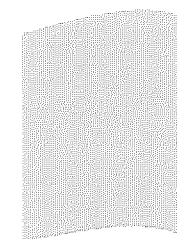


National Fostering Framework

Phase One Report

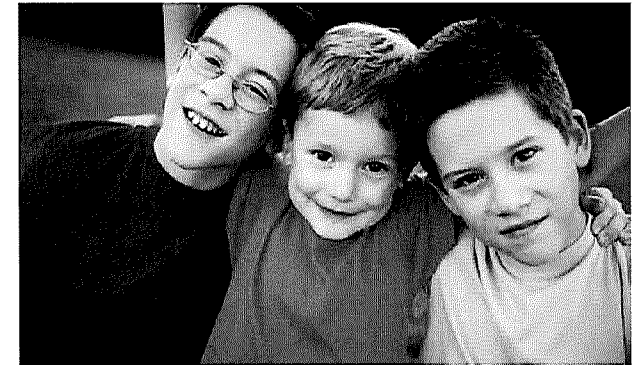
2015 – 2016



National
Fostering
Framework
Fframwaith
Maethu
Cenedlaethol

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Summary and Recommendations

We can demonstrate that foster care is hugely beneficial to children and young people living away from their families. Having good placements and quality foster carers is a fundamental safeguard for children who are looked after and the key to their future life chances.



We can demonstrate that foster care is hugely beneficial to children and young people living away from their families. Having good placements and quality foster carers is a fundamental safeguard for children who are looked after and the key to their future life chances. In many ways, this is public care at its best. The services often work to exceptional standards and with good examples of well-conceived improvements. Our mission is to ensure that all relevant children and young people are able to have good quality care in which they can develop and thrive, and reach their full potential. This care needs to be provided by a well-supported body of dedicated foster carers who can provide a safe, caring and nurturing family environment. There is mounting anxiety that we are not getting very much closer to fulfilling these goals consistently enough.

We need an urgent solution to:

- growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales;
- placement pressures and our current inability to match needs and placement options well enough; and
- difficulties in recruiting foster carers and in providing them with the range of skills and support needed for the complex and challenging work they undertake.

For example, research published by the Fostering Network in 2015 identified the need for an additional 550 foster care families in Wales. Over the last three years, the total number of general foster placements across the whole of Wales has declined year on year. In the same period, there has been a drop in the number of placements made with local authority foster carers and with Independent Providers. Given that the average age of a foster carer in Wales is 55, we will need to recruit more carers 'just to stand still' but local recruitment campaigns appear to have relatively limited impact. We know, of course, about considerable efforts to find more innovative ways of working, to tackle some of these major problems. However, too many good initiatives don't seem to have enough traction and do not get picked up uniformly across Wales, perhaps because they are not co-ordinated well enough or supported consistently during difficult times.

A clear consensus has emerged that further progress depends upon Wales developing a far more cogent and compelling strategic intent in relation to fostering services, to address growing concerns about their overall effectiveness and sustainability. Continuation of the status quo is likely to produce a situation characterised mostly by managed decline, especially when the operational and financial

context for looked after children services as a whole is likely to be very challenging for the foreseeable future. This is why many key stakeholders advocate strongly the need for greater collaboration in the delivery of fostering services across all sectors and why they see development of a National Fostering Framework as a major priority. In 2015, they came together to develop this concept, motivated by principles of co-production.

This collective enterprise became one of the four major key workstreams within the programme of the Strategic Steering Group set up by Welsh Government with the task of 'Improving Outcomes for Children'. The Group seeks to take forward the policy agenda mandated in the Social Services and Well-being Act, together with the Codes of Practice in Part 6 of the Act, which will have profound implications for the way services for looked after children are delivered.

A reference group for National Fostering Framework was established. One of its key tasks was to produce a 'First Thoughts' paper – which outlined the case for change, identified how we can achieve better partnership across the different sectors and presented initial ideas about what can be delivered most effectively at national, regional and local levels. In order to get an overall picture of the work programme to date, this paper is an important reference document.

There followed a wide-ranging consultation programme, partly based on getting a response to the paper-providing opportunities to engage with many people (individually and in groups). We organised:

- on-line surveys for foster carers and staff in all sectors, with leadership from the Fostering Network and local authorities;

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- workshops with young people, provided by Voices From Care;
- attendance at existing forums and meetings, to meet directly with carers and providers; and
- an all Wales event for local authority managers, staff and public sector partners. Leadership for this event was provided by AFA Cymru.

The outcomes of the National Fostering Framework work programme for 2015/16, including messages from the consultation exercises, have been brought together in this Phase One Report.

The case for change put forward in the First Thoughts paper was almost universally acknowledged, and agreement that a National Performance Framework should be established. This reflected both the scale of people's concerns and also the need to support effective change, tackling some major challenges which can be addressed only at a strategic level. We received a wealth of ideas, views and opinions about what sort of National Fostering Framework is required and its likely components: increased co-ordination; more sector-led improvement; a means of measuring, monitoring and improving performance and resource management; greater accountability and a search for economies of scale where appropriate. People told us that it should be comprehensive and aspirational, collaborative and inclusive - a means of ensuring that known concerns are addressed and of introducing greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity within the current system.

Above all, it was acknowledged that a National Fostering Framework is only a means to an end and that we need to pursue three common aims:

- i. guarantee that fostering is seen as an essential, quality service provided to individual children and for the benefit of society as a whole;
- ii. ensure that foster carers feel valued and supported by their fostering service and by all of us; and
- iii. enable everybody to co-operate effectively in helping children in foster care to achieve the best possible outcomes, including good health and high levels of educational attainment.

We must find ways of delivering a National Fostering Framework Phase 2. A real momentum is building which we cannot afford to let slip. The work programme for the next phase is likely to involve developing a clear set of proposals and an outline implementation plan for what a National Performance Framework should look like, the structures and mechanisms and resources required to establish it. The proposals will need to consider which aspects of the service are best delivered on national, regional and local levels. This will build on the priority areas of action set out at the end of this Report.

The work will involve:

- Developing an agreed framework for allocating responsibilities at a national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures (learning from the approach used in establishing the National Adoption Service)

- Creating a resource management and performance framework
- Establishing a Welsh identity for Foster Care, a national approach to marketing and use of social media
- Developing a national policy framework for foster care, to include a structure for training for foster carers
- Beginning a project to bring about greater consistency and transparency in the fees and allowances carers receive
- Addressing the issues raised in the initial scoping paper on Kinship Foster Care
- Producing strategies for commissioning placements between local authorities, with the independent sector (commercial providers) and independent providers (third sector).

If developing a National Fostering Framework is to improve outcomes for children and young people and support for foster carers, we must engage children and young people, foster carers, staff in the independent and third sector, and local authority staff and their public service partners in the work programme for Phase Two. Consideration must be given as to how this can best be achieved. Above all, principal decision-makers and leaders need to decide whether they are willing to commit to establishing a National Framework as the best means of responding to the concerns and aspirations expressed in a very unified way by the wide range of stakeholders who took part in the consultation exercises.

Summary and recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
1. 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.	Support for a National Fostering Framework was expressed by all key stakeholders during the consultation programme, with consistent views emerging about what elements of the fostering service could best be delivered on a national, regional and local basis.	Year One
2. 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.	There is considerable concern about the way the current 'market' operates in practice. It is not generating the right number and types of placements, delivering best value for the investment of public resources. Part 2, Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being Act requires further consideration about the role social enterprises, co-operatives, user-led services and the third sector in delivering fostering services.	Year Two
3. Establish an all-Wales public service fostering collaborative, delivering services regionally and locally, incorporating all the relevant services directly provided by local authorities.	Local authority fostering services have lost ground over the last twenty years to the commercial sector. In achieving the correct balance between the sectors, it is important that local authority fostering services are as well-equipped as possible to meet the needs of children for local, publicly managed placements.	Year Three

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
4. Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers.	A strong message coming from the consultation programme from foster carers and staff was the need to have more common policies across Wales. The training of foster carers, post approval and the support to carers were issues frequently mentioned.	Year Two
5. 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).	The work in Phase One provided clear evidence about how little is known regarding the performance and resourcing of fostering services across Wales and that what we do know is fragmented. Work on a performance and resourcing framework is considered essential to maximise the opportunities presented by the implementation of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS).	Year One
6. 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.	The need to have an all-Wales identity for fostering was a very strong message from local authority staff and others during the consultation programme. This was seen as a key mechanism for improving the ability to communicate well with current foster carers and children and to encourage recruitment and retention.	Year One

Summary and recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
7. 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.	The issues surrounding kinship foster care were very strong messages emerging from the consultation programme. Inconsistent use of kinship foster and a variety of practice approaches were identified through the work in Phase One. An issues paper was prepared, identifying the benefits that could be gained from developing a more national approach.	Year One
8. Develop national arrangements for commissioning all placements, regardless of sector but building on the work of the 4Cs.	Limited progress has been made in matching on an all-Wales basis, placement needs and the options available, partly because we have yet to develop appropriate tools for commissioning.	Year One

Recommendations	Evidence	Delivery
9. Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.	The payment of foster care allowances and fees was identified by foster carers and staff as a key issue during the consultation programme. The need for greater consistency and transparency were seen as key issues. It was recognised this will present particular challenges but one that should not be ignored.	Year Three
10. 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.	There were many examples of children in foster care achieving good outcomes as the result of positive family experiences in combination with help from social services, education, health, housing and other professionals. However, young people and foster carers expressed strong concerns were concerned about inconsistent and inadequate support.	Year One