

<b>Name of Committee</b>	<b>Care Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>March 17, 2022</b>
<b>Title of item</b>	<b>Fostering Strategy</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Update on the fostering strategy in Gwynedd in the context of the National Fostering Framework</b>
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## 1. National Background

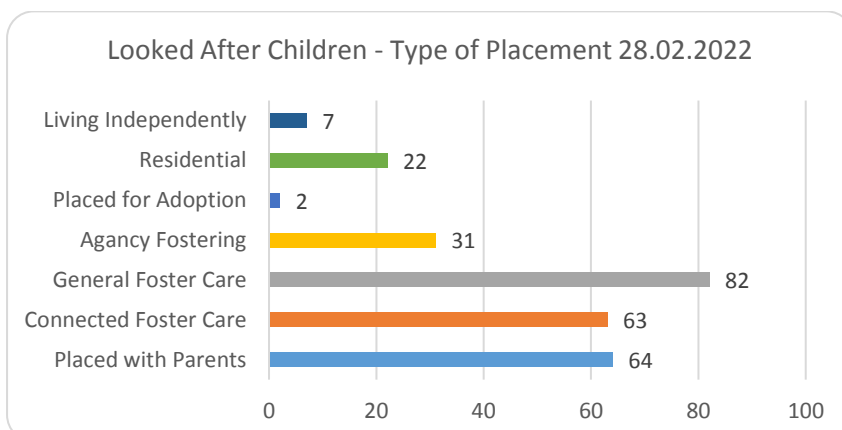
The National Fostering Framework was created to address the growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales. The development of a national framework for fostering services (NFF) was one of the major work strands of the work programme designed by the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group.

One of the key drivers in the development of a National Fostering Framework has been the recognition that Local Authorities across Wales did not have sufficient numbers of foster carers, with sufficient support and skills to meet the increasing demand for placements for children and young people with increasingly complex needs. The work undertaken under the Framework focusses on this to assist Local Authorities to meet this demand.

The Final Report of 2018-2021 of the National Fostering Framework (**Appendix 1**) gives an overview of the work undertaken and with the launch of Foster Wales, the national or co-ordinating functions will now be taken forward through collaboration with the National Adoption Service Central Team, with additional staff at a national and regional level.

## 2. Local Context

Building our internal fostering provision is essential to continue to improve outcomes for children, this means shifting the balance of care and resourcing our Fostering teams to enable growth and the ability to respond to demands. The number of children looked after in Gwynedd at the end of February 2022 was 271. 175 of these children are placed in foster care. In Gwynedd, 46 children became looked after in 2020-21 and 50 so far this year. 33 of these children have been placed in foster care (32 in 2020-21). Of those placed in foster care, 19 were placed with mainstream foster carers and 14 with connected foster carers. In 2020-21, there were 32 new foster Placements ( 20 mainstream and 12 Connected).



In 2020-21 the number of mainstream fostering households registered with Gwynedd increased from 68 to 71. This was due to not having any mainstream foster carers leave the Service during the year. The total registered this year has slightly decreased, with some long serving foster carers deciding to retire.

It is not only necessary to ensure that these numbers are replaced in order to meet the demand we have currently, but also that year on year we increase the number of Local Authority foster carers in Gwynedd in order to meet the future demands of children who are Looked After. A lack of Local Authority foster carers can lead to an increased use of Independent Fostering Agency placements at additional costs to the Council. The placements offered by the independent agencies are also more likely to be out of county which creates additional pressures, complexity and costs in relation to staff time and expenses.

### **3. Gwynedd Fostering Service**

The main priorities of Gwynedd's Fostering Service are as follows:

- To provide any child who cannot live with their family, or requires regular respite or shared care to do so, a local foster family which can meet their needs with regard to rehabilitation (where appropriate), stability, security and attachment.
- To meet the needs of looked after children and young people and support the achievement of outcomes as detailed in their care plans.
- To increase the number of registered foster carers.
- Ensure good matching and promote placement stability.
- To increase the proportion of Looked After Children in internal fostering placements.
- To ensure foster carers receive the support they need when they need it.
- To ensure effective training and development for foster carers.
- To actively seek the views and opinions of young people and carers when planning and reviewing services.

#### *Connected Foster Care*

On a national and local level connected persons fostering provision has seen a net growth year after year. Connected persons foster carers are usually related to the child and when a child needs to become looked after, consideration is always given first of all to placing with a relative or friend. Maintaining these relationships and providing suitable support is therefore a crucial priority for the fostering service in planning its work.

This is recognised under the National Fostering Framework and a Connected Carer Good Practice Guide published. This has been fully implemented in Gwynedd. In order to focus on the different needs of connected foster carers, manage the assessment process and provide support, the Fostering Team in Gwynedd has been restructured, with 4 Social Workers undertaking the bulk of this work under the guidance of a Practice Lead.

#### *Mainstream Foster Care*

Following the restructuring of the Fostering Team, 6 Social Workers under the guidance of a Practice Lead now manage the assessments and provide support as the Supervising Social Worker to mainstream foster carers. The priorities for these workers are to provide effective support to mainstream foster carers, assist in their Learning and development and to undertake assessments for new foster carers.

### *Recruitment*

On a National level mainstream fostering provision continues to report net loss in the total number of approved households. A key challenge for all Local Authority Fostering Services in Wales is to improve the number of enquiries and approval of new foster carers. The launch of Foster Wales in July 2021 was a significant development to raise the profile and awareness of the need for new foster carers across Wales.

For the first time there is a national brand for Local Authority Fostering Services, ensuring efficiencies of scale in relation to marketing and recruitment activity. Under the brand each local authority retains its own identity and a Regional Marketing Officer has been recruited. This officer is employed by Gwynedd and will have responsibility for fostering marketing for all six Local Authorities, including the development of a recruitment and marketing strategy, implementing local and regional recruitment campaigns, developing content for the websites and social media channels and leading on national recruitment and marketing priorities.

#### **4. Priorities for future development**

- Continue to host the Regional Development Manager post in Gwynedd
- Develop the role of the Marketing Officer to co-ordinating national and local foster care marketing and recruitment
- Embedding and using the fostering National Performance Management framework to monitor local Delivery and assist future planning of the service
- To develop the national retention initiatives such as the National Commitment to foster carers.
- Further develop the Learning and Development framework in Gwynedd
- Continuing to contribute to the work in respect of harmonisation of foster carer payments
- Promoting best practice standards and quality improvement across the sector
- A Regional Needs Analysis has already been undertaken and this will be used to inform a regional and local Recruitment and Retention Strategy for 2022-25. The data collection for this task is underway and will be completed during April 2022.