

COFNOD O BENDERFYNIAD WEDI'I DDIRPRWYO GAN SWYDDOG
RECORD OF DELEGATED OFFICER DECISION

Penderfyniad Allweddol | Key Decision ✓

PWNC | SUBJECT: Fostering Services - Regional Collaboration to create a Cwm Taf Morgannwg Front Door for Foster Carer Recruitment

DIBEN YR ADRODDIAD | PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:


In accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, this report has been prepared to accompany the intended Officer decision of the Group Director, Community & Children's Services.

The purpose of the report is to seek approval to align fostering recruitment across RCT, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend to create a Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional front door for Fostering Services in order to handle all fostering recruitment enquiries, process applications, co-ordinate the marketing function and support potential foster carers through the process of becoming a foster carer.

PENDERFYNIAD WEDI'I DDIRPRWYO | DELEGATED DECISION:

To approve the proposal to extend the current regional front door for fostering recruitment to include Bridgend CBC from 1st April 2021.

The Council formalises the arrangement through a memorandum of understanding between the three local authorities.

 Llofnod y Prif Swyddog Chief Officer Signature	Paul Mee Enw (priflythrennau) Name (Print Name)	17.03.21 Dyddiad Date
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Mae'r penderfyniad yn cael ei wneud yn unol ag Adran 15 o Ddeddf Llywodraeth Leol 2000 (Swyddogaethau'r Corff Gweithredol) ac yn y cylch gorchwyl sy wedi'i nodi yn Adran 5 o Ran 3 o Gyfansoddiad y Cyngor.

The decision is taken in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government Act, 2000 (Executive Functions) and in the terms set out in Section 5 of Part 3 of the Council's Constitution.

YMGYNGHORI | CONSULTATION



17.03.21

**LLOFNOD YR AELOD YMGYNGHOROL O'R CABINET
CONSULTEE CABINET MEMBER SIGNATURE**

DYDDIAD | DATE



17.03.21

**CYFARWYDDWR Y GWASANAETHAU CYLLID A DIGIDOL
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND DIGITAL SERVICES**

DYDDIAD | DATE

RHEOLAU'R WEITHDREFN GALW-I-MEWN | CALL IN PROCEDURE RULES.

A YW'R PENDERFYNIAD YN UN BRYN A HEB FOD YN DESTUN PROSES GALW-I-MEWN GAN Y PWYLLGOR TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU?:

IS THE DECISION DEEMED URGENT AND NOT SUBJECT TO CALL-IN BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

YDY | YES NAC YDY | NO ✓

Rheswm dros fod yn fater brys | Reason for Urgency:

.....

Os yw'n cael ei ystyried yn fater brys - Ilofnod y Llywydd, y Dirprwy Lywydd neu Bennaeth y Gwasanaeth Cyflogedig yn cadarnhau cytundeb fod y penderfyniad arfaethedig yn rhesymol yn yr holl amgylchiadau iddo gael ei drin fel mater brys, yn unol â rheol gweithdrefn trosolwg a chraffu 17.2:

If deemed urgent - signature of Presiding Member or Deputy Presiding Member or Head of Paid Service confirming agreement that the proposed decision is reasonable in all the circumstances for it being treated as a matter of urgency, in accordance with the overview and scrutiny procedure rule 17.2:

.....
(Llywydd | Presiding Member)

.....
(Dyddiad | Date)

DS - Os yw hwn yn benderfyniad sy'n cael ei ail-ystyried yna does dim modd galw'r penderfyniad i mewn a bydd y penderfyniad yn dod i rym o'r dyddiad mae'r penderfyniad wedi'i lofnodi.

NB - If this is a reconsidered decision then the decision Cannot be Called In and the decision will take effect from the date the decision is signed.

AT DDEFNYDD Y SWYDDFA YN UNIG | FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

DYDDIADAU CYHOEDDI A GWEITHREDU | PUBLICATION & IMPLEMENTATION DATES

CYHOEDDI | PUBLICATION

Cyhoeddi ar Wefan y Cyngor | Publication on the Council's Website:- 18.03.21

DYDDIAD | DATE

GWEITHREDU'R PENDERFYNIAD | IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

Nodwch: Fydd y penderfyniad hwn ddim yn dod i rym nac yn cael ei weithredu'n llawn nes cyn pen 3 diwrnod gwaith ar ôl ei gyhoeddi. Nod hyn yw ei alluogi i gael ei "Alw i Mewn" yn unol â Rheol 17.1, Rheolau Gweithdrefn Trosolwg a Chraffu.

Note: This decision will not come into force and may not be implemented until the expiry of 3 clear working days after its publication to enable it to be the subject to the Call-In Procedure in Rule 17.1 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

Yn amodol ar y drefn "Galw i Mewn", caiff y penderfyniad ei roi ar waith ar / Subject to Call In the implementation date will be

24.03.21

DYDDIAD / DATE

WEDI'I GYMERADWYO I'W GYHOEDDI: ✓ | APPROVED FOR PUBLICATION :✓

Rhagor o wybodaeth | Further Information:

Cyfadran Directorate:	Community & Children's Services
Enw'r Person Cyswilt Contact Name:	Alastair Cope
Swydd Designation:	Regional Development Manager - Fostering Services
Rhif Ffôn Telephone Number:	01443 744310



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

KEY DELEGATED DECISION

17th FEBRUARY 2021

FOSTERING SERVICES - REGIONAL COLLABORATION TO CREATE A CWM TAF MORGANNWG FRONT DOOR FOR FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT

REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Author: Alastair Cope, Regional Development Manager - Fostering Services.
Tel No: 01443 744310

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek approval to align fostering recruitment across RCT, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend to create a Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional front door for Fostering Services in order to handle all fostering recruitment enquiries, process applications, co-ordinate the marketing function and support potential foster carers through the process of becoming a foster carer.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 The proposal to extend the current regional front door for fostering recruitment to include Bridgend CBC from 1st April 2021 is approved, and
- 2.2 The Council formalise the arrangement through a Memorandum of Understanding between Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC, Merthyr Tydfil CBC and Bridgend CBC, the final form of which to be approved by the Group Director, Community & Children's Services in consultation with the Director of Legal Services.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To increase the pool of local authority foster carers by increasing the awareness of the benefits of fostering for your Local Authority, therefore, increasing the number of enquiries received from the public about becoming a foster carer. It is also envisaged that by focusing on this area

improvements will also be made in the conversion rate from those who initially enquire going through to a full assessment.

- 3.2 To increase opportunities for regional collaboration across fostering services in order to align processes, share resource and develop further opportunities for regional marketing campaigns.
- 3.2 The overall objective is to create more local authority foster placements which will result in better matching, less reliance on high cost Independent Foster Agencies (IFA's), provide better value for money and improve outcomes for children looked after.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 The challenges facing fostering services nationally and the case for change are well documented through the National Fostering Framework (NFF) 'First Thoughts' paper and Phase One and Two Reports. These can be summarised as:

- '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.' (National Fostering Framework, 2016, p.3)

4.2 The NFF phase 3 report sets out the first stage principles of regional working within its' 8 work-streams. The streams we want to focus on in this report are:

- Work-stream 2: Development of Regional Work programmes based on regional priorities identified by the national performance framework.
- Workstream 4: Create an all Wales brand for local authority fostering. Establish a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand.
- Workstream 5: Increase capacity within the regions to respond to additional enquiries following the marketing activity.

4.3 All three Local Authorities have experienced difficulties in the recruitment of foster carers. Each year foster carers are lost to each authority due to retirement, sickness, change of career, transfer to Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and other life events. It is not only necessary to ensure that these numbers are replaced in order to meet the demand we have currently, but also that year on year we increase the number of Local Authority foster carers in Cwm Taf Morgannwg in order to meet the future demands of children who are Looked After.

- 4.4 A lack of Local Authority foster carers can lead to an increased use of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements at additional costs to the Council. The placements offered by the independent agencies are also more likely to be out of county which creates additional pressures, complexity and costs in relation to staff time and expenses.
- 4.5 The learning from the experiences of IFA's on the success they have had in recruiting foster carers demonstrates the importance of a responsive customer focused approach when recruiting foster carers. Evidence suggests that prospective foster carers are more likely to choose to apply to an agency if they receive a prompt and timely response; hence the need for a dedicated recruitment resource and a comprehensive customer focused approach at our front door. The learning from these organisations also suggests that a dedicated marketing specialist is essential to coordinate the marketing function.
- 4.6 At present advertising, marketing and enquiries are managed in the following ways:

RCT and Merthyr Tydfil

From 1st April 2019, RCTCBC and MTCBC have been working in collaboration to operate a Regional Front Door for fostering recruitment. The team consists of a Regional Development Manager, Regional Recruitment Officer and Regional Communications and Marketing Officer. The recruitment team facilitates all enquiries, recruitment visits, marketing activity and initial visits up to the point of assessment. Once at the point of assessment the applicant is transferred over to the Team Manager responsible for fostering assessments in each LA. The enquirer will contact the service via phone, email, web enquiry or online chat. If necessary, a return phone call is completed within 24 hours and an initial visit (pre-assessment screening) takes place within 5 working days of initial enquiry. Following a positive IV, assessments need to be allocated within 10 working days.

The following timescales are in place for responses to enquiries:

- Initial enquiry – follow up call within 24 hours
- Initial Visit (IV) - within 5 Days of the initial enquiry or at a time convenient to the applicant.
- Preparation Training – runs every 1-2 months on a regional basis (keeping in touch processes and early assessment work plans are in place whilst this is arranged)
- Assessment – Completion 4 to 6 months from commencing assessment.

The Regional Recruitment Officer coordinates all recruitment activity including maintaining databases and systems, making recruitment calls, completion of IV's and processing application forms. They also coordinate the regional skills to foster preapproval training.

The Regional Marketing Officer coordinates all marketing activity in relation to fostering, including the development of a comprehensive marketing strategy for each LA, the development of materials, content and case studies, maintaining and facilitating each LA's fostering Facebook pages, maintenance and updating of the regional fostering website and linking in with national priorities.

Bridgend

BCBC currently have a vacant post for a full-time development officer with responsibility for some recruitment and marketing activity, including the development of a recruitment strategy.

In addition, the service has a shared marketing resource in the form of a staff member within the corporate communications department. However, this post is not dedicated to fostering and facilitates a portfolio of marketing activity for several departments within the LA.

The service handles enquiries through the following means:

Initial enquiry received via email

The current Development officer will contact the applicant and complete initial contact form (Screening)

If the contact is positive and applicant wants to proceed this is forwarded to a social worker to complete the initial visit.

Initial enquiry by phone/ in person

Whoever receives the contact within the team will complete the initial contact form, if they are a social worker, they will also arrange the initial visit during this call.

Where possible, assessments are allocated to in house social workers for completion

4.7 RCT Recruitment Data

Year	Enquiries	Initial Visits		Assessments Allocated	
		Number	% of enquiries	Number	% of enquiries
2018-19	146	24	16.4%	17	11.6%

2019-20	143	40	30%	25	17.5%
2020/21 (to 31/01/21 only)	113	46	40.7%	20	17.7%

4.8 Timescales for current Cwm Taf Regional Front Door provision

	Follow up Call	Initial Visit	Allocated Assessment
2020/21	1 day	4.9 days	30.1 days
2019/20	1 day	11.9 days	55.1 days
2018/19	4.8 days	35 days	66.2 days

4.9 We can see that in RCT, where a regional front door team has been in place since April 2019, whilst enquiries have stayed largely the same, the numbers proceeding into IV and onto full assessment have increased. This can be attributed to both a dedicated resource at the front door handling enquiries in a prompt and professional manner and the specific content, developed by the Regional Marketing Officer, available through the regional fostering website and social media platforms, allowing people to have all the information available prior to taking the first step of enquiring to become a foster carer.

4.10 The table in 4.8 shows the impact that having a dedicated resource at the front door has on reducing timescales between enquiry and allocation of assessment, therefore reducing the risk of applicants going to other agencies. By providing a dedicated, responsive service we can ensure that all applicants have the opportunity to progress into assessment as quickly as possible, whilst still gathering all the information needed to make informed decisions on whether or not applicants are suitable for fostering.

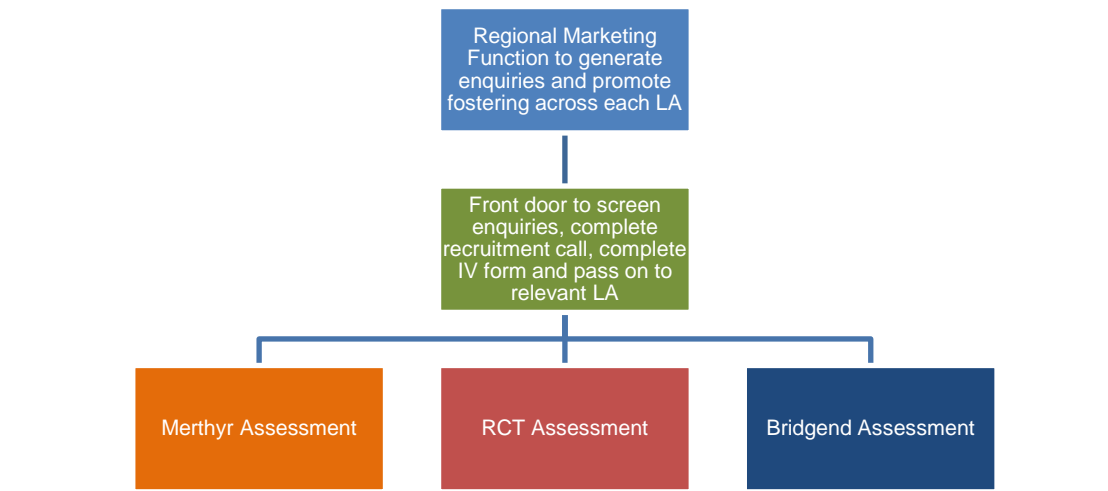
4.11 By further investing in the area of marketing and recruitment and bringing these front door functions together, on a collaborative (and providing dedicated staff to the role of recruitment and marketing), this will continue to improve the amount of people hearing the message of fostering for the Local Authority, the responsiveness towards enquiries, completing Initial Visit pre assessment screening within an appropriate time and the amount of applicants reaching assessment and therefore result in an increase in the amount of approved foster carers. This will lead to a

greater availability of local authority foster placements, better matching and less reliance on expensive IFA placements. Shared resources and ideas will represent better value for money, an opportunity for regional recruitment campaigns and provide a much-improved service.

5. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 A range of options were considered by the regional strategic group, including shared resource of the current Cwm Taf enquiry line across the region, a collaborative approach to initial enquiries, a collaborative approach to IV's and a complete collaboration involving the existing regional front door team completing the marketing and recruitment for BCBC in addition to RCT and Merthyr Tydfil. An options appraisal was developed and the following option was identified as the optimum fit for the objective.

5.2 Option 4



Strengths

- Enables marketing expertise and marketing resource dedicated to fostering in all 3 LA's at fostering service level.
- Would enable a speedy, consistent and robust response to enquiries across the region.
- Responsive of current service has been effective so far in Merthyr and RCT (similar model)
- Alignment of recruitment processes across the region
- Cost saving from current practice for each LA (more for less)
- Avoids duplication of work across the region
- Would lay the ground for Foster Wales and provide a coordinated link with national priorities across the region
- Would enable regional marketing campaigns to take place, pooling resources to have a stronger impact across the local area.

- Campaigns that haven't been viable locally due to finance could take place regionally
- Regional website would reflect new regional footprint and contain details and case studies from all 3 LA's.
- Future funding may be available through NFF/ Foster Wales to adopt this approach, CTM would be a step ahead.
- Sustain links and sharing of good practice between all 3 LA's
- Common aim and shared agreement between all 3 LA's means consistency and strengthens LA voice over IFA's
- Local marketing strategies can be aligned, whilst maintaining individuality
- Fully in line with Foster Wales ethos of shared marketing resource across whole of region.

Weaknesses

- Adoption of recruitment posts would need to be considered as to which LA's they were based in and processes for line management of staff, ICT equipment etc. established.
- Recruitment processes are currently different within Bridgend and all LA's processes may need to be adapted/ changed to ensure consistency across the service
- Requires financial contribution from all 3 LA's
- New digital marketing tools will need to be established (Bridgend Facebook page)
- Timescale to implement may have impact on current recruitment service
- Robust and regular regional meetings between LA's need to be re-established to ensure the project is a success and a partnership approach is adopted

5.3 It was felt that this option will meet the needs of RCTCBC, MTCBC and BCBC and provide a robust, responsive service to potential fostering applicants, as well as achieving the aims of Foster Wales to have a dedicated regional marketing officer and therefore would be the preferred option. This option would avoid duplication of work across the region and could also be achieved without significant further investment.

5.4 **Implementation of a Regional Fostering Recruitment Services:**

The overall regional fostering framework action plan is monitored by Heads of Children's Services and reported to the National Fostering Framework group. There is a dedicated implementation plan to follow before the regional front door launch in April 2021. The arrangements for the collaboration as follows:

- RCT CBC will remain the employer of the Regional Marketing Officer, who will have the responsibility for fostering marketing for all three LA's, including the development of a recruitment and marketing strategy, implementing local and regional recruitment campaigns, developing content for the websites and social media channels and leading on national recruitment and marketing priorities. Some corporate support will still be necessary with regards to marketing, including posting content on the Council's main social media channels and website and website development.
- Merthyr Tydfil CBC will remain the employer of the Regional Recruitment Officer who will have the responsibility for fostering recruitment across all three LA's, including organising recruitment events, handling initial enquiries, completion of IV's and recommendations, processing of application forms and being the point of contact up to the point of assessment.
- The team will be managed by the Regional Development Manager for Fostering Services.
- Any phone calls will be directed through a dedicated phone line in the RCT Contact Centre and web enquiries sent directly to the recruitment team through RCT's CRM system.
- Funding for the project has been identified through existing budgets and an apportioned cost has been agreed between the Authorities.
- An allocation protocol has been agreed so that RCT residents would be referred to RCT fostering services, this agreement also considers those living outside RCT and carers personal choice.
- Each local authority would retain its own brand identity so that we can ensure a local fostering identity remains. The recruitment officer would visit either on behalf of RCTCBC or on behalf of MTCBC or on behalf of BCBC and not as Cwm Taf Morgannwg, however some regional collaboration on marketing activity would be of benefit to all 3 LA's.
- A memorandum of understanding is being developed, setting out the responsibilities of each LA.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no equality and diversity implications in relation to the implementation of the regional front door. As a result of the change, both fostering services and children looked after will benefit from the increase in LA foster carers.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation with key stakeholders has taken place through consultation events and attendance at the NFF regional development managers meetings and NFF Strategic Steering Group.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 This proposal sets out to deliver improvements by implementing this collaborative project within current budgets. At this stage, no additional funding will be required.
- 8.2 The estimated direct staff cost of the proposed new team is approximately £73,536, of which RCT CBC will provide £29,214, MTCBC will provide £16,249 and BCBC will provide £28,073. This will be reviewed on a regular basis and at least annually. RCT finance officer has been leading on this aspect of the work.
- 8.3 It is proposed that any shared costs such as ICT and Regional Marketing costs will be shared between each Local Authority.
- 8.4 It is proposed that any direct costs associated with recruitment, retention and marketing activity on a local level (i.e. relating to local authorities own schemes) will be funded by each respective Local Authority.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 There are no predominant legal issues. A memorandum of understanding is being developed between the three local authorities to formalise arrangements, including financial implications and governance of the project.

10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 10.1 The implementation of the Regional front door for fostering enquiries will make a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan Vision of *'a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all'*; as it will deliver against the specific priorities of *'People - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone and 'Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work'*.
- 10.2 It will also help the Council to meet three of the seven wellbeing goals that The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place as follows:
- A more equal Wales
 - A healthier Wales
 - A Wales of cohesive communities
- 10.3 The proposed changes are also consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

- Long-term – The project aims to safeguard fostering services in RCT by addressing the issue of losing carers and placements in order to meet the future demands of children who are Looked After in the area.
- Prevention – The difficulties in LA’s recruiting foster carers have been well documented. This project aims to help both LA’s improve this before there is an increased issue around placement finding for CLA.
- Integration – Regional working supports the WG objectives of the National Fostering Framework as laid out in the regional work programme and business case.
- Collaboration – Regional working expands working with other authorities to ensure the benefits laid out in the business case. This will also open doors to work alongside outside partner agencies across the region.
- Involvement – Consultation with foster carers and CLA has already begun. This will increase over the life of the project to ensure that this is fit for purpose and continuously meeting the needs of CLA.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The effective implementation of a regional fostering recruitment service is critical to ensure the continued demand for placements in Rhondda Cynon Taf is met. It assists in providing the best provision for our children looked after by recruiting more carers, allowing for better value for money and improved matching for placements, supporting longevity and sustainability of foster placements and preventing placement breakdown. In summary the proposal provides a more comprehensive service for no additional cost, whilst contributing to meeting the aims of the National Fostering Framework.
- 11.2 This report has outlined the changes proposed to Fostering Services. These changes will ensure that the challenges faced by the local authority in respect of fostering recruitment are met and improved outcomes for the fostering team, foster carers and children looked after are met in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Community and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer

Alastair Cope



RHONDDA CYNON TAF





LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

KEY DELEGATED DECISION

17th FEBRUARY 2021

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

**FOSTERING SERVICES - REGIONAL COLLABORATION TO CREATE A
CWM TAF MORGANNWG FRONT DOOR FOR FOSTER CARER
RECRUITMENT**

Background papers

None

Officer to contact:

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