

maethu  
cymru

foster  
wales

# annual report 2022/23



# working together to build better futures for local children



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# introduction

This report reflects the first full year of Foster Wales. It draws on performance returns from all 22 local authorities (LA's) for 2022/2023, includes comparisons to previous years and provides an update on the priorities of the Foster Wales workplan for the year.

## Foster Wales Work Programme 2022-23

The work programme for the year includes the priorities in delivering Foster Wales and the actions taken to meet those priorities, these included the following:

### Marketing & Recruitment of Foster Carers

The overarching aims included increased local placement options for children and young people to facilitate effective matching, placement choice, improved placement stability and improved outcomes for children and families. Our work included developing and delivering on a comprehensive marketing strategy, further embedding the Foster Wales brand and implementation of recruitment best practice.

### Retention of Foster Carers

The ambition of Foster Wales is to improve rates of foster carer satisfaction, reflecting LA fostering as the first and best choice for all members of the fostering household in respect of support, development, and reward. Our intention is to create resilient and stable foster carers for our children, supported by a resilient and stable practitioner workforce. Our work includes the further development of the national commitment (to support foster carers) and further embedding the learning and development framework.

### Performance Management

We aim to ensure the effective monitoring and analysis of data to enable improved outcomes. We use data to ensure that services can respond to demands, identify and address quality improvements, strive to achieve excellent outcomes for children and families and ensure sustainable service delivery. Our work includes the further development of the KPI's to gain more relevant data on a regular basis and reduce the reliance on an annual data collection, whilst ensuring the correlation between regional work plans and findings from data collection.

### Governance

The aim was to ensure, develop, and sustain the effective governance arrangements for Foster Wales to enable successful delivery of the work programme. This included putting in place governance meetings and involving senior staff, ensuring that effective methods for information dissemination and consultation were in place across all LA's, supporting and enabling every LA to access opportunities and maximise collaboration as well as further supporting the Regional Development Managers (RDMS's) and Regional Marketing Officers (RMO's) provision in each region.

The collective effort in providing and reporting on the information in this report provides Foster Wales with a better understanding of fostering services across Wales, as well as identifying trends and themes across all local authority fostering services.

Almost every local authority has been able to fully complete the new Key Performance Indicator (KPI) template, while improvements to ensure accuracy and quality assurance continue to be embedded at local level. The information in this report comes from the monthly and annual data, although future reports will come primarily from the KPI's, ensuring speedier reporting. RDM's have undertaken a significant level of quality assurance of this data, however some inaccuracies may remain. The RDM's have also been involved in the analysis of the regional information and these reports will be critical in the ongoing development and delivery of regional work programmes.

We thank all the local authorities and RDMs for their commitment to ensuring that this report is as accurate as it can be. Going forward we are confident that as the frequency of reporting improves, so will the accuracy of information contained within reports.



## Roles and Responsibilities

Foster Wales is established with the following key roles to deliver the work programme.

### Director of National Adoption Service & Foster Wales

The role oversees the strategic development of both Foster Wales and the National Adoption Service (NAS) and provides a strategic link with ADSS Cymru, AWHOCS and Welsh Government to drive improvement, consistency, and co-ordination of both programmes, through delivery supported by the host local authority Cardiff Council.

### Head of Foster Wales

The Head of Foster Wales has been in post since March 2022. As well as leading on the work programme, matrix managing the Regional Development Managers and coordinating the national priorities, they have been focusing on collaboration with all local authorities and representing Foster Wales in national media opportunities, including on television and radio.

### Central Team

This consists of key business support capacity shared with NAS and a dedicated Foster Wales Business Support Officer.

### Lead Heads of Childrens Services

The Lead Heads of Childrens Services group provides the governance arrangements for Foster Wales, including contribution at monthly LHOCS Meetings, coordination of strategic oversight of the programme within the six regions and relaying of information to and feedback from the other heads of service within their regions.

### Regional Development Managers

The six RDM's coordinate the regional programme for their respective regions, providing oversight and facilitation of regional operational and strategic meetings, driving forward new developments through a co-productive approach with fostering services, as well as facilitating and quality assuring the monthly and annual data.

### National Marketing Manager

The role provides coordination, leadership, and oversight of the marketing strategy for Foster Wales. This includes oversight of our partner organisations to coordinate the PR and marketing activity (Cowshed Communications), website delivery (Illustrate Digital) and Pay Per Click/ Search Engine Optimisation (Liberty). The National Marketing Manager coordinates regular meetings with the RMO's and oversees national and regional marketing opportunities.

### Regional Marketing Officers

The six RMO's coordinate marketing opportunities within each of the local authorities in their region, this includes working with fostering and corporate communication teams, assessing the impact of marketing and supporting the LA websites.



# progression in 2022-2023

## Marketing and Recruitment

The National Marketing Manager and Regional Marketing Officers drove forward the marketing workstream of the Foster Wales Work Programme during 2022-23, with the input of Cowshed Communications, who are commissioned to provide marketing and PR expertise and support.

- Foster Care Fortnight took place 9th-22nd May 2022, with national and local Foster Wales campaigns. Assets were developed to support local authorities, including national and local press releases. Three new case study videos were developed and released to press and social media, featuring stories from foster carers and Voices From Care Cymru (VFCC). Analysis of the activity showed a successful increase in website traffic, social media and enquiries.
- A campaign specifically designed to attract potential foster carers from other agencies was completed in August. Posts had good levels of engagement and interaction, one post reached over 25,000 people.
- A national Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) campaign was launched in September 2022. Two case study videos were created as well as a national press release and bespoke social media content, which was shared by every local authority.
- Finance themed social media posts and a blog were developed and launched in November, linking back to a website article featuring 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQ's) on financial support, employment, tax and what allowances cover. These were created to address the fall in enquiries during August and September due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- There was positive attention on fostering on the back of the John Lewis Christmas TV advert, Foster Wales shared the advert across all social media platforms.
- A national TV advertising campaign ran from 1-31st January, this included 74 advertising slots during popular programmes and across catch up services.
- Panel videos were produced featuring existing Foster Wales foster carers. This was developed into a six-episode series of vlogs and posted across social media pages. The videos were an honest and open conversation between foster carers recorded with an experienced journalist and presenter Mai Davies hosting the chats.
- A Direct Mail template was developed for LA's to use in council tax renewal inserts/ direct mail campaigns. This was a postcard featuring a care leaver story with a QR code to link directly to the story on the FW website. The design was provided to all local authorities and was distributed to residents across Wales during March 2023.



Foster Wales attended several large-scale events across Wales during 2022-23. This included:

- sponsorship of the Urdd Eisteddfod certificates at the event in Denbighshire in May,
- the South Wales air show in Swansea in June
- attendance at the National Eisteddfod, Pride Cymru in Cardiff and
- the Royal Welsh Show during August.

The national marketing activity has also been supported by Pay Per Click (PPC) Google advertising to ensure Foster Wales retains its high ranking through search engines.

Links with national media have been developed, with them now approaching Foster Wales for a variety of media interviews and opportunities. These have included:

- BBC Radio Wales Phone in – 12/05/22
- BBC Radio Wales advice hour – 13/11/22
- ITV news piece on UASC – 17/11/22
- BBC Radio Wales drive time on John Lewis Advert – 10/11/22
- UASC news article on BBC website and TV Item on 6.30pm BBC /News – 19/12/22
- BBC Radio Wales Advice Hour on LGBTQ Fostering & Adoption – 08/03/23
- Metro national news piece on young refugees – 14/03/23

A detailed user analysis of the Foster Wales websites was completed using an analysis tool leading to minor refreshes of them all. Enhancement of new areas of the website were also completed during the year; this included additional sections on supported lodgings and UASC to coincide with the campaign around UASC plus a redevelopment of the “already fostering” pages, to ensure LA offers are represented and attractive to carers with other agencies who may wish to transfer to Foster Wales.

The websites are linked to Google Analytics, which allows comparison of performance; this information was used to develop blog content on the national and local websites on a variety of topics, including financial support. This all assists our search engine optimisation strategy and helps us to rank higher on Google, without the need to dedicate additional budget over and above the existing pay per click campaigns.

Web traffic significantly increased on the previous year, however, traffic dropped in September due to all social media activity ceasing when Her majesty Queen Elizabeth II, died. It increased again in October and continued to rise through the rest of the year.

Results from the YouGov brand tracker survey showed a significant increase in brand awareness compared to competitor independent fostering agencies. Brand recognition for Foster Wales increased from 9% (Feb 2022) to 17% (Jan 2023), with the next closest competitor at 9%.

### The Foster Wales National Commitment

The Foster Wales National Commitment is our vision for every local authority foster carer in Wales to receive consistent levels of support, rewards, learning opportunities and additional benefits. It was originally launched in July 2021 and local authorities have been working towards implementation across Wales. The National Commitment includes the following, along with many more:

- Appreciation and recognition gestures
- Support groups and consultation opportunities and communication
- Fees and Allowances
- Discount cards and schemes
- Foster carers charter
- Mentoring and peer support
- Learning and development

New elements were developed during 2022-23 and added, alongside Foster Wales achieving greater consistency in terms of minimum standards and implementation of the various elements. The tables below show the progression since launch.

## April 2022

■ complete
 ■ in progress

Region	LA	TFN Charter	Support Group	L&D Framework	Support OOH	Qual SWs	Consultation Events	Social Events	Mentor & Peer Support	Newsletter	Appreciation Gestures	Long Service Certificate	Foster Friendly Employer
Gwent	BGCBC												
	CCBC												
	MCC												
	NCC												
	TCBC												
C&V	CARD												
	VOG												
CTM	MER												
	RCT												
	BCBC												
M&W	CARMS												
	POWYS												
	CER												
	PEM												
WG	SWAN												
	NPT												
NW	GWYN												
	YM												
	CON												
	DEN												
	FLINT												
	WREX												

## March 2023

Region	LA	Newsletter	Appreciation Gestures	TFN Membership	Social Events	Support Groups	Discount cards Scheme	Qual SWs	L&D Framework	Consultation Events	Mentor & Peer Support	Long Service Certificates	Support OOH	Recommend a friend scheme	Foster Friendly Employer	FC Charter	Foster Carer Profiles	Payments (fee & allowances)
Gwent	BGCBC																	
	CCBC																	
	MCC																	
	NCC																	
	TCBC																	
C&V	CARD																	
	VOG																	
CTM	MER																	
	RCT																	
	BCBC																	
M&W	CARMS																	
	POWYS																	
	CER																	
	PEM																	
WG	SWAN																	
	NPT																	
NW	GWYN																	
	YM																	
	CON																	
	DEN																	
	FLINT																	
	WREX																	
Completion date												April 23		Sept 23	Sept 23	July 23	Dec 23	Apr 24



## Engagement and Collaboration

A key area of the Foster Wales Work Programme is consultation and engagement with key stakeholders, in particular foster carers and fostering teams.

Foster Wales has continued the work to embed the Foster Wales brand across services, with teams reporting that they are benefitting from being part of national collaborative and very much identify as Foster Wales. In addition, regular collaboration with fostering services has developed, including a monthly meeting with team managers and a quarterly meeting of learning and development leads.



The first Foster Wales National Conference was held in September 2022 in Aberystwyth Arts Centre. The event was well attended, with over 60 people attending in person and a further 60 online.

The focus of the event was 'hearing the voice' of foster carers across Foster Wales and included sessions on learning and development, the national commitment, marketing and recruitment and a general Question & Answer session. The event was well received and led to an action plan being developed, ensuring that the views of foster carers directly fed into the Foster Wales work programme.

The plan included several key actions such as:

- To review the implementation of the Learning and Development Framework
- To hold regular sessions with foster carers updating on progress and hearing views
- To develop a national annual Foster Wales Survey
- To further develop the harmonisation of fees and allowances work

An on-line follow up 'feedback' event was held in February 2023 to update foster carers on progress against the plan and the ongoing process will continue in the 2023 conference.

Foster Wales has developed strong links with Voices From Care Cymru, including attending several of their events and advisory groups, both to promote the work of Foster Wales and to hear the views of care experienced children and young people. This has included attendance at two national events and regular engagement over topics through the VFCC advisory group.

## Governance and Structure

The national infrastructure has continued to make good progress via the Central Team including the Director, Head of Foster Wales, the National Marketing Manager and business support staff.

Governance arrangements for Foster Wales at senior officer level are in place through the Lead Heads of Children's Service (LHOCS) meeting and the former NFF Business Management Group (Executive) continues to meet on an ad-hoc basis until the new Joint Committee is established. The Joint Committee Agreement has been finalised, with local authorities formally agreeing and signing up to it. It is anticipated that this will start to meet in 2023/24 alongside a revised agreement with the host local authority being put in place.

The arrangements with the commissioned PR / Marketing company continued to the end of 2022/23, procurement for a new contract was completed in the early part of 2023/24. The provider has supported with the National Campaigns, Foster Care Fortnight and the development of case study videos as well as establishing and advising on national media opportunities.

Foster Wales won a National Fostering Excellence award. The award was presented in Birmingham in November 2022. Representatives from Foster Wales collected the award and photographs were used across social media for promotion. WG colleagues were also in attendance at the event.



# performance information



# key themes

Below are just some of the highlights emerging from the All-Wales Performance Report for 2022/23.

**Note:** this data is based on local authority returns for Foster Wales. It may vary slightly to other data sources due to differences in definitions and the cohorts of children counted.

## Placements for children looked after in Wales

- At **7,181**, the overall level of Children Looked After increased by 1.7% (n121) by 31.03.23.
- Foster care remains the largest placement type for children looked after with 69.3% of children placed, marginally lower than the last two years.
- At 9.4% the proportion of children placed within residential care shows the most significant growth over the same period.
- Half of all new placements made (50.2%), were for children aged 11+, continuing an upward trend. Within this increase was a 10.9% increase in children of this age being placed with commercial foster carers and a 21.3% increase in placements in residential care.

## Location of placement

- 65% of children were placed within their own local authority area, although this level has fallen by 1% over the last two years.
- The proportion of children placed within Wales, but outside their local authority area, changed marginally to 27.5%.
- The proportion of children placed outside of Wales increased to 7.5% (n543) although numerically this was fewer than the previous year.
- Of new foster care placements made, **84%** were made within local authority provision were in the child's own local authority area, compared to **24%** of new placements made with commercial IFA's.

## Children in foster care in Wales

- Foster care remains the largest placement type for children looked after with 69.3% of children placed.
- The children placed in connected persons placements continued to grow to 23.3% (n1,673).
- There was a corresponding small decrease to 28% (n2,021) in children placed in mainstream LA foster care.
- Children placed with 3rd sector fostering agencies increased slightly to 2.1% (n152) while those with commercial fostering agencies decreased slightly to 15.8% (n1,134).
- New placements made rose in all but connected person's placements; more local authority fostering placements were made in house.
- The number of children who experienced their placement ending in an unplanned way increased further to 16.4% (n 471) across all foster placement types. This has increased each year since 20/21.

## Mainstream recruitment and retention

- There was a further reduction in enquiries and approval of mainstream foster carers. However, the rate at which enquiries fell, reduced significantly compared to the last 5 years.
- The rate at which initial visits have fallen has also reduced this year compared to the last 5 years.
- Over half of foster care approvals were within the 6-month recommended timeframe.
- Retention of foster carers improved in 2022/23, with some aspects returning to pre-pandemic levels e.g. foster carers leaving the service was the lowest for 3 years and 30% (n91) fewer placements were lost compared to last year.
- At year end 2023 a net loss of 69 households and a net loss of 89 placements was reported, however changes of approval status have led to an increase in overall placement numbers.





## Mainstream fostering provision split

- **61.2%** of children in mainstream fostering placements are placed within LA resources, this is the same as the figures at Match 2022.
- **4.6%** of children are placed in Independent 3rd sector provision, this is a slight increase 21/22.
- **34.2%** of children are placed in Independent commercial provision, this shows a slight increase from 34% in 21/22.

## Connected persons fostering provision

- The demand for connected persons assessments remains high (856 viability assessments undertaken); 66% of these were undertaken by fostering service staff.
- More than three times as many connected persons assessments were allocated than mainstream assessments i.e. 651 compared to 206. This maintains a pattern seen for several years.
- There were 308 new connected persons approvals, an increase of 7.6% (n22).
- 1,673 children were living with Connected Person Foster Carers at the end of 22/23, an increase of 4% (n66).

## Placement Availability

- The total approved mainstream LA foster placements increased by 3% to **2,408**
  - > **79.7%** (n1918) placements were occupied, nearly all by children from the home LA.
  - > At **8.6%** (n214) more unoccupied placements were available for use than last year. Of these **6** were Parent & Child vacancies.

## Costs

- Local Authority foster care remains the most cost effective of the fostering placements within the sector in Wales both for mainstream and parent and child placements.





# placement use

## Static Placement Use

Static placement use reflects the placements provided for all children looked after as at the last day of the financial year for each period.

### Key Messages:

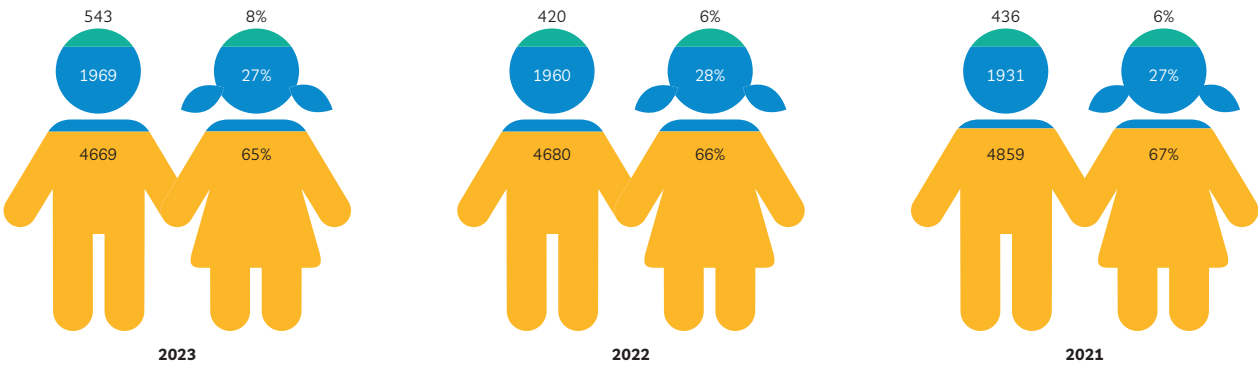
At **7,181** the overall level of Children Looked After in all placements had increased by 1.7% (n121) on the 31.03.23. Overall figures show the following key changes:

- Foster care remains the largest placement type for children looked after, with 69.3% of children placed, marginally lower than the last two years.
- At 9.4% the proportion of children placed within residential care shows the most significant growth over the same period.
- Most children, 65%, were placed within their own local authority area, although the level has fallen by 1% over the last two years
- The number of children placed outside of Wales has increased to 7.5% while the number placed within Wales, but outside the local authority area, has changed marginally now standing at 27.5%
- Placements made in Parent and Child arrangements total **168** This is broken down into **21%** in independent commercial, **51%** residential, **22%** own LA and **4%** with 3rd sector.

### Foster care placements

- The number of children placed in connected persons placements has continued to grow to 23.3% (n1673) in 2022/23
- There was a corresponding small decrease to 28% (n2021) in children placed in mainstream LA foster care
- Children placed with 3rd sector fostering agencies increased slightly to 2.1% (n152) while those with commercial fostering agencies decreased slightly to 15.8% (n1,134).

## Children in All Placements



### Children in All Placements as at 31.03.23

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons FC	Connected persons carers s26	Third Sector FC	Commercial FC	Total CLA Fostered	Residential (external)	Residential (own LA)	'Other'	Total CLA
■ Outside Wales	21	2	114	21	6	131	295	115	3	130	543
■ Within Wales	293	10	228	33	102	660	1,326	370	1	272	1,969
■ Within LA	1,692	3	1,041	236	44	343	3,359	109	73	1,128	4,669
Total	2,006	15	1,383	290	152	1,134	4,980	594	77	1,530	7,181

## 01 Placement Use

### Children in All Placements as at 31.03.22

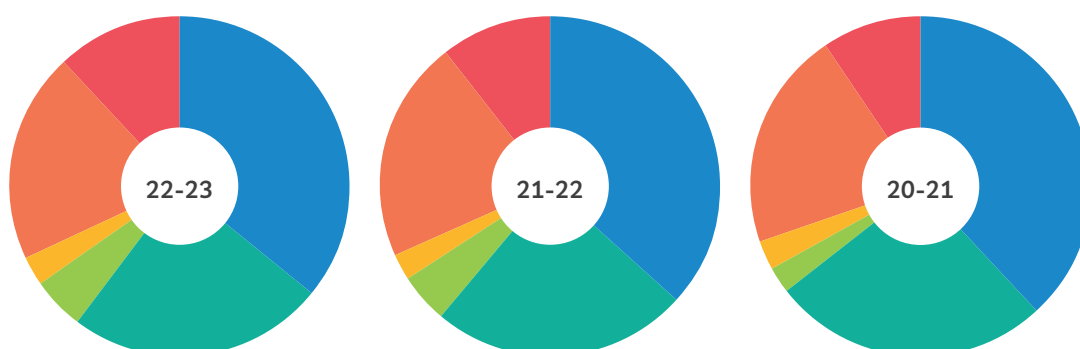
	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons FC	Connected persons carers s26	Third Sector FC	Commercial FC	Total CLA Fostered	Residential (external)	Residential (own LA)	'Other'	Total CLA
Outside Wales	24	0	103	14	1	74	216	105	0	99	420
Within Wales	301	13	250	38	78	719	1,399	292	1	268	1,960
Within LA	1,697	1	992	210	47	380	3,327	98	74	1,181	4,680
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,022</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1,345</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>1,173</b>	<b>4,942</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1,548</b>	<b>7,060</b>

### Children in All Placements as at 31.03.21

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons FC	Connected persons carers s26	Third Sector FC	Commercial FC	Total CLA Fostered	Residential (external)	Residential (own LA)	'Other'	Total CLA
Outside Wales	27	1	113	15	5	68	229	92	5	110	436
Within Wales	305	17	261	12	83	712	1390	273	0	268	1931
Within LA	1782	7	1089	128	65	383	3454	94	52	1,259	4,859
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,114</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1,463</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>1,163</b>	<b>5,073</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>1,637</b>	<b>7,226</b>

#### Placements

- LA Carer
- Connected Persons
- Reg 26
- 3rd Sector
- Commercial
- Residential



## Findings

As of 31st March 2023, the overall number of children looked after in Wales stood at 7181, an increase from 7060 from March 2022, however this is still lower than the March 2021 figure.

543 children were living outside of Wales on 31.3.23, this is an increase from 420 children, or 1.5%, compared to last year. Of these children living outside of Wales, **25%** are with connected person carers, **22%** are living in residential settings, **24%** 'other'<sup>1</sup> arrangements, **25%** in independent fostering provision (3rd Sector and commercial) and **4%** are local authority fostering placements.

The percentage of total children going into each placement type has remained static since last year, with a slight decrease in mainstream fostering placements and a slight increase in connected persons fostering placements. The change is slightly more over the three-year period. Similarly, there has been a small increase in foster placements with 3rd sector providers and a reduction with commercial fostering providers. There has been a significant increase of around 20% to the numbers of children placed in residential settings, with the majority of these in external residential placements.

Parent and child usage has also increased, with more children being placed in residential and less in local authority parent and child placements.

<sup>1</sup> 'Other' arrangements – includes a wide range of placements as 'other' settings. 'Other' arrangements include adoption placements, placement with parents, independent living arrangements, custodial remand, supported housing arrangements and other unregulated/ OWR placements.

**01** Placement Use**New Placement Use**

This data captures the new placements made over the financial year, including new entries to care and change of placements throughout the year. This data is intended to build a greater understanding of the placements used and build upon recruitment needs analysis.

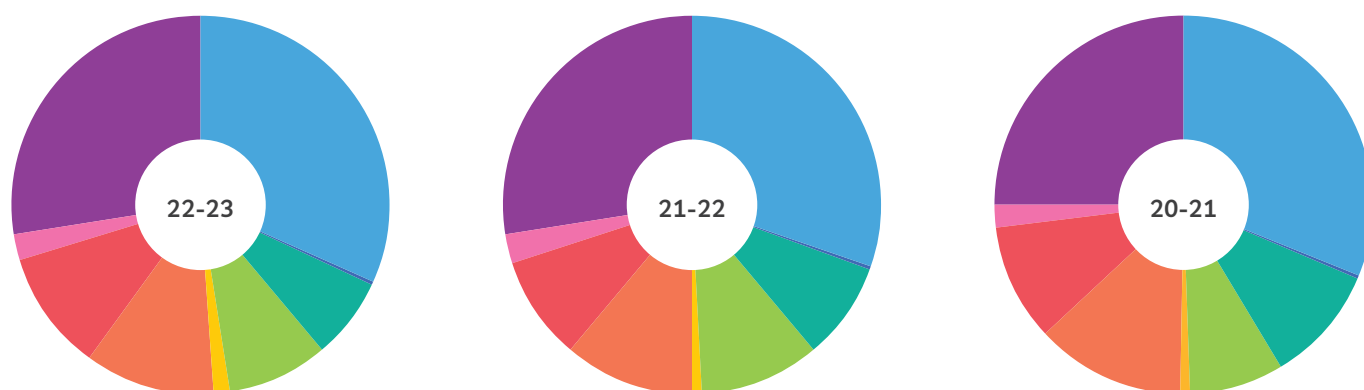
**Key Messages:**

The total number of new placements made during the financial year 22/23 was **5040**, an increase of **375** placements, or **8%**, on the previous year. Overall figures show the following:

- The increases were in local authority 'own' placement, placements commissioned from the 3rd or for-profit sector and 'other' placements.
  - New placements made within Residential settings increased by 24.4% (n128) to 652
  - New placements made in any Other looked after arrangements increased by 11% (n142) to 1421

**Foster care**

- There has been an increase in all but connected person's new foster placements including those placed with local authority foster carers, with more placements made in house.
  - New placements made with Own Local Authority Mainstream Foster Carers increased by 16% (n230) to 1648 and Other Local Authority Mainstream Foster by 4 placements to 20.
  - New placements made with Independent Third Sector provider Foster Carers, increased by 88% (n34) to 64
  - New placements made with Independent Commercial provider Foster Carers increased by 9.6% (n51) to 578
  - New placements made with Connected Person & reg 26 Foster Carers fell by 6% (n52) to 815
- In terms of location, 84% of new placements made within local authority provision were in the child's own local authority area, compared to 24% of new placements made with commercial IFA's.

**New Foster Placements as at 31.03.2023**

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons FC	Connected persons carers s26	Third Sector FC	Commercial FC	Total CLA Fostered	Residential (external)	Residential (own LA)	'Other'	Total CLA	PAC
Outside Wales	7	2	23	22	5	83	135	135	0	128	398	50
Within Wales	257	15	56	63	49	355	752	286	4	349	1,391	80
Within LA	1,384	3	275	376	10	140	2,080	115	112	944	3,251	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,648</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>2,967</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>1,421</b>	<b>5,040</b>	<b>168</b>

## 01 Placement Use

### New Foster Placements as at 31.03.2022

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons FC	Connected persons carers s26	Third Sector FC	Commercial FC	Total CLA Fostered	Residential (external)	Residential (own LA)	'Other'	Total CLA	PAC
Outside Wales	13	0	35	18	0	44	110	86	0	106	302	34
Within Wales	206	15	79	88	26	322	736	251	0	291	1,278	62
Within LA	1,199	1	279	368	8	161	2,016	76	111	882	3,085	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,418</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>2,862</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>1,279</b>	<b>4,665</b>	<b>130</b>

### New Foster Placements as at 31.03.2021

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons FC	Connected persons carers s26	Third Sector FC	Commercial FC	Total CLA Fostered	Residential (external)	Residential (own LA)	'Other'	Total CLA	PAC
Outside Wales	18	-	-	28	-	37	130	95	-	66	291	32
Within Wales	184	7	67	30	27	343	658	227	1	97	983	79
Within LA	1,106	4	297	278	19	147	1,851	92	81	880	2,904	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,308</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>2,639</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>1,043</b>	<b>4,178</b>	<b>147</b>

## Findings

There has been an increase in new placements made since last year, including those placed with local authority foster carers, with more placements made in-house. Residential use has also seen a significant increase for new placements both within internal and external provision.

New placements made with connected persons has seen a slight decrease, although this may be attributed to the rise in SGO's over the last 12 months.

At 84%, the majority of children newly placed within local authority fostering provision remain in their home local authority, compared to 25% of new placements in other fostering provision.

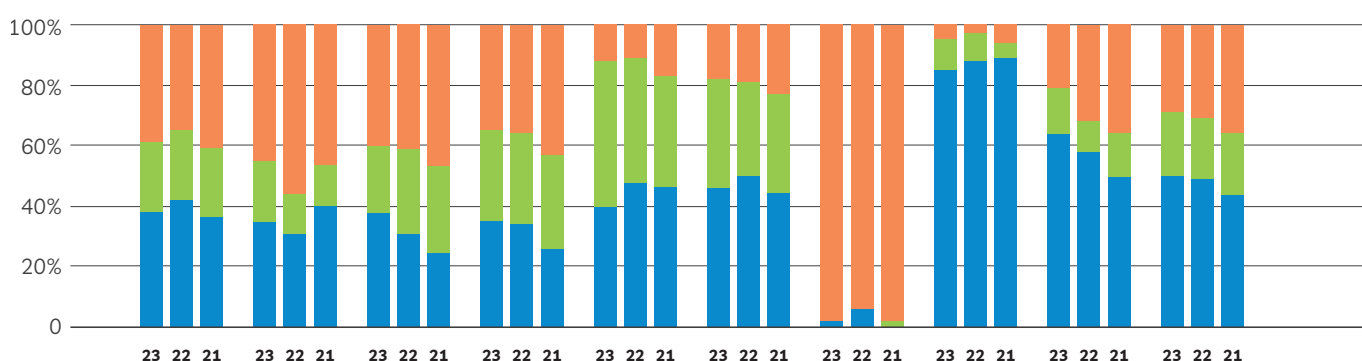
## 01 Placement Use

## Age Profile of New Placements

## Key Messages:

- Half of all new placements made, 50.2%, were for children aged 11+.  
 – There has been a significant increase in children of this age range being placed since 20/21 when this was 43.8%, showing an ongoing and increased need to place older children.  
 – Within this increase for 2022/23, there was a 10.9% increase in children aged 11+ being placed with commercial foster carers and a 21.3% increase in children aged 11+ being placed within residential care.
- At 29%, fewer new placements made were for children aged 0 - 4 years. This is a slight reduction from last year but a significant reduction from 35.9% in 2020/21.
- 20.8% of new placements made were for children aged 5 -10 years, a slight increase from 19.6% in 2021/22.

The chart below shows the age profile of children in Wales, according to the placement type requested as of 31st March 2023.



## Age Profile of new placements 2022-23

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons	Connected carers s26 SS&WB	3rd Sector FC	Commercial FC	All Parent & Child Arrangements	Residential (external)	All other new placements	Total Placements Made	%
0-4 yrs	659	9	136	169	8	107	165	32	318	1,603	29%
5-10 yrs	382	4	76	141	31	211	0	68	215	1,148	20.8%
11+ yrs	637	7	131	167	26	274	6	569	949	2,769	50.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,678</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>1,482</b>	<b>5,520</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Age Profile of new placements 2021-22

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons	Connected carers s26 SS&WB	3rd Sector FC	Commercial FC	All Parent & Child Arrangements	Residential (external)	All other new placements	Total Placements Made	%
0-4 yrs	501	9	153	175	5	98	116	16	410	1,483	30.9%
5-10 yrs	327	2	107	145	18	160	0	46	136	941	19.6%
11+ yrs	606	5	119	160	21	247	8	469	744	2,379	49.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,434</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>1,290</b>	<b>4,803</b>	<b>100%</b>



## 01 Placement Use

### Age Profile of new placements 2020-21

	Own LA FC	Other LA FC	Connected Persons	Connected carers s26 SS&WB	3rd Sector FC	Commercial FC	All Parent & Child Arrangements	Residential (external)	All other new placements	Total Placements Made	%
0-4 yrs	534	7	200	137	7	119	136	24	426	1,590	35.9%
5-10 yrs	294	2	122	98	15	167	3	28	169	898	20.3%
11+ yrs	476	6	105	82	19	228	0	427	593	1,936	43.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1304</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>1188</b>	<b>4,424</b>	100%

### Findings

The majority of placements made are for children aged over 11 years, and this number has increased substantially over the last 24 months.

Whilst there has been a 5.1% increase in the numbers of children aged 11+ being placed with local authority foster carers, there has been a 10.9% increase in children aged 11+ being placed with commercial foster carers and a 21.3% increase in children aged 11+ being placed within residential.

There is a need therefore to consider targeted foster care recruitment towards those who have the skills to care for older children. However, to enable a wide range of placements in the sector, approval statuses need to be across the broad range of 0 – 18 years to meet demands and provide matching choice as well as the provision of further development opportunities for our existing cohort of carers to increase their confidence and willingness to consider changing their age preference.

## Placement availability of LA fostering placements

### Key Messages:

- The total of approved mainstream LA foster placements increased by 3% to **2408**
  - 79.6%** (n1918) placements were occupied, nearly all by children from the home LA.
  - At **8.6%** (n214) more unoccupied placements were **available** for use than last year. Of these **6** were Parent & Child vacancies
  - The remaining **11.8%** unoccupied placements were not available for use.
  - 0.6%** (n14) placements were occupied by children from other LA's
- There has been a decrease of 5.8% (n12) in respite placements to 194

**01** Placement Use**Availability of Foster Placements**

As at 31.03.23	Number of placements occupied by own LA Children	Number of Placements Occupied by Other LA Children	Number of Unoccupied Placements which are Available	Number of Unoccupied Placements which are Not Available	Total
Mainstream Short Term	1,060	5	161	199	1,425
Mainstream Long Term	892	9	47	89	1,037
Parent & Child	10	0	6	6	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>1962</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>2484</b>
Percentage split	<b>79%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	
Respite only	42	0	93	59	194
Total placements	2004	14	307	353	2678

**Availability of Foster Placements**

As at 31.03.22	Number of placements occupied by own LA Children	Number of Placements Occupied by Other LA Children	Number of Unoccupied Placements which are Available	Number of Unoccupied Placements which are Not Available	Total
Mainstream Short Term	907	10	135	166	1,218
Mainstream Long Term	909	6	31	155	1,101
Parent & Child	12	0	2	4	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>1828</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>2337</b>
Percentage split	<b>78.2%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	
Respite only	87	1	84	34	206
Total placements	1915	17	252	359	2543

**Findings**

There was a small increase of 3% in the number of LA foster care placements bringing the total to 2408.

The level of approved vacancies available has increased to 8.6% from 7.2% last year. Meanwhile the level of placements occupied by LA 's own children has increased to 79% from 78.2%, there have been increases over the last 3 years.

The number of parent and child placements occupied has decreased, and available parent and child placements has increased. The data earlier in the report shows there is a need to develop this provision due to 47 placements being made with independent fostering agencies and 85 placements being made within residential settings.

Individual rates of unoccupied placements continue to vary significantly across all local authorities, with the lowest rate of unoccupied available placements being 0.7% and the highest being 17%.

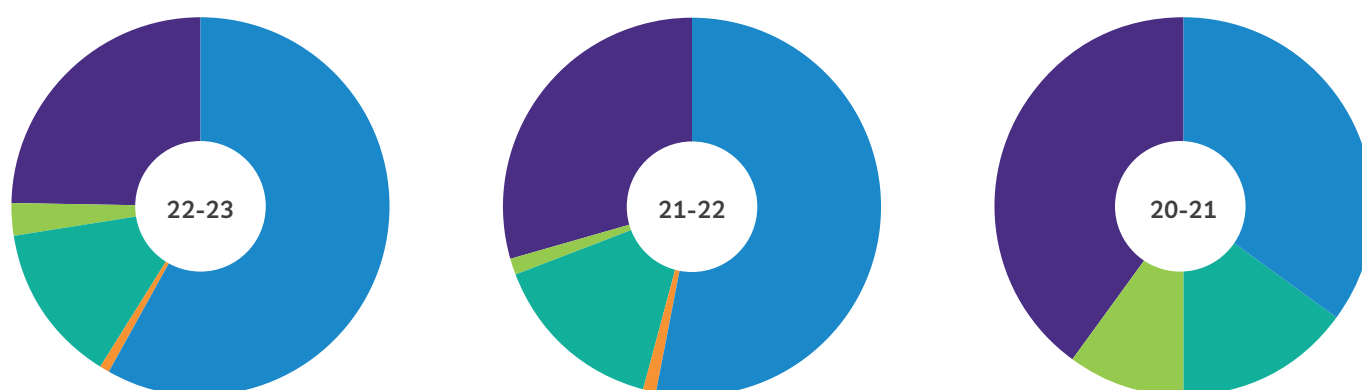
Services should consider whether mechanisms to make best use of inter-authority placements for children could be strengthened. Inter-authority placement numbers have dropped slightly and remain lower than we would expect to see with the vacancies reported. It is recommended that robust systems and monitoring processes are in place to ensure that neighbouring LA fostering provision is explored prior to any wider placement search process being initiated.

## 01 Placement Use

### Unplanned Endings – Children Looked After in Foster Care

#### Key Messages:

- The number of children who experienced their placement ending in an unplanned way increased further to 12.4% (n 619). This has increased each year from 8.6% in 20/21.
  - Across all children fostered in local authority provision (mainstream and connected persons) the rate of 12.2% (n361) although there was an increase in mainstream placements
  - This compares to 13.4% (n152) in commercial placement provision and 11.2% (n17) in 3rd sector provision.
- During 22/23 there were **619** unplanned endings (LA & IFP) where children moved between placements or returned home, not in accordance with their care and support plan, an increase of **170** on the previous year.



#### Unplanned Endings

		Placed with local authority foster carers	Placed with other local authority foster carers	Placed with connected persons foster carers	Placed with independent third sector provider foster carers	Placed with independent commercial provider foster carers	Total
<b>2022-23</b>	number	361	5	84	17	152	619
	percentage	18%	33%	5%	11.2%	13.4%	12.4%
<b>2021-22</b>	number	243	5	68	6	134	449
	percentage	12%	35%	4.3%	4.8%	11.4%	9.1%
<b>2020-21</b>	number	214		91	61	244	438
	percentage	10%		5.6%	39%	21%	8.6%

#### Findings

The number of children who experienced their placement ending in an unplanned way has increased in the last 12 months and over the past three years across all types of fostering provision.

The biggest increase was in local authority mainstream fostering placements which increased by 6% (n118) to 18% (n361) although when the connected person's data is combined this falls to 12.2% (n445).

The rates also increased in the 3rd sector and commercial fostering agencies by 6.4%(n11) to 11.2% and 1% (n18) to 13.4% respectively.

Placement stability continues to be a key factor to improving outcomes for children looked after and should be closely monitored.



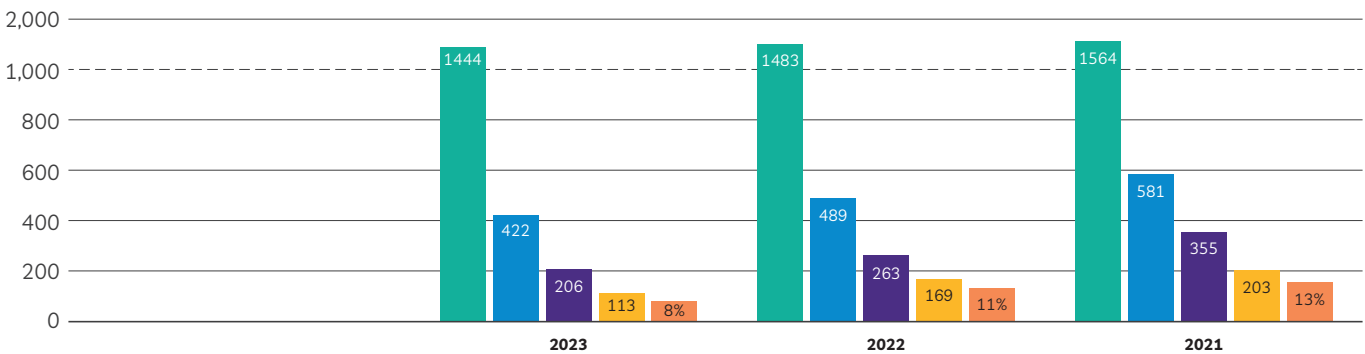
# mainstream recruitment and retention

## Recruitment

### Key Messages:

- 2022/23 saw a reduction in enquiries and approval of mainstream foster carers. However, the rate at which enquiries fell reduced significantly compared to the last 5 years. The rate at which initial visits has fallen over the previous 5 years has also slowed down.
  - The total number of enquiries to foster fell slightly by 2.6% (n39) in 2022/23 to **1444**
  - There are encouraging small increases in enquiries from both people new to fostering and those who have fostered before; this reverses previous trends, indicating that fostering with the Local Authority is becoming more attractive.
- 113** households were approved, a third fewer than last year, reflecting a conversion rate of 7.8%, a lower conversion rate than previous years.
- 54%** of approvals were completed within the recommended six-month timescale, compared with 57% in 21-22 and 54% in 20-21
- 124** new placements made available, a decrease of **92** compared to the previous year. These were made up of **88** were mainstream placements, **35** respite placements and **1** parent and child placement.

### Recruitment of General Foster Carers



	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Enquiries	1444	1483	1564
Home visits / assessments conducted	422	489	581
Fostering Assessments allocated	206	263	355
Approvals made	113	169	203
Approval conversion rate	7.8%	11%	13%

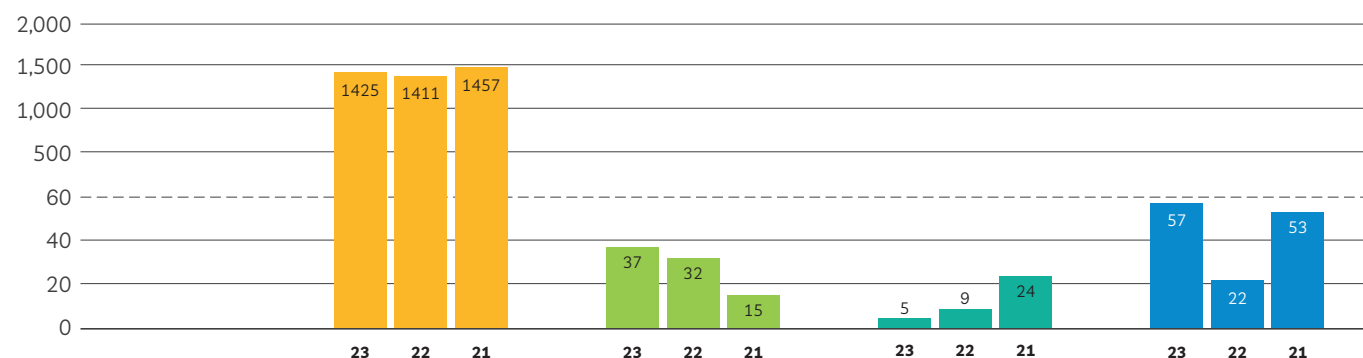
### Findings

Although the number of enquiries decreased this year, the decrease of 39 enquiries was substantially lower than the decrease of 81 the previous year and over 100 in previous years. The numbers of initial visits and assessments allocated has also reduced, however, following the same pattern as enquiries with the a lesser reduction each year. However, the numbers of overall mainstream fostering approvals reduced by a greater extent in 2022/23, in comparison to each of the previous 3 years.

Monthly monitoring and quarterly reporting of recruitment data continues to take place, through the monthly KPI data collection tool. It is hoped that this monitoring of data as well as the development of recruitment best practice training, embedding of improved recruitment practice across services and the marketing activity delivered through Foster Wales, will assist us in increasing enquiries as well as seeking ways to continue to improve the conversion rates from enquiry to approval.

## 02 Mainstream Recruitment and Rentention

### Enquiries



	Households that have not previously fostered	Households that have previously fostered through other LAs mainstream	Households that have previously fostered through third sector organisations	Households that have previously fostered through independent commercial organisations
2022-23	1425	37	5	57
2021-22	1411	32	9	22
2020-21	1,457	15	24	53

### Findings

The numbers of enquiries from households that have previously fostered increased by 35 on the previous year and enquiries from households that haven't fostered before by 24. These are small increases, but they start the reversal of a previously downward trend. They indicate that LA fostering is attractive to many people who have fostered before. Although this hasn't seen an increase in approvals yet, the numbers of enquiries from people who have not previously fostered indicates that more people are seeking local authority fostering as their first step.



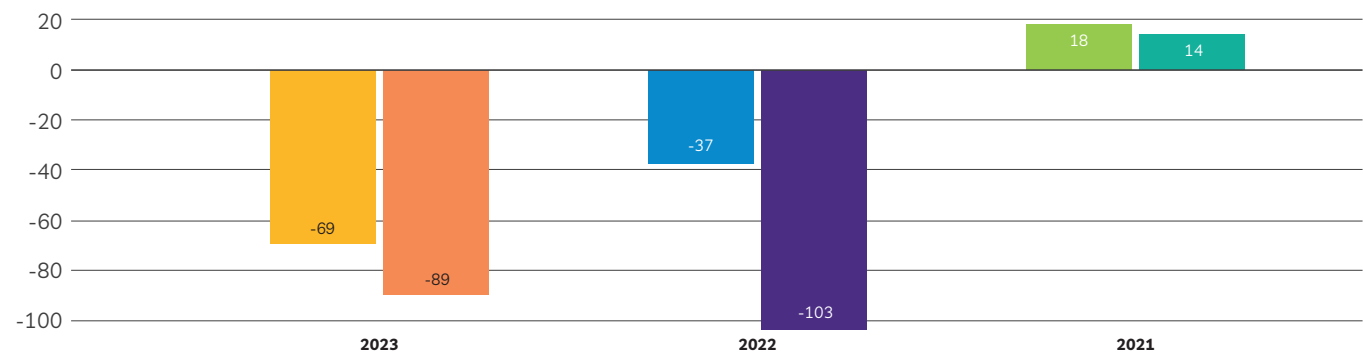
02 Mainstream Recruitment and Rentention

Retention

Key Messages:

- Retention of foster carers improved in 2022/23, with some aspects returning to pre-pandemic levels
  - Foster carers leaving the service was the lowest for 3 years, with 10% (n22) fewer leaving than last year.
  - 30% (n91) fewer placements were lost compared to last year
  - At year end 2023 a net loss of **69 households** and a net loss of **89 placements** was reported
- The main reason reported for fostering households leaving the service in the last financial year was Ill health / Bereavement/ Relationship breakdown / Relocation
- There was a significant rise in carers leaving fostering due to a special guardianship order being made.

Gains and Losses of All-Wales Carers

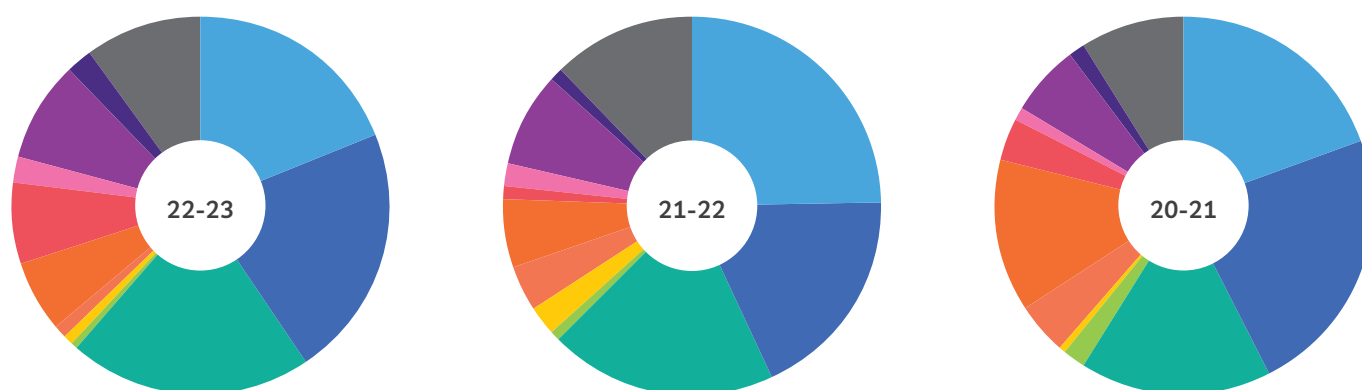


	2022-23		2021-22		2020-21	
	Households	Placements	Households	Placements	Households	Placements
Number of approvals during the year	115	124	169	201	203	303
Number left the service during the year	184	213	206	304	185	291
Net gain / loss	-69	-89	-37	-103	+18	+14

Findings

There has been a decrease in terminations of approval indicating that local authorities are retaining more foster carers. The numbers of carers resigning due to long service has returned to pre-pandemic levels and fewer carers transferred to commercial (for profit) and not for profit fostering providers, meaning more are choosing to stay with their local authorities. Foster carers leaving due to the placement converting to a 'When I am Ready....' arrangement or concerns, complaints or allegations, remained broadly similar. The other noticeable change is that the number of foster carers resigning due to a Special Guardianship Order being made increased again, meaning that more children are staying in longer term arrangements, increasing stability for them. This is in line with Welsh Government policy but highlights the need to replace the carers resigning with new foster carer approvals.

## 02 Mainstream Recruitment and Rentention



### Reason for Mainstream Carers leaving the service

	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Long Service	35	51	36
Ill health / Bereavement/ Relationship breakdown / Relocation	40	38	43
Change of Career	38	40	30
Transfer to other LA	1	2	4
Transfer to 3rd sector organisation	2	5	1
Transfer to commercial sector organisation	2	8	8
WIR / Supported lodgings arrangement	11	12	24
Special Guardianship Order made	13	2	7
Adoption Order made	4	4	2
Concerns / complaints / allegations	16	17	11
Child returned home	4	2	3
Fostering did not meet expectations	18	25	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>185</b>

### Findings

The ongoing net loss of foster carers over the last 3 years, albeit that fewer placements were lost in 2022/23, highlights the need for an increased focus on both recruitment and retention to ensure that Foster Wales can achieve a growth within local authority fostering provision. Both the National Commitment and the Marketing Strategy will be key to delivering this.



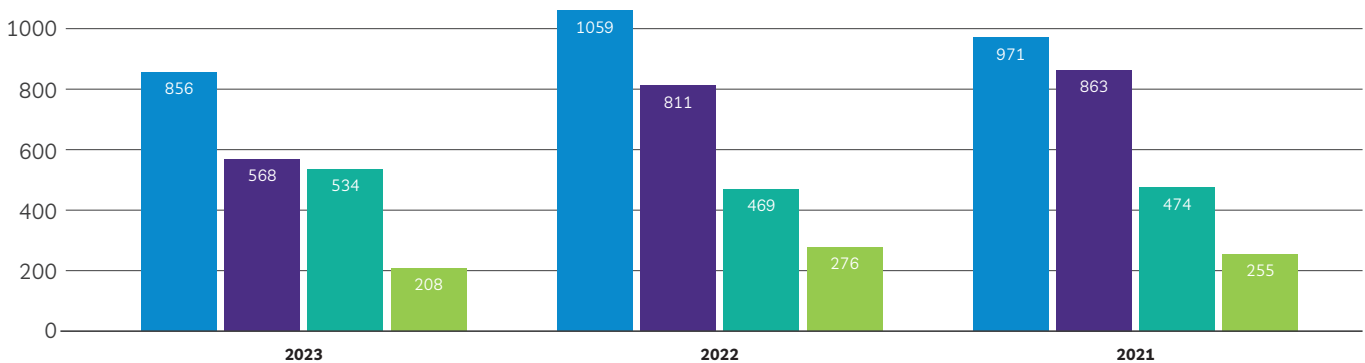
# connected persons recruitment and retention

## Recruitment

### Key Messages:

- The demand for connected persons assessments by local authorities remains high with 856 viability assessments undertaken, 66% (n568) of these being undertaken by fostering service staff and remainder by other teams.
  - More than three times as many connected persons assessments were allocated than mainstream assessments i.e. 651 compared to 206. This maintains a pattern seen for several years.
- The number that resulted in a full assessment as a result increased by 13.8% (n65) despite the reduction of 19% (n203) in the number of viability assessment undertaken,
- There were 308 new connected persons approvals, an increase of 7.6% (n22)
- The number of Special Guardianship Orders made following these viability assessments was **167**, a decrease of **36.5%** (n96)
- 1,673 children were living with Connected Person Foster Carers at the end of 22/23, an increase of 4% (n66) from 21/22

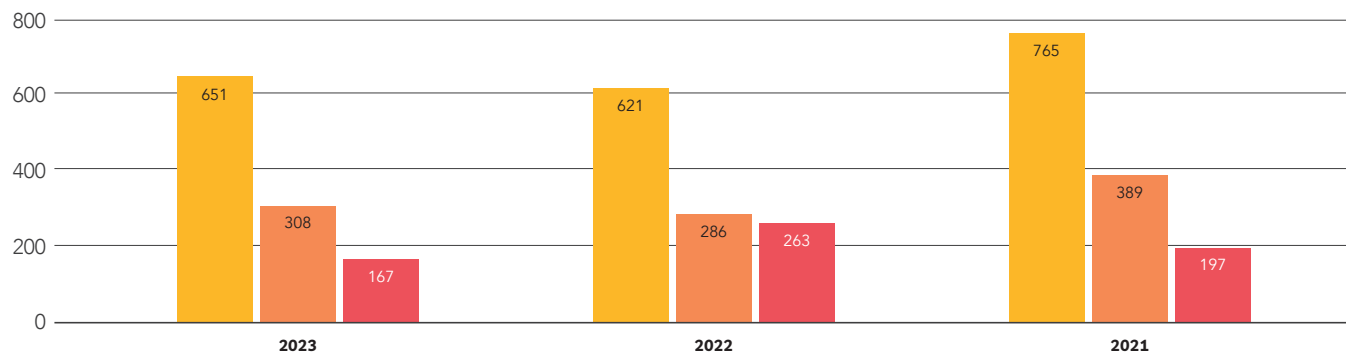
### Viability/Initial Assessments



	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
■ Viability/initial assessments referred to fostering service	856	1059	971
■ Viability/initial assessments completed by fostering service	568	811	863
■ Positive viability/initial assessments by fostering service	534	469	474
■ Viability/initial assessments completed solely by childcare teams	208	276	255

### 03 Connected Persons Recruitment and Retention

#### Full Connected Persons Assessments



	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Full assessments allocated	651	621	765
Approved as Connected Persons	308	286	389
SGO granted	167	263	197

#### Findings

The demand on services in respect of connected persons assessments continues to remain high across local authorities, but the level of requests for viability assessments reduced compared to the previous year.

Although the number of initial viabilities reduced this year (-19.1%), the numbers of positive viabilities completed by the fostering service increased substantially (+13.9%) and assessments allocated also increased (4.9%).

When these figures are directly compared to mainstream assessment demands more than three times as many connected persons assessments are allocated each year. In 22/23 fostering services allocated 206 mainstream assessments in comparison to 651 connected persons assessments.

This has significant resource implications for fostering services and the resources available to mainstream assessments and support. The number of new connected persons foster carer approvals has also increased over the past 12 months although the number of Special Guardianship Orders made as a result has decreased.

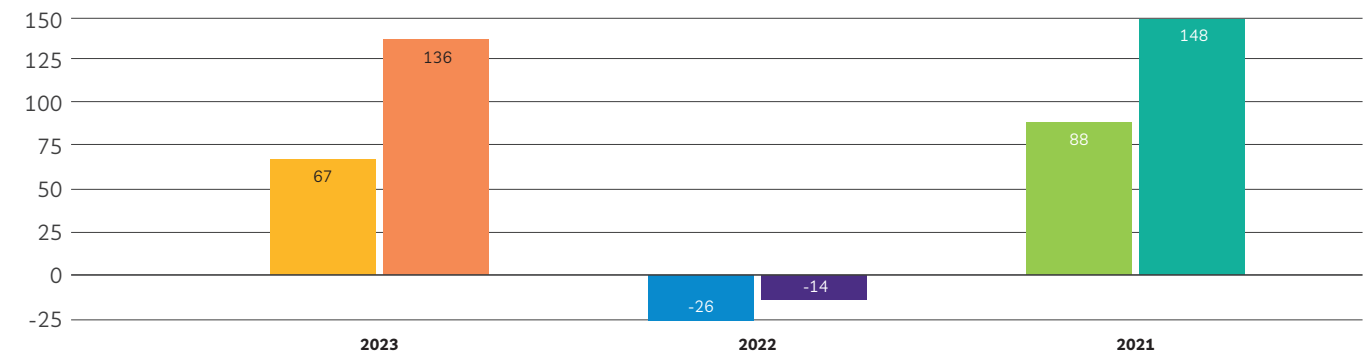
03 Connected Persons Recruitment and Retention

Retention

Key Messages:

- The number of connected person foster carers in Wales has increased further with a net gain over the period of **67** households including approvals of 308 households and 439 placements
- 23% fewer **connected persons** (n71) fostering households ceased to be approved than in the previous year
- The main reason reported for fostering households leaving the service in the last financial year was **Special Guardianship Order** made
- The second highest reasons for households ceasing to be approved was due to being not required to care for the child. This indicates assessments undertaken where carers are not required.
- There were fewer fostering households ceasing to be approved due to complaints, concerns and allegations

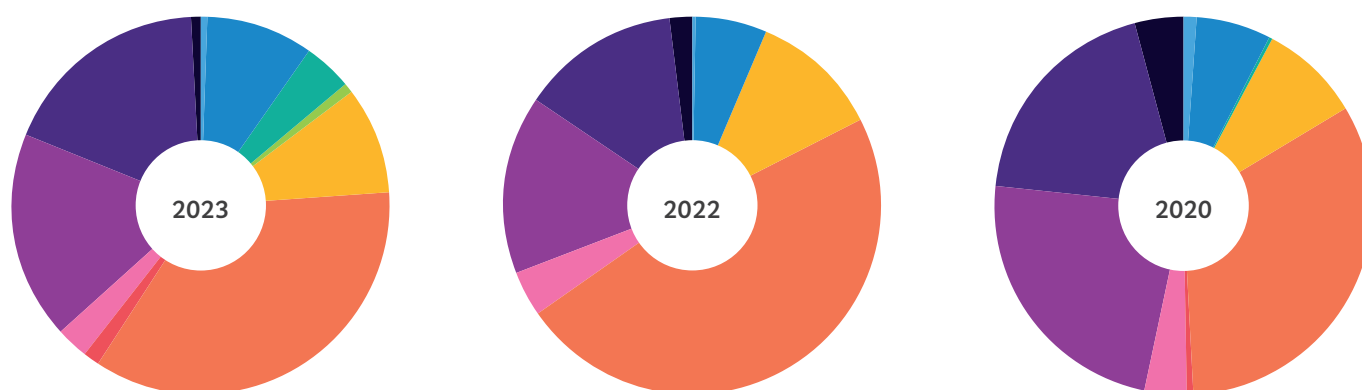
Gains and Losses of All-Wales Connected Person Carers



	2022-23		2021-22		2020-21	
	Households	Placements	Households	Placements	Households	Placements
Number of approvals during the year	308	439	286	406	389	534
Number left the service during the year	241	303	312	420	291	386
Net gain / loss	+67	+136	-26	-14	+88	+148



### 03 Connected Persons Recruitment and Retention



#### Reason for Connected Persons Foster Carers leaving the service

	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Long Service	2	1	4
Ill health / Bereavement/ Relationship breakdown / Relocation	22	19	19
Change of Career	10	0	1
Transfer to other LA	2	0	0
WIR / Supported lodgings arrangement	22	35	26
Special Guardianship Order made	85	149	99
Adoption Order made	3	0	2
Concerns / complaints / allegations	7	12	11
Child returned home	43	48	71
Carer approved but not required	43	42	58
Fostering did not meet expectations	2	6	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>312</b>

#### Findings

There has been an increase in the overall number of approved connected persons, however in 2021-22 there was an increase in the numbers of children placed under regulation 26 arrangements and so some of these may have become formally approved and are therefore contributing to the increase.

There has been a net gain of 67 households and 136 placements since last year.

There has been a significant drop in the number of connected persons ceasing to be approved. While the main reason for this continues to be due to a Special Guardianship Order being made, there was a reduction in the number of these made.



# associated costs

**Key Messages:**

- Local Authority foster care remains the most cost effective of the fostering placements within the sector in Wales.
  - The average weekly cost of a mainstream LA placement is **£582** (including placement and whole service support costs).
  - The average weekly cost of a connected persons LA placement is **£372** (including placement and whole service support costs)
  - The average weekly cost of an independent 3rd sector placement is **£1,078** (including all costs charged to the LA)
  - The average weekly cost of an independent commercial placement is **£901** (including all costs charged to the LA)
- On average the cost of placing a child in a commercial or 3rd sector IFA placement is, at minimum, an additional **£16,588** per child per year
- If every commercial IFA placement was brought back into local authority provision, the cost savings to local authorities would be **£18,810,792**
- Parent and Child arrangements average weekly costs follow a similar pattern
  - £844** for LA provision,
  - £944** for 3rd sector,
  - £1,492** for commercial and
  - £3,861** for residential placements
- The additional cost of placing a Parent and Child arrangement within a commercial IFA is **£7,776** more for a 12-week placement and within a residential setting is **£36,204** for the same length of placement.

## Foster Wales costs

The costs associated with looked after children placements have risen considerably in recent years; the largest proportion of this tends to be spent on foster care. In 2021/22 (latest available) £136.52m was spent on directly provided and commissioned fostering services.

Most of the funding associated with the local authority fostering services that form Foster Wales comes from local authorities' own budgets, but local authorities and the Welsh government have provided grant aid to support a level of national and regional infrastructure plus new and additional approaches in local authorities. In 2022/23 this amounted to circa 0.9% of the overall expenditure on foster care in Wales; much of the Welsh Government grant aid is made available to local authorities via Foster Wales. Additional funding is to be made available by Welsh Government in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The table below outlines the funding available to Foster Wales for 2022/23.

Income Stream and Source	Allocation of spend		Totals
WLGA – Allocation from RSG £433,600 (to be confirmed annually)	Staff, office, and national co-ordination costs.	£193,600	<b>£433,600</b>
	Funding towards 6 x Regional Development Managers employed by lead LA's,	£240,000	
Welsh Government Grant 'All Wales Brand' £558,700 (secured to 31.03.25)	National Marketing Manager & other national infrastructure costs	£131,400	<b>£558,700</b>
	Funding towards 6 x Regional Marketing Officers employed by lead LA's	£132,000	
	National Website maintenance & development	£15,000	
	National and local marketing & PR	295,000.00	
Welsh Government Grant 'Supporting Foster Wales' £181,500 (secured to 31.03.27, significantly increased for 23/24 & 24/25 <sup>2</sup> )	Infrastructure – staff and hosting costs	£181,500	<b>£181,500</b>
Fees & Allowances project funding £12,800	Fees and Allowances year 1	£12,800	<b>£12,800</b>
<b>Total Income</b>			<b>£1,186,600</b>

<sup>2</sup> 'For 2023/24 and 2024/25 there is significant additional funding of circa £1.8m Recruitment & retention officers, other recruitment, assessment and support capacity and other projects

**maethu**  
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