

Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service Quality of Care Report 2018/19

The Local Authority Fostering Services Regulations (Wales) 2018

Background

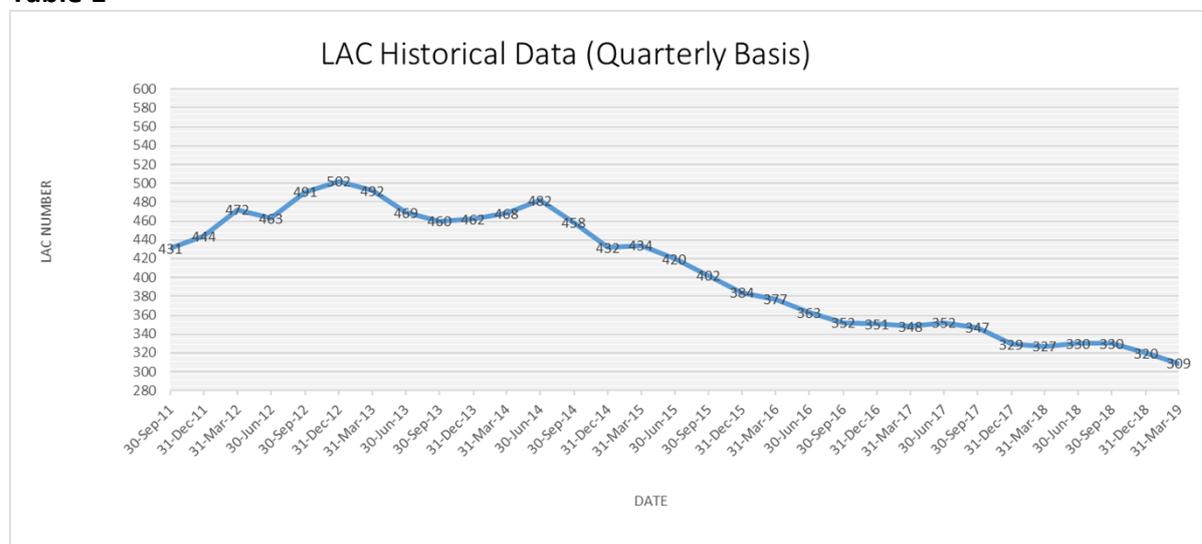
The purpose of this report is to report on the activity of the Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service in line with the requirements of Regulation 52 of The Local Authority Fostering Services Regulations (Wales) 2018 which came into effect on 29th April 2019. The Regulations set out the duty of the Fostering Service to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of the service.

Profile of Looked After children

Numbers of LAC

The numbers of children who are looked after by Neath Port Talbot has continued to reduce, and in 2018/19 the numbers fell from 327 to 309 children looked after by the Local Authority.

Table 1



Type of placements

The number of children who have required care in a residential provision has remained relatively stable. Neath Port Talbot does not have its own residential children's home but every effort is made to keep children and young people as close to home as possible. Of the 10 children who are in residential placements at 31.3.19, two are placed within the county

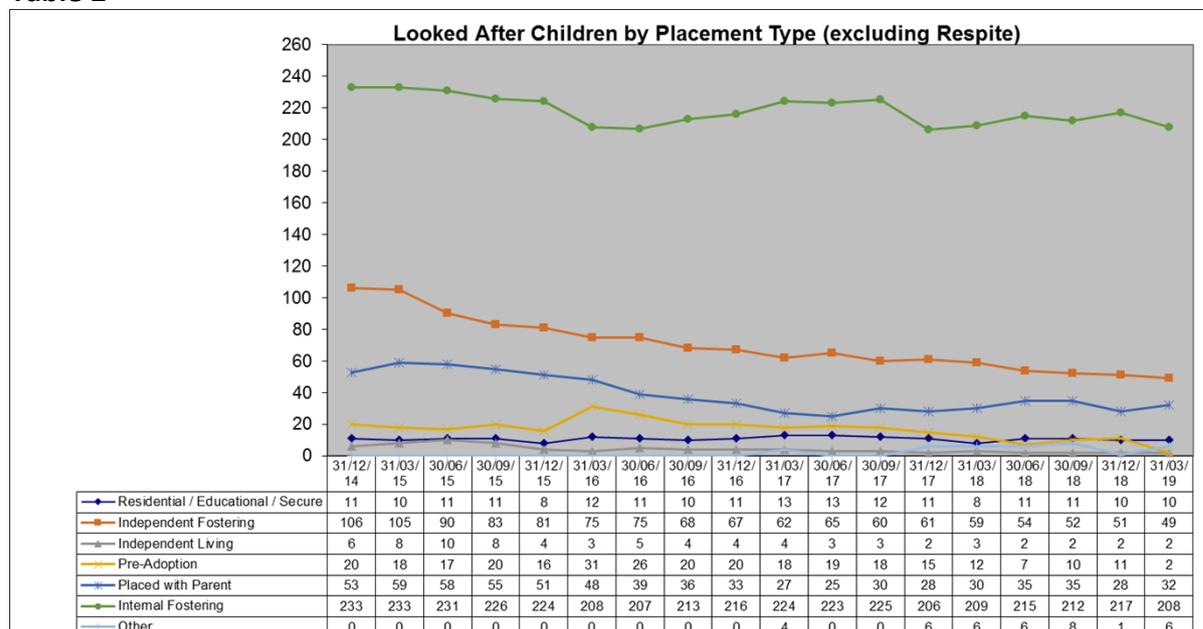
boundary. Of the remaining 8 children 7 are placed in South Wales with one young person placed outside of the Welsh Border.

The service has continued to see a reduction in the number of children placed with Independent Foster carers. 47 of the 49 children who are looked after by Independent foster carers have a plan of long term care and have been matched as being placed long term with their carers. The other two children are placed short term in parent and child placements. 5 children in Independent foster placements will become 18 years old in 2019/20. Another 4 will become 18 years old in 2020/21 and a further 12 will become 18 in 2022/2021. Therefore there will be a natural reduction in the next three years of 21 children from Independent foster placements.

In 2018/19 there were no new long term placements made with Independent foster carers. Of the small number of placements made to independent foster carers 1 children was placed short term in an emergency then was matched with Neath Port Talbot foster carers, and the others have been short term parent and child placements.

There are plans to step down several of the young people in residential placement into foster care which may result in a slight increase of Independent foster placements if no in house matches can be made.

Table 2



Placement stability

Table 3

	31.3.16	31.3.17	31.3.18	31.3.19
Number of children who have had 3 or more placements in a year	33 out of 377	17 out of 347	20 out of 327	23 out of 310
Percentage	8.7%	4.9%	6.1%	7.4%

23 children who were looked after in 2018/19 experiences 3 or more changes of placement. This is a slight increase from the previous year. The reasons for the placement changes include; bereavement or illness of the foster carer, change of plan, or short term placements while long term match is being identified. 3 of the children have experienced moves but have remained within the care of their families during this time. One child's move is a positive step down from residential to foster care.

A small number of children have experienced placement moves as a result of the ability to identify a suitable match to meet their complex needs. This is being addressed by the review of the Looked after children's strategy in 2019/20 which will include a review of support for foster carers to improve placement stability.

Stability of children in placement remains a priority for Neath Port Talbot as is maintaining children within the Neath Port Talbot area.

Reduction of Looked After Children

The Local Authority introduced a looked after children strategy in 2015 and this was updated in 2018. It is currently in the process of re writing the strategy as the service and legislation that supports the way the local authority work have changed considerably over the past 3 years. At the end of 2018/19 Welsh Government Ministers notified the Local Authority of the intention to visit individual services in order to discuss the need to reduce the looked after children population. Neath Port Talbot Children's Services has met with the Minister to discuss its position.

Neath Port Talbot is currently still continuing to see a steady and small reduction in looked after children. This has been achieved to date through enhancing early intervention and support services, making edge of care services responsive to need, thorough scrutiny and planning and by supporting permanency for children outside of the care system wherever it is possible to do so. The local authority is clear in its position that any reduction of looked after children needs to be safe, and if it is the only option to keep a child safe then they will be looked after.

As can be seen from the table below the number of children becoming looked after has been less than the number of children being discharged from care.

Table 4

2016 - 2017	2017 - 2019						TOTAL
	Q4 17/18 Jan - Mar	Q1 18/19 Apr - Jun	Q2 18/19 Jul - Sep	Q3 18/19 Oct - Dec	Q4 18/19 Jan - Mar		
ADMISSIONS (Excluding Respite)	14	37	15	18	13		83
DISCHARGES	19	34	15	26	26		101
TOTAL CHILDREN ON LAC REGISTER AS AT END OF QUARTER (EXCLUDING RESPITE)	327	330	330	322	309		

A new looked after children's strategy will be developed in 2019/20 and will take into consideration the current profile of looked after children and carers, the changing range of support services needed, developing family group conferencing to support families and support rehabilitation of looked after children and arrangements for placement with parents.

It is felt that there continues to be scope to further reduce the looked after population, but that this will be at a slower pace that has been achieved over the past few years.

As part of the strategy consideration will be given to how the fostering service can evolve to support children remaining with their families where it is safe to do so. Initial ideas include expanding the support break scheme and developing a parenting support scheme to work alongside parents in the community.

Foster carer Profile

Number of approved foster carers

Table 5

	31.3.15	31.3.16	31.3.17	31.3.18	31.3.19
Foster Carer	139	137	143	139	131
Foster Carer Plus	5	4	7	7	6
Relative Carer	56	42	54	53	48
Total	200	183	204	199	185

Number of Placements available

Table 6

	31.3.15	31.3.16	31.3.17	31.3.18	31.3.19
Foster Carer	250	232	237	227	212
Foster Carer Plus	6	6	11	11	10
Relative Carer	63	52	79	75	73
Total	309	290	327	313	295

Number of Enquiries to Fostering Service

Table 7

Period	Total household Enquiries
2018-2019	41
2017-2018	46
2016-2017	40
2015-2016	55
2014-2015	64

Number of new approvals

Table 8

Period	Total household Approvals Mainstream	Total household Approvals Family and Friends
2018-2019	13 (4 respite)	21
2017-2018	13 (5 respite)	23
2016-2017	12 (2 respite)	21
2015-2016	15 (6 respite)	10
2014-2015	16 (3 respite)	11

As shown in tables 5, 6 the number of approved foster carers and number of overall placements available has decreased in 2019/20. Due to the decreasing numbers of Looked after children the lower number of registered carers has not resulted in an increased use of Independent Foster Placements. However, a lower number of available placements does mean that there can be restrictions on placement choices for young people. Getting the matching right when children need to be looked after is important as it means that the child is more likely to have their needs met and there is a lower likelihood of a placement disrupting and the child needing to move.

Table 7 shows a corresponding decrease year on year on the number of enquiries for people interested in becoming fostering carers.

Table 8 shows the number of (mainstream) foster carers who have been approved year on year has remained fairly stable over the past 3 years and we have achieved our target to approve 10 carers a year. Despite the numbers of approvals the net gain has not increased. Therefore further work is needed to review the number of de-registrations and resignations and to analyse the current carer population to have a prediction of the numbers of carers who may leave the service over the next 3 years.

Marketing and Recruitment

The recruitment of foster carers remains a National, Regional and Local Priority.

The service has a dedicated marketing officer who ensures that the fostering service has a presence within the community through the year, in addition to ensuring that the service is represented at job fayres, community events and family activities. Leaflet drops and poster campaigns are part of the ongoing recruitment activity.

The service has continues to use social media as a platform to raise the profile of the service. The NPT fostering website is updated on a regular basis, and has received an increase in the number of visitors. The service has been supported by the corporate communication team.

The service made a decision to streamline its advertising campaigns in 2018/19. Instead of having a larger number of small advertising campaigns the focus was on reaching a larger audience with the use of radio advertising. A key priority of the Council is the development of resilient communities, and drawing on this theme the campaigns aimed to appeal to encouraging people to foster to support their local area and local children. Although the service competes with a number of other local fostering agencies in the radio advertisement there does appear to be early signs that the campaign is successful as several applicants have cited it as having being motivated to contact the service after hearing it.

The service has continued to ensure a good visual presence within the local community by advertising in family events; fun days and by undertaking targeted leaflet drops.

The service has been involved in the regional work of the National Fostering Framework considering the impact of National, Regional and Local advertising.

The service took part in the Fostering Network marketing research project and the findings of this were published in the Fostering Network 'motivations to foster' book in January 2019

The Service has had the support of its foster carers in recruitment campaigns and several carers have supported the service by writing articles for publication or appearing in video's talking about their experience of being a foster carer.

Support to Carers

Sufficiency and quality of staff

Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service provides recruitment, training, assessment, supervision and support to prospective foster carers including connected person carers. In addition the service provides a placement coordination service for the Local Authority.

The team benefits from having stable and competent management support. The majority of the staff in the service have been experienced front line child care practitioners prior to working in the fostering service. The team generally has low staff turnover which provides a consistency in support to carers and children. Over the past year the team has experienced a small number of temporary staff who have supported maternity and sickness absence, and a small number of natural retirements.

The team structure is as follows:

Table 9

Supervision and support team	Assessment and connected persons team
1 team manager	1 team Manager
1 Deputy Team Manager (placement coordinator)	1 Deputy Team Manager
1 Consultant social worker	
7 social workers	6 assessing/reviewing social workers
1 part time psychologist	3 x fostering support workers
1 therapeutic consultant social worker	
1 Play therapist	
4 Business support officers Inc. panel administrator	

Therapeutic support

As seen in the structure above, the service has developed a small therapeutic support team consisting of a psychologist, consultant social worker and play therapist. The team is able to deliver direct clinical therapeutic interventions to children in addition to offering consultation support to foster carers, social workers and other professionals with the aim of supporting a team around the child approach to understanding and meeting their needs.

Staff training

Staff in the fostering service have access to the Local Authority training programme which consists of core training and more specific themes. Included in the training that the staff have undertaken in 2018/19 are the following:

Table 10

Secure Base Model	Prevent	PACE
Transition work	Life story work framework	Equality and diversity

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence	Impact of domestic abuse on children	Fostering in a digital world
Outcomes training	Risk assessments	Attachment & Neuro-biology of Trauma

Pre-approval training for carers

All prospective applicants attend pre-approval training. 4 sessions are run per year jointly with Foster Swansea. 27 Prospective applicants (16 households) attended the training in 2018/19

Fostering Panel

Foster Panel has met on 19 occasions in 2018/19. The panel has had a change of Independent Chair in this year as the former chair's tenure had come to its end.

The membership of the fostering panel for 2018/2019 was as follows:

- Ms J Goodwin Social Services (Panel Advisor)
- Ms Artie Meakin Independent (Chairperson) until October 2018
- Ms Jenny McMillan Independent (Chairperson) from October 2018
- Ms S Prosser Independent (Vice-Chair)
- Dr P Barnes Medical Advisor
- Mr Neil Johnson Social Services (Social Worker)
- Ms Maria Stephens Social Services (Social Worker)
- Cllr Alan Lockyer Councillor
- Ms Hayley Roberts Independent
- Mr G Clifford Independent
- Ms Donna Hallett Independent

Financial support

Neath Port Talbot foster carers are paid child allowances in line with the Welsh Government Guidelines for the National Minimum payments for foster carers. The amount of payment is related to the age of the child and is payable for each child they are caring for.

Payments include pocket money and clothing allowance. In addition carers receive a holiday allowance, birthday or special celebration allowance and a Christmas or religious ceremony allowance.

In 2018/19 consultations took place with foster carers about the payment of holiday allowances. Historically, and at the request of foster carers Neath Port Talbot has paid the holiday allowance as a one off annual payment. Consultations have taken place to seek the views of carers on changing the holiday payment to a weekly allowance. While the foster carers unanimously wanted to retain the current payment arrangement of an annual payment they accepted that this needed to change to ensure that the system is equitable to all carers and that those carers providing short term placements are not missing out. The consultation is not finalised, but it is proposed that if any changes take place they will not happen until 2019/20.

Foster carer fees in Neath Port Talbot are based on the age of the child the carer looks after and the carers' approval, skill and qualification level. All foster carers are approved to care for children aged 0-18, but carers will state a matching preference which is based on their experience and fits with their family life.

Foster carer training

All foster carers (including connected person carers) are able to access the Local Authority training for staff. In addition they have a dedicated training officer and a training programme specifically tailored for them. The range of training in 2018/19 has included the following:

Table 11

Attachment and PACE	Attachment and family belonging	Attachment and caring sensitively
Contact, recording and safe care	Fostering changes programme	Understanding the system
Equality and diversity	Child development in teens	Substance misuse
Child development	Safer care	Self-harm
Baby massage	County Lines	Child Sexual exploitation
Safeguarding	Kinship attachment and PACE	First aid
Contact	Caring for siblings	Literacy skills
Numeracy Skills	Recording and reporting	Post approval training
Secure base model		

Advanced training and Diploma

We have a successful Foster Carer Training Programme in operation within Neath Port Talbot. The programme has several sections:-

- Main Training Programme (weekly training sessions “Training Tuesdays” – with each month comprising of a theme, such as attachment, core training, working with teens)
- Out of Hours Training Programme (Core training and topical sessions such as County Lines is delivered throughout the year through Saturday morning and twilight sessions)
- Diploma Training Programme (see below)
- Advanced Training Programme (open to carers who've completed all core training and the Level 3 Diploma. Courses are facilitated by Adult Learning and have included Child Psychology, Developing Self Awareness and An Introduction to Counselling. These are generally 10 week courses.)
- Family Friend Carers Training Programme (see below)
- Learn from Home (includes online learning)

Within the training programme we include City and County of Swansea's training calendar, this significantly increases the number of training sessions available to carers across both local authorities. This structure aims to minimise the barriers that exist preventing carers accessing training. Since operating this structure attendance figures have increased significantly.

All training is compliant with the learning outcomes identified within the National Fostering Framework -Post Approval Learning and Development Framework for Foster Carers.

Throughout the coming year the Training Officer is developing workshops to enable the Foster carers to complete the All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care. It is hoped the sessions will be attended by carers and their supervising social workers.

Annually carers are expected to attend at least 3 training sessions. Each year new titles are introduced into the training programme aiming to keep it fresh and interesting to long service foster carers. Examples for this year include Hidden Sentence, Bereavement, RSPCA –Breaking the Chains,

Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (children and Young People)

The Diploma Programme is delivered through a series of 18 workshops. It is open to those who've completed all their core training. Carers are registered to complete the Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Children and Young People) in cohorts. There is a current cohort of 7 Foster Carers completing their diploma qualification.

To date 68 carers who have achieved the Level 3 Diploma and 21 carers awaiting a place on the qualification.

Connected person training

All Family Friend Carers are welcomed on any part of the training programme. It is recognised that this group of carers have very specific needs in addition to those recognised in main stream carers. The Family Friend Carers Training Programme includes newly approved carers training, this comprises of information on changing roles within the family, attachment, safer caring etc. and the programme covers specific issues such as Managing Contact in Kinship Care.

Special Guardianship Carers

The assessment and support team within the fostering service play a key role in ensuring that the local authority supports Special Guardians. There are now 113 Special Guardians in Neath Port Talbot.

When a child who is the subject of a Special Guardianship Order has an active support plan the child is allocated a support worker from the looked after children's team. Those carers who receive financial support but have no additional support have an annual financial review by the fostering team.

A support group has been established for Special Guardians. Further work is planned in 2019/20 to ensure that we have sufficient support arrangements to maintain stable Special Guardianship placements.

Out of hours support

The fostering service operates an out of hours support service which is staffed by the managers and deputy managers in the team. The service compliments the Local Authority Emergency Duty Team support which is available out of hours, and provides telephone advice and assistance to carers. The service also supports placement coordination for the rare occasions where a new placement is needed out of hours.

Multi-Agency Placement Support Service (MAPSS)

MAPSS is a West Glamorgan regional support service which is led by Neath Port Talbot. The service provides a therapeutic approach to improving outcomes for looked after children. The aim is to promote the stability of placements by supporting carers, social workers, education staff and other professionals to understand a child's responses in the context of their experience. By providing relationship and attachment based therapeutic support to the team around the child the aim is to increase skills and resilience and increase placement stability. The service also provides therapeutic support directly to children.

Other specialist support

The service is also able to access support for children and young people from commissioned services such as TAIH and Better futures.

All looked after children are offered an advocate and can have access to an independent visitor.

Independent support for allegations against foster carers

All mainstream foster carers have membership of Fostering Network who provide counselling and legal advice via a telephone helpline and legal expenses cover. The provision of independent support is required by regulations. This can also be spot purchased for any carers not covered by this membership.

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

All applicants or existing carers who are either not recommended for approval/re-approval or have their approval status changed have the opportunity to challenge this decision through the Independent Mechanism process. One of the fostering team managers has been appointed as a professional member of the IRM panel (excluding any NPT cases that are referred)

Since the last report there has only been one referral to the IRM panel and the decision made by Neath Port Talbot was upheld.

Foster Care Association

The group have been proactive in trying to engage a wider audience of carers to participate. They meet regularly and have taken the opportunity to make connections with other associations across Wales. The group have organised a number of social and fundraising events and are keen to develop a peer mentoring role and keep in contact by a close social media account.

The fostering service continues to provide an annual financial contribution to the foster carers association, and in addition offers some administrative support.

E Care Scheme

The eCare project provides computer equipment and internet access to improve communication and sharing of information between carers, children, the fostering service and social workers.

The project has continued to run over a number of years and has supported the way in which information is communicated to foster carers including the development of a foster carers members section of the NPT website in which carers can access information on

policies and procedures, on call rota contact numbers and any consultation events that are happening.

Leisure Facilities

An agreement is in place with Celtic Leisure for foster carers, their own children and the children they look after and care leavers to have free use of Celtic Leisure facilities.

Letter Box Club

Neath Port Talbot Fostering continues to participate in the Letter Box Club, which is funded by Welsh Government in association with Book Trust Cymru. It focusses on improving the educational outlook of looked-after children aged 3-13, by providing them with a parcel of books, maths activities and stationery items once every month for six months from July to December.

Children and foster carers report extremely positive feedback about the scheme and Foster carers have reported increased engagement in reading from the children/young people who have been part of the scheme.

Support Groups

During recent years, the support groups have ranged from specific areas of need, such as Adoption/Moving On to inviting guest speakers along on topics requested by foster carers (e.g. internet safety). Our Men Who Care group continues to have regular attendees and offers guest speakers as and when requested.

This year, we are developing the groups; we have consulted with foster carers and they are in agreement that we need to change the focus of the general group and concentrate on carers' own 'well-being'. To date, the foster carers have set up a walking group, we are in discussions with a local well-being facility and are compiling a list of wellbeing groups that carers can access via their local leisure facilities (free using their Celtic Leisure Passes). MAPSS are also consulting with us on how they can provide support to the groups.

In addition to the Fostering Service organising support groups, the Foster Carers Association support each other via a monthly coffee morning/open session.

Engagement with carers and young people

Neath Port Talbot has a dedicated participation and engagement officer and towards the end of 2018/19 developed a small participation and engagement team. While the service has many activities for looked after children it is a key priority area for development in line with the Council's Children and Young People plan and the Children's Services Development Plan.

The Local Authority has a children in care youth council called Your Voice Matters (YOVO). The group meet regularly and are active in ensuring that children and young people who are in foster care are able to express their views and opinions and have their voices heard by decision makers. In 2018/19 YOVO worked closely with Swansea University's Observatory on Human Rights which is an initiative to ensure that the human rights of children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled. As part of their work the children

looked at their experienced of becoming looked after, and they have been able to feedback the information that they wished that they would have had when they first went to live with foster carers which included more information about why they needed to be in foster care and more information in advance about their carers.

As a result of the children's feedback the service is now going to undertake further work on the development of carer profiles and carer family books. While these started to be developed there is a need to ensure these are kept up to date and there is a mechanism in place to ensure that they are passed on to children prior to them becoming looked after. What fell out of this work was a need to also review the information that is provided to carers about children. While there is a good system in place to ensure that carers have information about the basic needs of children such as their health, development, family, and contact arrangements etc, often what is missing is the information the children would like the carers to know about them including such as their dislikes, hobbies and so on. Work on this will continue in 2018/19

Members of the YOVO group have been active in the recruitment of senior officers within the local authority and have had their own interview panel.

Neath Port Talbot has an established Quality and Performance Framework and as part of this the service holds regular thematic reviews. There have been a number of audits undertaken in respect of looked after children. In 2018/19 audits were undertaken on the quality of visits to looked after children, disruption meetings and placement moves for children.

The service currently collects the views of children and foster carers as part of their looked after children's review and the foster carers' annual review. While this information is reported to the review meeting or the fostering panel the collective data is not currently accumulated. Plans are in place for early 2018/19 to collate the data from the questionnaires and report on the thematic findings to highlight any strengths and areas for improvement.

Regular meetings are held between the fostering service managers and the foster carer association. The meetings are a positive way for the service to ensure that the voice of the foster carers is heard and that there is good two way communication.

Monitoring

The Fostering service has developed a range of performance management tools which assist in monitoring the quality of the service. These include reminder screens for staff to ensure that checks, reviews and visits are completed on time, as well as notifications for children's reviews.

In addition the service is able to retrieve data on the numbers of approved carers, placements, payments and training.

The Fostering Service completes the National Fostering Framework - performance and Resource Framework data set, and is currently in the process of streamlining and re-

designing the IT system to avoid duplication and to be better able to collate the data required for this framework as some data currently requires manual collection.

Complaints and allegations

2 complaints were made by connected person carers. Both were resolved at stage 1.

7 Professional abuse strategy meetings took place in respect of allegations made against Neath Port Talbot foster carers. Of these: 4 were unsubstantiated, 2 were substantiated (but one was subsequently overturned) and one investigation is ongoing.

No foster carers were deregistered as a result of the allegations.

Conclusion

The Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service has continued to work with the wider workforce in Children's Service to promote positive outcomes for children and young people, provide high quality placements and to support the safe reduction in the number of Looked after Children and children placed out of County.

The therapeutic service has continued to provide an added support to promoting the secure base model and the development of therapeutic foster carers.

The staff in the service have continued to provide a range of supports to foster carers through supervision and training and the service has continued to deliver a range of additional services to carers such as support groups and an out of hours service.

Next Steps

The fostering service has some creative and innovative ideas which will further enhance the stability of foster placements and successful outcomes for children and families and the continued safe reduction of looked after children.

These include ideas such as;

- The expansion of a support break service
- Development of a parentage support scheme to support parents in the community
- Development of a well-being programme to support foster carers
- Reviewing the current use of foster carer profiles and ensuring that each child/carer has the information they need about each other before a placement begins
- Analysing what children and young people tell us about their placement
- Improving engagement with foster carer and carers
- Continuing to be part of the implementation of the National Fostering Framework and the development of National and Regional initiatives
- The service needs to further develop its quality assurance and audit work and to take forward lessons learned and actions

In addition the fostering service will

- Review its marketing strategy in line with the National Fostering framework
- Along with the looked after children's team review the support arrangements for Special Guardians

- Review its policies and procedures (in collaboration with the West Glamorgan Region)
- Ensure compliance with the Fostering Services Regulations (Wales) 2018 Regulations and the The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018
- Review the number of carers who have left the service over the past 3 years.
- Analyse the information we know about our current carer population to consider any predications that can be made about carers who may leave the service I the next 3 years.

The Quality of Care Report will be reviewed in September 2019