



Fostering RCT

Local care for Local children

Quality of Care Report 2021/22

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 that is currently Hybrid/agile working) 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 Family Support and Accommodation, Claire Williams. The registered Care Inspectorate Wales 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. 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.

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

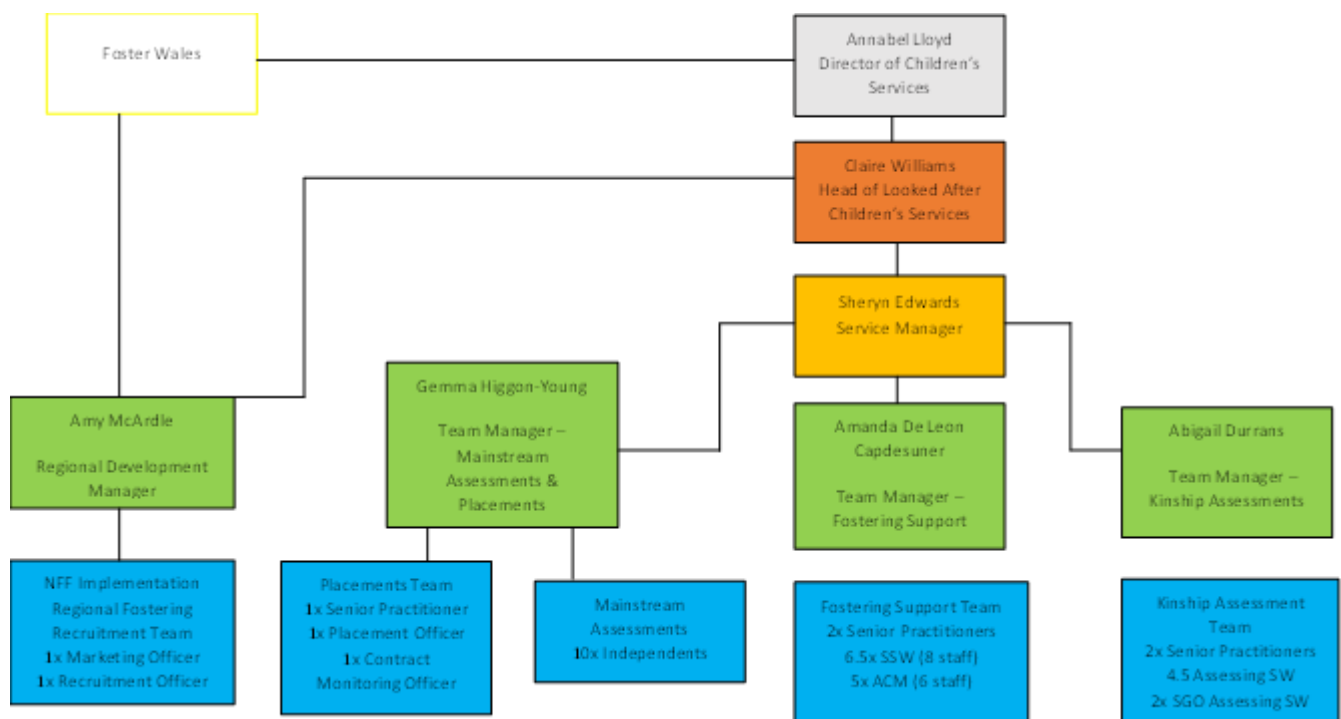
- Training of carers and staff
- Compliance with foster placement agreements
- Accidents, illnesses and injuries
- Complaints
- Allegations against foster carers
- Unauthorised absences from the foster carer home

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 and undertaking SGO assessments
- 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.

During this reporting period we have been able to gradually re-introduce direct, face to face sessions, to consult with foster carers and children on a more regular basis as the pandemic restrictions have reduced.

The face-to-face consultation sessions have taken the form of workshops and coffee mornings, coupled with the continued online sessions, have provided varied opportunities that assist carers to express their feelings and views on the ways in which the service could improve and their views and experiences. The main areas raised by foster carers are

- Activities for children
- Fees and Allowances
- Training opportunities
- Flexible support

Our activity reporting has coincided with a programme of events from Welsh Government Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing funding streams that RCT fostering were successful in their applications. As a result, an array of trips and activities were organised during the spring summer and winter months, including bowling, cinema trips, picnics, children's parties, and fostering day's out. Our pioneer foster carers took the lead in organising events and this proved so successful that they have recently organised the annual award giving appreciation lunch and the Christmas party for children in foster care both were a resounding success.

Included in this involvement work is the following contributions and feedback from foster carers and young people and other professionals:

- Foster carers have reported they feel more comfortable and relaxed when attending foster panel and valued by the social workers supporting them in the

panel. This was positive to hear because a re- development of the role of panel and panel functions has been undertaken and the feedback has been very positive. Foster carers are reporting that they feel well prepare for the panel and know what to expect. One applicant stated that she felt emotional hearing the positive feedback from panel members but also very pleased and proud to be a kinship foster carer. Another applicant, who was approved as mainstream foster carer, reported that the assessment has been very detailed but was a positive experience as was the panel process.

- The Multi-agency Placement Permanence Service (MASPPS) training workshops have also proved popular with foster carers who have been able to actively take part in these shorter sessions provided by the therapeutic team on topics directly related to caring for children in foster care. Further sessions are planned on the consultation process for social workers and foster carers to ask advice on possible referral to the team and MAPPS panel which as a fostering service we welcome.
- Consultation events attended by foster carers and staff from the fostering support team provided opportunities for foster carers to share their views and comments on the service provided by fostering in RCT. They have spoken of how they feel well supported by their supervising social worker, and how queries are dealt with quickly when they contacted the fostering support team. Some of their concerns are relating the fees and allowances and uplifts. The national Foster Wales Team have recently written out to foster carers to explain developments and Welsh Government are commissioning work to address the harmonisation of fees in and uplifts in allowances.

In 2022, RCT Fostering Service undertook a new style consultation exercise with connected persons (Kinship) foster carers and mainstream foster carers to find out their thoughts and feelings in relation to the assessment process and support provided by the service. This way of consulting proved very successful, and a similar survey will be completed in March / April 2023. The survey will focus on what carers feel work well and support them in their role, the things they feel don't work so well and what the fostering service and children's services could improve on.

Kinship Cymru continue to provide a service to our kinship foster carers in RCT and have provided an update on their involvement over the past year.

Kinship Connect is an intensive 1:1, emotional support, guidance, and advocacy service for kinship carers, on any order or no order. The project provides carers with direct access to a project worker who can offer emotional support, a listening ear, and sign posting to other services for the carer, as well as support and guidance through Court proceedings and PLO.

The worker will link in with any/all other services involved with the family and bridge the gap between the statutory services and the family. The worker will advocate at CLA, CASP and CP reviews, as well as school meetings, meetings with CAFCASS, Snap Cymru, educational phycologists, health professions etc. We also facilitate twice monthly support groups, a WhatsApp chat group and arrange face to face events for carers to gain peer support. We access and apply for grants via Buttle UK. We have access to our dedicated Welsh advice worker via our advice line, who as well as

providing advice on legal, housing, education, and welfare benefits; she can also apply for other grants, such as CIN, Comic relief etc.

So far during the commissioned period.

- We have supported 46 number of carers with 1:1 support and meeting advocacy.
- We have over 100 carers accessing peer support via the WhatsApp and Facebook page.
- We have accessed just short of £14,000 of Buttle grants.
- Facilitated 16 virtual support group and 2 face to face events, attended by over 130 carers.
- Provided Foodbank Vouchers to 9 families.
- Provided Christmas gifts for over 30 children and 5 festive food hampers.

The support provided by our service is instrumental maintaining placements and provided the much-needed support tailored for each family needs, empowering them to meet future challenges and get the best for the children they care for.

Quotes from carers:

- Vickie is amazing. She's listened many times when I was stressed. The afternoon tea was great as it stopped us feeling isolated. I'm looking forward to more face-to-face events. Being part of Kinship has made us feel so much better, there are people like us to talk to and I've made a new friend out of it – Kinship Carer RCT
- Vickie has been unbelievable. Brilliant. We couldn't have managed without her help. We would have been lost without Vickie throughout this whole process. If it's been promised by Vickie, it has been done. – Kinship Carer RCT
- I will always access the group as well as I feel I have made friends when before was so lonely now I am not so much. – Kinship Carer RCT.
- The grant accessed has made my granddaughter feel that this is her home now and she is more settled. – Kinship Carer RCT

Quotes from professionals:

- Kinship Connected has made a big difference to nan to have someone to speak to, being able to meet with other kinship families. – Play Therapist Comets and Rockets
- The Kinship Connected Project has made a big difference to our work for families who are referred who are kinship carers. – Play Therapist Comets and Rockets
- Victoria is well-informed in respect of legislation and regulations that govern Kinship care arrangements and therefore provides accurate advice to carers and challenge of children services when appropriate to do so. – Independent Reviewing Officer RCT
- Having the support from Kinship Cymru offered an independent person who could also advocate alongside me as the fostering Social Worker. Having a worker helped my carer feel even more supported with her emotional well-being and gave her a voice when she didn't feel had one. – Social Worker RCT

Staff consultation is another area we are improving across Children's Services. We actively encourage social workers to attend practitioner forums to gather staff viewpoints on the services 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 in 2022 and feedback from these events informs future planning. We have fostering representation on the practitioner group which is useful for fostering developments. As a service the quality of assessments and supervision of foster carers and the review process will be our focus in the coming year.

Consultation with staff in the Fostering Service also takes place in regular Team Meetings and the Regional Development Manager will attend these meetings to discuss the work programmes. During the next reporting period there are plans to arrange a Fostering and SGO 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

There is a new participation graduate officer in post, and this has been a busy and exciting period of engagement with our looked after children and young people which will feed into a wider strategy to improve how we listen effectively to the young people in our care. Voices from care have continued to complete direct consultation work and ensured young people can attend the regular care experienced forums, reviews, and direct work not only have their voice heard but to promote their lived experiences at a strategic, policy and legislative level both locally and nationally.

Children in foster care will be able contribute to the annual "Get Involved" survey to capture the themes that are important to them. The ambition of the new RCT participation strategy is to not only ensure co production but also ensure the voice of the child is heard in service delivery and development and the future model will include bi-annual feedback on any changes made. The participation events have been arranged through face-to-face sessions, virtual meet ups and through website and apps. One session, a building strengths workshop, focused on a strengths-based approach and the positive qualities shared from the young people were, "Strong", "Confident", "Creative", "Resilient". The 8 –13-year-old group workshop created written material and requested more nature activities and arts and crafts. The third participation event focused on education issues and linked in with the new CLA education virtual schools' team that has now been created in RCT.

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, and can include 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 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. One of our pioneer foster carers has assisted with this and her input has been invaluable.

The fostering support team ran 19 activities from the beginning of July to the end of September for the fostering community in RCT which also included residential, fostering, SGO and Kinship Cymru. These events included, bowling, picnics, outdoor activities, cinema trips. The total number of children / young people that attended over this time was 675 children, total number of adults 359. The team manager received very positive feedback from children and adults as the events really helped to bring fostering families together.

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 to ensure parents views (where appropriate) are gained as part of the annual review process.

We are looking to ensure that a report from the parents is captured as part of the reviewing process and continue to work closely with the IROs who review the care and support plans for all children looked after in RCT. The fostering social workers attend all the CLA reviews when invited and this works well in not only supporting the foster carers and child but also building good relationships with parents. Going forward 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 and reported to managers and CLAQA. Feedback received directly from the teams would suggest that further compliments have been received but not formally noted to the relevant department. Lost of complimentary quotes from foster carers and children are contained in our foster carer surveys and from our participation officer's report on direct work with children

The foster panel chair has provided regular positive feedback on assessments being of a high standard and the foster carers have reported improved methods of being part of panel that is largely online, but how they can input in a meaningful way.

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. The Face-to-face consultation will continue and the workshop for foster carers will be encouraged, RCT fostering will look to provide a venue, refreshments, and staff to facilitate these events and enable foster carers to take an active part in the future developments.

A more robust system for ensuring that feedback is given to foster carers following consultation events will be implemented So that any actions taken within the service as a direct result of the consultation are highlighted and we demonstrate that we are actively listening. This will improve co-production and the quality of the service.

The team manager of the reviewing service and the team manager of the fostering support team are planning to meet more regularly to look at how carers, children and parents' view's and experiences of fostering (as part of the CLA review) can be improved This will also require us to develop our reporting systems to be able to better capture and analyse this feedback to improve our understanding and positively impact service delivery as a result.

The changes that have been made to the independent foster panel over the course of the year will be evaluated within the next survey to our foster carers. The Panel advisor and panel chair will undertake to review the panel process annually using a 360° approach.

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

Improved consultation with foster carers and fostering staff on the Foster Wales regional work programme. Team managers to attend the Regional Operational Group Meetings and Foster carers will be encouraged to take part in the wider Foster Wales consultation events to ensure their issues are highlighted as part of the agenda.

The fostering team managers will also attend regional Foster Wales meetings and the service manager will attend the strategic group to ensure Foster Wales RCT are well positioned and supported to meet the local and regional work plan.

Improve the timelessness of the Annual Review process for foster carers and continue to hold regular panel agenda meetings to ensure assessments and reviews are on track.

Encourage the use of the foster care guides which provide information about the service available to children/young people and fosters carers to ensure that those using the service are fully informed of their rights.

Continue to use Foster Carer profiles as part of the matching process in the placement team and by social workers as part of the placement process.

Improvement to the fostering service will be measured as part of the placement stability and permanence processes that report to CLA QA.

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.

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 established as a pilot by Fostering Network to encourage professionals to work together with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes. Also creating a shared language for multi-agency professionals and a shared framework to operate and contribute to workforce development.

Specific outcomes include:

- Greater recognition that Foster Carers are 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 integrated activities and the development of a shared approach.
- Greater knowledge and confidence displayed by foster carers and advocating for their child and accessing education support services.
- Increased knowledge and confidence levels amongst foster carer and staff and greater clarity regarding the role they can play educational attainment of children looked after.
- Improved understanding of other links between emotional wellbeing and education attainment.
- Increased access for foster carers to peer support for training and information.
- Potential benefits and the recruitment and retention of foster carers through the development of peer support network and enhanced wellbeing.
- Additional local resources to support the fostering community through the introduction of fostering wellbeing champions.

RCT continues to work to the Fostering Well-Being model and has been very successful in recruitment and development of the foster care pioneer programme.

Pioneers

After the completion of the original Master Class 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. In April 2020, we had recruited 4 Pioneers who had been trained as part of the Fostering Networks Fostering Wellbeing programme. During the lockdown period we focused on supporting the children they are looking after and their own families due to the Covid 19 restrictions 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.

- Workshop Events with Kinship Carers and Mainstream Carers
- Day time 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 peer support and support the carers' Facebook pages
- Organising and facilitating activities and events

The scheme has been so successful and with such positive outcomes we hope to further recruit pioneer kinship foster carers. Going forward the Pioneers will continue to undertake development work in the fostering service, including supporting other foster carers in working with the children in their care support with the ongoing implementation of the Learning and Development Framework

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 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 signed up to ensuring the framework by including this as part of 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.

It has now been agreed in RCT that a new review of the implementation of the framework will take place and during this reporting period it has been agreed that a re-launch is required in 2023. The regional manager will facilitate this and work with the regional training department to implement.

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 and leisure activities

Foster carers 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. 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 senior education psychologist has provided the following data with regards to school exclusions for this reporting period. Going forward the new virtual head will provide this information along with the new curriculum in Wales and new ways of gathering the data on outcomes and achievements. The fostering service are looking forward to working with the new CLA education virtual school team and have already made good links to improve the outcomes of children looked after in foster care. This has been strengthened by participating in the fostering wellbeing programme with the educational psychologists

Table 1: Incidents of Fixed Term (FT) and permanent exclusions in the academic year 2021/22 involving RCT Children who are Looked After. Exclusions for school population - Academic year 2021 - 22

Number of students	CLA	Non CLA
Fixed term	114	2298
Perm	1	18

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 02/09/2021 and 22/07/2022 who are Looked compared with Non CLA

Overall attendance in RCT schools	
CLA pupils	Non CLA pupils
88.03%	85.05%
Primary school attendance	
92.57%	89.25%
Secondary school attendance	
86.65%	82.47%

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. This has proved very popular and has continued for those children in foster care if required.

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 229 children placed with Relative Carers. This figure includes approved and non-approved kinship carers. The number has decreased by 10 when compared to the same time last year.

The Fostering Service has a dedicated support team for foster carers with allocated social workers that provide support and supervision we have been working closely with a local project provided by Kinship Cymru to ensure a range of services are provided.

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.

Foster Carer Training

A training needs analysis survey was held in in January 2022 for mainstream and kinship foster carers to comment on the courses offered the delivery, venues used and any online opportunities. The outcomes of the survey were used to plan the training calendar.

All foster carers can access the Local Authority training programme specifically tailored for them and have support to access training from a dedicated training officer. During the pandemic from March 2020 foster carers were able to continue 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 learning up until lockdown in December 2020. Then in January 2021 we moved all the courses online via zoom and then Teams and this progressed into 2022.

We are now able to provide face to face training however some courses remain online this is useful for foster carers who are not able to always travel to courses or attend all day training courses.

The following courses were available face to face to our foster carers from April 2021- March 2022

Fire Awareness	Introduction to Moving and Handling	Call, Push, Rescue (First Aid)
Level 2 Child Protection for foster carers	Recording Skills	Working with Birth Families and contact
Child Development	Advocacy and Children's Rights	Life Journey Work
Developing a secure base and promoting attachment	Supporting Education and Development for Children looked after	Promoting good health
Neurodevelopmental Behaviour Support	Bereavement and Loss in Looked after Children	Foetal Alcohol Disorder
Preparation to adoption	Digital safeguarding	Reduction of Suicide and Self Harm
Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse and the Effects on Children	Self care for foster carers	Substance misuse awareness
ELSA for foster carers	Parenting with PACE	Emotion Coaching
Growing up in care – Lived experiences	Self Awareness	Basic ICT Skills

E – Learning

Adolescence – understanding key issues in working with young people	Assessing and Managing Risk	Attachment and Brain Development
Behaviour and Physical Environment (inc level 4)	Brain Development and Positive Parenting	Building resilience
Building individual and community resilience: level 4	Child Development	Child Protection
Child Centred Assessment	Communicating with children and young people	Confidentiality and Record keeping
Contact in Foster Care	Domestic Violence	Emotion Coaching (inc level 4)
Equality and Diversity (inc level 4)	Impulsive behaviour	Maladaptive Behaviours level 4
Men in Children's Services	Multi disciplinary working	Narrative Work (inc level 4)
Parental Mental Health issues	Professional Development	Secondary Trauma
Self Harming behaviours	Sexualised Behaviour (inc level 4)	Team Work
The role of the foster carer	Transitions and Vulnerabilities	Understanding Trauma

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

The Skills to Foster preparatory training is back up and running, it was cancelled during the first lockdown and then reinstated following guidance from the fostering network around virtual delivery.

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 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 continue 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.

Kinship Cymru will continue the two day a week contract that provides RCT kinship foster carers with advice and support groups in the community and training events and one to one support if required.

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 (Significant Incident Form) 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.

There were 3 significant events recorded between April 2021 – March 2022.

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. Activity is reported to the 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 2021/22 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 will 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
10	1	6	3

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 to work in another local authority. We have inducted two new starters to the service. As at 31.3.22 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 2021 and 31st March 2022, there were 8 episodes relating to 7 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. We have also updated the policy on restrictive practice and positive behaviour management.

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. The medication policy in place has also been updated this year.

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 their 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 2021-2022 the foster panel has met and made recommendations on:
April 2021-March 2022

Number of Panels	27
Approvals-mainstream carers	11
Immediate Placements (connected persons under Section 76 SSWBA (W) 2014)	14 (Reg 26 placements)
Annual foster carer reviews	43
Change of approval status	11
Terminations of approval-mainstream	5
Connected persons/ Kinship approvals	35
Terminations of approved kinship carers	25

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. The teams' members can use desks located in offices in RCT and utilise hot desks within Ty Trevithick and operate out of other Council premises and 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, which can 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 are undertaken and will going forward be held with the panel chair and panel advisor

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.

Continue to work closely with 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.

Continue to develop quality assurance and audit work including dip sampling and take forward lessons learned and actions.

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.

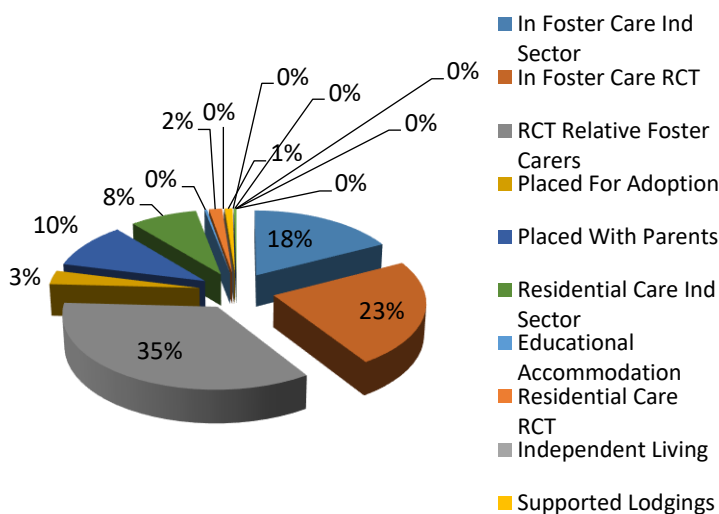
What we do well and the evidence for it? Consider a summary of arrangements in place including access to the local community; how privacy, dignity and confidentiality is maintained, and a summary of views obtained on any changes to the environment

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 over the last 12 months and there currently 654 children looked after which is 39 less children looked after than at the same period last year.

Placements:

CLA at 15/04/2022



Based on current children looked after numbers, we have the most children placed with Relative Carers (35%). This figure includes approved and non-approved kinship carers. The number has decreased by 10 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 2% when compared to last year.

The number of children placed in external residential placements has increased by 2 when compared to last year. 52 placements in Apr 22 compared to 50 in Apr 21.

The number of Mother and Baby placements has decreased from 4 to 2 over the last 12 months.

The number of children placed with parents has decreased by 1 when compared to last year. 66 placements in Apr 22 compared to 67 in Apr 21.

Placement Stability:

32 children who were looked after on 31st March 2022 experienced 3 or more changes of placement. Performance has improved since Quarter 3 2021/22, and we achieved 4.9% 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 support 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 2021	100	171	146	264
Number of approvals/changes between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022	12	19	42	58
Number that left the service between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022	14	23	35	53
Number of fostering households/placements as at 31st March 2022	98	167	153	269

There have been 14 mainstream foster carers who had their approvals terminated between April 2021 and March 2022. 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

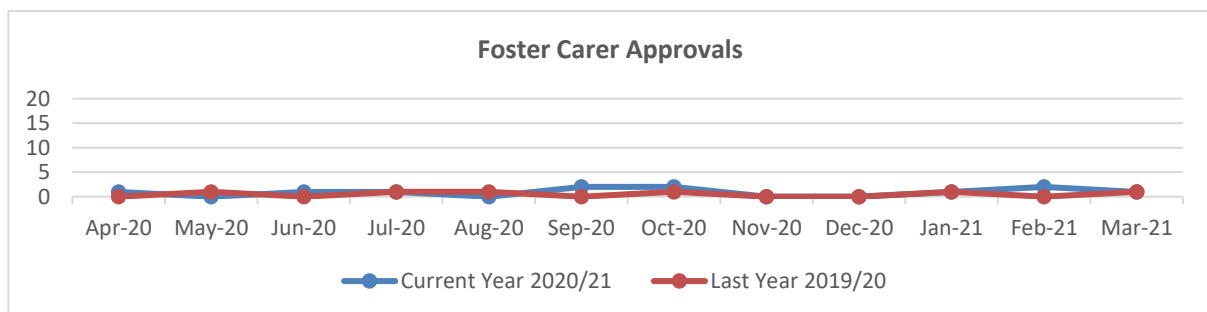
a result. There was also one resignation relating to concerns, complaints and allegations relating to a carer who was not meeting fostering competencies.

There have been 35 kinship foster carers de-registered between April 2021 and March 2022. The highest number of approvals that ended relate to carers converting to being SGO carers.

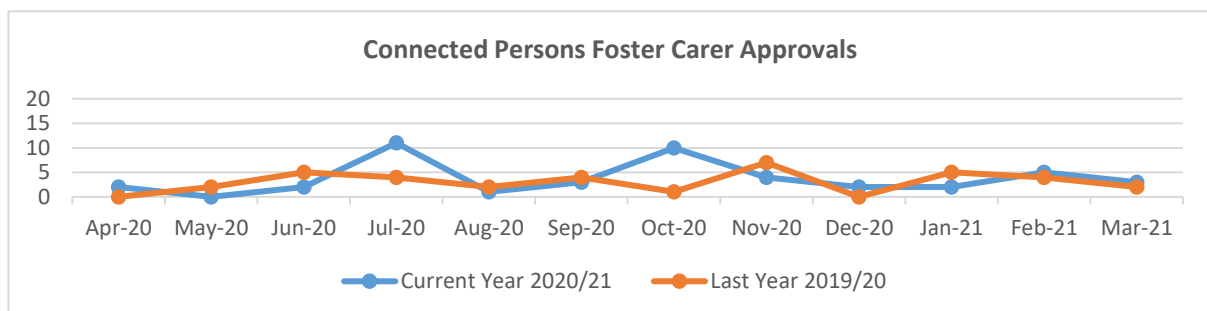
Marketing and Recruitment:

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 and performance of the regional service is monitored by the regional management board.

The recruitment team facilitates all enquiries, recruitment calls, marketing activity and initial visits up to the point of assessment for both RCT and Merthyr and Bridgend. 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.



There were 12 newly approved mainstream foster carers in this review period, an increase of 1 carer household compared to the previous review period.



There were 42 Kinship Carer approvals in this review period, an decrease of 3 carer households compared to the previous review period

Future Developments

The Foster Wales national brand has now been launched and a structured a marketing plan has been implemented.

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 for older, more complex children or larger sibling groups and parent and child placements.

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 is established to address parent and child provision specifically parent and child in the community.

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

- **Continue Consultations to enhance understanding of foster carers, young people, and parents' experiences**
- **An up to date fostering guide available and accessible for foster carers and children**
- **Foster Carer Profiles in place for young people and social workers to improve the matching process**
- **Health and Education information collected specifically to contribute to the monitoring process**
- **Pioneer Foster Carers recruitment and support systems developed across mainstream, and kinship foster carers**
- **Parent and Child Training and development to encourage existing foster carers to transfer to this provision**
- **Foster Wales Recruitment campaign developed to recruit more foster carers locally**
- **Foster Panel training and appraisals to support the Quality Assurance role of the foster panel members**
- **Review the impact of Learning and Development Framework for foster carer training**
- **Develop quality assurance and audit work and to take forward lessons learned.**
- **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.**