

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Scrutiny Committee Gwynedd Council
DATE OF MEETING	30 January, 2020
TITLE OF ITEM	The National Fostering Framework
PURPOSE	To give an update on the Framework
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1. Introduction

1.1 The National Fostering Framework (NFF) is one of four workstreams sponsored by the Strategic Steering Group set up by the Welsh Government. This was in response to the call from key stakeholders for greater collaboration to address strategically, across all sectors, growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales. The National Fostering Framework Phase 1 report was published in March 2016. It contained a comprehensive analysis, a summary of consultation responses and ten recommendations for delivery.

1.2 The recommendations were:

- Develop a National Fostering Framework, including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures.
- Establish the right balance between local authority foster care, third sector providers and commercial providers in terms of national policy objectives, service quality considerations and value for money requirements.
- Establish an all-Wales public service fostering collaborative, delivering services regionally and locally, incorporating all the relevant services directly provided by local authorities.
- Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers.
- Introduce a national performance and resource framework, aligning this with the work being done to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS). A phased approach to implementation will be developed. A distinct performance framework should be developed for the independent sector (commercial providers and third sector providers).
- Introduce a national web-site, social media, brand and identity for foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication.
- Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care for children who are looked after, building on the initial scoping paper from Phase One.
- Develop national arrangements for commissioning all placements, regardless of sector but building on the work of the 4Cs.
- Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.
- Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services – to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster care placements.

1.3 Work on the National Fostering Framework for Wales (NFF) is a major strand in the overall programme agreed by the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG). It fits within Workstream 2 of the MAG – Providing and commissioning a flexible, affordable and sufficient range mix of high-quality placements for children who are looked after, to meet their diverse needs and circumstances.

1.4 The workstream has adopted a number of design principles which include the following:

- Children and young people should be well matched with placements able to meet their needs. Wherever possible, placements should be local so that children and young people remain in their communities, maintain their networks and experience the least possible disruption in their lives.
- Most children will have their needs best met in a substitute family.
- Local authorities should aim to increase the number of locally recruited and supported foster carers with skills and competence in providing care for children with a range of needs.

1.5 All local authorities should have placement commissioning strategies which considers how they will tackle issues of supply and provision of different placement options. These strategies should include how the local authority will ensure that appropriate options are available for the most vulnerable children with needs which indicate likely difficulties in making placements.

1.6 For the purpose of developing the NFF £400,000 funding has been made available by the Welsh Government. This has been utilised by appointing a national Programme Manager and Regional Development Managers for each of the regions in Wales. North Wales received £40,000 as part of this funding to appoint a regional Development Manager.

1.7 A regional development plan (See Appendix 1) and narrative report were included in the NFF Phase 3 Report.

1.8 In November 2019 a business case was presented to Welsh Government and the Ministerial Advisory Group based on the developments and findings of the workstreams under the NFF. St David's and AFA Cymru were successful in the WG tender for the National NFF Programme Manager role and Sarah Thomas has been appointed to lead the programme.

2. The 5 Work Streams in the national NFF programme:

2.1 Performance Framework

- a) Annual NFF Data Returns have been collated for 3 years. In 2018 – 2019 NFF Data Returns were submitted by individual authorities, with regional and national analysis and formulation of performance data reports.
- b) Placement Needs' Analysis has been undertaken in order to identify individual authority and regional levels of unmet need (based on 'new' placements made during the year / those made in IFA / residential provision not in accordance with the child's Part 6 Care & Support Plan).
- c) Anonymised Regional Needs Analysis Report 2018 – 2019 discussed at the Fostering Managers' Group (5 September & 3 October), Regional Recruitment Group (27 September); and at HOCS group meeting (29 November)
- d) Main findings of the Regional Report:
 - 1,250 children / young people looked after regionally with 853 in foster care
 - 20% in placement with parent arrangements
 - 20% in kinship care
 - The numbers of children placed with independent providers has increased from 179 (year to March 2018) to 213 (year to March 2019) and continues to rise throughout 2018 – 2019
 - Of those in foster care (Kinship, general & Independent provider) the regional range of children placed with independent providers is 12% - 56%; of those in either general or independent provider care the range increases to between 19% - 75%
 - Foster carer cohort is now 39% (Kinship) and 61% (General) with some authorities reporting 50% / 50%
 - Kinship carer numbers continue to increase whilst the baseline figure for general foster carers is not being **maintained**, 80% assessment capacity was taken up by kinship

- It is anticipated that 180 general foster carers will need to be approved over the next three years to meet the current placement gap and to offset the projected loss of general foster carers.
- The current expenditure on independent provider placements is a significant consideration; authorities are working on reducing loss of foster carers e.g. providing a core offer such as Fostering Friendly policies and Council Tax Reduction / Exemption.
- National Performance Data Task & Finish Group has agreed an amended data set informed by experience of collating data and need to dovetail with other data requests and submissions.

2.2 Kinship Care Service Development

- a) 20% of children looked after regionally are placed with kinship foster carers.
- b) 33% of those children are aged under 5 years.
- c) Kinship Carer Good Practice Guide published (see appendix 2)
- d) Kinship Conference held regionally 11 October 2018
- e) Some local authorities are restructuring their teams to deal with the increase in numbers.
- f) All authorities are developing support services for kinship carers including strengthening arrangements for Special Guardianships.

2.3 Learning & Development Framework

- a) Regional Launch held 21 November 2019 (framework attached in Appendix 3).
- b) Implementation Plan involving all stakeholders (foster carers, fostering services, workforce development /training, panel members) developed.
- c) Task & Finish Groups established (next meeting 22 January 2020).

2.4 Marketing, Branding & Recruitment

- a) Marketing Gap Analysis has been undertaken by Matt Clarke of Narrative Edge. Proposal is for national strapline Maethu Cymru / Fostering Wales with individual authorities reflecting this. Individual north Wales local authority developments complement and resonate with the national proposal Maethu Cymru / Fostering Wales.
- b) North Wales (along with emerging Mid & West Wales website) differs from the other regions. NW compares favourably with other regions in respect of discrete recruitment activity and expertise particularly in respect of regional developments and working together.
- c) North Wales Recruitment Officers group have significant input into national developments.
- d) Marketing Gap Analysis identifies need for significant investment in this area
- e) Core Offer – there are excellent north Wales examples (including Council Tax Exemption / Reduction & Fostering Friendly policies informing national developments and this committed investment has been reflected in Business Case to WG).
- f) Regional Needs Analysis and Marketing Gap Analysis together will inform individual authority and regional recruitment and strengthen the Business Case to WG

2.5 Harmonising Fees and Allowances

- a) Draft National report developed by Harmonising Fees & Allowances Group has been presented to the Strategic Steering and Grant Monitoring Groups, based on the consideration of adopting specific options. Following presentation to the AWHOCS a further Work Programme has been developed:
- b) Best Practice Guide & Policy to be developed.
- c) Individual local authorities to consider regional implications, and this to be reflected in Regional Work Programmes.

- d) Identified need to strengthen and increase financial expertise at regional level to enable the more detailed costings and mapping – regional Finance Officer nominated.

3. Blaenoriaethau Rhanbarthol / Regional Priorities

3.1 Analyse individual Placement Strategies and develop a regional strategy.

3.2 Increase recruitment and assessment capacity and reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies; move to structured commissioning rather than spot purchase.

3.3 To ensure a shared understanding and sense of corporate ownership e.g. Core Offer, Fostering Friendly and Council Tax Exemption initiatives.

3.4 On a local level the Fostering Service is fully committed to developing The NFF framework and has representation in each of the 5 work streams. The 6 North Wales authorities are working collaboratively on developing and implementing the framework. The Fostering Team Manager attends (and currently chairs) the regional fostering managers forum. The Head of Service is also the national representative and NFF lead and attends the Ministerial Advisory Group in this capacity.

3.5 In addition to the above regional priorities, the service in Gwynedd is currently reviewing its structure due to the demands on the service as highlighted in the Regional Needs Analysis in order to achieve a better balance in undertaking its role with kinship cares and general foster carers.