

Quality of Care Review Report - Foster Wales RCT

Legal Context

The Quality of Care Review is a legal requirement for Foster Wales RCT and is written in accordance with:

- The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (the 2016 Act)
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018
- Whilst there is no requirement to follow CiW's '*Guidance on Completing the Quality of Care Review*' this approach has been chosen to assist in meeting statutory responsibilities

Designated Responsible Individual (RI)

The designated responsible individual Foster Wales RCT has a corresponding legal responsibility to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of care and support provided by the service. This is known as the 'quality of care review'. The regulations require the review to take place as often as required, or at least every six months.

Aims & Objectives of the Review

CiW reports that '*An effective quality of care review seeks to determine the extent to which people who are in receipt of services have their rights met and can achieve their personal outcomes through the service provided*'. To achieve this objective this report will demonstrate the approaches the Service has undertaken by using the following methods:

- setting internal quality standards
- gathering information
- undertaking an analysis
- reporting and action planning

Responsible Individual & Report Author	Gemma Higgon-Young
Date Completed	11 March 2024
Date Report presented at Corporate Parenting Board	19 March 2024
Next QoC Review due	September 2024

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About the Service

Foster Wales RCT is the Local Authority's Fostering Service (re-branded as a national brand in 2021) and provides a range of approved foster placements for children from the local community aged between 0 to 18 years of age. The service has 4 teams:

- Foster Wales's 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 service is located under the leadership of the Head of Service for Family Support and Accommodation, Claire Williams.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CiW) completed an Inspection in November 2023, the outcome was positive and reflected the current position of the service. The last inspection took place 7 years ago, on 18th January 2016. It was difficult to assess the actions completed following the 2016 inspection to date due to the impact of changes that have occurred in legislation, regulation, and guidance over the time period.

The 2023 inspection resulted in a list of improvements to the service such as:

- Service Manager to be appointed.
- The absence of a service manager has impacted on the provision of the service with no consistent oversight to review and develop service objectives.
- The delegation of tasks and responsibilities from managers to senior staff needs to be reviewed to enable managers to focus on the development of the service and to ensure it meets the requirements of the regulations.
- Recommendations of the review for future planning and developing the service were identified but it was unclear what action and progress had been made.

Further improvements noted by CiW are discussed later in this report. A number of improvement points have already been actioned and updated will be reported on in the next Quality of Care Report. The Inspectors are aiming to return in 12months time (from November) to review the improvements required.

On 4th December 2023, the designated Responsible Individual for Foster Wales RCT is the Service Manager, Gemma Higgon-Young was appointed. The RI has a dedicated Development Plan for the service in which the CiW areas for improvement have been incorporated.

Foster Wales RCT is a regulated service and has a legal obligation to ensure suitable arrangements are in place to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing, and improving the quality of service to ensure the most vulnerable children in our communities are appropriately cared for.

The Service is currently operating temporarily from:
 YOS Unit 2
 Maritime Industrial Estate
 Pontypridd
 CF45 5NY

Hybrid working arrangements are place (in line with Council Policy 2022) and the Service has dedicated ‘office days’ on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week. The hybrid arrangements support the combination of face to face and remote working which reflects the needs of the service. As a service, we value the hybrid arrangements and the benefits that this brings to helping us meet the demands of working in Children’s Social Care while achieving a positive balance for staff.

Overall strategic and day to day management

Foster Wales RCT is the responsibility of the Service Manager for Fostering & Placements, Gemma Higgon-Young, and three Fostering Team Managers. In addition, a Regional Development Manager assists the service with the Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers.

All staff are suitably qualified for their roles and meet the Fitness to Practice requirements stipulated by CiW.

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.

Service Established in 2000	2024
Number of Mainstream and Kinship	132 Mainstream 148 Kinship (as at 17.01.2024)
Total number of foster carers	280
Total number of Special Guardianship	243 children subject to SGOs

The Promises to Care-experienced Young People

- We will take time to listen to all care-experienced children and young people and ensure their views, wishes and feelings are heard and actively considered in all decisions made about them.
- We will treat all care-experienced young people with respect.
- We will involve all care-experienced children and young people in decisions that are made about them.
- We will keep all care-experienced children and young people informed about our involvement with them and explain our actions to them.
- We will use straightforward language when we communicate with all care-experienced children and young people.
- We will show compassion when considering the needs of all care-experienced children and young people.
- We will work with all care-experienced children and young people to help them achieve their goals.
- We will advise all care-experienced children and young people of the process to make a complaint should they feel we are not adhering to this charter.
- We will advise all care-experienced children and young people that they have a right to access independent advocacy to make sure their views, wishes and feelings are heard during decisions being made or when they are unhappy and want something stopped, started or changed.

The following 4 sections will provide an overview of the quality of service provided across the service and outlines areas for improvement and development during the forthcoming year.

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.

An audit of WCCIS Files was completed in preparation for the CiW inspection in October 2023. It was reported that:

Children/Young People can express their views through several different ways:

- In consultation with their Independent Reviewing Officer for their Child Looked After meetings
- In consultation with their Social Workers
- In consultation with independent advocacy TGP Cymru.
- In consultation with another professional such as Supervising Social Worker or Teacher.

Specifically for Foster Wales 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.

Participation – Children and Young People

The purpose of the consultation and participation events are to find out:

- What is going well for you? (And for other young people that are care-experienced)
- What could be better? (Are there any changes that you would like made for your care and support and for other care-experienced young people?)
- How would you like to get involved with Children's Services to have your voice heard?

A series of 'Get Involved' feedback conversations with young people aged 11 to 15 and 16+ in Residential care, Foster Care, Kinship care and through the 16+ drop in to find out how they would like services to be developed and improved through on-going participation events from September 2022 to the present.

The Participation Officer reported from their findings that:

Positives (going well) for young people.

- Education, volunteering and learning opportunities.
- Seeing siblings.
- Youth club.
- Hobbies.
- Having a safe place.
- 'Safe adults to support young people' (Foster Care and Residential Care).
- 'Living with other young people' (Residential Care).
- 'Care2Work' has been amazing and so supportive' (16+ drop in West).
- 'The staff for 16+ are amazing'...and attending the 16+ drop in' (16+ Drop in West).

A draft Corporate Parenting Pledge has been drawn up with a focus on shared principles and promises that Corporate Parenting Board members need to fulfill when working with care-experienced children and young people.

A Celebration Event was held on 29th November 2023 for care experienced young people. 37 nominations were received from schools, Children's Services staff for young people's achievements in sport, education, the arts and personal achievements. Young people in Foster Care attended along with their foster carers and we had over 100 children and young people (including children in other CLA arrangements), carers and staff attend the event. This was a joint event with Education and Children's Services.

Children and Young People in Foster are participated in singing, guitar and keyboard performances. There were also young people who gave inspirational speeches about their achievements as part of Care2Work scheme.

The Participation Officer report 'A Foster carer told me that she found the event inspirational for her young people because it was good for them to listen to young people who have overcome challenges and doing well with their education, training or employment and for her son to listen to this information from young people themselves.'

It is anticipated that another celebration event will be held in July 2024 with our Education Service.

A Participation newsletter will be sent to children, young people, parent/carers and staff to provide an update on how we are hearing children and young people's voice and how young people can get involved in redeveloping our public facing information (website) to meet their care and support needs.

The Transformation Team in Children's Services are developing accessible public facing information for children, young people, carers and families. This includes revised content for children looked after and care leavers. This information will be piloted with young people from April/ May 2024.

Voices from Care Cymru have also been delivering their 'Sky's the Limit' workshops for young people aged 8- to 13-year-olds through accessible wellbeing events that include a

Christmas Party, two pantomime events at the New Theatre Cardiff and Park and Dare. They've also held a New Years Party for care experienced young people. Voices from Care Cymru have a 'Sing Proud Cymru' choir for children and young people in RCT that meet once a week during term time.

Parent's views are captured via the Child Looked After meetings.

Participation – Foster Carers

Foster carers coffee morning take place every quarter to support the emotional and social wellbeing of all our foster carers.

Following feedback from the Foster Carers coffee mornings, the RCT Virtual School for Children Looked After Session on Virtual Schools for Foster Carers arranged re ALN following feedback from foster carers.

Pioneer Foster Carers are proactive generating consultation and feedback from our foster carers. They are a proactive group of carers with a focus on supporting other carers with various needs. This is managed by the Fostering Support Team Manager and is reported to be well received by foster carers. The group has been recognised by AFKA and The Fostering Network as a champion LA for the pioneer scheme. The Pioneers have been asked to attend the Pioneer Steering Group with the Fostering Network.

Foster Care drop-in sessions (office based) began February 2024, and we anticipate to report on this area in the coming months.

We have one foster carer who currently cares for a Parent and Child (PAC). In February 2024, we established and linked with another LA and their PAC Foster Carer within the Cwm Taf Region (via regional partnership working) with the aim of peer support and sharing best practice advice and guidance.

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.

Next Steps for Participation

The Participation Officer provided feedback from the Get involved survey:

What could be better to improve young people's care and support?

5 to 10 years old

- Make sure young people know who their Social Worker is and other trusted adults.
- More activities in the community.
- Some young people want to know about their children's rights.
- to 15 years old
- Looking at a range of different ways to keep in touch with family.
- Living closer to family.

- Wellbeing- to feel better about yourself.
- to 25 years old
- Access to information about mental health and wellbeing services.
- *'Extend the 16+ drop in from one day per week to 2 or 3 days per week.'* (16+Drop in West- collective voice).
- More in person meet up activities in the community.
- Housing and tenancy support.
- Benefits support.

The Transformation Team in Children's Services are developing accessible public facing information for children, young people, carers and families. This includes revised content for children looked after and care leavers. This information will be piloted with young people from April/May 2024.

Provide information leaflets to care experienced young people and carers/family in March 2024 to explain the purpose of participation events and engaging young people to share their voice for service developments. This may support consultation with a wider range of children and young people who are looked after.

The Graduate Officer for Participation has prepared a draft Corporate Parenting Board Pledge for RCT that builds on Welsh Government's 'Corporate Parenting Board Charter- A Promise from Wales'. The draft pledge will go to Cabinet in February 2023 prior to sharing with the Corporate Parenting Board.

Continue to work with Children's Services colleagues and ICT in developing the accessibility of the 'My Voice, My Review' through Widgeit software that includes text and symbols for easy reading. The Reviewing Team will also pilot this information with young people once the Widgeit software is ready to be used.

CiW reported (19.12.23)

Wellbeing

- development of further consultation forums and feedback from children about their fostering experiences would support a more consistent approach to inform service development and improvement.
- The service needs to ensure there is adequate oversight and monitoring of savings made by foster carers on behalf of children.
- Support Groups - some scheduling in advance would ensure foster carers are able to plan and this would support their attendance.

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

The Service Development Plan has been updated from the outcome of the CiW inspection. This is a working document that is reviewed at various stages.

The Service Development Plan will be monitored and progressed by a series of actions including:

1:1 Supervision between Service Manager and Head of Service
1:1 Supervision between Team Manager and Service Manager
Team Managers Meeting (weekly)
Service Development Days
Service Development Meetings
Working Groups

Summary

There is a clear and embedded process for participation and information is recorded and feedback accordingly.

There are areas for improvement that we have included in our service development plan and anticipated that they will be actions over the course of the next 12 months. The Service Development Plan is monitored and reviewed regularly with relevant managers.

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.

Health, Education and leisure activities

The Annual Review contains details in respect of the child’s health, education, and leisure activities and related outcomes. The review focuses on how foster carers are meeting each of the child’s needs detailed in the Care and Support. At 3 yearly intervals (or sooner if the need is required) the annual reviews were presented at foster panel for further quality assurance.

Kinship Support

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.

Celebration event for care-experienced young people 29.11.23

Foster Carer Learning and Development

Pre-approval training – Skills to Foster is a course that is attended by every applicant and is well received (evidenced via assessment feedback)

The Source is a platform that is accessed by foster carers to record their learning and development. There has been some resistance due the system not being easy to use and a number of foster carers not being confident in using such systems.

Multi Agency Permanence Support Service (MAPSS)

MAPSS is a specialist therapeutic intervention service for care experienced children and that is available to all foster carers. The service offers support for a range of emotional, behavioural and mental health challenges. Specifically for foster carers, there are several types of support available including consultation support, training and support for carer burnout.

Family Group Meetings (FGM)

FGMs are available to all fostering households. An awareness training session is planned for 7th March 2024 for all staff with the aim of understanding the trigger for referral and related process.

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.

We would like to extend our pre-approval training for Kinship and Special Guardian applicants.

We continue to support our foster carers with IT support to help them access online training and related accounts.

CiW

- The system to record foster carer's learning and development needs to be strengthened to provide an overview of what training has been undertaken and to ensure this complies with the service's policy and expectations of foster carers.
- Whilst the local authority gathers information in relation to the educational progress of all care experienced children; information to demonstrate the attendance, progress and academic attainment of children placed with foster carers is not readily available and gathered by the service to monitor and inform outcomes for children using the service.
- Action to collate information about training completed by foster carers has more recently been prioritised and the completion of learning and development records are in the process of being completed. These are areas identified as requiring improvement.

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.

Liaising with The Source and Training Department to strengthen our service's understanding of the learning platform.

Further development work required in relation to training completed by foster carers including liaising with Training Department.

Liaising with the Virtual School to assist in measuring outcomes for care experienced children in Foster Wales RCT fostering households.

Summary

There are defined improvements required CiW in respect of learning and development for foster carers as well as measuring outcomes for children.

A change in our approach to learning and development is required to meeting the expectations required, we have already begun to identify how our processes need to assist in the analysis and recording of learning and development.

Management Information is required for those children in fostering households to assist in the reporting on the outcomes of health, educational and leisure activities as required by CiW.

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.

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.

The following significant events can be captured via the Significant Events Form:

- All accidents, injuries and illnesses of children placed with foster parents
- Complaints in relation to children placed with foster carers and their outcomes.
- Any unauthorised absences from the foster home of a child accommodated there
- Use of any measures of control, restraint, or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home
- Medication, Medical treatment, and First Aid administered to any child placed with foster parents
- Other Significant Events

All significant events are reported by the carers to their supervising social worker or duty worker as soon as practically possible following the event. The allocated supervising social worker takes responsibility for completing the Significant Incident Form. The form will be 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 and the event be reported via the Portal to CiW.

11 Significant incident forms have been completed:

1. Young Person aged 17 - Police involvement, young person arrested due to young person being present during a drug deal 15.01.24
2. Young Person aged 15 Threat of allegations 22.11.23
3. Young Person aged 15 – Dishonesty and aggression to wards carer and other child 19.12.23
4. Young Person aged 17 – Displaying violence within the household 30.10.23
5. Child aged 10 - Accident resulting in minor injury 07.01.24
6. Young Person aged 14 – sharing inappropriate images and community issues. 24.10.23
7. Child – serious health issue and required biopsy on 10.10.23
8. Young Person aged ? – CCTV of young person enabling animals cruelty, police involvement 21.10.23
9. Young Person aged 8 – report of inappropriate sexual activity, however, further discussions reported lack of understanding of sexual language

10. Young Person aged 13 – Safeguarding concerns and Professional strategy meeting in relation to foster carer – Young Person accessing sexual videos online and concerns regarding carers relationship.

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

It is reported that 9 referrals were received by the Safeguarding team during the quarter 3 of 2023.

The data in relation to the outcomes of the referrals is not available at the time of writing this report and will be reported on in the next QoC report for 2024.

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

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

The service does not provide specific education provision. All educational needs are met by the LA’s Educational Department and Children Looked After Virtual School.

Records of Assessments

50 Assessments were presented to foster panel from Aug 2023 to February 2024, comprising of:

Type of Assessment Presented to Foster Panel	Connected Persons (Kinship)	Mainstream
Form F Assessments	NA	4
Connected Persons Assessments	9	NA
Deferred Assessments	2	0
Enhanced Payment Assessment	1	NA
Annual Reviews	8	8
Termination of Approval	14	5
Regulation 26 extension	1	NA

In addition, 4 Regulation 26 placements were recorded for the same time period.

Following each assessment an evaluation form is sent out to carers/applicants for completion, the following themes have been identified from the returns:

- Professional working relationships
- Respectful
- Positive Experience
- Clear Information provided

The Foster Panel Chair has provided consistently good feedback during this period regarding the standard of the assessments provided to foster panel.

Records of Fostering Panel meetings

The panel consists of:

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Foster Carer
- Independent Social Worker
- 2 Experienced and qualified social workers
- Community Medical Advisor (available for advice),
- Legal Advisor (available for advice)
- Panel Advisor
- Agency Decision Maker

In this review period, the fostering panel continue to operate as a virtual panel. Attendance from members of the panel is strong which has enabled the panel to be quorate and proceed when scheduled.

14 foster panels have been held between Aug 2023 – Feb 2024. 3 foster panels were cancelled due to incomplete assessments due to outstanding checks.

Two members of Business Support staff provide direct support and coordination to the Foster Panel. They ensure to gather necessary data and facilitate timely foster panels.

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

The Fostering Support Team and Kinship Assessment Team have established duty rotas in place. The teams are supported by a communication system called Cisco Jabber. Cisco Jabber delivers instant messaging, voice and video calls, voice messaging, desktop sharing, conferencing, and presence. There are mixed reviews in respect of how valuable the system is for our service.

All teams have a team specific email address and inbox that is monitored and actioned as required. This has proved to be effective especially when staff are absent from work for various reasons. The email inboxes have an automated response to assist those trying to communicate with the teams.

Minutes of Staff Meetings

All 3 teams hold regular team meetings, usually on a monthly to bi-monthly status, meeting minutes are stored electronically and are easily accessible for all Staff Members.

Team meetings provide opportunity to discuss updates, changes, research, regional and local services.

Team Managers and Service Manger meet on a weekly basis, one week the focus is on progressing the Service Development Plan and the next week focus is on operational matters. The Head of Service and Director are invited to team meetings, usually 2-3 times per year.

Service Development Meetings were held in September 2023 and January 2024. The meetings have a focus on development and future requirements of the service. Both meetings were well attended and positive feedback was received from staff. Themes and patterns are shared with staff during the day and via email.

Staff are invited to Children's Service wide meetings called 'Inform and Involve'. Staff within the service are encouraged to attend to keep up to date with wider service issues and developments.

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

Service Manager has requested CiW Portal access in respect of uploading significant events forms to CiW as and when required.

CiW improvement areas (reported 19.11.23):

Leadership and Management

- Where allegations have been made about foster carers, the service does not consistently ensure their fostering approval is reviewed and returned to panel within reasonable timescales.
- Some delays in completing mainstream assessments within a six month timeframe has been due to the lack of staff to allocate work. This impacts on the service's capacity to increase the availability and choice of foster carers for children
- There have been occasions when exemptions have been requested to place children with foster carer's outside of their approval. However, this has not been consistently undertaken for all arrangements and consideration given to the impact on accommodation and the fostering household. The service needs to ensure full compliance with the regulations in relation to exemptions.
- High caseloads were sighted as having an impact on staff's ability to complete core and statutory responsibilities as support to foster carers is given priority
- The request for references for staff appointments made from within the local authority needs to be aligned to the fostering regulations.
- The service needs to make improvements to monitor and review the quality of care provided by foster carers
- An annual review of the quality of care was completed in March 2023. This is not within the six month review period as required by the regulation and has not been updated.
- Visits by supervising social workers are not made within timescales as set out in the foster carer's handbook and service delivery standards.

- Opportunities for foster panel members to attend training needs to be given further consideration and the function of the panel should be included in the service's quality of care review.
- Arrangements for the annual review of foster carer's approval has not taken place within required timescales.
- Newly approved foster carers have not been consistently reviewed following their first year of approval or following allegations and considered at panel.
- A significant number of annual reviews are out of timescale. The impact of this is there is no evaluation of the care provided by foster carers and there is a lack of independent scrutiny by the fostering panel of the quality of care provided to individual children. Steps have been made to address this deficit with the appointment of an agency social worker with responsibility to complete annual reviews. However, this is unlikely to be effective due to the substantial number of foster carers approved by the local authority provider and the considerable number out of timescale. A system needs to be developed to prioritise and take action to address this concern which is a serious shortfall in the service provision.
- Statement of Purpose needs updating to reflect the changes in the service and also meet regulation.
- Service Guide for Children needs updating and consideration should be given to a format that is accessible to all.
- Foster Carer Profile need to be reviewed
- Service needs to ensure children receive information about their fostering arrangement prior to or following their placement
- All documents need to be in Welsh
- Records of children placed with foster carers are maintained electronically. However, these were not always accurate and updated to ensure children have an exact history of their care should this be required in later life. Information about children's access to short break stays and the periods they were away from their main foster placement were not clearly recorded. The service's audit of information is also identified as in need of improvement.
- Some policies require updating in line with current guidance and some remain in draft form. The complaints procedure needs to be specific to the fostering service and not a corporate policy. This does not meet the requirements of the regulations to outline specific processes for those using the service and is identified as an area requiring improvement.

Environment

- The fostering service has transferred to another office location which is shared with other services operated by the local authority provider. This information needs to be updated on the service's statement of purpose.
- The delay in completing annual reviews of foster carer's approval does not ensure scrutiny of health and safety issues as part of the review process

Fostering Assessment Evaluation

We aim to encourage carers/applicants to complete the evaluation sheet at the end of their assessment period so that we can further improve the delivery of the assessments and related experiences. From 50 assessments that were undertaken only 6 evaluation forms were returned.

Cisco Jabber (telephone system) – we plan to consult in 2024 with our foster carers, applicants and staff members regarding Cisco Jabber’s efficacy in providing a robust duty service.

Further development of data reporting systems to assist in quality assurance is required.

Monitoring data during Team Managers Meeting to being in March 2024.

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.

The service is developing new proformas to assist in achieving a more streamline service.

It is anticipated that over the next 12 months the service will aim to achieve to clear the outstanding annual reviews.

Quality assurance process to be created to support exemption requests.

Following CiW’s report, Annual Reviews following allegations are currently allocated to Independent Social Workers for completion. They are allocated following the outcome of the allegation. Improvements will be made to the WCCIS system to report related performance indicators related to allegations specifically.

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.

Further development of quality assurance systems to support the quality of service provided are taking place.

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

A clear Service Development Plan is in place to support the operations and service delivery. The Plan is lead by the Service Manager and monitored by the Head of Service.

Summary

Foster Wales RCT has recognised that the systems that support our service function need to be updated and streamlined to provide an effective and efficient service.

Foster Wales RCT has taken on board all of the recommendations for service improvements reported by CiW and this has been embedded into the service plan. Actions have been delegated to appropriate staff within the service to assist in achieving the improvements required.

As an immediate action and temporary measure we have looked at the processes and have been dynamic in terms of improving our systems.

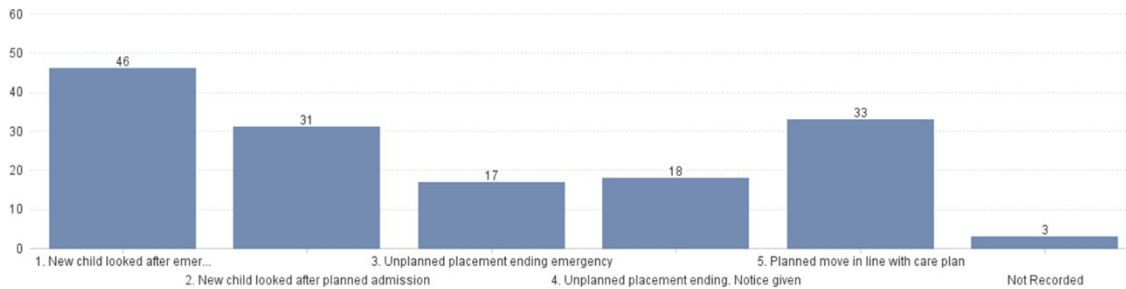
The aim is to meet the objectives of the Service Development Plan over the next 12 months.

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

Placement Data (relating to August to October 2023)

Type of Referral	Aug to Oct 2023	Difference from last quarter
Fostering	78	+26
Residential	14	-1
Total	92	+27



During this period there were 39 referrals requiring placements same day or next day within 24 hours. (40 since December 2022, 28 of since April 2023)

Review on new data capture linked to the Placement Referral form on WCCIS (been in effect for 6months):

- 21 children were placed with in-house fostering provision while 8 were placed with external fostering agencies.
- 5 children were placed with in-house residential provision while 8 were placed in external residential provisions.
- 5 young people were placed in 16+ supported living provisions, 2 of these were UASC young people.
- 2 parent and child placements with Family Assessment Centres.
- 3 young people were placed into OWRs during this period.

Patterns and Trends

We have continued to receive a very high level of emergency same day placement requests for all ages of children and young people.

Receiving direct work such as This is Me to add to search tenders continues to be an issue. However, this is also reflective of the number of requests for emergency placements.

There remains a lack of fostering placements available for young people particularly teenagers which means that we are then seeking residential placements as an alternative.

There is a limited amount of residential providers that provide and accept emergency placements, which is a contributory factor to children being placed in OWR placements.

The availability of foster carers who can meet the needs of children and young people open to DCT is problematic. This remains an issue when seeking placements for children complex health and behavioural needs.

Marketing and Recruitment:

RCT Performance Data – January

2023/24	Enquiries	Initial Visits	Assessments Allocated	Assessments ended pre panel	Approvals
Number	17	5	5	0	0
Conversion rate from Previous Stage	N/A	29.41%	100%	0	0
Conversion rate from Initial Enquiry	N/A	29.41%	29.5%	0	0
2022/23					
Number	5	1	2	2	0
Conversion rate from Previous Stage	N/A	20%	200%	100%	0
Conversion rate from Initial enquiry	N/A	20%	40%	40%	0
+/-					
	+12	+4	+2	-2	0

Recruitment Analysis

Enquiry and Initial Visit (IV) Info:

- 17 enquiries – 5 of which unable to contact (3 FB leads, numbers not valid, 2 unable to contact on info supplied)
- 3 requested for more info (not in a positions to move forward)

- 11 moved forward to IV stage - 5 completed in Jan (2 from Dec enquiry), 3 have delayed until Feb and 3 on hold due to change of circumstances.
- 3 enquiries from events (one request for more info, 2 moved to IV and now in full assessment stage).
- 1 transfer request still on going from December.

Events

- Role up play village Pontyclun
- Sobell sports centre (one enquiry which has moved to full assessment)

Care Friends Retention / Recruitment App

Launched Care Friends to RCT FCs in January 2024:

- Document leaflet has been uploaded to closed FB group.
- Emailed to Kinship & Mainstream carers
- Discussed in support group – all took details, some downloaded there and then.
- Frequently asking SSWs to help promote, and encouraging FCs to use

Foster Wales Regional Marketing Officer reported that January saw the launch of the new campaign 'What will you bring to the table?' complete with Foster Wales National assets to accompany the activity. For example, on 08th January 2024 the National Team launched a media campaign across TV in Wales (ITV and S4C) plus Video on Demand / catchup on ITVX, All4 and also on Sky AdSmart. The activity was further supported by radio with a campaign on Heart South Wales.

It is reported that there was an impressive amount of PR generated by the National activity and saw fostering talked about on National TV (BBC breakfast), local BBC and ITV news, in The Metro and across online platforms).

From a Foster Wales RCT perspective additional media spend and coverage on ITVX, GTFM, Bus Rears and paid socials. The new 3 x 30" TV adverts for the National campaign was shared across Foster Wales RCT social media channels and will share a regional CTM branded version was shared in February.

In January, the new campaign messaging was frequently and consistently shared and the Foster Wales RCT 'Meet the Team' event promotions correspond with the 'What will you bring to the table?' messaging. The aim of this campaign is longevity, with lots of planned and responsive marketing opportunities that will correspond with the 'table' ideas.

We had excellent levels of reach and engagement in January which would have been too a mixture of the impact of the National activity and the quality of our own content and the support we had from followers and the teams in sharing our posts.

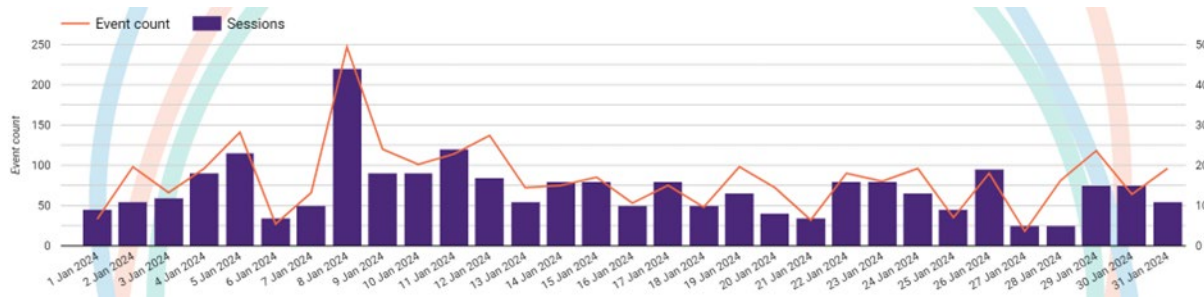
We saw a healthy number of visitors to our websites in January (311) – we may have expected more given the amount of activity we had in the month, but in fact our numbers were down on the previous two months (December at 529 and November at 767).

However, this is in part explained by the fact that we had not run any paid social or online advertising in the month – we had planned to but were doing well enough with our organic posts and the impact of the National media and PR – so we help spend back until February.

This raises an interesting observation which is that although our numbers for website visitors were lower, the KPI data suggests that we had succeeded in reaching people more likely to be interested in our content, as the conversion to enquiries and IVs was much improved in January.

Our organic (not paid for) posts on our facebook page were seen by nearly 6k people and we had 274 comments or reactions to our content – giving us a good engagement rate of over 10%. Our posts on Instagram reached 166 people. We have continued to see improvements in our reach and engagement which will be partly due to the fact that Lisa in her role as recruitment officer has been sharing a lot of our posts and linking in local community groups.

You can see in the chart below that we had a spike in visitors when the new campaign launched with a number of peak TV spots and impressive amounts of PR coverage.



Future Developments

- Improving service - Q&A online session with foster carer planned and invitations sent out for end of Feb to all those in full assessment stage.
- PHB presentations in Feb
- Online information session planning underway for 18th March.

Service Development of Special Guardianship

Special Guardianship continues to be a priority for the service, assessments are carried out by the appointed Social Workers. While further development work is identified for the support aspect of Special Guardianship.

As of 18.01.24 there are 243 Special Guardians, who are entitled to support and development opportunities as set out in the Special Guardian Regulations 2018.

The changes in Public Law Outline (PLO) have contributed to an increase in SGOs being made.

12 week timescale for PLO, that is in conflict with the 16-24 weeks CPA timescales, this places further pressure providing a robust and resilient assessment, resulting in a more labour intensive assessment period.

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

Placements:

There remains a lack of fostering placements available for young people particularly teenagers which means that we are then seeking residential placements as an alternative.

There is a limited number of residential providers that provide and accept emergency placements, which is a contributory factor to children being placed in OWR placements.

The availability of foster carers who can meet the needs of children and young people open to DCT is problematic. This remains an issue when seeking placements for children complex health and behavioural needs.

Complex cases involve prolonged and intensive searches which directly impact on the wellbeing of the child.

Marketing and Recruitment:

The team has finalised the groundwork for annual planning, the chart below summarises what is going well, what we need to do more of, what needs to be improved and what we need to be aware of:

Drivers	Inhibitors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face and real life stories on social work well. • Using our pioneers • Promotion of retention events • Peer support groups for foster carers • Positive sentiment towards fostering team and SSWs <p><i>What are we doing capitalize on our areas of strength?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collating quotes of praise / thanks for SSWs to use in future campaign - Working closely with the team and pioneers - Increasing numbers of pop-up events to attend with team - Regular meetings with and feedback from FCs - Expressing gratitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff capacity and engagement with team - Staffing of events - Budget restraints - Size of service - Drop out rates of assessments <p><i>What are we doing to improve in the next quarter to address the inhibitors?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing team have supported and shared open job roles on their socials and on personal LinkedIn accounts - A new recruitment officer will be in post shortly which should be a huge help and mean we can attend more events - marketing will continue to send fortnightly updates to fostering team if this is useful – have been doing so since April - Smaller regional targeting will help inform what budgets would be ideal across the whole region – we should be able to complete this analysis once areas are activated in Q3 - Analysis of drop out rates and reviews with previous applicants is on-going
Opportunities	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Size of borough- bigger pool and variety of people - Opportunity to build relationship with local councilors - Targeting specific communities, not just our larger town centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calon and Compass very active - Cost of living and competitive fees - Plummeting enquires and approvals - Conversion rate <p><i>What are we doing to improve in the next quarter to address these risks?</i></p>

- Use our pioneers to target their own local communities
- Joint events for retention and recruitment
- Using pioneers to aid conversion from IV to approval

What are we doing to maximise these opportunities in the next quarter

- *We have workflows on place to deliver on those areas highlighted in green above*

- *We will continue to share posts with a transfer to us / Eliminate Profit theme as we think these are cutting through to IFA carers*
- *We will show and share gratitude through our 'Families of Foster Children' campaigns in which we would hope would encourage people with their own families to enquire*
- *The drop out rates are being reviewed and analysed and results will be built into improvements once available*
- *A fees and allowances meeting will be held with the team and our foster carers in Q3 – it was scheduled for Q2 but has had to be re-arranged. A survey has been shared with our FCs.*

Special Guardianship (SG) action plan:

Appoint workers into post and set up support processes.

Develop a service wide understanding of SG to support future aims and objectives.

Embed the new proforma and guidance

Action transfers in and out of the LA.

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.

Recruitment aims:

- To increase our overall foster care provision
- To increase the matching opportunities for children coming into foster care
- To increase specialised foster care – support care and parent and child
- To increase foster care provision for children with complex needs
- To increase our Pioneer Fostering membership to support other foster carers
- To increase community engagement
- To increase the brand recognition
- To raise the profile and support Fostering Friendly organisations and employers.

Placement Stability:

Foster Wales RCT has an aim to incorporate the AFKA Cymru Placement Stability Guide into our practice. The approach involves all those involved with the child, including professionals, parents and foster carers. It considers a holistic approach to supporting placements and consider matching as a long term matter for consideration and not a one off event.

The approach will need to be distributed to wider children's and other services including parents and carers. There are training opportunities to support the approach and clear research on the positive impact this approach can make on placement stability.

Service Development:

Special Guardianship is an area that is likely to grow in the future. It relates to the Children's Services target of achieving permanence for CLA and the proactive move towards reducing the number of care orders. We are currently in the process of recruiting a social worker (vacancy post) and support worker (new post) to assist in the support aspect of SG.

In almost 10 years, the need for our service by the community has grown and for at least 5 years we have not been in a position to provide the full quality service we know we are capable of. For example, an average case load for a Supervision Social Worker (across Wales) is identified as 12 cases (plus an assessment), our workers are currently carrying 25+ cases (per full time worker) and do not have capacity to provide placement stability support as it should be. It is well known that the service has been 'firefighting' for at least 4 years.

Summary

Foster Wales RCT is a large service supporting both foster carers and children. The service has spent the last several months focussing on the future and how we can offer further stability to the children's lives.

The recent recruitment campaign for foster carers has been a real success and generated plenty of enquiries leading to potential assessments. In recent months we have started to see the impact of the national brand and an upturn in recruitment KPIs we haven't experienced in many years. This is partly due to the significant national coverage received and grant funding through Foster Wales national stream for recruitment officer and marketing capacity. However, we must recognise that to meet the needs of Foster Wales RCT placement sufficiency further local investment is needed.

Special Guardianship (SG) contributes towards the Welsh Governments and LA's plan of reducing the number of children looked after and the service is committed to supporting SG.

Overall areas identified for improvement:

- Reduce reliance on IFA placements
- Minimise the children being placed into residential care
- Increase in-house Foster Carer placements
- Retention of foster carer rate is increased
- Bespoke SG support service.