



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

22ND MARCH 2021

FOSTERING SERVICE QUALITY OF CARE REPORT 2019/20

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Corporate Parenting Board members with the Annual Fostering Service Quality of Care Report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Acknowledge the information contained within the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 This report provides information about the annual fostering service (2019-20) as is required.

4. BACKGROUND

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



4.2 The report itself is attached and highlights the achievements and developments of the Fostering Service during 2019-20 and has been delayed in presenting it to Corporate parenting Board due to the demands of responding to the Pandemic.

10 CONCLUSION;

10.1 Progress was made during the year in relation to carer support and consultation, education and establishing the regional front door. Priorities for the year ahead were:

- Consultations – Improve reporting systems and enhance understanding of foster carers, young people and parents' experiences
- Foster Carer Profiles – Available for young people in a child friendly format and the social workers to improve the matching process
- Health and Education – Improve how data can be collected and contribute to the monitoring process
- Pioneer Foster Carers – Encourage development and links with education and provide advice and guidance to foster carers.
- Parent and Child Training – Encourage existing foster carers to transfer to this provision
- Recruitment campaigns - Assess and recruit foster carers locally
- Kinship care- Monitor the resources available to respond to demand
- Foster Panel- Annual training event to support the Quality Assurance role of the foster panel members

10.2 A report covering the period 2020-21 will be provided in July 2021.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

RCT Children's Services

Quality of Care Report

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

Service Background

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

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

All staff are suitably experienced and qualified to operate a Fostering service.

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

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

- The numbers and range of foster carers available
- The turnover of foster carers
- The recruitment strategy and timescales for assessment and approval
- Foster Panels
- Timescales for annual reviews/medicals/DBS checks
- Number of placements and vacancies
- Educational attainment of children placed with foster carers, including the number of children excluded from school
- Training of carers and staff
- Compliance with foster placement agreements
- Accidents, illnesses and injuries
- Complaints
- Allegations against foster carers
- Unauthorised absences from the foster carer home

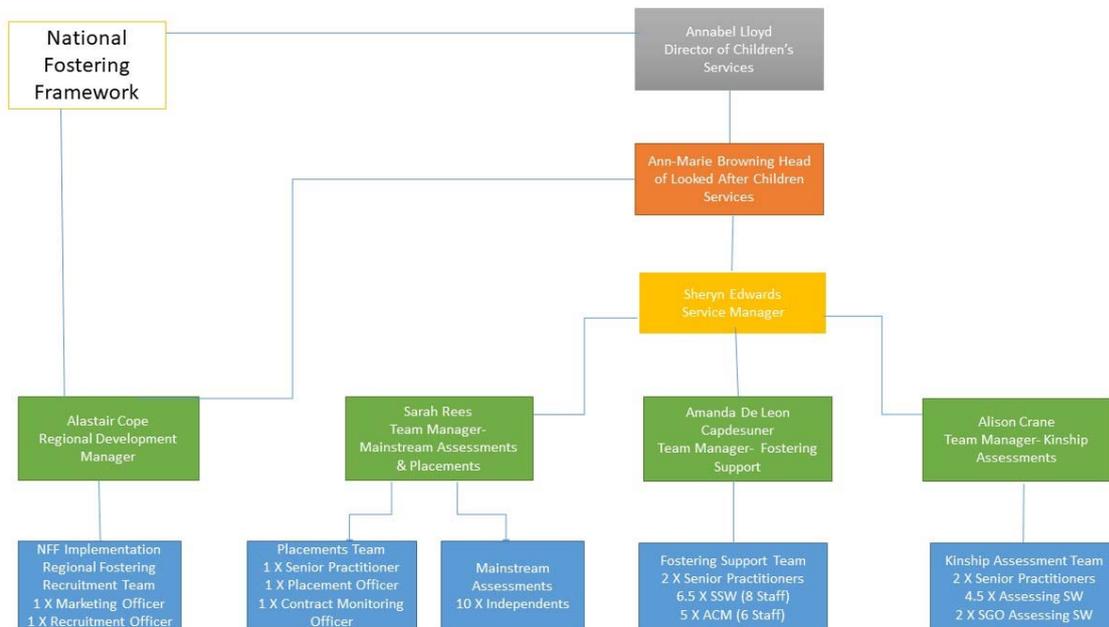
Staffing

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

- Regional Recruitment Team- Responsibility for recruitment of mainstream foster carers.
- Placements and Assessments Team - Responsibility for assessment of mainstream carers and placement finding.

- Kinship Assessment Team- Responsibility for initial viabilities and assessment of all kinship carers
- Fostering Support Team- Responsibility for fostering supervision and support for mainstream and kinship foster carers

The full-service structure is below:



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

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

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

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

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

What we do well and the evidence for it, summary of arrangement in place and methods used to involve children and young people in their care and support.

Summary of the views received from children who use the service, family members, and other professionals. Summary of how the rights of people who use the service are being met.

Over this reporting period RCT fostering service has undertaken a series of consultation events with foster carers and children in order to gain their views and experiences and improve the ways in which we provide our services.

RCT fostering service undertakes regular consultation with its' Foster Carers. These happen 3 times annually and usually take place across 3 different areas of RCT on each occasion. These have proved successful and we have averaged 15-20 carers attending on each occasion, with the last taking place in October 2019. Various outcomes have arisen from the consultation events. One example of this is Carers utilising the events to raise concerns around the lack of provision for other members of the fostering household, for example children of foster carers. Following this feedback, two members of staff organised a sons and daughters event for the children of foster carers to attend. The event was arranged in Pontypridd Lido for the summer of 2019 and further work is underway to further develop this into a regular support group. Other ideas that have been implemented through being raised during consultation events include the Foster carers Appreciation lunch and the CLA Christmas Party.

Consultation is also ongoing with Foster carers through the work of the National Fostering Framework. Several parts of the NFF Work Programme have involved foster carer consultation and collaboration. These include the redevelopment of the active offer to potential and existing foster carers. As part of the research into this business case a consultation exercise took place in June 2019 to ask foster carers their viewpoints on what they would like to see as part of the offer. This took place via a paper-based questionnaire and further discussion in supervision with Supervising Social Workers. Foster Carers raising council tax as one of the key priority areas for them influenced the business case to include a reduction in council tax as the main proposal on the redeveloped offer.

"I would Like to see better discounts on Council tax and water rates" Foster Carer. May 2019.

"We have many benefits as foster carers but I am not aware of what they are so it would be helpful to have a list including the shops / services that provide the discounts / benefits" Foster Carer. May 2019

Whilst a reduction in council tax was not taken forward in RCT, the senior leadership team of the council agreed to pay every mainstream foster carer an annual £1,000 retention payment every year to ensure the payment was equitable for all carers. This received positive feedback from foster carers.

Other areas where foster carers have been consulted upon is in the roll out of the Learning and Development Framework. A regional implementation group was established in November 2019 and included RCT foster carers. The group are focussing around the barriers to implementing the new framework and how it will impact them in their roles. RCT foster carers have been key to giving the Regional Development Manager, who is leading the implementation, their experiences of learning and development and feedback on how they think it will work going forward. A regional launch took place in November 2019, where every RCT foster carer attended and were invited to ask questions on and learn more about the framework. Included below is an example of feedback from that event.

"Hello

Thank you once more for a very informative morning.

As a reflective thinker and somebody who spoke to different groups of people after the presentation, I would like to just elaborate on a point made during the feedback session.

One Psychologist from RCT mentioned that Education is not on the Training list for Foster Carers. On further discussion with her, the point that she was making is that it would help all children in Foster Care if carers really understood how children learn. This I think is a very good and poignant point as if carers understand this to some degree,

they can use this knowledge and skills to not only develop a child's knowledge but also to change behaviours and develop their social and emotional development also. I looked through the list of Training courses offered, and it might be covered under some of the Child Development courses and 'Supporting Education and Development'.

I just wanted to clarify that point as I know you made some notes on the feedback given from representatives.

Kindest Regards"

Foster Carer. November 2019. Following Launch of L&D Framework

Staff consultation is another area we are currently looking to develop. We are in the early stages of looking at ways to gather staff viewpoints on the service and what could improve wellbeing, staff retention and improve outcomes for both staff and the children in our care.

Children/Young People's Views

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

The forum has worked with the fostering service to establish a group of those younger children who are also care experienced, mainly in foster care, for them to express their views and experiences. A small group of children took part in an activity event and SSW provided transport and support.

Parent's views

Building strong supportive relationships is key to the work we undertake with foster cares and parents and this is an area we also want to develop.

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

- One of our supervising Social Workers in the Fostering Support team highlighted that during CLA reviews one mother always feedback how supportive the foster cares have been and how thankful she was for the support they provide. The SW said "Its lovely because the young person is fully aware that his cares and mother have developed a really positive relationship, and this has helped him become more stable in placement"
- Another social worker reported how it is better when parents can meet the foster cares prior to placement. He said parents reported feeling more open about their child's needs and they could talk about this when they met the cares. In this situation the parent engaged in all the social worker involvement and meetings and the child returned home after 8 months.
- An SGO Social worker reported that when assessing a mainstream foster carer applying for an SGO she met with the parents to ascertain their views. In this situation the feedback was positive, and they were "more than happy "for the order to be granted.

We also work with the IROs who review the care and support plans for all children looked after in RCT. The fostering workers attend all the CLA reviews when invited.

<p>This works well in not only supporting the foster carers and child but also building good relationships with parents. IRO's are able to directly pass on the positive views of parents as part of their consultations.</p>
<p>What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further?</p> <p>Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of engagement, feedback, and monitoring and CIW reports.</p>
<p>The foster carer consultation events are popular and prove to be useful in developing our support services, these will continue and RCT fostering will provide a venue, refreshments and staff to facilitate.</p> <p>To improve the fostering services to children we have recently undertaken an exercise to redevelop all the foster carer profiles. This includes logging information and photographs of foster carers, their households and properties in order to be able to give relevant and up to date information to childcare social workers and children looked after before a child enters placement. We would want to develop this further so that all foster carers have child friendly profiles.</p>
<p>What specific action do we need to take to make improvements successful and how will this be measured?</p> <p>By September 2021, we will establish improved reporting systems that will enhance our understanding of parent and young people's experience of the service which in turn will be used to make improvements.</p> <p>All newly approved foster carers will be encouraged to create their own foster care profiles the fostering support team will assist current carers in this process.</p> <p>These profiles will be available for placement officers as part of the matching process and by social workers as part of the placement process.</p> <p>This will be measured as part of the placement stability and permanence processes that report to CLA QA.</p>
<p>Summary</p>
<p>The rights of children and young people are at the centre of our work in fostering. By ensuring children, foster carers, parents and social workers views are recognised and improved the ways in which we provide fostering services for children looked after.</p>
<p>2. People are happy and supported to maintain their ongoing health, development and overall well-being. This includes intellectual, social and behavioural development</p>
<p>What we do well and what is the evidence for it? Include a summary of arrangements in place including methods for collecting views and a summary of views received from people who use the service and professionals.</p>

In order to provide a robust and responsive fostering service foster carers must be able to provide high quality care for children looked after and work in collaboration with parents, social workers and education and health professionals the following are the areas that assisted with this development.

RCT was fortunate to be part of the Fostering Wellbeing programme and our foster carer, staff and young people participated.

The fostering wellbeing project was established as a pilot by the Fostering Network in order to meet 10 key wellbeing goals.

Fostering Wellbeing encourages professionals to work together, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes. It creates a shared language for multi-agency professionals, a shared framework from which to operate, and contributes to workforce development.

Specific outcomes include:

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

The programme delivers learning, bringing people together and sharing best practise across service boundaries with an aim to embed a shared approach across the organisation. The core programme elements are:

- **Service Support:** Providing facilitated workshops to engage key stakeholders and develop service-level activities to cascade learning and identify sustainable model for developing learning.
- **Fostering Wellbeing Champions:** We have recruited foster carers as programme 'pioneers' They are experienced foster carers who in addition to the skills and experience they bring to the role they receive training and support to help them cascade learning within their service. Their role includes supporting recruitment events, organising support groups and offering advice and guidance to other foster carers.
- **Regional Themed Masterclasses:** We have offered 5 core masterclasses, delivered on 3 separate occasions. The objective of each masterclasses was to enable foster carers and supervising social workers to gain the skills, competence and confidence needed to help inspire and equip children and young

people to fulfil their potential. Participants left each session with theories, practical tools and additional materials that can be used straight away to enhance practice. One of the aims and the rationale behind developing the masterclasses is to ensure continuity of support for well-being and learning between home and school. Masterclasses built upon knowledge, understanding, skills, confidence and strategies to assist use in working with each other and with the children in their care.

Pioneers

After the completion of Master Classes training held by Fostering Network in collaboration with Cardiff University, foster carers were invited for an interview if they wanted to be selected to become RCT Fostering Support Services Pioneers. Initially six Pioneers were recruited but due to their own personal circumstances, only four remained. We used to run a help desk in Ty Trevithick every Tuesday from 10 am to 12 pm where one or two pioneers would come and sit amongst all the professionals. They were issued with a works mobile and had access to all equipment such as photocopier, computers and telephone. Two of these Pioneers also used to attend the last half hour of our team meetings and share with us the work they had done.

The Pioneers' roles started with ringing schools mainly primary schools to make appointments to talk about their roles and to do a presentation on the ten wellbeing principles. Their roles as experienced foster carers are to promote our CLA in schools as they understand children's needs, they know what can work and they can paint the bigger picture to school staff. They were also at hand to accompany any foster carer to meetings in school if support was needed.

The Pioneers worked on their presentation and contacted schools when they operated the help desk. They also answered a few enquiries from foster carers. The Pioneers were invited to two primary schools and delivered their presentation. They attended a third primary school and spoke with the head teacher about their roles and the help they offer foster carers. The plan was to deliver more presentations to primary schools to start off with and then secondary schools but unfortunately this came to a stop due to Covid-19.

A road show was held in all three districts where the Pioneers explained their roles to the foster carers and showed a short film on the wellbeing programme. There was a question and answer session after each presentation.

Three of the Pioneers also helped with a recruitment event and two of them assisted with Skills to foster pre-approval training.

Four Pioneers were funded to attend advanced training on Trauma recovery and Facilitation skills as well.

Post Approval Learning and Development Framework

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

- Provide a consistent approach to post-approval learning and development for foster carers in Wales
- Provide guidance on how the Learning and Development Framework and the Social Care Wales' All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care Workers fit together
- Create a mechanism for collating and reviewing of the learning and development achievements of foster carers as well as the identification of future needs

- Create a clear pathway for foster carers to map their own professional development
- Provide a resource for supervising social workers to discuss with foster carers their learning and development needs
- Promote a range of learning and development opportunities
- Place an expectation upon foster carers to take greater ownership of their own learning and development
- It creates clear and transparent standards to strive to achieve

RCT have actively signed up to ensuring this new framework is rolled out and committed to every foster carer using the new learning and development plan as standard by including this as part of their supervision and annual review paperwork. This is hoped will improve knowledge within each fostering household and therefore outcomes for children and young people in our care. RCT foster carers are represented on the regional working group for implementation of the framework and actively contribute to this group.

Health of children placed with foster placements

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

During 2019/20 239 out of 296 (80.7%) CLA were registered with a GP within 10 working days:

During 2019/20 34/62 in timescales (54.8%) CLA were seen by a Dentist within 3 months of Becoming Looked After:

(Note: These figures are in relation to all Children Looked After and not solely those in Local Authority foster care placements).

RCT foster carers receive training on meeting the health needs of children and young people in foster care. Foster carers also receive training on first aid for children.

There continues to be links with the Cwm Taf Specialist Children Looked After Nursing team who are available to discuss health concerns and offer advice to foster carers.

Health promotion is also discussed e.g. smoking, healthy eating, drugs, safety and safer sex. Issues as a part of the supervising social workers four weekly visits to foster carers and recorded in the supervision records. Any medication prescribed to children is recorded by the foster carer and provided to the supervising social worker and the child's allocated social worker.

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

Education, employment and leisure activities

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

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

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

Educational exclusion data In 2019-2020, there was one permanently excluded CLA pupil. The female pupil was attending Year 10 in a local secondary school. She was excluded in relation to substance misuse, was in receipt of Free School meals and was recorded as School Action Plus. She subsequently attended another mainstream school in RCT.

Table 3 Incidents of Fixed Term (FT) Exclusions in Autumn and Spring term 2019/2020 involving RCT Children who are Looked After

	Number of FT exclusions	Number of students with a FT exclusion
CLA	81	47
Non CLA	1428	889

The KS 4 results will be published and shared in due course.

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

An important initiative in place for CLA in RCT is the CLA Friendly Schools. **The Children Looked After Friendly Schools Project** was a joint project commissioned using PDG/LAC funding and developed between Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. It started in 2016/17 with the aim to promote good practice within schools and educational settings and achieve the Central South Consortium vision for CLA learners.

This project was composed of three elements:

1. **Children Looked After Friendly Schools Handbook** – a resource launched in September 2017 to support the practice of schools and settings in this area. All schools in RCT and Merthyr have received a hard copy and the resource is available to download:

http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/7516f3_1c19c56aa1f749d4a6fa40ac73756238.pdf

Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities

**CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER
FRIENDLY SCHOOLS**



- 2. CLA Friendly Schools Training** – a three tier training programme for those who work in educational settings that reinforces and develops the practice set out in the Handbook.

Level 1 training was piloted and then delivered to Designated Persons within RCT and Merthyr during January 2018 and July 2018.

It is envisaged that all Designated Persons are trained and supported to deliver this whole school awareness training session within their own schools & that this training is revisited annually.

Level 2 training was piloted within RCT & Merthyr in May 2018. This whole day training follows on from the Level 1 training delivered within each local authority to the school's Designated Person for CLA. Level 2 training is delivered via CSC in Autumn & Spring Terms.

Level 3 whole day intensive training is also delivered via CSC in Autumn & Spring Terms.

- 3. CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark** – A quality mark for schools achieved by evidencing a high standard of practice for CLA pupils. The Mark is based on a set of indicators that have been derived from the CLA Friendly Schools Handbook. The criteria framework was piloted with 6 schools in RCT and 2 schools in Merthyr during Summer Term 2018. The Quality Mark framework was launched across the Consortium in October 2018.

More about the CLA Friendly School Quality Mark

A development team including the Programme Director for Educational Psychologist training at Cardiff University and former Principal Educational Psychologist for both local authorities; Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist for RCT; CLA Advisory Teacher with CLA Education Team in RCT; the CLA Education Coordinators from both local authorities and Designated Persons from local schools devised an audit tool to recognise high standards of practice.

Using research relating to NICE guidance, the development of Attachment Aware Schools in England, Welsh Government guidance and the building blocks identified in Chapter 3 of the CLA Friendly Schools Handbook, a set of quality indicators (essential & desirable) were drawn up based on the **3 themes** for making a school CLA Friendly. These themes were:

- **Whole school systems & practice**
- **Preventative approaches & building resilience**
- **Responsive strategies to support CLA presenting with more challenges**

A framework for excellence has been developed so that schools can evidence their practice throughout an academic year.

As part of the process of creating a strategic plan for the PDG LAC grant, all schools within the Central South Consortium region are now required to link their planning to pertinent indicators from the Quality Mark audit tool. The use of the Quality Mark indicators will ensure that school leaders use the grant strategically to make the changes needed to improve the lives of the children and young people who are Looked After. Practice that enhances strategic planning and processes is an important aspect of the PDG LAC Grant.

What is required to achieve CLA Friendly School Quality Mark?

Schools can achieve awards at two levels: Gold and Platinum. The former is composed of 44 indicators (36 essential and 8 desirable) and schools will be expected to evidence practice against these and achieve a score of 80% (including all essential indicators) or more. The latter evidences examples of sector leading and innovative practice as well as the achievement of **all** Gold Level indicators and attendance at **Level 3** training.

CLA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS L1 TRAINING UPDATE

- **87** Designated Persons for CLA in RCT have attended L1 Awareness 'Train the Trainer' sessions with the expectation that they deliver this training to whole school community annually

CLA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS LEVEL 2 TRAINING UPDATE

- 51 RCT schools have attended L2 training which is delivered through the Central South Consortium

CLA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS LEVEL 3 TRAINING UPDATE

- 33 RCT schools have attended L3 which is delivered through the Central South Consortium

CLA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS AWARD UPDATE

- **14** Schools in RCT have achieved CLA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS Award

Pontypridd High	PLATINUM
Tonyrefail CS	PLATINUM
St John Baptist CiW High	PLATINUM
Maesgwyn School	PLATINUM
Maerdy Primary School	PLATINUM
Dolau Primary School	PLATINUM
Trerobart Primary School	PLATINUM
Cwmclydach Primary	PLATINUM
Gwauncelyn Primary	PLATINUM
YG Rhydywaun	GOLD
Pontrhonda Primary	GOLD
Coedpenmaen Primary	GOLD
Aberdare Park Primary	GOLD
Tai Centre	GOLD

- **31** Schools in RCT have expressed interest in CLA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS Award for current academic year (2019/20)

As an authority we are committed to rolling out the CLA friendly schools programme and supporting schools to gain CLA friendly schools quality Mark status - in the coming 12 months further.

Employment and Training for CLA

One of the key areas of activity in Wales for Welsh Government is to support improving outcomes for children and young people including Supporting Care experienced people to achieve successful future's and independent living. Figures from Welsh Government report that 6,846 children were looked after on 31 March 2019, an increase of 439 (7%) on the previous year, 696 of these children and young people were under the Care of RCT Local Authority, 96 of these 696 aged between 16-18 years.

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

RCTCBC offer two programmes dedicated to supporting Children Looked After into further employment, education and training: Step in The Right Direction and Care2Work. Both programmes sit within The Employment, Education and Training Team and in line with its

Corporate duty seeks to ensure that Care experienced Young People Young People with Care and Support needs are provided with the right practical and emotional support so that they are able to access opportunities in Education, Employment and Training that meets their individual needs and wishes. We strongly believe that every Care experienced Young Person receiving support via the Local Authority deserves the same and worthwhile opportunities afforded to their peers and non-care experienced young people within their Community. The team are also committed to enhancing the aspirations and ambitions of Care experienced young people to enable them to recognise their self-worth and individual potential in terms of Employment, Education and Training. The ultimate objective being to close the gap between Care experienced young people and their non-care experienced peers in terms of accessing but also sustaining positive and worthwhile Employment, Education and Training experiences within their community.

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

Outcomes:

1st Apr 2019 – 31st March 2020

Trainees recruited – 11

Trainees securing employment in RCT Council – 9

Trainees securing employment externally – 2

Placements included:

- Children Services – Disabled Children's Team
- Social Care – Tegfan Resource Centre
- Social Care - Learning Curve Day Services
- Catering Services – Aberdare Community School
- Parks – Aberdare Park
- Highways – Abercynon

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

Outcomes:

1st Apr 2019 – 31st March 2020

Referrals – 44

Training Outcomes – 41

Employment Outcomes – 3

In April 2018 'Cater2Work' was launched on a full-time basis working with eight groups of 4 young people per year. Over the course of the programme, the young people acquired practical skills and accredited training in cooking and food preparation, barista operations, customer service, handling of money and teamwork. In addition, various soft skills were achieved including an increased work ethic, Communication skills, being part of a team and gaining much needed skills for independent living such as utilising public transport to access training and adhering to a contract of work expectations. The aim of this project was to create a worthwhile training opportunity in the Catering and hospitality Sector whereby Care experienced young people are upskilled in this chosen Career Path which would in turn increase their employability prospects and along with Care2work on-going

support could make a successful transition into either further training or employment and therefore no longer be NEET.

Since this time 30 young people have enrolled onto 'Cater2work'. What makes the programme Person Centred is that it recognises everyone's pathway to learning is different and for some young people they may require a longer journey on their training. Therefore the programme is not time limited and is flexible in its approach in encouraging an individual young person a further period on the programme, should it be felt necessary to build their resilience so that they are able to transition when they feel ready. Out of the 30 young people, 6 experienced a longer period on the Cater2work programme before progressing onto some other form of EET.

Of the 30 young people, 66% have transitioned onto further education and training including College, 6 % secured employment and the remaining 28% chose to remain actively involved in wanting to receive on-going support via Care2work to develop their skills ready to access EET opportunities.

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

Care2work are also flexible and accommodating in their approach by meeting with young people newly referred to Care2work via the Fostering team when they are 15 ½ years.

This ensures a preventative and planned approach to help transition a young person who is coming to the end of their mainstream statutory education into some form of EET provision post 16 and thus try and prevent them from becoming NEET.

Foster Carers will also liaise and keep in contact on a regular basis with Care2Work to ensure there is continuity of support offered by all teams/individuals supporting and looking after a young person. Foster Carers will also attend EET provisions such as Llamau training in order to raise their awareness of the EET opportunities those they foster are accessing and engaging in.

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

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

The Pioneers will be allocated to a Senior Practitioner who along with the team manager will encourage their development and links with education and promote their work with current foster cares.

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

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

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

Summary

By ensuring that RCT fostering services work closely with specialist agencies for children looked after in the council ensure that fostering can be part of good practice, research and developments.

3. People feel safe and protected from abuse and neglect

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

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

1. Compliance in relation to each child

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

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

All accidents and injuries are reported by the carers to their Supervising social worker or duty worker as soon as possible following the incident, the allocated supervising social worker then takes responsibility for completing a Schedule 7 report that is then passed to the Team Manager for any further action that may be required.

This information is electronically stored on the child's file, the foster carer's file and the original is stored by the Manager. If the notification is significant, the Service Manager will be informed who will update the Head of Children's Services.

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

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

Information is provided to foster carers on how to complain via the fostering policies. Children receive information on how to complain via their allocated social worker and a referral is made to the advocacy service with the child/young person's consent. All children receive an active offer of advocacy which is commissioned from Tros Gynnal. Activity is reported to Senior Managers and Corporate Parenting Board.

The annual review process for foster carers considers any complaints made and their outcomes and where necessary the annual review is brought forward and referred to Foster Panel for consideration.

During 2019/20 there were 1 formal complaint and 1 informal complaint recorded for the fostering service in RCT

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

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

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

Total Number	Substantiated	Unsubstantiated
5	2	3

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

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

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

During the year we had 4 staff members who left the service, for promotion and retirement. We have inducted two new starters to the service. As at 31.3.20 the service had 4 vacancies.

6. Notifications of events listed in Schedule 8

Schedule 8 Events

- Death of a child placed with foster parents
- Referral to the Secretary of State pursuant to section 2(1)(a) of the Protection of Children Act 1999(1) of an individual working for a fostering service
- Serious illness or serious accident of a child placed with foster parents
- Outbreak at the home of a foster parent of any infectious disease which in the opinion of a registered medical practitioner attending the home is sufficiently serious to be so notified
- Allegation that a child placed with foster parents has committed a serious offence
- Involvement or suspected involvement of a child placed with foster parents in prostitution
- Serious incident relating to a child placed with foster parents necessitating calling the police to the foster parent's home
- Absconding by a child placed with foster parents
- Any serious complaint about any foster parent approved by the fostering service provider
- Instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster parents

Between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020 there was 1 Informal complaint and 1 contact received for Fostering Services. There were no formal or serious complaints or allegations recorded.

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

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

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

RCT Children's Services have a joint protocol with the Police 'children missing from care' and each incident is responded to in accordance with this protocol. Information is shared with police and social services to reduce the risk of reported episodes and to gather intelligence in respect to exploitation. When a child goes missing repeatedly a Risk Management meeting may be arranged, which foster carers should attend.

Every unauthorised absence triggers a Schedule 7 notification to the Team Manager and is updated accordingly. Where the missing episodes involves the child being missing overnight or where the risks are high the Service Manager is alerted and is responsible for informing and updating the Head of Service.

Between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020, the number of children missing from placement episodes was 8 episodes relating to 5 children. We must note that this figure relates to all children looked after and is not specific to children in Local Authority Foster Care.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. Records of Assessments

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

12. Records of Fostering Panel meetings

The panel consists of:

- Chair - Independent previously registered Social Worker and Senior Manager,
- Vice Chair – Retired Social Worker/Teacher
- Cabinet member for Children's Services
- Foster Carer
- Independent Social Worker
- 2 Experienced and qualified social workers

- Community Medical Advisor (available for advice),
- Legal Advisor (available for advice)
- Panel Advisor – Team Manager, Fostering/ Kinship/Assessments and Placements
- Agency Decision Maker – Director of Children’s Services.

Attendance from members of the panel is very strong which has enabled the panel to be quorate and proceed when scheduled. The resilience of panel membership has been strengthened during the year with the appointment of new panel members.

In the year 2019-2020 the foster panel has met and made recommendations on:

Number of Panels	27
Approvals-mainstream carers	4
Immediate Placements (connected persons under Section 76 SSWBA (W) 2014)	10
Annual foster carer reviews	45
Change of approval status	2
Terminations of approval-mainstream	14
Connected persons/ Kinship approvals	33
Terminations of approved kinship carers	7

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

The staff of the Fostering Service work flexi arrangements in line with the HR policies of RCT CBC. This includes agile working, which was rolled out in September 2018. Many staff do not have a permanent desk but utilise hot desks within Ty Trevithick and are able to operate out of other Council premises as well as other locations through a laptop and mobile phone which is provided to them. The hours worked and any annual leave or sickness are monitored by the line manager of each staff member through an internal flexi spreadsheet and the Vision System, which is able to log any hours worked/ missed. A duty officer is available to offer support and advice between office hours with support available to carers out of hours through the Emergency Duty Team.

14. Records of staff appraisals

Staff personal development plans and appraisals have been completed with all staff within the last 12 months and their feedback has assisted with development of the service. The appraisal system is co-ordinated via corporate HR colleagues with reminders sent to managers on an annual basis.

15. Minutes of staff meetings

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

- changes in placements
- vacancies and potential matching considerations
- placements stability concerns

- carers that are likely to need additional support in the coming week

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

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

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

The Fostering Teams will continue to provide support to foster panel members by ensuring relevant training takes place for all member including, chair, vice chair and panel advisers.

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

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

Support the fostering panel and provide a training event that addresses the quality assurance role of the fostering panel and its functions.

Summary

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

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

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

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

Accommodation

RCT fostering service has a supportive and flexible foster care provision which ranges from 0 to 18 years with experienced foster carers who have short- and long-term placement availability and newly approved carers who are fully supported in their

fostering journey. There are currently foster carers who offer short break provisions and carers who specialise in providing baby care and others who provide a home to the teenagers.

We assess every home to ensure that the children in our care live in accommodation that best supports their well-being and achievement of personal outcomes.

Accommodation issues relating to health and safety are addressed via a risk assessment document that social workers complete as part of the form f assessment process. With regards kinship foster care the suitability of accommodation is highlighted as part of the unified assessment process.

Our foster carers are encouraged to access their local resources, including local leisure centres and we provide a leisure passes for activities in the community.

All foster carers are provided with a copy of their annual reviews and CLA Reviews and a lockable box is provided to all foster carers to ensure they have confidential place to store any record relating to the child they are caring for. Memory boxes for the children are created along with developing life story work digital material, by means of a secure site.

Matching

In order that children live in accommodation that meets their individual needs and maintains their family, social and community networks RCT fostering teams work closely with the Intensive Intervention teams. Information is shared via the placement referral process and the fostering vacancies process and with the social workers who have detailed knowledge about the child and the foster carer.

Placements

The development of placement team has contributed to the overall aims of improved matching, placement sufficiency and stability and keeping children local. We will continue to develop robust systems to monitor placements both with in-house services and, externally commissioned placements to ensure quality of care provision.

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

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

We are also looking at the redevelopment of mainstream foster carer offer to add additional benefits to new and existing foster carers and becoming a foster friendly organisation.

The changes in the Public Law Outline continues to show a significant increase in the number of Immediate Placements under Section 76 (SSWB (Wales) Act 2014) with family or friends and therefore an increase in requests for unified /connected person's assessments to be completed. While these are undeniably positive arrangements for

children and young people it does impact staffing pressures within the service, particularly around timescales and assessment capacity.

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

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

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

A working group has been established to address in house at the parent and child provision.

A HOS led service Fostering Delivery plan is in place.

Summary

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

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

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

Future Planning and Developments

- Consultations – Improve reporting systems and enhance understanding of foster carers, young people and parents' experiences
- Foster Carer Profiles – Available for young people in a child friendly format and the social workers to improve the matching process
- Health and Education – Improve how data can be collected and contribute to the monitoring process
- Pioneer Foster Carers – Encourage development and links with education and provide advice and guidance to foster carers.
- Parent and Child Training – Encourage existing foster carers to transfer to this provision
- Recruitment campaigns - Assess and recruit foster carers locally
- Kinship care- Monitor the resources available to respond to demand
- Foster Panel- Annual training event to support the Quality Assurance role of the foster panel members