



## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **Fostering Service – Carmarthenshire County Council**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018**

#### **Background of the Fostering Service**

The purpose of this report is to meet the requirements of regulation 42 of the Fostering Regulations (Wales 2003) which sets out the duty of the Fostering Service to report the mechanisms for data monitoring and reporting on the quality of care they provide to children who are looked after.

The Carmarthenshire Fostering Service is based at the Ty Elwyn Offices in Llanelli and is responsible for the recruitment, preparation, assessment, training and support of mainstream foster carers and connected kinship carers.

The functions and aims of the Fostering Service in Carmarthenshire is:

- To provide sufficient numbers of high quality placements to meet the needs of those children in need who are assessed as needing to be living away from home.
- To support the variety of needs of the children placed in foster care and support foster carers to ensure good quality care is achieved. Whenever possible children should be placed with approved carers, relatives or friends who can meet the needs of children in a family environment. To achieve permanency by supporting adoption and special guardianship orders where appropriate through the monitoring of care planning through permanency panel.
- To liaise with the child care teams and monitor placements to ensure that placement support meetings are held regularly to quality assure placement stability and achieve the best outcomes for children who are looked after.
- To manage fostering resources responsibly by helping foster carers develop their skills through providing personal development plans in relation to their training needs. To support carers through the

implementation of the Induction framework and promote their development through post qualification training.

- To provide support to foster carers on an emotional practical and financial basis dependent on their needs and the impact fostering may have on them and their children and family life.
- To provide regular monthly individual supervision to foster carers and friends and family carers.
- To carry out annual reviews of foster carers and connected carers in accordance with regulations and standards.
- To communicate closely with the child care teams and other professionals in relation to the child's care plan and be able to attend Looked After Children Reviews.
- To work closely alongside the fostering recruitment staff and meet with them on a regular basis to discuss the strategy and recruitment of new carers.
- To work jointly with the recruitment staff in ensuring we are maintaining new foster carers within the first year of placement and ensuring that they receive appropriate and regular support and meet their learning and personal development plans as part of the new induction framework, QCF and development of the 'Newly Approved Foster Carers Support Group'.
- To hold regular team meetings across the fostering service with the recruitment staff in order to determine and focus on the needs of the service and in particular the demands to recruit foster carers for specific placement categories and areas across the County. This is to ensure appropriate matching and to continue to deliver a needs led service. To maintain young people within their own community when appropriate and provide them with the stability in relation to their health, education and emotional needs.

## **Management and staff within the Service**

The Service is strategically managed by the Head of Childrens Services and the responsible senior officer is the service manager for fostering and resources.

The service is managed on a day to day basis by the team manager who is supported by 3 assistant managers. All staff are suitably qualified and experienced to operate a fostering service and managers have relevant

management qualifications as outlined in the fostering regulations. Staff are encouraged to attend regular post qualification training as part of their continuing professional development and receive annual appraisals. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 there were 7 full time Social Workers and 6 part time Social Workers within the Service. There is 1 full time vacancy at present.

At present the service appears large but there are a lot of ongoing activities that engage staff in supporting and reviewing foster carers as well as providing monthly supervision requirements under the fostering regulations. Staff undertake placement support meetings to ensure that children are stable in their placements and the necessary support is in place for foster carers to maintain quality care. It is also a large geographical area to cover as placements of children are across both urban and rural parts of Carmarthenshire. Staff also support connected kinship carers who are family members such as grandparents approved to care specifically for children within their families. Some of these placements are out of county.

The staff in the recruitment side of the service undertake pre approval foster carer training in the skills to foster preparation course. The recruitment roles involve attending marketing and recruitment events as well as undertaking initial assessments and enquiries for the service. Staff are involved in post approval training of Foster Carers and their learning and development programmes.

The staff on the support side of the service are involved in undertaking annual reviews and supporting foster carer and kinship carers with placements which include monthly supervision. They are required to undertake placement support meetings and also attend looked after children reviews. They participate in duty on a daily and out of hours role for placement requests.

## **Fostering Service Activity: April 2017 - March 2018.**

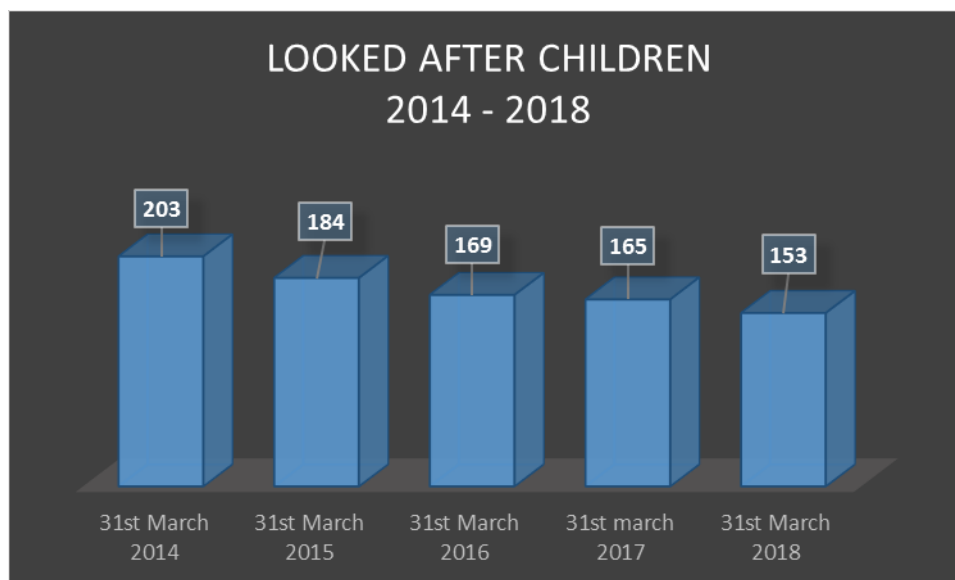
### **Looked after Children**

The number of Looked after Children population has steadily reduced during the last three years as Carmarthenshire has strived to develop key strategies around their family preventative services.

The reduction of looked after children has been achieved through the following:

- Good preventative work to maintain children outside statutory services.
- Strengthening the procedures for admission to care.
- The development of the accommodation panel

- Supporting the opportunities for children to have permanency in their care outside the care system through special guardianship orders.
- Ensuring that where children are looked after they receive a high quality service and wherever possible support rehabilitation back to the family.



Children Looked After by Carmarthenshire Carers

In 2017-2018 the majority of children continue to be looked after with our in house foster carers.

There were 4 young people placed in residential care due to their complex needs and 2 with Independent Fostering Agencies.

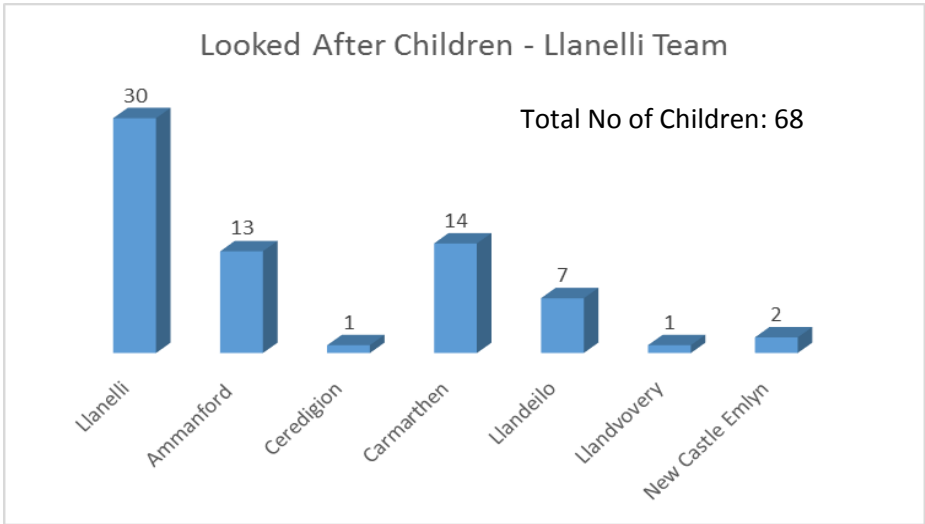
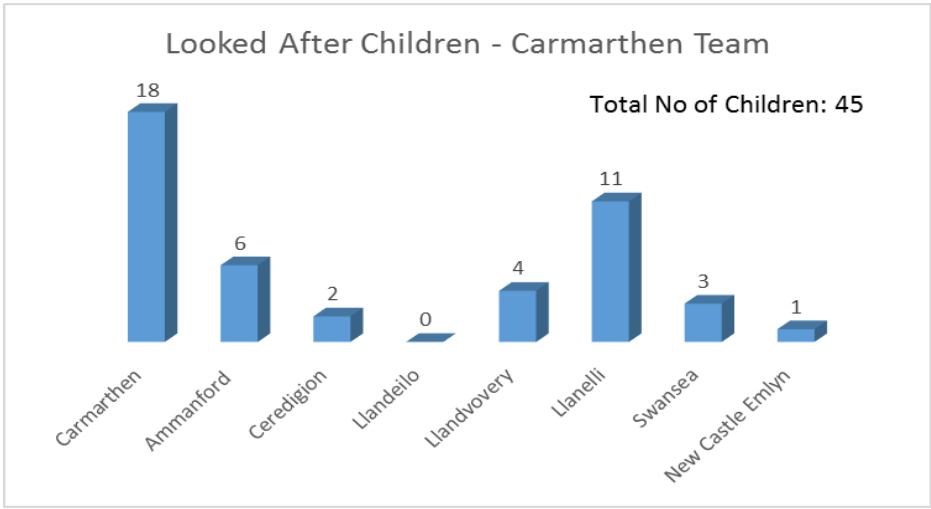
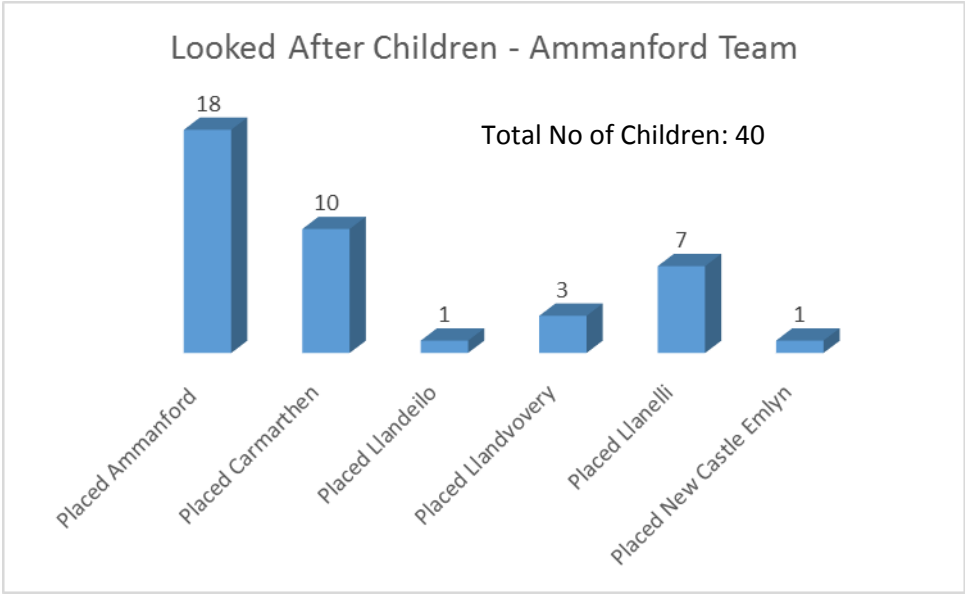
The service also provided a number of mother and baby placements.

There are only 2 short breaks carer for children with disabilities. However the service has skilled mainstream foster carers who provide placements to children with disability and complex needs.

### **Looked After Children Transportation**

Local Authority has a duty to transport children to remain in their local schools and ensure their educational stability. As we can see from the statistics some children are living outside their school area and placed across the county.

Taxi provision is required to transport children across the County to ensure they have consistency in their school provision. We endeavour to manage this transport arrangement by considering all options given our budgetary responsibilities.



## School Stability

As you can see Carmarthenshire has an excellent record of maintaining children in their local schools:

1 or More Change of Schools			
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
No of School Children	155	145	120
1 or more Change of Schools	6	5	6
<b>These figures are below the welsh average</b>			

## Recruitment

During 2017- 2018 the service received 100 initial enquiries from members of the public who were interested in obtaining information on fostering.

From these enquiries 27 applications were received to foster and attend the skills to foster training.

### Reasons for no response after initial enquiry

1.	Declined to attend skills to foster training
2.	Applicants pursuing adoption.
3.	Lack of bedroom space
4.	Decided not to proceed after attending information evening
5.	Medical and Health reasons highlighted – counselled out
6.	Family Issues – Counselled out
7.	No response to telephone messages or correspondence sent out
8.	Recent domestic incident – local authority involvement
9.	Previous connected carers – SGO granted. No response after initial enquiry
10.	Withdrew after skills to foster training – not for them
11.	Couple moved out of the area no longer interested.

12.	Withdrew after initial interview
13.	Counselled out after initial interview
14.	No longer interested
15.	Applicants applying for IVF treatment
16.	Family known on care first – counselled out
17.	SGO on grandchild – child too young at this time to consider application
18.	Did not attend information evening after invitation
19.	Work being completed on house – may return to application after completion of work
20.	No response after 3 months – closed due to no response – 33 applications

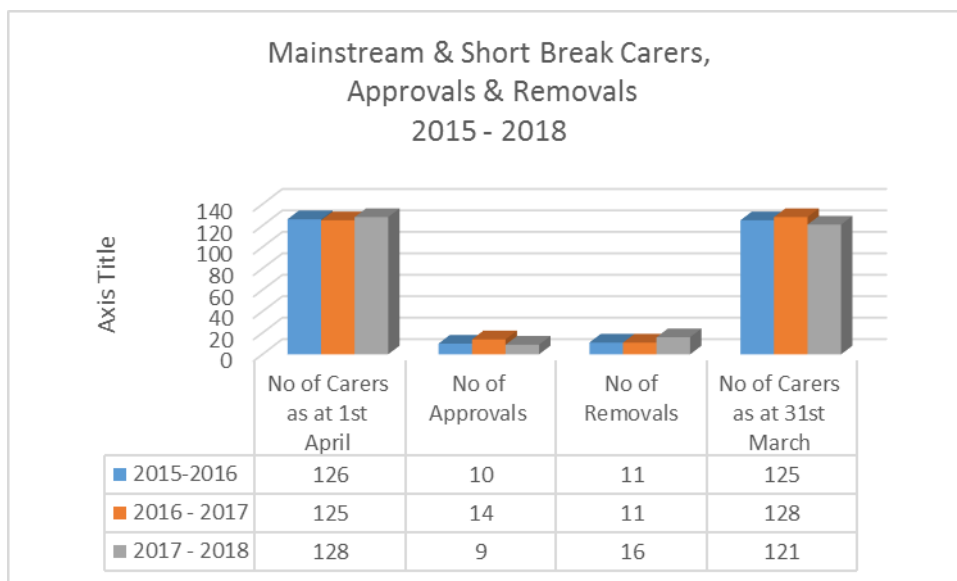
Some of the year's enquiries are still ongoing due to allowing 3 months to respond to the application form after the first initial enquiry.

Once people have received the application pack, some withdraw due to the, in-depth assessment process and effect they may have on their family life ie the effect on their children, lifestyle, suitability of accommodation, health reasons, financial and unsuitable home conditions. Some decide to apply to independent fostering agencies or other local authorities due to financial reasons.

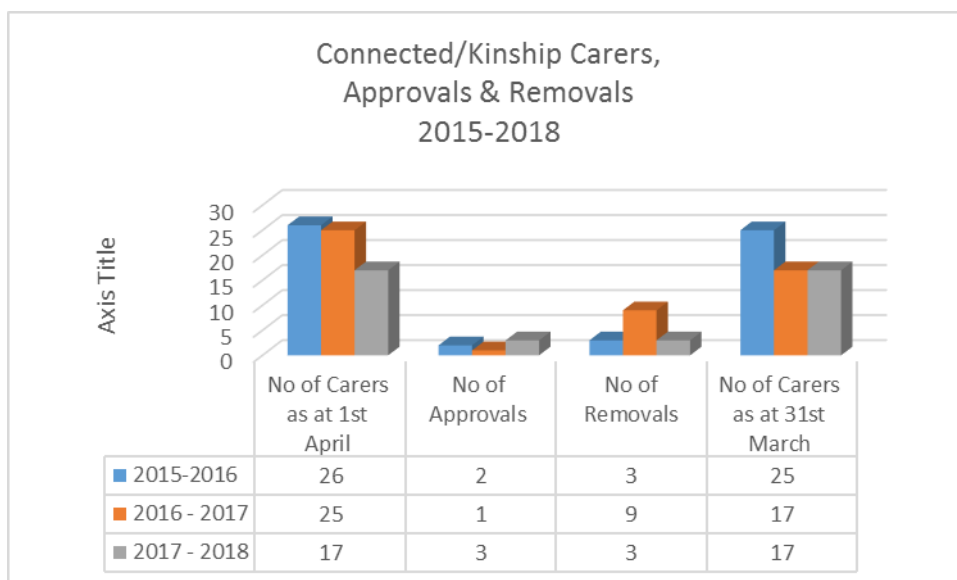
There were 9 newly approved foster carers. The reasons for not proceeding to a full assessment on the other applications were due to staff counselling members of the public out, due to their unsuitability to be approved as foster carers. There were a number of prospective carers that withdrew from the assessment process due to a change in their circumstances and some who did not wish to proceed.

The service will need to continue to target and recruit new foster carers for 2018-2019 in line with their recruitment and retention strategy.

## Carers, Approvals and Removals 2016 – 2017 & 2017–2018 Mainstream & Short Breaks



## Connected Kinship Carers





## Reasons for Carers Leaving

<b>Mainstream Carers – Leaving</b>	<b>2015 - 2016</b>	<b>2016 - 2017</b>	<b>2017 - 2018</b>
Special Guardianship			1
Retirement	4	4	2
Moving Out of Area			2
Ill Health	1	1	2
Bereavement	1	1	
Change in Family Circumstances	4	4	7
No longer wish to Foster/Resignation	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>

Only 3 households resigned due to the fact that they did not feel that fostering was a role they wanted to continue with.

<b>Connected Kinship Carers - Leaving</b>	<b>2015 - 2016</b>	<b>2016 – 2017</b>	<b>2017 - 2018</b>
Special Guardianship obtained	1	6	3
Child returned to Family	1	1	
Independent Living		1	
Breakdown in Family Relationship	1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>

In 2016-2017 there were 6 connected carers who attained a special guardianship order for the children they were looking after which provided them with permanent care.

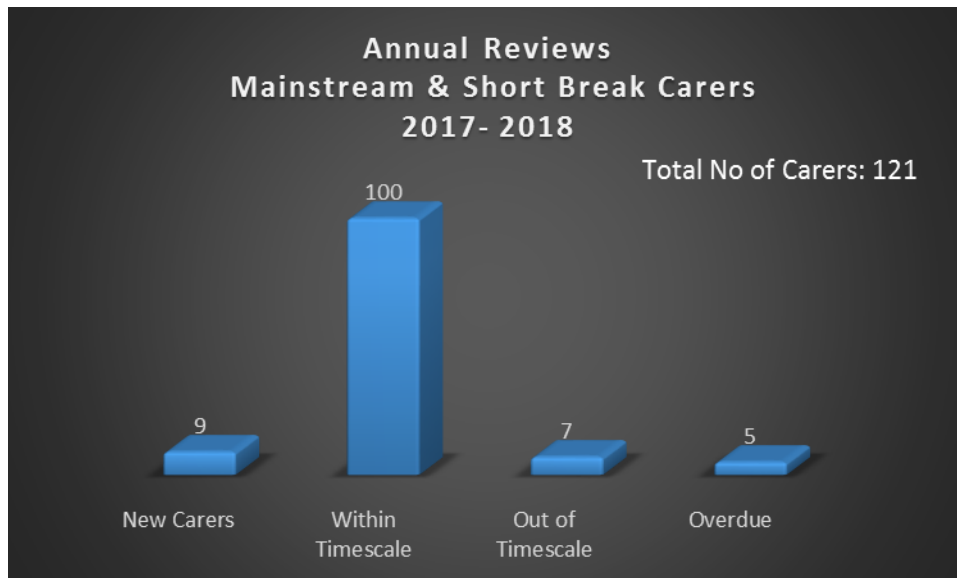
In the other 3 connected households 1 child returned to the family home and another young person left and moved into independent living arrangements.

The other child moved into mainstream foster care due to a breakdown in the family relationship.

In 2017-2018 there were 3 connected carers who obtained a special guardianship order to provide permanency for the children in their care.

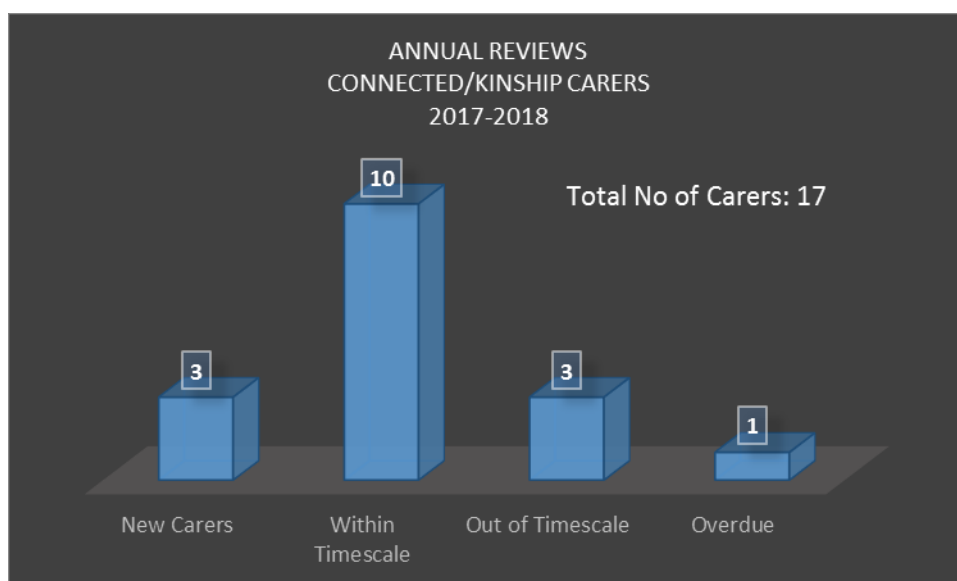
## Annual Reviews completed 2017- 2018

### Mainstream & Short Break Carers Reviews



The reasons for annual reviews being out of timescales are mainly due to staff sickness absence within the team. This is being monitored closely and systems being reviewed to improve this performance.

### Connected Carers/Kinship Reviews



## Placement Stability

Placement Stability	2015- 2016	2016 - 2017	2017 - 2018
3 or More Placement Moves	32 14.9 %	23 9.2%	14 Reported Dec 2017

There has been a reduction in 3 or more placement moves during 2017 – 2018 in comparison to the previous year.

The service is implementing its three or more moves placement strategy plan to improve on performance.

## Developments and Activities to report within the Service

### Training & Support for Foster Carers

The Local Authority has adopted a model of Attachment Focussed parenting

PACE.        P (playfulness)  
                  A (acceptance)  
                  C (curiosity)  
                  E (empathy)

It is a well-researched and effective parenting model that Carmarthenshire has implemented to support foster carers connect with the children they are caring for. Through a playful, highly accepting, curious and empathic approach the carers can more deeply connect with the looked after child's internal experience. This is modelled on the way that primary carers connect with their infants in healthy 'parent-child' relationships, and is the foundation for healthy relationships and the development of attachment security.

Supervising social workers have continued to provide regular supervision to foster carers and convene regular placement support meetings to try and maintain placement stability for children.

It is fair to conclude that more time is dedicated to maintaining placements within Carmarthenshire and this places a great emphasis on the importance of time and caseload management for supervising social workers due to the challenges of working with children who are placed with complex needs.

Additional support for foster carers is available from the educational psychologist and corporate parenting team who provide therapeutic and counselling services in relation to children's health, education and emotional wellbeing.

There were 5 children who have received a specialist service through CAHMS which can be an invaluable support to foster carers to maintain children in their care.

## **Mentoring Service**

Carmarthenshire continue to provide extra support to the foster carers across the County. The service has appointed 6 mentors who are experienced foster carers. There is 1 Foster Carer that provides support to Recruitment Campaigns and Fostering Events. The Mentoring Service is primarily to support new carers and provide additional support to carers when child protection and safeguarding allegations are made and investigated through formal procedures.

Training has been targeted for mentors in relation to managing allegations and safe care in line with safeguarding processes and procedures. Peer Mentor training has been devised in order to equip mentors with the necessary skills to take a more proactive role in the facilitation of foster carer support groups.

## **Sons and Daughters Group**

In the 2016 CSSIW Inspection Report it was recognised that Carmarthenshire have a well-established Sons and Daughters Group.

The team have continued to provide individual support for the Sons and Daughters of foster carers. This is also being developed further through group support by providing an event or activity during school holidays or the weekend. The training and recruitment manager with staff is also involved in consultation with this group to provide support during preapproval and post approval processes.

Consultation and activity days have been organised and promoted during the year and have taken place during the school holidays. This forum is used as a consultation group to feedback on the service. This is an area that the service intends to focus and develop upon, and is in the process of collaborative work with our regional partners.

In October 2017 the Looked After Children celebrating success consultation and information day took place at Ffos Las Llanelli organised by the Corporate Parenting Team. This was well attended by foster carers, teachers, social workers, health and educational professionals and supervising social workers. Carmarthenshire County Council representatives also attended the day. This day is always a successful event and provides information for feedback following consultation work undertaken with looked after children about their care and taking forward developments for the future.

A number of recruitment and activity events took place during 2017. These included celebrating the success of foster carers and their achievements. Christmas and Halloween events as well as a summer family and fun day at Pembrey Country Park.

There were events held at the Botanical Gardens and information evenings for recruiting new foster carers.

## **Fostering Panel**

The fostering panel continues to work in an efficient and effective way. The last CSSIW report in 2016 highlighted improvements in the panel process. Foster panel members' appraisals have been introduced and foster panel policies and procedures have been updated. It was highlighted as good practice that young people were encouraged and supported to attend fostering panel, to express their views on their placement as part of the foster carer annual review process.

There was a requirement to recruit appropriate new members to the panel and provide them with training and assist in their learning and development. The panel chairperson has been instrumental in developing appropriate feedback to staff and managers to monitor and quality assure the assessments and reviews undertaken in the service. The panel has continued to meet on a monthly basis and provided additional panels to meet standards and requirements to ensure there is no potential delay to recommend the approval of both mainstream and family and friends foster carers.

The panel became paperless in 2017 and all members have access to electronic iPads.

The fostering panel will continue to hold an annual business meeting to address issues relating to quality assurance; to improve and develop the monitoring of the service and feedback any issues of concern to the head of service who is the agency decision maker. It will also continue to monitor and focus on quality of assessments and annual reviews being timely in line with minimum standards.

The feedback for panel through the use of evaluation forms and questionnaires has been positive. Some of the comments include:

- *“The chairperson was very welcoming as were panel members”.*
- *“The process was fair and made us feel at ease”.*
- *“We were able to take part in the discussion and put our views across”.*

Foster carer views were captured through the annual review reports and several positive comments were made about the excellent support received from their support workers. There were some comments made about the level of support received when staff were absent, due to sickness, although the carers were always able to access the office for duty and management support.

Feedback was received from Children and Social Workers on the quality of care they received.

Comments on children's wishes and feelings about their foster care include:

- *"I am very happy living with ....."*
- *"I love living in this house because everyone loves you".*
- *"They listen to what you have to say and they respect what you say".*

Social Work comments on quality of foster carers:

- *"They are excellent Foster Carers who have shown real commitment to the three young persons. It is a pleasure to see how they are developing within their care.*
- *"They are a pleasure to work with, as a professional. They communicate well and are child focused."*
- *"Are excellent in dealing with issues in a sensitive and balanced approach."*

## **Accommodation Panel**

The Accommodation Panel continues to meet on a fortnightly basis to ensure that the Local Authority is satisfied that the referral for placement requests is the most suitable way of promoting and safeguarding the welfare of the child. The Panel Members discuss and agree that a placement is required but need to be satisfied that all resources have been utilised to maintain children at home with their families.

Panel Members consist of Fostering Service Manager, Service Managers for Child Care Team and the IFSS Manager who has a resource identification role.

All request for placements referred to the Accommodation Panel are discussed with the Head of Service at the regular Senior Management Meeting.

## **Service Development and Challenges for 2018/2019**

The fostering service will continue to:

- Challenge and target the need to recruit and retain foster carers within Carmarthenshire. To provide more choice of placement and improve matching the needs of children who become looked after.
- Develop a fostering website to promote and improve the marketing and recruitment of new foster carers within the service.

- Develop the national training programme for foster carers alongside our regional partners.
- Be involved in the national and regional developments through the National Fostering Framework to achieve better outcomes for children.
- To improve our duty and placement systems by the appointment of a placement and duty officer.
- Review our When I am Ready arrangements for children who remain with foster carers post 18 and develop this service alongside training of our regional partners
- To develop the training on focused attachment models (PACE) and to ensure all staff within the service can support this model of work to supervise and manage placements effectively.
- To further develop the Confidence in Care Training to ensure that Carmarthenshire's Foster Carers develop their skills to enable them to be best placed to provide care and support for vulnerable young people in their homes
- To work closely alongside the Corporate Parenting Team and child care teams to ensure good support is maintained for children and carers across Carmarthenshire to provide and improve placement stability.
- The target and business objectives for the year ahead will be stipulated in the Team Business Plan 2018- 2019. A continuing priority will be to continue to improve on the annual review process for mainstream foster carers and family and friends. This is a target necessary to meet the requirements of the minimum standards and CIW.
- To consult with our stakeholders and develop a foster carer charter alongside our corporate partners.
- To develop and continue consultations with foster carers, looked after children and stakeholders across services to ensure we provide a quality service and initiate new developments to improve resources. This will be delivered through our annual questionnaires and feedback from foster carer support groups and advocacy services.

- To implement an increase and review of our fostering allowances to retain and recruit foster carers to remain in Carmarthenshire.

**Jayne Meredith**