

Fostering Recruitment Strategy

Background and Aims

In 2015, The Fostering Network published its report detailing the statistics of children in care.

On any one day there are approximately 63,000 children who are living in foster care and there are almost 52,500 foster families in the UK. The Fostering Network estimates that UK fostering services need to recruit a further 8,370 foster families in the next 12 months. Some children will return home or move to live with a member of their wider family, and approximately 6000 children in the UK are awaiting adoption, but many will live with foster families throughout their childhoods, which is why it is so important to find the right family for these children, and find families who can offer permanence and stability.

In Wales, there are approximately 4,405 children were living in care and approximately 3,650 foster families. It is estimated that a further 550 foster families are needed in Wales in 2016, and that there is a particular shortage of foster carers for older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities.

The aim of this document is to identify the profile of Looked After Children and Foster Carers in Neath Port Talbot and will consider the key issues which need to be addressed to have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced carers within this Local Authority.

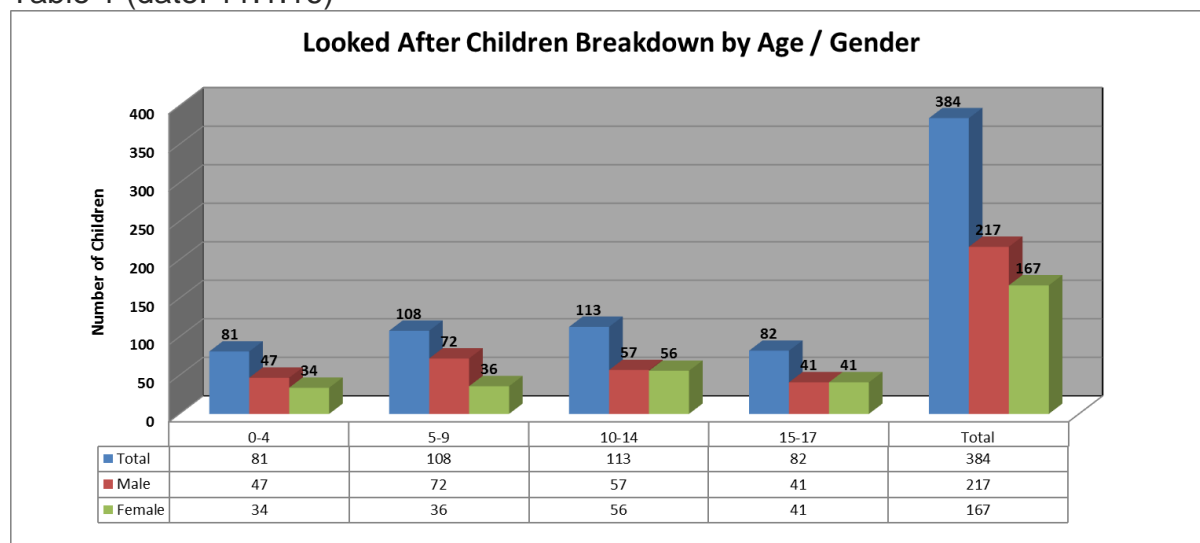
Who are our Looked after Children

For the purpose of this strategy, we have concentrated on children who are living with NPT Foster Carers, Independent Carers and those in residential placements.

The remaining children were living with family members, parents in independent living or in pre adoption placements.

NPT had experienced a significant rise in the number of children becoming looked after looked after between 2010 and 2013. Following significant improvements in practice and workforce stability the numbers of Looked After Children are reducing, however NPT continues to have the highest percentage of Looked After Children per population in Wales.

Table 1 (date: 11.1.16)



KEY ISSUE	The reduction in numbers of children accommodated is moving in the right direction but needs to be maintained and continue in order for NPT to reduce its Looked After Children population.
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Where are our Looked After Children living

Whenever it is considered necessary for a child to become looked after, the first consideration will always be to place that child with a Neath Port Talbot carer. When it is not possible to place a child with NPT foster carers, it is sometimes necessary to commission a placement from an Independent Fostering Agency.

Children are placed with Independent Foster Carers for a variety of reasons. Sometimes an independent placement is needed when no suitable match is available with an NPT foster either due to the child's needs, the needs of other young people already in the foster placement, the skills of the foster carers or the need to keep a sibling group together.

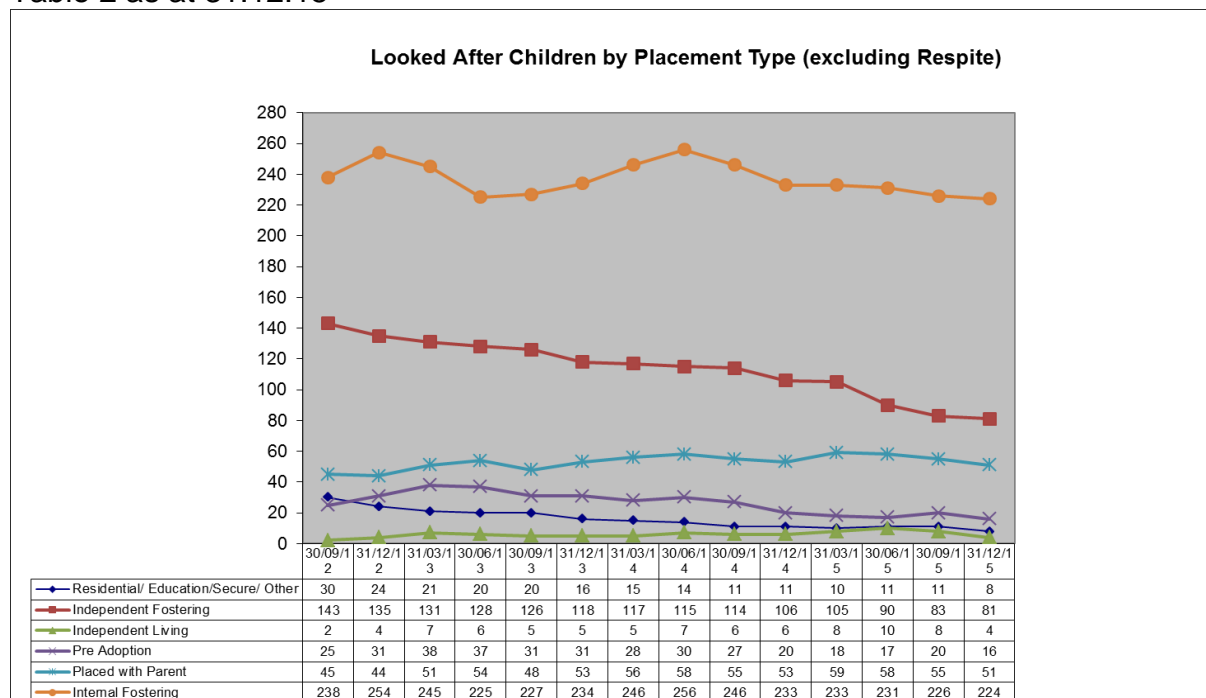
The key areas highlighted for why young people are placed in an independent placement are:

- Children with disabilities
- Sibling groups
- Young people with challenging behaviours
- Children who were identified as needing a long term placement
- Parent and baby placements
- Young people who have experienced placement breakdown/s with in- house carers

There are, and will continue to be a cohort of young people who will need to be placed in Independent placements due to having specialist needs which require carers who have specific skills or training (such as children with complex medical needs/disabilities) or children who need to be placed outside of NPT for their welfare. There are also cohorts of children who have been placed with independent foster carers and are in established placements where they have become integrated into the foster family. Moving these children would not be appropriate as it would not be in their welfare; therefore, they remain with the independent foster carers.

At the 31st December 2015 there were 81 children placed in independent fostering placements and 8 in residential placements.

Table 2 as at 31.12.15



The use of IFA's has a number of consequences: IFA's may not be located within the Local Authority and may be out of County, which means that children may have to move out of the NPT area affecting their access to their local communities that they are familiar with and sometimes their contact with their family and friends. A move out of the area can often also mean a change in education or health providers.

The cost of an IFA placement is double the cost of a placement with an NPT foster carer due largely to the agency costs involved. An average foster placement with an IFA costs £40,000 per year, whereas an average foster placement with an NPT carer costs £20,000 per year.

The table below shows that the number of children under 10 placed in independent placements has reduced significantly in the last 5 years, however while there has

been a slight reduction in the number of children who are over the age of 11 placed in independent placements this number has tended to fluctuate and has not seen a significant fall.

NPT Fostering has been able to continue to accommodate a stable number of children over the age of 11 with its own NPT foster carers, but it has not been able to tilt the balance to increase this number in order to be able to reduce the number of children over the age of 11 in independent placements.

Table 3

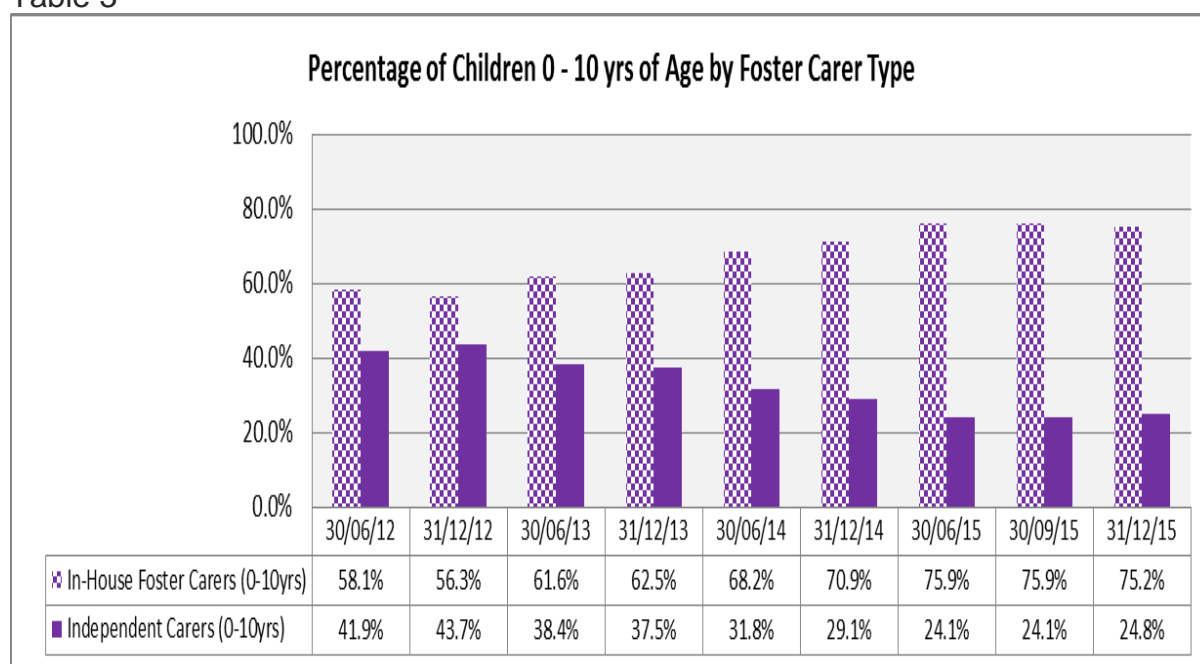
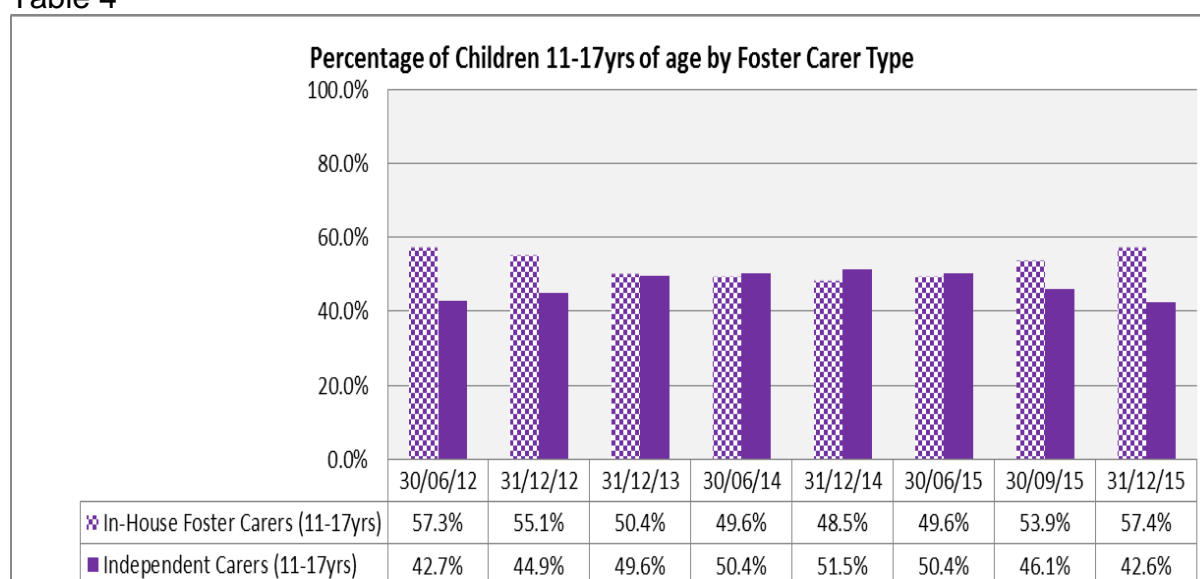


Table 4



KEY ISSUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There needs to be a continuation in the reduction of children
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	<p>placed with IFA carers as the overall numbers remain high, particularly for children over the age of 11 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the number of children placed in IFA's is key to reducing expenditure and improving outcomes for young people. More local placements are needed with NPT foster carers. • We need to increase the number of NPT foster carers who can offer a placement for children over the age of 11 years in order to reduce the high number placed with IFA's.
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Stability of placements

In a report published in June 2015, The Fostering Network revealed its findings of a survey of 1600 children in care:

25% of fostered teenagers are living with at least their fourth family in care
 17% of fostered teenagers are living with at least their fifth family in care
 and 5% of fostered teenagers are living with least their 10th family in care

The findings highlight the need to find more people who are willing and able to foster teenagers. There is also a real need for more foster families to offer homes to siblings and disabled children.

The survey also found that almost 1 in 3 (29%) of children aged 5 to 10 are currently living with at least their third family in care, with one in five (18%) living with at least their fourth family in care.

Being moved from home to home can have a hugely detrimental effect on children's education, wellbeing and ability to make and maintain relationships. Not being able to find the right foster carer also means that children too often have to live a long way from family, friends and school and are split up from their brothers and sisters.

The figures relating to placement stability in NPT show that overall children do experience placement stability, but we know that those children who have 3 or more placements are young people who have particularly challenging needs and are more likely to be young people over the age of 11.

Table 5

	31.03.13	31.03.14	31.3.15
Number of children who have had 3 or more placements in a year	44 out of 493	30 out of 467	30 out of 434
Percentage	8.9%	6.4%	6.9%

In 2014/15 the highest number of placement moves experienced were by 2 young people, one of whom had 6 placement moves and the other had 7. Both of these young people displayed challenging and complex behaviours including being at risk

of sexual exploitation, absconding behaviours, self-harm, and mental health problems. These complex behaviours led to a move from in house placement to independent placement to residential care, and demonstrates that being able to provide the right levels of support to out NPT carers is vital in being able to maintain young people in a family environment.

KEY ISSUE	Skilled carers are needed to maintain young people in foster placements with Neath Port Talbot Carers, and support services are needed for those children who have the most challenging behaviours.
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Who are our foster carers

NPT has a stable and committed group of foster carers; however over the past few years the recruitment of new foster carers has not been able to outnumber the number of foster carers who have deregistered. Therefore, the overall number of placements available and the range of placement types has not significantly changed to meet the needs of the service.

Foster carers in NPT leave the service for a number of reasons:

- Natural retirement due to the carers age/stage of life
- A change in personal circumstances
- Following a substantiated allegation in relation to their care of children

The challenge of recruiting foster carers with a range of skills is not unique to NPT and is a reflection of the national deficit. NPT Fostering Service is creative in its recruitment activities.

NPT has a small cohort of foster carers who are paid at an enhanced rate under the Foster Plus Scheme. These carers have been assessed as having the skills to care for young people who present significantly challenging behaviours who would otherwise be placed in residential care, or young people who have returned from residential care back into a foster placement. There are also a small number of carers who are approved as being skilled to support parent and baby placements.

Table 6

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of enquiries	94	78	64
Number of initial visits	54	77	63
Number attending training	17	28	28
Number of carers approved*	20	25	9
Total number of foster carers	137	148	139
Total number of places available	271	277	257

Number of children placed with NPT carers	169	172	167
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***NB applications made in one year may not be approved until the following year. i.e. if someone attends training in January 2014 their approval is unlikely to take place until 2015/16.**

The table above shows that of the number of foster placements available in 2014/15 with NPT carers, approximately 35% were vacant. Based on figures alone it would appear that the number of vacancies should be able to meet the demand for children needing to be accommodated, and resolve the issue of children being placed with IFA placements. However, the majority of vacancies that are available are for children under the age of 10, and nearly half of these again are for children under the age of 5, the age group where the demand for placements is the lowest.

Number of Vacancies for children under 10 = 31 (of these 31, 15 vacancies are for children aged 0-5)

Number of vacancies for children over 11 = 15 (of these 15, 11 are not available due to matching issues with the other children placed or carers own children)

The journey to approval

The number of applicants enquiring about fostering has dropped over the past 3 years. In 2012/13 there was a high dropout rate from initial enquiry to the initial visit. As a result, changes were made to the way that initial enquiries were dealt with and all potential applicants are now visited at home, rather than the applicants getting an information pack then having to contact the team again to arrange a visit. This has proved successful in improving the number of enquiries that proceed to initial visit.

Only 36% of people making enquiries in 2013/14, and 44% in 2014/15 went on to attend training. The main reported reasons cited for why people drop out after the initial visit are as follows:

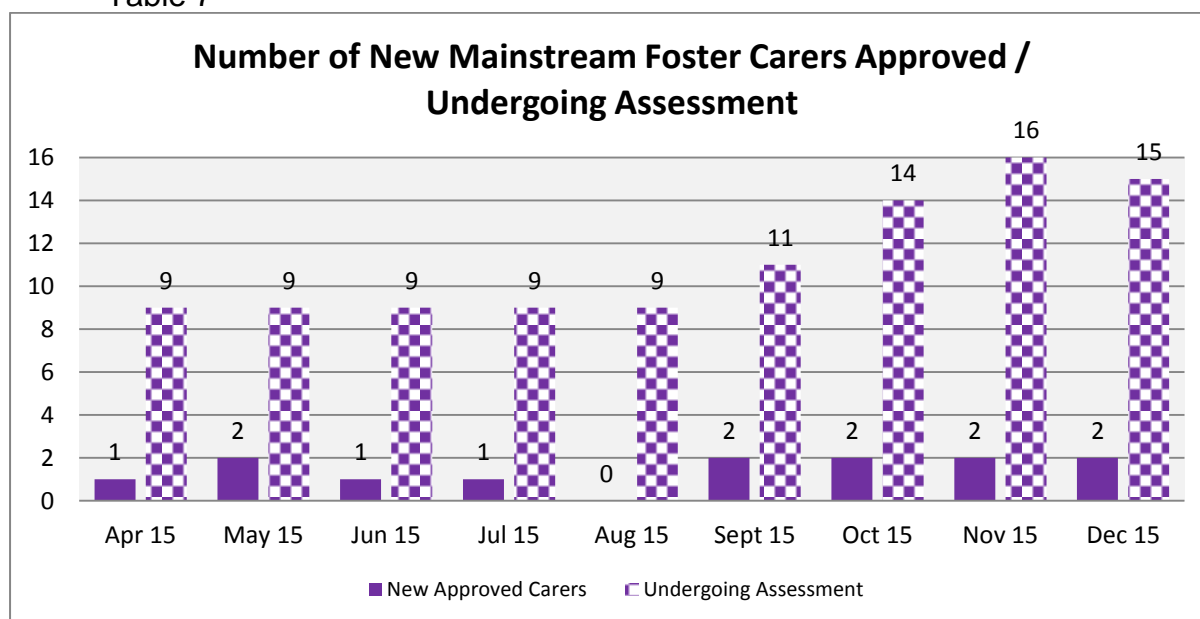
- Concerns about the impact of fostering on their family and children
- Financial issues
- Taking forward the application with another agency
- Taking up full time employment
- Health reasons
- Family commitments
- Criminal convictions which would impact on the application

Following the initial visit applicants are invited to attend pre-approval training. Attendance at training is a requirement for all applicants wishing to be assessed. The average time applicants have to wait to attend training is 2 months. This figure may be influenced by carers choosing to defer to a later session due to their personal commitments.

During the training and assessment stage a further number of applicants are either counselled out or withdraw for the following reasons:

- Financial issues, including the issue that some neighbouring fostering services offer a retainer when a carer has a vacancy
- Concerns about the levels of support the applicants would require
- Concerns with applicants' presentation in the training
- Undisclosed DBS conviction impacting on the assessment
- Couples where one partner was not committed to fostering

Table 7



KEY ISSUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The profile of the existing foster carers needs to change to meet the demand on the service. Fewer placements are needed for children under 10 and there needs to be an increase in the placements available for children aged 11 plus. • Existing foster carers need to be supported to explore whether they have the skills to care for older children. • Although 98% of initial enquiries led to an initial visit only 44% of initial visits led to the applicant attending training. • Changes are needed to the way the financial support offered is marketed to ensure that this is not a factor preventing applicants from approaching the service. The financial support available needs to be able to compete in the Local market. • Payments for carers looking after teenagers in NPT are lower than the payments offered by other Local Authorities and Independent fostering agencies.
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Support needs and access to services

While finance is important and having the right finance package is essential it isn't the sole barrier to recruiting new foster carers.

The key to successful foster placements is having a range of support services for children, young people and foster families. When foster carers are considering becoming foster carers they want to know the support that is available to them and the children they care for.

Training programme

The service provides a comprehensive training programme for newly approved and experienced foster carers. Feedback from carers indicates that they value training courses where they can train alongside Social Workers and that there is a joint approach to working with Looked After Children.

The training programme is reviewed annually and is updated to include new research and development and can be tailored to the individual needs of carers and young people. The Fostering Service is participating in the Confidence In Care training programme for all foster carers which is being delivered through the Fostering Network.

Professional carers/qualification

Carers who wish to further develop their skills can apply to participate in the Diploma in Child Care. Currently the Diploma allows carers to receive an additional payment level, but has no additional attached responsibilities. There is the potential to consider the development of additional opportunities for skilled carers such as mentoring other carers.

The development of skills based approach to fostering will assist in developing the way the service is able to meet the needs of children with more complex needs.

Support Services

Wherever possible we would want children who are looked after to access mainstream services within their own communities. Some Looked After Children who have a specific diagnosis will be able to access support services through CAMHS; however in the main it is difficult to access a service where children are not assessed with a diagnosed mental health disorder and their primary difficulty is considered to be an emotional difficulty often linked to early trauma or attachment difficulties.

What additional services are required

There are occasions where additional support is required to:

- Support a child with their experiences
- Help to maintain a placement

- Support children to return home

It is important that any support required is based on a thorough assessment to ensure that the needs are understood, and the right support is identified. Providing the right support to achieve stability is essential in achieving positive outcomes for children and fostering families.

Managing challenging behaviours is often the key factor in a foster carer being able to accept a placement of a young person or maintain a placement. The carers ability to understand behaviours and cope better with behaviour is often more successful than an approach which deals with behaviour modification.

Having access to the right professionals to assist with behaviour management is important and the ability for the support to not only focus on the needs of the Looked After Child but to consider a family approach to behaviour change. It is recognised that in addition to social work supervision, the impact of clinical supervision for foster placements is an effective method of supporting children and young people.

There is a move across Local Authorities to recognise the importance of clinical supervision of carers, with many fostering services developing a partnership with a psychologist either through collaborative or commissioned arrangements or through developing links with local CAMHS services.

A key feature in recruiting carers who are able to offer a placement for children with complex needs is being able to offer a comprehensive package of support. The fostering team have been trained to support foster carers in managing attachment difficulties, secondary trauma, and supporting fostering families in managing behaviours. The additional support of clinical supervision would have a significant impact on improving outcomes and supporting stability for young people, and preventing placement breakdown, which can often result in young people moving from placement to placement, and to independent provisions.

KEY ISSUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration needs to be given to how support services can be developed either through the existing Family Support Services strategy, or through the development of new collaborative working arrangements in order to provide a clinical supervision to foster placements for children with complex needs • The inability to access support from CAMHS for Looked After Children with unassessed needs or emotional, attachment and behavioural difficulties is a major difficulty in getting the right type of support to maintain placements and achieve positive outcomes. • Consideration to be given to develop a mentoring service for carers using experienced carers and the support of professionals.
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Financial Support

The National Minimum Standards for foster carer payments sets the benchmark for the payments that should be made to foster carers.

While we would not wish financial remuneration to be a key motivator for people considering becoming foster carers, the way in which financial packages are designed can often be a driving factor behind a successful recruitment campaign. For many families, pursuing fostering as a career comes with anxieties around financial stability. One of the identified factors for applicants withdrawing is the issue of finance.

A review of the Fostering Finance Policy is required to ensure that the payments that are made are competitive within the local market, but are also reflective of the tasks required of the carers. This will ensure that the service is in a strong place to attract those carers who are able to meet the needs of children who we currently have difficulty finding placements for.

A comparison has been made with the rates of payments as set by the National Minimum fostering allowances, the NPT rates and the comparative payments as made by neighbouring Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies.

Name of Local Authority or Fostering Agency	Max payment for 11 – 15 year olds per week
Neath Port Talbot	£298.12
Swansea	£339.99
Bridgend	£366.99
Cardiff	£357.64
TACT fostering	£378.00
NFA	£366
Fostering Outcomes	£433

What the data shows is that NPT provides a competitive payment rate for children 0-5, 5-10 and for young people with complex needs and for mother and baby placements.

Where the payments show a marked difference is in the payments that are made to young people aged 11 plus. This forms a contributory factor in NPT's ability to successfully recruit foster carers for teenagers, resulting in them being over represented in our independent foster placements.

The profile of foster carers in NPT has changed with the number of foster carers under the age of 40 increasing. With this change in profile comes two significant features:

- Younger foster carers means that they are more likely to be considering fostering as a career, and applicants will often be considering fostering as their 'employment'. What this means is that there is more of an impact for

foster carers when they do not have a foster child placed with them, as during these times they do not receive a foster carer fee. Some fostering providers now provide a retainer for a time limited period in order to ensure that the foster carers ability to be available is not compromised by their need to seek additional employment at times when they do not have any children placed with them. The use of retainers is an attractive addition to applicants when considering which agency to foster with. NPT currently only provides a retainer to its Foster Plus carers/complex needs carers

KEY ISSUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The payments made to NPT foster carers needs to be able to compete with the local market in order to recruit carers to the service. • The payment needs to reflect the skills of the foster carers and should give consideration to the payment of a retainer for carers who are available to care for children aged 11 plus in order to support the recruitment to this age group, and reduce the use of IFA placements.
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Summary

The Looked After Children’s Strategy was implemented in January 2015.

The number of Looked After Children has decreased over the past 18 months in line with the targets set out in the Looked after Children’s Strategy and the Forward Financial Plan, with the actual number of LAC reducing from 467 on 30th March 2014 to 387 by 21st December 2015. Further work is required to ensure that the targets as set out below continue to be achieved and surpassed.

Table 8

Financial year	Projected Number of LAC	Reduction	Rate of LAC per 10,000 population
2013/14	467 (actual)		168
2014/15	441	-26	158
2015/16	411	-30	148
2016/17	371	-40	133
2017/18	345	-26	124

The Looked After Children’s Strategy set out a number of ways in which the reduction of Looked After Children would be achieved.

By achieving the reduction in the number of LAC within this period the Strategy was able to support achieving the £700,000 saving required of Children and Young People's Services within 2014/15 financial year.

The Family Support Strategy introduced new opportunities for how commissioned services could support Looked After Children. The Rapid Response Service has successfully intervened in placements where young people were facing a placement breakdown, and services provided by Action for Children have been integral to supporting young people to be rehabilitated home to their families. The Family Group Conferencing Service was initially not aimed at children who were looked after, but was able to be responsive to the service need and change its remit to offer support where children were returning from foster carer to their families.

The Accommodation Panel has been successful in ensuring that only children who need to be accommodated enter the Looked After Children's System. This will be further enhanced in January with the introduction of a resource panel, which will consider alternative supports which will further support children remaining within their families.

Permanency Panel continues to track and ensure that children who are in accommodation do not drift within the Care System and have a timely move to a permanent family without the need for statutory intervention whenever possible. In the last 12 months of the cases tracked by permanence panel:

- 12 Special Guardianship orders have been granted, with a further 17 being considered.
- 7 children who were looked after and living with their parents under Placement with Parents Regulations have had Care Orders revoked. There are currently 16 children subject to Care Orders where the plan is to support rehabilitation to parents or to revoke the Care Order.

There has been a reduction in the use of independent foster placements for children who are under 10, however the number of children 11 and over placed with independent carers has on the whole stayed static. It is now essential that this is re-balanced. The average cost of an IFA placement per year is £40,000 with an in house placement averaging £20,000. The more children that can be looked after by NPT foster carers, the greater the savings that can be made and better outcomes can be achieved with children who can remain within their local community.

NPT fostering has a vacancy rate of 35% within its available placements; however with the exception of a small handful of placements where careful matching is required, all of these placements are for children under the age of 10. We now need to increase the number of foster carers for children over the age of 11 to reduce the reliance on IFA placements.

While NPT offers a reasonably competitive financial support package to foster carers, the payments for NPT foster carers looking after children aged 11 – 16 are not comparative to other fostering providers, including neighbouring Local Authorities. NPT carers for this age range are being paid on average £50 less a week per placement. This needs to be addressed in order to attract new carers to look after children in this age range. In order to offset an increase in foster payments there will be a need to decrease the number of children in IFA placements by 9 in the next financial year.

A revised Fostering Marketing Strategy is required in order to support the need to recruit new foster carers into the service. The margin between the number of people expressing an interest in applying to NPT as carers and the numbers approved needs to be reduced. Applicants report that a key factor in deciding whether to foster with NPT or another fostering service is whether a retainer is available for times when they have no placement. This is something that needs to be considered as a means of increasing the number of placements that are available with NPT carers for children over the age of 11.

In addition to the existing supports available for young people and carers consideration is currently being given to exploring the use of clinical supervision, assessment and support for foster carers in order to support and maintain placements for children with challenging or complex needs.

Proposals for addressing the key issues identified within this strategy are addressed through the attached document (Appendix 1).