

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2018/19

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

11TH SEPTEMBER 2019

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

Agenda Item No: 5

**Draft Placement
Commissioning Strategy
May 2019 to April 2022**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to give scrutiny the opportunity to consider and endorse the draft Placement Commissioning Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.2 It is recommended that scrutiny considers and endorse the draft Placement Commissioning Strategy
- 1.3 Agree the outlined next steps.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The reasons for the recommendations are so that scrutiny can:
- Acknowledge the information contained within this report.
 - Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

4. **BACKGROUND:**

Children and young people looked after by the local authority rather than their parents are amongst the most vulnerable groups in our society. As corporate parents, it is our responsibility to keep them safe, make sure their experiences in care are positive and provide suitable and sufficient placements that meet their needs.

The Rhondda Cynon Taf placement commissioning strategy outlines the priorities for development within the placement service and our external commissioning up to 2022. The strategy provides insight into our current services and through analysis of management information of our existing commissioning patterns identifies our priority areas.

The purpose of this strategy is to pull together in one document the identified strands of placement commissioning, to ensure there is a clear vision which underpins our approach to commissioning and ensure this vision aligns with our corporate planning.

5. **PRIORITY AREAS:**

The priority areas identified are:

- Recruit more foster carers able to meet the more complex needs of children and young people.
- Provide more in house residential placements within the local area to meet need.
- Provide better support packages to carers to encourage them to apply for Special Guardianship Orders rather than be kinship foster carers.
- Provide a range of accommodation for 16+ and care leavers.
- Improve our commissioning processes for external placements, including integrated commissioning with key partners.
- Develop a reunification model to return young people safely to their family members.

6. **NEXT STEPS:**

The next steps are that the strategy will inform:

- The shaping of internal placements
- Our partnership working approach to placement commissioning with stakeholders and a range of public and private sector partners.

In order to achieve this we will produce a Market Position Statement that will be

published.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A Equality and Assessment Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the development and implementation of the strategy.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 This strategy to be put before Scrutiny as part of the consultation process. In compiling the draft Placement Commissioning strategy staff, young people and providers of placements were consulted.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report for the council.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 The legal requirements for children looked after are set down within Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act (2014)

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP

- 11.1 The appropriate placement of children looked after 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*'.
- 11.2 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:
1. A more equal Wales
 2. A healthier Wales
 3. A Wales of cohesive communities

12. **CONCLUSION**

The reasons why children become looked after are complex and when they enter the care system they often have a wide range of problems including complex and cumulative vulnerabilities. To ensure we are able to meet the needs of these children and young people we need a variety of available placements and accommodation and supports so that we can address these needs and achieve the best possible outcomes for the individual child or young person to live successfully in their communities



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
TREFTADAETH GADARN | DYFODOL SICR

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Placement Commissioning Strategy

From May 2019 to April 2022

Commissioning is... the process of identifying needs within the population and of developing policy directions, service models and the market, to meet those needs in the most appropriate and cost effective way.

*IPC (2016) National Commissioning Board (Wales):
Procurement Options in Social Care in Wales.*

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1. Executive Summary

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council placement commissioning strategy outlines the priorities for development within the placement service and our external commissioning up to 2022. The strategy provides insight into our current services and through analysis of management information of our existing commissioning patterns identifies our priority areas. These will be focusing on increasing our recruitment of foster carers and improving our support package to carers who may wish to pursue and SGO, developing our in-house residential provision and 16+ accommodation options, a reunification project where young people can safely return to family members and improving our commissioning processes for external placements. Our market position statement we will provide information for providers about RCT placement needs so enabling the development of services we require to meet the complex needs of children and young people.

2. Introduction

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT CBC) is committed to take earlier preventative action to support children and their families so that families are able to care for their own children and prevent unnecessary entry or repeat admissions to care.

By working together more effectively and prioritising early intervention and prevention we can ensure that fewer children and young people in the Cwm Taf region need to become looked after. For those children who become looked after within the Cwm Taf region, we want them to have a positive experience of being looked after and achieve great outcomes.

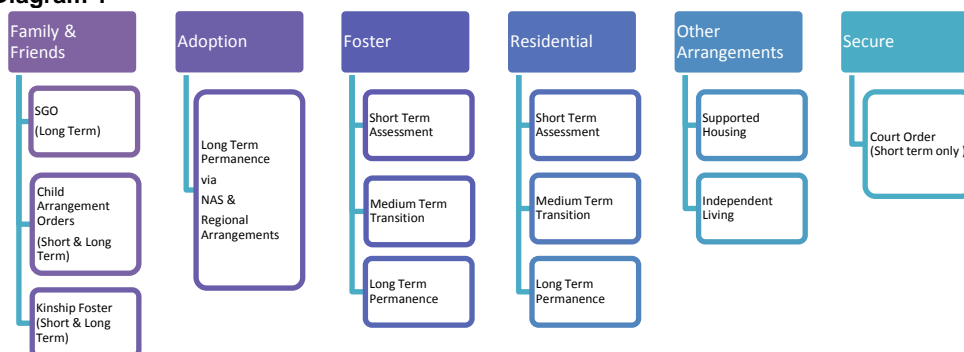
In response to the requirements of the Social Services Wellbeing Wales Act (2014) we promote the upbringing of children within their family whenever it is safe to do so, through a focus on early prevention and intervention. The following interventions are available or under development, however we will continue to explore and develop additional innovative ideas:

- RCT Integrated Family Support Framework
- RCT Resilient Families programme
- Miskin Service
- Early Years and Family Support Service
- Reflect Project
- Information Advice and Assistance Team

We will ensure that children are looked after in placements that meets their needs. The placement strategy sets out how we will meet the assessed needs of children looked after to enable them achieve the best possible outcomes by providing them with high quality, cost effective placements, when it is necessary for children to be looked after.

A 'placement' is the term used to describe an arrangement by which a local authority places a child or young person in a suitable home environment in order to safeguard and promote their well-being. Placements are often with a foster carer or in registered children's home but other settings are possible (See Diagram 1 below).

Diagram 1



When commissioning placements that are in the child's best interests, we will have regard to the vision and principles contained in the *Cwm Taf Social Services and Well-Being Partnership Board Shared Regional Statement of Strategic Intent for Supporting Children, Young People and Families 2018*. We will also ensure we commission placements which meet the statement of values as outlined within RCT Permanency Policy 2018. Our values are that:

- All children have a right to a family life.
- Where possible, this should be within the child's birth family.
- Where it is not possible for children to live with their birth parents, alternatives within their wider birth family or family friends should be explored.
- Where children need to be looked after by the local authority, the aim should be for them to be placed with a safe, stable and loving alternative family.
- Where possible children will be placed with their siblings
- When decisions are made about the permanent placement of children the child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be respected.
- Permanence and stability ought to give a sense of belonging.
- Permanence and stability relate to the continuity of relationships as well as the continuity of where the child lives.

2.1 Purpose of the Strategy.

The agreed approach to the strategic commissioning of placements by Children's Services in RCT is to:

- Shape our internal services to maximise the benefits of public sector provision in terms of quality and value for money;
- To work in collaboration with public sector partners across the regional footprint where this offers identifiable benefits;
- To increase placement choice supplemental to our Sufficiency Duty to enable good matching;
- To co-produce outcomes focussed services acknowledging that there are a range of different methods for strategic commissioning with multiple partners who may be co-operatives, charities or commercial partners.

The purpose of this strategy is to pull together in one document the identified strands of placement commissioning, ensure there is a clear vision which underpins our approach to commissioning and ensure this vision aligns with our corporate planning.

This strategy will inform;

- The shaping of our internal placement services.
- Our partnership working approach to placement commissioning with stakeholders, and a range of public and private sector partners.
- Our Market Position Statement which will be published.

2.2 Priorities and Desired Outcomes

Cwm Taf Partnership Statement of Strategic Intent for supporting children, young people and families sets out our shared vision:

To ensure that children, young people and families in Cwm Taf live safe, healthy and fulfilled lives and that they can achieve their full potential by building resilient communities.

The Cwm Taf Public Services Board will make sure that all our activities and services are driven by this Vision Statement.

RCT CBC Children's Services Delivery Plan 2019-2020 sets out Service Priorities to contribute to the delivery of the Vision.

These Service priorities within the Service Delivery Plan are;

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Service Priority 1 | Ensure that families have access to the right support, earlier so that fewer children and young people requires statutory Children's Services support. |
| Service Priority 2 | Ensure children and young people are protected from abuse and neglect. |
| Service Priority 3 | Ensure that children that cannot live with their own parents live in suitable accommodation in RCT. |
| Service Priority 4 | Lead on the implementation of the National adoption Support Framework within RCT to ensure the children placed for adoption reach their full potential and have opportunities to achieve. |

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Children looked After Quality Assurance Panel (CLAQA) Work plan 2018-2019 sets out the Objectives to meet the Service Priorities set out in the Delivery Plan.

Objectives are:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Objective 1 | To develop a framework of quantitative and qualitative performance information that supports robust analysis of current placement provision in RCT CBC. |
| Objective 2 | To monitor the children looked after budget, highlighting areas of financial pressure and identifying areas where improvements in the use of resources can be made |
| Objective 3 | To identify a commissioning mix and range of placements that support children's looked after and care leavers to achieving positive outcomes |
| Objective 4 | Promote engagement with children looked after and partners agencies to ensure co-production and that the voice of children and young people is heard |
| Objective 5 | To monitor and drive service change and improvement |

This Placement Commissioning Strategy specifically supports the delivery of Service Priority 3 (SP3) and Key Objectives 3 (KO3) highlighted above.

This approach aims to improve outcomes for our children who are looked after, achieve best value with children placed in high quality and value for money placements, safeguard children and promote their wellbeing.

2.3 Methodology

This strategy is based on an analysis of the needs and demands of RCT CBC looked after children cohort. To better understand our placement commissioning needs an analysis of data, placement processes and practice for sourcing appropriate accommodation for children who are looked after has been carried out.

The data analysis was sourced from:

- The Review and Refocus of Accommodation and Placement Provision to Children Looked After 2017.
- RCT CLA Quality Assurance Panel Management Information Reports

- Placement Panel reports
- Stats Wales
- Daffodil
- Children Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR)
- RCT Quarterly Baseline data reports
- RCT CBC Internal Reports and relevant strategies.
- Consultation undertaken with key stakeholders as part of Placement Panel and the Review and Refocus of Accommodation and Placement Provision to Children Looked After 2017.

3. Social Care and Policy Context

3.1 Relevant National Legislation and Guidance

We will ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for all types of children who are looked after in line with Section 79 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act). We will ensure we meet the requirements of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015.

RCT has a duty to ensure the placements are made within the local authority's own area (section 81(9) of the Act), unless it is not reasonably practical to do so or there are overriding reasons for placing a child out of authority, the primary overriding reason being safeguarding.

In keeping with the duty and aim of promoting the upbringing of a child by their family, there is a clear emphasis in the Act that, unless it is not consistent with the child's well-being, arrangements must be made for the child who needs accommodation to live with a parent or a person with parental responsibility or residence / child arrangement order. Where this is not possible, preference should be given to placement with a relative, friend or other person connected to the child or young person.

If neither of these are possible, a range of sufficient alternative provision should be available within the Local Authority, including foster carers and children's homes, supported lodgings and secure accommodation. **It is this 'sufficient alternative accommodation' that is the focus of this Placement Commissioning Strategy.**

3.2 National Context

Co-production and partnership are at the core of the Legislation requiring Local Authorities and Health Boards to work together to assess and plan for the wellbeing of their population. Children must be actively engaged and enabled to co-produce their plans, which includes influencing a preferred model of care or setting.

Placement sufficiency has a national focus as the foster care population continues to decline and sufficiency of placement types across the spectrum is impacted. The Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children Looked After has two key projects considering placement sufficiency, quality and outcome delivery: the National Fostering Framework (NFF) and the Task & Finish Group on Residential Care. We will ensure that the learning from these projects will be factored into local strategy, planning and implementation.

3.3 Key Messages: Research and Good Practice

Continuity of relationships remains the foundation stone or the 'golden thread' throughout people's lives to ensure good outcomes, based on a resilient identity and a feeling of belonging. Relationships provide the feeling of security required for being valued and capable of becoming a full member of an extended family and wider social network.

It is essential that the decision making processes in relation to children becoming looked after and their ongoing care arrangements are robust and that assessments and care plans are needs-led and outcome focused. To support this and ensure standardisation in the area of risk management across Children's Services and all partner agencies, we have, in partnership with Merthyr, invested in the

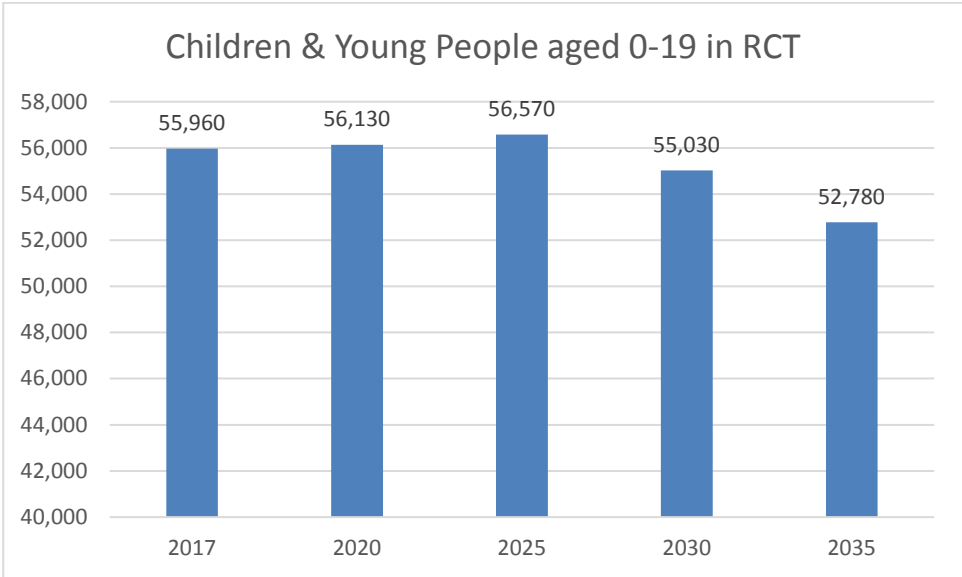
development of a multi-agency risk assessment model (Cwm Taf MARAF), which has been mandated by Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board.

The introduction of the MARAF should assist us to analyse and manage risk and to better utilise family strengths, building on resilience levels and supporting children and young people to access universal services. This will provide us with greater confidence in the thresholds being applied for child protection and decisions to accommodate, ultimately resulting in a reduction in CPR and CLA numbers.

3.4 Local Context

RCT is the second largest Local Authority in Wales with a population of 239,127 (2017 MYE)

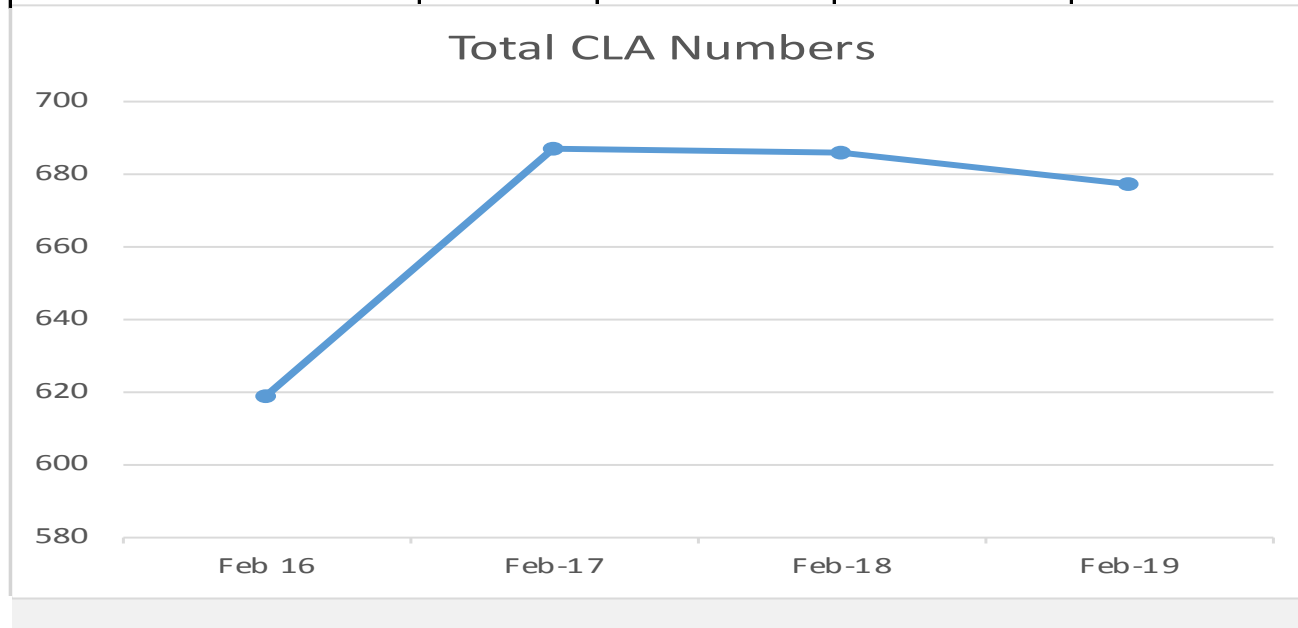
The age profile of the 0-19 population in Rhondda Cynon Taf is expected to change. The number of children between the ages of 0 and 19 years is forecast to decrease from 55,960 in 2017 to 52,780 in 2035. For the duration of this Placement Commissioning Strategy (2019-2022), the population is expected to increase to 56,570 an increase of 430 children as illustrated in the table below.



Source: Daffodil

CLA Population Data February 2016-February 2019

	Feb 16	Feb-17	Feb-18	Feb-19
Total CLA Numbers	619	687	686	677



Source: RCT MI Team

The table on page 7 illustrates the increase in Children Looked After numbers from 619 in February 2016 to 687 in February 2017. Whilst this was a significant increase of an additional 68 children looked after, we have seen a decrease by 10 to 677 as at February 2019.

Research suggests that some variation in the numbers and rates of looked after children across local authorities can be explained by differences in the demographic and socioeconomic profile of each local authority. This is especially the case in relation to population size, deprivation and the proportion of households that are lone parent families. Other aspects affecting the numbers and rates of looked after children relate to factors more within the control of the local authority and their partners – especially the way that local areas lead, organise and deploy their services for vulnerable children and families.

3.5 Existing Strategic Placement Commissioning Partnerships

RCT work very closely with internal and external partners on an individual and strategic level. This includes piloting with Merthyr CBC the Fostering Well Being Programme which is supported by Welsh Government and working collaboratively as part of the National Fostering Framework to develop a regional approach to the recruitment and assessment of foster carers.

RCT is also a member of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's) which is a strategic commissioning alliance between Welsh Local Authorities to support placement commissioning needs in respect of Fostering & Residential placements.

RCT is a Signatory Authority to the All Wales Local Authority Framework for the Provision of Foster Care Services for Children & Young People and the All Wales Local Authority Framework for the Provision of Residential Care Services for Children & Young People. These frameworks deliver strategic level commissioning partnerships with independent sector providers in fostering and residential services where either the Local Authority's sufficiency duty necessitates external individual placement commissioning or where best quality, outcome delivery or value for money is delivered through external commissioning rather than internal service delivery. The All Wales Frameworks are managed by the 4C's.

RCT is a Member of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Service, which is supported by the National Adoption Service. This regional arrangement delivers all functions related to placements for permanence through the use of Adoption endorsed by the Courts.

To meet our needs for short breaks provision for disabled children, RCT also commission a residential short breaks service via Action for Children.

3.6 Corporate Priorities

This strategy should be read in conjunction with relevant existing RCT strategies and policies, including:

- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Corporate Plan
- Children Services Delivery Plan
- CLA QA Work Plan

Section 2 - Data and Trends

This section considers what the data tells us about RCT CBC and considers comparator local authorities, overall key performance indicators, trends and emerging issues.

4.0. Children Looked After Data and Trends

4.1 Children Looked After per 10,000 population

Graph 1 - The rate of children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18 Cwm Taf region comparison with South East Wales LA's over the period 2013 to 2018. (Graph 1 below)

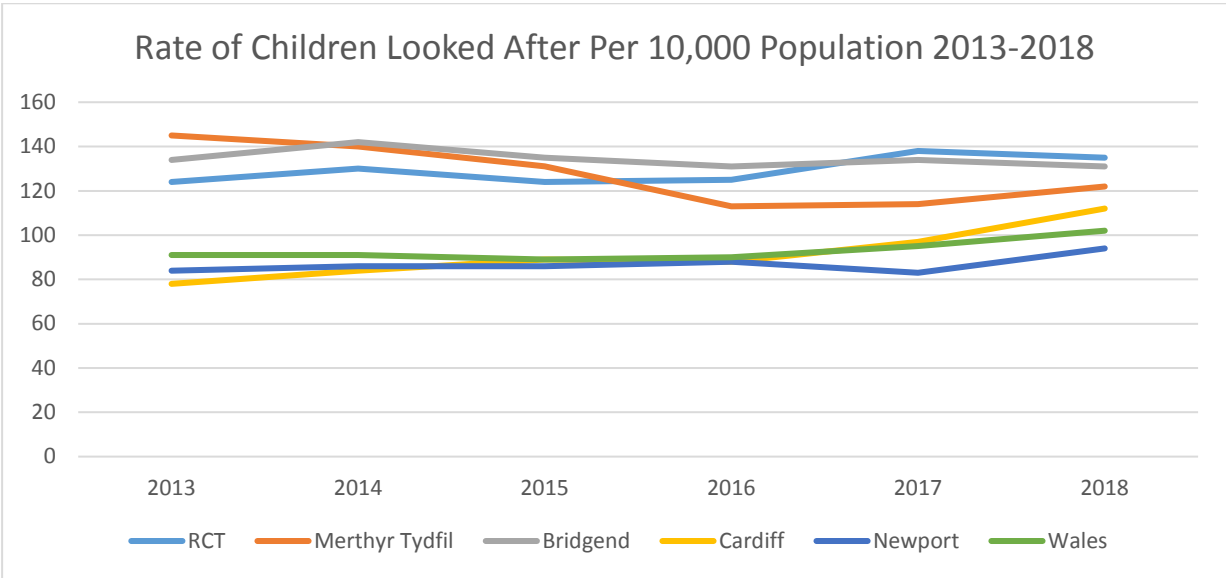


Table 1

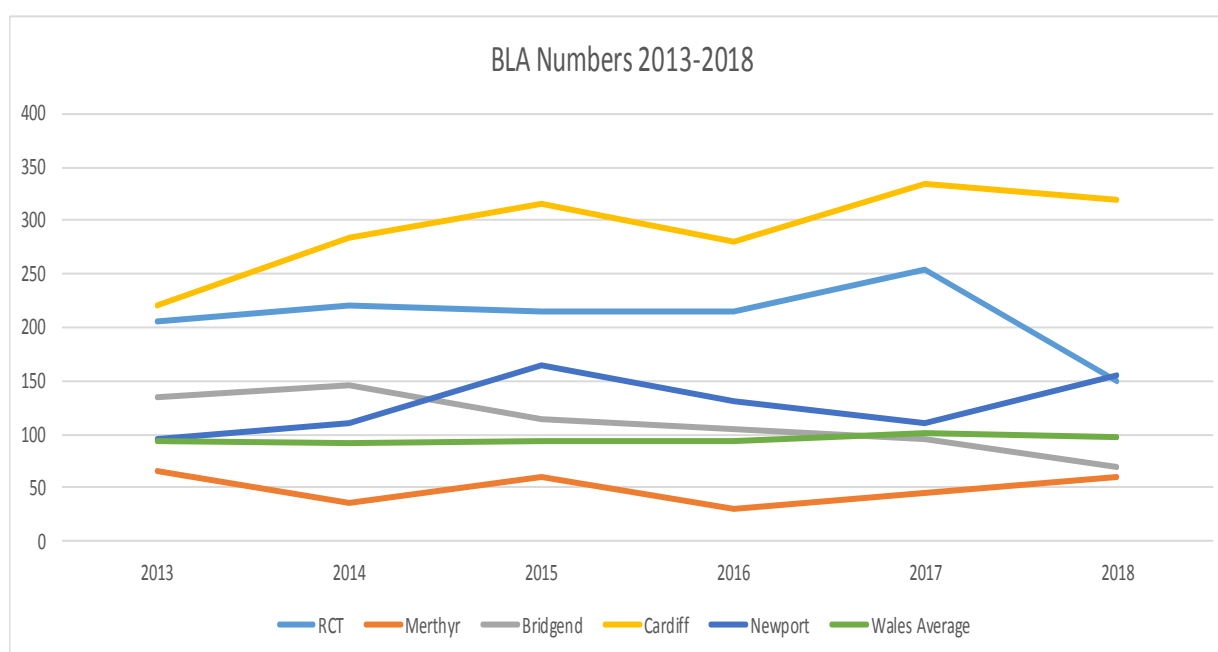
Children Looked After Per 10,000 Population	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
RCT	124	130	124	125	138	135
Merthyr Tydfil	145	140	131	113	114	122
Bridgend	134	142	135	131	134	131
Cardiff	78	84	89	88	97	112
Newport	84	86	86	88	83	94
Wales	91	91	89	90	95	102

Source: Stats Wales

Both Graph 1 and Table 1 above illustrate that at the 31st March 2013 the rate of children looked after for RCT was the lowest across the region at 124 per 10,000 of the population. When making comparison with neighbouring local authorities we can see that at 31st March 2018, the rate per 10,000 population had dropped for RCT slightly on 2017 levels from 138 to 135. Bridgend similarly has seen a drop from 2017 to 2018 rates. Merthyr, Cardiff and Newport have seen an increased rate of children looked after per 10,000 population. The RCT figure remains considerably higher than the all Wales rate of 102.

4.2 Number of children starting to be looked after during the year to 31st March 2018

Graph 2 – Number of children starting to be looked after during the year to 31st March 2018

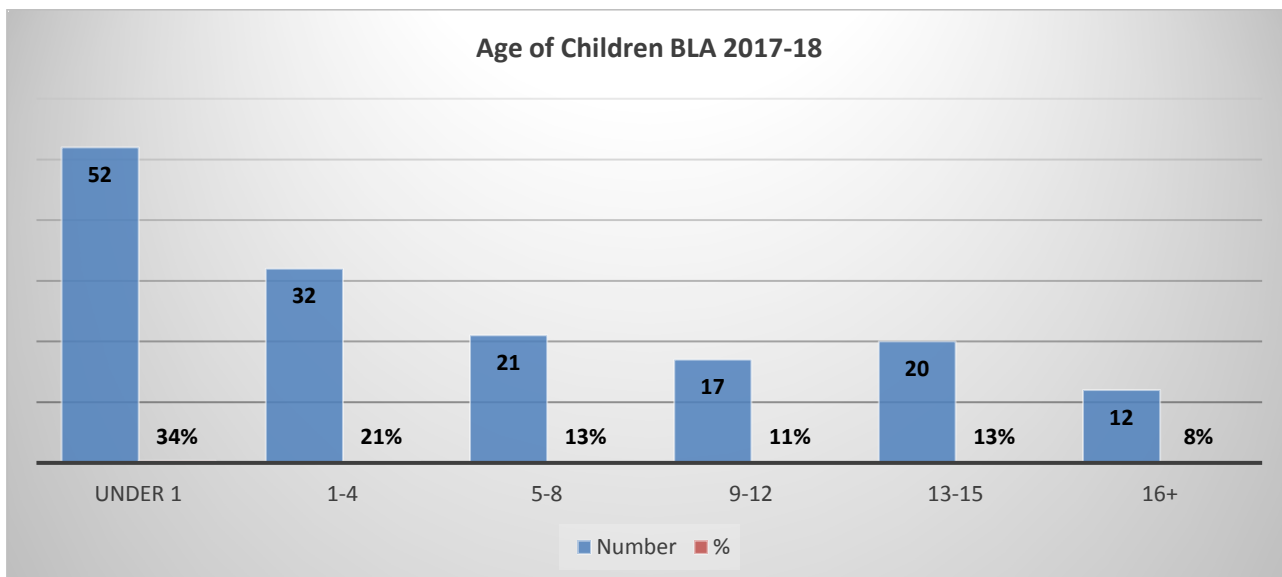


Source: StatsWales

The number of children becoming looked after in RCT, shown in Graph 2, increased by 20% between 2013 & 2017 (from 205 in 2013 to 255 in 2017), this was significantly higher than both Merthyr CBC and Bridgend CBC who, in the same period saw a decrease in children becoming looked after of 45% and 42% respectively. However, the all Wales figure also increased by 10% (from 2,010 in 2013 and 2,220 in 2017) and Cardiff CC saw an increase of 35% (220 in 2013 and 335 in 2017). However, during the 2017/18 period the number of new admissions dropped quite significantly (by 42%) in RCT from 269 in 2016/17 to 156. Both Merthyr & Newport experienced a rise in the number of admissions in the same period.

The children looked after population in RCT has increased over the past five years from 621 in 2013 to 676 at the end of 2017-2018 financial year. The numbers and profile of the children and young people becoming looked after has changed and numbers have fluctuated with 2017-2018 seeing an overall decrease in admissions of 42% compared with the same period in 2016-2017. Graph 3 shows the age profile of those children becoming looked after in 2017-2018:

Graph 3 – Age profile of those children becoming looked after 2017 – 2018.



Source: RCT MI Team

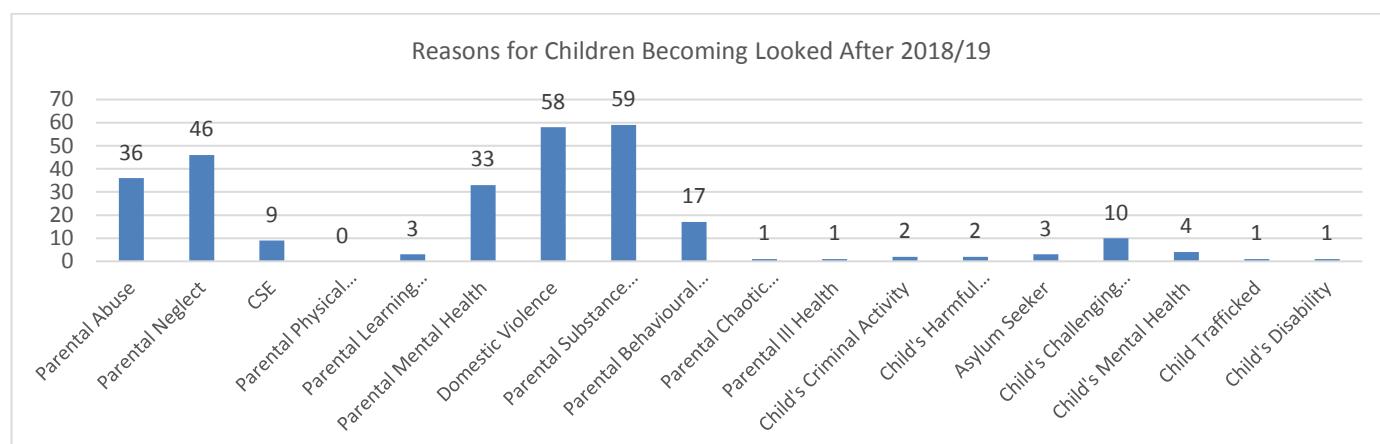
The information shows that 55% (84) of all admissions were for children aged 0-4 years. However, in the same period the number of children leaving care in this age group was 43% (80 of 164). This indicates that permanency is being achieved for children in this age group. (See 4.6 for further information).

The number of children looked becoming and remaining looked after is a key priority for children's services and is subject to continuous focus and action as part of the quality assurance children looked after panel.

4.3 Reasons for entering care

Analysis of data from RCT Placement Panel revealed that during 2018/19, the main reasons for looked after placements being requested were due to the risk of significant harm if the child were to remain with family and where all attempts at interventions to reduce risk & maintain and support the child with family have been unsuccessful. The graph 4 below shows the detailed issues that led to care being requested.

Graph 4 – reasons for Children becoming looked after 2018/19



Source: RCT MI Team

Parental substance misuse, domestic violence and parental mental health were the largest factors cited for children becoming looked after. (There may be an element of double counting as more than one factor could be present)

The 'toxic trio' (trigger trio – Hodges & Bristow March 2019) is the interaction of:

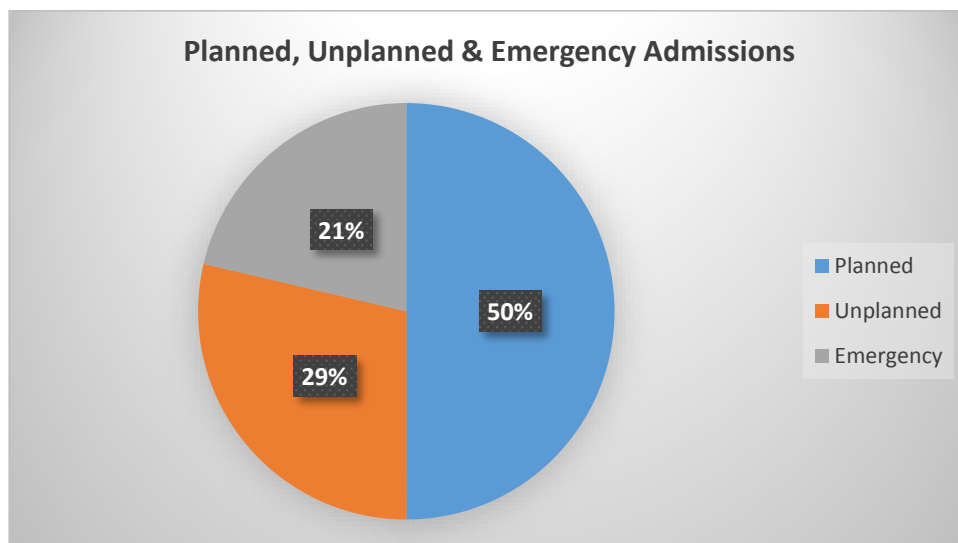
- Domestic violence and abuse (DV&A) within the household
- Parental substance misuse (alcohol or drugs)
- Parental mental health issues

There is a wide literature showing that each of these issues can have damaging consequences for the wellbeing and outcomes of children; see, for example, Harold et al. (2016), and Hedges and Kenny (2018). The 'toxic trio' issues – and associated responses of frontline practitioners – have been cited as a major driver of the increases on children's services caseloads and the numbers of children being taken into care (ADCS, 2016).

Children's Commissioner (England) - Estimating the Prevalence of the Toxic Trio July 2018

The graph 5 below shows the results of some further analysis of the Placement Panel data that revealed that of the 164 children admitted to care during 2017/18; 82 (50%) were admitted on a planned basis; 47 (29%) of admissions were unplanned & 35 (21%) were emergencies. 28 of the emergency placements were made by our Enquiry and Assessment Teams in relation to cases that were not open to Children's Services at the time of referral.

Graph 5 – Planned, Unplanned and Emergency Admissions



Source: RCT MI Team

Placement Planning Definitions

- **Planned Placement**

The placement is a planned part of the child's Care and Support Plan. **The key factor is that planning takes place and the decision is recorded on the Child's Care and Support Plan before the change takes place.** This could include circumstances where a placement change was not expected but becomes necessary, moves from short to long term foster care or where a child is placed for adoption with the current foster carer.

- **Unplanned Placement**

An unplanned placement is a placement of a child in care that is not identified on the child's Care and Support Plan, planning has not taken place and no change has been recorded on the Care and Support Plan before the change occurs.

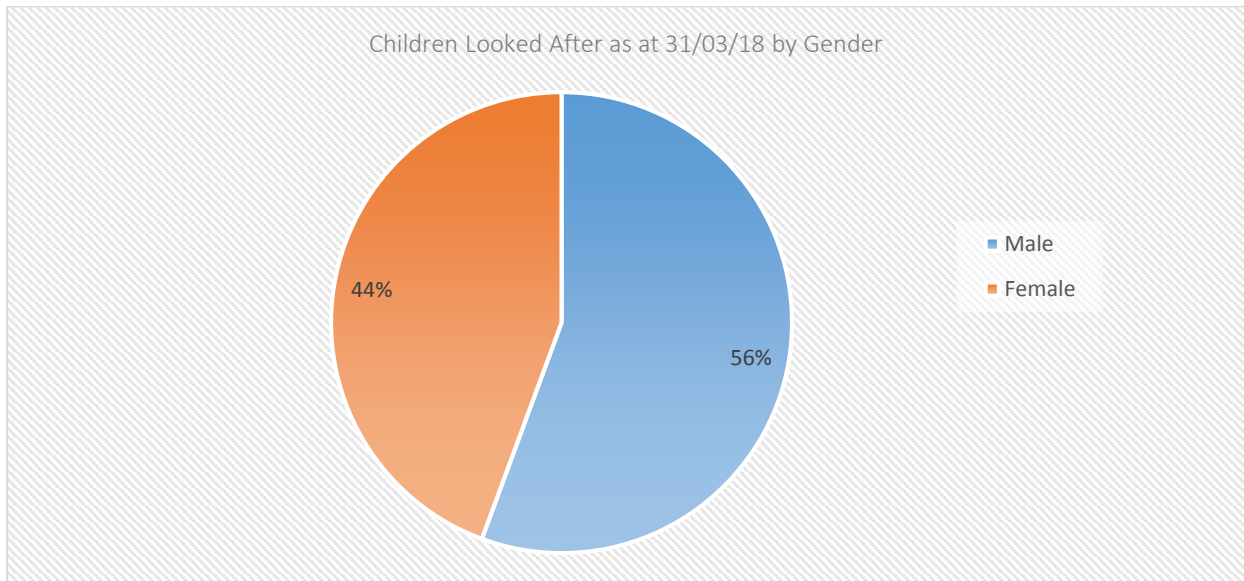
- **Emergency Placement**

An emergency placement is the placement of a child in care made without the usual planning and/or complete assessment process having taken place because of the need to ensure the safety and the welfare of the child immediately, this may be due to:

- A risk of immediate **significant harm**
- A need to urgently terminate an existing placement.
- The unplanned placement of a child outside normal working hours.

4.4 Gender and ages of Children Looked After

Graph 6 - Gender



Source: RCT MI Team

Data (including trend data captured) demonstrates that more males and females enter the care system, it should be noted however that placements are not developed on a gender basis.

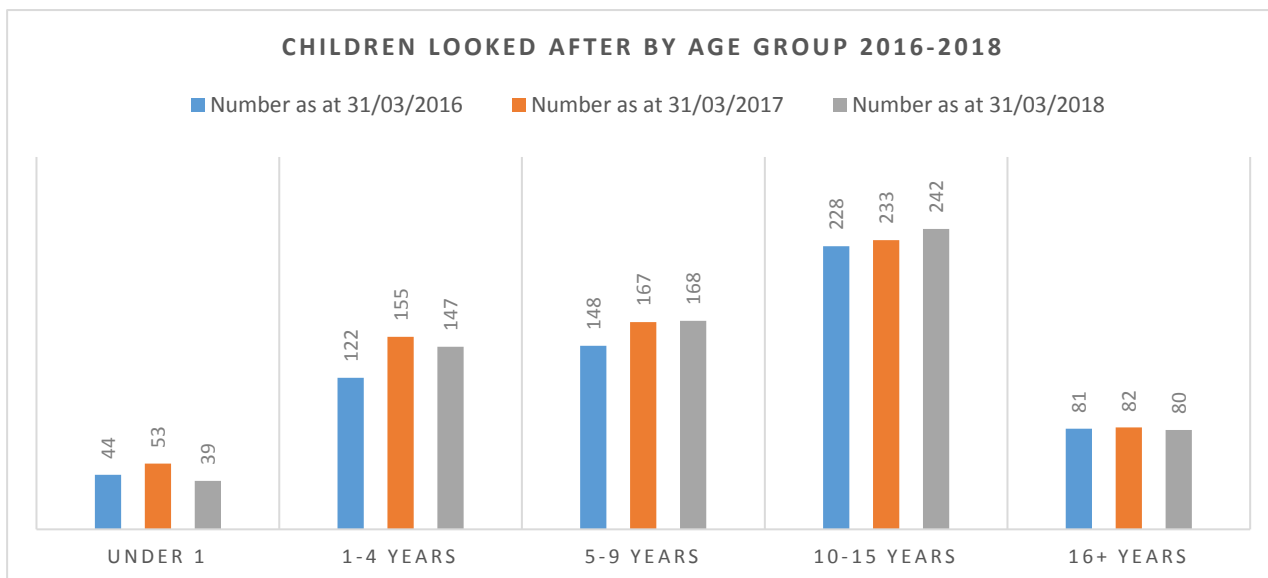
Table 2 - Children Looked After by Age Group Trend Data 31/3/2016 to the 31/8/2018

Age	Number as at 31/03/2016	% of Total	Number as at 31/03/2017	% of Total	Number as at 31/03/2018	% of Total
Under 1	44	7%	53	8%	39	6%
1-4 Years	122	20%	155	22%	147	22%
5-9 years	148	24%	167	24%	168	25%
10-15 years	228	37%	233	34%	242	36%
16+ years	81	13%	82	12%	80	12%
Total	623		690		676	

Source: RCT MI Team

Table 2 above indicates that at 31.3.2019 676 children were looked after, the same number as the previous year. Trend data demonstrates that over recent years RCT has stabilised the number of children who are looked after.

Graph 7 - Children Looked After by Age Group Trend Data 31/3/2016 to the 31/8/2018

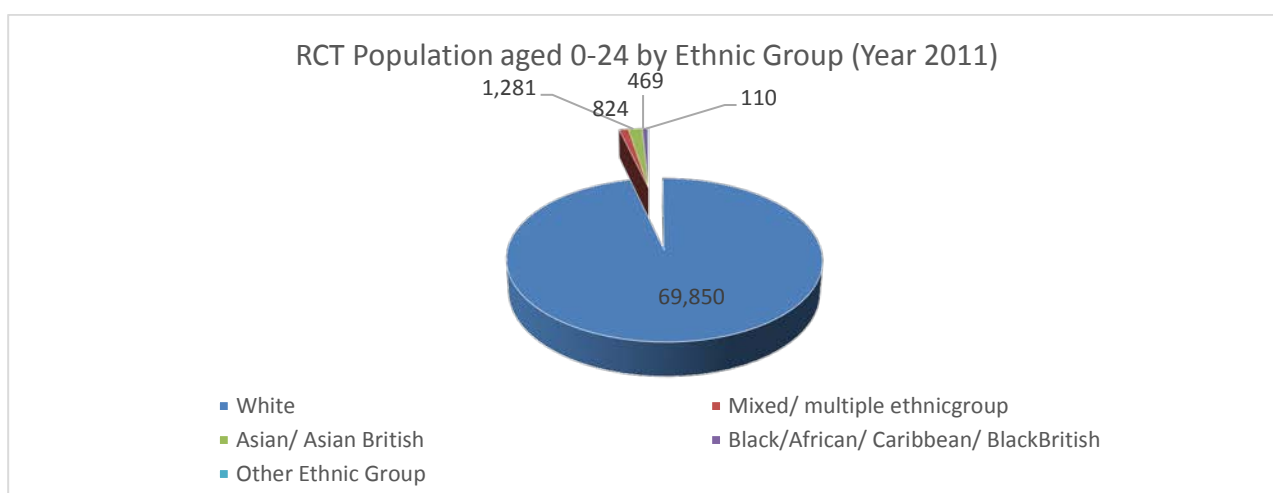


Source: RCT MI Team

The age profile data above indicates that the area of highest demand for placements is the age category 10 - 15 years which is problematic as there is a national shortage of placements for this cohort. Analysis of placement requests indicates there is a particular pressure identifying suitable placements for children in upper age of this category i.e. 14/15 year olds requiring packages of complex care and support.

Further analysis undertaken has indicated that the children within this age range have been looked after for a significant period of time, 60% having entered care before the age of ten. The Children Looked After Quality Assurance Panel Work Plan 2019-2020 will focus on reunification processes and implementation within the authority.

4.5 Graph 9 - Ethnicity



Source: Daffodil

Graph 9 shows the ethnic breakdown of the 0-24 population in RCT at the time of the last Census in 2011. 96.3% of the 0-24 population at this time were white.

RCT will continue to work with the British Home Office in relation to future dispersal arrangements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

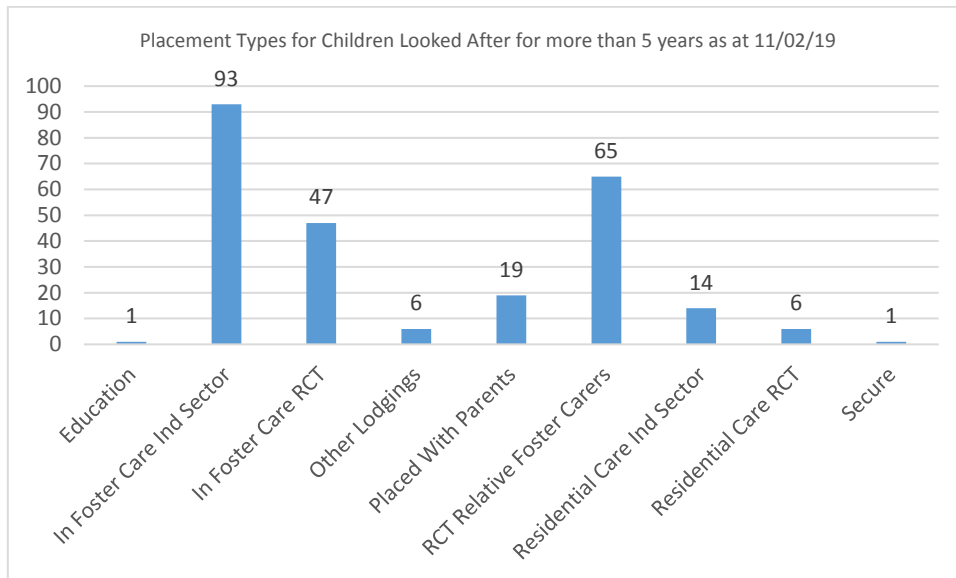
4.6 Length of Time in Care

Table 3 below shows the length of time children looked after in RCT on 11th February 2019 had been in care; 71% had been in care for over 2 years, with 37% of these having been in care for more than 5 years.

Table 3

Length of Time in Care	Female	Male	Total	%
Up to 4 weeks	7	6	13	2%
More than 4 weeks but less than 4 months	16	13	29	4%
More than 4 months but less than 10 months	30	39	69	10%
More than 10 months but less than 2 Years	31	52	83	12%
More than than 2 Years but less than 5 Years	103	128	231	34%
More than than 5 Years	120	132	252	37%
Total	307	370	677	100%

Graph 10



Source: RCT MI Team

Graph 10 shows the current placement type for those children looked after for more than 5 years on 11/02/2019. Analysis of the data reveals that 81% were placed with foster carers (relative carers, RCT Foster Carers and Independent sector foster carers). In accordance with our Statement of Values the majority of children are being placed within suitable alternative family based foster placements.

The below graph (Graph 11) shows the average length of time spent in care for children who left care between 2015/16 & 2017/18.

Graph 11

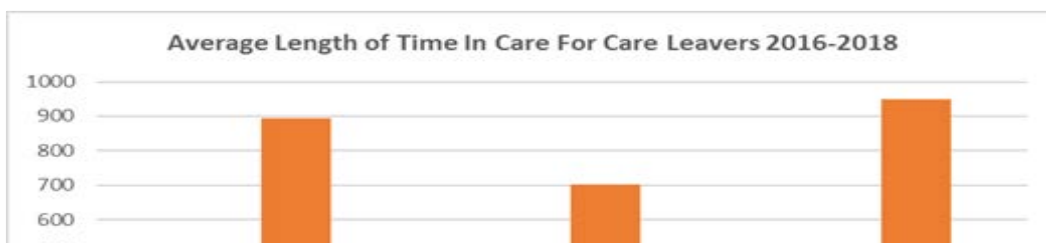


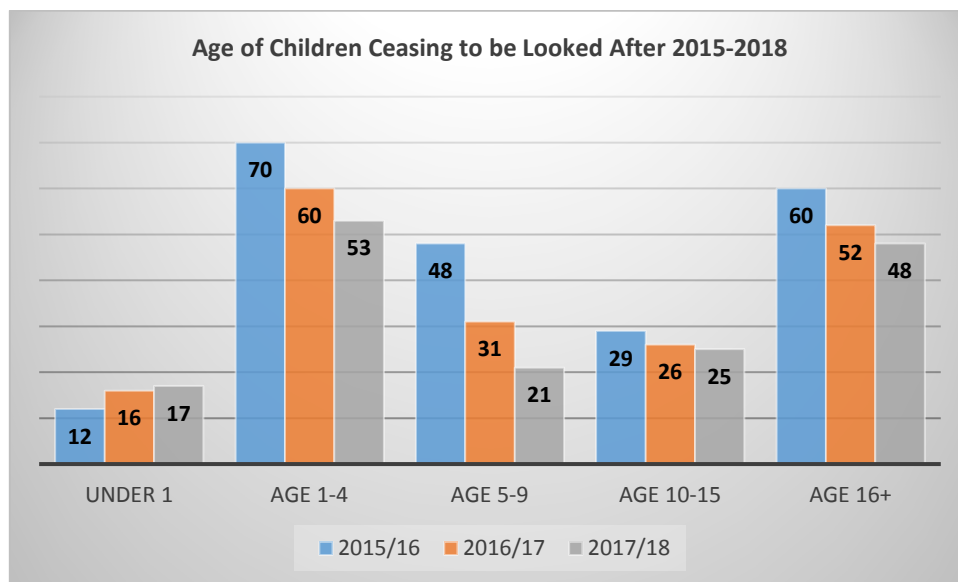
Table 4

Year	Number of Care Leavers	Days in Care	Average Days In Care
2015/16	219	195,609	893
2016/17	185	130,063	703
2017/18	164	155,487	948

Source: RCT MI Team

Graph 12 below shows the age that children were at the point they ceased to be looked after, as previously noted it demonstrates that the majority of children leaving care are in the 0 to 4 years age range.

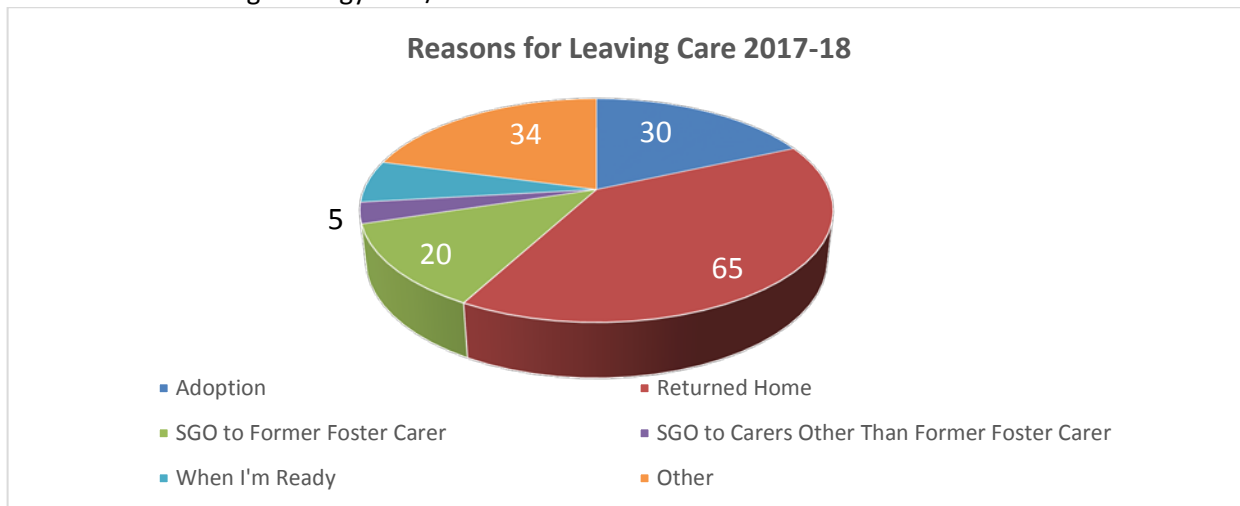
Graph 12



Source: RCT MI Team

4.7 Reason for leaving care.

Graph 13

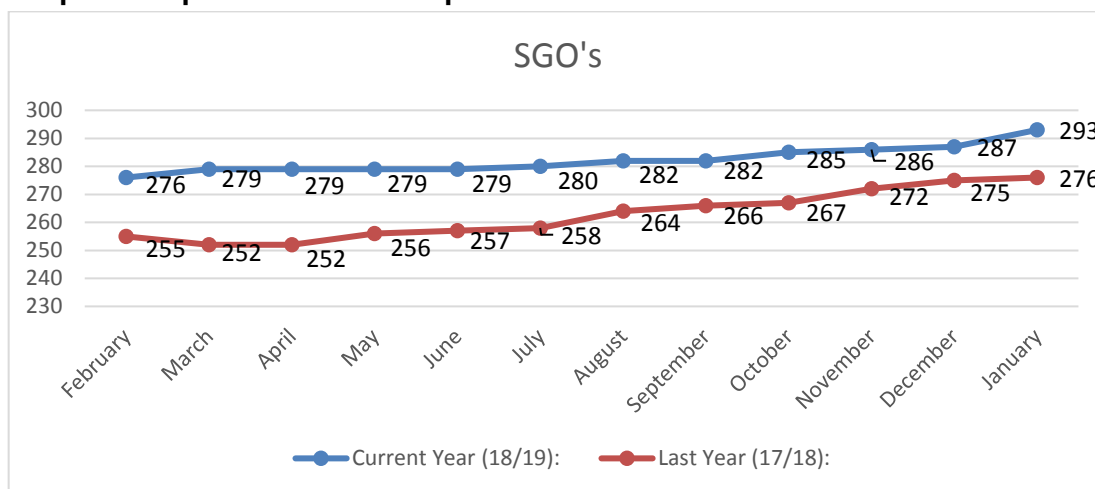


Source: StatsWales

The above graph (Graph 13) shows the reasons why children left care during 2017/18. There were 164 care leavers during the period, 65 (40%) left care because they returned home to parents or extended family; 34 (21%) left care for other reasons, the vast majority of which were because the child had reached the age of 18 and 30 of the 164 (18%) were adopted. The sections below look in more detail reasons for leaving care.

- Special Guardianship Orders

Graph 14 - Special Guardianship Orders



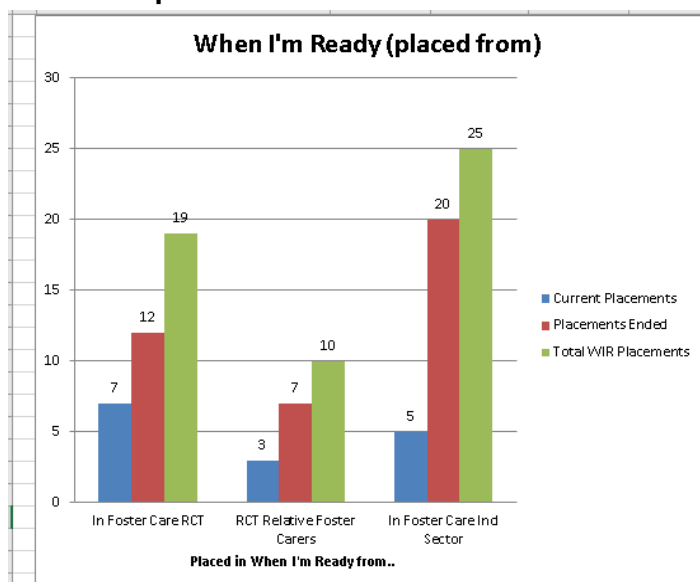
Source: RCT MI Team

There has been a steady increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders granted in RCT in the last two years from 255 in February 2017 to 293 in January 2019 which equates to a 15% increase. The continued growth of Special Guardianship Orders is a focus for the authority.

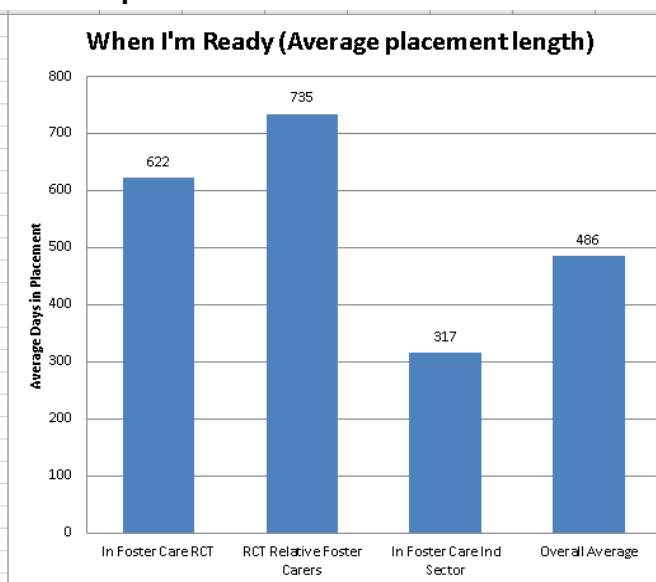
- When I'm Ready

Graph 15 a and Graph 15b When I'm Ready

Graph 15a



Graph 15b



There have been 54 Young Persons placed in When I'm Ready placements since the scheme started in 2015. 46% (25) of these YP remained with their Former Independent Foster Carers, 35% (20) with RCT Foster Carers and 19% (10) with Relative Carers.

A young Person is entitled (if the foster carer agrees) to spend 3 years in a When I'm Ready (WIR) placement (1,095 days). The average length of WIR placements that have ended is 486 days. There is a big difference in the length of placement depending on the type of placement it was prior to converting to WIR. Former Relative placements last on average 735 days, former RCT carers 622 days and former Independent Carers 317 days. There are numerous reasons why a WIR placement may end e.g. the young person feels prepared enough to move to their own tenancy and full independence but the data also suggests there is a direct correlation between the levels of remuneration being received and placement length. Relative carers do not see any difference in remuneration levels by converting to WIR and Independent carers see the biggest reduction. For further information regarding type of care leaver accommodation, please see 5.3.

4.8 Children with Disability

A review of RCT Disabled Children's Services has been completed by IPC during 2018 and will inform the development of the service to disabled children across RCT and inform future commissioning. RCT Disabled Children's Service is part of Intensive Intervention Services within the Children's Services structure and currently supports children and young people who have a substantial and permanent disability. The service is made up of two social work teams, split geographically East and West, who undertake assessment, produce care and support plans (CASP), co-ordinate interventions and review plans. The social work teams work with children from 0-18 and manage all elements of CASP, Child Protection (CP) and Children Looked After (CLA) processes for disabled children. Within the social work teams there are specialist roles for under 5's (3 SWs) and 16+ (2SWs) as there are specific issues that affect children, young people and families in these age groups. The needs of children using DCT services are wide ranging and complex. RCT will consider the guidance by Welsh Government on commissioning for children with complex needs in developing our strategy for the future.

The data below outlines the number of children who are currently being supported by children's services as at March 2019:

Number of children with a disability who have a Care and Support Plan

– **538 Children**

Number looked after

- **48 Children**

Number of direct payments

- **152 families.**

(Direct Payments are made to support children with disabilities to stay safely at home with their families for longer. Direct payments enable increased self-determination of the packages of care and providers of that care by the child and their family.)

Number of Care and Support Plan Part 6

- **1 Child**

Number of short breaks Care and Support Plan Part 4

- **78 Children**

Short breaks in RCT are provided through a combination of in house fostering (Family Link and contract carers), residential placements through Nantgwyn home and a commissioned service from Action For Children.

Work is currently being undertaken to reconfigure the Disabled Children's Service and implement a new practice model which incorporates the recommendations of the IPC Report.

5 Current Placement Provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf

Table 5

Placement Type	17/04/2015		17/04/2016		17/04/2017		17/04/2018		11/02/2019	
In Foster Care Ind Sector	174	28%	172	28%	182	27%	166	25%	153	23%
In Foster Care RCT	160	26%	174	28%	193	28%	177	26%	183	27%
RCT Relative Foster Carers	135	22%	149	24%	175	26%	194	29%	199	29%
Placed For Adoption	38	6%	19	3%	23	3%	31	5%	26	4%
Placed With Parents	55	9%	49	8%	52	8%	51	8%	58	9%
Residential Care Ind Sector	46	7%	40	6%	31	5%	30	4%	35	5%
Educational Accommodation	2	0.3%	3	0.5%	1	0.1%	3	0.4%	1	0.1%
Residential Care RCT	9	1%	10	2%	8	1%	9	1%	7	1%
Independent Living	0	0.0%	2	0.3%	5	0.7%	4	0.6%	1	0.1%
Supported Lodgings	1	0.2%	2	0.3%	7	1.0%	3	0.4%	9	1.3%
Bed & Breakfast	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%
Mother & Baby	-	-	-	-	3	0.4%	6	0.9%	2	0.3%
Medical	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Secure	1	0.2%	2	0.3%	2	0.3%	1	0.1%	2	0.3%
Total	621		622		682		675		677	

Source: RCT MI Team

The table above (Table 5) shows a breakdown of placement types for children looked after at a point in time between 2015 & 2019. Of significance is the increase in the number and percentage of children & young people who have been placed with relative foster carers; and the decrease in the dependence on the independent sector for foster placements. The table also demonstrates that there is low demand (a small number of placements 0.3%) for parent and child (Mother and Baby).

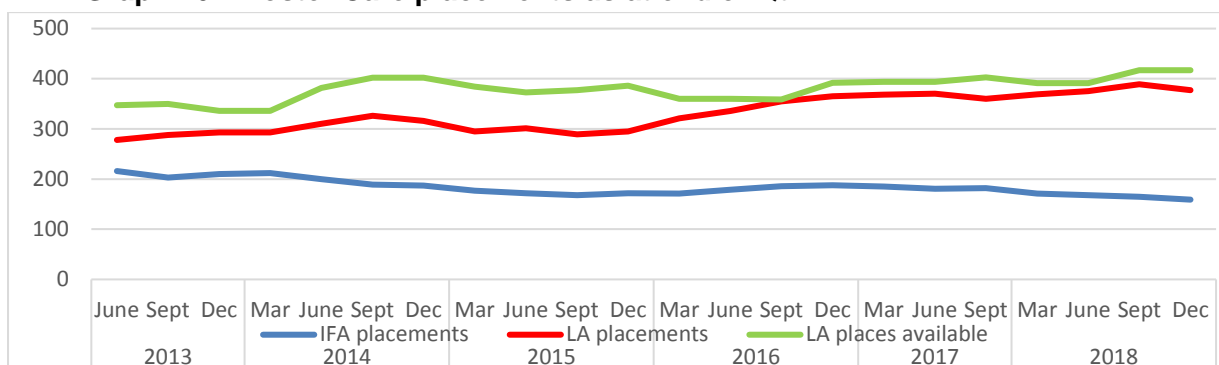
The number of children placed with relatives has increased from 135 in 2015 to 199 in 2019, from 22% to 29%. In the same period the number of children & young people placed with independent sector foster carers (IFA) decreased from 174 to 153, from 28% to 23%.

There has been a reduction in the number of children placed in independent sector residential settings since 2015 from 46 (7%) to 35 in 2019 (5%). However, the financial data in Section 3 demonstrates that the overall budget expenditure on external residential placements has in fact

increased from £6.2 million, in 16/17 to a projected £7.3 million in 18/19 indicating the rising cost of individual placements.

5.1 Foster Care

Graph 16 – Foster Care placements as at end of Qtr

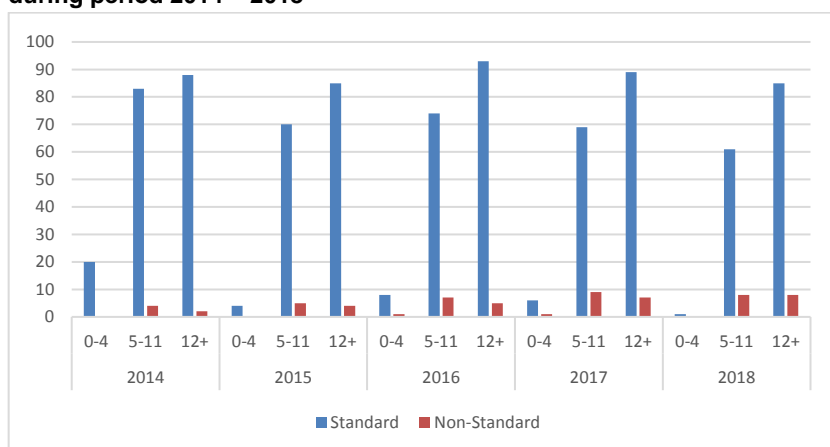


In-house fostering and residential services are identified as being of high quality and contributing towards positive outcomes for children looked after. It is evident, and is supported by the data shown in Graph 16 above, that the use of independent fostering placements is reducing as a result of the investment and development of in-house fostering provision such as the growing number of kinship carers; the increasing number of foster carers being recruited and the support and training provided to carers and staff.

The Quarterly Baseline Return captures both in house foster care and relative foster carers as at 31st Dec 2018 there were 146 in house (mainstream) foster carers with a total of 223 registered places and there were 156 relative cares with a total of 194 registered places.

Graph 17 below gives data on the age range of fostering placements made external to RCT provision as at the end of Sept during the period 2014 – 2018. This includes standard and non-standard placements commissioned from Independent Sector and other Local Authorities. The use of inter authority placements is of low number so is not shown in the Graph above, at the end of Dec 2018 there was only 1 Inter Authority placement (Merthyr Tydfil)

Graph 17 - Number and age range of children in standard and non-standard fostering placements as at 30th Sept during period 2014 – 2018



QBDR

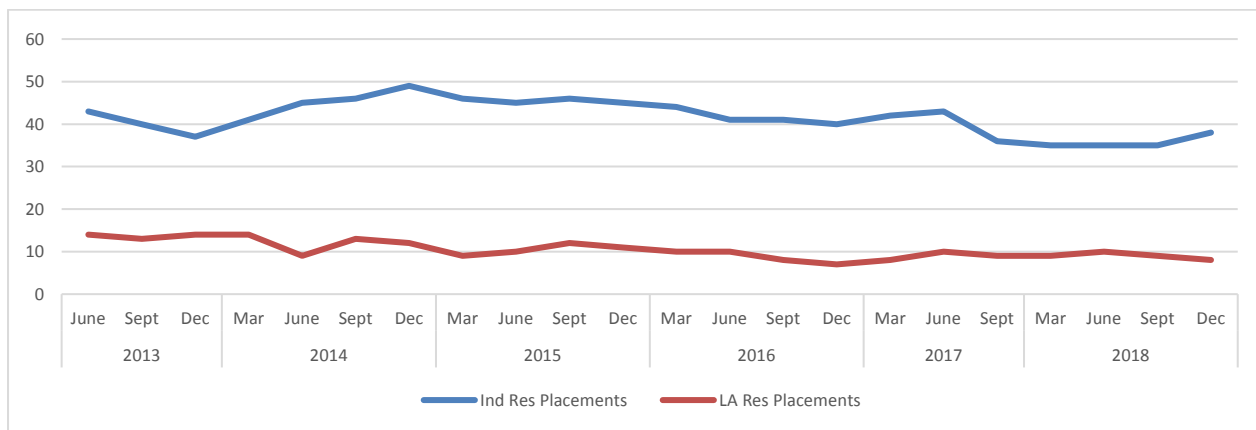
The graph indicates a low use of non-standard foster placements. The low number of non-standard placements may be due to lack of placement capacity that can fulfil more complex care package requirements rather than through choice.

To be able to provide a comprehensive needs analysis RCT are committed to review data capture and reporting through CCSR and WCCIS. This will enable commissioners to produce accurate and timely

reports on needs, placement referrals, and other areas of services which will inform future placement commissioning decisions.

5.2 Residential Provision

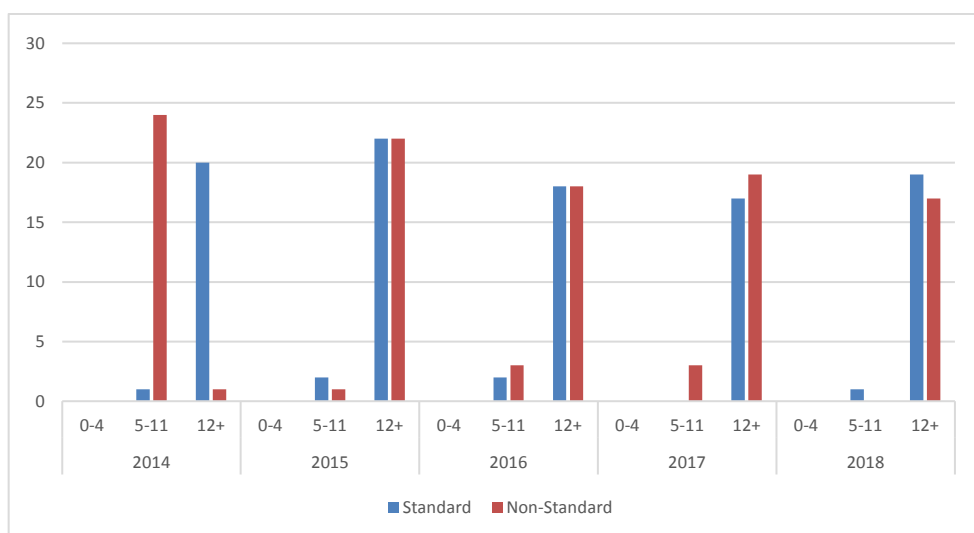
Graph 18 – Residential Provision



As at 11th Feb 2019 (see table 5 above), 6% (42) of our placements were made within a residential setting. This is a 2% decrease on 2014 data where there were 55 residential placements, however there has been an increase during 2018 in the use of external residential provision. The graph above (Graph 18) also indicates that the number of Independent Placements is also decreasing.

The graph below gives data on the age range of residential placements made external to RCT provision as at the end of Sept for each year.

Graph 19 - Number and age range of children in standard and non-standard residential placements as at 30th Sept during period 2014 – 2018



As stated above to be able to provide a comprehensive needs analysis RCT are committed to review data capture and reporting through CCSR and WCCIS. This will enable commissioners produce accurate and timely reports on needs, placement referrals, and other areas of services which will inform future placement commissioning decisions.

5.3 Children looked after in placements outside Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

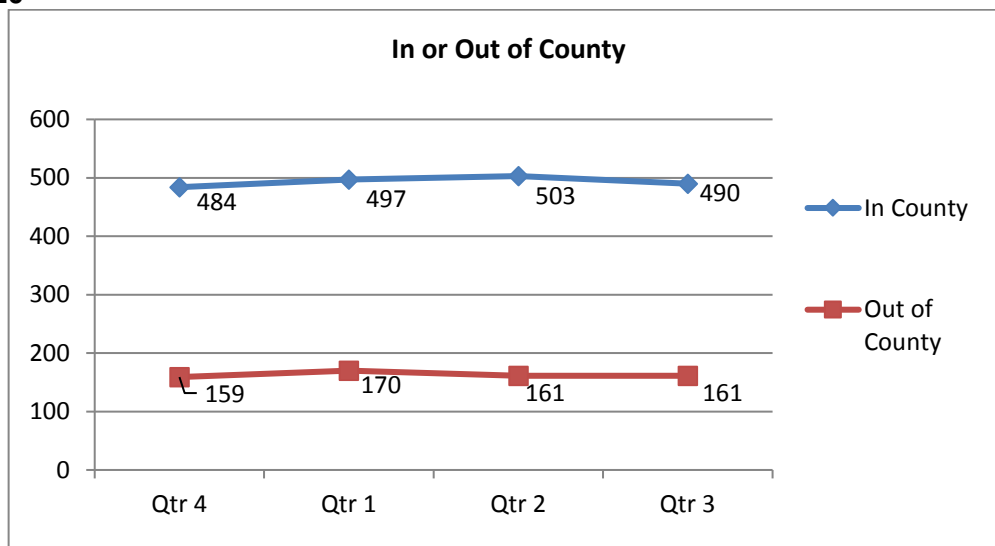
We are committed to using public sector placements in preference to independent sector placements on the presumption that due consideration is given to matching and they can meet the needs of the child, whilst offering better value for money. A consideration when matching the needs of the child however, is whether the distance of the placement will impact the outcomes of the child adversely and if this a key factor, with an independent placement available closer to home than a public sector placement, the match will be prioritised over the status of the placement.

Location of Placements In/Out of County (the table & graph below excludes Adoption Placements)

Table 6

	2017/18	2018/19		
	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3
In County	484	497	503	490
Out of County	159	170	161	161
Total	643	667	664	651
% Out of County	25%	26%	24%	25%

Graph 20 -



Source: RCT MI Team

76% of looked after children were residing within RCT on the 30th Sept 2018. The % of children residing outside of RCT has fluctuated by 1% at the end of each quarter dropping to 24% on the 30th Sept 2018 but rising again to 25% by 31st December 2018.

A detailed analysis was undertaken in respect of children looked after on 7th November 2018 and placed outside of the county borough. The below graph (Graph 21) and table (Table 7) show that 56% (99) of the 176 children residing out of county were placed in a neighbouring Local Authority. (This analysis includes children placed for adoption).

Graph 21

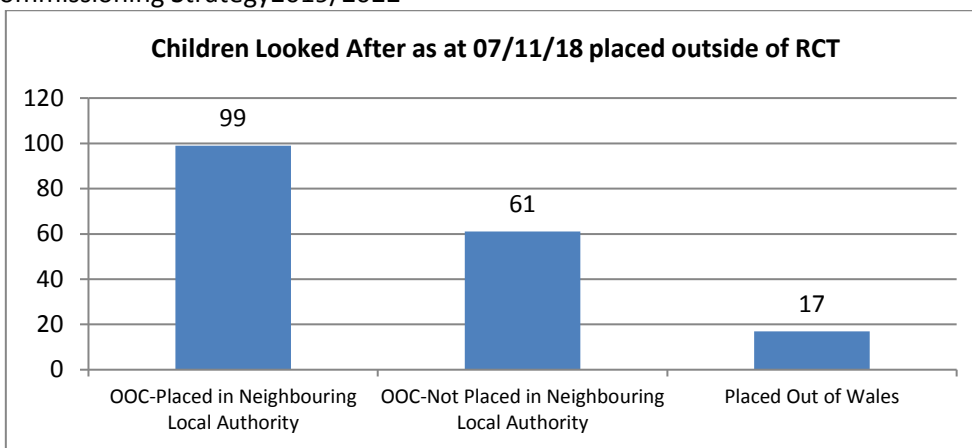


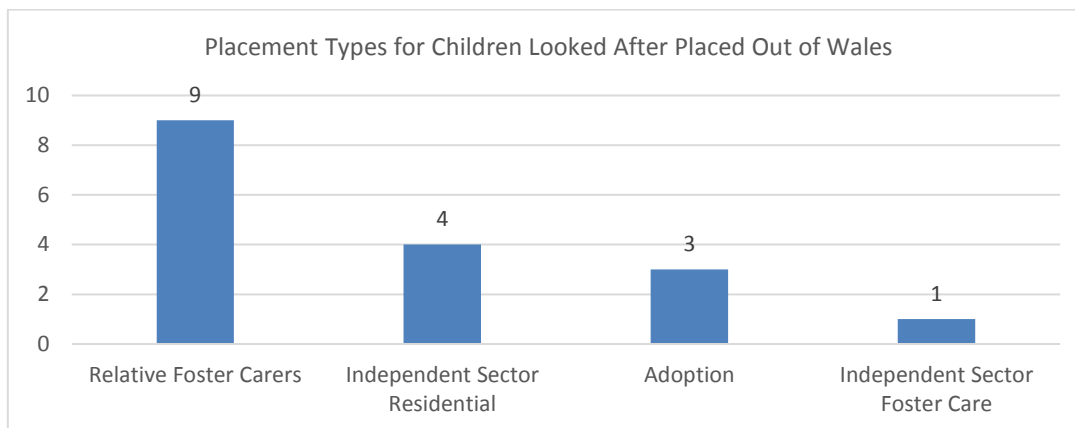
Table 7

Location	Number	%
OOO-Placed in Neighbouring Local Authority	99	56%
OOO-Not Placed in Neighbouring Local Authority	61	34%
Placed Out of Wales	17	10%
Total	176	100%

Source: RCT MI Team

10% (17) were actually placed outside of Wales. Further analysis of this cohort revealed that they had been placed in the following placement types & areas:

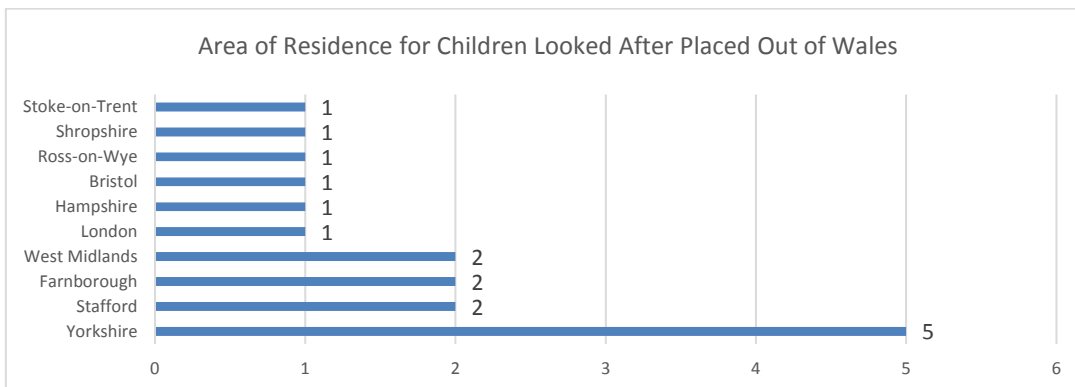
Graph 22



Source: RCT MI Team

The data above indicates that of the children placed out of Wales, the majority were placed with family members. Therefore only four out of the seventeen placements were placed out of Wales because they required specialist residential placements to meet their high levels of need.

Graph 23

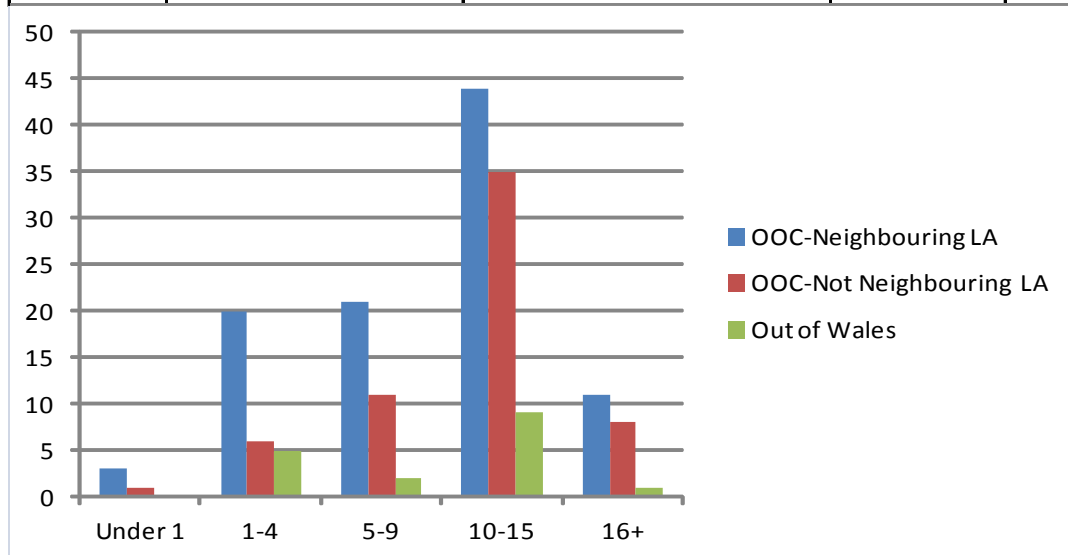


Source: RCT MI Team

Some analysis was also completed in respect of the age of the children who were placed out of county at that time. This revealed the following:

Table 8 – Graph 24

Age Group	OOO-Neighbouring LA	OOO-Not Neighbouring LA	Out of Wales	Total
Under 1	3	1	0	4
1-4	20	6	5	31
5-9	21	11	2	34
10-15	44	35	9	88
16+	11	8	1	20
Total	99	61	17	177



Source: RCT MI Team

The 35 children aged 4 & under and placed out of County were either placed with relative foster carers, placed with their parents or were placed for adoption. Data confirms that under 4 year old were only placed out of RCT to be with family members or their plan for permanence was adoption.

5.4 Placements with complex care and support packages

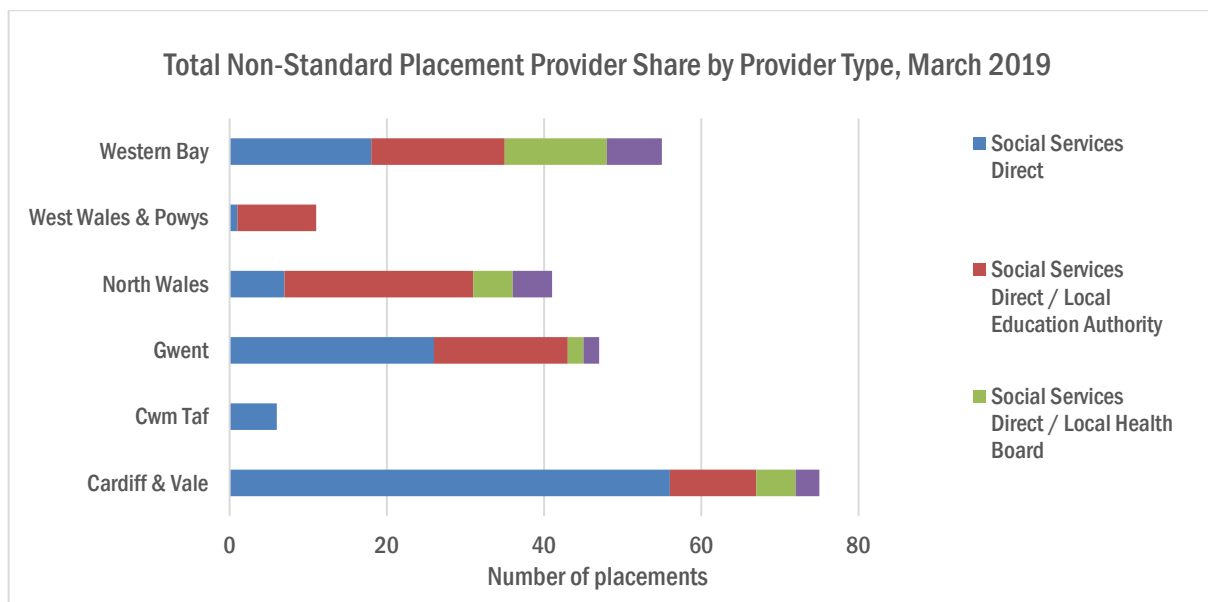
Within RCT we have recently experienced a number of young people where existing residential care placements aren't always able to meet the needs. This may be due to the existing models of care, or that the natures of the young people and their needs aren't matched to the range of services available. This is an issue not just within RCT but across Wales. The needs profile of these young people with complex care needs across Wales features:

- Extremely challenging behaviour; with features of physical violence, destruction of property and lack of victim empathy.
- Mental health diagnosis or pending assessment, with presentation of mental health symptoms significantly impacting emotional wellbeing.
- Sexual risk or need; such as child sexual abuse (CSA) child sexual exploitation (CSE) sexually harmful behaviour (SHB).
- Gender identity related needs.
- Trauma.
- High levels of multiple risk taking behaviours with features of; self-harm, suicidal ideation, absconding, substance misuse or criminality.
- Gang affiliated behaviours.

This unfortunately has resulted in residential establishments struggling to be able to provide the flexibility and or autonomy for this particular group of young people.

For a small cohort of young people 16+ years of age RCT has used unregistered establishments placements Between March 2018 and February 2019 this has ranged from a maximum of 5 to a minimum of 1. The 16+ Accommodation and Support Strategy outlines the measures we are taking to address this and includes developing the Trauma Recovery Model within our residential provision. Please see Section 3 for further details.

Graph 25 - All Wales breakdown of sole, bi-partite or tri-partite funded placements as at 31st March 2019 and Cwm Taf – Health Board funding.



RCT does not have any tri-partite funded placements, the Multi-Agency Placement Panel continues to experience a challenging environment when progressing the joint funding of complex packages of care with the Local Health Board.

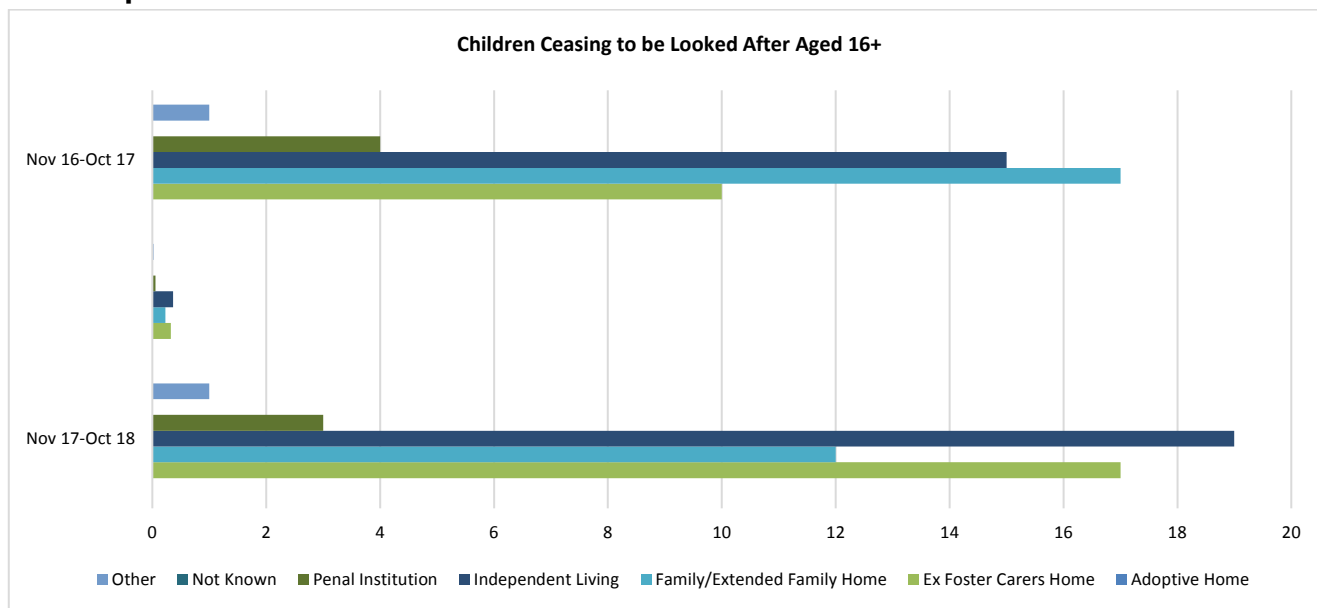
5.5 Supported Housing

Summary of Children Leaving Care Aged 16+ between 1st November 2016 and 31st October 2018 by the type of accommodation

Table 9

Children aged 16+	Nov 16 - Oct 17		Nov 17 - Oct 18	
	Total	%	Total	%
Adoptive Home	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Ex Foster Carers Home	10	21.28%	17	32.69%
Family/Extended Family Home	17	36.17%	12	23.08%
Independent Living	15	31.91%	19	36.54%
Penal Institution	4	8.57%	3	5.77%
Not Known	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Other	1	2.13%	1	1.92%
Ceased LA per Year:	47		52	

Graph 26



As the data through the Placement Commissioning Strategy shows the number of children 16+ years of age requiring support will continue to rise at a steady rate over the next few years.

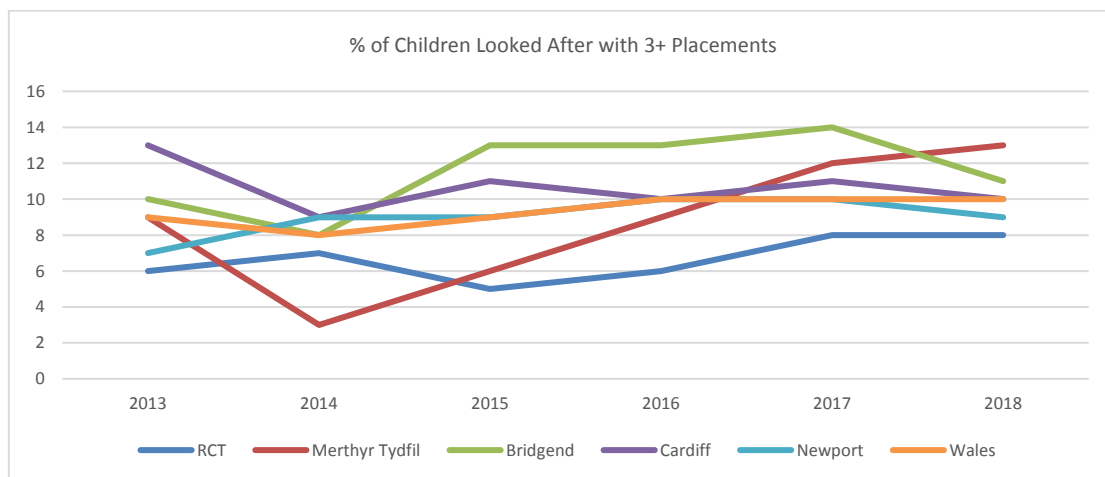
The nature of the young person's placement whilst looked after i.e. relative foster care, mainstream foster care or residential accommodation will have a direct impact on the type of accommodation/ support provided on leaving care.

Table 9 above shows that there has been an increase in the number of care leavers remaining with foster carers post 18 years, it would appear that a third of children leaving care at 16+ years remain with their ex foster carers in When I'm Ready placements (see Graph 15a and 15b), a third return to family/friends and a third move into independent living. Data indicates that this trend is likely to continue. As previously noted there is a significant difference in the length WIR placement depending on the type of placement converted.

5 Placement stability

Percentage of children experiencing 3 or more placements per year.

Graph 27



Source: StatsWales

Graph 27 above represents the percentage of children who had 3 or more placement moves from 2013 to 2018. RCT remain consistently below the Welsh average of 10% and the graph above also shows that we remain below those of the comparison Local Authorities. In 2018 Merthyr CBC was the highest with 13%, Bridgend CBC were 11% and Cardiff CC achieved the Welsh average.

While this is crude tool for monitoring placement stability, which is linked in research to delivery of good outcomes for children and young people, it is the most common indicator used by authorities. Of particular concern is the 'or more' where children and young people may have had several placements which can re-traumatise them and further embed attachment issues that have emerged within their birth family. Some degree of placement movement is healthy and indicates progression in care and support plans in a timely manner in the best interests of a child as their placement needs may change. However this rarely applies to more than 3 placements in one year, instead this indicating disruption and instability for the child.

Going forward RCT has a planned approach to capture data through WCCIS to better identify and collate the need of children to support improved future placement commissioning.

6 Current placements provision in RCT

6.1 Foster Placements

RCT has a well-established fostering service offering support to 185 mainstream and kinship foster carers providing care to 381 children and young people (at 10/04/2019). The RCT fostering service provide assessment of all mainstream and kinship foster carers and following approval transfer to the support team who help both kinship and mainstream foster carers to develop in their role and ensure fostering regulations and standards are achieved. The establishment of a dedicated Assessment Team and Support Team within Fostering has allowed us to more effectively manage the demands on service.

Cwm Taf regional fostering recruitment service has been launched with RCT as the host authority from April 1st 2019. The service operates a regional front door for all enquiries to become foster carers via a customer care centre. Enquiries are transferred to the regional recruitment officer who completes initial enquiry information and offers home visits to potential foster carers across the region. Decisions on whether to proceed to assessment are made by the Team Manager from respective local authorities.

The Cwm Taf regional fostering project manager implements the service delivery plan encompassing NFF objectives which is monitored by the Cwm Taf regional development board. Ongoing consideration will be made to the development of regional assessment and panel functions and other opportunities for regional working which could be achieved. It is recognised there is a national shortage of foster care placements with all local authorities and agencies facing recruitment challenges. Our local recruitment strategy links in to the NFF all Wales recruitment strategy

RCT is part of the Cwm Taf pilot Fostering and Wellbeing Programme supported by Fostering Network since the first quarter of 2017-2018. The Fostering Wellbeing programme aims to improve wellbeing outcomes for children looked after by encouraging in the team around the child to work together to share learning and best practice.

The programme combines social pedagogy principles with education focused activities including;

- Master classes for foster carers, social workers, health and education professionals
- A 'champions' scheme to shape programme delivery and provide peer support this will include foster carer and young people's champions.
- Service planning which looks at system changes and sustainability model which will support multi sector partnership and underpin the value base of social pedagogy principles, and how this could be replicated across Wales.

RCT has adopted the unified assessment model when assessing potential carer's suitability as a means of ensuring the best outcome for the child is achieved. The model enables other assessments to be undertaken, for example Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangement Order (CAO) as part of the fostering assessment if this is deemed more appropriate.

RCT has recruited 2 SGO social workers based within the Fostering Assessment Service whose focus is on identifying and supporting those kinship placements suitable for conversion to special guardianship arrangements. The workers will also be able to explore the reasons why a CAO or SGO was not sought in the first instance, and whether there are additional identified carer support needs that we could better meet during the carers assessment process that would increase applicant's confidence in applying for SGO's. The SGO social workers link with the IAA team to respond to any queries relating to SGO support as well as applications.

Multiple Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) operate within RCT local authority boundaries. The agencies consist of a mix of charitable and commercial providers who are all party to the All Wales Framework for Foster Care Services co-ordinated through 4c's. When commissioning placements RCT initially look for a suitable placement match from our internal fostering services. Where we are unable to identify suitable in-house placement resource we use the CCSR database to commission IFA placements. All new admissions are reviewed as part of the weekly placement panel attended by Heads of Service and Children's Service Managers.

RCT have reduced the number of external fostering placements made with IFA's over the past 3 years. Our commissioning of external non-standard placements remain low with 15 placements during 2017-18. (Quarterly Baseline Return data). Our recruitment strategy will need to have a focus on recruiting foster carers able to care for children with more complex needs or able to offer solo placements. Currently we do not recruit carers specifically to offer 'non-standard' foster placements, with this recruitment strategy we also need to address the payment structures required to deliver a non-standard package of care with in-house foster carers.

6.2 Residential Placements

RCT currently operate three registered residential children's homes and are in the process of developing a fourth. Our homes offer a range of accommodation services to children and young people aged up to 18. Nantgwyn provides short breaks to disabled children. The service is available to up to 40 children over the year. Beddau and Bryndar offer short or long term planned placements to children and young people up to the age of 18. Each service has a statement of purpose which outlines the specific outcomes to be achieved through the service and is reviewed on an annual basis.

Our new provision being developed in Aberdare aims to address gaps in our service provision. The new home has been purchased and will be registered to offer placements to children and young people who may need an immediate assessment placement on a short term basis before transition to a standard residential placement or step-down to fostering placement. The home will operate using the Trauma Recovery Model of care with staff receiving training to deliver the model across the service. Our statement of purpose will be to meet the needs of up to 2 children using this resource.

All our children's homes are inspected on an annual basis by CIW and the reports are monitored by the corporate parenting board as well as quarterly monitoring visits carried out by the Responsible Individual. The services are highly regulated and monitored to ensure a high standard of care is provided to all children and young people.

Residential placements are inevitably higher cost in comparison to internal or external fostering placements. We recognise there is a need to have a mix of placements and alternative models of care to enable us to meet the complex needs presented by children and young people who cannot have these needs met within a standard fostering setting.

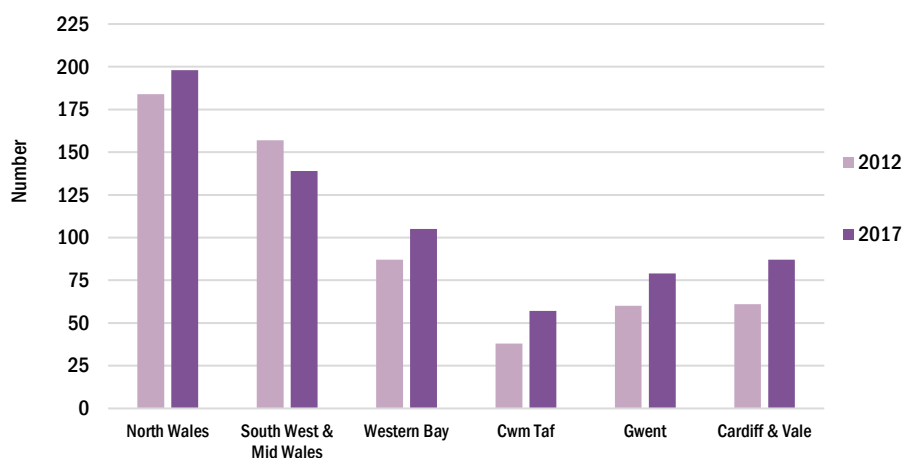
In addition to our in house short breaks residential service we commission via a service level agreement a service through Action for Children. This service offers support to disabled children and their families.

As at 23rd March 2019 RCT have 39 children and young people placed with external residential providers. Whilst we recognise there will always be a need for external residential placement provision to meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs the high usage of external providers has a significant financial impact on budgets. The development of the flexible residential framework from 1st April will hopefully provide a wider range of provision and models of care in the market. In order to respond to the changes in commissioning RCT will need to strengthen its placement service to ensure we obtain value for money. When searching for residential placements we initially consider our in-house residential provision, where there is no suitable match we externally commission via CCSR with providers who are part of the All Wales Residential Framework.

We are unable to provide an accurate reflection on the average weekly cost for each provider within the Residential settings due to the fact that the models of care procured are varied by setting not at provider level. Averages need to be seen in the context of some emergency placements lasting only days whereas an increasing number of placements are long term care plans for residential but with features of disruption and multiple moves which are detrimental to good outcomes

Currently there are 16 CIW regulated residential children’s homes within RCT, three of which are run by RCT Council. In terms of geographic spread of these establishments, there are three homes in Porth, one in Tonyrefail, two in Pontyclun, one in Pontypridd, five homes are in the Cynon Valley.

Number of beds in registered children's homes, December



The table above demonstrates how the average registered capacity per children’s homes setting has changed across the regions of Wales over the last five years. Generally, there has been little change in the average number of beds in children’s homes across five of the regions

Table 1 shows how this has changed for each region in Wales from 2012 to 2017.

Table 1

Number of registered children's homes by ownership, December

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
--	------	------	------	------	------	------

North Wales	Independent	38	37	38	40	41	43
	Local authority	4	4	4	4	3	3
South West & Mid Wales	Independent	27	25	27	27	28	29
	Local authority	4	4	4	5	5	5
Western Bay	Independent	11	17	17	17	18	19
	Local authority	6	5	5	4	4	5
Cwm Taf	Independent	5	5	6	8	10	10
	Local authority	4	4	4	4	4	4
Gwent	Independent	13	14	15	14	15	15
	Local authority	5	6	6	6	5	5
Cardiff & Vale	Independent	5	6	6	10	-	11
	Local authority	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wales	Independent	99	104	109	116	112	127
	Local authority	24	24	24	24	22	23

Table 2 shows that only a quarter of the total registered bed spaces available in the Cardiff & Vale region offer general therapeutic and specialist models of care, whereas, in the other regions, this ranges from 60 to 76%. The North Wales region has the highest number of beds in settings offering general therapeutic and specialist care, whereas Cardiff & Vale has the lowest with 23 beds available in total.

Table 2 – Number and percentage of beds by region and provision type, December 2017

Region	General therapeutic and specialist care		Short break / respite service		Disability only	
	Beds	% of region	Beds	% of region	Beds	% of region
North Wales	119	60%	28	14%	51	26%
West Wales and Powys	85	61%	29	21%	25	18%
Western Bay	77	73%	21	20%	7	7%
Cardiff & Vale	23	26%	28	32%	36	41%
Cwm Taf	37	70%	12	23%	4	8%
Gwent	60	76%	9	11%	10	13%

Source: Care providers' statement of purpose analysis

We have looked at supply at a regional level, and this is shown in Table 3. We have separated the services specialising in short-term residential care and services specifically for disability care (including both learning and physical) for both the independent sector provision and the local authority provision.

Table 3

Children's Homes				
Region	Total capacity based on registration	Short break / Disability only	General therapeutic & other care	Welsh Looked After Children in Children's Homes
North Wales	198	79	119	55
South West & Mid Wales	139	54	85	25
Western Bay	105	28	77	20
Cwm Taf	53	16	37	40
Gwent	79	19	60	40
Cardiff & Vale	87	64	23	50
Wales	661	260	401	230

Source: Care Inspectorate Wales; Looked after children census, Welsh Government

6.3 What are our stakeholders telling us?

There are a number of different ways that we consult with children and young people who are looked after. These include:

- Consultation documents for each child or young person's review, depending on age. These are also given to their parents and foster carers. The comments and views provided in these documents are used to inform the review process and the planning for individuals.
- A website has been developed by young people for RCT children looked after to provide information about reviews and other services. It aims to enable young people to contribute to their reviews and also service development through the continuation of the group.
- There is a group of young people 'Blue Print Forum' that is facilitated by Voice in Care, these meet regularly to capture the views of young people and contribute to service development, evaluation and delivery.

The Independent Review and Refocus of Accommodation and Placement Provisions to children looked after was coproduced with young people, foster carers and staff developing the vision and strategy for service delivery.

Further development has taken place during 2017 with foster and kinship carers where consultation events are undertaken every quarter and support groups have been established. Feedback from carers had been that this has been appreciated, as it demonstrates their value and contribution to children and young people and the service.

The Your Life, Your Care Survey, developed through the Bright Spots Programme to measure the well-being of looked after children was undertaken in Rhondda Cynon Taf during February 2018. Information was sent to children looked after between the ages of 4 and 18 years (410 children and young people in total). 146 completed surveys were received a responses rate of 36%. They Key recommendations were as follows:

- o **Make sure that all social workers explain who they are.** Consider leaving child friendly information with children and young people about their social worker.
- o **Work with children and young people to involve them in decisions.** Ensure that they are informed of when and why decisions are made about their care.
- o **Explain to every child why they are in care and regularly review with children whether they would like more information.**

- **Continue to communicate with schools to identify and help children who feel bullied at school and those who feel that they do not have a good friend.** Remind schools to give children in care opportunities to be trusted.
- **Give carers further training in therapeutic parenting:** 44% of young people did not talk regularly to their carers/parents about things that mattered and nearly a third of young people with worries felt unsupported.

RCT are also exploring during 2019 the potential of adopting the Mind of My Own App to enable children and young people to provide their views about the service they receive from staff and carers.

Section 3

Section 3 takes what we have learnt from the current data, identifies oversupply or gaps and when projecting future demand considers options for future provision to meet need most effectively.

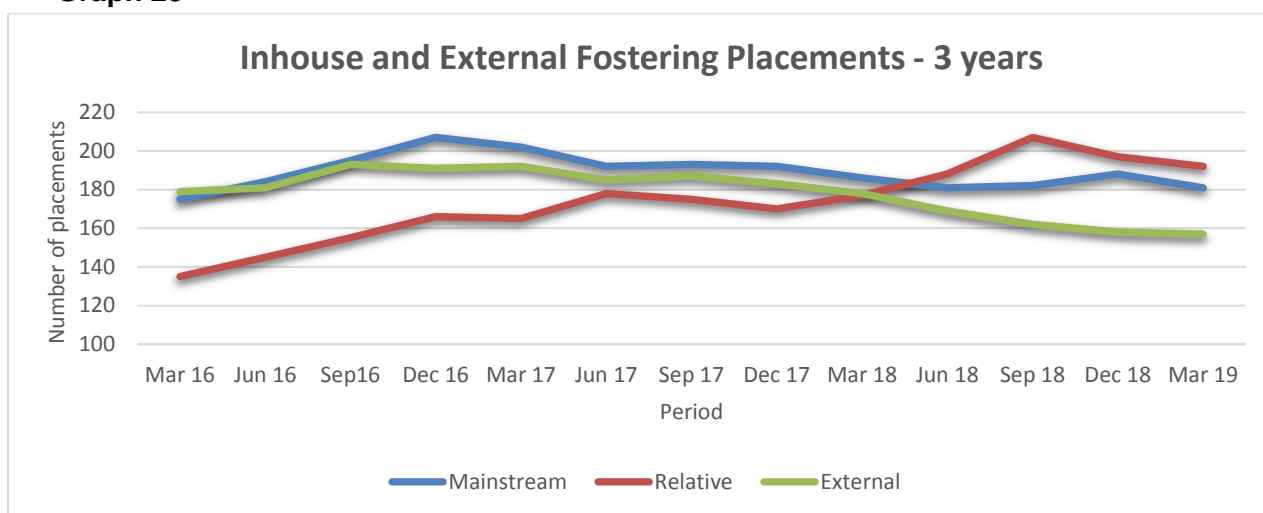
7. Projection of Future Needs

This strategy sits within the context of unprecedented pressures on local authorities to change services and reduce costs. At the 31st March 2013 the rate of children looked after for RCT was the lowest across the Cwm Taf region at 124 per 10,000 of the population. As at 31st March 2018, the rate per 10,000 population had dropped for RCT but the rate remains considerably higher than the all Wales rate of 102.

Table 10 - Placement type by use

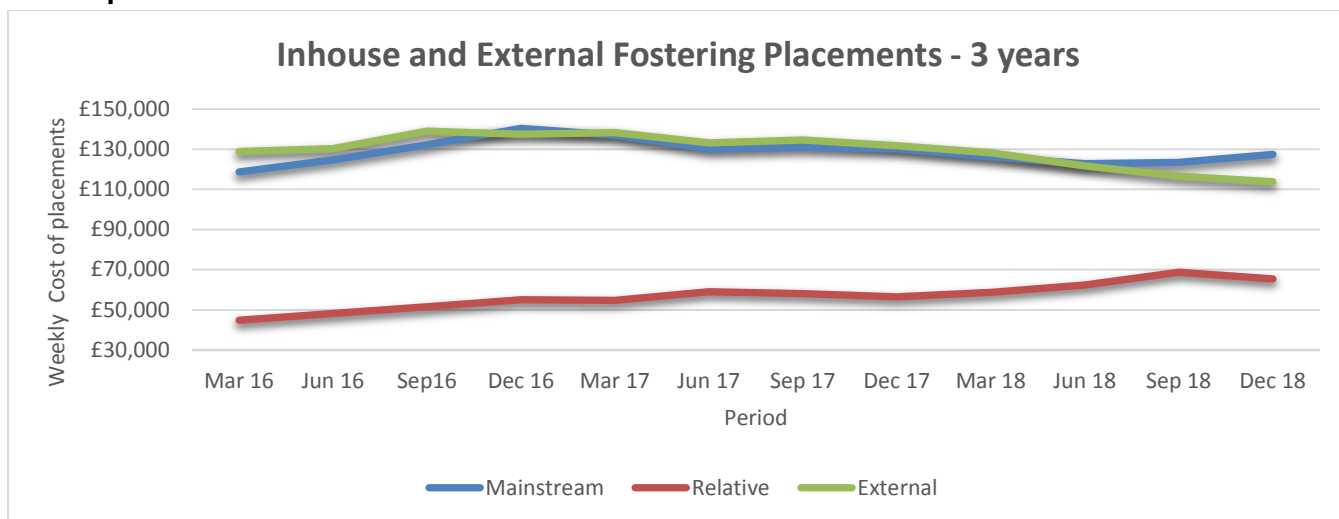
Type of Placement	16/17 Numbers	17/18 Numbers	Increase / Decrease	18/19 Numbers	Increase / Decrease
In-house Residential	8	9	1	8	-1
Independent Residential	41	37	-4	43	6
In-house Foster Care	202	186	-16	181	-5
Relative Foster Care	165	177	12	192	15
Independent Foster Care	192	178	-14	157	-21
Total	608	587	-21	581	-6

Graph 28



Graph 29 demonstrates that Relative foster carer placement whilst meeting the objective of keeping children within their families, is also our most cost effective option. The action plan highlights the key theme to further enhance the support service we provide to relative foster carers.

Graph 29



9. Commissioning Activity

As stated previously within the strategy there is a need to maximise the commissioning process to assist in achieving best value for money especially reviewing the pathways and processes for integrated commissioning across the Council and Local Health Board, this also includes the use of CCSR for commissioning external provision. The action plan highlights the need to review the process to commission external placements including maximising the use of CCSR.

Table 16 – CCSR search 1st March 2018 to 31st March 2019

Searches	Response	Foster	Already Assigned	Residential	Already Assigned
Framework	Awarded	29	14	19	13
	No Suitable Responses	131	0	75	0
	Withdrawn	10	0	7	1
Framework Total		170	14	101	14
Non-Framework	Awarded	8	7	14	12
	No Suitable Responses	82	0	118	0
	Withdrawn	15	0	10	0
Non-Framework Total		105	7	142	12

N.B. already assigned – these are the searches where the CCSR process was not followed and contract awards were entered retrospectively.

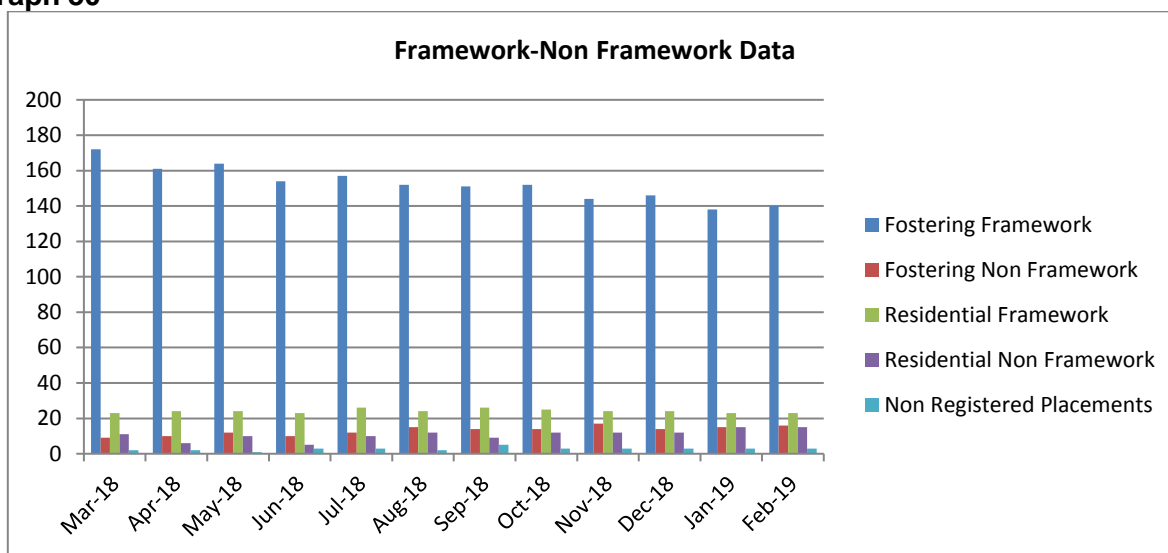
Table 17 Framework/Non Framework Data

	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19
Fostering Framework	172	161	164	154	157	152	151	152	144	146	138	140
Fostering Non Framework	9	10	12	10	12	15	14	14	17	14	15	16
Residential Framework	23	24	24	23	26	24	26	25	24	24	23	23
Residential Non Framework	11	6	10	5	10	12	9	12	12	12	15	15
Non Registered Placements	2	2	1	3	3	2	5	3	3	3	3	3

Summary February 2019

Total Framework	163
Total Non Framework	31
Total Not Registered	3
	197

Graph 30



Whilst the graph above (Graph 30) indicates the use of non-registered placements is small relative to the total number of placements, it is an area that is closely monitored by the CLA Quality Assurance Panel on a monthly basis, and reviewed weekly in Placement Panel to ensure the programme of support reduction is meeting the needs of the child.

10 Are Current Services Meeting Needs & the Gap Analysis?

The gap analysis reviews the data in Section 2 to identify current gaps in service and where we need to focus our development and/or commissioning of services to achieve desired outcomes. This is summarised below in Table 14.

Key theme 1: Providing increased provision of foster care placements able to meet complex needs

Key theme 2: Providing increased residential placements

Key theme 3: Providing support to relative foster carers and SGO carers

Key theme 4: Need to maximise the use of the commissioning processes to assist in achieving best value for money, including integrated commissioning with key partners.

Key theme 5: Placement stability and processes, to include reunification approach.

Key theme 6: Providing a range of accommodation options for 16 + and care leavers

RCT CBC maintains a strong commitment to children whose needs can only be met through the provision of accommodation services. We have also developed a robust early intervention and prevention services to ensure our focus remains on the prevention of children becoming looked after. Our commitment to this is evidenced across a number of strategies and Council plans, including the Director's Report. However, we recognise there will always be a cohort of children who require highly specialised services and placements and through the development of our commissioning strategy we will look to address the specific areas where we need to focus development.

	Key Theme	Impact on Desired Outcomes	Target Change to Improve Outcomes
1	Providing increased provision of foster care placements able to meet complex needs	<p>Unable to match sufficiently to meet children's needs and provide placement choice.</p> <p>Unable to sustain placements due to limited support to foster carers.</p>	<p>Review our approach to marketing and recruitment of foster carers through the Cwm Taf regional team. Targeted approach to recruiting carers able to offer 'non-standard' fostering placements.</p> <p>Continue to develop the regional front door and assessment service as part of objectives of NFF.</p> <p>Harmonisation of fees to ensure carer offer is consistent across Cwm Taf and also reflects non-standard packages.</p> <p>Explore and develop support services to foster carers using the fostering wellbeing project approach. Explore the potential to develop specialist foster care support e.g. parent and child foster placement, support to parent and child placements within the community.</p> <p>Implement the Cwm Taf fostering well-being programme across children's services to improve outcomes for children and offer to foster carers.</p>

2	<p>Providing residential placements within local area to meet need.</p>	<p>Unable place children and young people within residential homes in the geographic area.</p> <p>Children and young people do not have placement choice and experience instability.</p>	<p>Re-focus residential care in RCT to manage continuum of needs through exploring the models of care used in our in-house residential homes.</p> <p>Implement an established model of care, Trauma Recovery Model within the newly developed residential home with an aim to roll out across all RCT residential provision. Residential Services Manager attending training in May 2019.</p> <p>Development of residential provision to provide a immediate, short term assessment placement resource.</p> <p>Enhance in-house placement service to ensure best value obtained when commissioning external residential placements</p> <p>Ensure placement team develop improved commissioning relationships with key providers to improve placement choice within the RCT boundaries which can meet the continuum of needs including development of be-spoke packages of care.</p>
3	<p>Providing support to relative foster carers and SGO carers</p>	<p>Children experiencing disrupted placements and cannot remain cared for within their family.</p> <p>Relative and SGO carers unable to continue to provide care due to minimal support leading to potential placement breakdown.</p>	<p>Review the support service to relative foster carers to ensure we are offering a range of opportunities which enable kinship carers to maintain stable placements.</p> <p>Develop existing SGO service to improve the support provision and meet the requirements of the SGO regulations implemented July 2018.</p> <p>To undertake a review of the financial support offered to Special Guardians.</p>
4	<p>Need to maximise the use of the commissioning processes to assist in achieving best value for money, including integrated commissioning with key partners.</p>	<p>Children do not experience placement choice and stability.</p> <p>Experience increased financial impact to local</p>	<p>The limited supply and increasing cost of external residential placements is a budget pressure. Work with commissioning partners to improve placement choice and shape provision within RCT.</p>

		authority budgets through lack of integrated working.	<p>Strengthen our placement services to improve commissioning arrangements.</p> <p>Review how we capture information through WCCIS and placement referrals and reasons for moves to better collate the needs of children and young people so improving future placement commissioning.</p>
5	Placement stability and processes, to include reunification approach.	Children experience a lack of stability with a number of placement moves	<p>Implement the fostering well-being programme across children's services to ensure foster carers receive adequate training and support.</p> <p>Review processes for improving stability of placements monitoring through placement panel and CLAQA Panel.</p> <p>Enhance elements of fostering service through development of alternative respite support for foster carers. Exploring alternative models of provision for day care and support.</p> <p>CLAQAP action 2019-2020 to review models of reunification and develop an implementation plan.</p>
6	Providing a range of accommodation options for 16+ and care leavers	<p>Ensure that children and young people who cannot live with their parents live in suitable accommodation in RCT.</p> <p>Ensure there is a clear accommodation pathway and a continuum of accommodation and support to meet the needs of care leavers in RCT</p>	<p>Implement the accommodation and support strategy for young people 16+ leaving care 2019-2021 to develop a range of accommodation choices for 16+ and care leavers.</p> <p>Expand the Supported Lodging provision.</p> <p>Exploring provision of support and mentoring for care leavers and using existing resources e.g. residential staff, foster carers.</p>

Section 4

This section sets out the strategic commissioning intentions in response to the analysis in sections 2 and 3. Actions will be reviewed as part of the CLA Quality Assurance Panel Work Plan on monthly basis to enable review of the effectiveness of the strategy.

11 Strategic Commissioning Intentions

In this final section we set out Rhondda-Cynon-Taf strategic commissioning intentions linked to the key themes identified in Table 11. This section outlines the shape of future provision; outline the agreed service model and market development; and confirm contracting and monitoring processes that will evidence the outcomes achieved for children who are looked after.

11.1 Commissioning Intentions related to Key Theme 1 – Increased provision of foster care Placements to meet complex needs

Our commitment is to increase the number of in-house foster carers during 2019/2020. We will achieve this through implementation of our Cwm Taf regional foster carer recruitment strategy which aims to recruit and approve an additional 10 carers and aim to increase this in 2020/2021 by 15 carers. RCT intends to shape its service by targeting recruitment to the key identified areas of unmet need: specifically carers able to provide solo placements, non-standard foster placements and placements for sibling groups. Our recruitment marketing will include developing a digital marketing approach and also targeting those who already work in childcare professions. ([link to Recruitment policy](#))

RCT budget for recruitment and retention for 2019/20 is £18,000 for recruitment and £5000 for retention. As part of the Cwm Taf regional fostering service we have invested in recruiting a marketing officer to recruit foster carers across Cwm Taf. We will also continue to work with the National Fostering Framework to ensure adequate resources are available locally and regionally which will supplement any National recruitment and marketing campaigns.

It has been acknowledged that a review of Foster Carer fees and allowances needs to be undertaken to ensure that RCT CBC remain competitive with IFA fees. The harmonisation of fees and allowances is a priority for Phase 3 Work Programme for the National Fostering Framework (NFF) and the Cwm Taf Regional Development Officer is preparing a full options appraisal for consideration of how this might be best achieved alongside other regional working in public sector fostering services.

We will continue our commitment to the Cwm Taf fostering well-being programme across children's services and work with partners in education and health to ensure a focus on promoting positive outcomes for children looked after.

Our market position statement will be shared with providers and will promote IFA's to consider focusing their local recruitment of foster carers who are able to provide specialist placements for children and young people children aged 12 plus who require solo placements and step-down from residential care placements. Our commissioning strategy identifies these type of placements as an ongoing need for RCT to commission externally.

11.2 Commissioning Intentions related to Key Theme 2 – Increased residential placements able to offer complex care and support packages

The Cwm Taf Children and Families Strategic Partnership has accessed ICF funding for the period 2018 - 2020 to support the development of a multi-agency resource hub which will consist of residential provision supported by an outreach attachment and trauma based service and an outreach skills for living team for care leavers. Review of models of care similar to this hub were commissioned by consultants Cordis Bright and IPC Oxford Brookes to ensure learnings from practice were considered ([link to CB & IPC reports](#))

RCT intends to develop residential placements using the TRM (Trauma Recovery Model) of care within internal residential services. However, due to levels of demand, we will continue to commission externally from independent provider's placements which are able to offer a model of care which supports positive outcomes for young people.

RCT's market position statement will be shared with independent providers, both charitable and commercial and will identify the areas where we wish to commission services as well as identifying areas of co-production. RCT's commissioning intentions will be to commission residential placements for children and young people who require an identified framework of therapeutic support and we are particularly focused on commissioning placements from providers able to offer a model of care to improve outcomes for children. RCT will commission placements with providers who are able to meet the higher end of the continuum of need. We will commission external placements from providers able to offer complex care and support packages to young people who need to address the impact of trauma and are also able to offer care in one or two bedroom accommodation to better meet their therapeutic needs.

11.3 Commissioning Intentions related to Key Theme 3 – Provision of support to relative foster carers and Special Guardians.

We will review our current support available to relative carers and special guardians and implement the SGO Code of Practice July 2018 across the service. It is our intention to improve support through information available via our website and at the first point of contact for members of the public calling children's services. Our aim will be provide support which will ensure stability of SGO placements for children throughout their childhood.

We will review our current SGO Financial Policy to consider whether this is adequately enabling relative foster carers to consider this as a permanency option for children in their care.

Commissioning Intentions related to Key Theme 4 – maximise the use of commissioning processes to achieve best value

RCT will continue to monitor and improve our placement service through the use of the All Wales Frameworks and the CCSR database managed by 4C's. RCT placement service has been strengthened through the appointment of additional posts during 2018, the service will continue to be reviewed to ensure that we achieve the best quality and value for money placements.

We will review our use of WCCIS to ensure we are gathering adequate performance information relating to specific needs which will inform our future placement commissioning intentions.

The Cwm Taf Children and Families Strategic Partnership Board has commissioned an independent consultant to review the pathways and processes for integrated commissioning across the Councils

and the Local Health Board. A project is well underway to streamline the referral and decision making pathways, alongside robust review of criteria for children's packages that are sufficiently complex to require integrated commissioning.

The recently published National Commissioning Board (NCB) Guidance and Toolkit on best practice in integrated commissioning for children with complex needs will be used in this review. The NCB ran workshops for regional partnerships during 2019 to consider the effectiveness of integrated commissioning and identify how to improve collaboration.

11.4 Commissioning Intentions related to Key Theme 5 – Placement Stability and Reunification processes

RCT will continue to evaluate the implementation of the fostering well-being programme across children's services including continuing the link with education colleagues to ensure foster carers are included as key members of the team around the child. We will review the support and training offered to foster carers to ensure they are continuing to receive what they need to maintain and support children's placements with them.

We will monitor and review the implementation of our placement stability process. We will ensure that stability meetings are being arranged early enough in the process to address support needs and also review the support available from other services which can promote the placement stability. We will monitor progress through our placement panel and CLAQA Panel.

We will develop our short breaks support for families and foster carers. Provision of planned short breaks to families and foster carers caring for children and young people can promote continued resilience and placement stability. We will recruit additional short breaks carers with the ability to offer support to families and carers.

RCT will also explore with external providers commissioning of short breaks carers to support children.

We will explore alternative models of support which could be provided to parent and children on the edge of care or where assessment of parenting is being completed. We explore the provision of day care which could be provided by existing vacant foster carers who would be able to carry out support in a parent's own home. This would supplement existing services with the aim of maintain children within their own families.

CLAQAP action 2019-2020 to review models of reunification and develop an implementation plan.

11.5 Commissioning intentions related to Key Theme 6 – Accommodation options for 16+ and care leavers.

We will implement RCT Accommodation and Support Strategy for Young People 16+ leaving care during 2019-2021. The aim of our strategy is to develop a range of accommodation choices for 16+ and care leavers, this will include expanding the supported lodging provision and exploring opportunities to enhance support and mentoring available for care leavers through a mentoring scheme.

We will engage with providers to commission supported living accommodation for care leavers 16+.