

Wrexham Fostering Service

Quality of Care Report

Wrexham Children and Young People Service

Children's Social Care Department

November 2022



Wrexham Fostering Service - Quality of Care Review

1st April 2022 – to 31st September 2022

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Introduction and Background

The Wrexham Fostering Service is a local authority fostering service providing a range of foster care placements for children and young people looked after by Wrexham County Borough Council.

Regulation 63 of The Regulated Fostering Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2019 says that the Local Authority Manager must maintain systems for monitoring and improving the quality of the service.

The manager must make provision for the quality of care and support to be reviewed as often as needed but at least every 6 months. The purpose of the Quality of Care Report is to present the assessment of the standard of care and support provided and recommendations for the improvement of the service.

The Performance, Improvement and Partnerships Service compiled the report in partnership with the Social Care Department. The layout of the report and content has been adapted to meet the new Fostering Regulations that came into force in April 2019.

The report was compiled and written by the Performance, Improvement and Partnership Officer following an analysis of a range of material from a variety of sources including surveys of looked after children, foster carers and Fostering Service workforce. This was alongside a review of documentation, discussions with team members within the service and virtual meetings with the Team Manager for Fostering. This work was carried out in October and November 2022.

The report presents a review of the areas listed below and in each case examines 'what do we do well' and 'what areas do we want or need to develop further'. The action plan presented in Appendix 1 identifies the actions developed as a result of the review.

Standard 1: Helping people achieve the well-being outcomes they want.

Standard 2: Working with people and partners to protect and promote physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Standard 3: Safeguarding people from abuse, neglect or harm.

Standard 4: Helping people to learn, develop and participate in society.

Standard 5: Helping people maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships.

Standard 6: Helping people achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

1. Standard 1: Helping people achieve the well-being outcomes they want.

Our Focus

- 1.1. Wrexham Fostering Service has seen a number of changes over the last 6 month period, notably the implementation of the new hubs into the Fostering Team. The four hubs include:
 - Recruitment and Retention;

- Connected Carers and Special Guardianship Offer (SGO) Assessments;
- Supervising Social Worker and Support; and
- SGO Support Team – Leaving Care

1.2. The aim of the restructure was to improve the stability of placements to better support the areas of development. The areas of development identified in the previous report included:

- Stabilising of teams through recruitment and the restructure of teams into 4 hubs;
- Support offered to foster carers through a family approach to foster carers, Special Guardianship Offer (SGO) carers and connected carers; and
- A focus on improving annual review timeframes.

1.3. Each of these areas of development are discussed throughout the report. Moving forward, possible areas of development for the next months include:

- Fostering Allowance- Payment restructure aligning to Welsh Government Policy. A paper is due to go to Executive Board in December which will propose a competitive rate of pay for foster carers to make the Fostering Service more competitive.
- Continue to focus on Foster Carer recruitment- Recruitment drive is ongoing.
- Improve the approach to consultation and support, ensuring that children and young people are at the centre of all decision making.
- Compliance - All foster carer reviews to be completed.
- Fostering Service Operational guide to be reviewed and revised by early 2023.

1.4. The implementation of the Fostering Hubs continues to be a success. The fostering service has been separated into:

- Special Guardianship Offer (SGO) Hub
- The Connected Carer's Assessment Hub
- Fostering Support Hub
- Recruitment and Retention Hub

1.5. Each hub has a dedicated Assistant Team Manager (ATM) and all Hubs are overseen by the Fostering Team Manager. The separation of the service into four dedicated hubs ensures that each of the social workers within each team has a specialist area of service. This enables them to provide a higher level of service and dedication to the areas in which they work in. There has been a marked level of progress and performance in each area since the implementation of the hubs. The hubs are now fully embedded and have created a more streamlined approach to the Fostering Team, this is supported with the expansion of the team and the successful recruitment of interim social workers to all advertised posts including an additional Business Support Officer and an additional Placement Officer.

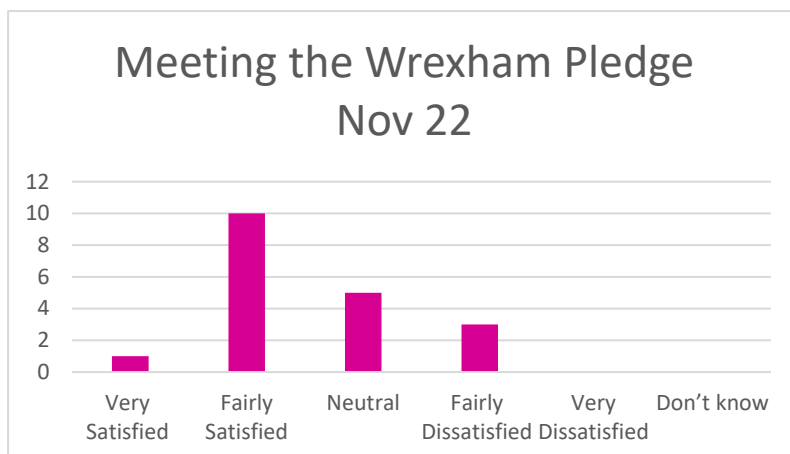
1.6. All four areas of development aim to support the service to drive forward improvements in the provision of stable placements where children have good experiences and are well supported. Wrexham Fostering Service understand that through these experiences and support, children have the opportunities to thrive and achieve the outcomes they want. Evidenced through meeting notes and discussions with team members, it is apparent that all of the teams within Wrexham Fostering Service continue to understand the overarching focus of providing stable placements

and how the Fostering Services activities and strategies contribute to these improvements.

- 1.7. The sub group of the Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Team continue to meet. The Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Sub-Group demonstrate an ongoing commitment to improve the numbers of Foster Carers through their commitment to ongoing work and recruitment drive.
- 1.8. Alongside the work of the Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Team the new Recruitment and Retention Hub supports the focus on improving the stability of placements. The main focus of the Recruitment and Retention Hub is to analyse the areas which can be targeted to improve the recruitment of our generic foster carers as well as retain the carers that we currently have. The outcome of this meeting has been the development and proposal to overhaul the rates paid to our carers to ensure that we are able to attract the most experienced and capable foster carers for our children and young people. The Fostering Allowances Payment Restructure proposal is yet to be fully signed off – this is estimated to be early December with implementation in early January 2023.
- 1.9. The objective of improving the capacity to better match children with their placements is supported and included within the Council Plan (2020-2023), through the work of the 'Improving Health and Wellbeing: With a Focus on Prioritising Children's Social Care Services' Priority Board and the Accelerated Improvement Board. Included within the success statements for this priority is the commitment to increase in-house foster carers through improved retention and recruitment. The target for 2022/23 is to improve generic foster carers from 50 at the end of March 2021 to 63 generic foster carers by the end of 2022/23 (see section 6 of the report for feedback on this performance measure). The outcome is scrutinised quarterly by the Priority Board and at quarter 2 and quarter 4 by SLT, Lead Members and the Executive Board.

Children feel their voices are heard, they have choice about their care and support

- 1.10. When children in care are treated with dignity and respect, their positive experiences influence their well-being; the Wrexham Pledge continues to set out Wrexham Council's corporate parenting promises. Wrexham Fostering Service's commitment to this pledge is was reviewed in the bi-annual Foster Carer Survey. The survey took place in Nov 2022 and the results are reported throughout this Quality of Care Report. 26 foster carers responded to the online survey, with 16 fully completing all questions. There was a slightly lower response rate from the previous two surveys. A full copy of all the responses has been shared with the Team Manager.
- 1.11. Foster carers were asked in the bi-annual Foster Carer Survey – to what extent do they agree that Wrexham Fostering Service meet their pledge to children and young people in their care. 58% of the responses were positive this is higher than May 2022, with 50% of responses positive.



- 1.12. The annual 'Measure the Pledge' survey offers an opportunity to gauge children and young people's judgement on Wrexham Council meeting the promises of the Pledge. However due to staff absence this hasn't been carried out this year. Children and young people's voice is an important element in the consideration of service delivery and decisions that impact on the outcomes of children and young people. Moving forward this is an area to explore as part of service improvements.
- 1.13. Alongside this, quarterly well-being statements from children and young people are collated using the 'Mind of My Own' app. Again this has been impacted as a result of the staff absence. This area has been included in 'What areas do we need to or want to develop further'. This has also been impacted by the decision for Children's social care to pause the project on the Mind of My Own application, with a new focus on implementing a new social care model which incorporated the voice of the child throughout.
- 1.14. Children are encouraged to attend their care plan reviews to ensure they are involved in planning decisions. In accordance with the Regulated Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2019, Wrexham Fostering Service complies with the responsibility to take the views of the child and young people into consideration when developing care plans, to reflect their choice of the opportunities that they have available to them.
- 1.15. In addition to statutory visits by the children's social worker, Supervising Social Workers (SSW) are required to see the child/young person as regularly as possible and at least twice per year in their placement with their foster carer. This is to ensure that the child's voice is central to the care planning and that they are having all of their needs met within their placement. A dedicated case note is included on the review as a separate section to ensure it is easily located and can be quickly viewed to ensure that this requirement is being upheld by the department. It was reported in the previous report (June 2022) that following a recent audit, approximately 20% of the reviews had the child/young person's case note completed as seen. In response to this, an action was raised in the team meeting and a follow up audit scheduled, verifying SSW's response to the 'ask'. As a result of this, records of foster carer Supervisions and case notes between June 2022 and October 2022 show that 61% of 'supervisions' were marked as children being seen during that supervision with a further 39% of children being seen during additional home visits to the carer. This

marks a significant improvement within the months of June, July, September and October 2022. This will continue to be built upon, with an aim to continue to increase this figure.

- 1.16. The importance of the child / young person's voice is reflected throughout Children Social Care and recognised as an area of development within all teams and high level improvement actions have been agreed to reflect the commitment of the full service to develop the voice of the child / young person. The recent Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Performance Evaluation Inspection of Wrexham County Borough Council's Adults and Children's Services key findings and evidence noted that 'Practitioners recognise the importance of ensuring children's voices are heard. We saw some examples in social care records where language, communication and level of emotional and developmental maturity was considered and explored to obtain/facilitate views of children. Opportunities for children's views to be consistently sought and appropriately recorded need to be strengthened'.
- 1.17. The Young People's Care Council continues to support opportunities for the Fostering Service to learn from children in care. The Care Council meets monthly, highlights over the last six months include:
 - The number of children and young people in attendance is very small, there are 2 reasons for this
 - The impact of COVID and meetings being virtually and are less interactive has led to the children and young people losing interest.
 - The group also had a number of young people around the 17 years of age, they have naturally disengaged as they have entered work/ further education etc. The group are working tirelessly to recruit new members.
- 1.18. Currently the group focus is on group cohesion and recruitment, sessions since March have centred around relationship building, as well as maintaining the group's purpose and consulted on Local Authority (LA) policies such as the upcoming Participation Strategy. The group have also reviewed and will to continue to be involved with the development of the Life Story books developed by the LA and also Child Protection information booklets. The group also requested attendance of the Looked After Child Education Coordinator to attend the group and explain grants and funding for education further input is planned. As the group gains momentum, consideration will be given to rebranding to reflect the wishes of the children at group as feedback suggests that current branding and language used may prevent interest from new recruits.
- 1.19. Managers and practitioners are committed to ensuring the voices and views of all children are central to their assessments, and inform care and support planning. Through the continued use of advocates (discussed below), and the Care Council, children's voices are heard and the service is moving towards a child centred approach. The Fostering Team recognise their role in ensuring these voices are heard and recognised within improvement planning.

Use of Advocates

- 1.20. Children have the opportunity to be involved in their care plans and are supported through the promotion of formal and informal advocates to take ownership of these

plans. The Regulated Fostering Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2019, part 10, recognise the importance of the use of advocates to ensure that Fostering Services are acting in an open and transparent way with any child placed by the service provider.

- 1.21. Advocate referrals to TGP Cymru are analysed quarterly to measure the commitment to providing advocate representation, ensuring consistent development of co-produced plans. The table below reflects quarter 3 and quarter 4. Unfortunately due to staff absence quarter 1 and 2 were not available. This will be updated in the next Quality of Care Reporting.

Referrals to TGP Cymru	Q3 (2020/21)	Q4 (2020/21)	Q1 (2022/23)	Q2 (2022/23)
Issue Based Advocacy (IBA)	22	28	Data not provided	Data not provided
Issues Dealt With	50	58	Data not provided	Data not provided
Care Leavers Support	2	1	Data not provided	Data not provided
Supported With a Complaint	0	0	Data not provided	Data not provided

Independent Safeguarding Reviewing Officers

- 1.22. The Independent Safeguarding Reviewing Officer's (ISRO'S) continue to act as a lead officer in coordinating an effective inter- agency response for Looked after Children. During Looked after Children (LAC) reviews, the ISRO's ask about the completion of Personal Education Plans (PEP's), health assessments and dental checks.
- 1.23. The ISRO team has undergone many developments over the last 12 months, in the recent Social Care Inspection, June 2022, CIW commented on the positive impact that the ISROS have on looked after children - The local authority benefits from an increased establishment of confident and competent independent reviewing and safeguarding officers who positively challenge and escalate poor practice. The oversight of IRSO was evident on children's records.
- 1.24. Children's Social Care are working with colleagues in Human Resources to improve the stability of the Independent Safeguarding Reviewing Officer (ISRO) posts. The ISRO team now has, 7 permanent posts (with one post being recently recruited) and 1 agency post.
- 1.25. One ISRO contributed in providing their views on the role over the last six months, based on their experience:

'The ISRO reported that the good working relationship has continued into the last 6 month period of 2021/22 .The allocated supervising social worker will generally respond to my emails and requests.'

I have found that carers are happy with the support they have received from the fostering team. Some carers who tend to struggle in reviews are supported in meeting

Having supervising social worker attending reviews is valuable and supportive in ensuring the needs of the child are met and will support carers. Some workers help carers to reflect and the care they give to the young person in their care. Fostering team provide guidance around parenting and strategies when struggling.

Main stream Foster carer appear to have a clear understanding of their role and responsibility

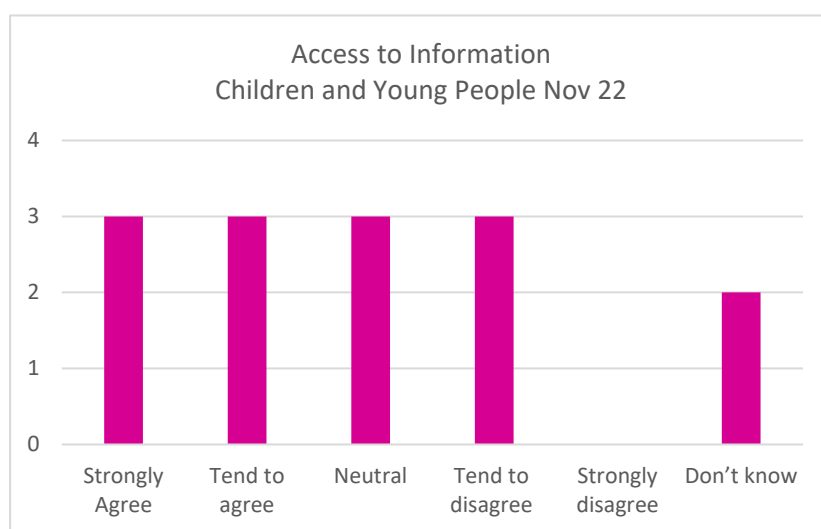
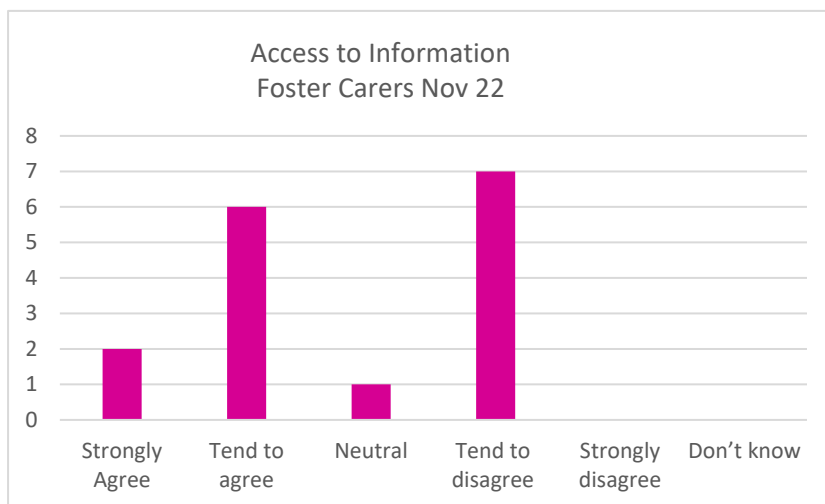
Concerns raised by the ISRO, ISROs are not always informed that a placement has broken down or notice has been given. Some of the Connected carer / Kinship carers do not appear to understand their role and responsibilities and the support given to connect carers does not appear to be the same level and very often not receiving the same training afforded mainstream carers'.

Access to clear and understandable advice and information

- 1.26. Wrexham Fostering Services have continued to support the reshaping of the access service users have to clear and understandable advice, information and assistance. The website has continued to develop and is now ranked on Google's first page ensuring an increase in hits. The website can be viewed here: [Wrexham Foster Wales](#). Appendix 2 provides an analytical breakdown of audience views from Google of the new website.
- 1.27. Since 1st April 2021 to the 31st September 2021, 23 new enquiries have been received through the enquiry form on the website, 8 of these had initial visits and 2 moved onto the application stage and checks.
- 1.28. The development of child friendly policies has focused on adhering to children's rights. There have been no new child friendly policies during quarter 1 and quarter 2.
- 1.29. The bi-annual Foster Carer Survey took place in November 2022. Within the survey, foster carers' were asked whether children/young people and foster carers have access to the right information when they need it.
- 1.30. When asked about access to information for children and young people, the majority of answers were positive, however there is a decrease in positive responses from the May 22 survey, with 37% responding positively compared to 61.9% in May 2022. The percentage of respondents responding positively to access to information for foster carers saw a slight decline from May 2022 from 54% to 50% in Nov 22.

When asked to expand on access to information, one respondent commented that 'My placement doesn't want MOMO app, they want to actually see someone. A consistent someone not once or twice or temps' another respondent commented that 'Often a child is placed out of hours and in an emergency and on occasions paperwork can be delayed or deficient of material. This is normally rectified within a couple of working days.'

Full survey responses have been shared with the Team Manager.



Timely completion of assessments

- 1.31. The following table presents the percentage of Looked After Children (LAC) statutory reviews completed within timescales. LAC statutory reviews are not the direct responsibility of Supervising Social Workers.

Month/Year	Percentage
2021/22 Q3	85.21%
2021/22 Q4	86.28%
2022/23 Q1	85.55%
2022/23 Q2	84.21%

- 1.32 The percentage of annual reviews completed within timescale specific to the Fostering Service was identified as an area of development; **a focus on improving annual review timeframes**. The table below illustrates that an improvement is yet to be seen in the percentage of annual reviews completed within timescale. From

discussions with the Fostering Team manager, it was felt that there is still a backlog from the previous months and although the new approach to the hubs has provided an improved process to focus on raising standards this has yet to impact on the completion rates. As a result plans are in place which will see the introduction to the Fostering Management Panel (FMP), this panel will hear annual reviews and will improve the percentage of annual reviews completed within timescales. It is expected that this new approach will also impact on outstanding annual reviews, it is intended that the FMP will meet every 2 weeks initially, and then move to a Monthly meeting schedule.

Month/Year	% of annual reviews completed within timescales
2021/22 Q3 and Q4	36%
2022/23 Q1 and Q2	36%

- 1.33 Wrexham Fostering Service has continued to benefit from a Fostering Panel to review assessments. The panel operates within specific, written policies and procedures and benefits from an independent chair, and medical and legal representation. An elected member sits on the panel to uphold its corporate parenting function. The term of the Chair of the WCBC Fostering panel concluded on the 30th September, this role will be covered by the Adoption chair for a period of 6 months whilst this vacancy is filled. The vacant roles of Fostering panel Chair and Vice Chair are currently being advertised. There is no written feedback from the Fostering Panel Chair for this 6 month period.

What areas do we need to or want to develop further?

- Work closely with partner teams to improve inclusion of children's voice to inform decision making and service improvements
- Recruitment of SCBC Foster panel Chair and Vice Chair
- Review approach to placement difficulties ensuring these are shared with ISRO's and placement meetings are held with relevant individual if placements are struggling, in order to prevent placement breakdowns.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements /developments?

See action plan - Standard 1: Helping people achieve the well-being outcomes they want.

2. Standard 2: Working with people and partners to protect and promote physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

- 2.1 Wrexham Fostering Service have used the 'Mind of My Own' app as a platform to protect the mental and emotional wellbeing of the children in their care. The Mind of My Own Policy is adhered to when children share concerning feedback. The policy provides information on the safety link process and escalations. This Project has now been paused and a new focus on implementing a new social care model, incorporating the voice of the child throughout

Looked after Children Nurse

- 2.2 To support the health of looked after children, Wrexham Fostering Service have increased the number of specialist nurses, the service now includes 1 full time and 2 part time nurses (equal to 2 FTE) . The new LAC nurses have successfully completed an induction and training period and are now able to work between health and social services. The team have worked hard and have successfully cleared the outstanding health assessments which had accumulated due to the volume of assessments required.
- 2.3 Processes have been reviewed and training has been undertaken with other health professionals such as school nurses and health visitors around the health needs of the LAC population. The LAC nurses work closely with both Health and Children's Services to ensure the health needs of children are met as well as working closely with children, other professionals and carers to address any health issues or concerns raised. Wrexham Fostering Service and the LAC nurse have consistently ensured that 100% of looked after children are registered with a GP within 10 working days during quarter 1 and 2. This performance has continued consistently through all quarters.

Achieving improved personal well-being outcomes

- 2.4 Wrexham Fostering Service continues to promote their comprehensive list of social and leisure offers. The list of remains the same with no new additional offers over the last six months.

Support:

- Foster carers newsletters
- Support groups
- Informal buddy system
- Training for foster carers
- Active 8 offer for LAC children
- Max cards Discount
- CADW- Discounts
- Membership to Fostering Network
- Fostering friendly employer- extra 5 days annual review
- Regular supervision visits from supervising social worker and child's social worker.
- Foster Carer Ambassadors
- Family passes to Erddig & Chirk Castle
- Foster family events (Easter Egg Hunt, Summer Get together, Santa's Grotto)

Financial:

- Foster care allowance based on age
- Skills payment
- 75% council tax reduction
- Financial help for resources such as new beds, pushchairs

What areas do we need to or want to develop further? Areas identified for further improvement include:

- LAC nurse concerns to be shared with the Fostering Team. Fostering Team to consider and work with the Looked after Children Team to identify any actions moving forward.
- Continue to review the list of social and leisure offers working with foster carers and children and young people to ensure the list meets their needs and supports their role.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements /developments?

See action plan - Standard 2: Working with people and partners to protect and promote physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

3. Standard 3: Safeguarding people from abuse, neglect or harm

- 3.1. In Wrexham Fostering Service, children are protected from abuse. Children and young people within the Fostering Service can be confident that they are protected through effective application of safeguarding and child protection processes. The recent Care Inspector Wales report - Report of Children's Services Risk Based Inspection 2022 commented- ' The local authority responds well to immediate safeguarding concerns but safeguarding practice following the initial intervention stage needs to be strengthened.
- 3.2. Wrexham Fostering Service monitor safeguarding processes through the Schedule 2 and 3 reports (appendix 5) this details investigations into complaints or safeguarding concerns.
- 3.3. In terms of the Deprivation of Liberty (DOL'S) Wrexham fostering service do not have any children subject to DOL's that are fostered by Wrexham carers.
- 3.4. Wrexham Fostering Service fully understands the importance of having procedures in place when a child is absent without permission and the service monitors this quarterly. During the period 1st April to 31st September 1 child absconded, this is a declining trend from the previous 6 months where there were 3.
- 3.5. As part of the schedule 2 reports, the service collects data on the number of incidents involving police. For the period 1st April to 31st September there were 5 incidents compared to 4 incidents in quarter 3 and 4. This is an increasing trend compared to the previous 6 month period and in comparison to the year-end total for 2020/21 of 5. However, it should be taken into account that the pandemic and restrictions associated with lock down may have impacted the figures in 2020/21. Prior to this there were 17 incidents during 2019/20.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

- 3.6. Safeguarding is viewed as a whole council priority and is set out in the Corporate Safeguarding Policy, within this there is a Corporate Safeguarding Action Plan advising departments on how to implement the policy. The Corporate Safeguarding Action Plan has been updated to reflect emerging issues like 'County Lines' (gangs),

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Modern Day Slavery (MDS) and PREVENT (Counter Terrorism). All of the Fostering Service team members have access to this policy. The Team Manager continues to attend this meeting and the Corporate safeguarding action plan is on the website for all team members to view.

- 3.7. Child protection enquiries include no investigations that took place because of a child protection enquiry, this remains static with 0 in quarter 3 and 4.
- 3.8. Foster carer's compliance with requirements of the Foster Care Agreement are now discussed in supervisions via foster carer diary sheets. A review has taken place to quality assure the supervision records and evidence from this suggests that they are keeping to the agreement. The diary sheets are regularly discussed in supervisions. The supervision template has been revised to include the foster carer diary sheet entry. In addition to this all of the required documentation including the foster carers review format is being revised to ensure that it is up to date and meeting the necessary requirements. The review of this documentation is due to be completed by the end of the year.
- 3.9. During the period 1st April to 31st September there were 4 incidents of serious illness/accidents compared to 7 in the previous 6 month period.
- 3.10. The Fostering Service workforce were given the opportunity to share feedback on the quality of care within the Fostering Service in the bi-annual Fostering Staff Survey. The survey took place in Nov 2022, with 15 staff member starting the survey and 11 staff members fully responding to all questions, this is an increase from May 2022 however the team has grown significantly. Respondents were asked to identify if they were permanent, temporary or agency staff, 8 permanent staff responded, 0 temporary and 7 Agency.
- 3.11. Within the survey, respondents were asked 'do you have knowledge of how to access the fostering statement of purpose and relevant departmental policies and procedures?' 80% of respondents agreed. This is a decline from May 2022 of 100% responding with yes.

Staff training

- 3.12. The Fostering Service Workforce survey asked; 'do you have access to the necessary amount of training to support your continued registration with the Care Council?' – 8 respondents agreed and 3 responded not applicable. This is an improved response compared to May 2022, where 3 respondents agreed and there were 3 not applicable.
- 3.13. Appraisals and Performance Development and Review (PDR) response rate has remained static since May 2022. When asked if the respondents have received a PDR in the last 12 months, all 7 permanent staff responded with 'No'. It should be noted however that 4 respondents had recently commenced employment or returned from Maternity leave. One respondent commented 'I never have had one in the two and half years I have worked in the authority.'
- 3.14. New staff who have joined in the last 6 months were asked about induction training. 4 permanent members of staff stated yes responded 'Yes' they had received induction

training and 3 stated 'No' (permanent). One respondent did leave the following comment 'There needs to be an induction programme for each new staff member; depending on their role, the programme should be tweaked to ensure it covers all aspects of their role. There should be far more shadowing opportunities; new staff should be invited to numerous meetings to get to know how Wrexham works. There should be training showing how to access policies and templates and there should be templates to enable the staff to feel from the outset that there are clear guidelines in place. Induction could also include observing Panel, reviews, family conferences and care planning meetings to mention but a few. There could be a more experienced member of staff assigned to each new staff member who the new staff member could call upon to answer any queries. It can be difficult knowing who to ask what to in the early weeks of a new job. When asked 'Do you feel that induction training prepared you for your new role?' 3 stated 'Yes' and 3 'No' (permanent).

- 3.15. All social workers across the fostering service are now trained to deliver skills to foster training to our carers. Prior to this, the training delivery of skills to foster training was outsourced meaning a cost to the Authority as well as a lack of flexibility for our carers who are required to attend the training to ensure that they are compliant with the national minimum standards of foster care.
- 3.16. Foster carers would often experience delays in commencing the training due to the training provider's schedules. The training can now be delivered directly by our skilled social workers within the fostering service. The training can be flexible to meet the needs of the foster carer, in line with the other demands that they have in their lives. The training can be delivered in group sessions both virtually and face to face, as well as on an individual basis as necessary. The training can be individualised to focus on any particular area that the carer may be struggling with or perceive as a struggle into the future.
- 3.17. It is anticipated that Wrexham Fostering service will see a demand from individuals and couples who wish to be assessed as foster carers. With this in mind, the fostering service has developed an in-house Form F training session that will be delivered over two half days, by the fostering support manager. This will ensure that all of our social workers are fully equipped to meet the anticipated demand as well as act as a refresher for those who are already experienced in form F assessment. Again this will provide a cost saving to the authority, without the need to outsource form F training or outsource Form F assessments to independent assessors due to lack of skill within the service.
- 3.18. The Reunification Team (a Pilot Social Work Team) launched on the 15th August 2022. The Team's work is based on the NSPCC Reunification Practice Framework, an evidence informed framework for social work return home practice. The Team provides an opportunity for an evidence-informed assessment of children with Looked After status where a return home is being considered. Practitioner training for Wrexham's Reunification Practice Framework is now being offered to all front line practitioners in AIT, All-age Disability Team, Family Intervention Team, Family Support Team, Looked After Children Team and Children's Safeguarding.

Complaints

- 3.19. In quarter 1 and 2 there were no complaints from carers compared to 1 in the previous 6 month period and 0 'Part 4' meeting compared to 0 'Part 4' meeting in the last 6 month period.
- 3.20. Wrexham has been committed to making sure that children and young people have numerous avenues to raise complaints, including:
- Leaflets and signposting in welcome boxes – including the child friendly complaints procedure developed by the Care Council;
 - Mind of my Own App; and
 - IRSO's and the Active Offer.
- 3.21. Children and young people are supported with safeguarding concerns/complaints through advocacy. Due to staff absence this information was not available for this report.
- 3.22. The service understands the need to make use of complaints to aid continuous improvement. Complaints against the service are now dealt with via Wrexham County Borough Council Complaints investigators, ensuring a consistent approach. During quarters, 1 and 2 there were 2 complaints made against Wrexham Fostering Service via this route.
- 3.23. The complaints were investigated and the complaint received in Q1 was upheld, an apology was issued and reminders regarding procedures were sent out to staff. The complaint received in Q2 was partially upheld it was found that whilst policy and procedures had been followed improvement actions were identified.
- 3.24. The importance of being able to raise grievances is advocated within the service and promoted via the Wrexham Pledge. The pledge contains the wording "Promises made to you by adults who work with you while you are in care. If they are not happening tell your carer or social worker". The 'Mind of My Own' app provides a platform for children and young people to voice their concerns and raise awareness to their grievances.

Performance Management Framework

- 3.25. The Fostering team continue to contribute to the monthly Practice, Performance and Quality (PPQ) workshops between Children's Social Care teams and the relevant Head of Service. The workshops provide an opportunity to discuss performance and identify any areas where progress is not on track. Actions are agreed to ensure early interventions. The Fostering Service team participate in this process and monthly/quarterly PPQ workshops take place to discuss and challenge the progress made with the Team Plan. Moving forward, these meetings provide an opportunity to integrate and review the actions from the Quality of Care review within one Team Plan.
- 3.26. One of the areas for development within the fostering team has been identified as foster carer annual reviews. The Foster Carer Annual review is a mandatory and necessary meeting that acts as a review mechanism of the Foster Carers registration. The annual review analyses the Foster Carer's ability within the last twelve months of their practice to ensure that they are meeting all of the necessary requirements of their

continued registration in line with the National Minimum Standards of Foster Carers. The demand on the main fostering panel has meant that Foster Carer annual reviews have not always taken place within the necessary twelve month timeframe.

- 3.27. In light of this the Fostering Management Panel has been introduced which will commence in December 2022 and act as a panel to complete the necessary Foster Carer reviews. The aim is to ensure that all carers receive a review within a timely manner and any issues are identified and addressed promptly. Those carers who have never had an annual review (new to caring) or who require a variation or exemption will still need to attend the main fostering panel however the management panel will decrease the demand on the main fostering panel resulting in carers not having to wait for extended lengths of time to receive their annual review.
- 3.28. Foster Wales meets once per month with the additional recently introduced element of additional localised team meetings. Foster Wales brings together all of the fostering leads from across Wales to discuss individual and all Wales issues within fostering with the aim to work together to improve the standard of foster care as well as to recruit and maintain a high number of skilled and experienced Local Authority carers.

Leadership and Management

- 3.29. There has been significant change in Leadership within the Fostering Service. The Head of Corporate Parenting post is currently filled by an interim post holder whilst the new Head of Service for Corporate Parenting is on leave. There is also an interim Team Manager in post. The changes in leadership will generate further developments within the coming year as new approaches to leadership are implemented. The Team Manager post is currently being advertised.
- 3.30. As part of the Annual Fostering Staff Survey, staff were questioned about management. There was an improvement in the percentage of staff who said they felt supported by management from the May 2022 survey. All staff replied 'yes' apart from 1 responded with 'Don't know'. There were 0 'No' responses. When asked to expand one positive comments stated; 'I feel so supported within this team with all staff but in particular my manager. She's great and has helped me settle in and I have no doubt this will continue. I have also found that the other ATMs for the other Fostering Hubs have been really helpful too'.
- 3.31. When asked 'Do you feel there is effective communication between management and staff' – 12 respondents replied 'Yes', 1 'No' and 2 'Don't Know'. This is an improvement from May 2022.
- 3.32. When asked if there are clear lines of accountability, 13 respondents replied with 'Yes' and 2 'No' this is a decline from May 22. When asked to expand on communication suggestions included: 'I think the team meetings could be better managed with a very clear agenda whereby the team manager provides council updates to the team and each team member reports back their specialist areas. I feel that it should be chaired tightly so numerous conversation take us off the topic for discussion and I feel it should be minutes and sent to team members. I feel team meeting needs to be much tighter, with a very clear feedback time from management down to SW. It should be chaired by the team manager and not assistant team managers, so team managers has a better

insight into what is going on in the team.' There was very positive comment that stated 'I feel we have a good system of communication through regular Team meetings, individual supervision and managers are always available via email or phone. They are responsive and supportive'.

- 3.33. 93% staff agreed that they have access to staff meetings on a monthly basis.
- 3.34. With 93.33% response rate, respondents agreed that supervision takes place regularly and 17% (1 respondent) provided a N/A response.
- 3.35. Respondents were asked to give any final comments on Management within the team. Comments included:
- I feel so supported within this team with all staff but in particular my manager. She's great and has helped me settle in and I have no doubt this will continue. I have also found that the other ATMs for the other Fostering Hubs have been really helpful too.
 - Great managers in fostering team.
 - I feel that assistant team managers have a tight and close working relationship with the teams I am surprised that team managers are not as involved and seem quite removed and invisible to the team I am surprised that managers above team managers are completely invisible and not involved in wanting to know what the team on the shop floor are doing - I feel there needs to be managers who have their ears closer to the ground. A lot is left to the assistant team managers, or so it seems; team managers should be far more involved

Full survey responses have been provided to the Team Manager. All responses provided remain anonymous.

What areas do we need to or want to develop further?

- Safeguarding practice following the initial intervention stage needs to be strengthened
- Review of Foster Carer Agreement
- Interim and Annual PDRs to be completed as a mandatory requirement.
- Induction training to be provided to include signposting to the location of relevant policies and procedures.
- Review impact Form F assessments

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements /developments?

See action plan - Standard 3: Safeguarding people from abuse, neglect or harm.

4. Standard 4: Helping people to learn, develop and participate in society.

- 4.1 As part of the corporate parent commitment, the Leaving Care Team work in partnership with the Fostering Service to support children and young people to participate in society and develop post care. The Wrexham Fostering Service have a

dedicated Leaving Care Team who continue to be responsible for the provision, implementation and coordination of the following initiatives that support care leavers:

- Local Offer for Care Leavers
- Pathway Plans replacing Care and Support Plans
- When I am Ready scheme (WIR)
- Training Flat
- Leaving Care Guide
- Allocation of a Personal Adviser
- Support is also offered on the following:
 - Accessing Education, Employment and Training.
 - Developing Independence skills.
 - Finding and managing suitable and safe accommodation.
 - Managing your finances and claiming benefits. Including ensuring all children from eleven years old have a bank account and a passport.
 - Support to access Health Services including access to Emotional and Mental Health support needs.

The Leaving Care Team manager has reported that 'the Leaving Care team have a positive and productive relationship with the foster care team. We work together on placements that have or are breaking down to establish plans to strengthen and support placements or through the matching process of finding new placements. The '4 C's' document is user friendly and updated regularly between the Leaving Care team and the Foster Team on live placement searches.

- 4.2 The Supported Lodgings service is an alternative to foster care and offers young people aged 16-21 the opportunity to live in a similar family environment, but with more independence. The current number of young people within supported lodgings placements is 7, with 1 vacancy available at the end of Q2.
- 4.3 The table below illustrates the percentage of Care Leavers who experienced homelessness (as defined by the Housing Wales Act 2014) within 12 months of Leaving Care.

Month/Year	Percentage
Q3 (2021/22)	11.8%
Q4 (2021/22)	5.6%
Q1 (2022/23)	10.9%
Q2 (2022/23)	2.83%

Help people to gain the skills and educational attainment they need to engage in things that matter to them.

- 4.4 Wrexham Fostering Service understands the importance of education and the impact of accessing education services to raise aspirations and support children and young people to meet their potential. Personal Educational Plans (PEP) are incorporated into the LAC Care and Support Plans, ensuring the child's education is a key part of their overall care and support. The new PEP was presented to Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators across Wrexham on the 14th February 2022. This was an opportunity to share with schools the new PEP and redesign. The use of a 1 page profile was integrated into the design, schools already use this approach with student.

- 4.5 The number of children with a PEP in place at the first review has seen an improvement from quarter 3 and 4 of 2021/22 with 1 for Q1 (9.1%) and 5 for Q2 21.4%, however the 2020/21 year-end percentage was 24.00%. This is a result of the ongoing changes in Social Workers over the last 6 months and the stability and consistency of the Children's Social Workers.

- 4.6 The table below illustrates the PEPs in place for the first review.

Personal Education Plan Information	Q3 (2021/22)	Q4 (2021/22)	Q1 (2022/23)	Q2 (2022/23)
Total LAC with PEP in Place this Q	0	0	1	5
Total LAC due a PEP this Q	7	8	11	23
Percentage	0.00%	0.00%	9.1%	21.4%

- 4.7 The quality assurance process to improve the quality of PEPs has continued and social workers are continuing to use the new page introduced to capture the views of the children/young people and the foster carers. This is providing a richer document covering a wider range of concerns and making it more child centred. The foster carers have the opportunity to input more into the PEP as a result. This is reflected monthly in the QA process, seeing an improvement in the quality of the PEP's. Feedback from the monthly QA's is provided to Social Workers for continuous improvement.
- 4.8 Wrexham Fostering Service recognises that a stable education placement is crucial to the progress and well-being of Looked after Children. The following table identifies the percentage of school age children looked after at 31st September who have experienced one or more changes of school during the year (excluding transitional arrangements, moves associated with adoption or moves home). The data illustrates an increasing trend and therefore declining stability for the children and young people when compared to the previous 6 month period.

Education Placement Information	Q3 (2021/22)	Q4 (2021/22)	Q1 (2022/23)	Q2 (2022/23)
The number of children looked after at 31st March who have experienced one or more changes of school (excluding transitional arrangements or moves associated with adoption or moves home)	6	8	5	12
The number of children of compulsory school age looked after	206	211	228	246
Percentage	2.91%	3.8%	2.19%	4.88%

What areas do we need to or want to develop further?

- Monitor the number of children looked after who have experienced one or more changes of school and work with Looked after Children Education Co-radiator to see if support can be given from Foster Carers.
- Consider implications of increase in the number of Total LAC due a PEP for Q2 as this has increased by 110% to 23.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements /developments?

See action plan - Standard 4: Helping people to learn, develop and participate in society.

5. Standard 5: Helping people maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships.

Provide people with stable and consistent placements

5.1 Numbers of Looked After Children with the Wrexham Fostering Service:

Children within the Fostering Service	As of 31st March 2021	As of 31st Sept 2021	As of 31st March 2022	As of 31st Sept 2022
Total children and young people supported by Wrexham Fostering Service	135	136	141	133
Generic Foster Carers	62	63	56	49
Connected Carers	61	62	61	63
Connected Carers (Regulation 26)	12	10	24	29

5.2 The total number of children and young people supported by Wrexham Fostering Service as at the 31st Sept 2022 has decreased by 8 children compared to 31st March 2022. The number of children placed with Connected Carers increased by 2 and there was an increase of 5 children placed with connected carers on a Regulation 26.

5.3 When comparing the 31st Sept to 31st March the number of children placed with Generic Foster Carers has decreased by 7 children.

5.4 As part of the Welsh Government performance and improvement framework for Social Care the total number of children looked after at 31st March who have experienced 3 or more placements during the year is collected and populated annually via the Welsh Government derived from the LAC census. The table below shows the percentage of LAC with 3 or more placements for quarter 1 and 2 compared with quarter 3 and 4. This has shown a slight increase in quarter 2 but is still significantly lower than quarter 3 and 4 showing an improving trend.

Quarter	Number	Total	Percentage
Q3 2021/22	20	371	5.39%
Q4 2021/22	31	367	8.45%
Q1 2022/23	9	375	2.40%
Q2 2022/23	17	377	4.51%

5.5 During the period of 1st April 2022 to 31st September 2022 there were 5 placement disruptions; in the previous 6 month period there were 4.

5.6 The service has increased the capacity in the recruitment to two full time recruitment and retention officers who work within Wrexham Fostering Service.

5.7 During the period 1st April 2022 to 31st September 2022 there was a decrease of 3 generic foster carers, highlighted in the table below. Overall as of 31st September 2022

there were 102 approved foster carers, this remained static from the previous 6 months. There were no new generic foster carers during this timeframe, however the three generic carers who left gave the following reasons:

- Ill health, not wanting to continue and 1 left after being granted an SGO.

6 month timeframe	Approved Foster Carers	Generic Foster Carers	Connected Carers
1st April 2020 to 30 th September 2020	121	52	68
1 st October 2020 to 31 st March 2021	127	55	72
1 st April 2021 to 31 st September 2021	103	53	50
1 st October 2021 to 31 st March 2022	102	50	52
1 st April 2022 to 31 st September 2022	102	47	55

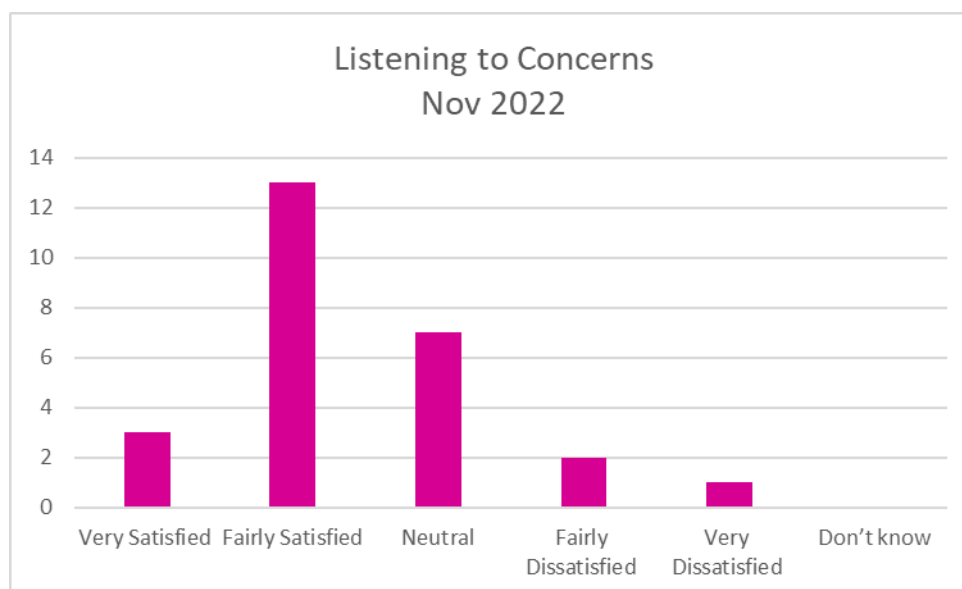
- 5.8 The service recruited 8 new connected carers and lost 5, 1 of these moved to the SGO. There is now a dedicated SGO Team who offer support to the SGO carers and financial support where needed. Long term the SGO is encouraging the stability of long-term placements and better outcomes for the children and young people.
- 5.9 The 'No-detriment' policy has been embedded into the service with the aim to harness the support and benefit package between Foster Carers and SGO. The SGO policy encompasses a fostering family approach with SGO, Foster Carers and Connected Foster Carers, harmonising the support and training and ensuring fluid transition from one to another. It is hoping that this will increase the number of assessments completed by the Social Workers through to application. The majority of assessments are Connected Carers and SGO carers this approach will ensure the capacity is available without impacting each other. The SGO policy and operational guide is currently under review to ensure that it is meeting and continues to meet the needs of our Connected Carers and those that are transitioning to SGO. The review of the SGO operational guide will be completed by mid-December 2022.
- 5.10 Wrexham Fostering Service did not meet the 2021/22 target to increase the number of generic foster carers to 93; as part of the Council plan review for the final year this target was amended to 63. Q1 and Q2 there were 50 generic foster carers this means that in the final 2 quarters there needs to be an increase of 13 foster carers which is a significant number in a 6 month period.
- 5.11 The table below illustrates assessments and approvals of foster carers. The table presents some changes in data including:
- An increase in Form F assessments
 - An decrease in new approvals of 5, from 12 to 7 during the 6 month period An increase of termination of approvals by 1
 - Registration approvals, remained static at 1
 - Exemptions/variations, a decrease of 1

Assessments/ Approvals/ Variations	1st April – 30 th Sept 20 (6 month period)	1 st Oct – 31 st March 21 (6 month period)	1st April – 30 th Sept 21 (6 month period)	1st Oct – 31 st March 22 (6 month period)	1st April – 30 th Sept 22 (6 month period)
Form F assessments	8 (1 completed)	10 (3 completed)	4 (3 completed)	1 (0 completed)	2
Kinship assessments	41	32	50	57	45
New approvals (kinship and generic)	15	13	10	12	7
Termination of approvals (kinship & generic deregistration's/resignations)	6	2	12	4	5
Registration approval changes	7	5	2	1	1
Exemptions / variations	10	2	7	2	1

Take the views of people's families, carers and other personal relationships into consideration when assessing their care and support needs, if appropriate

- 5.12 The annual biannual foster carer survey collates views from foster carers. Within the foster carer survey, Nov 22, foster carers were asked 'How satisfied are you that Wrexham Fostering Service listen to your concerns and acts upon them?' The positive response rate has remained static from the May 22 Survey, with 61.54% positive response, negative responses have improved from May 22 with 11.54% compared to 21.88% in May 22.

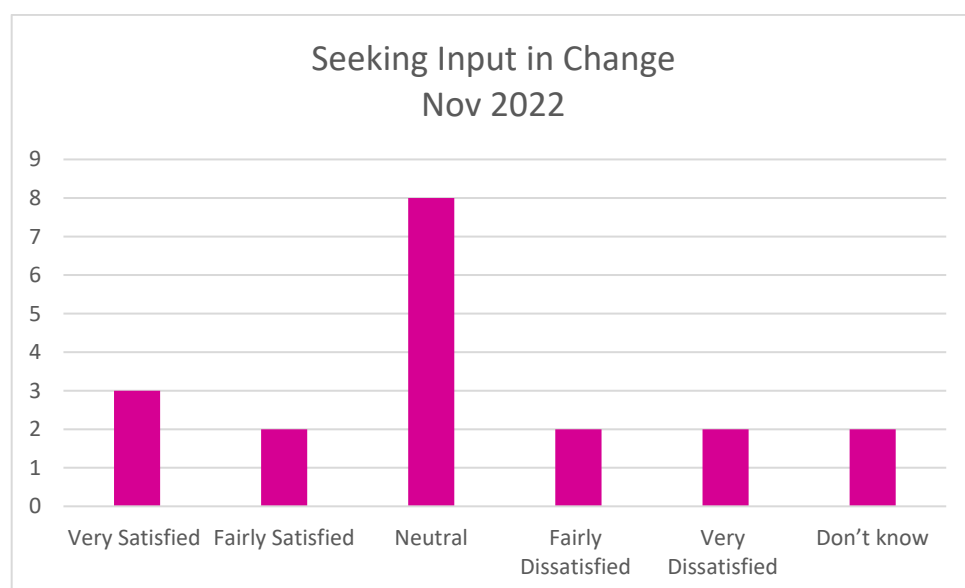
Full comparisons and responses shared with Team Manager.
The chart below illustrates the responses.



- 5.13 When asked to respond with further comments, there were more negative than positive comments. There continues to be higher number of negative Children's Social Worker (CSW) comments than Supervising Social Worker (SSW) comments. Some common reoccurring themes included a lack of communication and the constant

changes to Social Workers, and lack of availability/contact, the responses included the following comment: 'My supervising s/w is great but neither me or my placement has seen a childcare s/w for over 2 months. I have mobile numbers for childcare s/w's (temps) but nobody ever answers. I take all my concerns to my supervising s/w who deals with problems as best she can. I have no idea who is above my supervising s/w in social services and I don't think they know who I am either. At the moment I have ONE port of call for everything and that's my SSW '.

- 5.14 This question was expanded to ask 'To what extent do you agree that Wrexham Fostering Service seek your input and ideas into the development of the service?' The chart below illustrates the answers. The positive response % has decreased from the May 22 Survey, with 26% positive response compared to 45% in May 22 dissatisfied responses have remained static from May 22. Full responses and comparisons are shared with the Team Manager.



What areas do we want to develop further?

- Respond to the actions within the review of the SGO Policy.
- Continue to embed all actions agreed as part of the commitment to increase the number of Generic Foster carers, ensuring there is a joined up approach to discussions within high level Boards with information/feedback shared in Team meetings.
- Consider decline in positive response to seeking input and ideas from foster carers to inform focus of activities and improvements.
- Increase in Q2 percentage of LAC with 3 or more placements for quarter 1 and 2.
- Review and address feedback from foster carers in relation to lack of communication.

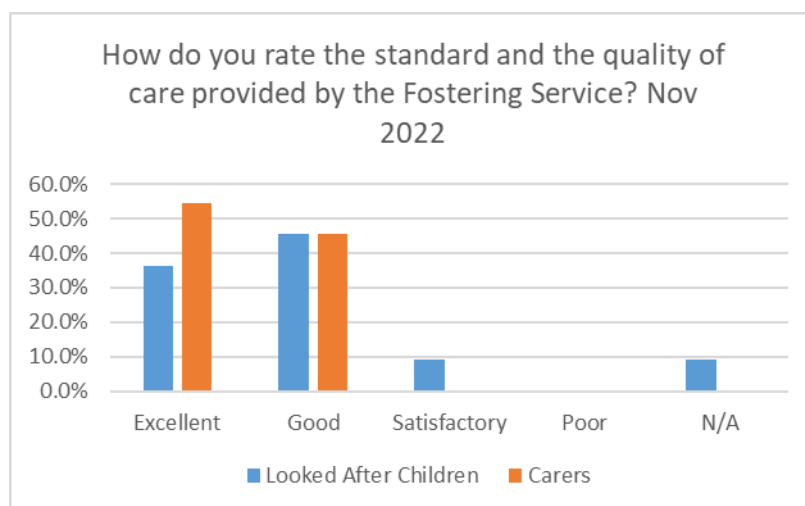
What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements /developments?

See action plan - Standard 5: Helping people maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships.

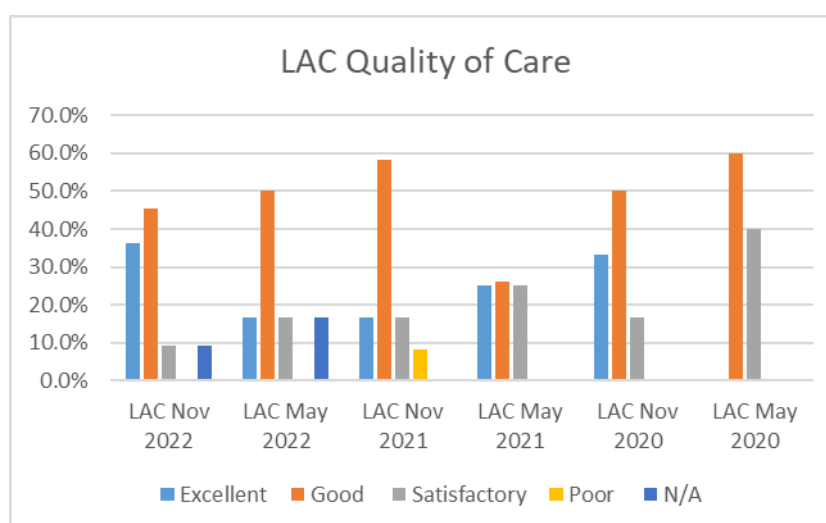
6. Standard 6: Helping people achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs

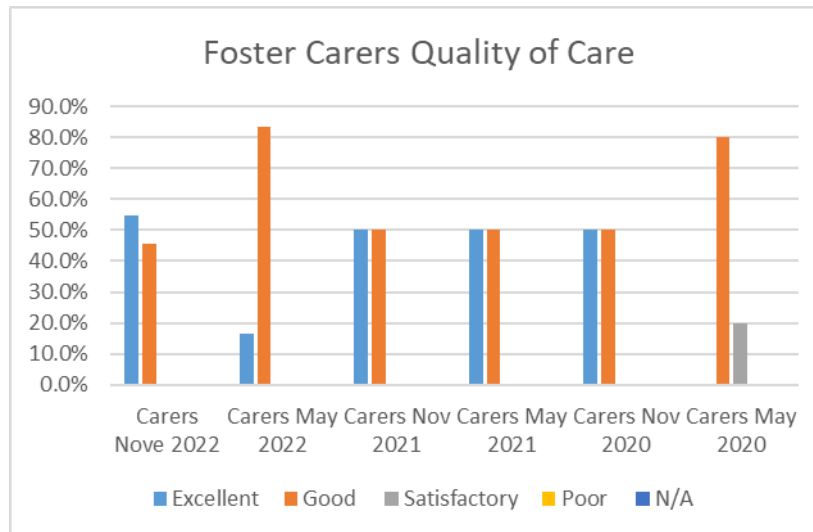
Support people to access living accommodation that meets their needs and facilitates independent living.

- 6.1 The Nov 2022 Fostering Workforce Survey asked the team to rate the quality of care for foster carers and children/young people. The percentage of 'Excellent' and 'Good' for LAC is 81.9% an improvement from 66.7% in May. The percentage of 'Excellent' and 'Good' for carers is 100% this is static from May 22 however there is an increase in the number of Excellent responses which improved to 54.6% compared to 16.7% in May 22. 66.7%. There were no poor responses for either LAC or Carers Quality of care provided by the fostering Service.



- 6.2 The charts below show the trend for rating the quality of care over the last 5 Quality of Care Reports.





- 6.3 Quality of Care rating from the Fostering team for Foster Carers has 100% responses of either Excellent or Good which is consistent with previous years. The quality of care rating for LAC has improved compared to May 2022 with most respondents answered either 'Excellent' or 'Good'.
- 6.4 The workforce were asked to expand on their responses. Common themes included: Foster carer engagement and training, support groups. Support for carers from carers Foster carer recruitment.
- 6.5 The workforce were also asked to comment on areas of development over the next 6 months, suggestions included:
- *Caseloads may be top heavy for Looked After Children Social Workers, maybe these could be considered. Training on the importance of replying to colleagues who are requesting information, to fit in with court timescales*
 - *Maybe schemes like Mockingbird to allow 24/7 support for carers from other carers, sharing in experience and knowledge*

Foster Carer Training

- 6.6 Over the last 6 months, Wrexham Fostering Service has developed training for foster carers to support the well-being and mental health of both the foster carers and the children and young people that they care for. An 'in house' training scheme has been developed which enables all of the Supervising Social Workers as well as the recruitment officers to deliver the mandatory 'skills to foster training'. Due to the development in this area Wrexham fostering service is able to deliver this training based on the needs and other responsibilities of the carer. This can be delivered in a group setting or on an individual one to one basis as necessary.
- 6.7 In addition to the skills to foster training Wrexham Fostering service offer a full catalogue of intermediate and advanced training which can be completed again as part of a group session or within the newly developing online modules. We have found that many carers alongside their caring responsibilities cannot attend day time group training sessions this allows carers to advance upon their skills and knowledge in their own time with the flexibility to complete the training from home around their caring responsibilities.

- 6.8 Wrexham Foster service has linked foster carer assessment and training to the recruitment and retention development plan. This identifies that training within the service is an essential factor in improving the skills and experience of the foster careers to better meet the children's needs.
- 6.9 Since October 2021, foster carer training has been delivered virtually where appropriate, including the following sessions:
- Paediatric first aid.
 - Safeguarding- online and face to face.
 - Safer caring- online and face to face
 - GDPR- online course.
 - Food safety- online course.
 - 6 week attachment course.
 - Reporting and recording- online or face to face.
 - Contact- online or face to face
 - Skills to Foster.
 - Life Journey.
 - Gambling Training.
 - Substance misuse.
 - Window of tolerance.

Workshops by Afa Cymru on request:

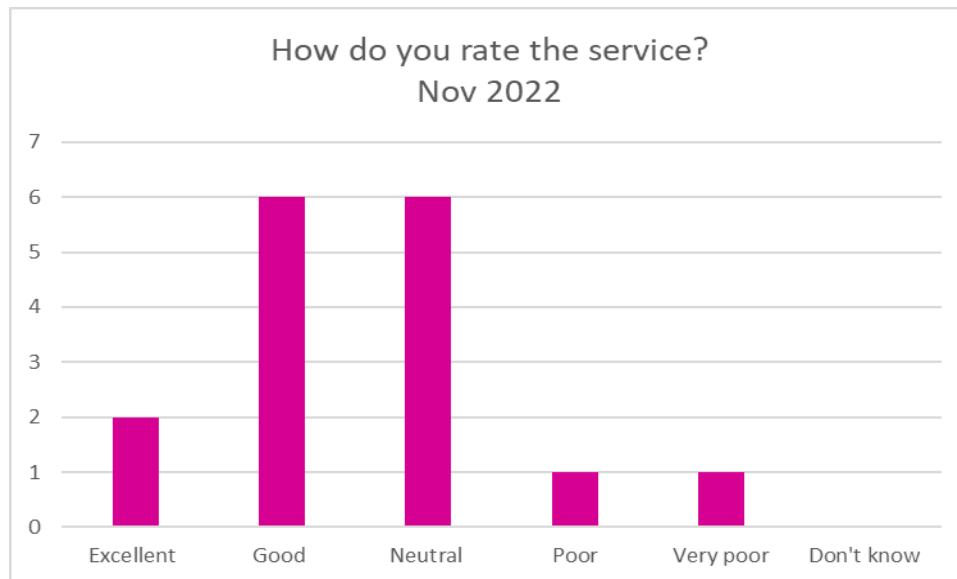
- Blocked trust
- Hang on and buckle up for the ride
- Step down placement
- Secure base

Additional learning resources:

1. [The Fostering Network](#) – on-line workshops
2. [Y Bont](#) – workshops
3. [NSPCC](#) – child protection workshops on-line and e-learning modules
4. [CEOP](#)- On-line safety courses including an e-learning module.
5. [Social Care Wales Learning Hub-North Wales Safeguarding Board](#)- for Safeguarding

Supporting Foster Carers

- 6.10 An area of development within the Fostering Service was to; **Support offered to foster carers through a family approach to foster carers.** Foster carers were asked how they rate the quality of care provided.
- The chart below illustrates the responses. The percentage of 'Excellent' and 'Good' is 50% which is a decrease from 56.25% in May 22 and 42.86% in November 2021. However, negative responses of 'Poor' and 'Very Poor' have decreased to 12.5% compared to 31.25% in May 22 and 23.81% in November 2021.



Supporting young people and care leavers to participate as active citizens both economically and socially through advice help and support

- 6.11 The final area of development from the last report was: Support offered to foster carers through a family approach to foster carers, Special Guardianship Offer (SGO) carers and connected carers. Wrexham Council approved the Special Allowance Guardianship Policy in October 2020. The policy is now in place and currently there are 109 Special Guardianship Orders, 26 of these children were on SGOs prior to the policy being granted in 2020. The Special Guardianship Policy *'creates a 'no detriment' policy by removing the barriers preventing foster carers from applying for special guardianship arrangements for the children in their care.* The Special Allowance Guardianship offer is regarded as a success and has had a real impact on the permanency of placements for children and young people.
- 6.12 Wrexham Fostering Service continue to ensure that all children and young people can access help and support in a variety of formats including through the medium of Welsh, in line with the Welsh Governments' framework for Welsh Language, 'More Than Just Words' or in other languages of choice where necessary. Due to staff absence further information on this was not available for this report. This is the same for number of young people received the Active Offer through the medium of Welsh and children and young people supported with protected characteristics from an age and gender viewpoint.

What areas do we want to develop further?

- Develop an annual feedback process for Foster Carer Training to ensure that provisions are reviewed and meet the needs of Foster Carers
- ISRO concerns raised- Connected carers receive the same training afforded to mainstream carers.
- Improve access to information for Foster child/children

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements /developments?

See action plan - Standard 6: Helping people achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs.