



Fostering RCT

Local care for Local children

Quality of Care Report 2020/21

This report is compiled as required under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. Regulation 52 of the Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018 also requires the local authority manager to put suitable arrangements in place to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of service.

Service Background

Rhondda-Cynon-Taf fostering service is based at Ty Trevithick, Abercynon, Mountain Ash and is responsible for the recruitment, retention, preparation, assessment, supervision and support of mainstream and Kinship (family and friend) foster carers. The service is located under the leadership of the Head of Children Looked After Services. The registered CIW manager for the local authority is the service manager, Sheryn Edwards.

The overall strategic and day to day management of the fostering service is the responsibility of the Service Manager for Children Looked who was appointed in November 2015, and three Fostering Team Managers in addition to the Regional Development Manager, funded through the National Fostering Framework. All staff are suitably experienced and qualified to operate a Fostering service.

An effective reporting structure is in place to ensure clear accountability for the service operation and includes regular management meetings, team meetings and performance data feedback to the Corporate parenting Board, Senior Management Team and elected members.

In order to ensure that a quality service is provided the following information is monitored but for the purposes of this report only the relevant data is included:

- The numbers and range of foster carers available
- The turnover of foster carers
- The recruitment strategy and timescales for assessment and approval
- Foster Panels
- Timescales for annual reviews/medicals/DBS checks
- Number of placements and vacancies
- Educational attainment of children placed with foster carers, including the number of children excluded from school

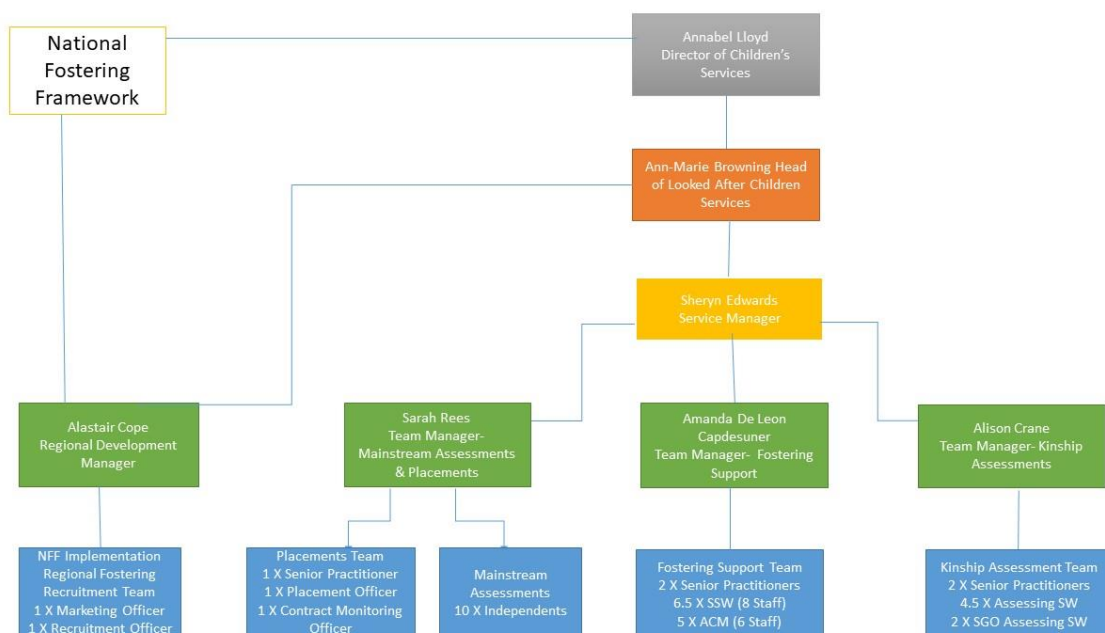
- Training of carers and staff
- Compliance with foster placement agreements
- Accidents, illnesses and injuries
- Complaints
- Allegations against foster carers
- Unauthorised absences from the foster carer home

Staffing

The fostering service are currently configured into four teams. These include the following:

- Regional Recruitment Team- Responsibility for recruitment of mainstream foster carers.
- Placements and Assessments Team - Responsibility for assessment of mainstream carers and placement finding.
- Kinship Assessment Team- Responsibility for initial viabilities and assessment of all kinship carers
- Fostering Support Team- Responsibility for fostering supervision and support for mainstream and kinship foster carers

The full-service structure is below:



All staff are suitably qualified for their roles and all have up to date DBS checks. Social workers are registered with Social Care Wales.

Training is actively encouraged for all team members with a comprehensive annual programme available to all staff. Training is identified via supervision and at each staff member's annual appraisal.

Each of our foster carers are actively encouraged to participate in the available learning and development opportunities. This is raised through supervision and annual review between the carer and supervising social worker and logged onto their personal development record and plan.

The Purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the quality of service provided across the fostering teams and outlines areas for development during the forthcoming year. This will be detailed in the following 4 sections.

1. People feel their voices are heard, they have choice about their care and support and opportunities are made available to them.

What we do well and the evidence for it, summary of arrangement in place and methods used to involve children and young people in their care and support. Summary of the views received from children who use the service, family members, and other professionals. Summary of how the rights of people who use the service are being met.

The fostering service in RCT ordinarily undertakes consultation events with both mainstream and kinship foster carers three times per year. Unfortunately, face to face sessions have not been possible due to the coronavirus pandemic, nevertheless over this reporting period RCT fostering service has continued to consult with foster carers and children in order to gain their views and experiences to improve the ways in which we provide our services.

During this reporting period, consultation questionnaires were sent via email to ten foster carers that had been identified as being newly approved. The aim was to assist carers to express their feelings and views on the ways in which the service could improve its recruitment and assessment process with a particular focus on:

- The assessment processes
- Attendance at Fostering Panel
- Training
- Post-approval support

Overall, feedback given for the assessment process was positive with carers commenting on understanding the need for such a thorough assessment. Applicants valued forming a positive relationship with the assessor over the assessment period. One carer expressed that she felt it was useful to reflect on her life experiences and consider how these have influenced her self-development. Another expressed that it was reassuring to be informed about the support available when approved as a foster carer.

The majority of Fostering Panels were held remotely via Zoom or Teams due to current covid guidelines. Most of the carers expressed feeling nervous about attending panel however then stated that they were made to feel more comfortable and relaxed by the panel members and valued the assessor supporting them in the panel. The majority felt they were well prepared for what would happen during the panel beforehand by the assessor. One applicant stated that she liked hearing the positive feedback from panel members. Most of the carers expressed that they were happy with the quality and variety

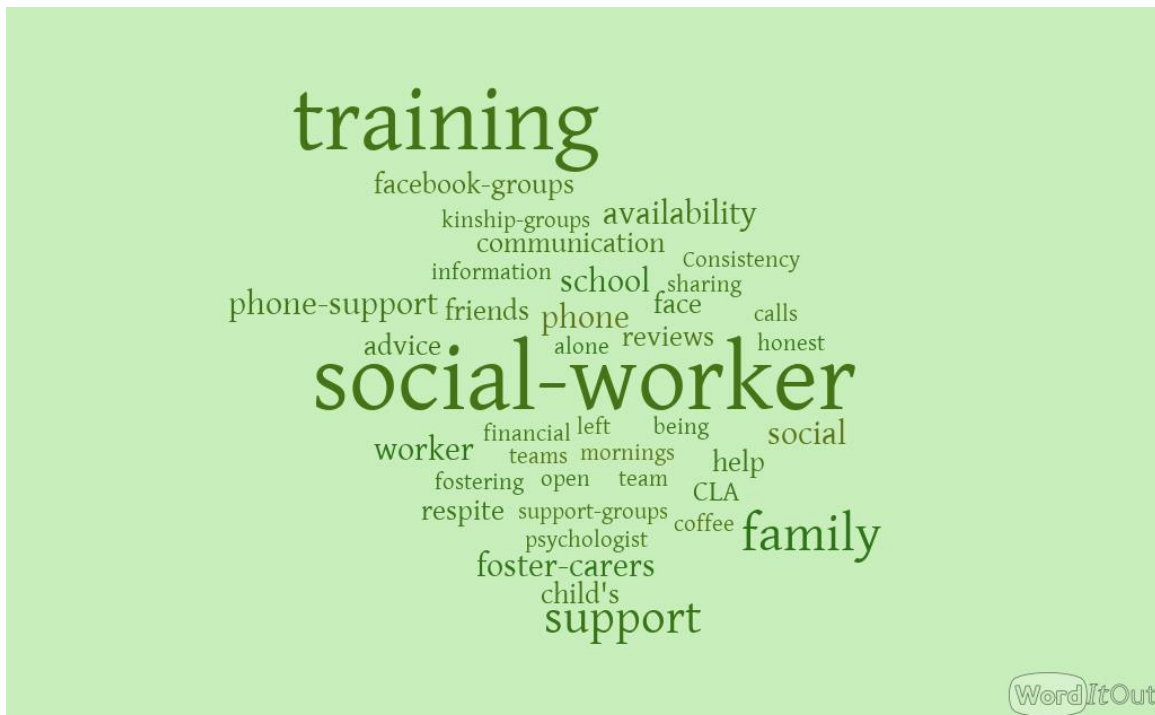
of training being offered and also identified areas they would like more training on going forward.

Positive comments were given by the carers in relation to feeling well supported by their supervising social worker with good communication and that queries were dealt with quickly when they contacted their social workers. One carer commented on there being a need for improvement in co-ordination between fostering and children's services.

Areas for further development of the service identified from the consultation include avoiding duplication in the rare event there is a change of assessor during the assessment process and limiting the number of people sitting on the panel to the absolute minimum for the applicants to feel less anxious about attending. Feedback in relation to training included offering evening courses or recordings of daytime courses for carers to access at a more convenient time. Additionally, offering access to the courses identified as being of an area of interest by the foster carers.

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, in order to identify where improvements could be made.

The carers were asked to comment on 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.



Additionally, carers commented on 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.



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 (kinship) foster carers and have had strong feedback which we can use to further develop the service. To have had 77 responses is extremely 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:

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 • Continuation of services through the pandemic • Facebook Group • Respite 	<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 • Specific preparation training. • Specific post approval training • ICT skills and equipment

Staff consultation is another area we are currently looking to develop across Children's Services. We are in the early stages of looking at ways to gather staff viewpoints on the service and what could improve wellbeing, staff retention and improve outcomes for both staff and the children in our care. A staff wellbeing survey was conducted during the summer of 2020, and a staff wellbeing week was delivered in December 2020. Staff feedback from these events is informing future planning as to the frequency, content and the way in which these events will be held in future, including when they are held to enable front line staff the capacity to attend.

Consultation with staff in the Fostering Service takes place in regular Team Meetings for each service area. Additionally, the Regional Development Manager for the National Fostering Framework will attend team meetings to discuss the ongoing work programme of the National Fostering Framework. During the forthcoming review period there are plans to facilitate a Fostering and Placement Service Consultation Workshop to seek staff views on the current structure of the service, what works well, current challenges and actions needed to further improve the quality of the service.

Children/Young People's Views

Regular consultation with Children Looked After takes place in the form of CLA forums, reviews and direct work sessions. The Blueprint forum meet monthly with care experienced young people. The primary focus of the Blueprint Forum is to provide looked after young people and care leavers in RCT the opportunities to have their voice heard and to promote their lived experiences at a strategic, policy and legislative level both locally and nationally. The forum link and regularly report to the Corporate Parenting Board. The forum is coordinated by Voices from Care on behalf of RCTCBC.

The Fostering Support Team undertake consultation with children/young people as part of the annual review process for foster carers. Supervising social workers in the team use a range of methods to gain children's views on where they live, and who they live with, including one to one consultation sessions, direct work and observation. The views of other household members and the childcare social worker as also sought as part of the annual review process and feedback is provided to the foster carers to inform future planning and address any issues that may arise regarding the quality of care being provided.

To improve the fostering services to children we have undertaken an exercise to redevelop all the foster carer profiles This includes logging information and photographs of foster carers, their households and properties in order to be able to give relevant and up to date information to childcare social workers and children looked after before a child enters placement. All newly approved foster carers will create their own foster care profiles and the fostering support team will assist current carers in this process.

Parent's views

Building strong supportive relationships is key to the work we undertake with foster carers and parents and this is an area we also want to develop in the forthcoming review period to ensure parents views (where appropriate) are gained as part of the annual review process.

The following are three examples directly from the teams of how a parent's views of the foster care provided have impacted positively on outcomes.

- During a CLA review "L (Mum) stated how very happy she was with the care provided to J. Mum also commented on the good relationship she has with J's carers and is very happy with the progress he is making."
- As part of the annual review process for respite carers providing regular support to a connected persons carer, the grandmother made the following comments: *"I feel very blessed that we have the respite carers and the girls in our lives. Their enthusiasm is plain to see. The care they provide M is first class. So warm and welcoming. M looks forward to every visit and I leave her there knowing she is very well cared for"*.
- Further comments from parents from CLA Review: Mum stated regarding the care given to the children, 'They are brilliant with them, you will never find better foster carers than them' Dad stated. 'They are brilliant, I am really grateful'.

We also work with the IROs who review the care and support plans for all children looked after in RCT. The fostering workers attend all the CLA reviews when invited. This works well in not only supporting the foster carers and child but also building good relationships with parents. IRO's can directly pass on the positive views of parents as part of their consultations.

Compliments

All compliments received about the fostering service are registered with the Complaints department centrally. During this reporting period there has been one compliment received noting many positive comments from a kinship carer relating to her SSW that has really helped her, including putting her on a course, giving advice and always being warm and welcoming. Feedback received directly from the teams as above would suggest that further compliments have been received but not formally noted to the relevant department.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further?

Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of engagement, feedback, and monitoring and CIW reports.

The foster carer consultation events are popular and prove to be useful in developing our support services. Face to face consultation has not been possible in this review period however RCT fostering will look to provide a venue, refreshments, and staff to facilitate these events when restrictions allow.

Additionally, developing a more robust system for ensuring that feedback is given to foster carers following consultation events on any actions taken within the service as a direct result of the consultation to ensure foster carers are aware, they are being listened to and are co-productive in improving the quality of the service.

In the next review period, we will establish improved reporting systems that will enhance our understanding of parent and young people's experience of the service which in turn will be used to make improvements.

What specific action do we need to take to make improvements successful and how will this be measured?

Ongoing consultation with foster carers and staff on the NFF regional work programme. Improvements will be measured and reported on at the NFF Regional Strategic Group Meetings.

Facilitating face to face foster carer consultation events in the next review period when Covid restrictions allow. Ensuring feedback and actions taken by the service following previous consultation events is a standard agenda item at the events.

Development of a quarterly newsletter for foster carers that will include updates on changes and improvements in the service. Improvements will be measured by reporting on improved communication in consultation events.

Review of the current Annual Review process for foster carers that incorporates a system for gaining the views of young people and parents on the service to ensure improved reporting on their experience of the service.

Development of written guides which provide information about the service to be made available to children/young people and fosters carers to ensure that those using the service are fully informed of their rights. Improvement will be monitored via the process for recording compliments and complaints and the foster carers' annual review process.

Foster Carer profiles will be available for placement officers as part of the matching process and by social workers as part of the placement process. Improvement to service will be measured as part of the placement stability and permanence processes that report to CLA QA and as part of the foster carer annual review process.

Summary

The rights of children and young people are at the centre of our work in the fostering service. By ensuring children, foster carers, parents and social workers' views are recognised we are better informed about the way in which we provide fostering services for children looked after.

2. People are happy and supported to maintain their ongoing health, development and overall well-being. This includes intellectual, social and behavioural development

What we do well and what is the evidence for it? Include a summary of arrangements in place including methods for collecting views and a summary of views received from people who use the service and professionals.

In order to provide a robust and responsive fostering service, foster carers must be supported to provide high quality of care for children looked after and work in collaboration with parents, social workers, education, health and other professionals involved in the child's care and support plan.

RCT was fortunate to be part of the Fostering Wellbeing programme and our foster carer, staff and young people participated. The fostering wellbeing project was established as a pilot by the Fostering Network, in order to meet 10 key wellbeing goals. Fostering Wellbeing encourages professionals to work together, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes. It creates a shared language for multi-agency professionals, a shared framework from which to operate, and contributes to workforce development.

Specific outcomes include:

- Greater recognition that foster carers are a key part of the team alongside teachers and social workers and play an important role as 'first educators'
- Increased engagement with foster carers and social workers through our integrated activities and the development of a shared approach
- Greater knowledge and confidence displayed by the foster carers in advocating for their child and accessing education support services
- Increased in knowledge and confidence levels amongst foster carers and service staff and greater clarity regarding the role they can play in raising educational attainment of looked after children
- Improved understanding of the links between emotional wellbeing and educational attainment
- Introduction of a range of new theories and approaches as part of standard fostering practice across the region
- Increased access for foster carers to peer support, training and information
- Potential benefits in the recruitment and retention of foster carers through the development of peer support networks and enhanced wellbeing
- Additional local resource to support the fostering community through the introduction of Fostering Wellbeing Champions
- A tested and sustainable model.

Pioneers

After the completion of Master Classes training held by Fostering Network in collaboration with Cardiff University, foster carers were invited for an interview if they wanted to be selected to become RCT Fostering Support Services Pioneers. Initially six Pioneers were recruited but due to their own personal circumstances, only four remained in this reporting period. In April 2020, we had 4 Pioneers who had been trained as part of the Fostering Networks Fostering Wellbeing programme who during the initial lockdown focused on supporting the children they are looking after and their own families due to the Covid 19 restrictions. During the summer of 2020, it was agreed we would utilise their skills more

flexibly, whilst honouring the ethos of the fostering wellbeing programme which was around supporting carers with learning and development and improving outcomes for children. Throughout the year the pioneers have undertaken the following.

- Consultation Event with Kinship Carers
- Day support to both kinship and mainstream carers, mainly at weekends to either prevent placement breakdown or promote placement stability.
- Peer support and mentoring of kinship carers and newly approved carers.
- Facilitating virtual peer support and support the carers' Facebook pages

In the forthcoming review period there are plans to recruit more Pioneers to undertake further development work in the fostering service including supporting carers in working with the children in their care to improve their independent living skills for the roll out of the ASDAN qualifications and supporting carers with the ongoing implementation of the Learning and Development Framework (see below for further detail)

Post Approval Learning and Development Framework

RCT Fostering Service is committed to ensuring all our accommodation supports the personal achievement and wellbeing of the children in our care by our continued commitment to the post approval learning and development framework for foster carers. The framework was developed as part of the National Fostering Framework and was launched to social workers, foster carers, panel members, training leads and team managers during a joint regional launch with Merthyr Tydfil CBC and Bridgend CBC in November 2019. The learning and development framework aims to:

- Provide a consistent approach to post-approval learning and development for foster carers in Wales
- Provide guidance on how the Learning and Development Framework and the Social Care Wales' All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care Workers fit together
- Create a mechanism for collating and reviewing of the learning and development achievements of foster carers as well as the identification of future needs
- Create a clear pathway for foster carers to map their own professional development
- Provide a resource for supervising social workers to discuss with foster carers their learning and development needs
- Promote a range of learning and development opportunities
- Place an expectation upon foster carers to take greater ownership of their own learning and development
- It creates clear and transparent standards to strive to achieve

RCT Fostering Service has actively signed up to ensuring this new framework is effectively rolled out and is committed to every foster carer using the new learning and development plan as standard by including this as part of their supervision and annual review paperwork. It is anticipated that this will improve knowledge within each fostering household and therefore outcomes for children and young people in our care. A review of the implementation of the framework and its impact will be undertaken in the next review period.

Health

All children and young people placed with foster carers should be registered with a GP, dentist and optician local and/or accessible to the foster placement. Registration of children with GP, health and optician is monitored through Foster Carer Supervision, contact from the CLA nurse and through the statutory CLA review process.

RCT foster carers receive training on meeting the health needs of children and young people in foster care. Foster carers also receive training on first aid for children. There continues to be links with the Cwm Taf Specialist Children Looked After Nursing team who are available to discuss health concerns and offer advice to foster carers. Health promotion is also discussed e.g. smoking, healthy eating, drugs, safety and safer sex. Issues are discussed as a part of the supervising social workers four weekly visits to foster carers and recorded in the supervision records. Any medication prescribed to children is recorded by the foster carer and provided to the supervising social worker and the child's allocated social worker.

The issue of children having access to a dentist and being registered with a GP are addressed as part of the CLA review process and escalated as part of the IRO process on a case-by-case basis. This process includes the IRO manager, the team manager and senior managers if required.

Education, employment and leisure activities

Foster cares are fully aware of RCT's commitment to promote the leisure activities of children placed with them. All fostering households in RCT have access to a leisure pass enabling to access free leisure activities within the borough when restrictions have allowed this during this review period. This includes foster children, foster parents and other children within the household. The Local Authority have several healthy living initiatives that take place within the Borough and these are promoted to foster carers through various communication channels.

The Fostering service has close working relationships with the CLA education team who work collaboratively with foster carers to achieve best outcomes for children looked after. This has been strengthened by participating in the fostering wellbeing programme.

The senior education psychologist provided the data with regards to school exclusions for this reporting period.

Table 1 Incidents of Fixed Term (FT) and permanent exclusions in the academic year 2020/21 involving RCT Children who are Looked After.

The data shows that RCT CLA pupils (approximately 1.5 % of the RCT school population) received a higher percentage of fixed term exclusions than non CLA students. As previously reported this data should be viewed in the context of the disproportionately high numbers of pupils with severe and persistent special educational needs, including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

Exclusions for school population - Academic year 2020 - 21

Number of students	CLA	Non CLA

Fixed term	26	847
Percentage of students who received a FT exclusion from cohort group.	7.1 % of CLA pupils	2.4 % of Non CLA pupils
Perm	1	9

As at the 31st March 2021 there were 455 children of compulsory school age who were looked after at 31/03/2021. During this review period, 38 children had a school move that wasn't transitional between April 2020 to March 2021. Some of the reasons for these school moves included children moving care address and the school not meeting the child's needs. We must note that this figure relates to all children looked after and is not specific to children in RCT Local Authority Foster Care. This is a Welsh government indicator which is reported on Quarterly and the target for 2019/20 was 12%. Performance has improved since Quarter 3 2020/21 and we achieved 8.4% at year end.

Attendance Figures for Children who are Looked After (CLA)

Table 2 highlights that the attendance levels of children and young people who are looked after and compares to the attendance of the general population of children in schools. This data shows that CLA attendance is similar and better in certain school types when compared with non CLA pupils.

Table 2: Attendance Levels of statutory school aged children between 02/09/2020 and 20/07/2021 who are Looked compared with Non CLA

Overall attendance in RCT schools	
CLA pupils	Non CLA pupils
89.9%	87%
Primary school attendance	
93.1%	91.1%
Secondary school attendance	
86.6%	85.4%

In response to the disrupted educational experience due to COVID -19, PDG LAC money has provided an offer of online tuition in Maths or English for all Key Stage 4 pupils taking exams.

It began in October 2020 and will continue until courses are completed this year.

Table 3: Pupils who have engaged with tuition in Years 10 and 11 in 20 -21

Year group	No of pupils participating
10	23 out of 31 eligible pupils
11	16 out of 25 eligible pupils

We have evaluated this initiative and currently arranging tuition for year 10 and 11 CLA pupils in mainstream to start an hour tuition per week in October and for Year 6 to start in January 2022.

The CLA Education Team promotes and encourages schools across RCT to achieve the CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark. To date 35 schools have been successful in achieving the quality mark with 14 schools attaining gold and 21 schools attaining platinum awards. 10 schools completed the quality mark in 2021. There will continue to be a focus on the roll out of our CLA friendly school process focusing on the 44 key indicators that will support pupils to engage with education. The related training provides a whole school approach that will support the understanding of the needs of children who are looked after and help shape interventions that promote their engagement.

Links between the CLA Education Team and the Fostering Pioneers will continue to be developed over the next 12 months and the team are supporting their journey to develop stronger links with schools. All Fostering Pioneers have attended the CLA Friendly Schools Level 1/CLA Designated Person training delivered by the CLA Education Coordinator.

Employment and Training for CLA

One of the key areas of activity in Wales for Welsh Government is to support improving outcomes for children and young people including Supporting Care experienced people to achieve successful futures and independent living.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales advocates that Local Authorities, as Corporate Parents for the children in their care, should offer work and training places to Care experienced young people as any other parent would do within their own family.

RCTCBC offer two programmes dedicated to supporting Children Looked After into further employment, education and training: Step in The Right Direction and Care2Work. Both programmes sit within The Employment, Education and Training Team and in line with its Corporate duty, seeks to ensure that Care experienced Young People and Young People with Care and Support needs are provided with the right practical and emotional support so that they are able to access opportunities in Education, Employment and Training that meets their individual needs and wishes.

We strongly believe that every Care experienced Young Person receiving support via the Local Authority deserves the same and worthwhile opportunities afforded to their peers and non-care experienced young people within their Community. The team are also committed to enhancing the aspirations and ambitions of Care experienced young people to enable them to recognise their self-worth and individual potential in terms of Employment, Education and Training. The ultimate objective being to close the gap

between Care experienced young people and their non-care experienced peers in terms of accessing but also sustaining positive and worthwhile Employment, Education and Training experiences within their community.

Step in The Right Direction programme is a two-year paid traineeship for young people aged 16-25 living in and leaving care in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Trainees are given work opportunities within a variety of Council departments and are managed by the Traineeship Coordinator, supported by an allocated 16+ Worker and overseen day to day by a Placement Manager. These young people have all the support needed to gain the work experience and training required to help them gain full time employment at the end of the programme.

Outcomes:

1st Apr 2020 – 31st March 2021

Trainees recruited – 5

Placements included:

- Older People Residential
- Playground
- Parks
- ICT

Care2Work was introduced in 2010 and offers Care experienced young people aged 16-25 years who are NEET opportunities that include one to one Careers Advice and guidance including mentoring and long-term support whether this be through individual sessions, employability courses, Sector specific training and work experience placements.

Outcomes:

1st Apr 2020 – 31st March 2021

Referrals – 52

Further Education and Training Outcomes – 18

Employment Outcomes – 9

Remain engaged with C2W - 15

In order to promote a partnership approach with the Fostering Teams, Care2work attend Fostering team meetings to raise the profile of Step in the Right Direction and Care2work and meet new members of the Fostering teams.

Specific Support for Connected Persons (Kinship Carers)

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.

At the end of this reporting period, RCT have 235 children placed with Relative Carers. This figure includes approved and non-approved kinship carers. The number has increased by 4 when compared to the same time last year. 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.

The Fostering Service has been working closely with a local project provided by Kinship Cymru, the project is called Kinship Connected and provides support to kinship carers regardless of their legal order. The model of support is designed on an asset-based approach which views the skills, knowledge and resources available in individuals and communities as a means of finding solutions to the issues people face. Kinship Connected works with the concept of social action: building resilience through peer-to-peer volunteering led by kinship carers.

The support provided by the Kinship Connected Programme in RCT includes the following:

One to one support from project worker:

- Advocacy support in meetings
- Emotional support
- Supporting the carers to attend a peer support group
- Liaising with local organisations that might be able to offer specialised support and training
- Liaising with schools or other organisations
- Supporting kinship carers with the behaviour of the child/children in their care

Peer Support:

- Virtual Support Groups (monthly)
- Someone Like Me – a telephone peer support service run by trained volunteers who are or have been kinship carers themselves
- Facebook group and WhatsApp group

Additionally, support is given to Kinship Carers for accessing grants from partner grant giving bodies and there is also an Independent Advice Service run by a specialist bi-lingual advisor for Wales. Advice can be accessed by kinship carers and professionals on issues such as, welfare benefits, housing, employment, legal options etc.

The pilot commenced in February 2021, and referral routes and awareness raising has been achieved. The impact of the project will be reviewed during the forthcoming review period.

Foster Carer Training

All foster carers (including connected person carers) are able to access the Local Authority training programme specifically tailored for them and have support to access training from a dedicated training officer. During the global pandemic from March 2020 until Sept 2020, some of our foster carers continued their learning with our E-learning

KCA suite which holds over 60 different courses relevant to fostering. Then in September 2020 we delivered a blended approach of face to face and online (via zoom) learning up until lockdown in December 2020. Then in January 2021 we moved all the courses online via zoom.

The following courses were available to our foster carers from September 2020- April 2021

Life Journey Work	Developing a secure base and promoting attachment.	Moving and Handling
Child Development	Supporting children to stay safe online (Digital safeguarding).	Heart Start (First Aid)
Child Protection and Safer Caring	Supporting education and development.	Basic I.T Skills
ELSA Sessions	Raising awareness of domestic abuse and the effects on children and young people.	Reduction of suicide and self-harm.
Advocacy and children's rights.	Bereavement and loss.	Fire awareness.
Substance misuse.	Communication skills.	
Foetal Alcohol awareness.	Preparation for Adoption.	Therapeutic parenting.

In addition, bespoke training was delivered by trainers who were previously children looked after following feedback from carers asking for more real life experiences.

During the initial lockdown of the global pandemic, the Skills to Foster preparatory training was cancelled as assessments were delayed until the service development a robust system for the assessments to continue with some virtual sessions. The training was then reinstated following guidance from the fostering network around virtual delivery and the first virtual Skills to Foster training was facilitated in July 2020 and it has been running virtually ever since every 6 weeks or so since this time.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further? Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of feedback, monitoring, CIW, any identified non-compliance and outstanding actions.

The fostering service will continue to work in partnership with the specialist CLA colleagues in education and health in order to ensure that the care and support plans in place can be implemented in a timely manner.

Further recruitment of Pioneers will be undertaken to encourage their development and links with education and promote their work with current foster cares.

The data from education and health to be presented to the Children Looked After Quality Assurance Group chaired by the Service Director. This will directly relate to the children looked after in foster care and contribute to the monitoring and reviewing process.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements/developments successful and how will this be measured? Include an action plan setting out the specific outcome-focussed actions needed to improve, timescales, lead officer and performance indicators to measure improvement.

Health and education specialists to attend CLAQA to report on children looked after, specifically, children excluded and GCSE attainments along with provision of annual health assessments, dental appointments and registration with GP.

Review of the current Annual Review to process to incorporate consultation with health and education professionals involved in progressing the child's care and support plan.

Review of the Kinship Connected pilot project.

Summary

RCT fostering services will continue to work closely with specialist agencies for children looked after to ensure that fostering can be part of good practice, research and developments.

3. People feel safe and protected from abuse and neglect

What we do well and the evidence for it? Consider a summary of arrangements in place, views of the people who use the service, number of referrals etc.

The following sections relate to the performance data and activity of the fostering team with regards support and kinship assessment.

1. Compliance in relation to each child

All children placed with RCT Foster carers are placed by the Child Care social worker with the supervising social worker or the Fostering team's duty worker, thus ensuring that all relevant information required to enable the carer to offer suitable care is provided to the foster carer. Where the placement is made in an emergency the supervising social worker or the fostering duty worker will follow up during the next working day. At the point of placement, the Placement Agreement is completed and signed, if the placement is an emergency and the full documentation is unavailable, this will be provided to the carers the next working day.

2. All accidents, injuries and illnesses of children placed with foster parents

All accidents and injuries are reported by the carers to their supervising social worker or duty worker as soon as possible following the incident, the allocated supervising social worker then takes responsibility for completing a report that is then passed to the Team Manager for any further action that may be required. This information is electronically stored on the child's file, the foster carer's file and the original is stored by the Manager. If the notification is significant, the Service Manager will be informed who will update the Head of Children's Services.

3. Complaints in relation to children placed with foster carers and their outcomes.

All complaints received are registered with the Complaints department centrally. The designated Complaints Officer co-ordinates the response to all formal complaints made in relation to children placed with foster carers, and the outcomes of these complaints are provided within quarterly and annual reports to the Senior Management Team and the Corporate Parenting Board. Robust complaints procedures are in place and all staff and carers are made aware of the complaints process on becoming a foster carer or an employee of RCT CBC.

Information is provided to foster carers on how to complain via the fostering policies. Children receive information on how to complain via their allocated social worker and a referral is made to the advocacy service with the child/young person's consent. All children receive an active offer of advocacy which is commissioned from Tros Gynnal. Activity is reported to Senior Managers and Corporate Parenting Board. The annual review process for foster carers considers any complaints made and their outcomes and where necessary the annual review is brought forward and referred to Foster Panel for consideration.

During 2020/21 there were 0 formal complaints and 1 contact recorded for the fostering service in RCT. There were no formal or serious complaints recorded.

4. Any allegations or suspicions of abuse in respect of children placed with foster parents and the outcome of any investigations

Any allegations made against a foster carer by children placed, children known to the carer or any member of the foster carer's household is referred to the safeguarding

manager and child protection procedures are followed. All professional abuse strategy meetings are chaired by the safeguarding manager in the area in which the carer resides. An initial assessment is completed by the child's social worker and the meeting makes the decision about whether a Section 47 investigation should be carried out. CIW are informed of any allegations. All children looked after receive an active offer to the advocacy service and carers are offered independent Social Work support via The Fostering Network. Written advice and guidance are given to any carer subject of an investigation. The process is outlined in the Foster Carers handbook.

During the current year there have been the following matters or concern that have required professional strategy meetings: -

Total Number	Substantiated	Unsubstantiated	Ongoing
6	3	1	2

Of the six allegations made, 4 related to physical abuse, 1 related to historical sexual abuse and 1 related to emotional abuse. Two investigations are currently ongoing. One carer has been de-registered at fostering panel and one carer resigned however the professional concerns and fostering panel processes continued.

5. Staff Recruitment records and conduct of required checks for new workers.

Within RCT CBC, the responsibility for completing checks on newly appointed staff lies with the Human Resources department. Managers within the fostering service are informed of any issues arising for consideration in relation to DBS checks and references. All new staff working within RCT's Fostering Service are required to have:

- an up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service Check (renewed every 3 years)
- employment history that details the reason for any gaps in employment
- references from previous employers
- evidence of eligibility to work in the UK
- evidence of qualifications
- registration with Social Care Wales (where required)
- satisfactory Health assessment

During the year we had 2 staff members who left the service for promotion. We have inducted two new starters to the service including a new Team Manager for the Fostering Support Service. As at 31.3.21 the service had 2.5 vacancies.

6. Any unauthorised absences from the foster home of a child accommodated there

The expectations of foster carers when a child goes missing from a foster home is that they inform children's services and if the absence occurs out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT). When a child/young person is absent from a foster placement without authority, the matter is reported to the police and shared with the relevant childcare social worker. If the Child is still absent from placement at the end of the working day an alert is sent to EDT to follow-up out of hours.

Procedures for Foster Carers when a child does not return to placement at the expected time, are clearly explained in the foster carer's handbook. Foster carers are aware of the All Wales Missing Persons protocol for managing children who go missing and follow this process. If a child has a history of absconding or going missing, this will be fully addressed

at the time of the Initial Placement Meeting and a risk assessment completed. Foster Carers are expected to keep a record of all absences from placement.

RCT Children's Services have a joint protocol with the Police 'children missing from care' and each incident is responded to in accordance with this protocol. Information is shared with police and social services to reduce the risk of reported episodes and to gather intelligence in respect to exploitation. When a child goes missing repeatedly a Risk Management meeting may be arranged, which foster carers should attend. Every unauthorised absence triggers a notification to the Team Manager and is updated accordingly. Where the missing episodes involves the child being missing overnight or where the risks are high the Service Manager is alerted and is responsible for informing and updating the Head of Service.

Between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, the number of children missing from placement episodes was 3 episodes relating to 3 children. We must note that this figure relates to all children looked after and is not specific to children in Local Authority Foster Care.

7. Use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home

Foster carers are provided with behaviour management guidance through the foster carer handbook and through the Skills to Foster preparation training to prevent any inappropriate use of discipline. Issues with managing the behaviour of children in foster placements is discussed during supervision visits and recorded within the supervision template. Further training is being developed to response to carers telling the Fostering Service that they need to develop their skills in managing behaviour that poses challenge. This need has also been identified through analysis of placement breakdowns and for when placement matching has proven difficult.

All foster carers sign a foster carer agreement not to use any form of corporal punishment with children. Supervising social workers continually support foster carers on appropriate methods of behaviour management.

8. Medication, Medical treatment and First Aid administered to any child placed with foster parents

All foster carers are provided with advice and guidance within the Foster Carer Handbook and through pre-approval training regarding first aid and the safe storage and provision of medication. Carers complete a record of any medication given to children placed. Any regular medication required and administered to a child placed should be contained within their care and support plan in line with their specific health needs and recorded on the minutes from the initial placement meeting. If a child placed requires emergency treatment foster carers are aware that they should notify children's services or EDT as soon as possible, the relevant Service Manager can then be contacted to provide consent. Wherever possible, birth parents are consulted. All foster carers receive First Aid training which is renewed on a regular basis to ensure awareness of first aid processes.

9. Where applicable, the standard of any education provision provided by the fostering service.

RCT Fostering Service do not provide formal education provision, however, we work closely with RCT Education services to ensure all children are receiving appropriate education as outlined in their care and support plans.

10. Records of Assessments

All records of assessment completed by the Fostering service are stored securely within WCCIS electronic data base. These can be shared with the subject after they have been quality assured by the Team Manager. All assessments are shared with the applicants prior to presentation to the foster panel.

11. Records of Fostering Panel meetings

The panel consists of:

- Chair - Independent previously registered Social Worker and Senior Manager,
- Vice Chair – Retired Social Worker/Teacher
- Cabinet member for Children’s Services
- Foster Carer
- Independent Social Worker
- 2 Experienced and qualified social workers
- Community Medical Advisor (available for advice),
- Legal Advisor (available for advice)
- Panel Advisor – Team Manager, Fostering/ Kinship/Assessments and Placements
- Agency Decision Maker – Director of Children’s Services.

In this review period, swift arrangements were made for the fostering panel to continue to operate as a virtual panel during the global pandemic resulting in there being only one less panel held than the previous review period. Attendance from members of the panel is very strong which has enabled the panel to be quorate and proceed when scheduled. One of the benefits of a virtual panel felt by panel members was the increase in attendances from the child’s social worker, as they didn’t have to travel to panel.

Annual training was arranged for panel members who attended training on the quality assurance role of the fostering panel and its functions.

In the year 2020-2021 the foster panel has met and made recommendations on:

April 2020-March 2021

Number of Panels	26
Approvals-mainstream carers	9
Immediate Placements (connected persons under Section 76 SSWBA (W) 2014)	15 (Reg 26 placements)
Annual foster carer reviews	57
Change of approval status	6

Terminations of approval-mainstream	15
Connected persons/ Kinship approvals	39
Terminations of approved kinship carers	24

12. Duty rosters of persons working for the fostering agency, as arranged and worked

The staff of the Fostering Service work flexi arrangements in line with the HR policies of RCT CBC. This includes agile working, which was rolled out in September 2018. Many staff do not have a permanent desk but utilise hot desks within Ty Trevithick and are able to operate out of other Council premises as well as other locations through a laptop and mobile phone which is provided to them. During the global pandemic, staff have predominately worked from home and/or hybrid models of working. The hours worked and any annual leave or sickness are monitored by the line manager of each staff member through an internal flexi spreadsheet and the Vision System, which is able to log any hours worked/ missed.

A duty officer is available to offer support and advice between office hours with support available to carers out of hours through the Emergency Duty Team.

13. Minutes of staff meetings

All minutes of staff minutes are securely stored electronically and are easily available to the staff team and managers. Staff meetings occur weekly to offer the team chance to 'catch up' with:

- changes in placements
- vacancies and potential matching considerations
- placements stability concerns
- carers that are likely to need additional support in the coming week

Monthly the team meet to provide opportunity to have updates on changes in legislation, research, regional and local services.

There are Staff Briefings at intervals through the year which are led by the Head of Service and allow staff to receive updates and raise any questions or challenges. The Fostering Service is represented at these briefings. The Head of Service and Director offer an open-door policy and will always respond to invitations to attend team meetings.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further? Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of feedback, monitoring, CIW and any identified non-compliance and outstanding actions

The Fostering Teams will continue to provide support to foster panel members by ensuring relevant training takes place on at least an annual basis for all members including, chair, vice chair and panel advisers.

Annual appraisals with fostering panel members need to be undertaken in a timelier manner.

A dedicated Business Support service will be available to ensure that panel functions are timely, and the collecting of data is robust.

Further develop systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing quality of service including the functioning of the Fostering Panel in line with The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements/developments successful and how will this be measured? Include an action plan setting out the specific outcome-focussed actions needed to improve, timescales identified, lead officer and the performance indicators to measure improvement.

Support the fostering panel and provide a relevant training event for panel members in this review period.

Undertake annual appraisals with foster panel members in this review period to inform future planning.

The service needs to further develop its quality assurance and audit work and to take forward lessons learned and actions.

Further develop systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing quality of service including the functioning of the Fostering Panel in line with The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.

Summary

This is a large and busy fostering service that is part of the wider children's services department. The Service Delivery Plan outlines overall outcomes, so they are clear with actions, timescales and lead officers, and is monitored by the HOS.

4. People live in accommodation that best supports their well-being and achievement of their personal outcomes.

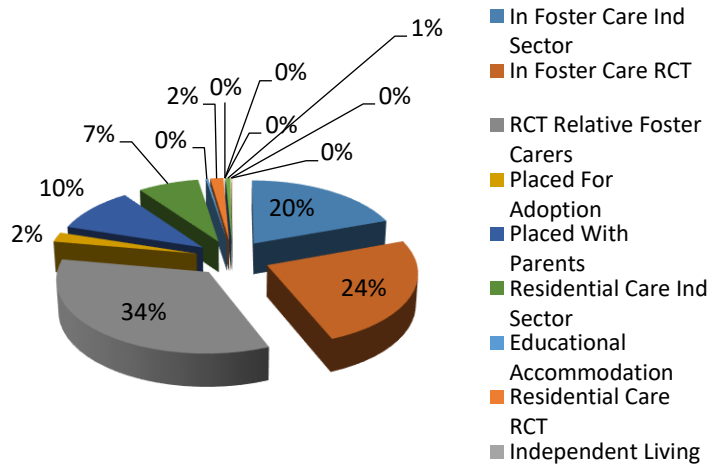
What we do well and the evidence for it? Consider a summary of arrangements in place including access to the local community; how privacy, dignity and confidentiality is maintained, and a summary of views obtained on any changes to the environment

The following headings summarise the arrangements in place to ensure fostering accommodation for children looked after meets their identified needs and outcomes in the local community.

The number of children who need to be looked after by RCT has been decreasing gradually since January 2021 and there currently 693 children looked after which is 23 less children looked after than at the same period last year.

Placements:

Children Looked after by placement type as at 15/04/2021



Based on current children looked after numbers, we have the most children placed with Relative Carers (34%). This figure includes approved and non-approved kinship carers. The number has increased by 4 when compared to the same time last year.

In House Foster Care placements continue to be higher than Independent Sector Foster Care. The number of Independent Foster Care placements has decreased by 11% when compared to last year.

The number of children placed in external residential placements has decreased by 1 when compared to last year. 51 placements in Apr 21 compared to 52 in Apr 20.

The number of Mother and Baby placements has decreased from 8 to 4 over the last 12 months.

The number of children placed with parents has decreased by 1 when compared to last year. 70 placements in Apr 21 compared to 71 in Apr 20.

Placement Stability:

33 children who were looked after in 2020/21 experienced 3 or more changes of placement. Performance has improved since Quarter 3 2020/21 and we achieved 4.8% at year end. Children move placement for a variety of different reasons & some of the 3rd placements will relate to children's moves to a permanent long-term placement. Performance can also be affected by the continued high number of children looked after which can put pressure on placement availability.

Stability of children in placement remains a priority for RCT as is maintaining children within the Rhondda Cynon Taff Local Authority area. In the forthcoming review period it is anticipated that performance in this area will be further supported by the revision of the Placement Stability Policy (formally Disruptions Policy)

Foster Carer Profile:

Approvals and Terminations of Approval	Mainstream Foster Care		Connected Persons Foster Care	
	Households	Placements	Households	Placements
Number as at 1st April 2020	104	177	133	235
Number of approvals/changes between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021	9	15	44	76
Number that left the service between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021	15	26	31	47
Number of fostering households/placements as at 31st March 2021	98	166	146	264

There have been 15 mainstream foster carers who had their approvals terminated between April 2020 and March 2021. The highest number of approvals that ended relate to carers retiring. There was one resignation relating to fostering not meeting expectations that relates to a carer that had a placement breakdown and resigned as a result. There was also one resignation relating to concerns, complaints and allegations relating to a carer who was not meeting fostering competencies.

There have been 31 kinship foster carers de-registered between April 2020 and March 2021. The highest number of approvals that ended relate to placements that are no longer required following assessment followed by the children returning home to parents and 6 carers converting to being SGO Carers

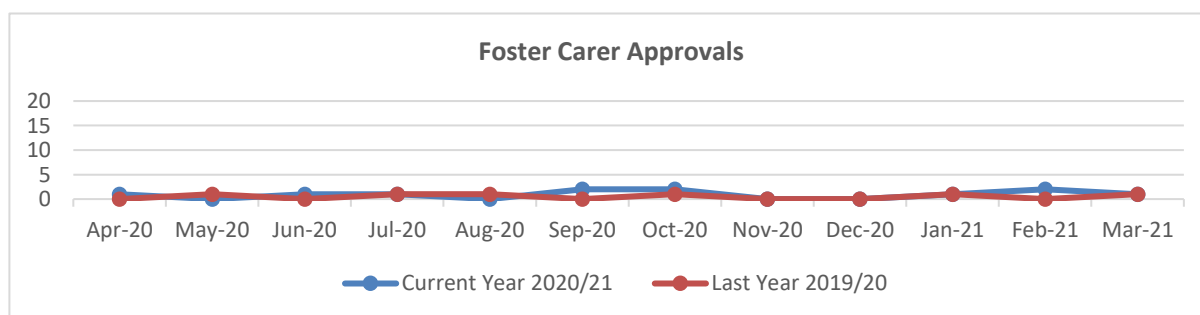
Marketing and Recruitment:

From 1st April 2019, we have been working in collaboration with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to operate a Regional Front Door for fostering recruitment. The team consists of a Regional Development Manager, Regional Recruitment Officer and Regional Communications and Marketing Officer. The Regional Front door team work closely with the fostering service managers in each local authority to ensure a seamless approach to the recruitment and retention of foster carers. In RCT the service is overseen by the Head of Service Children Looked After and performance of the regional service is monitored by the regional management board consisting of Head of Children Services in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Director of Children's Services Rhondda-Cynon-Taff County Borough Council.

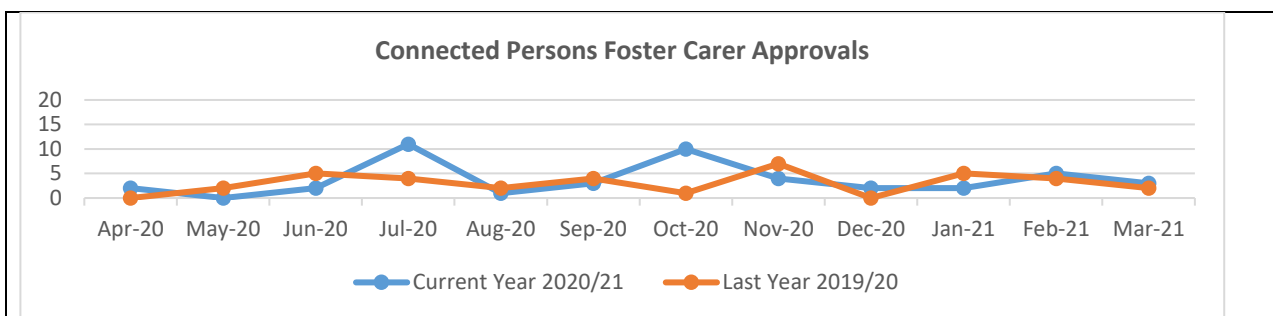
The recruitment team facilitates all enquiries, recruitment calls, marketing activity and initial visits up to the point of assessment for both RCT and Merthyr. Once at the point of assessment each Local Authority has a dedicated team manager who allocates assessments. In RCT the Team Manager is responsible for allocation of assessments to independent social workers.

In the last two financial years, an inbound approach was taken to marketing which better suited our budgets and needs. This means that instead of spending money to reach a large number of people, we focused instead on serving relevant content to a smaller pool of those more likely to be ready to consider being foster carers.

At the heart of our inbound marketing strategy was content; content developed specifically for those people who are interested in fostering and at one of the relevant stages in their decision-making process. The two main distribution channels for our content this year have been the Fostering RCT Facebook page and our regional website – fostercwmtaf.co.uk.



There were 11 newly approved mainstream foster carers in this review period, an increase of 5 carer households compared to the previous review period.



There were 45 Kinship Carer approvals in this review period, an increase of 9 carer households compared to the previous review period.

Future Developments

This year we are looking to build on our success with inbound marketing, whilst knowing that we should get a boost to our reach to new people when the Foster Wales national brand launches later this year. We have structured a marketing plan which sees maintenance of inbound activity in Q1 and Q2 with key campaign times such as Foster Care Fortnight and 'Empty Nesters' highlighted. This will feed into the national brand launch when we will dial down our inbound marketing in Q3 when we hope our key retention events will happen. We shall then hope to return in Q4 to capitalise on the increased awareness of Local Authority Fostering and round off what we hope will be a successful year.

RCT fostering service has a supportive and flexible foster care provision which ranges from 0 to 18 years with experienced foster carers who have short- and long-term placement availability and newly approved carers who are fully supported in their fostering journey. There are currently foster carers who offer short break provisions and carers who specialise in providing baby care and others who provide a home to the teenagers.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further? Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of feedback, monitoring, CIW and any identified non-compliance and outstanding actions

In terms of service need, we have an identified gap in our mainstream foster carer resources is in respect of foster carers who are prepared to foster older, more complex children or larger sibling groups and parent and child placements. Recruitment and successful retention of such carers would be positive for RCT as it would reduce our dependence on potential future placements with Independent Fostering Agencies which are often high cost and situated outside of RCT.

The changes in the Public Law Outline continues to show a significant increase in the number of Immediate Placements under Section 76 (SSWB (Wales) Act 2014) with family or friends and therefore an increase in requests for unified /connected person's assessments to be completed. While these are undeniably positive arrangements for children and young people it does impact staffing pressures within the service, particularly around timescales and assessment capacity.

Whilst the establishment of a kinship assessment team has gone a long way to relieving some of the staff pressure, the rise in Kinship care continues to impact on the resources available in the support team.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements/developments successful and how will this be measured? Include an action plan setting out the specific outcome-focussed actions needed to improve, timescales identified, lead officer and the performance indicators to measure improvement.

To improve our foster care provision an overall recruitment campaign is in place that addresses the specific needs including training.

A working group will be established to address in house at the parent and child provision.

A HOS led service Fostering Delivery plan is in place.

Summary

RCT Childrens Services are working continually to ensure a robust, fit for purpose and child-centred Fostering Service exists. The Statement of Purpose and the Fostering Service Delivery Plan sets out our core goals and our steps to achieve them.

This Quality-of-Care report will assist in planning for the future and delivering quality care to children looked after.

The following bullet points are the goals to implemented over the coming year.

Future Planning and Developments

- **Consultations – Improve reporting systems and enhance understanding of foster carers, young people and parents’ experiences**
- **A guide to service to be developed for foster carers and children looked after**
- **Foster Carer Profiles – Available for young people in a child friendly format and the social workers to improve the matching process**
- **Health and Education – Improve how data can be collected specifically for children looked after by RCT carers and contribute to the monitoring process**
- **Pioneer Foster Carers – recruit more pioneers to encourage further development and links with education and provide advice and guidance to foster carers.**
- **Parent and Child Training – Encourage existing foster carers to transfer to this provision**
- **Foster Wales Recruitment campaign - Assess and recruit foster carers locally**

- **Kinship care- Monitor the resources available to respond to demand**
- **Foster Panel- Annual training event to support the Quality Assurance role of the foster panel members**
- **Foster Panel – Annual Appraisal of Panel Members**
- **Training – review of impact of Learning and Development Framework**
- **The service needs to further develop its quality assurance and audit work and to take forward lessons learned and actions.**
- **Further develop systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing quality of service including the functioning of the Fostering Panel in line with The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.**