – narrative/answering difficult questions, particularly when you as a carer may be part of that family narrative

3 Understanding the system:

- The legal framework for fostering
- Attending meetings
- The respective roles of the child's social worker and the fostering support worker
- Delegated authority
- Safe care/allegations/disclosures+ safeguarding
- Recording

4 Understanding family dynamics – This was a topic that the grandparents group felt to be most important. To include:

- Managing contact
- The importance of recording in this context

5 The way forward – looking at the pros and cons of an SGO compared with remaining as a foster carer for a looked after child

6 Understanding adolescence – Confidence in Care (to share with mainstream carers but to have more than one kinship carer)

7.3 Training on a Regional Basis

Through the auspices of the NFF, local authorities may decide to provide kinship carer training on a regional basis.

The benefits are:

- Greater/more timely availability
- Greater attendance and so better value
- Better use of expertise/expensive external trainers

The disadvantages are:

- Geography/travel time
- Not building up local networks (for informal support)

Support (and some training) for kinship foster carers alongside special guardians can also be very positive – there may be a different legal framework but the task is very similar.

7.4 Support for Carers

The single most important factor highlighted by carers is the attitude of workers. One carer said of her support worker 'it was the way she put across the requirement for assessment and DBS checks to care for the family ... she understood my dynamics ... she was a shoulder to cry on.'

In order to be able to support family placements, child care social workers need specific training and support in working collaboratively and empathically with kinship carers. Family placement social workers can often take the lead with this

This attitude of collaboration, empathy and transparency needs to start at an early stage, with clear information being given at any family group meeting/family meeting and for a member of the family placement team to be available at the meeting to answer questions.

The provision of easy to read and appropriate written information, from an early stage. A series of leaflets could provide the right information at the right time. These leaflets could include a section on 'frequently asked questions'. Conwy has a leaflet for kinship carers.

Good Practice

Neath Port Talbot has a specialist support worker for kinship carers. They also provide, where appropriate, a separate social worker providing support for kinship carers who have a current placement under reg 26 CPPCR(W)R and who is separate from the fostering assessment social worker.

Once into placement:

- The provision of informal support groups carers. Again these could be separate or combined with mainstream carers or provided with special guardians
- Out of hours emergency support (should be provided already?)
- Consideration given to practical support to be able to attend (travel/child care/timing of groups)
- Activities (parties/picnics/pantomime trips) are popular support activities
- The provision of psychological advice and assistance apart from CAMHS
- The provision of support groups for children looked after by family members
- A recognition that adolescence brings its challenges to all families and that support needs to be accessible throughout the child's minority
- Help to access counselling services for carers themselves
- Access to advocacy services

7.5 Support on a Regional Basis

Benefits:

- Enables a greater 'menu' of activities by sharing expertise across the region
- Avoid duplication/provide critical numbers for running schemes with very small authorities
- Provides links with wider community (eg other BME carers/LGBT carers)
- A greater opportunity for sharing best practice



8. National Training Framework

Developing a National Learning and Development Framework for post-approval foster carer training



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the key recommendations arising out of the Phase One report was to:

'Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers.'

In 2017 the Fostering Network and AFA Cymru were commissioned to develop a framework and standards for post-approval foster carer training. The National Fostering Framework strategic steering group agreed their joint proposal and a National technical working group was established to take this work forward, based upon further consultation and engagement with foster carers, care experienced young people, practitioners and other staff within the sector.

The draft framework was designed to reflect the key findings of the Scoping Report, the revised Health and Social Care Induction Framework and the proposed new Fostering Regulations. It was also recognized that the training framework for foster carers will need to have opportunities for foster carers to train alongside staff in Children's Services and colleagues in health and education.

A national steering group was established to act as a critical friend in reviewing and guiding the development of the draft post approval training framework, and share information that to guide the consultation process which included regional engagement events, national forums and an online questionnaire.

The draft framework has been largely endorsed through the consultation process and the finalised version is presented at the end of this report. We have called it a Learning and Development framework to reflect the widely held view that a range of face to face or self-guided learning methods should be recognised as evidence, not just attending formal training events.

The key findings were that a tiered framework is appropriate, but this needs to be integrated with foster carers professional development plans and be driven by the needs of the child in placement. The delivery of training needs to be tailored to foster carers child care commitments and the needs of working carers. Implementation of the framework will require it be embedded within the process of assessment, approval, supervision and annual review.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 National Fostering Framework (NFF) report: Phase One

A strong message arising from the National Fostering Framework Phase One consultation programme <http://bit.ly/phaseonereport> (mainly from foster carers and staff within the sector) was for the need to have more common and consistent policies across Wales. Post approval training and the support that foster carers are afforded was cited by many as a significant issue. Consequently, one of the key recommendations arising out of the Phase One report was to:

‘Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers.’

A result of the work of the NFF, it has been acknowledged that post approval training should at least be considered at a national, regional and local level.

1.2 National Fostering Framework strategic steering group

In 2017, the National Fostering Framework strategic steering group agreed a joint proposal from the Fostering Network and AFA Cymru to develop a framework and standards for post-approval foster carer training. The Fostering Network and AFA Cymru, were asked to take the lead role in this work given their Wales wide brief, their complementary skills and abilities, and common approach to promoting positive outcomes for fostered children and their foster carers.

It was agreed that this work will not propose the setting of best practice standards specifically for kinship carers as this has already been undertaken in Phase Two of NFF. However, the work being undertaken on Kinship Care will need to take into account the national training framework and the consistent learning outcomes.

1.3 National Technical Working Group

A National technical working group was established to take this work forward, based upon further consultation and engagement with foster carers, care experienced young people, practitioners and other staff within the sector. The group agreed the following delivery plan

- Establish a reference group with representation from each of the regions.
- Consult widely with foster carers, young people who are or have been fostered, practitioners, other staff within the sector and colleagues in health and education.
- Agree, develop and draft a proposed training framework by the end of the phase three.
- Work with the regions to develop regional implementation plans.
- Produce a report of the findings and report back to NFF Strategic Steering Group.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Current training requirements

In order to become approved as a foster carer, all successful applicants must receive pre-approval training. Currently this is not standardised across Wales, but the majority of fostering services use or adapt The Fostering Network's The Skills to Foster™ pre- approval training programme. However, expectations regarding the ongoing learning and development needs of foster carers, once approved, remain inconsistent and unclear across Wales. Whilst induction standards exist, these are not currently mandatory and consequently not used by all fostering agencies. Social Care Wales have recently revised the Health and Social Care Induction Framework which is not mandatory for foster carers, but the revised framework as well as the revised qualification framework should inform their post approval training programme. <https://socialcare.wales/collections/all-wales-induction-framework-resources>

The absence of standardised formal post-approval standards has resulted in the provision and takes up of learning and development by foster carers being varied and inconsistent across Wales.

2.2 The Fostering Network Scoping Report on the training needs of the fostering workforce in Wales (March 2017)

The Fostering Network undertook a scoping exercise to identify the training needs of the fostering workforce in Wales arising from legislation, policy and practice requirements. Consultation with foster carers and staff from the statutory, independent and third sectors identified some key themes

- There is a need a comprehensive post-approval training programme for newly approved carers .
- This should be followed by advanced training professional development opportunities for experienced carers.
- Attachment theory was identified as a thread that should run through post approval programmes.
- The other core training topics identified were safeguarding (safer caring and digital safety), challenging behaviour.
- Training as part of a cohort provides foster carers with additional support through learning from others and sharing experiences in a safe and structured environment
- Joint training for foster carers with children's social workers, adoption teams, education and health professionals (the team around the child) is a key requirement.
- Training is needed for the whole foster family, including sons and daughters of foster carers, and should be integrated with wider support.
- The quality of training provision varies widely across the sector and there is a need for quality standards.

- While all foster carers received standardised pre-approval training as part of the approval process, there is no clear professional development route for newly approved foster carers.
- Experienced foster carers require training at an advanced level and to develop their skills as mentors or ambassadors

The report concluded that the absence of standardised formal post-approval standards has resulted in the provision and take up of learning and development by foster carers being varied and inconsistent across Wales. There is a consensus among local authority, independent and charitable fostering providers that a comprehensive post-approval training programme for newly approved carers is needed. This should form part of a training framework to provide learning and development opportunities for all foster carers whatever their level of experience.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Draft Framework

The draft framework was designed to reflect the key findings of the Scoping Report, the revised Health and Social Care Induction Framework and the proposed new Fostering Regulations.

It was also recognized that the training framework for foster carers will need to have opportunities for foster carers to train alongside staff in Children's Services and colleagues in health and education.

The draft framework is underpinned by a set of principles and standards to promote consistency and professional development opportunities for all foster carers regardless of their experience. The Skills to Foster™ pre-approval programme is used consistently across Wales, and accepted as Level 1 of a foster carers learning and development pathway, which we built upon to form the tiered framework

- Level 2 – Induction
- Level 3 – Consolidation
- Level 4 – Experienced
- Level 5 – Mentor

Each level contains a suite of core training courses for all foster carers, including kinship, respite and special guardians. Every course has 3-4 learning objectives which need to be consistent, regardless of who delivers the training or how the learning intervention undertaken. the learning is undertaken. The learning outcome provides a consistent measurable goal "the foster carer will be able to....." that can be evidenced through assessment.



3.2 National Steering Group

A national steering group was established to act as a critical friend in reviewing and guiding the development of the draft post approval training framework, and share information to guide the consultation process. The group met in November 2017 with representation from across Wales

- Social Care Wales
- Regional leads
- Fostering team managers
- Local Authority Training officers
- The Fostering Network's foster carer advisory group members

3.3 The Fostering Network's Forums

The Fostering Network hosts a number of National forums which meet on regular basis and we used these as a mechanism for consulting with professional groupings

- Local authority team managers
- Independent fostering agency managers
- Confidence in Care board members
- Training officers from statutory, independent and charitable agencies
- Foster Carer advisory group members
- Associate Trainers

3.4 Regional Engagement Events

We engaged with the Regional Fostering Managers to organise a series of events taking place in each of the six regions during February and March 2018. These were attended by Team Managers, Training Officers, Supervising Social Workers, Foster Carers and Panel Members. The key questions we asked people to consider at these events were

Training framework

- What is a realistic amount of training for carers to complete each year?
- How many levels or tiers is appropriate?
- What can be delivered regionally and what should remain local?

Core content

- Is the importance of attachment and safeguarding as core themes reflected?
- How can we ensure more experienced carers have opportunities that stretch them?
- Should course be delivered in a prescribed order?

Delivery

- What are the benefits/disadvantages of cohort models?
- What training should be attended with other professional groups?
- What are the best times, and how long for each session?

Recognition and application

- What other learning methods should we be including?
- How can learning be assessed and credited (including prior learning)?
- How do we integrate with assessment, supervision and annual review?

3.5 Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was designed using Survey Monkey and was distributed via the Fostering Network and AFA Cymru to all members of The Fostering Network in Wales, Fostering Team Managers, IRO's, Training Officers and Associate Trainers. (Refer to appendix 3) The key questions we asked were

The post approval training programme

- What is a realistic amount of training for foster carers to complete in a year?
- How long should training sessions last?
- Should they be delivered in a prescribed order?
- What are the best times of day to deliver training for foster carers?
- Should the framework be a mandatory requirement?

Delivery models

- What should be delivered locally and regionally?
- What training delivery models would you like to be made available?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of foster carers attending training with other professionals?

Recognition and application of learning

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of accrediting post approval training?
- What methods should be counted as learning hours within the framework?
- How should we recognize and evidence prior learning and learning that is not classroom based?
- How can the framework be integrated with foster carers assessment, supervision and annual reviews

3.6 The third NFF National Conference Making it Happen, March 2018

We presented the key findings from consultation activities during two workshops at the conference and took the opportunity to ask participants to consider implementation issues such as the development of regional training and links to Social Care Wales Health and Social Care Induction Framework and the qualifications that are under development. The participants were local authority, independent and charitable fostering managers, practitioners and foster carers.

We asked them to consider

- Recognition and application of Learning
- Local, Regional and National Working



4.0 KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Themes from the Fostering Network's National Forums

The Framework

- Six courses per year is an achievable number, but we need to recognise other learning methods to cover all the required subject knowledge
- The framework needs flexibility and the stages should not be time constrained
- Learning should be driven by the foster carers personal development plan, which should be determined by the needs of the children placed with them
- The order of courses depends on child's needs and carers previous experience
- There is a challenge to ensuring consistency when anyone can deliver the training, regardless of qualifications and experience
- Experienced carers need to re-visit and refresh their learning – new legislation, research, practice examples
- There should be incentives to attend and sanctions for non- attendance , using annual reviews as a mechanism to achieve this

Content

- Digital safety , Child exploitation and challenging behaviour should appear earlier in the framework
- There needs to be more emphasis on mental health issues, including self-harm and suicide
- The framework should be simplified to focus on core subjects

Delivery

- Training should be delivered between 10am and 2pm, with an additional evening session for working carers
- E learning and blended learning are required methods , but are not a substitute for group work
- Supervising Social Workers should be attending training with foster carers

Recognition of learning

- There is a need for a standardised national tool for supervising social workers to use when developing a foster carers professional development plan
- Supervising Social Workers have the vital role in assessing and evaluating learning
- Accreditation is not seen as realistic or desirable
- We need formats for measuring learning through one-to-one mentoring sessions e.g. with play therapists
- Learning also occurs through supervision session discussions
- We should measure hours of learning rather than the number of courses attended

4.2 Themes from the Regional Engagement Events

The Framework

- It should be called a Learning and Development Framework as it needs to incorporate a range of learning methods
- There should be menu of options to be chosen from according to the child's needs
- Review the foster carers training plans when placements are made
- The tiered approach may not be accessible enough for all carers e.g. non-academic people
- A payment for skills system will be required

Content

- Core general training is included but carers will need additional training
- It's the right spread of subjects – but how do you fit this much learning in?
- There should be more on the importance of transitions
- Therapeutic parenting training is essential for all
- Fostering changes should also be available for all foster carers
- Attachment training is needed before the first placement
- More emphasis on carers own wellbeing needed
- We need good quality materials for carers to use after training

Delivery

- E-learning options needed in rural areas such as Mid and West Wales
- Not just the main carer, but the secondary carer should complete the framework too
- Specialist training could be delivered regionally through an annual programme but core training needs to be delivered locally
- Joint training is needed to support partnership working/ team around the child
- It's difficult for rural areas to deliver training regionally due to geography and travel issues
- Induction training should ideally be attended before the first placement

Recognition and application of learning

- Supervision is key to embedding the framework in practice
- Embed in assessment, approval, supervision and annual review cycle
- Carers should have a Continuing Professional Development file from assessment and approval stage onwards

- Use a range of sources of evidence e.g. watching TV programmes, reading books
- Support groups are also a source of learning

4.3 Themes from the Questionnaire

The respondents:

- 59 responses
- 88% worked for a local authority
- 88% were foster carers (others were Team Managers, Supervising Social Workers, Associate Trainer and Head of Service)
- 41% had been fostering for between one and five years
- 36% had been fostering between five and seven years

The Framework

- 42% said that three to five courses was a realistic number of courses to attend during the first year of fostering but 32% thought that six-eight courses was achievable
- 77% thought that the framework should be mandatory requirement

Content

- 95% agreed that the framework reflects the importance of understanding attachment and transitions
- 94% felt that the framework reflected the underlying ethos of providing a safe and nurturing environment
- 58% thought that training courses should be attended in a prescribed order e.g. child development, attachment, behaviour then safer caring

Delivery

- 90% said that training should be delivered between 10am and 2.30pm to fit in with school hours
- 84% wanted online training options
- 49% said that evening training was required for working carers, while 28% also wanted training on the weekends

- 63% thought that foster carers should attend training in cohorts
- Two thirds of the respondents wanted peer mentoring, buddying and self-study to be recognised as learning within the framework

Recognition and application of learning

- Supporting documents will be required for implementation. 78% wanted an easy read version, 72% would like a fact sheet and 61% said that a children's version should be available

4.4 Themes from the March 2018 NFF Making it Happen National Conference

Recognition and Application of Learning

- The framework should specify hours of learning, not training attended
- It is important for experienced foster carers to re-visit subjects
- Evidencing transfer of skills through written work or test, but we need to ensure this doesn't depend on a foster carer having a high level of literacy
- It's part of the supervising social workers role to establish the relevance of prior learning
- Links to needs of the child in placement, registration and the Qualifications Credit Framework
- Use 360 feedback model, reflective journals and learning portfolios
- Need to capture information during assessment e.g. set homework
- Support foster carers to identify their own learning outcomes and measure the impact of training
- Carers may not feel valued without a formal professional qualification
- Challenge of evidencing experiences rather than qualifications

- We should measure improved outcomes for children as opposed to the number of training courses attended

Local, Regional and National Working

- Learning needs to be mixed so e-learning and face to face options needed
- This can't be separated from fees and allowances and there needs to be parity
- Rewards should be used to encourage attendance, rather than sanctions
- How do we implement sanctions for non-attendance with kinship carers
- A central learning portal with signposting and further reading
- Infrastructure to support attendance through childcare
- Joint training with social workers and other professionals who also need to evidence continuous learning
- Supervising social workers can provide personalised training
- Difficulty of filling courses delivered locally where there are small numbers of foster carers
- Training should be part of the placement agreement
- Foster carers should be able to influence their local training programmes

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Adopting a National Approach

The need for developing a national post approval training framework was identified by the sector and foster carers as a priority in previous years. The format for the framework proposed through this work was endorsed through consultation across Wales and both professional as and foster carers were consistent in a view that it would be useful. This consultation included fostering services from within the statutory, third and independent sectors, foster carers and a range of other child care professionals.

There was a positive view that a coordinated approach to training across the regions would improve the range and number of training opportunities. Foster carers indicated that they would be willing to travel in order to access the right training at the right time.

A national framework will need to be linked to subsequent developments from Social Care Wales and there needs to be a mechanism to do this.

In addition any framework needs to reflect the end point of the ongoing work about Harmonising Fees and Allowances that is being undertaken as part of the NFF.

Recognising Learning and Development

A framework for post approval learning and development needs to recognise learning through both formal and informal learning opportunities.

- Formal learning opportunities includes face to face training. To be accessible to foster carers formal training needs to be delivered during school hours (10-2). There is also a need for evening and weekend sessions for foster carers who have day-time commitments. Foster carers would welcome more opportunities to attend training alongside other child care professionals.

- Informal training learning includes self-guided learning, learning through consultancy given with respect to the child etc. Good practice ideas and resources could be collated.
- Measuring 'hours of learning' was felt to be more useful than measuring 'days'.

A staged approach was felt to be appropriate. However the Framework needs sufficient flexibility to be integrated with foster carers individual professional development needs, as well as being responsive to the needs of the child in placement

The intention behind the learning and development activity for foster carers is

- to improve placement outcomes for children who are being cared for,
- to ensure the wellbeing of the fostering family
- to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and processes.

In order to do so, there needs to be robust assessment of learning and development needs of the foster family. This needs to be ongoing, and needs to run alongside a process that considers the impact of the learning and development activity when delivering the outcomes stated above.

These processes need to be at the heart of the assessment, approval, supervision and annual review of foster carers. As such they will need to be encapsulated in local processes within fostering services.

Clearly the role of the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) is central to the process of applying learning and there may be additional training implications to prepare them for this role.

More work is required to develop a directory of good practice ideas, including for example, e-learning opportunities.

Regional working

Developing a coordinated approach to delivering formal training was seen as an opportunity for

- ensuring a consistent offer is made to foster carers – it was clear that training opportunities are inconsistent across different local authorities. Where tis is poor foster carers spoke about a negative impact on their skills, confidence and ‘buy in’ to the fostering service. There are clearly benefits in terms of improving placement outcomes, alongside stability and carer retention and well being.
- getting the right training at the right time if programs were available regionally.
- Providing more economic and regular methods of delivering specialist training e.g. parent and child.

There are implications for how foster carer training is organised, publicised and booked if a regional approach is to be adopted.

Links to Fees and Allowances

This work is being undertaken alongside a parallel NFF workstream looking at whether it is possible to make a proposal about Harmonising Fees and Allowances. When the outcome of this work is clear there may be an additional task to ensure that it is clearly linked to a national approach to post approval learning and development.

The issue of rewards and sanctions was raised at every consultation. Non-attendance at training was a common issue which needs to be addressed. Whilst many people felt there should be rewards (through skills payments), and sanctions (for not engaging with learning and development activity and non-attendance) further work is required.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Feedback from this work would indicate that there is an interest in continuing the work to develop and embed a national approach to the post approval learning and development of foster carers.

In order to progress this further work needs to include

- The development of a toolkit to ensure a consistent approach to recognition of prior learning and recording the application of learning
- Ensuring that the framework is mapped to HSCIF and new qualifications framework being developed by SCW
- Developing learning outcomes for specialist practice areas, such as parent and child etc.
- We would recommend that expressions of interest for piloting a regional approach to learning and development within one of the NFF regions are asked for. An evaluation the subsequent learning could inform decisions made in other regions.
- Regional managers to consider the outcomes of this work when developing their regional action plans.
- Work is undertaken to collate information about e-learning opportunities.

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9. Harmonising Fees and Allowances

A First Thoughts Paper

Harmonisation of Foster Care Fees and Allowances

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- To inform stakeholders of the NFF work programme;
- To identify the key challenges in bringing about greater harmonisation;
- To identify the current regional picture across Wales;
- To identify the national minimum allowances across the UK;
- To identify the key principles of any new payment structure for carers;
- To share one local authority's experience of reviewing their foster care payments;
- Propose a Toolkit approach for authorities wishing to introduce changes to their payment structure;
- To consider savings and ISA's for young people;
- To recommend the next steps.

2.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN IN PHASE ONE AND TWO

During Phase One, 2015-16, an extensive consultation and engagement programme was undertaken with all major stakeholders. One of the key messages emerging from this, from both foster carers and local authority fostering staff was that the payments to foster carers needed to be included in the overall NFF work programme. From the outset it was acknowledged that to achieve greater harmonisation in foster carer payments across Wales was going to prove one of our greatest challenges. Not to make efforts to move to greater harmonisation would be to ignore the 'elephant in the room'.

During Phase Two, 2016-17, The Fostering Network (TFN) were commissioned to undertake a mapping exercise of every local authority's foster care allowances and fees. This was the first time that an all Wales picture of each local authority's foster care payments had been undertaken. Prior to this mapping exercise taking place, this information was not accessible or easily available to stakeholders.

This mapping exercise did not include the payments to Kinship Carers. This work has been undertaken by AFA Cymru who has a lead role in the work on Kinship Care.

When foster carers are asked about what they would like to see changed, to improve the lives of the children they care for, a common theme was the need for proper financial support, to enable them to focus on caring for children and not worry about their financial situation. Some speak of feeling pressurised to take part-time jobs, when the needs of the children were such that they felt they should be at home. In addition to adequate allowances and fees, foster carers raised the issue of retainers, holiday pay, sick leave and pensions. Others cite the challenges of not receiving an income, when they encountered periods without children being placed with them and when retainer payments were not made. The 'postcode lottery' regarding the payments carers receive is also frequently stated by them as being unfair and can have an impact on the local authority or the independent fostering agency they first approach if interested in becoming a foster carer.

Each Region was asked to consult with some carers in their region, some of the key messages emerging were:

- The allowances for younger children are adequate to cover the cost of caring for them
- The allowances for older children is sometimes not sufficient
- The payments for the extras- holidays, birthdays, hobbies etc are not sufficient
- The fees are not adequate for any carer needing to give up employment

- Transparency and clarity in any payment system is very important
- Finance matters but it is not the reason why people become carers
- Finance and support are of equal importance
- Foster carers need to feel valued and appreciated and finance is one way of demonstrating this.

These messages are very consistent with what we already know and it is positive to have this re-enforced.



3.0 THE KEY CHALLENGES

- A Competitive Market** – all local authorities are attempting to recruit foster carers within a highly competitive and contentious environment. It is widely acknowledged and evidenced that foster carers do not foster for the fostering agency, whether local authority, third sector or commercial purely based on ‘who pays the most’ but the financial payments are a factor foster carers consider when applying to become a foster carer. Whilst the payments made to foster carers should be made available by all agencies we know this isn’t as transparent as it could be. As we move to more regional approaches the payments to carers are likely to become more visible. Foster carers have a right to be having access to clear information on the payments made by all fostering agencies.
- Policy Framework** – a review of payments to carers will require consideration of the policy framework for how payments to carers are made. How do carers move from one fee level to another? Is the policy on carers payment based on the skills of carers or the age of the child, or both? Are retainers paid?
- Whole service approach** – it has become evident through this work that decisions on the level of allowances and fees to carers need to be set within a comprehensive review of fostering services, the nature of the relationship between foster carers and the local authority are at the essence of this work.
- WG Guidance on National Minimum Allowances** have been in place since 2011. There is considerable differences between Wales and England and Northern Ireland which are difficult to justify. There is no consistent framework for the payment of fees.
- Resource Implications** – it is recognised that to achieve

greater harmonisation in allowances and fees, for some local authorities will have considerable financial implications for some local authorities.

- Tools, material and time to change** – Introducing a new payment structure for carers for any local authority is likely to be highly sensitive and raise considerable interest. Local authorities will need to consider their capacity to bring about this considerable change.
- Kinship Payments** – any changes to the payment structure for mainstream carers will have implications for payments to kinship carers. These will need to be considered as integral to any changes.

4.0 THE REGIONAL PICTURE

To support the development of the regional work programmes the NFF regional development managers (RDMs) have been collected detailed information on the fees and allowances paid in each region. This regional information helps promote an understanding of the similarities and differences across the local authorities in each region. This analysis will be useful as regions consider moving to regional marketing and recruitment strategies. There is a working assumption that, as a first stage, each region will consider the move towards greater harmonisation, whilst being aware of the developments across other regions and at a national level. This work will be incorporated into each regional work programme.

5.0 THE NATIONAL & UK PICTURE

The National Minimum Allowances were introduced in Wales by the Welsh Government in 2011. They have achieved considerable but not complete harmonisation of allowances. The differences that remain were evidenced in the mapping exercise undertaken by the Fostering Network. The national minimum allowances for the 0-4 age group are higher than those for the 5-10-yr olds and the 11-15-yr olds.

The National Minimum Allowances paid in Wales are higher at every age group with the exception of the 11-15 age groups where they are very similar. The table below shows a considerable difference in the allowances in Wales for the 0-4-yr olds compared to those paid in England and Northern Ireland.

Local Authorities have consistently expressed their concerns regarding the allowances for this age group, particularly considering the challenges in recruiting carers to look after children/ young people 10yrs+

The Table below identifies:

- The adjusted average for Wales shows that this falls somewhere between those paid for South East of England and the Rest of England.
- Most if not all Welsh LA's pay more than English LA's for children under 4. This is not surprising as most local authorities expressed some concern about these payments at the time they were introduced.
- Allowances paid to children 16+ varies quite widely across LA's in Wales, even where higher fees are paid.
- There are significant variations paid by Welsh LA's for all age categories. It would appear that there is a link (not in all cases) to those with higher than NMA paid to there being a lower fee rate paid. As such, it would suggest that LA's may wish to look at the overall remuneration paid to carers (total fee's and allowances) should a harmonise fee rate be introduced.

Summary of foster carer fee rates – 2018/19

Region	Babies	Pre-Primary	Primary	11-15 years	16 +
England Min All (London)	£144	£147	£165	£187	£219
Variance to Ave Wales (Higher fee payers)		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
England Min All (South East)	£138	£142	£158	£179	£211
Variance to Ave Wales (Higher fee payers)		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
England Min All (Rest of England)	£125	£128	£141	£161	£188
Variance to Ave Wales (Higher fee payers)		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A



6.0 PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW PAYMENT STRUCTURE

It has become evident through this work that it is important to achieve greater harmonisation on the principles underpinning any foster carers payment structure as well as the actual allowances and fees. The principles identified below are recommended.

- The national minimum allowance should cover full cost of caring for the child;
- The policy framework should include payments to Kinship Carers/Connected persons;
- There should be transparency and simplicity for carers and staff;
- Payments should be made in a timely fashion;
- Foster Carers should be treated as professionals and given discretion to use the allowance within guidelines;
- The national minimum allowance should include payments for birthday, holidays etc.;
- Retainers should be paid if the carer is available to care for children subject to review;
- Carers should be approved to care for children & young people aged 0-18;
- Any changes considered on a regional level should be made with an awareness of the national picture;
- The Annual Review should consider the payments carers receive, decisions outside of this to be considered by Service/Operational Managers;
- A new payment structure should provide financial protection for existing carers (either for a period of time or for as long as child/young person currently in placement remains with them);

- A fee structure that is simple.

Proposed Fee Structure	
Fee Level	Description
Standard (maybe zero)	Carers not approved to care for any child that may need to be looked after
Tier One (receive a fee)	Carers who wish to place some restriction on the children they care for. This may be because of age, of not wishing to receive emergency placements etc.
Tier Two (receive a higher fee)	Carers who have been approved to care for any child the Local Authority has matched with them.

7.0 ONE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S EXPERIENCE – THE SWANSEA EXPERIENCE

'The statistics said it all'

At the end of the financial year March 2011, the Swansea Child and Family Performance Report conveyed the following figures:

- Total Looked after children population – 580
- Total Looked After children placed in general Foster Care – 313
- 55% of children placed with an Independent Fostering

Provider

- 45% of children placed with in-house foster carers
- 51% of these children placed outside of the LA boundaries

(CCS Mar 2011)

When these figures were reviewed against the earlier records the trend in rising numbers of LAC being placed with IFP's and outside of their home LA was stark. Over half of Swansea's children in foster care were placed outside of their own local authority area. Senior managers from across the service identified that action needed to be taken to reduce this trend, improve outcomes for Looked After Children and create a sustainable service.

Time for Action

A project management approach was taken and a management board was established with the Head of Child and Family Service as the chair. A full review of the fostering service commenced with a focus on the need to organise our services around the needs of our Looked After Children.

The starting point was to review IFP's as a benchmarking tool for our improvement. It was undisputable that they were growing in number and achieving successful carer recruitment. It was clear that a marketplace had been created which Swansea, like many LA's across Wales needed to address to become a serious competitor. We soon discovered that competing for potential foster carers, providing the best quality service to them whilst evidencing best value for the LA was a challenge which required considerable energy and focus if the balance was to be addressed.

Our work developed into two main work streams, recruitment and foster carer finance.

Harmonising Fees and Allowances

The recruitment of quality foster carers was already known to be the essential ingredient to improve service provision. We needed to establish what best practice looked like in recruitment and we achieved this through a secret shopper exercise and analysis. We set about making the changes required to rise to a level of practice in recruitment that excelled our competitors. We developed a business model approach which included responsiveness to enquiries, prompt visits to applicants, team training on achieving customer satisfaction and an overall customer focused approach. The best success came from recognising our unique feature and selling this – We are the Local Authority. Standing alongside this new approach to recruitment was a full redesign of our foster carer payment system based on the research undertaken into our competitors. We learnt that our LA system for payments to foster carers was almost the exact opposite to the payment structures across IFP's.

The table opposite reflects the changes we implemented as a result of our research.



Historical system	Moving forward
A banding system – Foster carers were paid a fee based on a system of six possible rates. All carers started at the lowest fee rate irrelevant of experience prior to applying to foster and were then able to work their way up. On paper this system appeared to create opportunity for carers fees to be linked to their development and growth in skill and task undertaken. However, in reality, we had high numbers of foster carers receiving the top band payment and offering a limited service. This system was the biggest barrier to recruitment of quality Foster Carers and did not attract the already skilled and experienced applicants ready for the challenge of foster caring.	We implemented two fees – Standard and Enhanced. The enhanced fee was set at a rate comparable to our competitors. We were instantly able to compare with the other fostering agencies competing for recruitment. We were also able to offer a fee which would attract skilled applicants, the nurses, teachers and care workers ready for a new challenge but unable to sacrifice their current income levels. Interestingly, the enhanced fee was no more than we had already been paying our top band carers and many of them had received this fee for years. The assumption that length of service equals the highest skill was just turned on its head with positive outcomes. The standard fee was lower and designed to capture carers undertaking a limited task either out of choice or because of limited skills. We designed a system which linked fees to the complexity of task undertaken and created an expectation for personal and professional development across the board.
Bureaucratic evidence system – receipts were requested for everything and to process payments social workers time was spent completing repetitive payment forms. High levels of inconsistency were evident in what, when and who claimed resulting in huge variations in payments across the service.	We set fees and allowances at a rate which ensured all costs were covered and removed the need to collect receipts or provide evidence. We pulled all our various discretionary payment budgets back into one pot. A simplified system for the LA whilst also building trust and respect for Foster Carers as professionals with financial accountability. It also created transparency and equality for every foster carer in the service removing the frequent use of "discretion".
Payments for training – The system included making payments to carers for physically attending training courses.	The new system removed this payment and removed any financial enhancement for completing training. We recognised that every foster carer has unique skills and qualities, be this personal or professional which will support them in their fostering task. We maintained our expectations that Foster Carers should attend training and continue their professional development linking this to maintaining their approval as foster carers. We were also clear that attending a course did not equal a growth in knowledge or skill base.

Harmonising Fees and Allowances

Historical system	Moving forward
Approval Status – we did not link a foster carers fee to their approval status and task. When we reviewed the payments made to all carers our highest paid households were in some cases caring for newborns 0-3 years. They were often carers who had been approved a long time but were very selective about their placement choice refusing to care for some of our more challenging children yet receiving the highest fee level.	We linked our two fees to the task and age of the child a carer was approved to care for. We phased in a recruitment approach to widen the approval statuses of all new carers and offered current carers the option to develop and evidence that they could widen their approval. We knew the service need was greater for children over 11 years so this age bracket was attached to the enhanced fee. We improved our assessment processes to become more robust at supporting and assessing new applicants to care for children aged 0-18.
Retainer payments – these were paid inconsistently and only after a carer had been without any LAC for a period of time.	We introduced a “Guaranteed minimum income” promise. All foster carers would receive their carer fee 52 weeks per year whether a child is placed or not, providing they had a wide approval status, they were available to foster and accepted placements matched to their skills and abilities. This was a big step to take and the financial implications were difficult to predict but the results were what we had hoped. We rarely have carers who are completely empty and if they are it is only a few days before they are utilised. This commitment went a huge way to improving our recruitment and retention without a negative financial impact.
Respite pay – when we looked at the budget for respite we were shocked at how much we were paying and the frequency that LAC were being moved around for this reason.	We wanted to address this because of the impact on the children and the need to provide another option to our carers. We acknowledged the need for a break and designed an alternative option for carers to identify family and friends to be assessed as “significant adults” to provide this support need. In return the carer retained their full fees and allowances and the child stayed within the family reducing disruption and improving stability.

The Result

By the end of the financial year, March 2015, 65% of our children were placed within Foster Swansea, our in-house LA provision. This was a significant achievement, made within stable LAC population numbers and resulting in a drop from 55% to 35% of children placed in Independent Fostering Provider's. Of the new children becoming looked after over the same financial year we reported that 93% of new placement demand was met by Foster Swansea internal carers. From recruitment performance information the figure for the number of enquiries translating into an approved LA foster carer has changed dramatically. A conversion rate of 1 in 174 was reported for the financial year 2010-2011 compared to a conversion rate of 1 in 11 reported at the end of the financial year 2014-2015.

The efficiencies were reported across the whole service and The Child & Family Services Performance Report (March 2015) detailed of a spend difference between 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 of £500,000 savings on IFP placement spend. With a cost difference between IFP placements and Foster Swansea placements on average £350 reduced per child per week. Foster Swansea had evidenced that they could provide quality foster placements for children locally and efficiently with an invest to save model.

8.0 SAVINGS & ISA'S FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Background

Child Trust Funds – these ran from 1st Sept 2002 – 2nd Jan 2011

Every child in the UK received a voucher for £250 to have a Child Trust Fund opened in their name.

If the voucher wasn't used within 12 months then the HMRC completed this and opened an account on behalf of the child. These accounts were not previously the responsibility of the share foundation but this has changed since 1st October 2017. Each LA must now update the share foundation on the details for all LAC including those born within the time frame to receive a Child Trust Fund, as these have transferred to the share foundation.

In 2010, the creation of Child Trust Funds ceased due to lack of funds in Government. The Government agreed that this would not apply to LAC and created new Junior Savings Accounts for all new and existing LAC who had not received a Child Trust Fund.

Eligibility Criteria set out by Government

- Under 18
- UK Resident
- Not born between the dates 1st Sept 2002 – 2nd Jan 2011, born before 3rd Jan 1994 or after 2nd Jan 2011
- In LA care for an unbroken 12 month period at latest period of care.

Each LA has a duty to send data to the share foundation on a monthly basis.

It is good practice that foster carers set up savings accounts for looked after children so that when children leave care and/or reach the age of 18 that they have savings that are available to them. There is currently no agreed framework to support this, and there are differences between Local Authorities on how this implemented with some Local Authorities deducting a percentage of the allowance into savings at source and others allowing carers to exercise their discretion.

9.0 THE NEXT STEPS

There is a consensus that we should strive to achieve greater harmonisation in payments to foster carers, however challenging. To have achieved this degree of consensus is a positive place to start. There are no 'magic wands' particularly at this time of significant budgetary constraints. The recommendations below, we believe will build on the work already undertaken and move to a position of greater harmonisation, firstly within regions and subsequently across Wales.

1. The Harmonisation of Fees and Allowances should remain as part of the NFF work programme for 2018-19
2. Greater harmonisation of fees and allowances is included in all the regional work programmes
3. A Finance Officer from each region is identified to work on the financial implications for each region
4. Work begins to provide some options on different fee levels
5. A National Policy Framework on the payments to foster carers, using the principles for a payment structure outlined in this report is agreed. This should include savings for looked after children and include payments to kinship carers.

6. An annual survey of the fees, allowances and additional payments is included as part of the NFF performance framework
7. The consultation and engagement with young people and foster carers regarding fees and allowances continues and forms part of the regional work programmes
8. Regions to consider developing invest to save bids within their regions to fund the greater harmonisation of fees & allowances
9. The WG Guidance on the National Minimum Allowances is reviewed
10. The First Thoughts Paper should be used as the basis for consultation with all key stakeholders.





10. The Way Forward

The Way Forward

The development of the National Fostering Framework (NFF) began in 2015-16 and was envisaged to be a five year programme.

Year One 2015-16

Development of the First Thoughts Paper & extensive Consultation programme.

Year Two 2016-17

continued Consultation and scoping the overall shape and functional model for the NFF.

Year Three 2017-18

First year of a three year implementation programme.

Financial support for the NFF work programme for 2015-18 has come from Welsh Government by means of a grant. Continued funding for the NFF for 2018-20 will come from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). As in previous years the oversight of the NFF monies will be exercised through Grant monitoring Group (GMG) and the SSG with elected member representation.

Priorities for 2018-19 have been considered and approved by the SSG.

Priorities for 2018-19	Expenditure
Appoint Regional Development Managers to take a lead role in establishing regional work programmes. The national performance framework for fostering services to be used to determine regional priorities.	It is a priority to build on the regional work begun in Phase Three. £40k was available for each region in 2017-18, this will continue for 2018-19 and 2019-20 Criteria to be established to access this funding.
Create capacity for an extended National Adoption Service central team, and the third sector to provide co-ordination and leadership required. Maintain Programme and Programme manager capacity.	Continuation of the infrastructure to support the work programme for 2018-19: • Increased capacity of the Director of NAS • Involvement of the ADSS Lead for the NFF • Involvement of the Lead Head of Service for the NFF • Programme management capacity • Infrastructure for central posts- desks, computers, stationary budget • Annual conference costs • Publication of Reports, including the annual Report • Translation costs
Implement the national performance framework across all local authorities to help shape regional and national/central priorities.	The national performance framework is a priority for the NFF. It needs to inform the regional work programmes. Work to embed the framework into WCCIS needs to continue. Part-time Performance management post is to be appointed in April 2018

Priorities for 2018-19	Expenditure
Create an all Wales brand for local authority fostering. Establish a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand.	Narrative Edge is leading on this work in 2017-18. The final Report is due mid-July. The Report will map out the options for developing the all Wales local authority fostering brand. Under spend in the total budget to be used to fund the marketing strategy, website, art work etc
Develop a Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care and an implementation plan. AFA Cymru to continue to take a lead role in this work, supporting the regions, and limited funding held by AFA Cymru to undertake this work.	Work to become part of regional work programmes
Continue work on harmonising fees and allowances for foster carers.	Work to become part of regional work programme. A 'First Thoughts Paper' on this to be completed by end of July. This Paper will begin to identify the resources required to bring about greater harmonisation.
Develop a national training framework for foster carers.	Work to become part of regional work programme

