

Fostering Services Annual Report 2022/23



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 2022 to 31st March 2023.

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 2022-23, 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 [on the services of the Therapeutic Fostering ASW]:

"She has provided us with a valuable and operational framework that allows us to look inward and understand the daily challenges that are our boys' lives. futures fulfilling and rewarding. Thank you so much for the services."

Torbay Special Guardian [on the support of their fostering assessment social worker]:

"Our assessor was wonderful, an absolutely brilliant practitioner."

Torbay foster carer [on the support of their supervising social worker]:

"We have a really good working relationship with our SSW and that makes a huge difference to our ability to foster well".

Torbay foster carer [on the bridging to adopt process]:

"We and the fostering to adopt carers have all been so impressed with the hard work and child-focussed practice and support the team have given to us all. They have kept us fully informed and involved us in the decision-making. We have complete trust in them and in their commitment to the child we care for and his best interests."

Torbay foster carer: "Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to fostering/Children's Services and the support you give us as carers/fostering families."

Torbay foster carer [on the impact of the Corporate Parenting Offer]:

"As a carer, I can't thank you enough for being able to share this experience with the child we care for, the memories will last a lifetime."

2. Profile of cared for children

Torbay continue to be corporate parents, as of the 31st March 2023, to 314 children; this overall figure also incorporated twenty-two Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who Torbay had welcomed either as part of the National Transfer Scheme or through representation as UASC by residents placed at local asylum hotels. 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. As outlined in previous Annual Reports, there is service wide focus on safely reducing the number of cared for children in Torbay, with particular attention given to effective and impactful edge of care intervention to ensure children are able to remain at home with their parents, carers or family members, as well as post-Order permanence options such as safe reunification, Former Foster Carer Special Guardianship and continued exploration of viable family permanence options.

In March 2023, 32% of cared for children and young people (equating to 100 children) 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. There are many reasons a cared for child might be placed out of county and at a distance from the address they lived in at the point of becoming cared for, and significant analysis of our cared for population identifies many of these reasons to be in line with the distinct and bespoke wishes and feelings or best interests. For example, 10% of those children are placed for adoption, and 16% placed with family or friends in the locality of their address; similarly, in line with their wishes and feelings, 11% of this cohort are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who have expressly asked to be placed in more urban areas. Those children and young people who require specialist settings, such as secure or residential provision, are all placed more than twenty miles away from the address they lived in at the point of becoming cared for also. Whilst Torbay have undertaken a significant amount of work to safely reduce the number of children placed in residential settings, from 46 children in the 2018/19 to 16 children as of March 2023, due to the geographical location of Torbay, most residential provision tends to be at a distance, and clearly, the focus for the matching for these children needs to be based on the capacity of the provision to meet the needs of the child over locality.

That said, Torbay recognise the increased vulnerability of children placed at a distance from Torbay, and this is reflected in the Out of County Placement Protocol which 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. It is also the underpinning reason that Torbay continues to focus on expanding the range of foster placement options available to our children. This understanding of the needs of our cared for children is used continuously to inform and enhance our fostering recruitment strategy and planning which continues to be focused on expanding the in-house placement options available to:

- Cared for children between the ages of 13-17.
- Cared for children who require placements alongside their siblings.
- Cared for children with additional or complex needs.
- Cared for children who are transitioning from residential settings into fostering families.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

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.

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

The key priorities and actions of the service in 2022/23 have been:

- Continuing to identify and enhance ways to capture the voice of our fostering families, and use this feedback to improve and enhance fostering assessment and services. This has included the introduction of quarterly thematic surveys.
- Expanding and developing the Corporate Parenting Offer for fostering families, cared for children, care experienced young people, parent/carers and Special Guardians throughout the year.
- Reviewing the training provided to foster carers on a regular basis. In 2022/23, a number of Torbay fostering families benefitted from a sensory training pilot.
- Running high quality and varied support groups, both internally and with input from CAMHS, to provide foster carers with therapeutic and emotional support.
- Implementing the new role of Therapeutic Fostering Advanced Social Worker within the service, offering bespoke therapeutic consultations and support to our fostering families.
- Providing bespoke and individualized plans of support, to enhance placement stability, inclusive of our of hours support from the Building Futures Together team.
- 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.
- Continuing to work within the three year agreement with Home for Good, now moving into Year Three 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.

- Enhancing the impact of our Quarterly Fostering Forums, 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.
- Creating and implementing Torbay's Fostering Friendly policy and celebrating our accreditation as a Fostering Friendly employer.
- Celebrating the commitment and achievements of our fostering families through the Letters of Thanks scheme, the Children's Celebration event and our fostering communications.
- Learning with our fostering families following their feedback, through a collaborative audit of the bridging to adoption process with a further audit planned specifically focusing on the voice of foster carers reflected through children's files.
- Seeking the voice of our fostering families in respect of the government consultation in relation to 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' and reflecting that voice in Torbay's response.

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 currently offer limited 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 our 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.

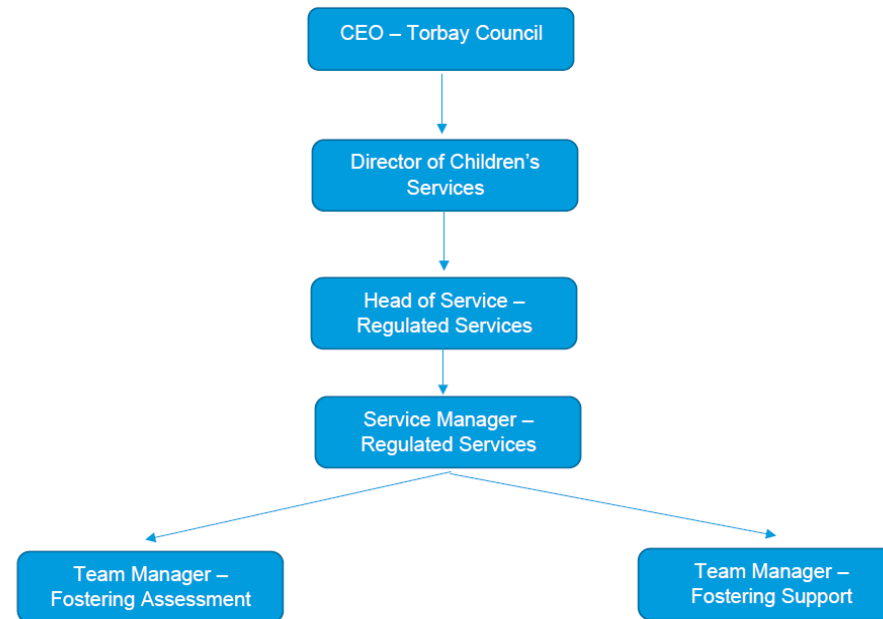
Torbay Fostering Service's objectives for service provision are:

- 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 for Regulated Services, 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 2023 comprised of:

- Two permanent Team Managers
- Two permanent Assistant Team Managers
- Three full time social workers (Fostering Support)
- Four part time social workers (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
- 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 2022/2023, the fostering service received a total of 111 initial enquiries; as a result of these enquiries, eight mainstream 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%
2022 – 2023	111	8	7%

The conversion of enquiries to approval during 2022/23 has decreased; despite a higher level of initial enquiries in 2022-23, eight mainstream fostering families were approved, resulting in a 7% conversion rate.

As a baseline expectation, the Fostering Service aim to increase the net number of fostering households by a minimum of ten per year. As of the 31st March 2022, Torbay supported 81 mainstream fostering families; as of the 31st March 2023, Torbay supported 84 mainstream fostering families. In 2022-23, eight mainstream fostering families were approved, and five mainstream fostering families were deregistered, resulting in a net increase of three mainstream fostering families, thereby seven mainstream fostering families short of Torbay's target.

There are a number of factors which have impacted upon this performance. In the year 2022-23, 40 Form C/Special Guardianship assessments have been undertaken by the fostering assessment team, to explore the viability of permanence through kinship care. Similarly, as of the 31st

March 2023, 20 cared for children were living with kinship carers under regulation 24 arrangements, on a temporary basis pending the completion of a Form C assessment and presentation to Fostering Panel. This is also reflected in the percentage of children who left care as a result of a Special Guardianship Order being made, which was 14% of all children who left care in 2022-23, higher than the England average.

Fifteen applicants also progressed from the point of initial enquiry, to stage whereby they were allocated to a social worker and the Form F assessment had begun, however they subsequently withdrew from assessment or a management decision. This is a higher number than in previous year, with the breakdown as below:

Withdrawn in Assessment	
Management Decision	2
Due to family circumstances	8
Due to health concerns	1
No contact	2
Went to IFA	2
	15

There remain a number of factors which are impacting on fostering recruitment both locally and nationally, which also impact upon the number of approvals for mainstream fostering families in the 2022/23 year. The cost of living crisis continues to impact on families, and influence their position on whether now is the right time for them to foster, as evidenced by the eight applicants who withdrew due to family circumstances. This includes personal circumstances, such as adult children returning to live in their home, as well as financial considerations, such as the impact of any plan to reduce working patterns in line with a fostering role. Similarly, a number of fostering families have spoken about the uncertainty in relation to the specific recommendation of the government's 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy in regards to Regional Care Co-operatives, and some initial concern raised by fostering families of the loss of the bespoke and individualized approach to fostering support that the Torbay Fostering Service is able to offer to families.

In analysing the individual circumstances of each of these prospective fostering families, a review has taken place of the process of the initial visit, to ensure that this is as robust as possible in identifying the viability of the family in terms of their ability to foster. All initial visits are undertaken by a social worker, with the oversight of the Assistant Team Manager, to ensure that the capacity within the fostering assessment team is focused on those applicants who are in a position to progress.

Similarly, during 2022/23, the fostering assessment team undertook a total of 44 negative initial viability assessments in respect of potential family and friend carers; this can often create a significant amount of work which does not directly lead to impact on children in terms of their permanence

outcomes. In recognition of this, and again to ensure that the capacity within the team is utilized and maximized, a new screening tool has been implemented, with the aim of reducing these high figures to a more proportionate level which does not impact as significant on the team workload.

Numbers of Foster Carers (as at 31st March 2023):

As of 31st March 2023, the total number of approved fostering households was 85 which is comprised as follows:

Total Beds	201	
Current Placements	142 (inclusive of 11 staying put)	
Vacancies	59	
Respite Beds	0	
Voids	0	

In March 2023, the total number of approved fostering households was 84. This is an increase of three mainstream carers from the 81 as of the 31st March 2022.

Throughout 2022/2023 financial year there have been **0** cases through the Independent Review Mechanism process.

From 1st of April 2022 to 31st of March 2023, **fourteen** fostering families were deregistered for the reasons as outlined below of which **five** were mainstream fostering families:

- Three fostering to adopt fostering arrangements ended as the placement converted into an adoptive placement.
- Eight deregistrations were initiated by the fostering family for a variety of personal reasons, including the choice to become Special Guardians to the children they care for.
- Three deregistrations were initiated by the fostering service: one fostering family then became a Connected Carer for Devon; one became an enabler supporting children with disabilities; one chose to offer Staying Put to their previously fostered child before retiring.

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 overall, 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.

Torbay's aim is to increase our fostering family cohort by a net increase of 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.

As part of the work undertaken on the Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2023-26, an analysis of the recruitment and marketing activity across 2021-22 and 2022-23 was undertaken, 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 identified, for example, that attendance at key community events generated a large proportion of initial enquiries into the fostering service, more so than print media advertising or social media campaigns [although the latter are integral in raising awareness and promoting the opportunity to foster]. Events generated on average 6 initial enquiries per event, with a total of 56 enquiries being received across all nine events, converting to 27 being qualified leads (48%). Granular analysis has also enabled the identification of key family-friendly events which led to a higher rate of enquiries and qualified leads; utilizing this level of understanding has enabled ongoing review of the event schedule, to ensure that

Information sharing sessions are also a critical means of establishing an initial contact with prospective foster carers, and building relationships with them from the outset of their fostering journey. Insight analysis demonstrates that those a high proportion of prospective foster carers who make initial enquiries are those who have come into contact with the fostering service, either through first or second-hand experience of being a foster child or knowing someone who has fostered. As such, there is great power within social media campaigns for example in providing insights into being a foster carer, for those who already foster for Torbay.

Analysis has also taken into account the geographical narrative in terms of areas whereby enquiries have been high (in 2022-23, uptake has been high in Brixham specifically for example) and undertaking targeting marketing strategies in areas where initial enquiries have been lower.

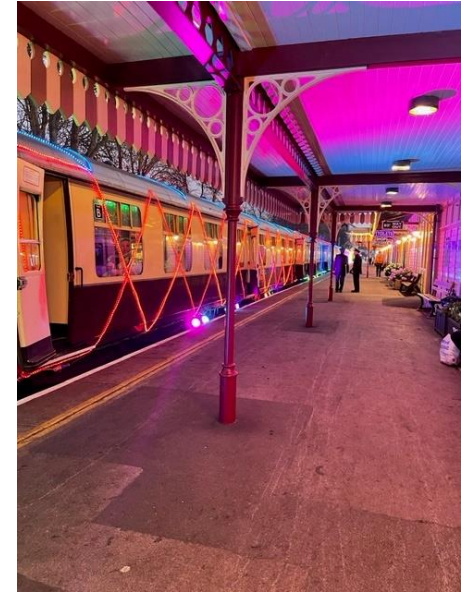
Next steps include:

- Launching the LCS Portal, including a direct virtual link to the recording system for all those expressing an interest in fostering.
- Making use of Power BI to geographically map initial enquiries, to inform marketing campaigns and strategies.
- Continuing to develop the Torbay Family Hubs website, as a one stop shop for all families in Torbay, including those who already foster and those considering fostering.
- Targeted marketing at those who work within the care and education industries, particularly in respect of Short Break carers.
- Utilising first hand accounts and testimonials from existing foster carers within our social media campaigns.
- Continued review of event-level analysis, to inform attendance at community events to promote fostering.
- Implementing an ongoing schedule of information sessions.

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 2022-23:

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



In 2023-24, we have sixteen 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 within our regulatory framework, and by the Corporate Parenting Board, the Overview and Scrutiny Board, the Continuous Children's Improvement 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.
- *The timeliness and impact of unannounced visits.

The Fostering Service have consistently sustained good performance in the four Key Performance indicators and have improved performance in comparison to 2021-22.

Fostering performance ss of the 31st March 2023 stands at:

Foster carers with up-to-date training – 99.5%
Foster carers with up-to-date DBS – 100%
Foster carers with up-to-date medical – 98%
Foster carers with up-to-date Annual Review – 92%

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

Following the migration to Liquid Logic, the fostering service are also currently involved in a reconfiguration project, which is reviewing all fostering pathways to ensure they are effective and efficient in promoting high quality recording and reporting. As outlined above, the Torbay Children's Portal is also due to go live in 2023-24, which will enable prospective carers to express their initial enquiry virtually.

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 face-to-face.
- 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.
- Evening support groups.

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.

Sensory Connections

A number of Torbay foster carers have been able to benefit from access to a Sensory Connection pilot led by health in 2022-23, which has focused on:

- The impact of pre-birth and early trauma on sensory and emotional development.
- Understanding our sensory systems (and why they are important!).
- How fear and anxiety can impact on children's behaviour (and how we can help them feel calmer and safer).
- The impact of sensory processing difficulties and trauma on the development of meaningful relationships with others.
- Concentration, learning and survival at school.
- The importance of self-care for foster carers to stay physically and emotionally well and to provide a buffer for the impact of secondary trauma.

10. Special Guardianship Support

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

The Fostering Assessment team is 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.

All Special Guardianship Order assessments are undertaken by social workers within the Fostering Assessment Team; all support for children subject to these Orders and their families is coordinated through the Fostering Support team. Referral routes, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and established.

A flowchart outlining social work responsibility in respect of Special Guardianship support plans, how these are recorded and the recording of communication of this to applicants. This has been communicated to all teams across Children's Services.

Information leaflets for assessment and support are in use by both the Fostering Assessment and Support teams. Consultation was offered by legal services in the creation of these leaflets.

A Special Guardianship Order tracker is being maintained, 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 Care Experience service.

Each Special Guardianship Support plan is then reviewed annually, in line with the month the Order was made, and a letter is sent to every Special Guardian at this point, outlining the support available to them, information in respect of our Family Hubs and our Family First support leaflet. For those Special Guardians receiving active support from the team, more frequent reviews of the Special Guardianship Support plan are undertaken in line with the child, Special Guardian, and family need.

In conjunction with the Learning Academy, Special Guardians will now also have access to specific training opportunities and also benefit from our growing Corporate Parenting Offer. In addition, Special Guardianship support groups are in place, and we will look to develop this over the next year and also through Torbay's ongoing Family Hub implementation.

The number of Special Guardianship Orders made in 2021/22 was 14 (and equated to 14% of children ceasing to be cared for within the year, above the England average). Seven were made to former foster carers who were relatives or friends, six to former foster carers were not relatives or friends (through Torbay's Former Foster Carer Special Guardianship Offer) and one was made to a relative of friends who were not former foster carers.

11. Key Priorities and Actions of the Service in 2023/24

- A review of the Fostering Contract will be finalized, to support a relevant and up to date response to our inhouse fostering carers.
- Focus on the timely completion by fostering families of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires in relation to children they care for, to inform holistic assessment and intervention for children experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties.
- 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.
- Finalisation of the Savings policy for children in care.
- Continued development of our offer of Parent and Child placements, with a clear support and assessment plan.
- 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 implement the Former Foster Carer SGO Offer and secure Special Guardianship Orders in respect of identified children who could achieve enhanced permanence through this option.
- Engage in a reconfiguration project to ensure that fostering pathways in Liquid Logic are effective in promoting high quality recording and reporting.
- Launch the pathway through the Torbay Children's Portal, to enable prospective foster carers to register initial enquiries virtually.
- Consult with our fostering families as part of the enhancement of the Torbay Family Hubs website, to ensure this is contains all relevant information and guidance for Torbay's fostering families.
- Increasing the numbers of cared for children engaged in the Children in Care Council groups.

12. Foster Carer Feedback

The Fostering Service collate all feedback that is received from fostering families, from our Foster Carer Workshops, specific staff feedback, surveys, Fostering Forums, Listening Circles and collaborative audits. We present this back to our carers through the You Said, We Did, We Will model, with an example of this below:

You said...	We did...	We will...
<p>Some of you verbally shared some of the courses you particularly valued individually (outside of formal feedback evaluations).</p>	<p>We will continue to use feedback to review our provision of previously well-attended and highly-rated courses to ensure these continue to be offered (or where provision has ended, whether they can be re-offered).</p>	<p>Wherever possible, we will explore constructive training proposals from Foster Carers. We will review those recommendations that have already been made to us.</p> <p>We will continue to welcome and review specific suggestions from Foster Carers for additional training provision – please do share your feedback with us for any courses that you have attended independently or trainers you would particularly recommend – either verbally in the forums or by email to: Learning&DevelopmentHub@torbay.gov.uk</p>

Please find an overview of some fostering family feedback which has been collated in the year 2022-23:

“Our fostering social worker has been a tremendous support and the support we had from him has been truly appreciated.”

“It was an emotional but lovely experience. The parents were lovely, it was the best possible outcome for the child. The child was going to the perfectly matched parents for him who will love him and spoil him. Executed perfectly by Torbay”.

“We have a really good working relationship with our SSW and that makes a huge difference to our ability to foster well.”

“Torbay’s staff were brilliant with the support they provided me. Everyone involved was supportive and communicated well.”

“I have received fantastic dedication from both social workers from fostering, they have both gone above and beyond in their support and always made us feel listened to.”

“Our social worker shows genuine care, understanding and empathy whilst maintaining a highly professional approach.”

“We feel supported well by our supervising social worker and are confident that we will be heard and supported.”

Torbay remain committed to continuing to seek the voice of our fostering families, and value this as a critical foundation upon which to review and enhance service delivery.

Date of review: 1st April 2024