

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE – CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	7 MAY 2025
Report Title:	FOSTER WALES BRIDGEND UPDATE
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	DAN BOLTON GROUP MANAGER – PROVIDER SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There are no implications for the policy framework and procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	<p>This report provides an overview of Foster Wales Bridgend's key developments and activities over the past 12 months, aligning with the Welsh Government's commitment to eliminate profit from the care of looked-after children. It outlines local and regional initiatives aimed at enhancing placement sufficiency, stability, and support for foster carers.</p> <p>Key highlights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislative Implementation: Progress in response to new legislation phasing out for-profit provision in children's care services. Recruitment and Retention: Launch of national initiatives, alongside the introduction of tools such as the Big Welcome App and Refer a Friend App to support carer recruitment and experience. Development of Placement Schemes Carer Support Initiatives: Transition from Liaison Carers to Pioneer Carers to enhance peer support, and the strengthening of training and engagement opportunities through Information and Consultation Events (ICE). Operational Enhancements: Formation of a Remodelling Fostering Board to improve placement recruitment, support and retention. Kinship and Permanence: Strengthening of kinship care through national pilot projects, new assessment tools, and increased Special Guardianship Orders—

	ensuring more children achieve permanence within their wider families.
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet Committee - Corporate Parenting with an update on Foster Wales Bridgend Service Developments.

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government 2022-2027, there are a number of commitments that taken together describe a new vision to transform children's services. The delivery of these commitments will effect change across the whole care system here in Wales.
- 2.2 A key component of this new vision for children's services is the Programme for Government commitment to remove private profit from the care of care experienced children.
- 2.3 The aim of the Programme for Government commitment is to ensure that public money invested in accommodation for care experienced children does not lead to profit, but instead any surpluses are reinvested into children's services to deliver better outcomes, service improvement and further professional development.
- 2.4 The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill received Royal Assent in March 2025. Foster Wales teams will work in collaboration with wider children's services and key partners to ensure clear and consistent communication of The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill's implications to all in-house foster carers, as well as those within independent fostering agencies. In February 2025, Foster Wales also launched a public campaign to celebrate and highlight foster carers who have chosen to transfer to their local authority fostering service.

The key timeframes and milestones below are set out in the legislation and provide the framework for implementation of the changes brought about by The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill:

- 1st April 2026 - no new for-profit providers of registered children's services, including care homes, fostering, and secure accommodation, will be permitted to register in Wales. In response, Foster Wales Bridgend will use 2025 as a critical year to strengthen local sufficiency, focusing on the development and implementation of new schemes to meet the needs of children and young people.
- 1st April 2027 - existing for-profit providers of children's care homes, secure accommodation, or fostering services will no longer be able to add additional beds or recruit new foster carers in Wales. In preparation for this, efforts will be focused on strengthening the engagement and overall experience of

current foster carers, recognising their vital role in promoting fostering through word-of-mouth and supporting future recruitment.

- 1st April 2030 - no new placements of children within existing for-profit children's care homes, fostering and secure accommodation service providers by English placing authorities except in exceptional circumstances specified in regulations. No new placements from Welsh placing authorities unless there is Ministerial approval via the supplementary placements process set out in The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill.

2.5 Bridgend has experienced a net loss of foster carers over the past three years. There is a well-documented shortage of foster carers across the UK, with some movement between fostering agencies, but an overall decline in foster care capacity in both Wales and the wider UK.

Locally, Bridgend faces a significant shortage of skilled and experienced foster carers who are equipped to meet the long-term needs of children and young people who:

- Are aged between 10 and 15 years old
- Present with trauma-related behaviours and require support for emotional wellbeing
- Are at risk of exploitation or exclusion from education
- Have disabilities

There is also a particular gap in the availability of foster carers with the skills and capacity to offer a range of placement types, especially short-term arrangements such as parent and child placements (including support and assessment), shared care, and short breaks.

This report provides evidence of how Foster Wales Bridgend is working to address the challenges outlined above. It highlights the service developments and strategic actions being taken to improve placement sufficiency, carer support, and outcomes for children and young people.

2.6 Our Vision Statement within Foster Wales Bridgend is:

We aim to ensure that Foster Carers are recognised as professionals whose views are actively sought and considered when decisions are being made about children in their care. Foster Carers will be provided with the right support at the right time to ensure that children and young people in their care achieve the best possible outcomes.

3. Current situation/ Proposal

National/Regional

3.1 Over the last 12 months there have been some key developments across Foster Wales. This includes the launch of our National refer a friend app, allowing foster

carers to receive financial incentives for encouraging members of their community to enquire into becoming a foster carer. While the app has had a positive impact across Wales, uptake in Bridgend has been lower than anticipated. The recruitment officer continues to promote the app, and the fostering remodelling project has identified that improving carer experience is key to encouraging peer referrals. We will continue to learn from other local authorities who have had success with the app and how this approach can be embedded locally over the next 12 months. This includes the use of the App to promote the need for foster families for specific children, such as a child identified for step-down from residential care. This is currently in discussion.

- 3.2 We have launched our Big Welcome App. This has been funded centrally through Foster Wales by Welsh Government. It provides an electronic solution to ensure all children placed in foster care—regardless of the urgency—have the opportunity to view a child-friendly profile of their foster family before placement. It will provide a child friendly profile with pictures that can help to reassure a child before being placed. Foster Wales Bridgend carers who will be welcoming new children have now completed these profiles, which will be shared with placing workers from April 1st 2025.
- 3.3 Foster Wales Bridgend have continued to work with regional partners facilitated by the regional development manager to develop three regional placement schemes. This includes a new Parent and Child Scheme, a new Support care scheme which aims to recruit and support a new group of part-time foster carers who can provide flexible, short-term care to children and families in various situations, such as those on the edge of care, children with disabilities, or foster placements needing respite and a Step-down scheme which will recruit foster carers specifically to take children who are coming from a residential placement. These would enable us to strengthen support and recruit carers for specific placement types, including mother and baby placements, respite placements and children with complex needs or those currently in residential care whose care plan identifies fostering as the preferred option. All three of these schemes are in the development stage.
- 3.4 Foster Wales launched their 'Bring Something to the Table' Campaign in January 2024. This was developed as an awareness campaign to build a better public perception of what it takes to be a foster carer. It has allowed us to engage a broader range of applicants with diverse backgrounds and skillsets applying. The campaign was launched with three different TV adverts all focused on how a table brings families together. This included the dinner table, caravan table and baking a cake. All based on real stories from Foster Wales families.
- 3.5 'Bring Something to the Table' has acted as a foundation for further campaigns in 2024/25, including the 'Support Bubble' campaign, which highlighted the incredible social workers and support workers who are on hand to help our foster families, and children of Foster carers month, sharing positive stories from children, whose parents foster, to address concerns some applicants may have about fostering while raising children while their children are still young.
- 3.6 In response to the new Act being passed by Welsh Government, we received approval to adopt a more assertive campaign approach to encourage foster carers from independent agencies to transfer into local authority fostering. In February 2025, on National Care Day we launched an Eliminate Profit Campaign, which we delivered locally, generating strong engagement and media coverage in local news outlets. It consisted of three case studies of carers who had moved to the local authority and

the benefits they have seen since doing this. The campaign aimed to dispel common myths about local authority fostering, often perpetuated by profit-making agencies.

- 3.7 Foster Wales's position on marketing during this transitional period will remain prioritising increasing sufficiency of foster homes in the market by strategies to encourage new carers to take up fostering. However, we will continue to strengthen messaging around the benefits of transferring to local authority fostering and highlight the benefits of fostering with the local authority. We will also work closely with other children's services staff who are responsible for care planning and the discussions they can have with carers in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) who are looking after Bridgend children.
- 3.8 Foster Wales Partners was launched in 2024, as a scheme that links with The Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly policy. This policy encourages employers to support staff who foster and raise awareness of fostering within their communities. While there are currently no businesses in Bridgend formally accredited through the national Fostering Friendly scheme, Foster Wales Bridgend continues to promote this initiative and support local adoption of fostering-friendly practices. Awen Cultural Trust has already adopted a fostering-friendly policy, and further engagement is ongoing with partners including Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO). Additionally, all members of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board are currently exploring the development and implementation of policies that would support fostering-friendly employment practices within their organisations. Through the Foster Wales Partners initiative, smaller businesses that are unable to meet the full requirements of the Fostering Friendly policy can still demonstrate their support. This includes sharing recruitment campaigns, offering free or discounted services to foster families, or providing community space for carer events and peer support.
- 3.9 With the appointment of a new workforce development officer covering foster carer learning and development in Bridgend last summer, there has been significant progress in offering foster carers a flexible and accessible programme of learning and development, including face to face training days. The officer has also joined the national group for fostering learning and development leads and has been able to increase the understanding of opportunities available through the national network. This includes ensuring Foster Wales Bridgend embed the national fostering framework for learning and development.
- 3.10 Foster Wales Bridgend has had five 'Liaison carers' in post for the past few years. The Liaison carer's role was to support an allocation of carers in their roles, alongside supporting the service in the development of the service, support and in areas of recruitment. Across 2024 we have consulted with our liaison carers and are now in a period of transition to becoming 'Pioneer Carers'. This is a national scheme, promoted, support and received some funding from The Fostering Network. This will mean our Pioneer carers will receive free training and support from the national network along with peer idea sharing with Pioneers from across Wales. Our Pioneers will also have specific remits and will be expected to evidence their impact on the fostering community.
- 3.11 We have recruited two new posts funded via Foster Wales. One post allocated to supporting the general fostering team and the other post is a regional recruitment and retention officer allocated to Bridgend. Our Recruitment Officer has been in post since December 2023 and sits within the regional recruitment hub managed by the regional development manager. This post works along recruitment officers from Rhondda

Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil and with two regional marketing officers. Together the team has an annual plan on the page strategy for each local authority, which filters into regional and national campaigns. Since the recruitment officer has come into post, we have seen a significant increase in the number of awareness raising events we have been able to attend, businesses we have been able to connect with and enquiries from potential foster carers. This post continues to implement best practice recruitment. However, our conversion from initial visit to assessment is low and work is being carried out around these processes-

April 24 – March 25	Target	Actuals
Enquiries	77	79
Initial Visits	32	28
Approvals	11	6

Local/General Fostering

- 3.12 In November 2023, Foster Wales Bridgend was subject to inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). The inspection identified a number of strengths across the service, as well as areas for improvement which are now being addressed through a detailed and regularly reviewed action plan. The service has benefited from the appointment of a permanent team manager, which has provided much-needed stability following a period of interim arrangements. The action plan focuses on key areas such as matching, safe care, safeguarding, and embedding policies and procedures into everyday practice. Progress is overseen through Silver Management and Performance Meetings, and the team remains committed to embedding these improvements ahead of the anticipated follow-up inspection in late 2025.
- 3.13 Across 2024-25 we recruited six new families as mainstream foster carers. However, there is insufficient in-house foster care capacity to meet all foster placement requests. Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) has experienced a net loss of in-house foster carers over the past three years as referenced in the table below and these challenges are predicted to increase in the near future due to Bridgend having an aging foster care population (30% are aged 60+). There is both a shortage of foster carers in numbers and in levels of experience and skills to manage children with higher needs, which means matching has previously been poor which has led to increased placement disruptions or the child requiring a residential placement.

Year	Number of approved fostering households at 31st March	Number of in house foster placements at 31st March	Net loss/gain of placements
2024-25	63	124 (137 if siblings)	-29
2023-24	72	153	-28
2022-23	85	181	-8

- 3.14 Foster Wales Bridgend has established a Remodelling Fostering Board to address the decline in in-house fostering placements and strengthen local sufficiency. The Board brings together internal and regional partners to co-produce solutions aimed at recruiting and retaining foster carers, improving placement stability, and ensuring care experienced children can remain within their communities. The project aligns with key national and local strategies and is structured around four interrelated themes: recruitment, support, our offer, and retention. This work will continue to evolve throughout 2025, with an agile and collaborative approach that responds to feedback from carers and professionals alike.
- 3.15 We have continued to hold a yearly Foster Carer Appreciation Event. In December 2024 this was held at the Hi-Tide in Porthcawl and was enjoyed by a variety of General and kinship Foster Carers. Feedback from our Foster Carers was that it was an enjoyable event, that celebrated the strengths of our Bridgend Fostering Service and how highly valued and appreciated they are. The event included a very moving account of a young person who credits her success in all areas of her life to the love and support she has had and continues to have from her foster carers.
- 3.16 Foster Wales Bridgend continues to provide strong opportunities for engagement and consultation with management. Our recent Information, Consultation Event (ICE) meeting was held in March 2025 and enabled positive engagement from the foster carer community into the remodelling project. The attendance figure was 104 foster carers and professionals from the Fostering Service, Senior Management and wider Corporate Parenting umbrella. This event allowed us to reset and redefine areas of focus, needed to support, recruit and retain carers based on 'what matters most' to them. From a survey that was undertaken prior to the event, we were able to identify areas where our foster carers felt that if developed, improved, would support them in their role. These were communication, benefits/incentives and therapeutic support. Using a problem-solving method based on a Hackathon style of co-production, we were able to identify areas that could be improved upon within a short, medium, and longer-term timescale. The feedback of the day from foster carers was that they felt we had the right people in attendance, that they felt listened to and included in being part of Remodelling Fostering. We have committed to keeping our Foster Carers up to date with progress being made prior to our second ICE meeting in September 2025 where we will come back together to provide an update of what has been achieved and potentially what we have not been able to achieve and to work on how we continue developing the service moving forward.
- 3.17 Also in place are bi-monthly coffee mornings and national consultation opportunities. Coffee mornings are well attended both by mainstream and kinship carers. They have grown in attendance in the last 12 months and have seen all new foster carers attend on a regular basis. Some attendees are now also organising a male carer specific support group launching in April 2025. Our Retention officer is also exploring putting on walk and talk sessions for more informal get together for peer support.
- 3.18 BCBC is working with colleagues in Foster Wales in relation to recruitment and retention. Foster Wales Bridgend has a 'plan on a page' that sets out recruitment strategies including targeted advertisement campaigns and events over the course of a year. As stated in this report communication to Independent Foster Agency (IFA) carers is going to be increased, making them aware of the eliminate policy. There are

currently 19 Bridgend children placed with IFA carers in Bridgend with 18 placed with IFA out of area.

Kinship/permanence

- 3.19 The aim of the Kinship and Permanence Team is to continue to support Kinship Carers to feel confident and supported to provide permanent placements to children at the earliest opportunity. The Team Strategy for how this will be developed and improved is currently being developed through co-production working with our carers, children, staff and invested partners and will be reflected in our Team Plan which will feed into our Remodelling Service Plan and to the Think Family - 3-year Plan and into our quarterly and six-monthly CIW reports. We are confident that we have the right vision and basic processes in place now to ensure children and families are not kept in fostering arrangements or in care longer than needed.
- 3.20 It is positive to note that over the past year, children being placed within their family has remained the leading alternative care provision for our children in Bridgend this year. 36 Connected Person Assessments were completed of which 23 new kinship carers were approved offering an additional 31 placements. This brings the number of kinship fostering placements as of the 31st March 2025 to 93 placements. Two of our existing Kinship Foster carers have been approved to convert to General Fostering, able to provide 2 additional placements, evidencing the skill, quality and commitment to caring for children demonstrated by kinship carers.
- 3.21 In addition to this, 23 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) were awarded in Court bringing the number of children being cared for under a Special Guardianship Order as of the 31st March 2025 to 163 children by 122 Special Guardians. From a kinship perspective, the numbers of care experienced children are declining because they are spending less time in kinship fostering arrangements – proceeding to Special Guardianship sooner than previously, which as stated is a key part of the kinship & Permanence Team plan. Now we have begun this trend, it is an opportunity to start mapping timelines between the time a child spends in a kinship foster placement to achieving permanence via SGO. The aim of this would be to review service quality and ability to deliver to not only sustain this trend, but to develop it for our families.
- 3.22 Kinship and Special Guardianship Carers have continued to have their own monthly Support Group where they have appreciated having a space of their own to reflect on their situations with other kinship carers, making important connections, sharing information whilst processing what has happened within their family and how their family now will need to function differently. We continue to support our carers to feel empowered and to be proud of the role they have taken on in caring for children. We celebrated Kinship Week in October 2024 by having staff serve afternoon tea for Kinship Carers and by having a well-being session delivered to our carers by which the carers really appreciated.
- 3.23 In a joint project with Swansea Fostering Service, our Kinship Team Manager worked with the Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption (AFKA) to develop a national transfer protocol for Special Guardians to ensure that they experience consistency of service when they move to another local authority area. AFKA have taken this into their good practice guidance and has placed it before the Welsh Government for inclusion into the Special Guardianship Code of Practice. We are also part of a new National Pilot Project to create a new Kinship and Special Guardianship Assessment template called Form K – which has been successfully trialled in England. Alongside

a select number of other authorities, we will be able to reflect the voices of our carers in the creation of this new Kinship Assessment ensuring that it reflects Welsh Kinship Care, the needs of our care experienced young people alongside our legislation, that has distinct differences from England.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 A summary of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment is listed below:

Long-term	Foster Wales Bridgend's work is focused on building a sustainable fostering service that meets current and future needs. By increasing placement sufficiency, reducing reliance on external providers, and improving recruitment and retention, the service is supporting long-term outcomes for care experienced children.
Prevention	The remodelling of the fostering service is designed to reduce placement breakdowns, increase stability, and prevent escalation into residential care. Initiatives such as the Remodelling Fostering Board, targeted carer support, and the use of Eliminate Profit Grant funding to embed therapeutic support and behaviour analysis are all helping to address issues early.
Integration	Foster Wales Bridgend works in close partnership with regional fostering services, children's social care teams, and health and education partners to ensure integrated planning around the child. National schemes such as Pioneer Carers and digital tools like the Big Welcome App are embedded locally in alignment with regional development plans and corporate parenting objectives.
Collaboration	The service takes a collaborative approach to co-production with carers, children and young people, and professionals. Events such as the ICE (Inform, Consult, Engage) meeting and carer appreciation events demonstrate a commitment to shared decision-making. Collaboration also underpins regional placement development and the national Foster Wales recruitment strategy.
Involvement	Children, young people, and foster carers are actively involved in shaping services. Engagement mechanisms include bi-annual ICE events, feedback surveys, and targeted co-production

activities such as the Hackathon event and Kinship strategy development. These structures ensure that lived experience is used to influence decision-making, inform planning, and build trust within the fostering community.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 This report provides updates regarding how Foster Wales Bridgend are meeting their duties to promote the wellbeing of children via undertaking activities to support recruitment of foster carers and supporting children to reside with connected persons where assessed as safe to do so.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting notes the contents of this report.

Background Documents

None

