



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22ND SEPTEMBER 2021

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

KINSHIP CARE

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Children's Services**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Scrutiny Committee with information arising from a survey of kinship carers who receive services from the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee Members:
- 2.2 Consider the contents of this report and;
- 2.3 Consider their formal response to the motion and any recommendations for considerations by Cabinet

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide assurance to Members regarding the service that is provided to kinship carers in line with the Council's duties.
- Note the information contained within this report.
 - Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On 13th January 2021 Children and Young people Scrutiny Committee received a report in response to a Notice of Motion in the names of County Borough Councillors J James and L Hooper that is included below at paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4. Following questions on 13th January 2021, it was decided that a future report should be submitted in relation to the results of a planned survey with kinship carers.

4.2 **Notice of Motion**

- 4.3 It is estimated that there are 200,000 children being brought up by family members or friends in the United Kingdom in what is termed as 'Kinship Care'. These kinship carers have stepped in to care for children whose parents are unable to look after them and keep their families together, and it represents three times the number of children in the national foster care system – and is a growing figure. Kinship care is one of the main ways to provide a sense of security, continuity and belonging for children who cannot live with their parents and it provides high levels of stability and enduring support well into young adulthood. However, the support that is offered to kinship carers throughout the country lacks consistency, and carers often feel isolated, abandoned and 'hung out to dry'. This is in marked contrast to the support that foster carers and adoptive parents can receive.
- 4.4 This Council recognises the invaluable work that kinship carers do for their loved ones, often under the most trying of situations, and is committed to providing the help, engagement and support that they need. This Council requests that a report be considered by the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee to look further into the role of kinship care in the County Borough and to work closely with Grandparents Plus to identify ways in which it can meet the needs of kinship carers and those in kinship care.

5. **THE COUNCIL'S DUTIES TO KINSHIP CARERS**

- 5.1 'Kinship carer' is sometimes used as an umbrella term to cover the following:

Kinship Carer Type	Definition	RCTCBC Duty
Connected Person	<p>These are approved RCTCBC kinship foster carers who are known to or connected to a child who needs safeguarding, and there is a duty to provide accommodation, most often the child is subject to a Care Order.</p> <p>In practice these are children who might otherwise be placed with an RCTCBC mainstream foster carer, but the carers are known to the child due to being a relative or connected person.</p> <p>These carers are assessed and approved in line with foster carer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carry out assessment in line with national guidance and fostering regulations• Provide an allowance in line with RCTCBC policy and national minimum allowances• Provide support in the same way as a mainstream foster carer. This includes allocation to a supervising social worker, access to training and development• As at 31.8.21 were 145 connected people approved as RCTCBC foster carers in for specific connected

	regulation	children in their care
Special Guardian	<p>Special Guardians are people with a relationship to the child appointed by the Court following application by the Special Guardian. The Special Guardian has parental responsibility, and cares for a child whose parents are unable to do so and a Care Order is not necessary.</p> <p>A plan of support normally accompanies a Special Guardianship Order shaped by the unique needs of the child given their background and circumstances.</p> <p>Where a child was looked after immediately before a Special Guardianship Order was made, the local authority which looked after the child will remain responsible for meeting any special guardianship support needs for a period of three years after the order is made, regardless of where that child is living.</p> <p>As at 31.8.21 RCT Children's Services were providing support to 243 Special Guardians.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty to provide information advice and assistance • Carry out assessment • Duty to implement the support plan or aspects of it for which children's services are responsible, and to carry out reviews • RCT Children's Services has a policy to carry out financial assessment and provide financial support in cases where SGO is supported as a more suitable alternative to the looked after system for a child
Informal kinship carers	<p>There are many and various informal arrangements, not all of which will be known to Children's Services.</p> <p>Where there is involvement by Children's Services with children who are living away from their parents with other family members or family friends, support is accessed and managed by the responsible Enquiry Assessment or</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information, advice and assistance or assessment where it appears that a child has needs for care and support. • Co-produce, implement and review a care and support plan for children identified by assessment as having care and support needs.

6. RCT CHILDREN'S SERVICES WORK WITH GRANDPARENTS PLUS

6.1 Grandparents Plus has changed its name to Kinship. The Fostering Service has been working closely with a local project provided by Kinship Cymru, the project is called Kinship connected. Referral routes and awareness raising has been achieved. The service provides attuned independent advice and support to kinship carers that is well appraised by carers and professionals. A further meeting has been planned for later in the Autumn in relation to future service provision.

7. CONNECTED PERSONS (KINSHIP FOSTER CARERS) CONSULTATION

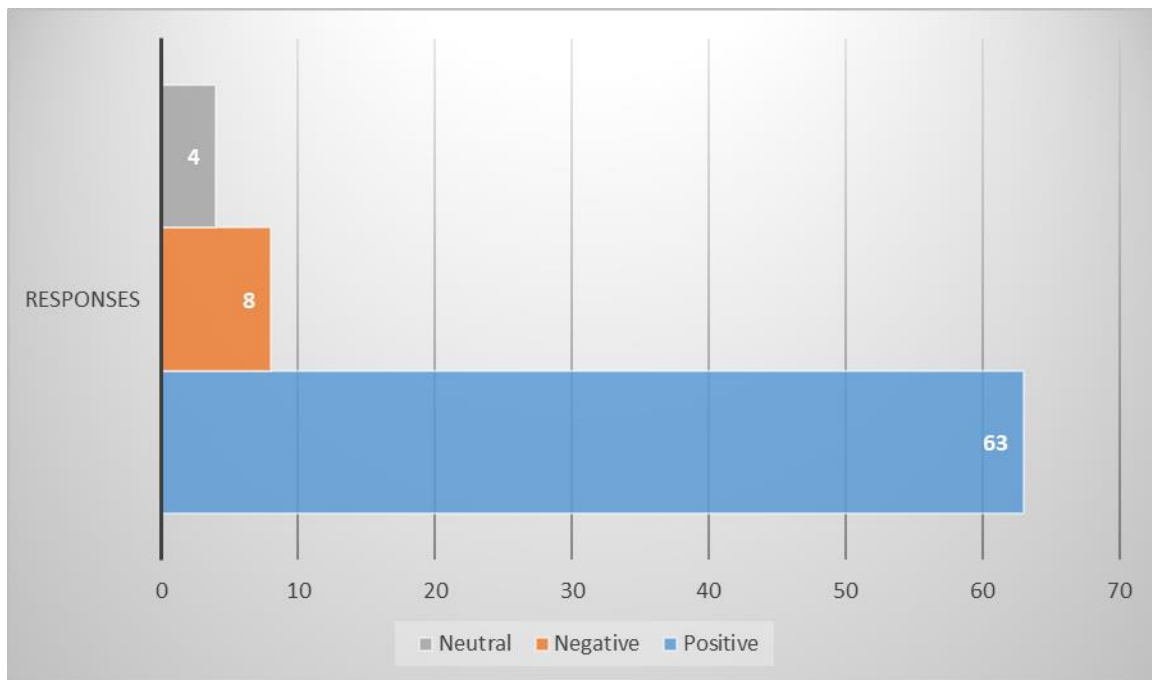
7.1 During March 2021 RCT Fostering Service undertook a consultation exercise with connected persons (Kinship) foster carers to find out their thoughts and feelings in relation to the assessment and support provided by the service and identify where improvements could be made.

7.2 The consultation exercise was set up as an online survey, however those who didn't have access to the internet or the necessary skills to complete the survey online were offered the opportunity to complete this via telephone with a student social worker.

7.3 Once completed any results were anonymised and fed back to the service. In total there were 77 respondents who completed the survey and highlighted in this report is an overview of their responses.

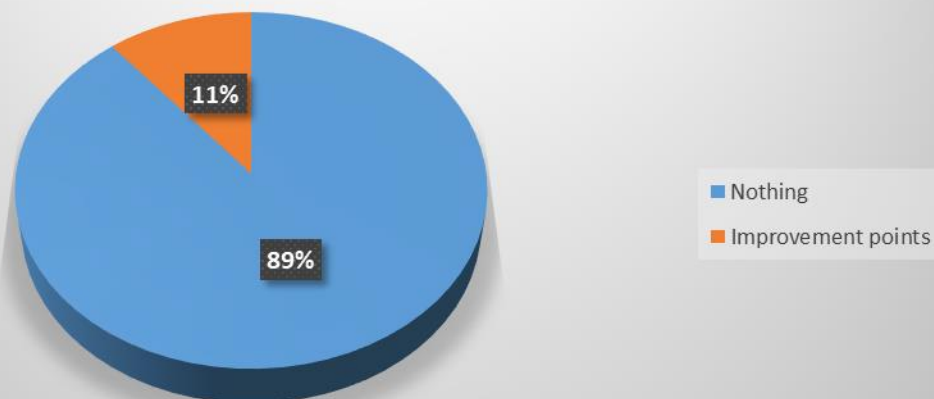
8. ASSESSMENT

What did you find most helpful during the assessment/ review process?



84% of respondents had positive responses to the question, with the majority highlighting the support from their social worker as the most helpful element of the assessment/ review process. Comments from connected persons include: *“Non judgemental assessor, looked at me now and who I have become, empathetic. Built up trust made such a difference”* and *“Explained everything. Really helpful. Not cut and dried, parents had special needs, some confrontational family members. Assessors were calming and supportive.”* Some of the negative comments were around the complexity of the assessment process and that applicants found questions difficult to answer and one comment around the length of time taken for formal approval *“Child living with us in August and not approved until January.”*

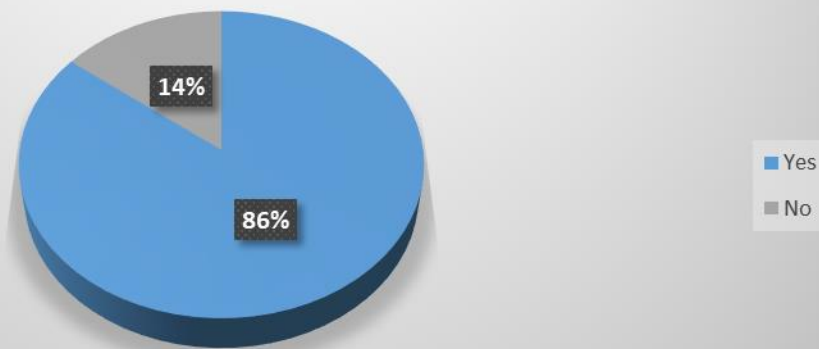
What do you feel the assessing social worker could have done to improve your experience and help you during the assessment process?



Overall 89% of respondents didn't feel the assessing social worker could have done any more to improve their experience of assessment. Comments included

“Nothing she could’ve done. She was there every step and was only a phone call away to provide any advice.” A few respondents described the process as feeling “rushed” and one respondent fed back that “We were given very little information about the child to be placed with us and little information about what the process was from the child’s side.”

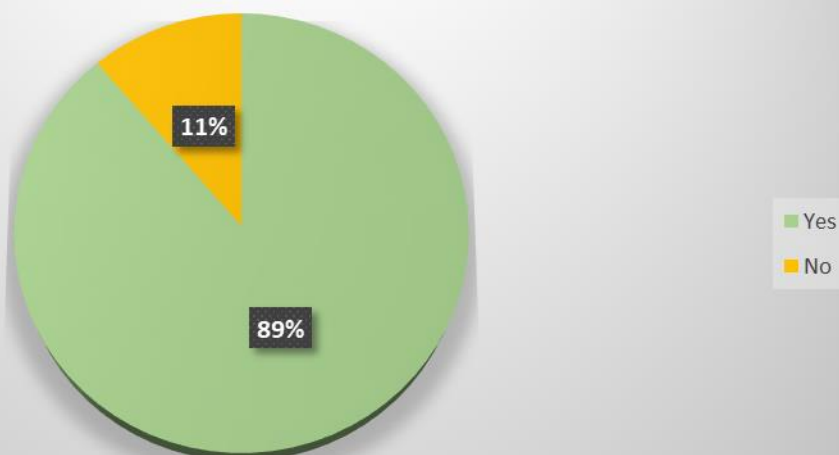
Do you feel you were provided enough information about the role of a Kinship foster carer at the beginning of the assessment process?



86% of respondents felt that they had been given enough information about the role at the start of assessment and many described being given “lot of information” and highlighted the fostering social worker as a good source of information. However, those who felt that they were not provided enough information demonstrated strong feelings about this and highlighted a lack of clarity and information from the children’s social work teams and around the legal process.

9. FOSTER PANEL

Did you attend RCT Foster Panel prior to your approval as a Kinship foster carer?

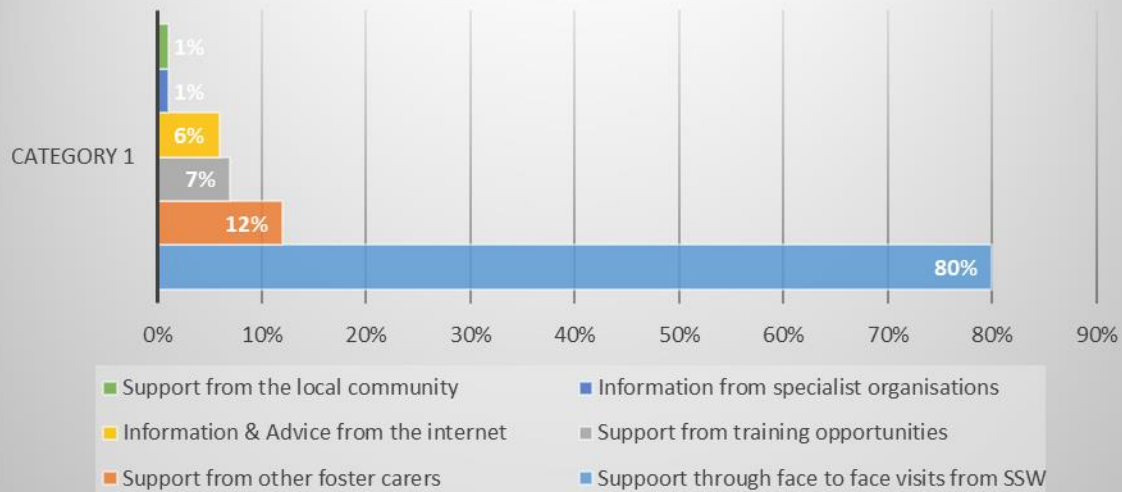


Respondents who attended foster panel generally fed back that panel were warm, friendly and supportive with one respondent stating *“Able to ask questions to people on the panel. I also felt welcome and everyone was really nice to me.”* and *“they made me feel like I was being listened to.”*

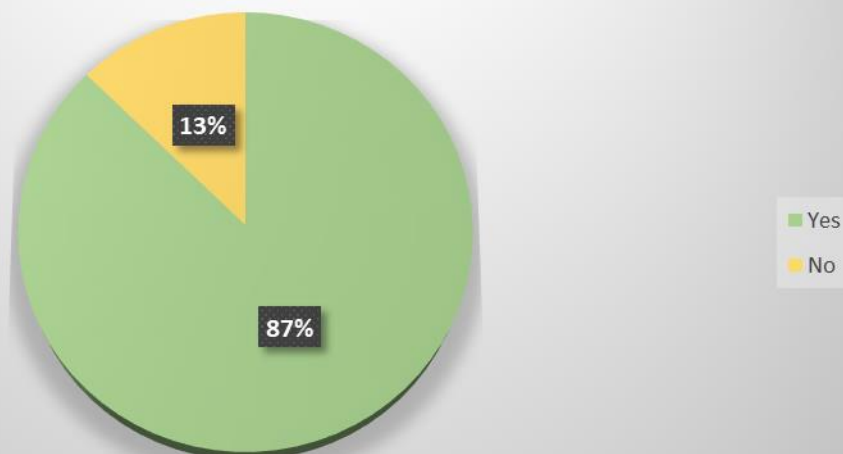
However a few applicants identified panel as a “scary” and “intimidating” experience, which was helped by reassuring assessing social workers. One respondent highlighted the need for information to be gathered prior to panel starting *“I went 4 times to panel, additional information was raised every time and this needed exploring and clarifying. All these things should have been sorted before even having panel date. This left me deflated at times.”* A few also highlighted that they were happy being able to go through panel despite Covid restrictions with one respondent stating *“I was on my phone camera, being able to show and express myself made all the difference.”*

10. SUPPORT

What forms of support are most useful to you in your role as a foster carer?

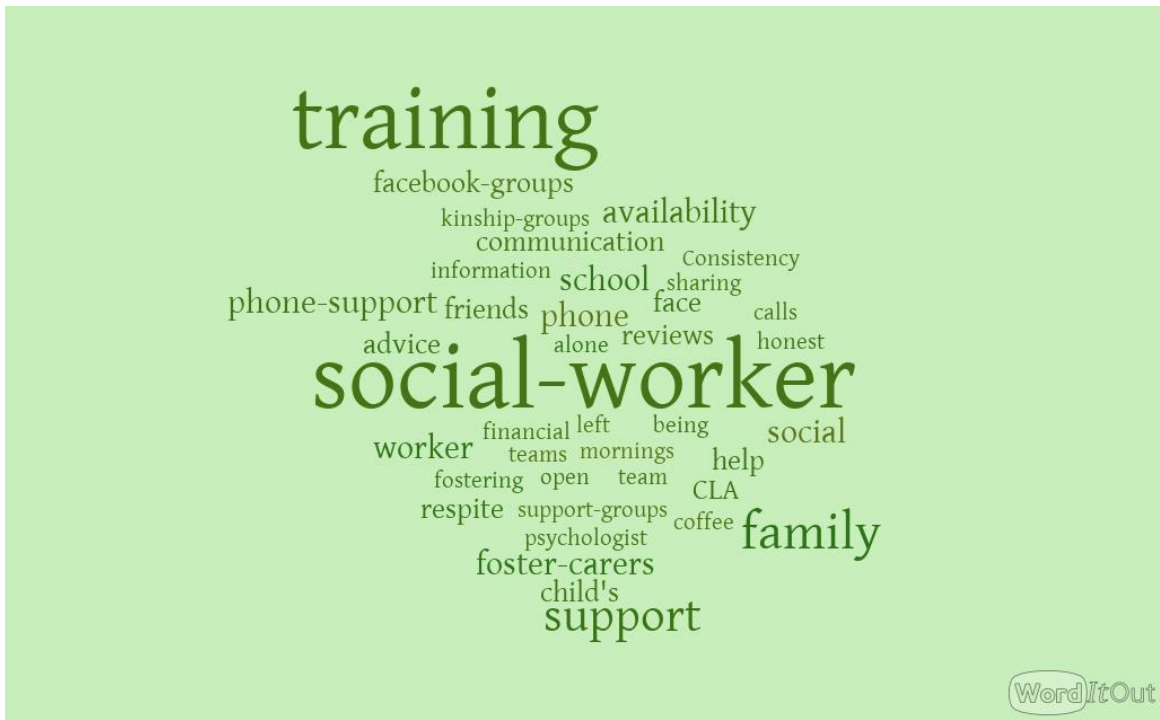


Do you feel you are receiving enough support for your role as a Kinship foster carer?



62 of respondents (87%) felt they were receiving enough support as part of their role and 80% of responses highlighted that visits from their supervising social worker are the most useful form of support. One respondent stated *"Whenever I have any questions I will text and my worker will call me within the hour. Always there for me and to speak to me and reassure me. They are always there"* Another highlighted the need for more peer support *"I would like to see other kinship carers. I would like to be able to have an informal support group with carers in my area. I have looked up things myself."* A few also highlighted the difficulty in terms of changing social workers and staff turnover within the childcare teams as a concern.

What are the 3 things that you feel work well and support you in your role as a Kinship foster carer? Below is a summary of comments from foster carers with the most common responses in larger/bolder print.

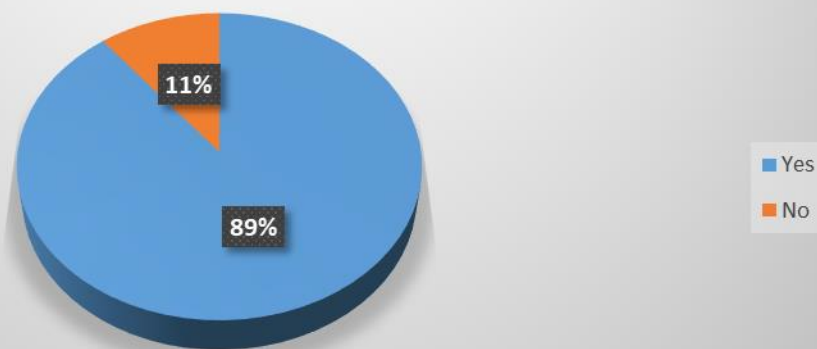


What are the 3 things that you feel don't work well and the fostering support team and children's services could improve on? Below is a summary of comments from foster carers with the most common responses in larger/bolder print.



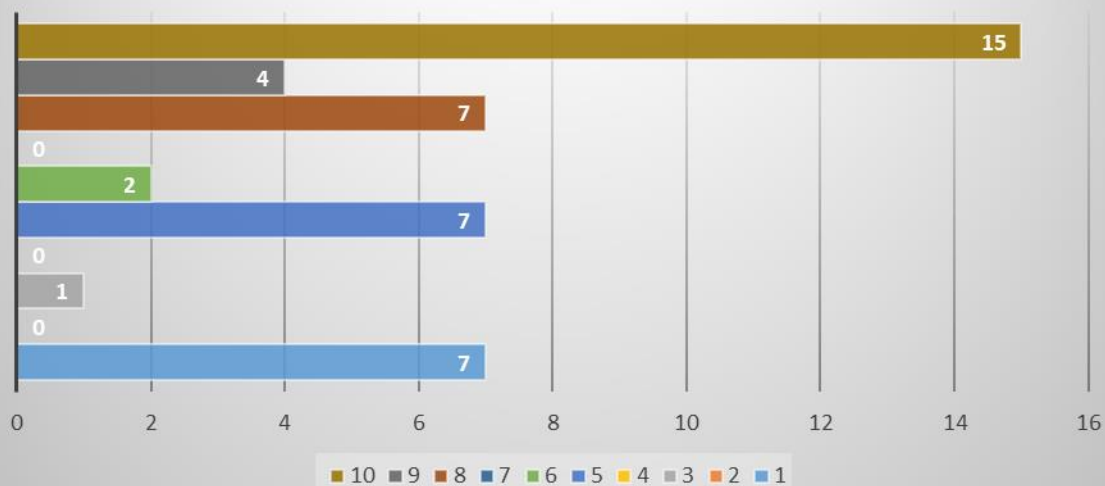
11. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Have you been offered opportunities to attend any training or other learning and development opportunities since being approved as a foster carer?



67 Foster Carers (89%) reported that they had been offered learning and development opportunities.

On a scale of 1 to 10 please rate how well the training met your needs.



35% of respondents rated the training meeting their needs 10 out of 10. 65% rated this as 6 out of 10 or higher. Some comments around the barriers to learning and development were that *“training was based in RCT and I live out of area so it has been difficult to attend”* and *“Training has been cancelled due to Covid.”*

Other areas that were identified as difficult for foster carers were that training was largely online during the pandemic and foster carers did not have the required skills, equipment or space away from children to attend. Other positive comments included *“I find training really good. I have plenty of opportunities to do different things. Training dept are good at getting back to me”* and *“I have had a lot of support for training and I learnt a lot. It made me understand the trauma and how*

this affects children.”

Please comment on the learning and development opportunities that you would like to see offered to assist you in your role as a foster carer.

Opportunities highlighted from respondents included:

- Safe Care
- Teenage Years
- Special needs- Autism
- Behaviour Management
- What rights are for children
- The impact of children in care homes
- ICT and computers,
- ASD, Neuro Development
- First Aid
- Mental Health
- Skills to Foster- Kinship
- Face to Face training.

Many of these courses are already offered through the foster carers training calendar, which is open to both mainstream and kinship carers.

12. SUMMARY

12.1 On the whole feedback from Connected Persons (Kinship) foster carers was positive. We have been able to ascertain how the service is performing in relation to the assessment, support and ongoing development of Connected Persons foster carers and have had strong feedback which we can use to further develop the service. To have had 77 responses is positive and shows the engagement we have with foster carers across the service. A summary of positives and areas for development, as highlighted by respondents can be found below. The areas for development will be included in discussion with managers and staff with a view to addressing these matters.

Positives	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thorough explanation and support from assessing social workers• Support from supervising social workers• Availability of support• Responsiveness of fostering teams• Training opportunities• Panel Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessment process often seems rushed• Staff turnover and absence• Timely information sharing• Panel can sometimes be intimidating• Peer support• Specific support groups

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of services through the pandemic • Facebook Group • Respite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific preparation training. • Specific post approval training • ICT skills and equipment
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13. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no implications associated with this report.

14. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

14.1 There are no consultation implication arising from this report.

15. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

15.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

16. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

16.1 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, associated regulation and guidance sets out Children’s Services duties in relation

16.2 The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 gives CIW powers to register and/or inspect our fostering service.

17. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

17.1 The authority has a plan in place for the next 3 years to safely reduce the numbers of children who need to be looked after as part of our ambition to improve the well-being of vulnerable children. Providing good and continuously improving support to all kinship cares is central to delivering that ambition.

18. CONCLUSION

18.1 The survey provides some degree of assurance about the quality and impact of the support provided to connected people. It also and provides insight into the priorities for development

18.2 The fostering service has developed good lines of communication with Kinship Cymru and will continue to develop that given the additional and important support that can be made available to all kinship carers in the context of that collaboration.