

Carmarthenshire Children’s Services summary report and action plan in respect of Looked after Children subject to three or more placement moves.

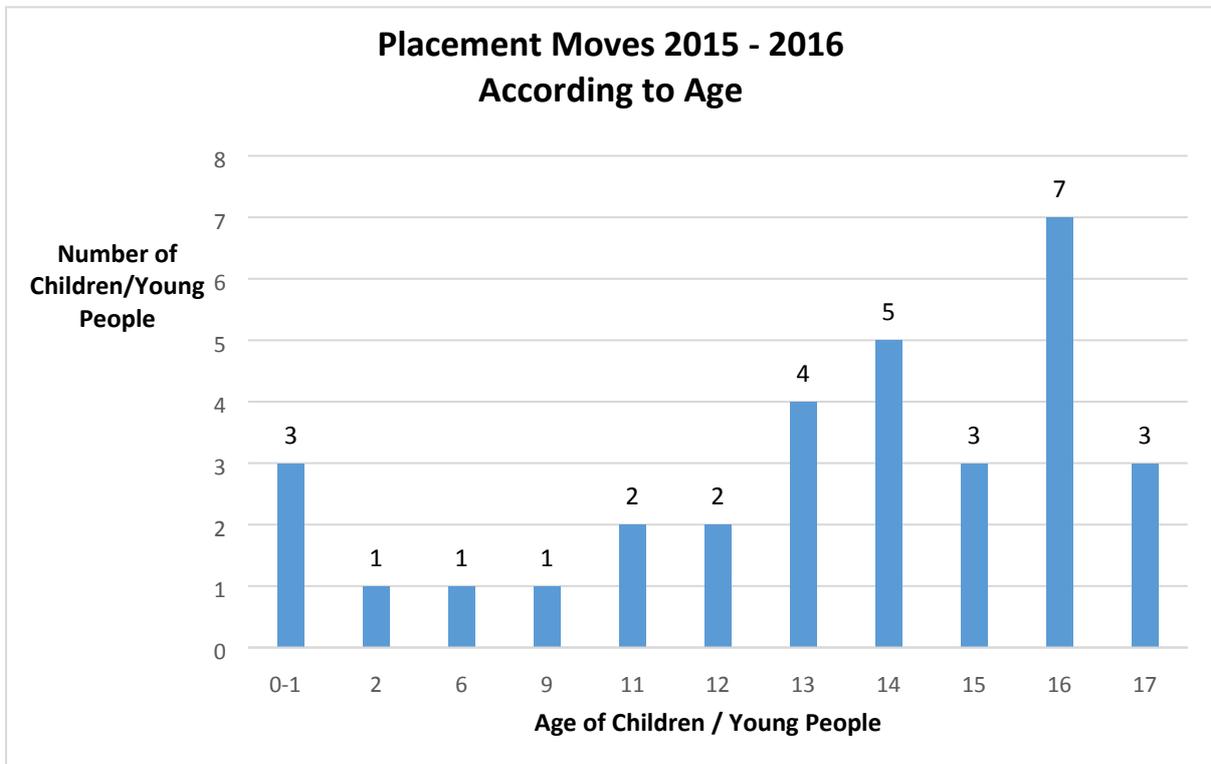
During 2015-2016 there were 32 children subject to three or more placement moves in Carmarthenshire. This represented 14% of the LAC population and was the highest proportion amongst all Welsh authorities. It is also fair to say that this has been an ongoing issue in the service.

However; it is equally important to stress that this is one indicator in respect of outcomes for children. In other indicators such as school stability and achievement; Carmarthenshire ranks as one of the best performing authorities in Wales and has consistently performed well.

This report presents a summary of information and an action plan to address the need for improvement and stability in placements for looked after children within Carmarthenshire.

Analysis of 2015/16:

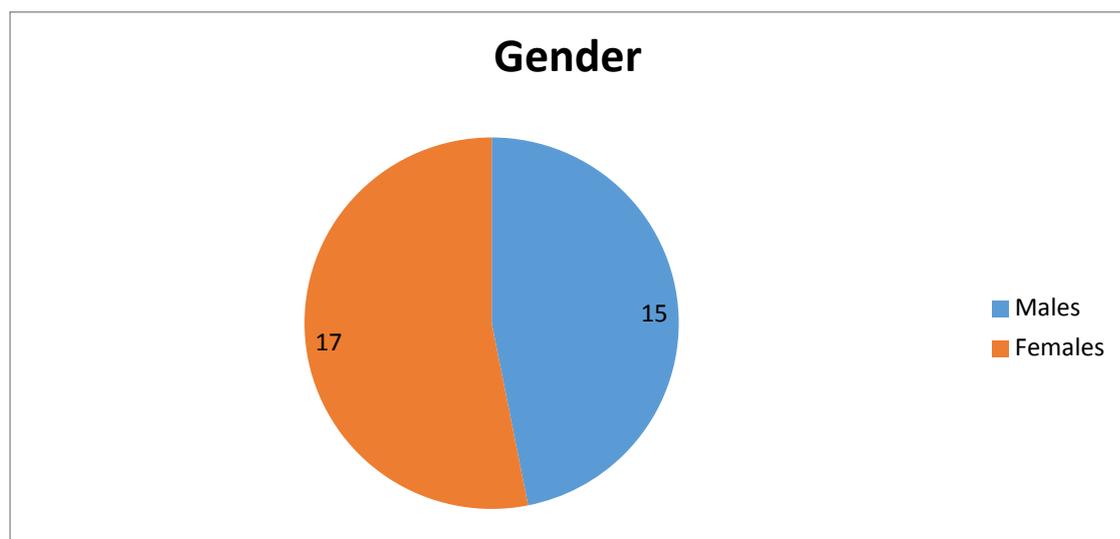
See following graphs for age and gender



Placement Moves 2015 – 2016 According to Age

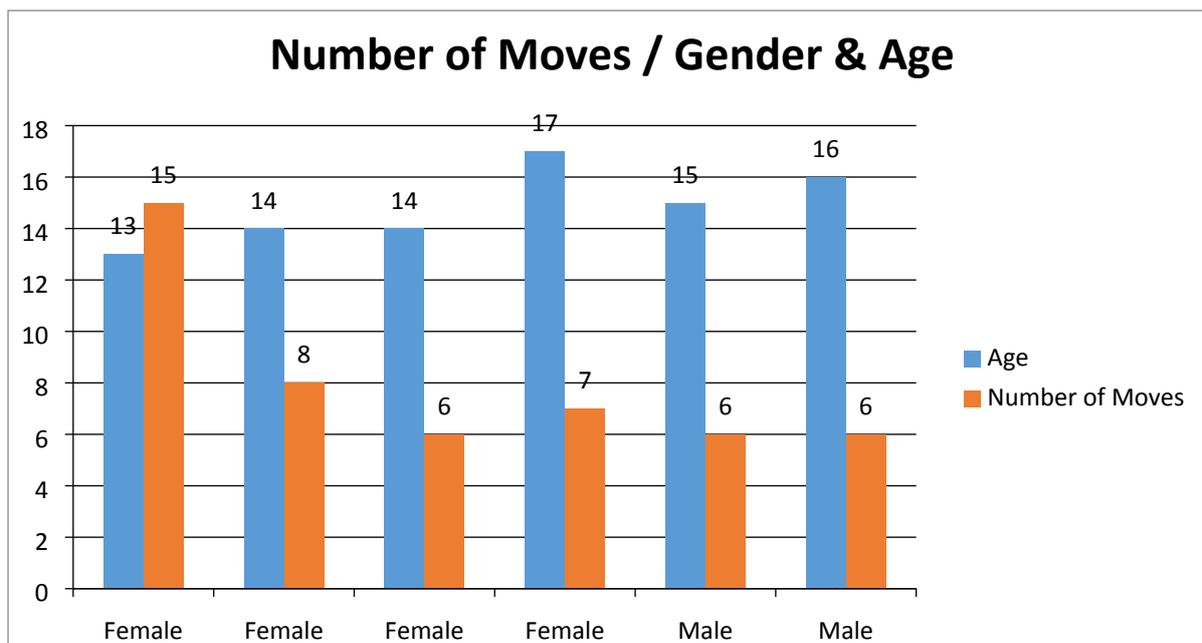
Number of Children / Young People	Age of Children/Young People
3	0-12 months
1	2 years
1	6 years
1	9 years
2	11 years
2	12 years
4	13 years
5	14 years
3	15 years
7	16 years
3	17 years

Gender : 15 were male and 17 were female.



The highest number of moves according to gender

- 1 female aged 13 years old experienced 15 moves
- 1 female aged 14 years old experienced 8 moves
- 2 females aged 14 experienced 6 moves
- 1 female aged 17 experienced 7 moves
- 2 males aged 15 and 16 experienced 6 moves each



The remaining 25 young people and children experienced 5 moves or less and out of this figure 13 children had 3 placement moves. Only 1 case relates to a sibling group of two children a brother and sister placed together in foster care. Both children were eventually placed with relative carers. In this case the placements broke down because the children wanted to be cared for by family members.

There were 3 cases relating to parent and child placements. One of these cases experienced 5 moves of a parent with her baby.

In summary the case highlighted that the placement was complex and highly challenging for foster carers to monitor on a 24 hour basis. The parents' behaviour was a contributing factor in the breakdown of 2 separate foster placements. Alongside these concerns was the foster carers' inability to have the skills to manage this appropriately and safely. The Local Authority was obliged to source and finance an Independent Parent and Child Placement through the court proceedings. The mother and baby in the interim had to move to a short term foster placement whilst an alternative placement was secured with an Independent Fostering Agency. The court ordered that the placement should be extended so the local authority had no available resources to provide a placement in house.

In the other case a young parent with her baby experienced 3 placement moves. The first move was due to the foster carer's ill health so a new

placement had to be sought. The mother eventually returned to live in the community with her daughter with extended family and social work support which resulted in a good outcome for the mother and child.

In the third case study three placement moves occurred as there was no suitable parent and baby placement available. The baby was discharged from hospital to a short term foster placement and then moved with their mother to a parent and baby placement. Following the completion of a parenting assessment the child returned home to live with her parents which was viewed as a successful outcome.

The care planning highlighted in these 3 case studies demonstrates a need to recruit and retain skilled foster carers for parent and baby placements when they are required. Parent and baby placements should only be sought when alternative arrangements cannot be secured with the extended family or supporting a parent to manage safely in the community. In Carmarthenshire during 2015-16 3 providers for parent and baby placements retired and we currently have 3 providers across Carmarthenshire.

The overall findings in respect of the data concludes that the majority of more than 3 placement moves is in children aged 11 years and over. In summary these cases represent many young people who have experienced trauma and neglect in their early family life and struggle with attachment issues. Some of the children require a more therapeutic parenting style and initially a sole placement with a foster family because of their challenging and complex needs. There is some evidence to suggest that some of the teenagers have highly challenging behaviour and have experienced short periods of time out of school and education and this has raised the pressure on placement stability with foster carers and family units.

The data reported also highlights that some older children wanted to return home to their families and this has not always been successful in some cases. This has led to placement moves and it is recognised that there is a need in terms of resources to provide greater support when children initially return home.

Action Plan for 2017-19

The Local Authority will need to continue to focus on the child care prevention strategy and ensure as many children as possible remain living at home with

family or friends. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 is clear on the responsibilities of local authorities in this respect:

Section 15 of Act requires that local authorities **must** provide or arrange for the provision of a range and level of preventative services which they consider will achieve the following purposes:

- a) Contributing towards preventing or delaying the development of people's needs for care and support
- b) Reducing the needs for care and support of people who have such needs
- c) Promoting the upbringing of children by their families, where that is consistent with the well-being of children
- d) Minimising the effect on disabled people of their disabilities
- e) Contributing towards preventing people from suffering abuse or neglect
- f) **Reducing the need for:**
 - I. Proceedings for care or supervision orders under the Children Act 1989
 - II. Criminal proceedings against children
 - III. Any family or other proceedings in relation to children which might lead to them being placed in local authority care, or
 - IV. Proceedings under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court in relation to children
- g) Encouraging children not to commit criminal offences
- h) Avoiding the need for children to be placed in secure accommodation; and
- i) Enabling people to live their lives as independently as possible.

A local authority **must** have regard to the importance of achieving these purposes in relation to the exercise of all its functions, not just in relation to social services functions. A Local Health Board **must** also have regard to the importance of achieving these purposes in the exercise of its functions.

Where children do enter care every attempt will be made to place in house and within the county boundaries.

Action 1. Maintain the focus on reducing the number of looked after children through the provision of a range of preventative services as detailed in the Family Support and Prevention Strategy 2016-18. Regular threshold meetings will continue to ensure that there is robust gate-keeping in respect of children entering the statutory service; and the alignment of referrals for both TAF and

the statutory service through the Central Referral Team will help to direct wherever possible, families to the non-statutory option; unless of course, there is a clear safeguarding issue.

Action 2. Effective use of our panels: Resources, Accommodation and Permanency. The first two of these panels regulate support, and all requests for children to be accommodated. In future, they will also play a part in requests to move a child who is already in placement where their current placement may be at risk. This should reduce the number of times children move to another foster placement when, with additional support and services, the placement could have been saved.

Placement stability is monitored through the quarterly Permanency Panel which is made up of multiagency professionals. There will be an increase in the monitoring of placement support meetings set up and initiated by the fostering team to review placements that require additional support services.

Action 3. Recruitment. The fostering service will continue to focus on prioritising the recruitment of placements for older children and children with complex needs alongside parent and child placements. This will in due course offer more skilled resources and choice of placements, to assist the local authority in matching children appropriately who have a significantly high level of needs. (Appendix 1)

Action 4. No single person should determine a placement is required; or a child should be moved. Successful outcomes when working with children and families can only be achieved by a team approach. All professionals need to be heard and consulted with in any major decision; particularly moving a child. Any move is significant and the IRO should also be made aware in advance of any proposed move and the view of the IRO sought.

Removing a child from home and family is a last resort. A child's foster home should be seen in a similar vein. Foster carers (including kinship carers) must be perceived as part of the professional team, and their views given due respect. (Appendix 2). This includes providing them with the opportunity to be supported by a mentor.

Action 5. Matching. The reality is that it is not always possible to achieve the perfect match. Delay can be harmful, but it is also important that any move should be planned. Emergency entry into care should be avoided where at all possible, this principle also applies to changing placements.

Matches will be achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and their family, potential carers and their families including other children they have in placement. Relevant professionals may include: the child's social worker, the supervising social worker for the carer, line managers, health and education staff, panel members and, on occasions the agency decision maker (where the decision is an emergency removal from a foster placement).

Contact must be considered as part of this process. Ongoing contact will have an impact on carers and must be considered when making the match. There needs to be honest and open discussions about how the contact will work; its potential to increase and the changes to the child's behaviour that may happen as a consequence.

It should be acknowledged that some children may require a residential placement where complex needs and behaviour is too challenging to manage in a foster home. However, foster care always remains the first choice.

Action 6. A senior social work practitioner in the fostering service has a specific focus on supporting the highly challenging teenage foster placements. The role will identify more appropriate matching and skills of foster carers and recognise unmet needs which will require an investment in further training resources and support in the recruiting and retention of foster carers. There is access to further training through the Confidence in Care programme and PACE model. It will also focus on working across all the child care teams and with partner agencies to prevent placements from breaking down.

Action 7. More choice for children 16 years and over in relation to supported living arrangements. This is an alternative to using foster placements when young people are approaching independent living and will assist them in their transition to adulthood. It is an active choice and not a means to direct children out of, or away from care, when they have needs which require the higher level of support that fostering offers.

Appendix 1



Carmarthenshire Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2016 - 2019

Aims and Objectives of Strategy

- Review what's working well and what we are worried about.
- Analysis of trends which informs of how, when, who, what and where we recruit over the next year.
- Maximize the number of fostered children who can be placed in Carmarthenshire.
- Reduce the use of Independent Fostering Agencies.
- Help us understand the needs of children who require placements.
- Sets targets that are SMART or sets recommendations for creating more resources.
- Ensure we are recruiting foster carers with the right skills and abilities to meet the needs of children, ensuring that we are focusing on a targeted campaign subject to the demands placed on our service and to appropriately match children within Carmarthenshire with skilled foster carers in order to provide better outcomes for children and achieve placement stability.
- Ensure our recruitment process is as efficient and effective as it can be, with a customer focus which ensures that applicants entering the process experience a professional service.
- Ensure our recruitment strategy aligns with the overall placement strategy of Carmarthenshire and the overall Child & Family Services Business Plan.
- Explore how financially effective Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service is and that we are supporting our overall aims and objectives.
- Planning and reviewing the support we offer to foster carers and how we retain the carers we recruit.

How well have we done this year?

Targets 2015-2016

The information below, further explores our targets and approvals during 2015 -2016

Target 20	Approved 10 - Mainstream
	Approved – 2 Connected Carers
Parent and Baby - 3	Approved – 1 Short Breaks Carer

The information above reflects that we didn't meet our recruitment targets during 2015-2016 with challenges in approving the target numbers of Parent & Baby foster carers and foster carers for ages 11+.

In relation to the challenges, further analysis is provided:

Parent & Baby Recruitment Challenges

- 1.) Level of internal interest established not materialising in as many eligible or interested in being assessed for the scheme as was originally forecast. All this evidence is captured and it ranges from unsuitability of prospective Foster Carers due to lack of bedroom space or concerns such as them being wholly unsuitable to progress to Form F or Skills to Foster.
- 2.) No specific targeted external advertising campaigns following plans to develop internal interest first.

However, although we have failed to recruit the target number of foster carers for the Child & Parent scheme by the end of the financial year, we are currently assessing a further 2 foster carers for the scheme and anticipate that these carers will be approved by the end of the next financial year.

Additional Challenges In Meeting Our Targets

Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service acknowledges that during the initial process, potential foster carers can display limited understanding of how fostering might work for them so it can be difficult to assess potential or encourage applicants to find out more. To overcome the issue of "losing any potential applicants" at the point of the initial phone call, due to lack of understanding of how fostering would work for them, the strategy details recommendations, including encouraging applicants to attend Carmarthenshire's intensive 3 day preparation training 'Skills to Foster' in order to gain a greater understanding of the different fostering tasks before making their decision.

The initial assessment is undertaken within 7 working days to ascertain the applicant's suitability and phone calls are followed up with applicants following the distribution of the information pack. **See flow chart.**

The Fostering Team are very skilled at matching prospective carers abilities, using their previous skills and knowledge and areas of interest to ensure that the assessment process is effective and enables the carers to recognise and optimise their inherent skill base.

We experienced a higher than normal de-registration figure in 2014-2015. In this case it is imperative that we acknowledge and analyse figures during the year to monitor the number of carers that resign or retire as well as those who leave to provide permanent care to children through Special Guardianship or adoption. This should assist our strategy and process to undertake a gap analysis of needs to focus on the location, area and skills of carers required to be recruited in the future. We are satisfied that we did not directly lose any foster carers due to a dissatisfaction with the service and this is evidenced in the information held around the reasons why foster carers have left the service. There is evidence however that a small number of foster carers are placed on hold due to an allegation being made against them and decide to resign from their role despite allegations being unsubstantiated.

It is also important to recognise that we have seen a net loss in foster carers between 2013-2016,.

Year	Target Mainstream	Approved Mainstream	Deregistered Mainstream
2013-2014	20	14	16
2014-2015	20	12	23
2015 - 2016	20	10	9
Total	<i>60</i>	36	48

During 2014-2015 the number of foster carers who were removed from the approved list was higher than previous years. The reason cited is that there were a high number of carers on hold for a period of more than 6 months due to a variety of reasons. In reviewing these households a higher number of carers left the service.

Between 2014-15 this was significant for the reasons below

13 Households tendered their resignations due to a change in personal circumstances and family relationships this includes moving out of the area.

10 households retired some due to bereavement and ill health.

It is significant that there has been a decline in approving mainstream carers between 2015-2016 and the challenges facing the service are due to a number of issues.

These are partially due to the competitive and economic climate. There are fewer adults at home due to working patterns. The competition of private agencies and neighbouring authorities who provide higher allowances is a barrier to recruiting carers. There is evidence that in the last year 32 household enquiries for checks were made to Carmarthenshire from neighbouring authorities mainly from the Swansea area.

Despite Carmarthenshire providing a marketing and advertising campaign which refers to competitive allowances and good support this is an area that requires targeting more

through more regular radio advertising locally and clarity around enhanced allowances around older children and teenagers.

The National figures also highlight a problem in recruiting foster carers and that the average age of a foster care is 55 years.

There is growing evidence at the end of the financial year 2016 that the trends are changing again. This relates to the fostering team targeting carers from the private sector to transfer over to Carmarthenshire where children have been placed and enquiries have been followed up.

2015-2016 Recruitment Performance

During the financial year 2015-16 the performance information below shows the impact of our recruitment activities. Analysis is provided below;

Month	Enquiries	Approvals by household	Approvals by placements able to provide	De-registrations by household
April	9	1	1	0
May	12	4	7	0
June	17	0		1
July	12	0		1
Aug	2	0		0
Sept	9	1	3	0
Oct	3	0		0
Nov	24	1	1	2
Dec	11	2	3	4
Jan 2015	7	1	3	1
Feb	10	0		0
March	14	0		0
Total	130	10	18	9

Approvals: We did not meet our recruitment target of approving 20 foster carers – Approved 10 Mainstream, 1 Connected Carers & 1 Short Break Carer this financial year. In spite of not meeting our targets this year, we continue to care for the majority of children in-house.

Fostering journey

The Fostering Network benchmarking report already referenced suggests that Fostering Services are taking on average 9 months to approve a foster carer, from initial enquiry to panel. In comparing the journey of those approved with Carmarthenshire’s Fostering Service experienced a journey time of 4-6 months or less from initial enquiry to approval. In

analysing the reasons for a few of the enquiries taking longer than 6 months to be approved, the majority is down to applicants request and out of our control such as a change of circumstances towards the end of the assessment that has impacted on the ability to bring the candidates to Fostering Panel; this still has an impact on our recruitment targets.

In-house provision

Following this year’s activities, our in-house foster carer population now looks like this;

End of March 2016- Total No of Foster Carers – 150; 122 Mainstream Foster Carers which includes 5 Parent and Baby providers, 25 Connected Carer (Foster Carers) and 3 Short Break Carers.

Between March 2015 and March 2016 - 9 Mainstream Foster Carers were deregistered.

The 9 households that were deregistered were unavoidable due to reasons as follows.

2 households resigned due to retirement and ill health.

1 household resigned due to them feeling that fostering was not for them.

1 household moved out of the area.

5 households’ circumstances changed due to family issues, health, change of career and separation of couple.

How well do we utilise our in-house provision and what does this mean?

We are clear that around 97 % of our placements are being used. This compares to a National average of 69% of placements being utilized (*as identified by the Fostering Network benchmarking exercise*).

This is further evidence that Carmarthenshire’s Fostering Service is providing an efficient in-house Fostering Service. E.g. Despite a net loss of foster carers this year and a reduction in the numbers of LAC we have continued to provide placements available for children in Carmarthenshire. The aim is to further reduce the number of children in foster placements provided by Independent Fostering Agencies and is supporting the continuing change of the balance of care.

Year	Number of children in foster care that are placed in-house	Number of children in foster care that are placed with IFA carers
March 2015	184 (includes 41 Connected)	6
March 2016	166 (includes 34 Connected)	7

What do others think about how well we recruit?

It is clear that currently Carmarthenshire is struggling to recruit foster carers for teenagers and currently we have three young people in an independent Fostering Agency.

This is essential information and in 2016 the Fostering Service undertook a consultation exercise with the wider Child and Family Service in Carmarthenshire to assess their views on what is working well within Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service, any worries they have and the next step to address any deficits in the service provided for Looked After Children in Carmarthenshire.

Current representation is taken from the Annual Inspection Report 2015, social work comments provided for foster carer annual reviews, comments from Child Care Team Managers, Independent Reviewing Officer and children themselves and some key messages about what is working well and feedback include:

'Engagement and Participation has a strong foundation in Carmarthenshire'.

CSSIW Inspection Report 2015.

'Carmarthenshire has some fantastic foster carers' (Child Care Team Manager)

'They (foster carers) have provided excellent support on both a practical and emotional level and have provided a very high level of care for 'S' and have shown a great understanding of her needs on both an emotional and practical level (child with extremely complex learning needs within a mainstream placement) Child Care Team Social Worker

She feels settled and safe (young person aged 16) and D (foster carer) works extremely well with the Department, is open and honest and keeps me informed at all times about any changes to L's plan. (Child Care Team Social Worker)

Both B and K (foster carers) have embraced the boys into their home since they were placed with them. They have encouraged their development and have ensured the boys have the stimulation and attention that they require (Child Care Team Social Worker)

'I have to say, the care provided to these children is amazing and R and J are taking fantastic care of them all. I had to phone you and let you know' (Child Care Team Manager in respect of a sibling group of four children placed together).

Carmarthenshire has some excellent carers (IRO)

J keeps me safe and I am happy here (child)

We have been very pleased with this placement and have valued everything that J and D have done for us all whilst being here (Parents who were assessed in one of our Parent and Baby placements).

However there are areas in which we need to improve such as in:

"Lack of suitable placement options for teenagers" IRO

'These carers just don't get it' Child Care Social Worker

Next steps;

“We need a strategy to recruit and support Teenagers who are going through crisis in their lives” Child Care Team Manager

“More carers who really get teenagers and are willing to stick with it through the ups and downs” (foster carer who enjoys looking after teenagers)

“If I was supported financially I would love to be able to give up work and provide support for more teenagers, I love this work, but I’m limited because my wife and I both work full time. We feel we have so much more to offer”

We need to have a robust and financially rewarding package of support for foster carers who are willing and have the necessary skills to support some of our more complex children in Carmarthenshire to ensure that we do not have to use Independent Fostering Agencies

What do children in our placements say about the recruitment of foster carers?

Carmarthenshire’s Fostering Service consult with children/young people in our placements using a number of methods.

Historically, Carmarthenshire has consulted with children/young people about the qualities they want from good foster carers and Looked after children are always consulted as part of a foster carer annual review and through regular LAC reviews and in participation groups.

More recent feedback received from young people in relation to what they want from foster carers includes things such as; ‘fun,’ ‘being interested in me’, ‘being honest with me’, a good laugh’, ‘keeping my confidence’, energetic and fun on the weekends’, understanding and knowing what I’ve been through’. This information is being incorporated in the assessment process and within the preparation training.

What do our applicants say about the process to become a foster carer with the Local Authority?

Although Fostering Panel questionnaires are sent to applicants to complete when they come to the end of their journey to become a foster carer once they are approved there needs to be a more robust method of gathering the qualitative data which will be essential to look at how we further develop our recruitment and assessment service

Areas to improve

The Fostering Service needs to ensure that feedback received via questionnaires sent out to newly approved foster carers is collated in order to ensure that quantitative and qualitative data can be analysed in order to identify the applicants experience throughout the various stages of the process. This would include:

- Their experience of the very first discussion with a social worker within the Fostering Service.
- Rapid follow up of initial enquiries backed up with phone call and visit planned within 5 working days.

- Their experience of the initial home visit
- The quality of the information provided (Information Pack)
- Their experience of the length of time it took to complete the pre-approval process/assessment
- The quality of communication during this process
- The experience of attending Fostering Panel
- What our applicants say about the Skills to Foster training

The Fostering Service also need to capture what applicants report about their experience of contacting Carmarthenshire’s Fostering Service and why they initial chose to do so. This is a vital aspect of our Recruitment campaign.

	2014-2015	2015-2016		
Initial Enquiries	145	130		
Approved	12 Mainstream	10 Mainstream		

What do our foster carers say about recruitment?

In 2015 we established a Foster Carer Recruitment Focus Group where all approved carers were invited to participate in the development of the Recruitment Service.

The Fostering Service has consulted with young people in order to illicit their views on how we can improve the recruitment of foster carers in Carmarthenshire, particularly focussing on the skills and knowledge that are required to best support vulnerable young people in Carmarthenshire and offer the best quality of care.

Carmarthenshire’s Fostering Service consult with foster carer mentors on a regular basis and regularly hold six weekly consultations where we plan and review our recruitment campaign.

Carmarthenshire Fostering Service has a dedicated number of foster carers who support our recruitment activities each year and recommend that people contact Carmarthenshire’s Fostering Service due to the positive experiences they have received as foster carers.

Word of Mouth continues to be one of the strongest sources of enquiries and this year foster carers have supported recruitment activities including getting involved with things such as; writing blogs and experiential testimonies for the website, participating in interviews and giving their story to the local paper.

Our foster carers are involved in meeting and greeting new applicants in their roles as Mentors and are an important part of our 'Skills to Foster' preparation training, sharing their experiences of fostering as well as speaking to members of the public in the community.

Currently we have five dedicated and experienced foster carers who support Carmarthenshire's recruitment process by holding 'Fostering Recruitment Surgeries' within several locations across Carmarthenshire.

One of our foster carers also takes on the role of 'Cal' our Fostering Mascot who is visible at all our major recruitment events across the County.

It is most beneficial to have this dedicated support as these foster carers are able to give their honest opinion of what it is like to foster for Carmarthenshire. Word of mouth is vital for our current recruitment strategy and the enthusiasm and dedication of the carers involved in this process cannot be underestimated.

In 2015 several foster carers were involved in a recruitment and information sharing event for individuals who were thinking of becoming foster carers.

Analysis of IFA use during 2014 /2015 and 2015/ 2016

The table below provides further information in relation to the number of children placed in IFA placements during 2014-2015 -

2014-2015	
6	

2015-2016	
7	

From analysing the information we are still able to meet and offer placements to the majority of children in our in house placements. It is accepted however that a factor relating to this may be due to the LAC population having declined and that there are placements available to children under 10. However a recruitment target is to focus on young people aged over 10 and requires a more dedicated and robust strategy to recruit foster carers to meet the needs of the service. The targeted group will be for the more complex and challenging teenagers and alongside this to recruit foster carers to provide support to these challenging placements as this has proved effective in the past to support placement stability.

The appointment of a senior practitioner dedicated to supporting and working with teenager placements within the service should provide a more robust and strategic process for recruiting and maintaining placement stability and retention of carers.

This analysis is also related to the number of in house placement breakdowns in 2015-16 in the age group 10 plus .Overall analysis of the service requires a more robust resource to

work alongside the preventative services and support young people to remain at home. The provision of the new Accommodation Panel and Resource Panel has supported the preventative strategy and acted as a gate keeping process to ensure children are only accommodated under reasonable and appropriate circumstances.

We are aware from analysis in 2015-16 that there are a group of teenagers with highly complex and additional needs that have suffered a series of placement breakdowns and some requiring more specialised resources in addition to foster care. We cannot underestimate the effects this has on our foster care provision in house in respect of matching although we have had some success of children returning to in house placements from IFA provision.

Recruitment targets 2016 - 2019 and how this fits with the overall strategy

The recruitment targets identified for 2016-2019 are based on current service need and reflect that although the number of looked after children has decreased, referrals and requests for older children to be accommodated is in demand.

Placement Type	Total number of foster carers
Child & Parent	6
Support Respite Care (with a focus on 10+ and complex needs)	6
Mainstream (with a focus on 10+)	36
Total	48

The targets don't account for effects of the "When I'm Ready" campaign on retention of foster carers which is still unknown, but this may be built into the strategy during the year if needed. The service is currently forecasting foster carers this may affect.

These targets are a reflection of need on the service rather than capacity within the team to carry out assessments.

Recruitment Plan 2016-2019

Campaign Approach

Our recruitment strategy during 2016-2019 considers the recommendations from the Fostering Network research.

There is clearly a need for more foster carers for specific groups of children, as identified in our recruitment target aims. Our recruitment targets for 2016-2019 remain focused on attracting more people to care for older young people, children with complex needs and Parent and Baby providers. Carmarthenshire has a need for more Short Term Break carers to

support children with complex needs and disabilities to remain within their family units through the provision of respite packages.

The messages in the current campaign are still relevant, however we will continue to invite applicants to attend training where there is clearly some uncertainty or a limited understanding around their preferred approval status/age of children they wish to foster. There is a general consensus amongst the Fostering Service that applicants do not have a full understanding about how becoming a foster carer will work out for them and their families at the point of the initial phone call and their views on approval ranges can change as they follow through the recruitment process. There is limited financial cost to this approach as the trainer costs remain the same irrelevant of numbers attending.

Due to the fact that in 2016/19 we are likely to lose between two to four sets of foster carers per year to Retirement the Recruitment of new Foster Carers is vital.

Campaign Plan

Recruiting foster carers continues to be a year round task. Research tells us that the average person considering fostering takes 7 years from the time they initially think about fostering to making the decision to contact a Fostering Service.

It is therefore vital that Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service is constantly visible within the whole of Carmarthenshire, including towns and rural areas.

The Fostering Service uses various sources of media such as Twitter, Face Book, radio campaigns (and weekly radio adverts that go out at peak times), fostering information surgeries within Carmarthen, Ammanford and Llanelli, advertisements on fleet vans within the local authority and newspaper and magazine advertisements.

Carmarthenshire Fostering Service takes part in Fostering Fortnight in May/June each year

Communicating the Campaign

Methods used to communicate the campaign during 2015-2016 have focussed on the highest performing methods during 2014-2015.

1. Radio

Advertising with the local radio station has always been one of the biggest advertising costs to the service in Carmarthenshire; however, it is important that the message about fostering for Carmarthenshire reaches a wide audience across the county and beyond.

More money is required to be spent on local radio advertising throughout the year to compete with our neighbouring authority.

The Fostering Service liaises with Carmarthenshire's Communication's team to ensure investments with key players in the local media e.g. Scarlet FM/Radio Carmarthenshire Swansea Sound, The Wave, Carmarthen Journal and The Primary Times represent good value for money for our council departments advertising with them. Our contracts with these providers will therefore not be renewed or re-negotiated unless we have discussed

the cost and effectiveness of these methods of advertising, to ensure that we maximize our return on investment when using these medias.

2. Internet

The number of those enquiring to Carmarthenshire who state they found us online has increased. During 2014-2015 this did decrease slightly from the previous year however, the internet was still one of our biggest sources of enquiries during 2015-2016.

The way our information is communicated on the CCC website has changed this year, following the re-design and development of a new CCC website. The way our information can be found and the navigation around the site has changed, along with the way our pages look. Visitor numbers to our pages will continue to be monitored.

There is a need to focus on updating the website not only in relation to recruitment but to provide clear information about Carmarthenshire's fostering service and what it can offer.

3. Word of Mouth

Word of mouth recruitment, or applicants stating that someone had recommended they contact Carmarthenshire Fostering Service, has continued to increase over the last few years and offers a huge return on investment, as in real terms, costs very little. The best performing "word of mouth recruitment" method during 2014-2015 was recommendations by foster carers.

Foster carer involvement in recruitment activities during 2014-2015 was a key part of the campaign and included foster carers being involved with writing blogs and testimonies for the website, meeting and sharing experiences with applicants during preparation training as well as members of the public at recruitment events/evenings and Fostering Information Surgeries. The success of this involvement is not only clear in recruitment terms but also acts as an intrinsic reward for foster carers, who benefit from feeling more satisfied, involved and valued as well as helping them to develop additional skills. Involving foster carers in our recruitment strategy will continue and be furthered developed.

A potential development to strengthen word of mouth recruitment is the proposal to expand the £100 recruitment incentive payment to financially reward those who make significant contributions to recruitment, as well as those who recommend someone directly. In addition, the strategy will consider the development of non-financial methods to recognize the recruitment achievements/contributions of foster carers as well as financial methods of rewarding.

From analysis of enquiry trends it's clear that very few people who make initial enquiries specifically state their source of enquiry as being "social media" (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) and this result is also a reflection of national research conducted by the Fostering Network, however, a presence on social media does help people to "find us" online and helps direct traffic to our website and new Carmarthenshire Fostering Service Facebook page.

Additional Activities

A number of additional activities and advertising opportunities are used throughout the year and contribute to the number of enquiries received, making sure that Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service remains visible and 'live' within the county and main towns of Carmarthenshire.

Parc Y Scarlets held a recruitment event in October 2015 and this was well attended, however we have yet to find a 'Fostering Champion' who can head our campaigns.

Currently the fostering allowance budget is under review as this is yet to be featured as part of our media campaign and we are in direct competition with our neighbouring authorities who award a higher allowance, however might not offer better value. Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service has awarded carers very favourable financial packages of support, however this is not easily translated into advertising campaigns.

This can certainly act as a barrier to recruiting prospective carers as allowances across neighbouring authorities are higher than Carmarthenshire and unless this is addressed will have a detrimental impact on providing a stable and fluid carer workforce.

How well did we retain foster carers in last 3 years?

	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
New Carers	14	12	10
De-Registered	16	23	9
Total No Of Carers	132	121	122

Combined Panel Business Report 2013-2016

One of the strengths of Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service is its ability to retain foster carers. Carmarthenshire has not lost any foster carers due to dissatisfaction in the service. The majority of foster carers who left the service were de-registered for a number of reasons. Several are now offering permanence to children/young people under the auspices of SGO permanence plans or resigning due to a number of personal reasons and ill health. Between 2014-16, 10 households resulted in SGOs with a further households expected to achieve this in the coming years creating permanence for the specific children.

In relation to the connected /kinship carers, 7 young people moved into independent living and 2 into a supported lodgings arrangement. Two carers resigned after very short periods of fostering for Carmarthenshire, citing that although they received excellent support through the assessment process and subsequently from their Supervising Social Worker, fostering children was not what they expected. Consequently further research and timely exit interviews are required to be undertaken to identify the reasons why "fostering was not what was expected" so we can analysis the findings and develop appropriate next steps.

Financial Support

Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service financial package is under review at present. Currently Carmarthenshire offers enhanced financial packages of support to those Foster Carers who are caring for children with high support needs and young people who are displaying high risk behaviours.

Retention Activities

Foster Carers within Carmarthenshire can expect

- A designated Supervising Social Worker
- A Foster Carer Mentor
- 24 hour support
- Additional retention methods have been employed, focusing on valuing foster carers and supporting them to develop links with one another and build on professional and peer support networks. These activities have been developed following recommendations from National research and foster carer consultation
- There are currently two monthly foster carer support groups
- A specialist support group for Foster carers who are newly approved and require additional support through their first year post approval.
- In 2016- 2017 we anticipate the development of a 'Men who Foster' support group and a Connected Carers Group.

Eagerly anticipated Social events throughout the year including Christmas Parties and Summer events for all carers and their families.

We are currently reviewing some of the key retention activities provided by Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service and this will include a Celebrating Fostering Award Ceremony.

What do our foster carers say about how we support them?

During the Foster Carer Support Groups and CSSIW Inspections over the last two years there is a clear message that foster carers within Carmarthenshire are supported and valued. When we have consulted with our foster carers and asked them what they think is working well within Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service, the majority of comments has related to the support offered by Carmarthenshire's Fostering Service

Retention Forecast 2016-2019

During 2016 - 2017 we have forecasted that we will de-register 6 foster carers, which is

more than what we would "normally" expect to see within the year. However, we need to take into account that 25% of our foster carer population is aged 60 years plus and over so unexpected de-registrations could also occur.

Foster Carer Population and Profile

To support and retain our foster carers we need to fully understand our foster carer population and profile and understand their motivations and values.

From analysing the above information, the following areas will be considered during 2016-2019;

- Recruiting younger foster carers
- More focussed support for our "newly" approved e.g. Within the last 5 years and require a high level of support and training
- There are specific areas in Carmarthenshire that are under-represented in terms of locality of foster carers that can be targeted. Further work will be conducted to compare this with areas that looked after children are placed in school, to establish "geographical gaps".
- Targeted approach on an advertising campaign to provide 2-3 placements for teenagers with challenging needs alongside the support of the new senior practitioner post. This will require a commitment from senior management to support a scheme which rewards carers financially alongside packages of individual support.
- Recruit and target foster carers for parent and child placements.
- Further develop a respite provision service to recruit and target potential carers to match them for supporting placements with high needs to maintain and improve placement stability.
- The promotion of sole placements where required for children with complex and challenging needs.
- Target local communities that have been more successful in recruiting new carers and how this can influence and contribute to planning local campaigns in the future.

Value based approach to support and how well have we done in 2015-2016.

There were 10 foster carers approved in 2015-16 and they provided 14-15 placements including sibling groups.

Maintained and provided placements for the majority of children and young people within Carmarthenshire and this is reflected in the low numbers of children placed with IFAs.

Provided placements for sibling groups of children to maintain them together.

Moved several children on successfully to adoption and permanency through the Special Guardianship Process.

Established a skilled foster carer workforce to assist in the rehabilitation plans of children returning home to the community or family members.

What do others think?

How well does the wider service think we meet children's needs?

In addition, during 2016-2019 and in line with the 'Signs of Safety' approach in Carmarthenshire the Fostering Service will start to develop a new method of getting children's views as part of the foster carer annual review process. This involves providing children's social workers and supervising social workers with direct work tools to use e.g. wizard and fairy, 3 houses, safety house. A children's social worker guide to gathering this information will be produced which includes a words and pictures storyboard that can be shared with children/young people about why we want their views and their importance.

What do we need to do and how do we plan this.

To improve placement stability and reduce the number of placement breakdowns by strengthening and targeting a more robust support and recruitment campaign.

There is a need to increase the recruitment part of the service by an additional full time worker and administrative support needs to be strengthened due to the demands on staff time devoted to training and assessment.

Target and focused advertising campaign to recruit specific carers for teenagers with better financial rewards so that we can be transparent in advertising our allowances.

Focus on providing support groups for foster carers and consulting with young people on how we shape the service for the future and improve on outcomes for children.

To continue to focus on responding to initial enquiries within appropriate timescales and following up with home visits.

There is evidence to suggest that over the past year 31 sets of carers have been lost to neighbouring Swansea due to LA checks being made to Carmarthenshire. There is strong evidence that the current allowances disadvantages and lowers the incentive to become carers for Carmarthenshire.

Dedicated radio time with local radio stations to advertise and promote fostering on a rolling programme basis.

Extra support and training for carers interested in fostering children aged 10 and over in order to provide a more skilled workforce.

More support required from our marketing section to target and improve recruitment

campaigns.

From analysing this information, we can identify a need to develop a complex needs strategy that would better support foster carers and children to maintain stability. In addition, with the majority of our foster carer population being approved within the last 5 years, the strategy might include a more thorough period of induction to ensure new foster carers are better prepared to meet the needs of children with more complex needs.

Recruitment & Retention Budget Spend 2015-2016

When reviewing how we spent our total recruitment budget of £29,706 in 2015-2016, around £24,042 was allocated to recruitment/advertising. Expenditure = £22,326.

Recruitment and Retention Budget Proposal for 2016-2019

Total budget 2016-2017 = £24,186 (Allocated to Advertising). This is likely to continue in the following two years.

Recruitment focus on all year round advertising with radio and papers.

More focus on online advertising.

Word of Mouth recruitment is successful so to continue to follow up with financial incentives.

Information sessions and community based recruitment programmes in areas which have been successful in recruiting new carers and learn from this to spread out to other areas across the county.

To continue to support and promote activities over the year such as foster walk fostering fortnight annual Christmas and fun events in Pembrey etc.

Community engagement with sporting activities development of sponsorships ie Scarlets.

Advertising on vans public places etc.

Overall Analysis

It is imperative that we research and analyse the reasons of why carers are leaving the service and from our figures it is clear that many have resigned due to retirement through bereavement ill health and change in family circumstances.

A smaller number have left due to fostering not being for them, and therefore we need to consider exit strategies as part of our recruitment and retention procedures.

It is recognised that our LAC numbers have fallen and this has assisted the service in maintaining children in house.

The target is to focus on recruitment for children aged over 10 and parent and baby placement providers and to support these placements, respite carers recruitment.

The target for 2016-19 has been reviewed and this is to achieve 48 households which will focus on the recruitment of specific carers for older teenagers with challenging needs.

The need to continue analysing and reviewing recruitment processes that work well.

Flow Chart of Initial Enquiry/ Application Form Process

Initial Enquiry Form completed

*

(Ensure form is signed and dated and application packs sent out 1st class by person taking enquiry, ensuring that it includes SAE)

*

Pass Completed Initial Enquiry Form to Admin for risk assessment

(on day of enquiry)

*

Initial Enquiry form to be placed in recruitment file by Admin once processed

(in Recruitment filing cupboard)

*

Recruitment representative to attend placement meeting or provide written information to meeting to discuss Initial Enquiries received the previous week and inform team about new Form F assessments, needing allocation

*

If application not returned Recruitment Team to undertake follow up phone calls to interested parties within 7 days of Initial Enquiry .Offer of home visit to be suggested – subject to the return of application form

(record /date on Initial enquiry monitoring form when phone call undertaken)

*

Once application forms received by office, passed to Sue John Evans for allocation - within 7 working days

*

CCC Checks to be undertaken by Admin once applications received

(Admin to date stamp and input information on to the spreadsheet)

*

Social worker to complete Initial Interview report with Applicants

(template on council file plan)

*

Completed Initial Interview report to be passed to

Recruitment Assistant Manager for discussion

*

Applicants to be notified by social worker completing the report whether they will progress to Skills to Foster training and if not the reasons why application will not proceed.

*

File to pass back to Admin to place details on list for next Skills to Foster training

(Skills to Foster Box File)

Appendix 2a

A council that removed children from a foster placement without showing it had considered their best interests has been criticised by the local government ombudsman.

An investigation found Sandwell council failed to demonstrate it had fully weighed up the options when removing two children, aged six and seven, from their beds 90 minutes after police told the authority their foster carer was going to be arrested.

The serious allegations made against the foster carer, who was the sole carer for the children, were later decided by police to be “unfounded and malicious”, according to the ombudsman’s report into the council’s management of the case.

The minutes of a Position of Trust meeting, convened when an allegation is made against a person who works with children and chaired by a local authority designated officer, described Sandwell’s response as “knee-jerk”.

But the ombudsman emphasised the council’s failing was not in removing the children from their home in itself but that it had failed to record any assessment or discussion of the children’s best interests and was unable to produce any evidence it had considered alternative ways of separating them from their carer.

Dr Jane Martin, the local government ombudsman, said: “Essential safeguarding processes are in place not to add time and bureaucracy but to ensure children’s welfare is paramount.

“Clearly councils do not take a decision to urgently remove a child from their home lightly, however they must be able to demonstrate they have thought about all their options and considered the child’s best interests.”

In the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance, councils are required to hold a strategy meeting when taking action to safeguard children. Sandwell did not hold a strategy discussion at any point in its handling of the case.

It also failed to carry out its duties under the National Minimum Standards for foster care services to provide independent support to people subject to allegations.

The foster carer complained he was not advised of his right to independent support or kept informed of the actions and decisions of the council.

He also complained Sandwell failed to return the children to him in the prescribed timescales after it was decided the allegations against him were unfounded.

The council has agreed to apologise to the foster carer and pay him £750. It will also apologise to the children in age-appropriate language and put £500 for each child into their savings accounts for when they leave care.

A copy of the ombudsman report will be placed on their files to help answer any questions they may have when they are older.

Appendix 2b

Essex council has agreed to pay £1,800 to a family after its decision to remove a girl from her aunt and uncle's care without warning caused "considerable distress".

The teenage girl, who had moderate learning difficulties, had lived with her aunt and uncle since she was a child. She also had respite care provided by her grandparents.

There were difficulties in the home, and she told social workers she was unhappy. The council took the decision to place her with new carers but failed to tell the girl, her aunt and uncle and grandparents until a social worker turned up at her school to remove her, a Local Government Ombudsman investigation found.

The ombudsman said the council had no reason to believe the placement would fail without extra support and there was "no evidence" the girl was at immediate risk of significant harm.

The council's decision to end the placement instead appeared to be based on concerns over the uncle's refusal to allow the girl's social worker into his house, the ombudsman found.

The council told the ombudsman it had problems working with the couple. The uncle would only let her social worker talk to the girl on the doorstep or in the garden as he was concerned over the social worker's "influence" on his other children.

The council told the ombudsman the uncle was "aggressive and non-cooperative". The authority also claimed the aunt failed to attend meetings. Both accusations were denied by the pair.

After moving the girl, her social workers did not emphasise her vulnerabilities to her new carers, the investigation found. She absconded from their care when they left her unsupervised in a park, where she hitched a lift from a stranger back to her aunt and uncle's house.

The girl was eventually returned to her aunt and uncle's care, where she continued to live past her 18th birthday.

The ombudsman also criticised the council's handling of the family's complaint.

It recommended Essex should pay £550 to the girl, £850 to her aunt and uncle and £400 to her grandparents as remedy for the distress caused. The ombudsman also told the council to review decisions about foster care placements it had terminated in the past year to ensure correct procedures were followed.

The council agreed to the Ombudsman's recommendations, and apologised to the family.

Michael King, local government and social care ombudsman, said: "While the young person had needs above that of a typical teenager, the council had no reason to believe the placement could not have continued given the right support. This is borne out by the fact the teenager is still living with her relatives despite being over the age of 18."

