



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

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1. Executive summary

This document is intended to read alongside the revised Torbay Fostering Statement of Purpose 2022-23.

Torbay Council have continued to revise their sufficiency strategy. The aims of the Sufficiency Strategy 2021-24 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.

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.

This is a report of the Fostering Service and covers the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st March 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 2022-23.

Throughout 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.

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.

Torbay foster carer: “the feeling that your comments and feedback are being listened to and your thoughts/ideas are being taken seriously” [on what is working well].

Torbay foster carer: “overall it was probably the best event that I have personally participated in to date” [on the 2021-22 Foster Carer Workshop].

Torbay foster carer: “the highlight of these events is always the networking with other carers and professionals and hearing the wide range of experiences of others” [on the 2021-22 Foster Carer Workshop].

Torbay Special Guardian: “thank you to Torbay Council, I am very happy with the help and support I have received and I am very grateful”.

Torbay foster carer: “thank you for all the hard work you are all putting in to make a difference” [on the developed Corporate Parenting Offer].

Torbay foster carer: “thank you for giving us the opportunity to start the run up to Christmas with a warm, loving feeling” [on the developed Corporate Parenting Offer.]

2. Profile of cared for children

In March 2022, 32% (96) 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. The latest comparator figures show the national mean to be at 20% for children placed 20 or more miles away. However, 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. That said, Torbay recognise the increased vulnerability of such placements and have devised an Out of County Placement Protocol which was implemented 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.

The number of cared for children is, as of the 31st March 2022, 301 children; this overall figure also incorporated eight Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People at that time who Torbay had welcomed as part of the National Transfer Scheme. This is a reduction from 330 cared for children in August 2020 and a height of 362 children and young people in the 2018-19 period. 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.

The sustainability of this safe reduction, particularly over the last nineteen months, has been achieved through the implementation of:

- A detailed and effective Sufficiency Strategy that is a legal requirement but has been based on sound knowledge and evidence to support the activity of improvement in children's services.
- The Independent Placements Overview Panel (introduced in August 2019) to provide a robust oversight of the independent placements for all children and mitigate against drift and delay in onward planning and transition planning.
- An Adoption Tracker, Adoption Tracker meetings and review of all children with a plan of adoption through the Permanence Panel, ensuring that these plans of permanence are progressed in a timely way.
- A Schedule 3 Tracker is maintained by the Court Quality Assurance Team Manager and all children with a plan of reunification are reviewed through the Permanence Panel, to ensure plans of reunification are comprehensively assessed and supported and decision-making in respect of revocation of Care Orders is timely.
- A Former Foster Carer Special Guardianship Order Offer has been agreed, which supports children in stable, long-term placements to achieve legal permanence through Special Guardianship (seventeen children and their carers are currently in the process of this assessment, with two Orders already made).

- Review of the Edge of Care (now called Building Futures Together) eligibility criteria and practice standards, expanding the service to incorporate support for children with a plan of reunification and support for placements experiencing instability, as well as intervention for children considered on the edge of care.
- Introduction of an Out of Hours Edge of Care team as part of the 2021 Summer Strategy, offering a service on evenings and weekends, to complement the work of the internal team and provide welfare checks, supportive telephone calls and visits and additional support to children, families, parents and carers (this team remained in place until the end of March 2022, and the internal team will now take on this function).
- A Legal Tracker and reviewed Legal Gateway Process which robustly monitors the progress of pre-proceedings and proceedings (in March 2022, the average length of pre-proceedings was 23 calendar days, a reduction from an average of 1010 in 2019-20).
- A reviewed care planning procedure and pathway, which stipulates the right of every child to a family-led meeting before any decision to make a child cared for.
- The Family Group Conferencing service, which is promoted across all services, to offer the opportunity for family led meetings.
- A one children's service vision that ensures the collaboration across the department to meet the needs of children.

It remains 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.

Residential placements

Following the re-inspection in 2018, there was an increase in how many children were placed in residential settings; at the 31st May 2019, 41 children were placed in a residential placement (the highest number of children in residential between 2018 to date was 46). This was in part due to the lack of management grip and oversight at that time, as well as a lack of local fostering families, provisions, and settings.

As a result of the increase in children being placed in such settings, the Independent Placements Overview Panel (previously named High-Cost Panel) was introduced in August 2019, in order to have a robust oversight of the independent placements for all children and mitigate against drift and delay in onward planning and transition planning.

Authorisation is required from the Director of Children's Services to initiate a residential placement search; similarly, should a residential placement be identified as the most appropriate match for a child, this can only be agreed at Director level. This reflects the understanding that residential should be the last option for a child and that a family setting should be sourced wherever possible. On the rare occasion when a residential setting is felt to be in the short-term best interests of a child or young person, social workers and Team Managers are encouraged to consider exit or move on planning at the very point the placement is made and is expected be formalised within the placement planning meeting.

As of the 31st March 2022, 22 children are placed in a residential setting or CQC setting; of those 22 children, four of those children were identified to have imminent reunification or transition plans.

Breakdown of ages:

Age	Number of children
17 years old	32
16 years old	34
15 years old	30
14 years old	27
13 years old	25
12 years old	20
11 years old	16
N>B 10 years old	13
9 years old	13
8 years old	11
7 years old	8
6 years old	10
5 years old	8

As can be seen from this breakdown, Torbay were as of the 31st March 2022 corporate parents to 66 young people (22%) aged sixteen to seventeen and 123 young people (42%) aged between fourteen and seventeen, who are in the formal stage of transition to adulthood. There are a range of reasons for this:

- Unaccompanied asylum seeking young people referred to Torbay as part of the National Transfer Scheme tend to be aged sixteen or seventeen.
- Young people at risk of homelessness may become cared for at sixteen or seventeen.
- There is a greater risk of family breakdown in the adolescent stage of development.

4 years old	8
3 years old	5
2 years old	8
1 year old	13
Under one	15

It is also important to note that permanence planning should be based on the key principle that every child has the right to a permanent home, one which meets their needs for safety, stability and love and nurture and that this should always preferably be achieved within their own family unit. As such, any assessment or planning should think family first, and consider how support and intervention can enhance the safety of the child within the care of their parents or other caregivers, and what support can be explored within the wider family system. As reflected within our restorative practice approach and care planning pathways, every child deserves the right to a family-led decision-making meeting, before any exploration of permanence outside of the family system.

Permanence assessment and planning is not static and is dynamic and fluid and should be ongoing through a child's care experiences. As such, for all cared for children, there will ongoing review of viable permanence options within their own families, should this be in line with the child's wishes and feelings and best interest. In addition, we continue to seek ways of achieving more robust legal, emotional and physical permanence for children, which minimises the risk of high levels of intervention and monitoring throughout a child's life where possible. This includes considering how to promote permanence through foster carer adoptions or conversions to Special Guardianship Order arrangements.

We currently have seventeen children whereby assessment is underway to support conversion from foster care arrangement to Special Guardianship arrangement, with two Special Guardianship Orders having been granted to such Orders as part of this work already.

We also have four cared for children whose plan is one of reunification and revocation of Care Order in the next six months.

Placement type:

Placement Type	Number of children
Short term fostering	91
Long term fostering	89
Placed for adoption	15
Fostering to adopt	4
Sixteen plus semi-independent provision	24
Residential (including CQC provision)	22
Placed at home with parents	12
Connected Carer placements with family or friends	32
Secure accommodation	0
Unregistered	3
Unregulated	4

Placement type is really important to consider when analysing outcomes for cared for children. As outlined above, every child has individual and unique needs, and will require a placement which is carefully matched and assessment to be able to meet those needs.

Wherever possible, when a child has a plan of long-term fostering, we will look to formally ratify the child's placement at the eleven-month point through Permanence Panel as a long term match for the child and the carers. Each child receives a personalised letter and certificate, celebrating the match. Short-term fostering also has an important role to play, for example during proceedings when a child's plan of permanence is not yet confirmed, or as a bridging placement.

There are times when a child's experience of a family or the complexity of their needs can mean that a short period of residential placement is required, to provide children with a period of containment to enable further assessment and planning to allow for their needs to be met. Torbay believe that every child deserves the opportunity to experience care in a family setting and we will always be seeking to support a child to step out of residential settings at the right time for the child. Some young people achieve better outcomes at sixteen or seventeen in semi-independent provision, which provide support and preparation for independence transition work for young people who may find a family setting more challenging or who may be ready to embrace more independence.

3. Key Priorities and Actions of the Service in 2021/22

The key priorities and actions of the service in 2021/22 have been:

- The development of a Strategic Fostering Development plan, as an outcome from the Chief Executive Assurance Visit which took place in 2021-22.
- The embedding of the role of the Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator in the Fostering Assessment Team. This role has also been integral in the developments made to the Corporate Parenting Offer for fostering families, cared for children, care experienced young people, parent/carers and Special Guardians throughout the year.
- The training provided to foster carers has been reviewed and this continues on a regular basis; 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 accessed training which focused on trauma informed practice and providing support and training in the use of Non-Violent Resistance in 2021-22.
- 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 'Building Futures Together' criteria was 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. This includes out of hours support.
- 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 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. We are actively supporting the training and development of our current cohort of foster carers to see if they would like to convert onto the Resilience Fostering pathway of providing a placement for a child with complex presenting levels of need.
- The Fostering Service have entered into a three year agreement with Home for Good and are now moving into Year Two of this arrangement. 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. Monthly meetings take place with Home for Good, to ensure that there is a shared understanding of Torbay's

priorities. Home for Good have been integral in raising the profile of fostering within the local community, and have arranged a number of events which Torbay's fostering community have been able to attend.

- A Torbay Fostering Family charter of expectations of the corporate parent, the fostering service, and the fostering family is now in use.
- The Quarterly Fostering Forums have been enhanced, to ensure that they provide a direct platform for collaboration on our model and implementation of services and provide an open portal of discussion relating to current live issues/events between our carers, social workers, managers, the Virtual School and the Head of Service. This also supports the development of our collaborative working response, with our carers, thereby embedding the restorative and co-produced approach to our improvements.
- Actions to improve the interconnectivity between the fostering service and the Fostering Panel. We have reviewed the current pay rate through a scoping exercise and approved business case, and recruited to the position of Vice Chair; we have also reviewed the training programme for Fostering Panel members, and introduced regular meetings between the Panel Chair and the Head of Service, in addition to the Quality Assurance document completed after every Panel. The Placements Auditor has been introduced to the Fostering Panel in a quality assurance role, ensuring that any themes or patterns are identified and captured within a Tracker for further service wide action to be taken. In addition, we have reverse the decision to exclude representation from the Virtual School on the Panel, with the two Extended Duties officers becoming Panel members for alternate Panels.
- We have continued to improve the sense of team around the child and open channels of communication between our fostering families and the service, by creating a Communication Sheet with key contacts which has been shared with all carers.

4. The 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: Whilst there are universal standards within our fostering offering of care there are individual specialisms/focuses that carers can offer to our children:

Emergency Fostering Placements

- These are carers who can offer a fostering family home at short notice, and for short period of time at point of need in an emergency.

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 can 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 supported by an up to date assessment and recommendation of the child's allocated social worker.

Respite Placements /Stay Overs

- These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home to children, who are often in a long-term matched 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 use as a short-term measure, and as part of the bridging process to alternative placements for a child at point of need.

Parent and Child Placements

- Torbay do not currently offer parent and child placements however we have identified several carers who have an interest in offering this type of placement and are actively looking to support progression of this interest by supporting focused training opportunities and a

development programme to move this forward and expand are service offer and expertise within our fostering families. Currently we are meeting this need of our service through specialist placement agencies that offer this level of expertise. 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 and communities. .

Sibling placements

- These are carers who are able to offer a fostering family home to sibling groups, not only in respect of providing accommodation, which is suitably sized for the sibling group, but carers who are suitably skilled to manage the presenting needs of each child within a sibling group of two or more children.

Resilience placements

- Resilience foster carers are carers who can 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, with the intention of fostering one young person and supporting them into adult life. We are developing our capacity in this area of care through our fostering recruitment strategy to assess suitably skilled potential carers through this route, in addition to exploring opportunity of training and development from our existing cohort of carers to expand on their current offer.

Staying Put Placements

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

All our foster carers are supervised and supported by social workers within the fostering service and this also includes our Connected Carers who are afforded opportunities to engage in training and support alongside other foster carers to ensure their support. The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to provide a range of high quality, safe and aspirational fostercare placements that meet the array of needs of Torbay cared for children.

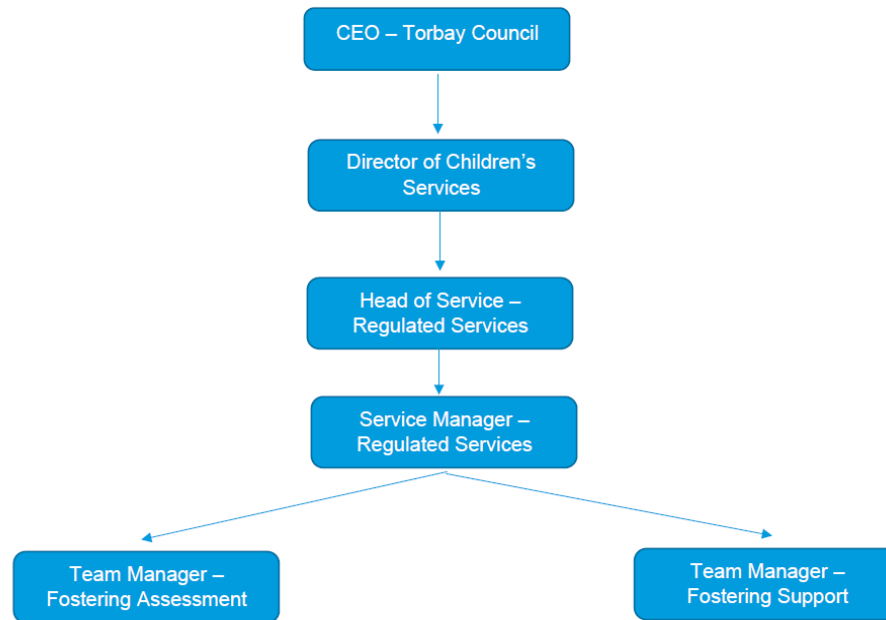
Torbay Fostering Service's objectives for service provision are:

- We want cared for children to live in an environment which is warm, stable and consistent to meet their needs.
- 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 our fostering families which is personalised and inclusive of appropriate support for out of hours response.
- 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 compliant with the statutory, regulatory and legislative framework under which we work within daily.
- 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.

5. 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, with the service sitting within the Safeguarding directorate:



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 to support the delivery of service. Operational delivery is overseen by the Head of Service and supported by the Divisional Director of Safeguarding.

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. And pre-approval 'Skills to Foster' training programme offered to adult applicants and a specially created workshop for their children to attend to support the development of skills through the assessment process.

The Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator role is an officer who works closely with the Fostering Assessment Team Manager, Communications team 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. The panel is independent and has a chair and co-chair to sit alongside members to enable the function of the panel. In addition to the panel membership our Placements auditor sits on the panel to provide a Quality Assurance lens to our preparations, reports and presentation are to the highest standard. The panel is supported by a panel advisor who provides expert advise to the panel on arising matter.

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 and contribute to the service offer to our families. .

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 coordinated and promoted by our Learning Academy.

The social work staff establishment on 31st March 2022 comprised of:

- Two permanent Team Managers
- Two permanent Assistant Team Managers
- Three full time social workers (Fostering Support)
- Two part time social workers (Fostering support)
- Two full time Newly Qualified Social workers – completing the ASYE programme (Fostering support)
- Four assessing social workers full-time (Fostering Assessment)

- Two part time Social workers (Fostering Assessment)
- Three Community Care Workers providing services across the fostering service.
- One Recruitment and Events Co-Ordinator that came into post in July 2021
- One Fostering Panel Chair and one vice chair
- Fostering Panel members
- Fostering Panel Advisor (this role is undertaken by the two team managers).

6. Fostering Recruitment Performance

During 2021/2022, the fostering service received a total of 99 initial enquiries; as a result of these enquiries, nine 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	99	9	9%

The conversion of enquiries to approval during 2021/22 has decreased by 50%, even though recruitment activity generated only 12 less enquiries than the previous year. When analysing and exploring these figures, it is important to recognize a number of national factors which are impacting on fostering recruitment across the country. Firstly, the impact of the pandemic has been significant on our fostering community. Nationally, 66% of foster carers are above the age of fifty; many, have underlying health conditions, or health vulnerabilities within their own families. This naturally has caused some of Torbay's carers to re-evaluate their ability to foster, when the expectation (in line with the child's best interest) has been to maintain face to face family time throughout the pandemic. This knowledge has been a factor which many new prospective carers have raised as personal concerns in terms of their decision to foster.

An ITV News survey conducted in 2021 of 1022 foster carers nationally found that 22% of foster carers had considered retirement from fostering as a direct result of the pandemic, 27% felt reluctant or unable to foster due to fears of infection arising from COVID-19, and 55% reported a decline in their mental health. This is reflected in the national recruitment picture, with many Independent Fostering Agencies and local authorities reporting

a decline in initial enquiries during the year 2021-22. Torbay's approach has been to be as honest and transparent with our current and prospective carers, listening to their fears and thinking creatively about the support they need to be able to foster in spite of those anxieties.

In addition, the current cost of living crisis is also having an impact on fostering recruitment. Whilst it some respects this has the potential to have a positive impact, as initial reports are that the trend is swinging from Independent Fostering Agencies to local authority fostering which is viewed as more stable, families are facing significant anxieties about their income and the rising costs of utilities and the cost of living. As such, some prospective carers are re-considering whether now is the right time to pursue their ambition to foster. They are aware that there is no guarantee of a placement full time, and that placements are made on the basis of the matching process and the needs of the child in line with the skills of the carer. As such, some are seeking more consistent forms of employment at this time.

It must also be noted that the assessment process and the lead time from enquiry, to progression through assessment and on to Panel presentation is approximately six months therefore not all enquires generated within the reporting year will have progressed through each stage within the financial year. We have a significant number of Form Fs in assessment now having carried over from the 2021-22 year (12 Form F assessments were in progress as of the 31st March 2022).

As a baseline expectation, the Fostering Service aim to increase the number of fostering households by a minimum of ten per year. Last year, nine additional families were approved (90% of this target).

Numbers of Foster Carers (as at 31st March 2022):

As of 31st March 2022, the total number of approved fostering households was 81 which is comprised as follows:

Total Beds	151	
Current Placements	93 (inclusive of staying put)	70%
Vacancies	8	4%
Respite Beds	12	6%
Voids	32	19%

In March 2021, the total number of approved fostering households was 81. It is recognised 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, as outlined above, 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 2021/2022 financial year there have been **0** cases through the Independent Review Mechanism process.

From 1st of April 2021 to 31st of March 2022, thirteen mainstream foster families were deregistered for the reasons as outlined below:

- Three Standards of Care/resignations.
- Five fostering families resigned due to a variety of personal issues impacting on their ability to foster.
- One fostering family resigned to offer the young people they cared for the opportunity to remain in their care under private lodging arrangements.
- One fostering family resigned as moving to another area.
- 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.

7. 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 Corporate Parenting Offer and is linked regularly into Fostering Network, Fostering Recruitment and Home for Good meetings. There is a strong focus on participation in local events and engaging with local businesses to support the ongoing development of our Corporate Parenting Offer.

The Fostering Team were present at the Devon County Show in 2021 and are booked to attend the event for June/July 2022; the communications team promoted this through social media platforms to support our representation. This generated several enquires and has now resulted in at least one enquiry progressing through the assessment stage.

Torbay's aim is to recruit ten new fostering families per year, to ensure that we have sufficient, local in-house provision to meet the needs of all of our children; the Strategy incorporates a profile of our cared for children, and their evolving needs (for example the increased need for fostering families who can support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children). When considering the impact of COVID-19 on fostering families both nationally and locally, and the increase nationally in foster carer resignation, the drive and focus on increasing our in-house provision must continue. The Fostering Network have undertaken research which indicates that for every ten initial enquiries, only one will convert to an approval. On this basis, and in line with Torbay's target, we will need to generate 100 enquiries at minimum per year. In the year 2021-22, 99 initial enquiries were generated, one below that estimate.

There is now the potential to undertake an analysis of the recruitment and marketing activity across 2021-22, to reach an informed and evidence-based view of the elements of this activity which result in increased numbers of high quality initial enquiries, and ultimately foster carer approvals. This analysis will consider the impact of activity across all five marketing methods: print media (local newspapers and publications for example); social media (promotion through Facebook); internal promotion activity (i.e. impact of Refer a Friend scheme and work undertaken to become a Fostering Friendly local authority); public infrastructure (i.e. bus campaign); and events (such as Music on the Meadows and the Devon County Show). In addition, the Strategy considers other improvements to practice which will ensure that the potential for an initial enquiry to move through to the assessment and approval stage is maximised, for example linking in the Short Breaks enabling service to offer prospective fostering families the opportunity to develop their direct work with children and become part of the Torbay team before they are approved, whilst also increasing our Short Breaks provision.

Following the success of the recent Foster Carer Workshop and ongoing work to embed feedback opportunities for our fostering families, this revised Strategy will also reflect the views of our foster carers in respect of what is most impactful when seeking to recruit new fostering families.

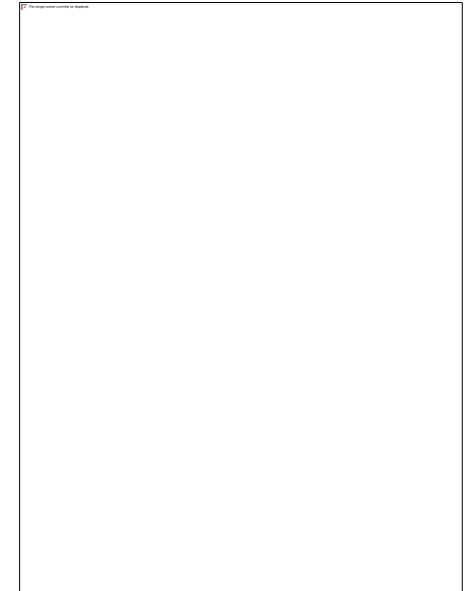
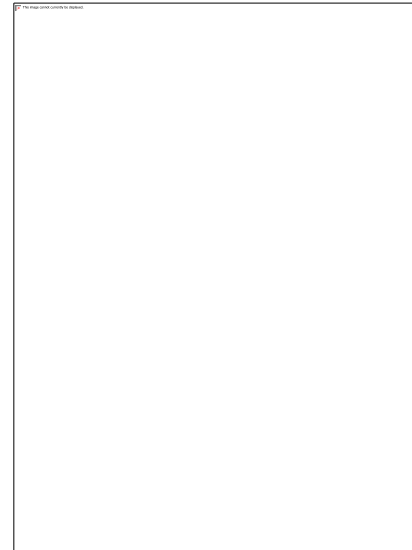
The Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2022-25 will include:

- Introduction
- Key Objectives for Fostering Recruitment in Torbay
- Profile of children cared for by Torbay Council
- Fostering Family Cohort and Enquiries
- Marketing Activity 2021-22
- Analysis of 2021-22 Marketing Activity
- Feedback from Fostering Families
- Recruitment Next Steps
- Retention
- Three year recruitment plan

8. Events

The Torbay Fostering Service have, as part of ongoing recruitment activity and the developed Corporate Parenting Offer, been able to attend and participate in the following events in the year 2021-22:

- Imagine Festival
- Armed Forces Day
- Music on the Meadow
- Paignton Festival
- Devon County Show
- Childrens Week
- Ullacombe Dog Show
- Torquay United Event
- Newton Abbot County Show
- Children's Week
- Lions Club Community Day
- Marldon Apple Pie Fair



In 2022, we have eleven planned events that we will be attending and providing a platform to promote our fostering service. These events will have representation from our fostering team in addition current foster carers that have committed to support these events and share their experiences of being a foster carer with Torbay.

9. 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 the 31st March 2022:

Foster carers with up-to-date training – 89%

Foster carers with up-to-date DBS – 90.45% (there have been some delays due to the increased demand for DBS checks as a result of the Homes for Ukraine scheme which takes priority)

Foster carers with up-to-date medical – 80.33% (this has been impacted on COVID-19 related delays)

Foster carers with up-to-date Annual Review – 86.52%

Following the migration to Liquid Logic, there has been some delay in ensuring that the right information is recorded within the system to enable accurate reporting. To mitigate against this, a manual Tracker has been established and is being used to report on this key indicators. An urgent Task and Finish group has been established incorporate the performance team, business support and the fostering service to address this.

Performance against these key indicators is a regular focus of the monthly performance surgeries chaired by the Head of Service, Regulated Services.

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 groups which is held monthly.
- Foster Carer Forums which are held quarterly.
- Foster Carer Workshops held bi-annually.
- Evening support groups and Connected Carer support groups.
- Single foster carers support group.

Foster carers receive financial allowances which value and respect their skills, learning and commitment. Detailed financial information and guidance around expectations are made available to each foster carer. In addition to the financial support, our foster carers benefit from local discounts and offers from providers that have made a commitment to support Torbay's foster care families as part of the Corporate Parenting Offer.

Paignton Zoo have made a pledge to provide all of our foster carers an annual family pass in addition to other local attractions providing discounted rates to access to foster 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 through our Building Futures team and provides a weekly response until 9pm weekdays and a service on weekends 10-6pm Saturdays. In addition, the EDS (Emergency Duty Service) provides advice and support 24 hours, 7 days a week. This is a generic service and will provide a duty response in the event of an emergency.

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. Fostering Service commissions, the independent individual support for foster carers from Fostering Network to support them through the investigation 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
PACE Training
Skills to foster (as part of the assessment)

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 provided 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.

10. Special Guardianship support team

Devon Audit Partnership undertook an audit in respect of Special Guardianship in 2018/19. The service have made significant improvement since that time:

- 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.
- A Special Guardianship Order tracker has been created, 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 includes 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 Care Experienced team.
- A flowchart has been created which outlines social work responsibility in respect of SGO support plans, how these are recorded and the recording of communication of this to applicants.
- 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.
- Information leaflets for assessment and support are now approved and are in use by both the Fostering Assessment and Support teams. Legal consultation was provided in the creation of these leaflets.
- SGO support plans are now signed off by the relevant Head of Service with overall case responsibility for the child.
- SGO assessment process and completion of SGO support plans forms part of the ASYE training programme.
- A consistent SGO support plan proforma is now in place. The SGO support plan proforma has been updated to include a specific section in terms of frequency of review and date for review.

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.
- Exemplar Support Plans are included as part of the Good Practice Legal Resources folder.

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 was approved in 2021-22 in respect of nineteen children.

Torbay also entered into an agreement with Family Action, on a subscription basis until June 2022 in respect of their additional Special Guardianship services. The subscription offers our Special Guardians:

- *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)

11. Key Priorities and Actions of the Service in 2022/23

- A review of the Fostering Contract is in process and will be undertaken to support a relevant and up to date response to our inhouse fostering carers.
- An ongoing review and consultation with foster carers around the training provided for foster carers via the Fostering Training Forum that takes place quarterly and in partnership with the Learning Academy and the Workforce Development team. 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.
- Ongoing consultation with foster carers will take place over this year via thematic surveys looking at specific topic such as their participation within the professional groups working with the children, training and development, support systems within the inhouse fostering, developing back up carers and use of enablers and other support services.
- A review and development of the Savings policy for children in care.
- Staying Put policy to be reviewed, considering the experience of transition from fostering to Staying Put as a care experienced young person within the fostering family.
- A fostering mentoring scheme will be developed to support newly approved families, to support them to embed themselves in their roles as new carers with the support of some of our more experienced foster carers.
- A therapeutic in-house working model will need to be developed throughout this year and specific training to be offered to fostering supervising social workers and fostering families.
- The Resilience Fostering Scheme to be explored with experienced foster carers and new applicants wherever stepping down from residential placements.
- Development of Parent and Child placements with identified fostering families and developed for up to 3 – 5 families, with a clear support and assessment plan to be endorsed through the Sufficiency Board.
- The development of the Torbay Fostering Website with the aim of transparency and accessibility for both foster carers and potential applicants.

- 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, particular 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.
- Continue to 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.
- Finalise the Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2022-25.
- Work with Placement auditor to develop the Quality Assurance of our Fostering Panel.
- Progress the Former Foster Carer SGO Offer and secure Special Guardianship Orders in respect of the remaining seventeen children identified.

12. Foster Carer Feedback

Please find an overview of some fostering family feedback which has been collated in the year 2021-22:

Foster Carer Workshop

“I thought it was really well organized. There was a great atmosphere and it was lovely to see managers, senior managers, Councillors working as one. Everyone seemed to be working together”.

“It was really well organised, and we felt very welcome and thoroughly enjoyed it.”

“It was really positive”.

“Overall it was probably the best event that I have personally participated in to date, although we deviated wildly from the script during most of the sessions, within our group, but very much to the benefit of those taking part.”

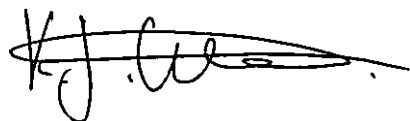
“I would just thank everyone in the team, and my fellow carers, for an interesting and stimulating event.”

“Being face to face with others after such a long time. The feeling that your comments and feedback were being listened to and your thoughts/ideas being taken seriously.”

Support Group Feedback

“The support group is important to myself as I enjoy meeting up with other carers for the social side and also if you are having a tough time and hear other carers are too it makes you feel you aren't alone.”

“A big thank you to social workers for all the hard work they do in support groups.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. J. C. S.', written in a cursive style.

Signed:

Name: Kelly Gosney, Head of Service (Regulated Services)

Date of review: 1st April 2023