

Fostering Services Annual Report 2021/22



As a service we aim to be:

F – forward-thinking and focused on the continued professional development of our staff and our carers

O – open to transparent communication and participation with our fostering families

S – safe, secure and stable

T – trustworthy and reliable

E – encouraging and proactive in respect of our fostering families' education and training

R – robust in respect of statutory and regulatory compliance

I – innovative in terms of service organisation and development

N – nurturing, supportive and caring

G – guided by best practice

Executive summary

This document is intended to read alongside the revised Torbay Fostering Statement of Purpose 2021-22.

Torbay Council have continued to revise their sufficiency strategy. The aims of the sufficiency strategy are summarised below:

Torbay's Sufficiency Strategy

Torbay Council's vision is to provide sufficient care in the community and high quality placements for children and young people in its care which meet their needs and offer the necessary support to enable their aspirations to become their reality.

Torbay aims to:

- Strengthen the delivery of edge of care, early help, early intervention and prevention services.
- Increase the numbers of in-house foster carers and review our existing bank of carers to develop and match their skills to the needs of our children.
- Reduce the use of out of local area provision which may disadvantage our children and young people.
- Increase the number of adopters who can adopt children who are known to be harder to place.
- Provide young people who are leaving care with a variety of placement choices and support to independence.
- Provide a robust commissioning framework which is effectively responding to the sufficiency challenges and driving up standards.
- Improve the overall data capture and data management of cared for children to better inform this strategy and improve accurate responses to sufficiency challenges.
- Raise our aspirations for educational attainment and other outcomes for cared for children.
- Continue to build on the strength of the Torbay Corporate Parenting Board.

In July 2021, 33% of cared for children and young people were placed more than twenty miles from the address they lived in at the point of becoming cared for. It must be noted that, for some of these young people, they are placed in certain locations in line with their wishes and feelings, and close to family networks in other areas. Similarly, due to the size and location of Torbay, a number of these cared for children are placed in neighbouring Local Authorities such as Devon and Cornwall, just outside of the twenty mile cut-off. Only 11% of our cared for children live outside of Torbay and neighbouring Local Authorities as of the 16th July 2021.

16th July 2021	Total cared for = 306
102 children placed out of county excluding those placed for adoption	33%
68 placed in neighbouring LAs	22%
34 outside of Torbay and neighbouring LAs	11%

As of July 2021, there were 79 children placed 20 miles or more away from their home (excluding those placed for adoption) or 26% of the cared for population of Torbay; this is a reduction from 2019-20 and 29.9% in June 2020. Overall, 102 children are placed outside of the authority's boundaries, which is 33%. The latest comparator figures show the national mean to be at 16% for children placed 20 or more miles away.

However, this must be taken in the context of the fact that Torbay is a small unitary Authority, and small in terms of its size; therefore, a cared for child placed in Newton Abbot [fifteen minutes by car] would still be counted as a cared for child placed outside of Torbay. That said, Torbay recognises the increased vulnerability of such placements and have devised an Out of County Placement Protocol which was endorsed in August 2021 and is now being implemented across Children's Services; this protocol advises of the specific role of the social worker, Team Manager and senior leadership team in supporting these cared for children and tracking and monitoring their placements, as well as particular expectations in terms of placement and care planning. An Out of County Placement Tracker is kept and maintained by the Head of Service for Regulated Services and monitored on a monthly basis; this forms the basis for quality assurance oversight in respect of the care planning and adherence to the protocol in respect of these cared for children.

The number of cared for children is, as of the 20th August 2021, 301 children. This is a reduction from 330 cared for children in August 2020. There are continued efforts to reduce the number of cared for children in Torbay, as a result of the implementation of the new Early Help Strategy, a focus on post final Order permanence planning, enhanced transition planning, more robust oversight of pre-birth planning, improved timeliness in terms of pre-proceedings and proceedings and stringent senior management of care planning for children through the implementation of a range of Panels. However, this will not be an overnight reduction and therefore it is imperative that placement sufficiency, and in particular the development of our in-house fostering provision, remains a key strategic priority. There is a continued need for a collective view that our cared for children have a right and a need for high quality, safe placements in their local area.

The key priorities and actions of the service in 2020/21 have been:

- The Fostering Service have continued implementation of a revised fee structure for Torbay Foster Carers, implemented in 2020, and linking this both to skills of the carer and to the age of the child.
- The Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator role is now embedded in the Fostering Assessment Team.
- The training provided to foster carers has been reviewed; there are plans to expand on existing training opportunities, and others have been introduced or re-introduced following foster carer feedback. A cohort of foster carers will also be accessing training which will focus on trauma informed practice and providing support and training in the use of Non-Violent Resistance from September 2021.
- The Fostering Service have continued to run support groups, both internally and with input from CAMHS, to provide foster carers with therapeutic and emotional support.
- The 'Edge of Care' team [this is due to be renamed with a more restorative lens] criteria has been reviewed and now allows access for foster carers experiencing placement instability to access this provision, to promote resilience in care arrangements and to promote placement stability. The out of hours 'Edge of Care' team has now been implemented as part of the Summer Strategy, enabling fostering families to access support from 6pm-10pm weekdays and 12pm-10pm on weekends and Bank Holidays, in addition to their access to the Emergency Duty Service.
- The Placements Team continue to build positive relationships with independent fostering agencies and placement providers and this relationship-based approach has been instrumental in working with providers to identify suitable and viable placement options for children and young people. An example of this effective joint work is in respect of one young person currently cared for within a residential setting; the Placements Team have worked closely with an independent fostering agency in respect of a step down placement more local to Torbay, in which intensive intervention can take place to prepare this young person for returning to a family setting. Alongside this, joint work between the Placements Team and the agency will be concurrent, to search for and secure an appropriate family fostering placement for him.
- In addition, the Peninsula contract ensures ongoing work with Plymouth, Devon and Somerset, with thirteen placement providers on this contract who are able to offer local fostering and residential provisions to the cared for child of Torbay. This contract is now in its fourth year, with a tender evaluation planned this year to prepare for a new contract being implemented in April 2021. Regular contract monitoring meetings take place on a quarterly basis, which an ongoing understanding of the sufficiency of placements, the progress of recruitment and the mechanism through which quality assurance is undertaken.
- In terms of in-house provision, there continues to be a focus and drive in terms of fostering recruitment and assessment, in conjunction with a clear communications plan and targeted recruitment of fostering families who may

be able to offer placements to children whereby there is a gap in the current local provision. This includes ongoing recruitment to the Resilience Fostering Pathway, which is focused on the recruitment of foster carers with specific skills, capacity and knowledge in respect of the care of older children, or children with complex needs.

- The Fostering Service have entered into a three year agreement with Home for Good. Work is currently being undertaken jointly with commissioning in respect of a joint project between Torbay Children's Services and Home for Good. Home for Good is a national Christian fostering and adoption focused charity working to inspire Christians to foster or adopt and equipping the church communities to support those who are caring for vulnerable children. Home for Good works with local authorities to develop and strengthen connections with local churches around foster carer recruitment and retention so they can best meet their obligations as corporate parents to the children in their care. Home for Good have developed a variety of resources to support prospective carers to explore whether fostering or adoption is for them, including online events and a national enquiry line to provide information for those exploring and support for those already caring.
- A reviewed and updated Fostering Statement of Purpose has been completed, which incorporates a Torbay Fostering Family charter of expectations of the corporate parent, the fostering service and the fostering family. This is currently out for consultation pending further amendments and it is hoped this will be ratified by the beginning of September 2021 by the senior leadership team.

This report will identify some of the improvements made in terms of performance, participation, fostering recruitment and the implementation of a restorative model which incorporates our fostering families

Introduction

This is a report of the Fostering Service and covers the period of August 2021 – July 2022.

This report will address the roles and functions of the Fostering Service and should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Statement of Purpose 2021-22.

Throughout 2020-21 and as we continue through 2021-22, the Fostering Service has endeavored to ensure that there are a range of placement options for children which offer both high quality and cultural appropriateness. We recognize that much more still needs to be done in order to provide a fully diverse range of placement options which will meet the needs of the children of Torbay and 2021/22 will be crucial in demonstrating how the service is meeting these demands.

Please note: for the purpose of this document, the word 'placement' is used throughout. In line with the implementation of the restorative model, it is fully recognized that this word may not be the right choice for individual children; however, each child will wish for the place where they live to be called something different, and home can have powerful connotations for cared for children and young people and therefore placement is used in this instance.

Role of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service continues to develop and improve practice to meet the needs of cared for children in Torbay in line with the requirements of National Minimum Standards 2011 and Fostering Regulations.

Torbay Fostering Service aim a range of fostering placements which meet the needs of our cared for children:

Emergency Fostering Placements

These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home at short notice, and for short period of time.

Short Term Fostering Placements

These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home on a short term basis; this could be for anything up to two years, for children who are cared for subject to proceedings and who need a safe and secure home whilst decisions are made about their care. These carers may then be involved in bridging to adoption, support to reunification, transition to other family care arrangements, transition to a longer term fostering placement or bridging to independence.

Long Term/Permanent Placements

These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home to children whose plan is one of long term fostering, and when final decisions have been made that a child cannot return home to the care of their parent/s or previous caregiver. These long term placements offer security and stability for children for their minority and often into their

adulthood. These carers make a long term commitment to a child, and are often matched as a long term permanent placement for the child following a year in placement, through the Permanence Panel.

Respite Placements

These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home to children, who are often in a long term placement, as part of their plan of stability and permanence within that placement, to provide appropriate support to long term carers. At times, these placements may be used as a short term measure, and as part of the bridging process to alternative placements.

Parent and Child Placements

Torbay do not currently offer parent and child placements however we have identified a number of carers who have an interest in offering this type of placement, and are looking to support them with training opportunities to enable them to do this.

These are carers with specific training who can offer placement to parent/s and child/ren. These may be young parents, under the age of sixteen, or parents of any age, who require intensive support, guidance and modelling to developing their parenting capacity in a safe environment.

Placements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, to enable them to adjust fully to being in a new country, and provide a nurturing safe base from which these young people can begin to recover from their experiences and forge a life for themselves in their new surroundings.

Sibling placements

These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home to sibling groups, not only due to the physical

Foster carers who have the skills, the physical accommodation and support within the home to offer placements for sibling groups of two or more.

Resilience placements

Resilience foster carers are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home to support young people aged 10-18 years who currently live in residential care and/or who may have particularly complex needs, or young people who may be in the youth justice system. For those who have the knowledge, skills and experience to care for a child with these needs, it's a unique fostering opportunity where carers provide long term, family based placements, fostering one young person and supporting them into adult life.

Staying Put Placements

These are carers who are able to offer a home to those care experienced young people aged eighteen and above who they have previously fostered.

All foster carers are supervised and supported by social workers within the fostering service and this includes all Connected Carers who are afforded opportunities to engage in training and support alongside other foster carers.

The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to provide a range of high quality, safe and aspirational foster placements that meet the needs of Torbay children looked after.

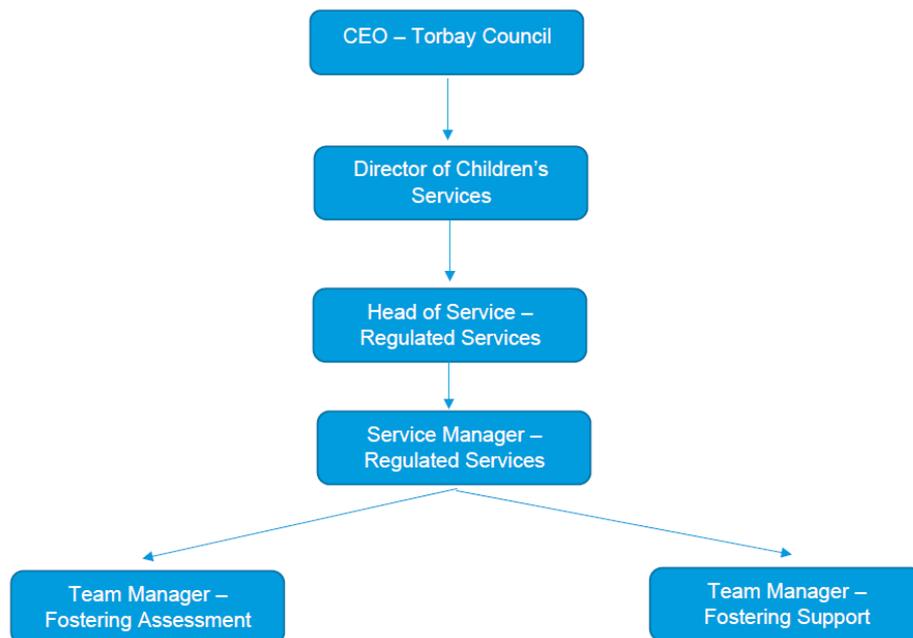
Torbay Fostering Service's objectives for service provision are:

- We want cared for children to live in an environment which is warm, stable and consistent.
- We want cared for children to have access to fostering homes which provide a safe, secure and nurturing base from which they grow into confident and happy young people who have aspirations for their future.
- We want cared for children to feel supported to achieve the best possible outcomes, not only in the short term but in the medium to long term too.
- We want cared for children to feel fully involved in their planning.
- We want cared for children to feel like they have a voice in the development of services designed to support them.
- We want social workers to understand the value of the fostering role and how their actions and practice can support the delivery of high quality fostering services.
- We want to provide social workers with the relevant training and development opportunities to help them to under this.
- We want to provide fostering families with high quality and individualised training and development opportunities.
- We want to provide support of out fostering families which is personalised and inclusive of appropriate support out of hours.
- We want to continue to recruit fostering families who have a wide range of skills and experience, who can offer homes to a wider range of cared for children, including sibling groups, older children or those children who may have additional needs.
- We want to continue to recruit fostering families from a diverse background who can offer a range of homes for cared for children, thereby enhancing the quality of the matching process.
- We want to be a service which demonstrates its core values of equality and the value of diversity through its operational actions as well as its strategic review of practice, policy, training and development.
- We want to be a service which is absolutely compliant with the statutory, regulatory and legislative framework under which we work.
- We want to be a service which recognises learning opportunities and ensures that service delivery is robustly monitored, reviewed and developed.
- We want to develop a team approach, which centres on the child and their needs, and which ensures that all involved in supporting a child are focused on the achievement of best practice.

Organisational Structure

Torbay Fostering Service is based at Children's Services, Tor Hill House in Torquay, and sits under Regulated Services. The Fostering Service consists of two teams: Fostering Assessment and Fostering Support.

The governance structure is as follows:



Day-to-day management and development of services is overseen by the two Team Managers, who are both qualified managers with experience in social work with children and families. Both Team Managers oversee a team of staff, inclusive of fostering assessment social workers, fostering supervising social workers, Community Care Workers, business support officers and a Recruitment and Events Co-ordinator. Our Fostering Assessment Team focuses on recruitment activity, assessments of prospective foster carers and support for prospective fostering families going through the Panel approval process.

The Recruitment and Events Co-ordinator role is a new role within the Torbay Fostering Service; this is an officer who works closely with the Fostering Assessment Team Manager, Communications and other professionals to understand our local demographic and support them to view the potential skills people may have for fostering, thereby contributing to the development of a wider range of fostering families and skillsets.

Our Fostering Support team focuses on the support and supervision offered to approved foster carers, support through the Annual Review process, ongoing or updating assessments and investigations, participation and feedback work, training and development and the implementation of support groups and other celebratory and collective opportunities for our cared for children and their fostering families.

Torbay has its own Fostering Panel that meets regularly to make recommendations for the approval of foster carer candidates as well as to receive reviews of approval. The panel also consider other matters that are brought to them by the social work team.

Torbay Children's Services also has its own Learning Academy, and works with a number of universities to offer social work placements for students as well as offering a robust and supportive programme for Newly Qualified Social Workers employed by Torbay, some of whom may work within the Fostering Service.

All the Managers and Supervising or Assessing Social Workers hold social work qualifications and are registered with the Social Work England.

All staff working at Torbay have access to a wide range of continued professional development and training opportunities which are co-ordinated by Torbay's Learning Academy.

The social work staff establishment on 1st August 2021 comprised of:

- Two permanent Team Manager
- Two permanent Assistant Team Managers
- Seven supervising social workers (Fostering Support)
- Eight assessing social workers (Fostering Assessment)
- Five Community Care Workers
- One Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator
- One Fostering Panel Chair
- Fostering Panel members

Recruitment Performance

During 2020/2021, the fostering service received a total of 111 initial enquiries; as a result of these enquiries, twenty fostering households were approved.

Years	Number of enquiries	Approvals	Conversion
2014- 2015	118	29	24%
2015- 2016	65	10	15%
2016- 2017	42	3	7%
2017 - 2018	86	10	12%
2018 - 2019	45	4	9%
2019 - 2020	51	2	4%
2020 - 2021	111	20	18%
2021 – 2022 (to date) as of 17/08/21	41	3	

The conversion of enquiries to approval as foster carers during 2020/21 has increased by 14% on the previous year. This is likely to be as a direct result of the increased focus on the fostering communication, recruitment and marketing strategy.

As a baseline expectation, the Fostering Service aim to increase the number of fostering households by a minimum of ten per year; whilst twenty fostering family households were approved in this year, there were also a number of resignations which have impacted on the total number of approved fostering families as outlined below.

Numbers of Foster Carers (as at 17th August 2021):

As of 17th August 2021, the total number of approved fostering households was 82 which is comprised as follows:

Total Beds	155	
Current Placements	109	70%
Vacancies	6	4%
Respite Beds	10	6%
Voids	30	19%

In April 2020, the total number of approved fostering households was 86.

It is recognized that the overall number of approved fostering households has decreased from last year, despite the fact that the number of initial enquiries and approvals had increased. This is in line with information shared across the Peninsula in respect of resignations and deregistration. It is highly likely that this local and national picture has been impacted upon by a number of different factors however the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a particularly influencing factor. The pandemic has led a number of fostering families to re-evaluate their current priorities and life goals, whether due to ill health, personal loss, health anxieties, a change in career or employment and other personal factors. A number of fostering families have, as a result of these changes in their circumstances, reconsidered their capacity to offer a fostering family home to cared for children.

Throughout 2020/2021 financial year there have been **0** cases through the Independent Review Mechanism process.

From 1st of April 2020 to 31st of March 2021, fourteen mainstream foster families were deregistered for the reasons as outlined below:

- Four Standards of Care/resignations.
- One fostering family moved to adult care provision.
- One fostering family moved to a different job which impacted on their ability to foster.
- One fostering family had a newborn baby and made the decision that they need to focus on their birth children and their business.
- One fostering family moved out of the area and resigned from fostering due to family commitments.
- Three fostering families became adopters.
- Three fostering families retired.

In addition, there were six Connected Carers, specific to a particular child, whose resignation was due to a Special Guardianship Order being granted.

Recruitment and Marketing Strategy and Campaign

Fostering recruitment remains a key strategic focus within Regulated Services. Whilst continuing to recognize the immense skill and expertise contained within our current fostering family cohort, there is an ongoing need to expand the placement sufficiency and variety we are able to offer our cared for children. Whilst the number of cared for children continues to decrease, the needs of cared for children do not and there is specifically a need to develop our in-house ability to provide placement options for: older children; children with additional needs; children with complex needs; young people bridging out of residential provisions; unaccompanied asylum seeking children; sibling groups.

The reinvigorated recruitment campaign launched in May 2020 and continues to be reviewed and built upon.

The introduction of the Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator has strengthened our recruitment focus and drive; the Co-Ordinator leads on engagement and marketing opportunities, as well as engaging with the local community and local business in respect of our Fostering Offer, and is now being linked regularly into Fostering Network meetings.

From September 2021, we will be re-running the marketing campaign on bus routes and on bus stops across Torbay, with a particular focus on the concept that you do not need to live in Torbay to foster for Torbay.

We have a regular marketing campaign running in local magazines, for example the Beach Hut publication, and are looking to expand on this in line with new community opportunities; we have begun to target specific publications, such as Police Life, with a particular focus on the Resilience fostering pathway due to the professional and personal skills and attributes of those perhaps retiring or moving on from careers in policing, nursing, teaching or other occupations which lend themselves to skills for fostering.

The Fostering Team were present at the Devon County Show from the 2nd July to the 4th July; the communications team promoted this through social media. This generated **eight** really good enquiries on Sunday 2nd July 2021 and a number of discussions with potential fostering families, which will hopefully convert to initial enquiries imminently. The Gun stand said that they have a lot of members who would love to become Foster Carers however are worried that, as they own guns, they will be refused. Under the National Minimum Standards, anyone who wishes to foster has to store and register firearms safely and there is strict guidance in respect of owning a gun. Fostering have taken their details in the hope that the team may be able to explore the rules and regulations with regards owning a gun.

The mayor of Exeter approached the team and commented on how fantastic the work Torbay were doing with regards to Fostering. The use of the QR code was seen as particularly effective and allowed for enquiries to be processed in the immediacy.

Torbay Council have now entered into a three year contract with Home For Good, and have entered into the engagement phase with our local families of faith. Peter Clayton delivered a speech to the congregation of St Mary Magdalene's Church in Torquay on the 19th June 2021, and delivered the message about the joint work being undertaken by Home For Good and Torbay to consider fostering as part of our faith outworking. The

Home for Good Torbay coordinator role is now being advertised and should be filled shortly. Regular catch up meetings are in place between Regulated Services and Home for Good in respect of the progress of their engagement work and all fostering social workers have now been subject to Home for Good Faith Literacy training which took place on the 22nd June 2021. There are plans to link Torbay Fostering Service with the Home for Good Facebook page and for a link to our website to be added to their homepage.

The Fostering Service have already begun to send out enquiries about the likelihood of 2022 taking place, considering the implications of the pandemic, and how the Fostering Service can be a presence at these events; this includes events such as Children's Activity Week, the Babbacombe Fair and the Pedal Car Grand Prix.

A monthly meeting is now embedded, involving the Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator, the Fostering Assessment Team Manager, and the Service Manager and Head of Service for Regulated, to review and monitor recruitment activity.

Next steps in terms of recruitment are:

- Enhance our use of social media, including Facebook Live drop-in sessions.
- Consultation with HR in respect of how Torbay Council as an employer can support employees considering fostering.
- Write an article about the benefits of fostering to be published in the local newspaper and as an online article.
- Confirm attendance at future events.
- Aim to replicate the success of the Train of Light Christmas event for fostering families and cared for children.
- Develop a Corporate Parenting Offer, detailing the offers made by local businesses in respect of cared for children, care experienced adults and fostering families.

Foster carer support

Performance

Torbay Fostering Service aim to provide the best possible care for children and maintain high standards in respect of children's care. In order to ensure that this is consistently achieved, Torbay have rigorous and comprehensive quality assurance frameworks in place, with audit activity across Children's Services taking place regularly.

The Fostering Service routinely provides reports in respect of the profile of the cared for children cohort and their placement types, information relating to vacancies and investigations, recruitment activity and performance, staffing considerations, training and development, service outcomes and aims and any other information relating to the performance of the service and the wellbeing of our fostering families and our cared for children.

Themes and patterns arising from Fostering Panels are tracked and monitored, with specific actions arising from any consistent areas for development.

Compliance with policies and procedures is monitored by managers in supervision and audit and dip sample activity. All staff receive regular supervision, the frequency agreed according to their role, experience and need.

The performance of the service is also monitored by Ofsted inspections, the Corporate Parenting Board, the Sufficiency Board, the Children's Operational Board, the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the senior leadership team.

Areas of key quality assurance focus for the Torbay Fostering Service are:

- *The numbers of cared for children, in relation to their plan of permanence.
- *Placement stability, with a key focus on minimising disruption for cared for children and enhancing placement stability which involves monitoring the number of placement changes for cared for children.
- *Placement sufficiency and the recruitment of new fostering families.
- *Compliance, including foster carer training, DBC checks, timely Annual Reviews and fulfilment of basic training requirements.
- *Timely and quality foster carer supervision.
- *Purposeful and comprehensive placement planning meetings.
- *The use of placement support and stability meetings.

Over the last year we have established a process and developed the performance indicator system to ensure that we have management oversight on all of our fostering files. This makes sure that foster carers are receiving regular supervision and that their annual reviews remain on time.

The Fostering Service have consistently improved on their performance in the four Key Performance indicators. As of June 2021:

- Foster carers with up-to-date training – 98% (last reported figure 98%)
- Foster carers with up-to-date DBS – 98% (last reported figure 98%)
- Foster carers with up-to-date medical – 100% (last reported figure 100%)
- Foster carers with up-to-date Annual Review – 100% (last reported figure 100%)

This is a regular focus of the monthly performance surgeries.

Support Groups

Torbay Fostering Service also run a number of support groups, which are organised at various times throughout the year and through various platforms. Torbay are committed to learning from feedback and participation and are constantly looking for ways in which we can make our training as accessible and purposeful and meaningful for fostering families as possible.

It is intended that support groups provide an opportunity for fostering families to meet with each other and share their views and experiences of fostering; in addition, fostering families can access support, guidance and signposting through these groups, and receive information about recent changes to policies and guidance and practice.

Currently, Torbay Fostering Service offer:

*A support group run by CAMHS which offers support through a therapeutic lens.

*Special Guardianship Support group for all Special Guardians receiving support from the Special Guardianship Team.

*A general foster carer support group.

Foster carers receive financial payment that values and respects their skills, learning and commitment. Detailed financial information and guidance around expectations are made available to each foster carer.

Quarterly Foster Carer forums are held, during which we invite guest speakers to share knowledge and expertise from their field. Additionally, fostering support groups are run monthly with staggered times (including evenings) and venues to ensure those foster carers that wish to attend are able to do so.

We are looking to introduce further support groups, including one for single carers and one for Connected Carers.

Out of hours support

Torbay Fostering Service currently also have access to an out of hours team which offers direct support to fostering families whereby issues in relation to placement instability have been identified; this is operating currently on a three month basis and provides support from 6pm-10pm each weekday evening and from 12pm-10pm on weekends and Bank Holidays.

Support during Allegations

Torbay Fostering Service also commission specialist support, for example mediation or advocacy services, in situations whereby this is required for foster carers through the allegation process.

Training

At Torbay, we believe that every moment of the fostering experience provides rich opportunity for learning and development; we are committed to supporting fostering families to grow and learn and develop their practice, and recognise that this will be on an individualised basis, with at times a bespoke training need.

Fostering families begin their training journey during the assessment and approval process and build on this learning as they move on to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards. Fostering families receive a full induction, in order to enable them to understand the expectations of the fostering role, the key principles and values which underpin the fostering role and how they can best meet the needs of the cared for children they may be supporting and caring for.

Foster Carer training includes:

Record Keeping for Foster Carers

Safer Caring

LADO Role and Allegations Against Foster Carers

SGO PACE Training
Delegated Authority for Foster Carers
Paediatric First Aid
Life Story Work
Introduction to attachment theory and practice
Grief, Loss and Change
Family Time Supervision
Bridging to Adoption
Fostering Changes Training

In certain circumstances, Torbay Fostering Service will explore alternative types of bespoke training for individual or groups of fostering families, where this is an identified need.

In September 2021, we are looking to provide bespoke NVR and DDP training to a group of twenty identified carers who:

- *Are existing foster carers who have considered the resilience pathway or who might consider the resilience pathway
- *Are existing foster carers whose preference is for the older age range, or who have expressed an interest in fostering children with additional need or complexity.
- *New foster carers who meet the above two conditions.

Special Guardianship support team

As of March 2019, all Special Guardianship assessments and Special Guardianship Support has been held within the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Assessment team are responsible for the assessment process itself, including support for the prospective Special Guardian and input into the formulation of the Special Guardianship Support plan. Once a Special Guardianship Order is made, Special Guardians can access support through the Fostering Support team.

As part of the quality assurance framework activity, the Head of Service has undertaken a dip sample of all Special Guardianship arrangements made by Torbay which gave the following overall view:

The earliest Special Guardianship Order made in Torbay was granted on the **6th December 2006**.

Since this date, a further **171** Special Guardianship Orders have been granted, totalling **172** children and young people. A further **eight** children have been made subject to Residence or Child Arrangement Orders in this timeframe.

The median age of a child, at the point of Special Guardianship being granted, is **three years old**, which is possibly a reflection of early action being taken to safeguard children and make decisions about their permanence.

102 Orders were made to Special Guardians within the Torbay locality.

125 Special Guardianship arrangements remain the responsibility of Torbay in terms of the provision of support services, either due to the Special Guardians living in Torbay or due to the fact that the Order was made in the last three years.

38 Special Guardians are currently receiving active support through the Special Guardianship Team, which is currently held in Fostering Support. Some of the children within these Special Guardianship arrangements are also supported in other areas of the service.

Three children have an active service from the Children with Disabilities Team.

Seventeen children have an active service, either under Child in Need or Child Protection, from Operational Services.

Two children have an active service from Single Assessment and are in the process of an assessment of need being completed.

A **further child** has recently closed following a period of CIN planning; one child has just closed to the single assessment team in June 2021; **three** children stepped down to Targeted Help in June 2021 following a period of Child in Need planning.

Seven children are in foster care conversion Special Guardianship arrangements.

Devon Audit Partnership undertook an audit in respect of Special Guardianship in 2018/19. The following table outlines the recommendations made at this stage and the subsequent progress made against these recommendations:

<p>The local practice guidance should be formally reviewed, with input from all parties, including Children's Services, Legal and Business Support. It should be applicable to all SGO situations, regardless of whether the child was previously in foster care, with clear signposting in relation to which sections apply to each situation. Going forward, it should be subject to regular review, with updates being made only when agreed by all parties.</p>	<p>All Special Guardianship Order assessments are now undertaken by social workers within the Fostering Assessment Team; all support for children subject to these Orders and their families is co-ordinated through the Fostering Support team. Referral routes, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and established.</p> <p>The Fostering Assessment Team Manager and the HOS for Regulated Services have reviewed Special Guardianship policy; this has been updated in February 2021 and the final version will be made available as part of Children's Service procedures manual. The policy review including all key parties, including the Learning Academy, both Fostering teams and legal. This policy will be reviewed at least every twelve months, or at any point of significant change in respect of policy, legislation or guidance. The Fostering Support Team Manager and the Service Manager for Regulated Services are in the process of creating a Special Guardianship Order tracker, to include all those children subject to the</p>
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	<p>Order, the status of the support being offered to them and the dates for review of the Special Guardianship Support plan.</p> <p>This will include trigger dates for the children at the age of fifteen years and six months, which will then prompt a letter explaining their rights to access from the Leaving Care team.</p> <p>The HOS for Regulated Service has created a flowchart outlining social work responsibility in respect of SGO support plans, how these are recorded and the recording of communication of this to applicants. This has been signed off by CLST and communicated to all teams across Children's Services.</p>
<p>Management should consider having a designated team of social workers who have responsibility for all SGOs, regardless of the situation. Should this not be possible, local practice guidance should clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of each team throughout the process.</p>	<p>Fully actioned. All SGO assessments are now progressed by social workers within the Fostering Assessment team; this includes quality assurance and oversight in the exceptional event of Independent Social Worker use.</p>
<p>Written information should be made available to all prospective SGs in relation to the support services that will be available to them, including financial support.</p>	<p>Information leaflets for assessment and support are now approved by CLST and are in use by both the Fostering Assessment and Support teams.</p> <p>Consultation was offered by legal services in the creation of these leaflets.</p>
<p>Management should ensure that Support Plans are signed by all relevant parties and that the latest information is taken into account in terms of support (particularly financial) that can be provided.</p> <p>In addition, where discussions have determined that no support is required by the SG, this should be identified within the Plan in case of future query.</p>	<p>SGO support plans are now signed off by the relevant Head of Service with overall case responsibility for the child.</p> <p>SGO assessment process and completion of SGO support plans forms part of the ASYE training programme.</p> <p>The Head of the Learning Academy is creating a schedule of training for all social workers across Children's Services in respect of assessment care planning; in-house training will be offered to social workers in respect of SGO support plans by a Practice Educator who is also Form F trained.</p> <p>A consistent SGO support plan proforma is now in place.</p>
<p>Where assessments are made in relation to periodic financial support, copies should be retained.</p>	<p>Held by Children's Finance.</p> <p>Copies are retained. The process for review of financial assessments is currently under review.</p>
<p>Management should ensure that clear timescales for the provision of support are</p>	<p>There is a specific section focused on timescales within the SGO process and this</p>

<p>identified within each Plan. Where support is ongoing, at the very least, the date of commencement should be shown.</p>	<p>is reviewed as part of the QA and HOS sign off process.</p> <p>The Fostering Support Team Manager and the HOS for Regulated Services are in the process of creating a Special Guardianship Order tracker, to include all those children subject to the Order, the status of the support being offered to them and the dates for review of the Special Guardianship Support plan. This will include trigger dates for the children at the age of fifteen years and six months, which will then prompt a letter explaining their rights to access from the Leaving Care team.</p>
<p>Management should ensure that procedures for review of support are clearly identified within each Plan. Consideration should be given to amending the Plan template to ensure that this aspect is separately shown, encouraging proper completion.</p>	<p>The SGO support plan proforma has been updated to include a specific section in terms of frequency of review and date for review. This proforma has been circulated to all staff.</p>
<p>Management should ensure that there are clear records in relation to communicating proposed Plans to the SG and any subsequent agreement (or otherwise).</p>	<p>The HOS for Regulated Service has created a flowchart outlining social work responsibility in respect of SGO support plans, how these are recorded and the recording of communication of this to applicants. This has been signed off by CLST and communicated to all teams across Children's Services.</p>
<p>Management should ensure that guidance is adhered to in terms of reviewing support services provided to SGs.</p>	<p>The Fostering Support Team Manager and the Service Manager for Regulated Services are in the process of creating a Special Guardianship Order tracker, to include all those children subject to the Order, the status of the support being offered to them and the dates for review of the Special Guardianship Support plan.</p> <p>This will include trigger dates for the children at the age of fifteen years and six months, which will then prompt a letter explaining their rights to access from the Leaving Care team.</p>
<p>Management should ensure that annual financial reviews are undertaken in line with the guidance, and appropriate action taken as a result.</p>	<p>Held by Children's Finance.</p> <p>The process for review of financial assessments is currently under review.</p>

Devon Audit Partnership undertook a review audit in June 2021. It noted many areas in which improvements had been made. As a result of this report, the following actions are being taken:

- In line with the review of the care planning pathways for cared for children, management will now include a care planning meeting whereby all and any issues pertaining to Special Guardianship and the Special Guardianship Support Plan will be overseen by the Fostering Assessment Team Manager; this will include the content of the Support Plan, communication with the prospective Special Guardians and their views, the signatures required for the Plan to be endorsed, the recording of communication and any other issue which may arise prior to the Support Plan being recorded as endorsed on the child's file. This will include an expectation of the endorsed Support Plan being sent by recorded delivery to the prospective Special Guardians. Each endorsed Support Plan will require Management Oversight from the HOS for Regulated on the child's file. This addition to the pathway will be fully implemented by the end of August 2021 and will be tracked through the updating of the SGO Tracker which has now been fully developed and created.
- The SGO Tracker has now been created and remains a live document which will now be reviewed in conjunction with the Court Manager and in line with the changes to the care planning pathway process as outlined above.
- Monthly meetings, in line with the month in which the Order was granted, are now in place to review each individual Support Plan on an annual basis. Management Oversight will be added to each child's file.
- At the point of a care planning endorsing a Support Plan, a review date will be scheduled at this point, to safeguard against the important step being overlooked.
- The Support Plan template will now be reviewed, to ensure that specific dates are prompted in relation to the starting point and projected end point for provisions. This will be achieved by the end of August 2021.
- Following the recommendations and outcomes of this audit, an exemplar Support Plan will be created and used as the foundation for whole service training in respect of Special Guardianship Support Plans. The exemplar will be created by 1st September 2021 and the training in place as part of the ongoing training schedule by October 2021.

In addition to this, and following a needs analysis in respect of some of the barrier to cared for children achieving legal permanence post final Order, a bespoke Former Foster Carer Special Guardianship Offer has now been approved in respect of nineteen children.

This feeds into a wider review of the Special Guardianship policy, which is currently underway pending a scope of the policy picture nationally.

Torbay have also now entered into an agreement with Family Action, on a subscription basis until June 2022 in respect of their additional Special Guardianship services. The new subscription would offer us:

*access for every Special Guardian to a dedicated SGO website

*crisis support out of hours, including evenings and Bank Holidays, for all Special Guardians

*online counselling service (50 min sessions, twice a week, up to 8 sessions

*online coaching service (30 mins sessions, twice a week, up to 20 sessions

*online befriending service (10 sessions of 60 mins)

Next steps:

As set out within this report, there are key areas related to fostering which must be a strategic focus as we move into the next year and beyond; this is reflected within the updated Sufficiency Policy, and in the updated Statement of Purpose which sets out a shared vision for the Fostering Service and its future.

Whilst the number of cared for children reduces, there remains a vital need for greater variety in respect of the nature of in-house placements on offer to our cared for children, particularly our older children, our sibling groups and our children who have additional or more complex needs. As such, recruitment must and does remain a key priority.

That said, it is also vitally important that we honor the expectations set out with the Torbay Fostering Family Charter, included within the Statement of Purpose, to ensure that we retain the highly skilled, committed and dedicated foster carers that we already support.

As such, the next steps include:

*Develop our use of social media as part of the Recruitment Strategy.

*Progress the actions as identified within the Fostering Recruitment Strategy.

*Create a resignation and exit interview Tracker, to identify themes relating to retention and support.

*Ongoing review and expansion of our Fostering Training Offer, in line with the participation work undertaken with fostering families in respect of quality, accessibility and sufficiency.

*Develop a wider range of support groups that fostering families can access, including Connected Carers, birth children and sole carers.

*Review the Special Guardianship policy pending the ongoing scope of the national picture in respect of Special Guardianship and financial support.

*Progress the Former Foster Carer Special Guardianship Offer in respect of the nineteen children identified.

*Progress and embed the care planning changes in respect of Special Guardianship as outlined above.

*Contribute to the quality assurance framework by undertaking dip sampling activity in respect of Special Guardianship breakdown, quality of placement planning, quality of foster carer supervision, quality of management oversight in fostering and feedback from Panel.

*Enhance the ways in which fostering families can feel part of the service, and feedback their experiences and their ideas, including regular survey activity as well as monthly participation meetings with senior management.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R Thompson".

Signed:

Name: Becky Thompson, Head of Service (Regulated Services)

Date of review: 1st April 2022