

National Fostering Framework

Phase One Report

2015 – 2016



National
Fostering
Framework
Fframwaith
Maethu
Cenedlaethol

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Summary and Recommendations

We can demonstrate that foster care is hugely beneficial to children and young people living away from their families. Having good placements and quality foster carers is a fundamental safeguard for children who are looked after and the key to their future life chances.



We can demonstrate that foster care is hugely beneficial to children and young people living away from their families. Having good placements and quality foster carers is a fundamental safeguard for children who are looked after and the key to their future life chances. In many ways, this is public care at its best. The services often work to exceptional standards and with good examples of well-conceived improvements. Our mission is to ensure that all relevant children and young people are able to have good quality care in which they can develop and thrive, and reach their full potential. This care needs to be provided by a well-supported body of dedicated foster carers who can provide a safe, caring and nurturing family environment. There is mounting anxiety that we are not getting very much closer to fulfilling these goals consistently enough.

We need an urgent solution to:

- growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales;
- placement pressures and our current inability to match needs and placement options well enough; and
- difficulties in recruiting foster carers and in providing them with the range of skills and support needed for the complex and challenging work they undertake.

For example, research published by the Fostering Network in 2015 identified the need for an additional 550 foster care families in Wales. Over the last three years, the total number of general foster placements across the whole of Wales has declined year on year. In the same period, there has been a drop in the number of placements made with local authority foster carers and with Independent Providers. Given that the average age of a foster carer in Wales is 55, we will need to recruit more carers 'just to stand still' but local recruitment campaigns appear to have relatively limited impact. We know, of course, about considerable efforts to find more innovative ways of working, to tackle some of these major problems. However, too many good initiatives don't seem to have enough traction and do not get picked up uniformly across Wales, perhaps because they are not co-ordinated well enough or supported consistently during difficult times.

A clear consensus has emerged that further progress depends upon Wales developing a far more cogent and compelling strategic intent in relation to fostering services, to address growing concerns about their overall effectiveness and sustainability. Continuation of the status quo is likely to produce a situation characterised mostly by managed decline, especially when the operational and financial

context for looked after children services as a whole is likely to be very challenging for the foreseeable future. This is why many key stakeholders advocate strongly the need for greater collaboration in the delivery of fostering services across all sectors and why they see development of a National Fostering Framework as a major priority. In 2015, they came together to develop this concept, motivated by principles of co-production.

This collective enterprise became one of the four major key workstreams within the programme of the Strategic Steering Group set up by Welsh Government with the task of 'Improving Outcomes for Children'. The Group seeks to take forward the policy agenda mandated in the Social Services and Well-being Act, together with the Codes of Practice in Part 6 of the Act, which will have profound implications for the way services for looked after children are delivered.

A reference group for National Fostering Framework was established. One of its key tasks was to produce a 'First Thoughts' paper – which outlined the case for change, identified how we can achieve better partnership across the different sectors and presented initial ideas about what can be delivered most effectively at national, regional and local levels. In order to get an overall picture of the work programme to date, this paper is an important reference document.

There followed a wide-ranging consultation programme, partly based on getting a response to the paper-providing opportunities to engage with many people (individually and in groups). We organised:

- on-line surveys for foster carers and staff in all sectors, with leadership from the Fostering Network and local authorities;

Summary and recommendations

- workshops with young people, provided by Voices From Care;
- attendance at existing forums and meetings, to meet directly with carers and providers; and
- an all Wales event for local authority managers, staff and public sector partners. Leadership for this event was provided by AFA Cymru

The outcomes of the National Fostering Framework work programme for 2015/16, including messages from the consultation exercises, have been brought together in this Phase One Report.

The case for change put forward in the First Thoughts paper was almost universally acknowledged, and agreement that a National Performance Framework should be established. This reflected both the scale of people's concerns and also the need to support effective change, tackling some major challenges which can be addressed only at a strategic level. We received a wealth of ideas, views and opinions about what sort of National Fostering Framework is required and its likely components: increased co-ordination; more sector-led improvement; a means of measuring, monitoring and improving performance and resource management; greater accountability and a search for economies of scale where appropriate. People told us that it should be comprehensive and aspirational, collaborative and inclusive - a means of ensuring that known concerns are addressed and of introducing greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity within the current system.

Above all, it was acknowledged that a National Fostering Framework is only a means to an end and that we need to pursue three common aims:

- i. guarantee that fostering is seen as an essential, quality service provided to individual children and for the benefit of society as a whole;
- ii. ensure that foster carers feel valued and supported by their fostering service and by all of us; and
- iii. enable everybody to co-operate effectively in helping children in foster care to achieve the best possible outcomes, including good health and high levels of educational attainment.

We must find ways of delivering a National Fostering Framework Phase 2. A real momentum is building which we cannot afford to let slip. The work programme for the next phase is likely to involve developing a clear set of proposals and an outline implementation plan for what a National Performance Framework should look like, the structures and mechanisms and resources required to establish it. The proposals will need to consider which aspects of the service are best delivered on national, regional and local levels. This will build on the priority areas of action set out at the end of this Report.

The work will involve:

- Developing an agreed framework for allocating responsibilities at a national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures (learning from the approach used in establishing the National Adoption Service)

- Creating a resource management and performance framework
- Establishing a Welsh identity for Foster Care, a national approach to marketing and use of social media
- Developing a national policy framework for foster care, to include a structure for training for foster carers
- Beginning a project to bring about greater consistency and transparency in the fees and allowances carers receive
- Addressing the issues raised in the initial scoping paper on Kinship Foster Care
- Producing strategies for commissioning placements between local authorities, with the independent sector (commercial providers) and independent providers (third sector).

If developing a National Fostering Framework is to improve outcomes for children and young people and support for foster carers, we must engage children and young people, foster carers, staff in the independent and third sector, and local authority staff and their public service partners in the work programme for Phase Two. Consideration must be given as to how this can best be achieved. Above all, principal decision-makers and leaders need to decide whether they are willing to commit to establishing a National Framework as the best means of responding to the concerns and aspirations expressed in a very unified way by the wide range of stakeholders who took part in the consultation exercises.

Summary and recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
1. Develop a National Fostering Framework, including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures.	Support for a National Fostering Framework was expressed by all key stakeholders during the consultation programme, with consistent views emerging about what elements of the fostering service could best be delivered on a national, regional and local basis.	Year One
2. Establish the right balance between local authority foster care, third sector providers and commercial providers in terms of national policy objectives, service quality considerations and value for money requirements.	There is considerable concern about the way the current 'market' operates in practice. It is not generating the right number and types of placements, delivering best value for the investment of public resources. Part 2, Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being Act requires further consideration about the role social enterprises, co-operatives, user-led services and the third sector in delivering fostering services.	Year Two
3. Establish an all-Wales public service fostering collaborative, delivering services regionally and locally, incorporating all the relevant services directly provided by local authorities.	Local authority fostering services have lost ground over the last twenty years to the commercial sector. In achieving the correct balance between the sectors, it is important that local authority fostering services are as well-equipped as possible to meet the needs of children for local, publicly managed placements.	Year Three

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
4. Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers.	A strong message coming from the consultation programme from foster carers and staff was the need to have more common policies across Wales. The training of foster carers, post approval and the support to carers were issues frequently mentioned.	Year Two
5. Introduce a national performance and resource framework, aligning this with the work being done to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS). A phased approach to implementation will be developed. A distinct performance framework should be developed for the independent sector (commercial providers and third sector providers).	The work in Phase One provided clear evidence about how little is known regarding the performance and resourcing of fostering services across Wales and that what we do know is fragmented. Work on a performance and resourcing framework is considered essential to maximise the opportunities presented by the implementation of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS).	Year One
6. Introduce a national web-site, social media, brand and identity for foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication.	The need to have an all-Wales identity for fostering was a very strong message from local authority staff and others during the consultation programme. This was seen as a key mechanism for improving the ability to communicate well with current foster carers and children and to encourage recruitment and retention.	Year One

Summary and recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
7. Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care for children who are looked after, building on the initial scoping paper from Phase One.	The issues surrounding kinship foster care were very strong messages emerging from the consultation programme. Inconsistent use of kinship foster and a variety of practice approaches were identified through the work in Phase One. An issues paper was prepared, identifying the benefits that could be gained from developing a more national approach.	Year One
8. Develop national arrangements for commissioning all placements, regardless of sector but building on the work of the 4Cs.	Limited progress has been made in matching on an all-Wales basis, placement needs and the options available, partly because we have yet to develop appropriate tools for commissioning.	Year One

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
9. Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.	The payment of foster care allowances and fees was identified by foster carers and staff as a key issue during the consultation programme. The need for greater consistency and transparency were seen as key issues. It was recognised this will present particular challenges but one that should not be ignored.	Year Three
10. Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services – to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster care placements.	There were many examples of children in foster care achieving good outcomes as the result of positive family experiences in combination with help from social services, education, health, housing and other professionals. However, young people and foster carers expressed strong concerns were concerned about inconsistent and inadequate support.	Year One

Year One 2016-17: Draft Project Plan

Action required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe
Secure continuation of the grant from Welsh Government for Phase Two and put in place project management capacity to take forward the work.	Welsh Government, Local Government	June 2016
Agree the governance arrangements to take forward the Phase 2 work programme, including involvement of the Regional Partnerships.	Welsh Government, Local Government, WLGA, ADSS Cymru, The Fostering Network, AFA Cymru	June 2016
Consider arrangements for the involvement of children and young people and foster carers in Phase Two.	Voices from Care, Fostering Network, AFA Cymru	July 2016
Strengthen the arrangements for involving health (including CAMHS) and education in the work of Phase Two.	Current Reference Group members	July 2016
Strengthen the arrangements for involving providers in the work to develop a National Fostering Framework.	4Cs Board, Third Sector Providers	July 2016
Develop a National Fostering Framework and a detailed set of proposals building on all the recommendations in this report. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide the allocation of functions at national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures. Introduce an interim national performance and resource framework, aligning this with the work being done to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS). A phased approach to implementation will be developed. A distinct performance framework should be developed for the independent sector (commercial providers and third sector providers). 	Welsh Government, Local Government, WLGA, ADSS Cymru, The Fostering Network, AFA Cymru, 4Cs, Allied Public Services	June 2016 October 2016

Action required	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce a national web-site, social media, brand and identity for foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication. Establish a plan for an all-Wales public service fostering collaborative, delivering services regionally and locally, incorporating all the relevant services directly provided by local authorities. Decide how to ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care for children who are looked after, building on the initial scoping paper from Phase One. Undertake a mapping exercise on the fees and allowances that carers receive in local authorities, independent providers (commercial) and independent providers (third sector). Agree national arrangements for commissioning all placements, regardless of sector but building on the work of the 4Cs. Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services – to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster care placements. 	Welsh Government, Local Government, WLGA, ADSS Cymru, The Fostering Network, AFA Cymru, 4Cs, Allied Public Services	December 2016 December 2016 December 2016 February 2017 March 2017 January 2017
Gain approval from policy makers and key decision makers to take forward the proposals.	Welsh Government, Local Government, WLGA, ADSS Cymru, The Fostering Network, AFA Cymru	September 2016 and ongoing

What is the National Fostering Framework?

Developing a national framework for fostering services is one of the four major key workstreams within the programme which has been established by the Strategic Steering Group set up by Welsh Government with the task of 'Improving outcomes for children'.

We need a system in Wales where every fostered child and young person is:

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

Similarly, every foster carer deserves to be:

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

“Improving outcomes for children and young people”



The 'First Thoughts' Paper

November 2015: What was It? and What did it Say?

To view the 'First Thoughts' Paper and the accompanying Context Appendix 1 Paper, please click on your preferred language:

THE AIMS OF THE NFF: WHAT ARE THEY?

- Improvements in permanency planning for children and quality of placement provision
- A more cogent and compelling strategic intent for fostering services
- Increased collaboration and co-operation by all key stakeholders
- Sector-led improvements
- Greater transparency about the performance of fostering services and efficient use of resources
- Economies of scale, where appropriate, with a respect for localism
- More shared services planning and commissioning
- Consistent use of best practice models for recruiting and supporting foster carers across all sectors
- Closer links to research and evaluation

POLICY AND PRACTICE CHALLENGES: WHAT ARE THEY?

- Focusing on early intervention and prevention
- Improving the provision of permanency placements for children
- Addressing the underlying causes of the unacceptable differences in the rates of children becoming looked after in Wales
- Providing and commissioning a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality placements
- Improving outcomes for looked after children
- Over 1,000 children being placed outside their local area
- Recruiting, supporting and training foster carers who can provide high-quality care for children with complex needs and challenging behaviour
- An ageing population of foster carers

OUTLINE PROPOSALS FOR A NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL APPROACH

National Level:

- A national performance framework to provide an analysis of performance across Wales by all providers
- Promotion of a strategic approach to service delivery
- Co-ordination of marketing activity
- Development of strategic relationships with partners and service providers
- Establishing a national website

Regional Level:

- Foster Panels
- Establishing internal markets between local authorities in each region
- Regional marketing strategies
- Regional 'front door' to respond to initial enquiries
- Development of common policies
- Regional pre- and post-approval training
- Regional approaches to 'When I'm Ready'

Local Level:

- Placing and matching of children and young people
- Supervision and support of foster carers
- Annual foster care reviews
- Agency Decision Maker responsibilities
- Full fostering assessments
- Kinship Foster Carer assessments

The Work Programme for Phase One

WHAT DID WE SAY WE'D DO IN PHASE ONE?

- Secure resources for the project
- Appoint a Project Manager and Resources and Business Support Manager
- Establish a work programme for Phase One
- Establish a Reference Group to lead on an extensive programme of engagement and consultation
- Establish a Consortium Group to provide strategic oversight
- Consult widely on an initial set of proposals
- Gain consensus from a wide group of stakeholders for taking forward a new model and create an alliance for change
- Produce a Phase One report to be presented to Welsh Government's Strategic Steering Group

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

- Grant secured. Financial management of the grant being undertaken by the Vale of Glamorgan's finance department
- Project Manager and Resource and Performance Manager in post and achieving the tasks in the work programme
- A Work Programme in place with monthly Progress Reports to the Consortium Group and Welsh Government
- Reference Group established, provided leadership on the consultation programme with different stakeholders
- Consortium Group established, monthly meetings, provided strategic oversight of the work and the Welsh Government grant expenditure
- Consensus emerging from key stakeholders on key issues that need addressing, more details later in this report
- Phase One report being presented to Welsh Government's Strategic Steering Group on 16th March 2016



Members of the Reference Group

Organisation	Name
Director of Social Services, Vale of Glamorgan, ADSS Cymru	Philip Evans
Director of Operations, National Adoption Service	Suzanne Griffiths
Policy Officer WLGA	Stewart Blythe
Welsh Government, Placements for Children and Adults	Elizabeth Lockwood and Huw Gwyn Jones, Deputising for Elizabeth Lockwood
Head of Children's Services, Vale of Glamorgan	Rachel Evans
Designated Doctor for Safeguarding / LAC, Safeguarding Children Service, Public Health Wales	Dr Carolyn Sampeys
4Cs Manager	Alison Smale
Chief Executive Officer, Voices from Care	Debbie Jones and Chris Dunn
Business Development and Community Manager for The Fostering Network Wales	Maria Boffey
Cascade	Dr Alyson Rees
North Wales Regional Consortium	Sarah Bartlett
Action for Children	Stacey Burnett
NHS Wales CAMHS	Dr David Williams
CSSIW	Vicky Poole
Head of Children's Services , Wrexham	Susan Evans
Head of Children's Services, Blaenau Gwent Chair of AWHOCS	Tanya Evans
NYAS Cymru	Sharon Lovell

Organisation	Name
Project Manager, Association of Fostering and Adoption Cymru (AFA Cymru)	Kathy S'Jacob
Head of Children's Services, Gwynedd	Marian Hughes (via Skype)
Foster Swansea, City and Council of Swansea	Donna Houlston
DHSS DPH Maternal and Child Health	Dr Heather Payne
Data Unit Wales	Richard Palmer
Public Health Wales	Karen Toohey
Children in Wales	Catriona Williams
Foster Swansea, City and Council of Swansea	Karen Benjamin
Head of Children's Service, Carmarthenshire	Stefan Smith
Head of Children's Services, Swansea	Julie Thomas
Director of Social Care and Housing, WGLA	Naomi Alleyne
Director for The Fostering Network (Wales)	Emily Warren
NFF Resource & Business Support Manager	Cath Hywwod
NFF Project Manager	Jane Moore

Performance Information: Fostering Services

We looked at what performance measures are available in relation to fostering services and what this tells us about the current position.

The majority of our information comes from individual child level data in relation to looked after children, which is collected through the 'looked after children census'. Returns from the Looked After Children dataset (SSDA903) are reported in the form of national statistics, which provide high level headline information about the numbers of children who are looked after in local authority and independent fostering services.

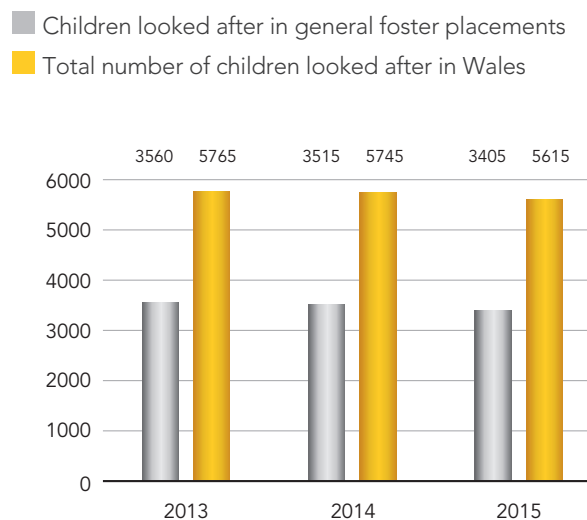
National statistics can be broken down to individual local authorities for purposes of benchmarking and are available to be used through the Welsh Government statswales website.

Looking at the picture of fostering services across Wales we found:

1. FOSTER PLACEMENTS

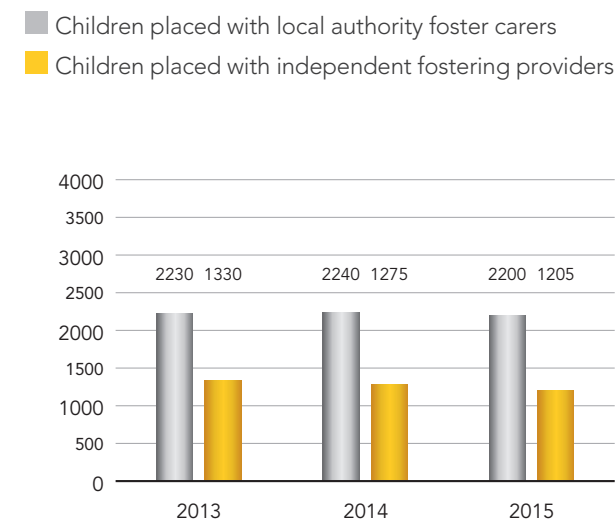
Statistics are as at 31st March, for each year, and exclude kinship foster care placements.

a) All-Wales total number of children looked after and total number of children looked after in general foster placements



Data for 2013 – 2015 shows that the overall numbers of children who are looked after has decreased slightly but the majority of children who need to be looked after are placed with foster carers. Although the overall number of children who are looked after has decreased, changes in court processes have resulted in children entering and leaving care more quickly and there remains a high level of demand for foster placements.

b) Total number of children placed with local authority foster carers and independent fostering providers



The proportion of placements made with local authority foster carers has remained consistently just below two thirds of the total number of children in general foster care with one third of children placed with foster carers with independent (commercial and third sector) fostering providers. Currently, information collected in regard to placements not made with a local authority's own foster carers does not distinguish between children placed with third sector fostering agencies and children placed with commercial fostering agencies; and is recorded as placements with independent providers.

2. FOSTER PLACEMENTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY BOUNDARIES

All statistics are as at 31st March and exclude kinship foster care.

Where possible children are placed within the boundary of their local authority in order to maintain links with their family, friends, school and community, promoting stability for the child and maintaining their identity. National statistics show that we have a significant number of children placed with foster carers who are living outside the local authority boundary.

a) All-Wales statistics for 2015

Out of a total of 3,405 children in placement with general foster carers there were 1,040 placed outside the local authority boundaries and 2,365 were placed inside the local authority boundaries.

Some placements outside the home local authority may still be geographically close to their school, community and significant people in their life. Local authorities strive to place children within a reasonable distance but access to cross-authority services for health and education can be inconsistent and result in challenges to providing appropriate support for a child and their foster carer.

b) As at 31st March 2015

Across all of Wales we had a total of 1,040 children placed outside local authority boundaries 330: of those placements were with local authority foster carers and 710 placements were with independent (commercial and third sector) provider foster carers.

With over 58% of children with independent (commercial and third sector) provider foster carers living outside the local authority boundary, there is a greater chance when commissioning an independent provider placement of not being placed in the local community.

Chart a)

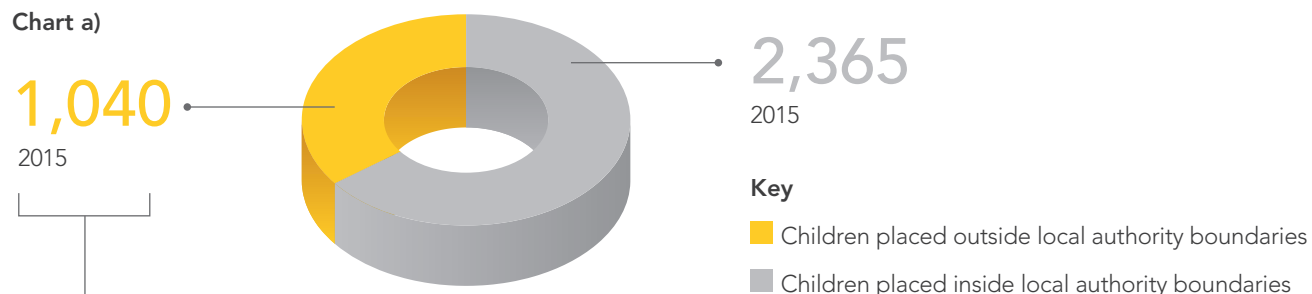
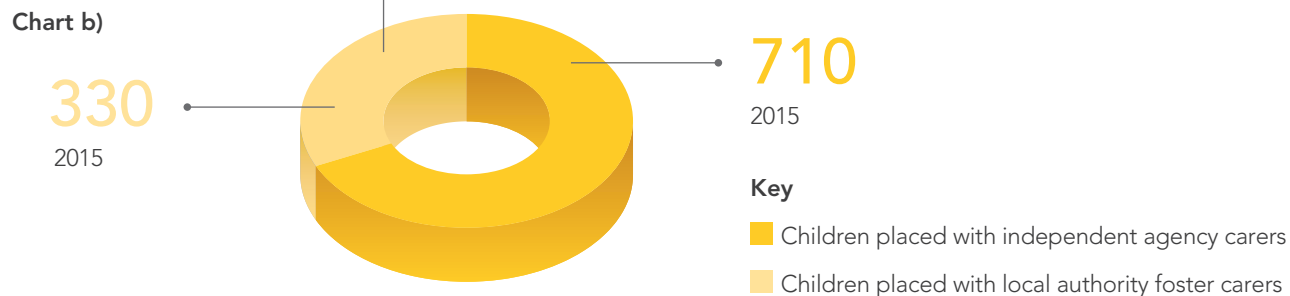


Chart b)



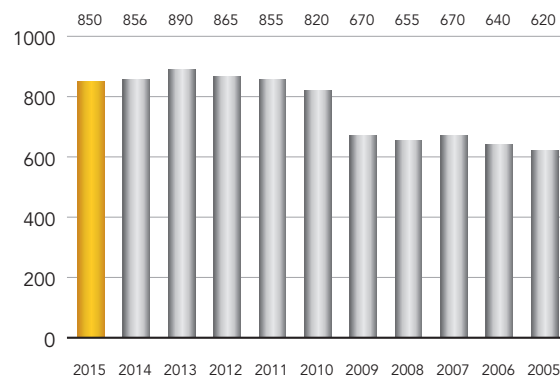
3. KINSHIP FOSTER CARE

Some children who are looked after are cared for by a close member of the family or a friend under fostering arrangements. Kinship foster carers are assessed and approved by local authority fostering services, which continue to provide supervision and support for as long as the child is in their care and they are registered foster carers.

Numbers of kinship foster carers vary for each local authority, but for some local authorities the assessment and support of the arrangements can place significant demand on the fostering service.

All-Wales statistics are as at 31st March of each year.

a) Total number of children placed with kinship foster carers



Over the past 10 years the number of children placed with kinship foster carers has increased by 23%, however since 2010 the number has stabilised and in the past three years remained at 25% of the total number of children in foster care.



Current Sources of Information

In order to understand how fostering services are performing and inform proposals for the development of a National Performance and Resource Framework, we needed to know what information is currently available about the performance of fostering services and how this is used.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF THIS INFORMATION?

WHAT DO WE GET FROM WHERE?

HOW IS THE INFORMATION USED?

Data source	Publishing organisation	Frequency of collection	Location	Data reference period	How the data is currently used
National Statistics – Children looked after (SSDA903)	Welsh Government	Annual	https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/	31st March for each year	Provides both national and local statistical information on the performance indicators for Welsh Government. Available to the general public and used to advise ministers, benchmark local authority services and in research and academic studies.
Report: Adoptions, outcomes and placements for children looked after by local authorities	Welsh Government	Annual	https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/adoptions-outcomes-placements-children-looked-after/	Period covered is the year ending 31st March with a report release date of the following September	Available to the general public. An annual report that presents information on those on care orders and other children provided with accommodation by their local authority. Statistical information presented on an all-Wales basis with some context but no analysis.
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales Inspection Report	CSSIW	Annual	http://cssiw.org.uk/our-reports/regulated-reports/	Period covered is the 12 months since the last Fostering Inspection.	Available to the general public. Used on a local level by the fostering services to inform service development, by commissioners and also used by prospective foster carers when considering the fostering service of their choice.
Quality of Care Report for Fostering Services	Individual Fostering Service Provider	Annual	Varied locations – some fostering providers have the Quality of Care Report available via their website and some have uploaded the document on Children’s Commissioning Support Resource database.	Period covered is the 12 months since the last Quality of Care Report was completed.	Available to the general public. Used on a local level by fostering services to evidence the requirements under regulation 42 of The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 and service activity.

Data source	Publishing organisation	Frequency of collection	Location	Data reference period	How the data is currently used
4Cs Baseline Report	Childrens's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs)	Quarterly reports that then inform an annual report	Distributed to all Welsh local authorities by 4Cs.	Cover financial year from 1st April – 31st March.	Baseline reports cover foster placement activity both with local authority foster carers and with independent (commercial and third sector) providers on an all-Wales basis and broken down to individual local authority level. Can be used by local authorities to compare market positions.
Fostering Service Providers	Local Authority Fostering Services, Third Sector Fostering Services and Commercial Sector Fostering Services	Not known	Most fostering services maintain their own performance management systems	Not known	Fostering services collate performance management information as part of regulatory requirement as well as indicators of their own performance for reporting arrangement within the organisation.

What does our current performance look like?

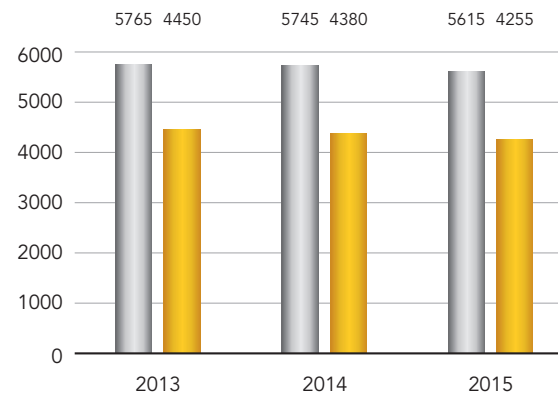
Current sources of information on fostering services performance are fragmented and sometimes difficult to access. We have inconsistency in what and how we are collecting information.

On a national and local level we have statistics that provide information on numbers and types of placements, if children are placed within the local authority boundaries and numbers of placement moves. We have some indicators of commissioning arrangements local authorities have with other fostering providers and some information about resources and local authority spend on fostering services.

a) All Wales

Statistics are as at 31st March and include kinship foster carer data.

- Children looked after by the local authority
- Children in foster care placements

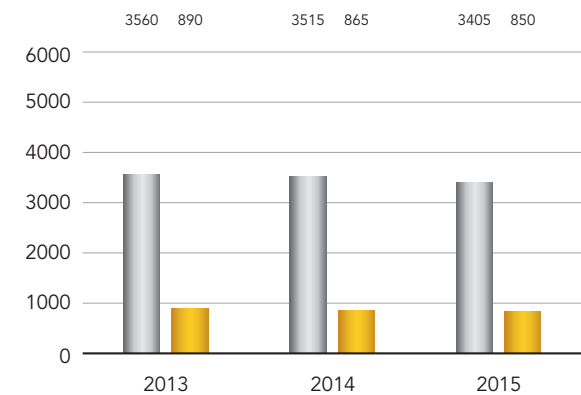


We know that the number of children who are looked after has not reduced significantly across Wales and the majority of children are cared for within a fostering arrangement. Over the last three years at least 75% of the total number of children who were looked after were being cared for by approved foster carers.

b) All Wales

Statistics are as at 31st March.

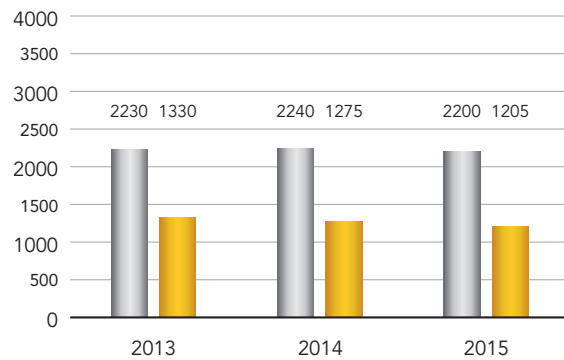
- Children cared for by general foster carers
- Children cared for by family and friend foster carers



When a child cannot be cared for by their parent and alternative arrangements are needed, family members are often the best option to provide continuity and stability for the child. Where a child needs to be looked after, the family arrangement will need to be formalised through the completion of a fostering assessment and continue to be supported by the local authority fostering service.

c) Total number of children placed with local authority foster carers and independent fostering providers

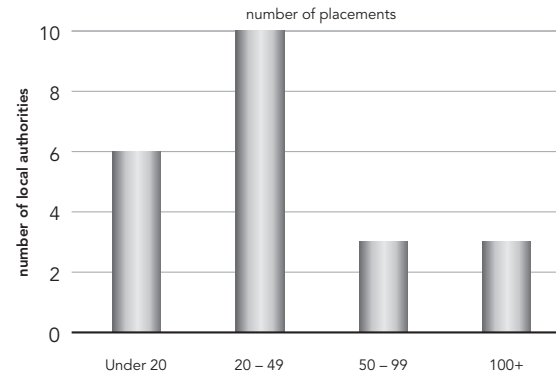
- Children placed with local authority foster carers
- Children placed with independent fostering providers



National statistics are available to provide information of the numbers of children we place with local authority foster carers and with foster carers approved with independent (commercial and third sector) fostering providers, which is also supported by baseline scorecard information provided to local authorities from the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) on placement activity. However, this does not provide detail of local authority activity in commissioning placements from each other or distinguish between third sector and commercial providers.

d) Local authority use of fostering providers

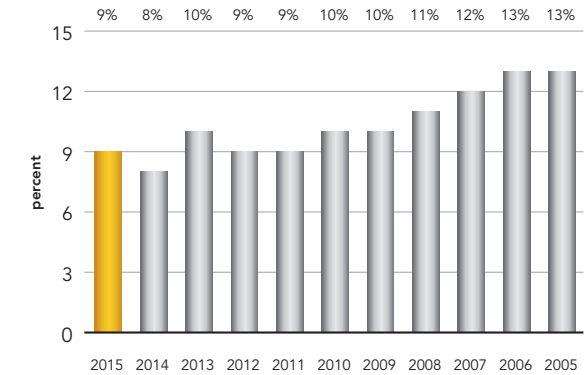
Statistics are as at 31st March 2015.



Across Wales there is a wide variety of practice in the commissioning of foster placements with the independent (commercial and third sector) providers. Information is not currently collated and shared on a regular basis about what drives the need for local authorities to commission from another source. This could be used to understand the variety in practice, to share good models of practice and develop a more strategic approach to the development of effective fostering services that meet the needs of children who are looked after.

e) Children with three or more placements

Statistics are as at 31st March but INCLUDE kinship foster care as the information is not separated out.



We know that performance measures have improved over the last 10 years for the number of children who have had three or more placement moves, however, it has not dropped lower than 8% of the total population of children who are looked after. Welsh Government use this as an indicator of placement stability for children in foster care, but some moves can be positive e.g. move to permanent placement or adoption.

What we don't know about our performance

While national statistics and other sources of performance information provide some information about fostering services performance, much of the information needed is collected on a local level by individual fostering service providers and not available to use to inform and improve service development or benchmark against other fostering service providers. How do we know we are delivering effective fostering services?



WE DO KNOW

- Majority of children who are looked after are placed in foster care.
- Numbers of kinship foster carers make up about 25% of the total of foster carer approvals across Wales
- All-Wales numbers of local authority foster carers are decreasing.
- Fostering Network have estimated in Wales in 2015 we need to recruit another 550 foster families.
- Across Wales local authorities have just under two thirds of children with their own foster carers and just over one third of children placed with independent (commercial and third party) fostering agencies.
- We have 1,040 children placed outside their local authority boundaries.
- We know the number of children who experience three or more placement moves.

BUT WE DON'T KNOW

- How many recruitment campaigns are being held, when and by whom and what the outcomes are?
- How many enquiries did we have from people wanting to become foster carers with all fostering providers?
- How many foster carers were approved last year?
- How the provision of 'When I Am Ready' arrangements will impact on the number of foster carers retained by fostering services?
- How many placement breakdowns were there that resulted in a child needing to move?
- How many sibling groups that needed to be placed together were placed separately?
- How many foster carers were vacant and waiting for a placement?
- How much did we spend on fostering fees and allowances?
- How much did we spend on recruitment, training, support and retention of foster carers?

Proposals to develop a National Fostering Framework as outlined in the First Thoughts paper have given an opportunity to produce an agreed and effective approach to performance and resource management that helps to quantify the extent to which local authorities and other fostering agencies deliver best practice.

Development of a National Performance and Resource Framework for all fostering service providers will support the aims of a National Fostering Framework in improving permanency planning for children and quality of placement provision; a more cogent and compelling strategic intent in relation to fostering services; and provide a greater transparency about the performance of fostering services and the efficient use of resources. As a work stream of the Improving Outcomes for Children – Strategic Steering Group, the development of a National Performance and Resource Framework will be closely aligned with the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and the National Outcomes Framework.

Development of a National Performance and Resource Framework will provide an opportunity for the first time for fostering services to be included as a mainstream data system by aligning the development with the work being done to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS).

PRINCIPLES OF DEVELOPING A NATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCE FRAMEWORK FOR FOSTERING SERVICES

- To support all fostering service providers in Wales to fulfil their statutory obligations to collate performance management information on the delivery of fostering services
- To develop a culture within all fostering services of continuous improvement of services using performance management information
- To promote good outcomes for children and young people in line with the work of the Improving Outcomes for Children – Strategic Steering Group
- To develop a performance benchmark for all fostering services across Wales regarding the delivery of foster services
- To develop a benchmark for cost-effectiveness of fostering services
- To promote a collective approach by fostering services to responding more effectively to pressures within the care system
- To provide transparency in the delivery of fostering services for service providers and service users

BENEFITS FOR FOSTERING SERVICES

- To have a consistent approach for collating a set of performance and resource management information
- To have clear definitions of what performance indicators are to be collected
- To have a clear timetable for the collation of information in line with other data collation requirement
- To collect information that is meaningful to the needs of fostering services
- To have access to performance and resource management information for benchmarking and improving fostering services
- To provide opportunity for fostering service providers to provide information to put context around the data collated
- To have a set of performance and resource management information that supports the evidence requirements for CSSIW inspections of fostering services
- To use information available in the recruitment and retention of foster carers
- To operate fostering services within a financial framework
- To raise standards nationally

Resourcing of Fostering Services

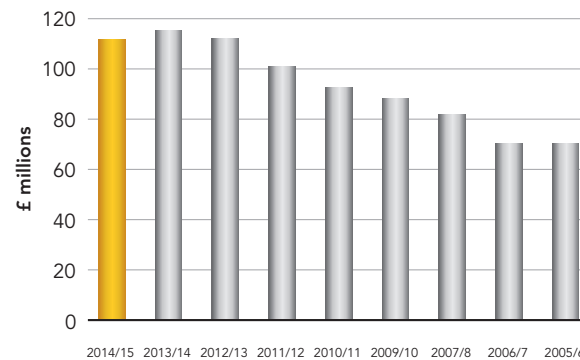
WHAT DO WE CURRENTLY KNOW ABOUT THE RESOURCES?

We know that the spend on fostering services increased year on year from 2005 to 2013 but decreased in 2014/15 but we do not know if this is in relation to spend on placements or spend on provision of a fostering service. We do not know what providers in the commercial and third sector spend on provision of a fostering service. We know that there is a vast variation of spend by local authorities but do not know why.

NET EXPENDITURE

The revenue out-turn survey is conducted by the Welsh Government and data is collected via annual returns from Welsh local authorities. The survey is conducted every summer with results available in October.

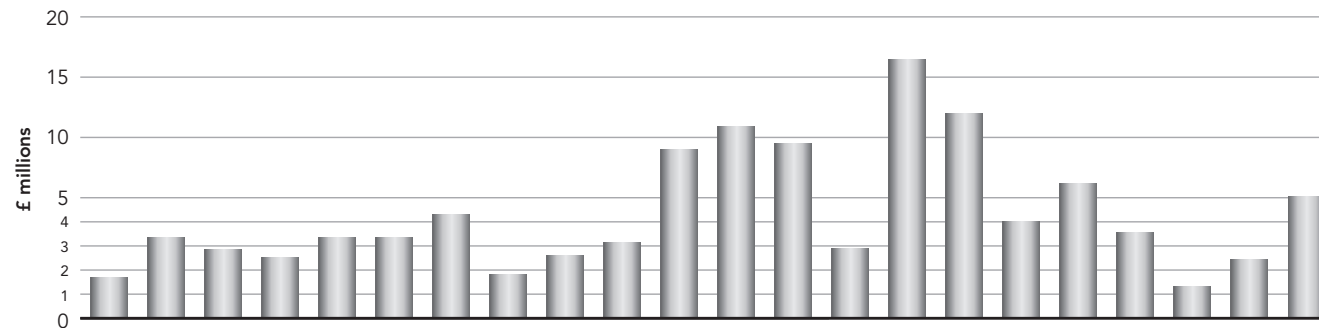
a) All-Wales statistics over the past 10 years showing net expenditure by local authorities on fostering services excluding placements with kinship foster carers



Net expenditure includes fees and allowances for foster carers and staff costs for fostering services but all other costs are not included.



b) Variation of expenditure across the 22 local authorities in 2014/2015



What the variation is in spend by local authorities on placements with the independent (commercial and third sector) providers does reflect is the wide variety of practice in relation to commissioning placements. However, there is not a direct correlation between the size of the local authority and the commissioning of placements with two local authorities of the same size having a variation of spend between £1,008,000 and £5,802,000.

c-i) All-Wales gross expenditure for fostering services excluding kinship foster care

	2012/2013		2013/2014		2014/2015	
Local authority foster care	£49,382,143	2230 children	£46,566,444	2240 children	£51,320,559	2200 children
Foster care provision from independent sector	£58,967,864	1330 children	£58,470,061	1275 children	£52,271,037	1205 children

Local authorities have consistently, over the last three years, had a larger gross expenditure on foster care provided by the independent (commercial and third party) sector than the gross expenditure on own services. Gross expenditure on local authority fostering services includes payment of fees and allowances to foster carers and staff costs; gross expenditure on independent sector (commercial and third sector) placements are inclusive of the payment to foster carers and the provider's management fee for each placement.

The Consultation Programme

WHAT WAS IT?

The National Fostering Framework Reference Group led on an extensive programme of consultation from November 2015 to the end of February 2016. All key stakeholders actively engaged in this and made positive contributions. Due to the tight timescales involved, existing consultation mechanisms were used as well as new ones developed specifically for this purpose.

- Fostering Network led on the consultation with foster carers.
- Voices from Care led on the consultation with Children and Young People.
- AFA Cymru provided invaluable support in organising the All Wales Event to consult with local authorities and their public sector partners.
- A group of local authority managers led on the consultation with local authorities.

A very special thank you goes to all these organisations and individuals for the invaluable contribution they have made to the Phase One of the work on the NFF.

We have consulted with:

- Children and Young People
- Foster carers in the independent sector, third sector and in local authorities
- Independent (commercial and third party) fostering services
- Local authority staff and their public service partners
- All Wales Heads of Children's Services.

CONSULTATION METHODS USED:

- All key stakeholders have had opportunities to submit the views from their organisations.
- Individual responses have also been encouraged.
- A powerpoint presentation on the NFF was developed for use by individuals in their own organisations to stimulate discussion.
- Online surveys for: young people, foster carers in the independent (commercial and third party) sector, and local authorities, staff in the independent (commercial and third party) sector and local authorities
- A structured telephone interview with foster carers.
- Workshops with children and young people.
- Attendance at existing forums/meetings.
- All Wales event for local authorities and their public sector partners.
- Presentation at an All Wales Heads of Children's Services meeting on 4th March 2016.



Consultation: Children and Young People

Voices from Care led on a number of interactive workshops with young people. Young people expressed their views on:

- What makes a good foster care placement?
- What can wreck a placement?
- What can stop a foster placement from being wrecked?

BUILDING THE PLACEMENTS

The groups initially discussed what attributes and actions you would like to see in foster carers. All the young people felt that it is vital that young people feel supported, loved, that they 'matter' and that they are listened to.



"A place you can feel safe"

Being valued:

- "Treats as though we matter"*
- "Love and kindness"*
- "Help us when we are low"*
- "Teach us skills – managing to independence"*
- "Be there for me"*
- "I loved being understood"*
- "Ask us our similarities"*
- "Having similarities with the family"*
- "Someone who understands you"*
- "Someone who listens to you"*
- "Someone who gets to know you"*
- "Supports us to do activities/clubs that we enjoy"*
- "They helped with school"*
- "A chance to heal old wounds"*
- "A place you can feel safe"*
- "Calming"*
- "Who you can talk to"*
- "Emotionally supportive"*

Acknowledgment of achievements was important and at the foundation of stable, loving and happy placement.

- "Celebrate your successes"*
- "Be proud of you"*
- "Praising us for the things we have done, doesn't take time showing us our faults"*
- "Celebrates successes and is proud of you"*

Importance of emotional bonds and relationships:

- "Treat us the way you wish to be treated"*
- "Treats us equal"*
- "They treat me like their own children"*
- "Respect our privacy"*
- "Treat you like their own"*
- "Be consistent with us"*
- "Be able to relate to you"*
- "Not choose their own children over us"*
- "Equality and being fair"*
- "Holidays like normal families"*

Consistency

"When I first came, they [foster carers] spent lots of money on me and we did lots of activities. This was really nice, but after a while this stopped. I'm not saying they should spend lots of money on me all the time but be consistent."

"Someone who understands you"

"Celebrates successes and is proud of you"

"Treats us equally"



Proactive preparation for placement moves

- "Foster carers could have a pen picture of me"*
- "Meet with people [foster carers] first"*
- "I was asked if I wanted to meet my foster carers. We went on a day out, which was great."*
- "Meet with the foster kids before you move"*
- "My foster carer came to see me before I moved, this made the move a lot easier on me."*
- "My potential foster carers had a picnic ready for me, with all my favourite foods. It was amazing, they had rung my social worker to find out."*

Importance of Information

Having information on the foster carers, the house and the area that the young people are going to live in before they move was seen as a great way of reducing the anxiety, uncertainty and stress of placement moves. Having this information in a format that is relevant to young people was discussed: the groups felt that making sure information was accessible on computers or on smartphones and delivered through videos, simply typed documents or virtual tours.

- "Young people could have a virtual tour of the house and their bedroom before they move in, so they know what it looks like"*
- "Info about the placements online"*
- "Info before we move in – names, ages, details on family, house rules expectation on us and the way you live"*
- "Where I'm going to live?"*
- "If you have any pets or children, what their names are and how old they are"*
- "Practical information like bus stops, meal plans, family information, bed times, curfews, local shops"*

"My potential foster carers had a picnic ready for me, with all my favourite foods. It was amazing, they had rung my social worker to find out."

"Lay out expectations, from the start"

We are happy when:

- "They take us out"*
- "Everyone's kind"*
- "Having new experiences"*
- "Giving us space when getting used to the people"*
- "(When we have) routine"*
- "(They) give me more opportunities"*
- "(They are) positive role models"*
- "It's a nice place to live"*
- "You need to talk to someone, they are there"*
- "From the start lay out expectation, spend time with carers, help clean the house, you know spend time with them.... Bonding time."*
- "More participation activities – meeting up with other young people who are looked after"*
- "(They) teach me to do things right"*
- "People are kind"*
- "Helps you flourish"*
- "Listens to my worries"*

Consultation: Children and Young People

THE WRECKING BALL

Young people were asked what they feel can harm positive relationships, how placements can break down and what make young people feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Many of the ideas young people came up with are the contrasting views to those given when discussing building a positive placement.

- "Not enough praise given to young people."
- "Not knowing about the carers"
- "Not sticking up for you"
- "Carer takes the child's side and treats you differently"
- "Not being (feeling) loved"
- "Being scared of people"
- "Feeling unsafe"
- "Favouritism to one foster child over another – you should treat everyone equally"
- "When they don't relate to you"
- "Not looking after you"
- "Feeling left out"
- "Not talking to us"
- "Not being treated the same, this make us feel sad and left out"

Communication

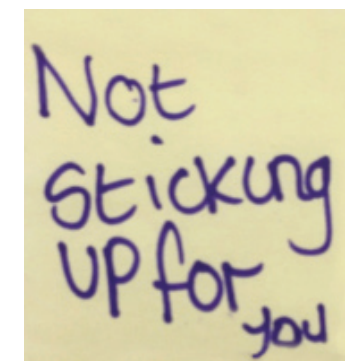
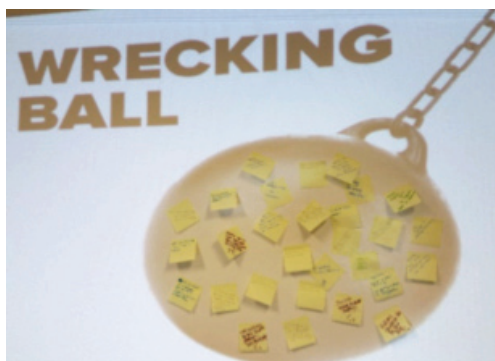
Young people felt that communication, with young people or with others, can evolve small issues into feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, which over time can lead to breakdowns in relationships and placements.

- "Having strangers to me in the house. We need to know who is coming into the house and how they fit in with family and friends."
- "Being fake – be natural and don't be someone you're not in front of social workers"
- "Not introducing you to their families"
- "Not being able to talk to someone"
- "Not taking you to your appointment"
- "Causing arguments for no reason"
- "Not listening to the child's problems eg. bullying"
- "Not understanding my needs and values"
- "Being told wrong information"
- "No communication"
- "Being placed in area that you know nothing about and you have to start your life over again"

Decisions

Young people discussed issues or decisions that the foster carers have no involvement in but can still cause relationships and placement to break down. Below are some of the key comments and thoughts.

- "Being moved to a cheaper placement"
- "Being labelled as a problem child"
- "The lack of foster homes"
- "No one in school I could talk to"
- "I cried when I moved"
- "When you are expecting to move"



Consultation: Children and Young People

Care Leavers Views

"If you don't feel safe, listened to or that your placement isn't stable, what do you do?"

It is important that the young person knows about advocacy or that they are able to talk to someone such as a social worker, independent reviewing officer or a teacher.

"There is a social stigma surrounding being looked after; this can really damage young people self-esteem". – We need to promote positive care leaver role models, best practice on dealing with stigma, which in time will educate the wider public. It's not our fault we are in care.

"Not being able to see friendship group's cause of placements". – Foster carers need to encourage socialisation and participating in different activities and groups. This does not have to be with just looked after children but sometimes this helps. A problem shared is a problem solved.

"When money comes before happiness" – There needs to be better preparation so young people are not unnecessarily moved on.

"Not being given time to adjust to new surroundings" – Support is needed for the whole family, to help everyone to adjust to a new placement. Meeting the carers before you move would speed up the bonding process.

THE WALL: HOW TO STOP THE WRECKING BALL

Young people gave some ideas on the support that is needed to keep placements happy and minimise the risk of placement and relationship breakdown.

"Explains why decision are being made"

"If we have to move placement where possible allow us to be in the same school"

"If there are arguments or disagreement between the young person and the foster carers, offer some sort of informal resolution support. So everyone sits down and is given the chance to tell their side of the story in a safe environment."

"Making it work" – There should be a list of attributes and actions that the foster carer and young person agree to... so like respect each other, help out around the house, being able to see friends. So there are a series of agreed expectations that people have to stick by.

Young people should be involved in deciding who becomes a foster carer. We should be involved in some part of the process even if we are not able to make the final decision.

Consultation: Foster Carers

HOW DID WE CONSULT?

Fostering Network led on the consultation programme with foster carers in the independent (commercial and third party) sector and local authority carers.

A focus group was carried out with four foster carers who are members of the Fostering Network's Foster Carer Advisory Group (FCAG) and key informers. This was supplemented by eight in-depth, part structured telephone interviews with foster carers from most parts of Wales, and an online survey was completed by a further 64 foster carers.

The numbers involved in the consultation were quite small and probably included the more active foster carers so we should not assume they represent the views of foster carers in general. However, the report is based upon the first-hand experience of these well-informed foster carers which gives confidence regarding findings in relation to quality factors relating to fostering services.

KEY MESSAGES

Foster carers believed they should have an important role in helping ensure services are delivered to agreed standards. In very general terms, therefore, it is possible to say that participants were concerned about improving practice across Wales in relation to:

1. training provision;
2. developing foster carers' support groups;
3. sharing good practice regarding payments and finance including greater transparency about the financial assistance that is available;

4. ensuring the same social worker is able to provide support to a family over a reasonable period of time;
5. improving other aspects of support including, supervision practice, out of hours support, support for all the family and respite provision;
6. addressing general issues of communication;
7. ensuring foster carers are involved more equally in decision making including ensuring services are delivered to agreed standards.

It is more difficult to be clear about findings in relation to the allocation of functions between national, regional and local levels.

In general terms again, the main conclusion that may be drawn is that participants would want the national functions to concentrate on policy, strategy and accountability issues in order to establish, monitor and assure high standards of service. Foster carers should be involved in these processes. They felt that delivery functions should be the responsibility of regional or local structures.

The focus group of foster carers considered that fostering responsibilities could be delivered at a national, regional and local level as described in the table, right.

Finally, what was obvious from the consultation was the dedication and responsibility that foster carers felt towards the children and young people they fostered. Whilst they recognised the structural limitations within which they fostered, what was clear was their will to ensure that each looked after child or young person reached their potential.

Allocation of functions between national, regional and local levels by focus group participants

NATIONAL LEVEL

- Development of common policies
- The Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM)
- Approaches to "When I am Ready"
- Grant system
- Financing – national and transparent
- Development of core training programme
- Standards, policies and procedures for foster carers
- Guidelines for marketing – separate considerations for IFAs and LAs

REGIONAL LEVEL

- The exchanging of placements between IFAs and LAs
- Agency or authority decision maker responsibilities
- Annual foster care reviews
- The placing and matching of children and young people (split decision: three voted for regional, one for local level)
- Undertaking full fostering assessments
- Marketing and recruitment activity to recruit carers
- Collaboration between services
- Support
- Out of hours service – social workers on call – not 9 to 5

LOCAL LEVEL

- Undertaking of kinship foster care assessment
- Responding to initial enquiries to foster (split decision: one voted for national, one for regional and two for local levels).

Consultation: Independent (Commercial and Third Sector) Staff

HOW DID WE CONSULT?

Fostering Network led on an online survey for staff with the independent (commercial and third sector) providers and in local authorities.

Staff in the commercial and third sector fostering agencies were encouraged to express their views and many did through the Nationwide Association for Fostering providers.

The Project Manager for the NFF attended an Independent (Commercial and Third Sector) Providers Forum hosted by Fostering Network in December 2015.

A combined written response was received from independent (commercial and third sector) providers following a meeting they held to discuss the NFF, detailing the key issues for commercial and third sector fostering services providers.

Third sector – not for profit – agencies were represented on the Reference Group and an individual response was also received from two organisations.

The combined response from the independent (commercial and third sector) providers identified some current tensions surrounding the commissioning framework. They also identified some issues that should be considered in developing a NFF and some areas of good practice. This was their response:

- Members voiced concerns over the sequential placement finding procedures and how this potentially eliminates the most appropriate placement for a child from a placement search.
- Members would like to see opportunities for local authorities and providers to work together to enable

better forward planning. To share the same knowledge on unmet needs and the market position. Providers say that without this, it is difficult for them to accurately shape development plans to meet future needs.

- Our members are concerned about the level of placement disruption and want there to be a greater focus on stability. Examples were given of well matched placements in the independent sector that had been disrupted as the local authority had moved the child to an in-house carer. They want there to be a greater emphasis on developing positive and trusting relationships and for there to be recognition that a foster carer with a commercial or third sector provider may be best placed to provide a long-term placement for a child.
- IRM – Providers do not feel this offers value for money and that efficiencies could be made if alternative processes are used.
- There was a suggestion of LAs and independent (commercial and third sector) providers holding joint recruitment events. They have identified that if one agency (LA or independent) has a recruitment drive, then all agencies see an increase in enquiries. They would like to see consideration of foster care recruitment events, which would enable potential carers to talk to a number of agencies.
- A wish for a better understanding of what 'local' means. Members want to develop positive relationships with their local authority commissioning and social work colleagues. Providers questioned how LAs can favour other local authority placements in other local authority areas, rather than place a child locally with an independent (commercial and third sector) foster carer. Independent

(commercial and third sector) providers would like discussions regarding this and for there to be a shared consensus that if 'local' is an important criteria for a child, then all local options will be explored, regardless of the provider, before a placement further afield is considered.

- There is real concern about the quality of referral information that is placed on the CCSR. Members said this was often inaccurate and out of date and it makes it very difficult to consider whether or not they have an appropriate carer to offer as a possible match. Providers gave some examples of how placements had failed due to mismatching (because referral information was incorrect). Providers feel there is a lack of quality monitoring of the referral information and little support for them when contractual issues arise as a result of the poor information initially received.

IFPs identified as working well:

- Some said that there can be delays in receiving individual placement contracts from local authorities and that the 4Cs have been helpful in chasing the local authorities for these, ensuring that they are sent to providers. This intervention is much appreciated by providers.
- Members said that they unfortunately have experienced some hostility from the 4Cs and a number of local authority colleagues who give the clear impression that they resent working with the independent sector. However, some local authorities colleagues are more modern in their thinking, friendly, helpful and more eager to work in genuine partnership and this often results in a more efficient and child-centred service. (I think unfortunately the negative experiences they have had do sometimes overshadow some of the good work that some

local authority colleagues do.)

- There are some good relationships with other fostering organisations, residential services and some support services.
- There was also a view that there are some experienced, resilient social workers with good organisational and communication skills who could co-ordinate a team around the child effectively. These individuals advocated for the child (even if this meant challenging management) and they showed respect for the Independent (commercial and third sector) provider, treating them as an equal. Providers felt this was often key to ensuring the success of a placement. (Again, whilst this was acknowledged, our members said that practice varied enormously and unfortunately this partnership work was not always in place.)



KEY MESSAGES FROM THE THIRD SECTOR FOSTERING AGENCIES

One third sector provider responded as follows:

1. We welcome the opportunity to ensure that looked after children in Wales experience a consistency of care across all fostering providers. In particular, we would welcome any work undertaken to bring local authority fostering services in line with the expectations of the All Wales Fostering Framework contract and reduce the disadvantage “built in” to the current system for some children. For example – the provision of a savings account for all children in foster care and reporting on measured/ scored outcomes for Looked After Children – these are contractual requirements for IFAs but not LAs.
2. We are continuing to see a reduction in the provision of therapeutic support for looked after children in Wales, whilst many children in foster care have complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. CAMHS services are stretched and expensive private therapeutic services are increasingly being used to fill the gaps. This raises concerns about a lack of consistent quality and approach across the sector for all looked after children in Wales. Therapeutic services for children within ‘When I’m Ready’ are also stretched and funding is less available in such placements to commission private sector therapy.

3. There has been an increase in the number of looked after children in Wales experiencing three or more moves in a year (10% in 2015). This should be a key priority for improvement, with services ensuring that they can provide stability for both younger and older children. Care planning should consider appropriately funded placements earlier on in the planning, rather than reacting to multiple placement moves later on in the child’s life.

The third sector fostering agencies expressed a strong desire to develop stronger collaborative relationships with local authorities that were distinct from those local authorities have with the independent sector. Their view is that one of the consequences of the commissioning framework is there has been little opportunities for this to develop. They see the development of the NFF as an opportunity to forge these new relationships, working more closely with local authority partners to support and enhance fostering provision in Wales. In addition, third sector fostering agencies are aligned with the development of the NFF as a way of producing quality data to inform decision making, leading to improved outcomes for children.

It is interesting to note the statutory relationship between local authorities and independent (commercial and third sector) fostering providers is different in Scotland from that of England and Wales. In Scotland, only not-for-profit fostering organisations are permitted by statute. The Social Services and Well-being Act is requiring local authorities to promote the relationships with third sector and not-for-profit organisations.

Consultation: Local Authorities and Public Service Partners

HOW DID WE CONSULT?

Fostering Network led on an online survey for staff in local authorities.

A PowerPoint presentation on the NFF was developed and used in a number of different settings to generate discussion and debate.

An all-Wales event for local authority staff and their public service partners was held on 12th February, this was attended by approximately 80 staff.

KEY MESSAGES EMERGING FROM THE CONSULTATION

1. An active willingness to consider how we might deliver fostering services differently to improve performance.
2. An acknowledgement that the performance on an all-Wales basis does not demonstrate continued improvement.
3. There have been significant improvements in performance, in some areas and in some aspects of the service. However, improvements are often hampered by changes of personnel and/or reductions in funding.
4. Kinship Foster Care was a significant issue for some authorities and was having an impact on their capacity to recruit mainstream carers, as Kinship Foster Care assessments were often court directed with tight timescales. For other authorities their use of Kinship Foster Care placements was much lower. A Kinship Foster Care: First Thoughts and Initial Scoping paper has been produced by Alison Crane RCT, Jo Goodwin NPT, Sarah Bartlett North Wales and Kathy S'Jacob AFA Cymru.

To view the Kinship Foster Care Paper, please click the link

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/8eplexo6hrir3zr/NFF%20-%20Kinship%20Care%20Paper.pdf?dl=0>

At the all-Wales event on 12th February for local authority staff and their public service partners, participants considered what could be better delivered on a national, regional and local basis.

There was considerable agreement on some aspects of service delivery but not all, as much will depend on the detail. However, it was acknowledged that the following should at least be considered at a national, regional and local level.

Consultation: Local Authorities and Public Service Partners

National	Regional	Local
Marketing Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand identity • Logo/strap line • National campaigns • Website 	Marketing strategies linking into the national campaign	Local knowledge feeding into regional and national activity as well as retaining local marketing activity – ‘knowing what works in your local area’
Common Policy Framework, for example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility to become a foster carer • Foster Panels • Recruitment • Reg 42 reports • Smoking/pets 		
Training framework setting standards for post-approval training	Post-approval training could be delivered on a regional basis Pre-approval training could be delivered on a regional basis if it helped reduce any ‘waiting’ time for applicants	Pre-approval training if there were no delays for applicants
Kinship Foster Care – a national framework to ensure a consistent approach across Wales		Reg 38/kinship foster care assessments/approvals – important to keep links with children’s services teams
	Post-placement support services with health, CAMHS and education	
National recruitment policy should set standards/timescales for applications to foster	Responding to initial enquiries to foster, to ensure a strong ‘customer ethos’ service from the first point of enquiry	Initial enquiries could be carried out at a local level if authorities can evidence standards/timescales are being met.
	Full fostering assessments, to avoid any delay	Full fostering assessments could be done by local authority if able to evidence national standards/timescales are being met
	Foster Panels could avoid delay for applicants	Foster panels could be held locally if authorities are able to evidence meeting of standards in national policy
		Matching and placing of children
	Peer Group support services for foster carers	Support for foster carers

PUBLIC SERVICE PARTNERS VIEWS:

The Welsh Medical Group (medical advisers in fostering and adoption and paediatricians with a special interest in adoption, fostering and looked after children from across Wales) is supported by AFA Cymru.

The suggested plans for a NFF are sensible and the idea of standardising services – recruitment, assessment, panel process is welcomed. The group consider the following issues to be of importance and would wish them to be included as we move into Phase Two.

- Making the role of medical adviser in fostering a statutory one. If the role of the medical adviser in fostering was a statutory role and this included attendance at foster panel, health boards would be required to support paediatricians who carry out this role and identify time in job planning. At present, this is difficult in some areas.
- Regional panels may cause difficulties for medical advisers logistically as current panels are busy. Any increase in workload would need the bullet point above addressed first. At present, there is no requirement for the medical adviser to attend panel – we do it as we feel it is good practice. It is highly likely that health boards would not support any increase in medical advisers time and may relook at what they currently provide.

- We would welcome more consistency and understanding about delegated responsibility.
- We value the professional role undertaken by foster carers.
- We have significant concerns about looked after children placed out of area:
 - We are developing an all Wales looked after children out of area notification protocol (with LAC nurses and safeguarding children service).
 - We think health should have a clearer role in out of area placement panels – where decisions are made about these placements. Every placement panel in Wales is different.
- We are not happy with the current PIs for health. They do not measure quality and are not outcome focussed. We would wish to develop improved performance indicators for health services with regard to looked after children.
- We feel health should be represented on regional fostering management committees.
- We are concerned that residential placements in the independent sector are in the “too hard” list for the NFF at present as we have safeguarding concerns about them being established without consultation.
- We have concerns about CAMHS support for foster carers and looked after children. This should be standardised across Wales. We would welcome fast tracking of Looked After Children within CAMHS if they do not have a dedicated Looked After Children service available and a recognition that input and support can stabilise a placement. In some areas CAMHS are signposting to school or social service support, but these decisions must be multi-agency. Good universal provision must also allow for fast tracking when necessary.
- Kinship Foster Care – we currently have concerns about differing standards of assessment.
- Special Guardianship Order – we are mindful of lack of assessment of carers which is not appropriate and doesn't safeguard children appropriately. The Welsh Government will be setting up a technical group in May 2016 in regard to Special Guardianship Orders.

Learning from One Another

All the consultation methods have been used to indicate there is some excellent practice in the delivery of foster care services. Foster carers have demonstrated their care and commitment to the young people they look after and young people have spoken passionately of the care they have received from their foster carers. Staff have also spoken with pride of the devices they have been responsible in shaping. We have not been able to capture all the examples of good practice in this report, but here are just a few.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE IN WALES

Working together to improve fostering services in North Wales

The local authority fostering teams are working together to improve their services. Regional projects begun by the North Wales Commissioning hub include *'The Skills to Foster™'* training, sharing in-house foster carer provision and joining the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs). The local authorities also worked together to produce a form for the assessment of kinship foster carers or other connected persons as carers. The second phase of the project is focussing on marketing, recruitment and streamlining policies and processes for in-house fostering services. Work completed to date includes:

- A joint website for the North Wales local authorities to promote fostering opportunities
www.northwalesfostering.gov.uk
www.maethugogleddcymru.gov.uk
- Working together to implement the 'When I'm Ready' scheme including a joint assessment of the financial impact, developing a policy, streamlining allowances and developing a train the trainer course.
- Producing a draft foster carer assessment form.

The next steps for the project are to continue working together to carry out joint marketing and look at the options for streamlining fees and payments. Project management support is being provided by the North Wales Social Care and Well-being Services Improvement Collaborative.

Fostering Healthy Futures

As part of the Confidence in Care research, Cascade (Cardiff University) are currently involved in a feasibility study to investigate whether the Fostering Health Futures (FHF) model of working with foster children, developed in Colorado, USA, would be relevant and practical to run in Wales. The underpinning philosophy of the intervention is preventative. The model is strengths based, aiming to reduce the development of mental health difficulties, promote self-esteem and enhance the resilience of young people. The model involves offering skills groups and mentoring to young people age 9–11 years, living away from home in foster care, over a nine month period. The skills groups run with 8 young people (four boys and four girls). In the US model, the mentoring is provided by postgraduate social work students as part of their practice learning opportunity. Each student mentors two young people which provides the opportunity for intensive direct work with children. The student as part of their role further liaises with the foster carers, schools, birth parents, youth offending team as appropriate, allowing for some multi-disciplinary working.

The quality of the evidence base relating to the impact of FHF on improving outcomes for looked after children in Colorado has been independently verified by the California Evidence-based Clearing House on Child Welfare. Professor Heather Taussig has written widely about the scheme. The feedback from the feasibility study has to date been positive and we would hope to apply for further funding to run a pilot in Wales.

MIST (Multi-disciplinary Intervention Service Torfaen)

MIST is a multi-agency partnership working to repatriate looked after children from residential care. It works seamlessly across statutory agencies to provide an effective and cost-saving alternative to residential care for looked after children with highly complex needs. MIST, hosted by Action for Children, has been running for 12 years.

Together, the team at MIST has the necessary resources to meet these children's complex needs. Making a long-term commitment and working in true partnership with professional colleagues, and most importantly with children themselves and their families, creates a significant resource of knowledge, skills, creativity and determination. The result is safer, happier and more resilient young people.

Success has been achieved by repatriating those children already in residential care to intensively supported therapeutic foster care placements and kinship placements. These placements include specialised education packages and individually tailored packages of multiple psychological therapies.

Fostering Outside Play

Fostering Outside Play (designed and delivered by Learning Through Landscapes) is a 4-day course which aims to improve the physical and mental health outcomes for Looked After Children by supporting carers and practitioners to provide high-quality, frequent and regular activities and play outside and in the natural environment. The course is delivered almost entirely outdoors and aims to build the capacity of foster carers to use their local green spaces (including their own gardens) for outside play and learning. During the course, carers use outdoor experiences to build trust and independence, provide alternative opportunities for contact, prepare children for moving on and appreciate the benefit of taking risks in order to build resilience.

Foster Swansea

The problem

At the end of the financial year in 2011 Foster Swansea reported a net gain of 0 foster carers after only recruiting the same number of foster carers who de-registered. The team were working hard to recruit and had a full time designated marketing officer producing quality campaigns that produced a total of 348 enquiries that year, however only 1 in 29 of these enquiries converted into an approval.

What we did

A member of the team undertook a marketing exercise to fully understand the new competition that had developed around them in the growth in IFP's. They also completed extensive research into the financial rewards and needs of foster carers so they can complete the task well and feel fully rewarded for their role. The outcome of this work resulted in significant changes to the financial package for foster carers and a complete overhaul in the recruitment process from start to finish.

The main changes were:

- We created two new teams: one to focus on mainstream recruitment/assessment and support of foster carers and the other to focus on assessing and supporting kinship foster carers
- The team structure of the mainstream team included a generic team with SSW recruiting, assessing and supporting foster carers, allowing for a greater number of assessments to be completed (caseloads of 12 carers 2 assessments)
- Introduction of a designated senior SW to oversee every aspect of recruitment, to quality assure and prioritise this work. Monitoring and responding to need
- A daily duty officer to take calls from enquirers and always respond promptly – the whole team was trained in the 'person centred business-like approach'
- Home visits to be booked within 7 days of the initial phone call
- An information pack to be sent the same day so it is always received within 24 hours
- Proactive call backs to applicants who aren't quite ready to proceed
- Speedy and effective preparation training and allocation for assessment (achieved by increasing the team of assessors and introducing strict 4-6 month timescales)
- Marketing focus on the intrinsic values of foster carers to ensure the advertising was directed correctly
- Proactive response to transferring carers – developing an in-house transfer pro-forma to assist in smooth transfers

The result – Within 12 months at the end of the financial year 2013 Foster Swansea reported a net gain of 28 foster carers and significant increases in conversion rates with 1 in 6 enquiries resulting in an approval. 12 foster carers transferred from IFP's within this period and 6 Swansea children were returned to in-house placements. The Local Authority invested heavily in foster carer finances in order to reduce its IFP spend alongside improved consistent recruitment procedures to increase placement choice in-house. This resulted in 75% of children referred that year being placed in-house and a total saving of £ 106,283.00 to the IFP spend.

Moving forward

The impact of recruitment over the last few years resulted in 93% of children needing foster care during 2014-2015 being placed in-house. Foster

Swansea now provide for 65% of the total looked after children population within in-house placements, compared to only 49% in 2012. This model can be replicated across other Fostering Services if an "invest to save" approach is taken.

What have we learnt from Phase One?

There is an eagerness by all key stakeholders to consider how we can improve our fostering services in Wales. All key stakeholders have expressed a desire to be involved in this endeavour.

We need to keep how we improve outcomes for children and young people at the heart of all our work.

Engagement with our public sector partners, particularly those in health, including CAMHS and education, will be key to any developments for a National Fostering Framework.

- Engagement with foster carers and keeping their issues a priority will be central if we are to make a real difference.
- The third sector has an important contribution to make in the provision of placements and new models of delivery.
- Independent (commercial and third sector) providers are keen to be involved in the development of the NFF.
- The diversity issues in Wales of culture, geography and language are of significance.

- We can learn lessons from how the National Adoption Service was established and its first 18 months of operation.
- There is some agreement that aspects of the fostering service could be better delivered on a national or regional basis.
- Kinship Foster Care provides local authority fostering service providers with very significant challenges that need addressing as a matter of some urgency.
- We do not know enough or have the right type of information for us to effectively manage our fostering services across Wales.

To develop a National Fostering Framework will not be easy but it is the right thing to do if we are serious about improving outcomes for children who are looked after.



Desired Outcomes from Phase One

These are the major themes that have emerged from what we knew already about our fostering services, the consultation programme and the work programme of Phase One.

All the priority areas for Phase Two will need to have at their core how they will improve outcomes for children and young people and for foster carers.

Priority area	How will this improve outcomes for children and young people?	How will this improve outcomes for foster carers?
1. National performance and resource framework	We will know more about what is working and what is not so we can have plans to improve the areas that require attention.	We will know more about what is working and what is not so we can have plans to improve the areas that require attention.
2. National policy framework for fostering services	The policy framework will achieve greater consistency for all children and young people whatever foster home they may live in.	The policy framework will achieve greater consistency for foster carers wherever they may live in Wales.
3. Kinship Foster Care	All children living with a Kinship Foster Carer will receive care of a consistent nature.	Provide a consistent approach to the assessment, support and training of foster carers.
4. Commissioning of placements – internally and externally	Ensure the maximum placement choice possible for children and young people and for them to be better informed about placement options.	Improved matching between children and young people and foster carers, increasing placement stability.
5. National training framework for foster carers	Children and young people will be looked after by carers who are better equipped for the task.	Foster carers will be better trained and supported to provide quality care and stability for children and young people.
6. National marketing strategy – website/ logo	Increase the numbers of foster carers and give more placement choice for children and young people.	Raise the profile and status of foster carers across Wales.
7. Payment structure for foster carers – fees and allowances	Ensure all carers are able to provide good quality care for children and young people.	Greater consistency and transparency for carers.