maethu cymru | foster wales 2021–26

five years of progress and collaboration to support our children



working together to build better futures for local children



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a message from the head of foster wales

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this special report marking the first five years of Foster Wales.

When Foster Wales was launched in 2021, it represented something new: a national network bringing together all 22 local authority fostering services across Wales behind a shared vision and identity. While each local authority had a long and proud history of supporting children through fostering, we recognised that by working together we could achieve far more than any of us could alone.

The ambition was clear. We wanted to strengthen local authority fostering, recruit more foster carers, improve support for those already fostering and, ultimately, ensure that more children could grow up in safe, stable and loving homes close to the people, places and communities that matter most to them. Five years on, we have much to be proud of.

Together, we have established Foster Wales as a recognised national brand, developed innovative recruitment campaigns, built stronger support for foster carers, improved collaboration between local authorities and created the infrastructure needed to drive continuous improvement across Wales. Most importantly, local authority foster carers have continued to provide homes, care and stability for thousands of children and young people.

This progress has only been possible because of the commitment and dedication of so many people. I would like to thank foster carers across Wales, who provide support, love and stability for our children every day. Their compassion, resilience and commitment make an extraordinary difference to the lives of children and young people. I would also like to recognise the contribution of social workers, support staff, managers, local authority leaders, elected members, Welsh Government colleagues, partner organisations and, most importantly, the children and young people whose experiences continue to shape and improve the way we deliver fostering services in Wales.

While this report celebrates the achievements of the past five years, it also reminds us that our journey is far from complete. Demand for foster care continues to grow and recruitment and retention remain challenges across the sector. We must continue to work together to ensure that local fostering remains attractive, supportive, sustainable and able to meet the future needs of our children. We know there is still much to do if we are to achieve our vision of providing every child with the opportunity to thrive.

As we look ahead to the next phase of Foster Wales, I am optimistic about what we can achieve together. The foundations we have laid are strong. We have demonstrated the power of collaboration, the value of a national approach and the difference that local authority fostering can make to children's lives.

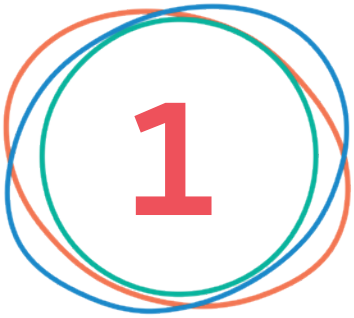
This report reflects on our journey so far, celebrating the progress we have made, recognising the people who have made it possible and setting out our ambitions for the future.

Thank you for being part of the Foster Wales story.

Alastair Cope
Head of Foster Wales



our journey



Foster Wales was established in 2021 as part of the National Fostering Framework, bringing together the 22 local authority fostering services across Wales under a single national identity. Its purpose was simple but ambitious: to strengthen local authority fostering, increase the number of local foster carers, and ensure more children could remain connected to their families, schools, communities, language and culture.

The creation of Foster Wales came at a time when local authority fostering services across Wales were facing a common set of challenges. Demand for safe homes for children was increasing, the needs of children entering care were becoming more complex, and many local authorities were finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain sufficient foster carers. At the same time, the need to commission foster care from independent providers was growing, often at significant cost and frequently further away from children's local communities.

For children, the consequences could be significant. When local foster carers are unavailable, children may need to move away from families, schools, friendship groups and the communities that form an important part of their identity. Maintaining these connections has long been recognised as a key factor in helping children achieve positive outcomes and experience stability in care.

Rather than local authorities responding individually, Wales chose a different approach. Foster Wales was created as a national network that would allow local authorities to work together on shared challenges, while retaining the strengths of locally delivered fostering services. Bringing together expertise from across Wales created new opportunities to collaborate, share resources, improve consistency and strengthen the voice of local authority fostering.

From the outset, Foster Wales focused on four key ambitions:

- Recruiting more foster carers for local authority fostering services.
- Improving support, training and recognition for foster carers.
- Increasing the availability of local foster carers for children.
- Strengthening collaboration and consistency across Wales.

Substantial progress has been made against each of these ambitions.

A common national brand was established, creating greater public awareness of local authority fostering and providing a single voice across Wales. Dedicated Recruitment Officers and Regional Marketing Officers were introduced, helping services reach new audiences and strengthening recruitment infrastructure across the country. National campaigns challenged misconceptions about fostering and celebrated the contribution foster carers make to children's lives every day.

At the same time, Foster Wales developed the National Commitment, setting out a shared vision for how foster carers should be supported. New approaches to learning and development, peer support, wellbeing initiatives and recognition have helped create a more consistent fostering experience regardless of where carers live in Wales.

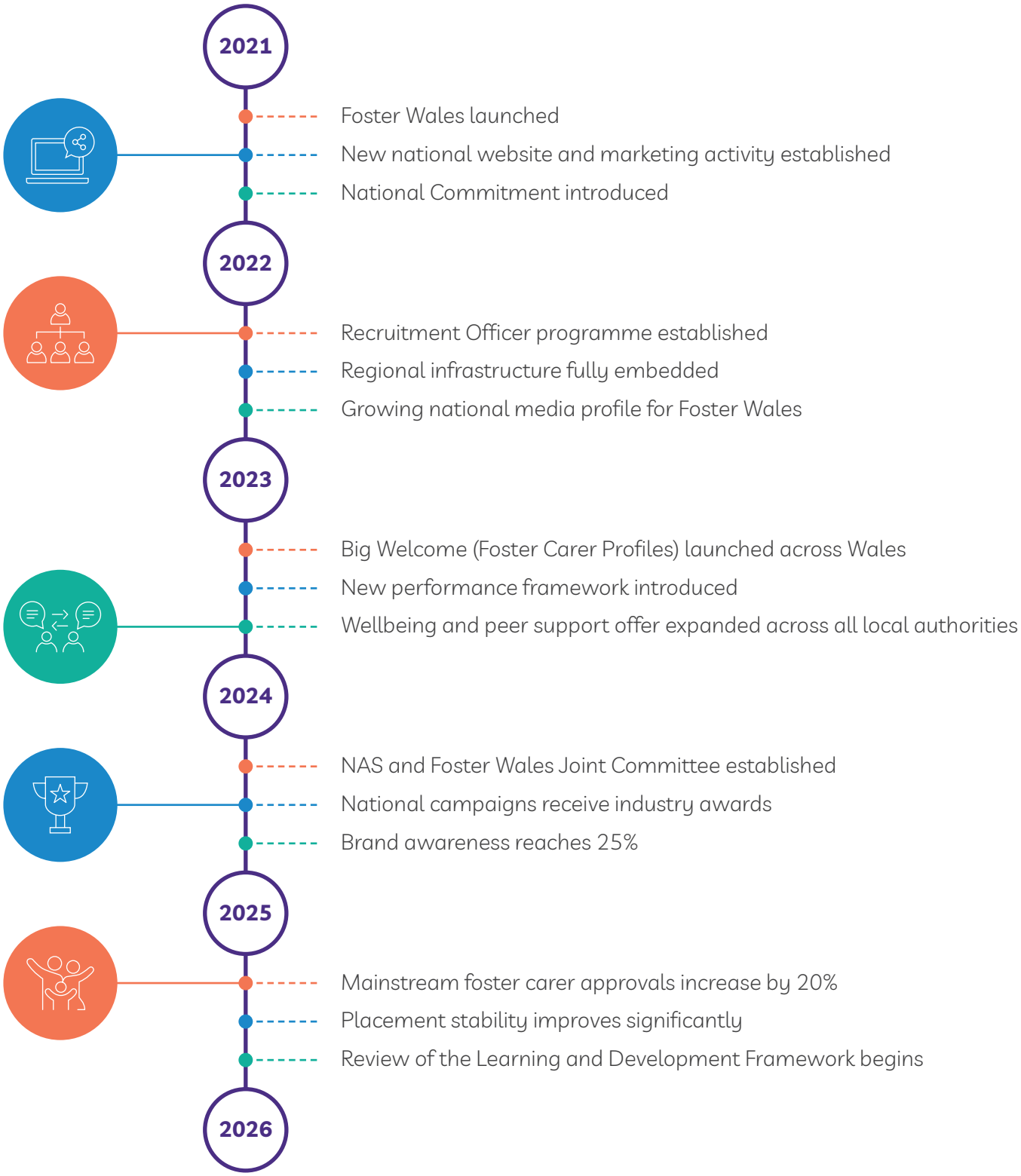
The collaboration has also invested significantly in building the foundations of a national collaboration. New governance arrangements were established, including the creation of the National Adoption Service (NAS) and Foster Wales Joint Committee in 2024. A stronger performance framework has improved the quality and consistency of data, helping services better understand demand, measure progress and identify opportunities for improvement.

Most importantly, these developments have remained focused on improving outcomes for children. Throughout this period, local authority foster carers have continued to provide the majority of foster care across Wales, helping thousands of children remain close to the people and places that matter most to them.

Foster Wales has evolved from a new national programme into an established and recognised national network. While challenges remain, the progress achieved demonstrates what is possible when all 22 local authorities work together with foster carers, children and young people, Welsh Government and partner organisations to achieve a shared vision.

The story of Foster Wales is still being written, but its first five years have shown the power of collaboration in building better futures for local children.

1.1 Key milestones



what has changed over five years?

2

Since its launch in 2021, Foster Wales has worked to strengthen local authority fostering across Wales and improve outcomes for children who need foster care. Local authorities have collaborated in new ways, developed a national approach to recruitment and support, and invested in building a stronger fostering community.

While significant challenges remain, the collective effort of local authorities, foster carers, children and young people, Welsh Government and partner organisations has enabled Foster Wales to make meaningful progress towards its vision of ensuring more children can grow up in safe, stable and loving homes close to their families, schools and communities.

The following themes illustrate some of the most significant changes since Foster Wales was established.



2.1 Growing Foster Wales

One of the primary ambitions of Foster Wales was to increase the number of people considering local authority fostering and strengthen the visibility of local authority fostering services across Wales.

Before Foster Wales, local authorities largely operated on their own for recruitment, often competing for attention within the same pool of interested people. The introduction of a national Foster Wales brand created a shared identity and a stronger collective voice.

Since launching, Foster Wales has delivered national marketing campaigns, developed a modern digital presence, established partnerships with national media and attended major Welsh events including the Royal Welsh Show, National Eisteddfod and Urdd Eisteddfod. These activities have helped raise awareness of fostering and promote the benefits of fostering for a local authority.

What changed?

- Brand awareness increased from 6% to 23%
- Enquiries increased from 1483 to 1838
- Assessments increased from 230 to 307
- Mainstream approvals increased from 126 to 145
- 8386 prospective fostering households made enquiries over the five-year period

Key milestones

- Launch of the Foster Wales national brand
- National television, radio and digital campaigns
- National press opportunities including BBC News
- Award-winning “Bring Something to the Table” campaign
- “These Are Our Voices” campaign developed alongside care-experienced young people

Regional Good Practice Spotlight: Cwm Taf Morgannwg

Regional Collaboration for Recruitment and Retention

Over the last five years, the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region has embraced the Foster Wales vision by bringing together the local authorities of Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf to create a more collaborative approach to fostering. A key part of this success has been the development of a dedicated regional recruitment and retention team, which has grown to six staff members focused solely on recruiting, supporting and retaining mainstream foster carers.

By working together, the region has strengthened the Foster Wales brand across local communities and significantly expanded its presence with community groups, local businesses and wider council services. This has helped create a more consistent flow of enquiries and improved the journey from initial enquiry through to approval.

The regional team has also transformed the way prospective foster carers are engaged and supported. Working alongside experienced Pioneer Foster Carers, they have introduced regular online information events, question-and-answer sessions and a more structured recruitment journey. This has evolved into the development of a "first year in fostering" framework, ensuring that foster carers are supported from their first enquiry through to approval and beyond.

Regional collaboration has also enabled local authorities to pool marketing resources and maximise their reach. Joint investment has supported campaigns across outdoor advertising, on-demand television, regional radio, publications and targeted social media, helping Foster Wales reach a wider and more diverse audience than ever before.

Perhaps most importantly, the regional approach has created opportunities to share performance information, learning and innovation across services. This has enabled local authorities to learn from each other's successes, strengthen support for foster families and continuously improve their recruitment and retention offer.

The Cwm Taf Morgannwg model demonstrates the power of regional collaboration, showing how sharing expertise, resources and ambition can strengthen local fostering services and help more children grow up in Foster Wales families within their own communities.

Regional Good Practice Spotlight: Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan

Five Years of Partnership

Foster Wales Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan have continued to strengthen regional working across both local authorities, creating a more joined-up and collaborative approach to fostering. By working together, the two local authorities have successfully delivered joint summer events, shared best practice, improved alignment in decision-making, and developed regional marketing plans and reporting processes that benefit both services.

A key achievement has been the development of active Pioneer Foster Carer groups across the region. These dedicated carers have played an invaluable role in shaping the service by providing feedback, participating in working groups, supporting home visits, buddying prospective foster carers during the early stages of their journey, and attending recruitment events to share their experiences.

Regional marketing has become an increasingly important part of recruitment activity. The region has taken a coordinated approach to raising awareness of fostering and encouraging more people to make a difference to local children and young people through the delivery of coordinated campaigns and using new methods trialled regionally.

Alongside recruitment, foster carer retention activities have increasingly taken a regional approach wherever possible, helping to strengthen relationships and build a sense of community across both local authorities. This year's Foster Care Fortnight was a great example of this collaborative approach, with all retention activities delivered regionally. Events included a celebration event recognising the dedication of our foster carers, a foster care walk bringing carers and staff together, and a fun salsa class.

Together, these achievements reflect five years of partnership, innovation and dedication to supporting foster carers, strengthening our fostering community, and improving outcomes for children and young people across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

2.2 Supporting foster carers better

Foster Wales recognised from the outset that recruitment alone would not be enough. Retaining experienced foster carers and ensuring they feel valued, supported and equipped to care for children has been equally important.

The Foster Wales National Commitment established a shared vision for consistent support available to foster carers across Wales. Over time, this has expanded to include learning and development opportunities, wellbeing initiatives, peer support networks, recognition schemes and additional benefits.

New resources have been introduced to support carers throughout their fostering journey, while greater collaboration between local authorities has helped share successful approaches and improve consistency across Wales.

What changed?

- Increased consistency around the foster carer offer
- Consistent local and regional recruitment
- Peer support opportunities available across every local authority
- Improved learning and development
- New wellbeing and recognition initiatives introduced
- Net loss of foster carers reduced from -80 to -6

Key milestones

- Introduction of the National Commitment
- Launch of The Big Welcome
- Introduction of Care Friends
- Development of dedicated support for LGBTQ+ carers
- Review and refresh of Learning and Development Framework.



Regional Good Practice Spotlight: West Glamorgan

Creating a Fostering Supportive Community

At the heart of Foster Wales is a belief that fostering does not happen in isolation. Children thrive when they remain connected to their communities, and foster carers thrive when they are surrounded by understanding, support and encouragement. This belief has driven a series of innovative community-based initiatives across the West Glamorgan region.

Recognising that fostering should be everyone's business, the region established the Foster Wales Business Partners Initiative, bringing together local businesses to help raise awareness of fostering and create a more supportive environment for fostering households. From small independent businesses to larger employers, partners have committed to promoting fostering within their communities and exploring ways to support local foster carers and the children they care for.

Building on this success, the region launched the Foster Wales School Champion Initiative, designed to strengthen support for care-experienced children and fostering families within education settings. Through a Bronze, Silver and Gold award framework, schools are recognised for their commitment to understanding the needs of care-experienced children, promoting fostering awareness and creating inclusive environments where children can flourish.

The response from schools was immediate and overwhelmingly positive. On launch day alone, 50 schools signed the Foster Wales pledge, committing to becoming School Champions and demonstrating a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people.

It is hoped that this new partnership will build awareness of fostering, strengthen the support available to both foster carers and children and help to create communities where children, foster carers and families can thrive.

Regional Good Practice Spotlight: North Wales

Working in Partnership with Employers

North Wales has a history of working in partnership across North Wales, and this collaborative approach has been further consolidated since the launch of Foster Wales. By working together across the region, local authorities in North Wales have delivered a range of successful awareness-raising initiatives, helping to strengthen support to local authority foster carers.

All six North Wales local authorities are fostering friendly employers, highlighting their commitment to support foster carers and the children they care for. Every local authority in the region also offers a Council Tax discount for approved foster carers, recognising the vital contribution they make to the lives of local children and young people.

Working together, the region has engaged with several key employers, bringing them on board as Foster Wales Partners and to offer additional support to employees who foster. These include Grŵp Llandrillo Menai – the largest further education institution in Wales; Adra – North Wales' largest housing association; M-SParc – Wales' first dedicated science park, and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) – the largest health board in Wales. BCUHB are the first health board in Wales to become a Foster Wales Partner and commit to becoming a fostering friendly employer.

These partnerships have created valuable opportunities to promote fostering through recruitment stalls, staff communications and wider organisational channels, as well as supporting local authority foster carers to balance their fostering role alongside employment.





2.3 Keeping children local

At the heart of Foster Wales is a simple belief: whenever possible, children should be able to remain close to the people, places and communities that matter to them.

Local authority foster carers have continued to provide the majority of foster care in Wales. While pressures remain across the care system, Foster Wales has worked to maintain local fostering capacity and reduce moving children further away from children's home communities.

For many children, staying local means being able to remain connected to family members, continue attending their school, maintain friendships and preserve important cultural and community connections.

What changed?

- Local authority fostering continued to provide approximately 71% of fostering placements
- 84% of children remained within their local authority area when placed with LA foster carers
- 27% of children remained within their local authority area when placed with Independent Fostering Agencies

Key milestones

- Expansion of recruitment activity
- Growth in connected persons and kinship arrangements
- Greater collaboration between local authorities
- Pressures around complexity of children's needs increasing

Regional Good Practice Spotlight: Gwent

Keeping Families Together through a Regional Approach

The Gwent Regional Parent and Child (PAC) Scheme was established through Welsh Government funding to increase the availability of local parent and child foster placements across the region. Delivered through a dedicated specialist team, the scheme focuses on recruiting, assessing and supporting parent and child foster carers, while providing support to birth parents. Its aim is simple: to keep parents and children together wherever it is safe to do so, within their own communities.

By providing local foster carers and local professional support, the scheme enables parents to develop their parenting skills within a safe and nurturing environment while assessments take place. A strong "team around the family" approach ensures regular support, oversight and review, helping families access the right help at the right time.

Since its launch, the scheme has developed a bespoke six-day training programme for carers and professionals, introduced a train-the-trainer model to ensure sustainability, and delivered regional marketing campaigns to raise awareness of parent and child fostering. A regional task group, new performance measures, and draft policy framework have also been established to support consistent practice across the region.

Looking ahead, the programme aims to further strengthen support for both foster carers and birth parents through dedicated support groups and the exploration of a regional payment framework.

The scheme demonstrates how regional collaboration has created innovative fostering services that keep families together, strengthen local support networks and improve outcomes for children and parents across Wales.



2.4 Improving stability for children

Providing a loving home for a child is only part of the task. Ensuring children experience stable, nurturing and lasting relationships is vital to improving outcomes.

Foster Wales has focused on developing services and tools that help children feel more prepared, supported and settled when moving into foster care.

One example is the Big Welcome initiative, enabling children to learn more about their foster family and home before moving. This child-centred approach helps reduce anxiety and support positive transitions into care.

Alongside this, Foster Wales has continued to work with foster carers and social workers to improve placement stability.

What changed?

- Unplanned endings reduced from 9.2% to 8.3%
- Big Welcome introduced across Wales
- 750 foster carer profiles created
- Placement stability improved by 35%

Key milestones

- Full implementation of Big Welcome across 22 LAs
- Placement stability added as a measure to the work programme
- Expansion of wellbeing and support initiatives
- Improved performance monitoring

Regional Good Practice Spotlight: Mid & West Wales

Transforming Learning and Development Through Digital Innovation

Mid and West Wales has developed a strong culture of collaboration around foster carer learning and development. Through regular partnership working, local authorities have shared resources, expertise and best practice to improve learning opportunities for foster carers across the region.

One of the most successful outcomes of this collaboration has been the development of an innovative digital learning eBook. Originally created by a single Learning and Development Officer, the resource brought together core fostering knowledge and mapped it to a wide range of learning opportunities, including podcasts, webinars, e-learning modules, videos and written guidance.

The eBook was designed to recognise that foster carers learn in different ways. By providing flexible learning pathways and allowing carers to access information in formats that suited their individual learning styles, it helped make learning more accessible, engaging and relevant.

The resource was quickly adopted across the region, with local authorities working together to expand its content, share resources and promote its use amongst foster carers. Its success has since led to national adoption, with the eBook now available to foster carers across Wales.

Building on this success, the resource is currently being redeveloped alongside the new Foster Wales Learning and Development Framework, with plans to expand its content to support all areas of foster carer development.

This work demonstrates how working together through innovation has created practical tools that improve learning, support foster carers and ultimately provide better support for children and young people across Wales.

2.5 Building a national collaborative

Perhaps the most significant change has been the creation of a national infrastructure capable of supporting and strengthening fostering services across Wales.

Since 2021, Foster Wales has established arrangements for governance, performance management, workforce development, marketing and regional collaboration. What began as a new national programme has developed into an established partnership involving all 22 local authorities.

Dedicated Regional Development Managers, Regional Marketing Officers and Recruitment Officers have provided additional capacity and enabled local services to benefit from shared national resources while maintaining their local identity and relationships.

National groups were developed to support sharing of barriers and ideas, support collaboration and inform the direction of Foster Wales.

These included:

- Team managers monthly catch ups
- Service Managers forum
- Learning & Development Leads steering group
- Communication leads group
- Recruitment officers network

The establishment of the NAS and Foster Wales Joint Committee in 2024 represented another major milestone, strengthening accountability and providing governance on behalf of all local authorities.

What changed?

- National governance arrangements established
- Joint Committee created
- National forums created
- Performance framework strengthened

Key milestones

- Six Regional Marketing Offcers appointed
- 22 Recruitment Offcers appointed
- Recruitment Offcer network embedded across Wales
- National quarterly performance reporting implemented
- Regional collaboration model fully embedded

2.6 Key milestones 2025-26

1. 750 foster carer profiles established through The Big Welcome platform
2. 72 pieces of national media coverage secured, raising awareness of local authority fostering across Wales
3. Top-three Google rankings achieved for 54 major fostering search terms
4. Launch of the national Learning and Development Portal for foster carers
5. Agreement across all 22 local authorities to extend training and peer-support opportunities for kinship carers regardless of where they live

Other notable achievements include:

Strengthening Foster Wales' Digital and Media Presence

- Implemented significant improvements to the national Foster Wales website, including enhanced user journeys, new enquiry functionality, local authority payment information pages and ongoing SEO optimisation.
- Fully implemented the Gov Delivery email marketing system across local authorities, delivering 42 recruitment and engagement bulletins during 2025-26.
- Increased use of the Care Friends referral app by 26%, contributing to the approval of 31 foster carers

Developing Foster Carer Support and Learning

- Commenced the review of the Learning and Development Framework
- Created a national Foster Carer Induction Programme to create a more consistent experience for newly approved carers across Wales.
- Published the Good Practice Guide for Kinship Assessment and Support

Enhancing Performance and Data Management

- Introduced a new Foster Wales KPI reporting template to improve consistency and quality of performance data across Wales.
- Commenced procurement of a centralised KPI monitoring and reporting system to improve national performance management



five years at a glance

3

150% increase in website traffic

assessments allocated **1,249**

706 mainstream fostering households approved

-80 mainstream net loss reduced to **-6**

8,471 enquiries received

1,178 connected persons fostering approvals

8,271 children supported by local authority foster carers

672 SGO approvals

15% increase in mainstream approvals

39% reduction in unplanned endings

6 national projects launched

22 local authorities working together through one national network

"I've been involved in lots of the work developed through Foster Wales. I'm happy to help, as working in collaboration provides a platform for the foster carers' voices to be heard and promotes our professional image.

Helping to bring about better outcomes for our young people, Foster Wales has helped to mould national change, including the first year of good practice guide-which has shaped the support around our new foster carers. Within my local authority, recruitment is up, it's so encouraging to see new foster carers being approved and to be able to support them through my role as a pioneer."

Tracy, Foster Carer, RCT



five years in numbers

4

- Brand awareness up from **6%** to **23%**
- **944,000+** website visits
- **8,374** enquiries
- **706** new foster carer approvals
- **26,500+** homes found for children
- **25,000+** children supported in foster care
- **77%** of fostered children cared for by Foster Wales (mainstream and connected persons carers)
- **39%** reduction in unplanned endings
- **58%** increase in Regulation 26 kinship arrangements

Foster Wales has transformed how fostering is promoted, delivered and supported across Wales. Behind every statistic is a child, a foster family and a local authority working together to provide stability, belonging and opportunity.

4.1 Reaching more people than ever before

944,455 Website visits

Foster Wales websites were visited almost one million times during our first five years, helping thousands of people learn more about fostering and take the first step towards becoming a foster carer. Website traffic almost tripled between 2021-22 and 2025-26, reflecting the growing strength and recognition of the Foster Wales brand.

Year	National Website	Local Websites	Total
2021-22	30,284	59,475	89,759
2022-23	104,256	89,626	193,882
2023-24	86,159	106,713	192,872
2024-25	72,742	138,012	210,754
2025-26	109,387	147,801	257,188
Total	**402,828**	**541,627**	**944,455**

257,188 visits in 2025-26, almost three times the number recorded in the launch year.

4.2 Building Wales's future fostering community

8,374 Enquiries about fostering

Thousands of people contacted Foster Wales to find out more about becoming a foster carer. This resulted in over 1,280 assessments being started and 706 new foster carer approvals. Recruitment activity has grown significantly since launch, with assessment numbers reaching their highest level in 2025-26.

Year	Enquiries	Initial Visits	Assessments Started
2021-22	1,483	489	263
2022-23	1,425	418	206
2023-24	1,722	401	237
2024-25	1,906	516	271
2025-26	1,838	446	307
Total	**8,374**	**2,270**	**1,284**

1 in 6 enquiries progressed to assessment in 2025-26.

4.3 Growing foster care

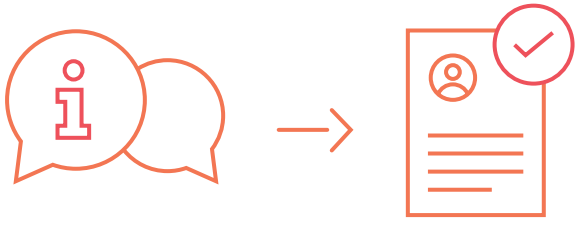
706 New foster carer approvals

Despite recruitment and retention pressures across the fostering sector, Foster Wales approved 706 new fostering households over its first five years. At the same time, the gap between approvals and terminations narrowed significantly, working towards our aims to increase sufficiency in local authority fostering.

Year	Approvals	Terminations	Net Change
2021-22	169	206	-37
2022-23	115	175	-60
2023-24	126	171	-45
2024-25	151	178	-27
2025-26	145	151	-6
Total	**706**	**881**	**-175**

One of the most encouraging trends has been the improvement in foster carer retention. In 2022-23, the difference between approvals and terminations was 60 households. By 2025-26 this had reduced to just six households. However, despite best efforts to recruit and retain foster carers the overall net loss shows that placement sufficiency will become more challenging unless local authorities start to significantly grow foster carer numbers and reduce reliance on external and residential placements.

96 new fostering households approved for every 100 leaving in 2025-26



4.4 Matching children with the right homes

26,564 Placements and placement moves

Every year thousands of children require either foster care for the first time or a planned move to better meet their needs. Placement activity has consistently exceeded 5,000 placements annually, ensuring children could access the care they needed when they needed it.

Year	Total Placements Made
2021-22	4,803
2022-23	5,520
2023-24	5,334
2024-25	5,451
2025-26	5,456
Total	**26,564**

The need for fostering homes has remained consistently high throughout the period, demonstrating both the scale of the fostering system and the responsiveness of local services across Wales. More than 5,400 placements or placement moves were made in 2025-26 alone.



4.5 Foster Wales at the heart of fostering in Wales

More than three quarters of fostered children cared for by Foster Wales (Mainstream and Connected Persons Carers)

Year	Foster Wales	Independent 3rd Sector	Independent Commercial
2021-22	3,629	126	1,173
2022-23	3,679	152	1,134
2023-24	3,605	146	1,102
2024-25	3,637	220	1,006
2025-26	3,525	207	831

How care was provided

Year	Foster Wales & Connected Persons	Independent Sector
2021-22	73.7%	26.3%
2022-23	74.2%	25.8%
2023-24	74.3%	25.7%
2024-25	74.9%	25.1%
2025-26	77.3%	22.7%

Throughout the first five years of Foster Wales, over 3,500 children each year were cared for by local authority foster carers, including both mainstream and connected carers. The proportion of fostered children cared for within these arrangements increased from 73% to 77% over the period. This is one of the clearest indicators of progress. While demand for foster care has remained high, a greater proportion of children are now being cared for by local authority mainstream foster carers and within their wider family networks. Reliance on commercial fostering agencies reduced by almost 30% during the period.

Nearly 8 in 10 fostered children are now cared for by Foster Wales foster carers.

4.6 Supporting older children

Half of all foster care involves teenagers

Year	Age 0-4	Age 5-10	Age 11+
2021-22	30.9%	19.6%	49.5%
2022-23	29.0%	20.8%	50.2%
2023-24	29.2%	17.9%	52.9%
2024-25	28.5%	22.2%	49.3%
2025-26	27.0%	21.9%	51.1%

In every year, teenagers represented the largest group requiring foster care. The data highlights the growing importance of recruiting and supporting carers for older children and young people.

More than 13,400 placement moves involved young people aged 11+.

4.7 Improving stability for children

Unplanned placement endings reduced by 39%

Year	Unplanned Endings
2021-22	451
2022-23	619
2023-24	508
2024-25	317
2025-26	378

Although year-on-year variation remains, the overall picture is one of improving placement stability. Unplanned endings reduced by 39% compared to the 2022-23 peak, meaning more children are experiencing consistent and stable care arrangements.

302 fewer unplanned endings than the peak recorded in 2022-23.



4.8 Kinship and connected persons care – Keeping children connected to family and community

More than 1,600 children were living with connected persons foster carers in 2025-26 and around one in three fostered children in Wales is now cared for by a kinship foster carer or under a Regulation 26 arrangement

Keeping children connected to people they know, and trust remains a key priority and family and friends care continues to play a vital role in Wales. While connected persons placements remained stable throughout the period, those approved temporarily, under Regulation 26 arrangements, increased by 58%, helping more children remain connected to people they know and trust during times of crisis.

Children Living with Connected Persons Carers

Year	Connected Persons	Regulation 26	Total
2021-22	1,345	262	**1,607**
2022-23	1,383	290	**1,673**
2023-24	1,338	332	**1,670**
2024-25	1,320	386	**1,706**
2025-26	1,249	415	**1,664**

Key Messages

Between 2021-22 and 2025-26:

- Regulation 26 arrangements increased by 58% (262 to 415).
- More than 1,600 children every year were cared for by connected persons carers.
- Connected persons care now accounts for over a third of all fostered children in Wales.

This clearly demonstrates the increasing use of family-based care arrangements.

4.9 Growing assessment and approval activity

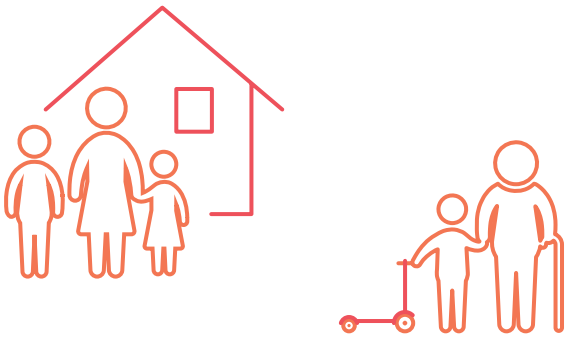
1,633 connected persons households approved

Local authorities have continued to invest heavily in assessing and supporting family members and friends who are willing to care for children when they are unable to remain at home. Since 2021, more than 3,450 viability assessments were completed and over 1,600 connected persons households were approved.

Assessment and Approval Activity

Year	Positive Viability Assessments	Full Assessments Approved
2021-22	667	286
2022-23	534	308
2023-24	548	350
2024-25	731	289
2025-26	794	386
Total	**3,278**	**1,619**

The number of positive viability assessments increased from 667 to 759 across the period, while approvals reached their highest level in 2025-26, with 386 connected persons households approved. This demonstrates a growing capacity across Wales to identify and support family members who are able to provide safe and stable care.



4.10 Creating permanence through kinship care

More than 900 children cared for through SGO and connected persons approvals

The connected persons assessment process has not only supported fostering placements but has also enabled children to achieve permanence through Special Guardianship (SGO) arrangements. Across the five years, approved connected persons and SGO households generated more than 2,200 opportunities for children to stay with people known to them.

Placements Created Following Approval

Year	Connected Persons Placements Offered	SGO Placements Offered
2021-22	240	153
2022-23	309	155
2023-24	375	189
2024-25	353	195
2025-26	443	230
Total	**1,720**	**922**

Connected persons and SGO approvals created capacity for more than 2,500 family-based care. Over 900 of these opportunities were linked directly to Special Guardianship arrangements, reflecting the important role SGOs play in achieving permanence for children within their wider family networks.

The number of placement opportunities generated through SGO approvals increased from 153 in 2021-22 to 230 per year last year, demonstrating the growing effectiveness of kinship care pathways across Wales.

1,664
Children living with connected persons carers in 2025-26.

1,720
Connected persons households approved.

58%
Increase in Regulation 26 arrangements since 2021-22.



4.11 Children in residential care

The numbers of children in residential homes increased by almost 60%, with children aged 11+ making up 66% of those residential placements.

Numbers of children in residential care

Year	External Residential	LA Residential	Unregistered Placements	Total Residential-Type Placements*
2021-22	495	75	-	570
2022-23	594	77	-	671
2023-24	645	105	59	809
2024-25	678	118	35	831
2025-26	650	179	76	905

As at 31 March each year, the number of children placed in residential settings increased significantly across Wales. External residential placements rose from 495 children in 2021-22 to 650 in 2025-26, an increase of 31%. Over the same period, children placed in local authority residential homes increased from 75 to 179, representing a 139% increase

Residential placements increased by almost 60% over the five-year period, rising from 570 children in residential settings in 2021-22 to 905 in 2025-26. This growth reflects both the increasing complexity of children's needs and significant challenges in fostering sufficiency and securing family-based care for some young people. This increase highlights the importance of early intervention and placement stability but also the investment needed to significantly grow fostering provision to prevent escalation into residential settings.

key financial highlights



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 2025/26 £149.66m was spent on directly provided and commissioned fostering services. This is calculated as £120.76m on placement costs and £28.85m on service support including staffng, recruitment and retention and administrative costs.

In terms of placement costs, Local Authority foster care remained the most cost effective of the fostering placements within the sector in Wales. The average weekly cost of a mainstream LA placement was £542 (including placement and whole service support costs). The average weekly cost of a connected persons LA placement was £413 (including placement and whole service support costs).

The average weekly cost of an independent 3rd sector placement was £873, and the average weekly cost of an independent commercial placement was £1,039 (including all costs charged to the LA).

On average the cost of placing a child in a commercial IFA placement is, at minimum, an additional £25,844 per child per year. Placements with independent commercial fostering agencies make up 41.6% of all fostering placement costs, whilst at the same time providing only 19.5% of the total weeks of care.

Parent and Child arrangements average weekly costs follow a similar pattern:

£8,788 for LA provision, £2,203 for commercial IFA provision and £5,816 for residential placements and the additional cost of placing a Parent and Child arrangement within a commercial IFA is £16,960 more for a 12-week placement and within a residential setting is £60,336 for the same length of placement.

Most of the funding associated with the local authority fostering services that form Foster Wales comes from local authorities' own budgets, but local authorities, through the Revenue Support Grant, and the Welsh Government, through grant aid, have financed a level of national and regional infrastructure plus new and additional resources in local authorities. In 2025-26 this amounted to circa 1.4% of the overall expenditure on foster care in Wales; much of the Welsh Government grant aid, and some of the revenue support grant is made available to local authorities via Foster Wales.

The table below outlines the funding available to Foster Wales for 2025/26.

Foster Wales budget 2025/26

Income Stream and Source	Allocation of spend		Totals
WLGA – Allocation from RSG **£400,670**	Staff, office, and national co-ordination costs. Funding towards 6 x Regional Development Managers employed by lead LAs	£415,051 (overspend met from reserve)	**£415,051**
Welsh Government Grant 'All Wales Brand' **£558,700**	Staffing and infrastructure	£112,305	**£558,700**
	Funding towards 6 x Regional Marketing Officers employed by lead LAs	£135,960	
	National Website maintenance & development	£14,343	
	National and local marketing & PR	£296,092	
Welsh Government Grant 'Supporting Foster Wales' **£2,137,249**	Staffing and infrastructure	£219,635	**£2,137,249**
	Local Authority Recruitment Offcers	£841,390	
	Local Authority Recruitment, Assessment and Support	£956,122	
	National projects (Marketing, Foster Carer Profiles and Learning and Development)	£120,102	
Total Income			**£3,096,619**
Total Spend			**£3,111,000**

five years in stories



Behind every statistic in this report is a child, a foster carer, a family or a professional whose life has been touched by fostering.

Since its launch, Foster Wales has supported thousands of children and young people through the dedication of local authority foster carers, social workers and partner organisations across Wales. While performance data helps us understand progress, it is these personal stories that best illustrate the difference fostering makes.

The following examples highlight some of the experiences that have shaped the Foster Wales journey over the last five years.

A Better Welcome: Helping children feel at home before they arrive

Moving into foster care can be one of the most uncertain moments in a child's life. Children are often left wondering where they are going, who they will be living with and what their new home will be like. To help reduce this uncertainty, Foster Wales worked in partnership with Action for Children to develop 'Big Welcome', a simple but powerful tool that introduces children to their foster family and home before they arrive. By sharing photographs, personal introductions and information about everyday family life, children can begin to build a picture of their new home before they walk through the door.

Social workers reported that Big Welcome helped children feel more prepared for what can be a difficult transition. Being able to see their bedroom, learn about the foster family and understand who would be there helped answer questions before they became worries.

One social worker reflected:

"It helped answer questions before the child even asked them. They could see their room, understand who would be there and begin to imagine themselves in the home."

The resource also proved valuable for professionals supporting children through placement moves. By providing information that would not ordinarily be available, it helped social workers prepare children, ease anxieties and have more meaningful conversations about what to expect.

As another social worker explained:

"It was really good to help the children understand who they were going to, other than just a name. It also helped me as the child's social worker to ease some of the worries they had about moving."

For many children, seeing photographs of the home and family transformed uncertainty into curiosity and excitement. One social worker described the impact on a young person who preferred visual information:

"It was so helpful for him. It was very reassuring, easy to navigate and easy to read. It really helped him understand the change visually, which is what he prefers. It made a difficult conversation so much easier."

The feedback from children has been equally encouraging. Social workers reported that children enjoyed exploring the profiles and learning about their foster carers before meeting them.

"The children really enjoyed going through the profile, reading it, seeing the photos and finding out more about the foster carers before meeting them. They were so excited afterwards and it definitely helped the journey into placement."

While simple in concept, Big Welcome demonstrates how small changes can have a significant impact. By helping children feel informed, reassured and welcomed before they arrive, it is improving the experience of entering foster care and ensuring that a child's sense of belonging begins before they even walk through the front door.

A Louder Voice: A care experienced young person's experience

Sophia used to be embarrassed to tell people she was in care.

We have given Sophia and other care experienced young people a safe space and support to share their story.

Since illustrating our cookbook in 2024, to sharing her story on nation press and TV – we are proud to see Sophia develop her confidence as a public speaker and lived-experience expert on what children really need form their foster carers.

Tom's Story: Why staying local matters

As a child in foster care, Tom experienced first-hand the difference that staying local can make. Being able to remain in the same school, maintain friendships and stay connected to his community provided the stability he needed to succeed. That stability helped him continue his education, progress to university and build a successful career as a lecturer.

Today, Tom gives that same opportunity to children through his role as a foster carer with Foster Wales Flintshire. Together with his wife and children, he provides short-term foster care for local children, helping them remain close to the people, schools and communities that matter most to them.

Tom believes that children should not have to lose their identity, friendships or education simply because they enter care. His story reflects one of the central ambitions of Foster Wales: ensuring more children can remain connected to the places and relationships that help them thrive.

"I think keeping children local to schools, family networks and friends is really important for their continuation and stability."

Donna's Story: From miles away to right on my doorstep

After fostering for twelve years with an independent fostering agency, Donna made the decision to transfer to Foster Wales Anglesey. Her experience highlights the difference that local authority fostering can make for both carers and children.

Before transferring, the children she cared for often lived long distances from their schools and support networks. Frequent changes in social workers and limited local support made it difficult to build consistent relationships. Donna wanted something different: fostering that felt local, connected and centred on children's needs.

Since joining Foster Wales, she describes feeling part of a genuine community. The children she cares for attend local schools, support is close at hand, and she has regular contact with foster carers and professionals who know both her and the children well.

Donna's story captures a key achievement of Foster Wales. Building stronger local fostering services that enable children to stay closer to home and carers to feel part of a supportive public service network.

"The biggest difference is how valued I feel now. Everything feels much more focused on the children's needs."

Delwara's Story: Relationships that last a lifetime

For Delwara, fostering has always been about relationships. Over fifteen years as a foster carer, she and her husband have welcomed children from a wide range of backgrounds into their home, providing mostly long-term care. Today, several young people remain part of their family.

Through patience, understanding and consistency, Delwara has helped young people overcome significant challenges. She recalls supporting children who had experienced trauma and helping them rebuild trust through everyday acts of care and understanding.

One young person she cared for struggled academically and initially failed their GCSEs. With continued encouragement and support, they persevered, completed an apprenticeship and eventually graduated from university.

Her story demonstrates that fostering is about much more than providing a placement. It is about creating lasting relationships, building confidence and giving children a sense of belonging that continues long after they leave care.

"I want them to know I'll always be here for them, even if they move out. They need to feel safe and know that relationship won't end."

Lorraine and Paul's Story: Supporting families to stay together

For more than thirteen years, Lorraine and Paul have provided parent and child foster care in Neath Port Talbot, helping vulnerable parents develop the confidence and skills needed to care safely for their children.

Together they have supported more than twenty parents and their babies. Drawing on their experience of raising eight children of their own, they provide practical support, guidance and encouragement to families at a critical point in their lives.

One young parent they supported, Demi, arrived at their home aged just 17 and pregnant. Through their support she successfully prepared for parenthood, returned to education to study mechanical engineering and began planning for independent living with her daughter.

Their story highlights the preventative role fostering can play. By helping parents succeed, parent and child fostering can strengthen families, improve outcomes for children and prevent the need for longer-term care arrangements.

"We're going to work with them to create an environment where they can do good enough parenting."

Rob's Story: There is no single type of foster carer

When Rob became a foster carer, he never imagined that he would one day continue fostering as a single man. Yet after fourteen years, he has cared for children of all ages and remains passionate about the difference foster carers can make.

Rob's own father played a significant role in raising him and his siblings, inspiring many of the values he now brings to fostering. Over the years, he has learned that fostering is about patience, empathy and helping children find confidence in themselves.

One of his proudest achievements has been supporting a young person through adolescence into adulthood, watching them gain independence, attend college and develop the skills needed for adult life.

His story challenges common misconceptions about who can foster and reflects the growing diversity of Foster Wales carers.

"If you have the time, patience and the ability to open your heart and home to children, I'd say just do it."





Working together for Wales: One national network

Perhaps the biggest story of the last five years has been the collaboration that has developed across Wales.

Before Foster Wales, local authority fostering services often worked independently. Today, 22 local authorities work together through one national network, sharing knowledge, developing consistent approaches and learning from one another.

Whether through recruitment campaigns, training opportunities, regional projects or national developments, the collective effort has helped create stronger foundations for local authority fostering.

Why it matters

Foster Wales demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations come together around a shared ambition: improving the lives of children and young people.

"Foster Wales is a partnership that is maturing and developing to establish an effective platform from which we strengthen and broaden our fostering activities. Over the last year we have had an upturn in fostering applications which will soon translate into more approved foster carers for the children looked after by this local authority.

We directly attribute this improvement to the financial and practical support we have received by collaborating as Foster Wales, added to the strength and determination of our local practitioners. We really appreciate the generous working relationship with the national team and the availability of the additional resources to add to the outstanding efforts made by all involved. We look forward to another productive year, working together as part of Foster Wales."

Audrey Somerton Edwards
Head of Children's Services, Ceredigion CBC

The stories in this report represent only a small snapshot of the thousands of fostering journeys that have taken place since Foster Wales was established in 2021.

Every fostering experience is different. Some last weeks, others last years. Some involve helping children return home, while others become lifelong relationships. Together, these stories remind us that fostering is not simply about placements or services. It is about people.

As Foster Wales looks towards its next chapter, it does so with gratitude for the foster carers, children and young people, social workers, local authorities and partners whose commitment has shaped the first stages of this journey.

looking ahead

7

The development of Foster Wales has demonstrated the power of collaboration. Together, Wales's 22 local authorities have created a stronger national voice for local authority fostering, improved recruitment and retention, increased support for foster carers, and strengthened the foundations needed to keep more children connected to their families, communities and local areas.

As we look ahead to the next chapter, our focus is not simply on maintaining progress, but on building upon it. The challenges facing fostering services remain significant. Demand for foster care continues to evolve, children's needs are becoming increasingly complex, and services across Wales must continue to adapt to ensure every child receives the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

The Foster Wales Work Programme 2026-28 sets out an ambitious agenda for the future. While the priorities reflect the changing needs of children, foster carers and services, they remain rooted in the principles that have guided Foster Wales from the beginning: collaboration, local provision, and better outcomes for children.





Recruiting the Foster Carers Wales needs

Over the coming years, Foster Wales will continue to strengthen its recruitment approach, ensuring that more people understand the opportunities available through local authority fostering.

This includes further developing the Foster Wales brand, improving digital engagement, expanding work with foster carer ambassadors and care-experienced young people, strengthening relationships with employers and community organisations, and increasing the visibility of fostering across Wales. Particular attention will be given to recruiting carers for specialist forms of fostering, including short breaks, parent and child placements and step-down from residential care.

Our ambition is not simply to attract more enquiries, but to improve the experience of prospective foster carers throughout their journey, helping more people successfully progress from enquiry to approval.

The following examples highlight some of the experiences that have shaped the Foster Wales journey over the last five years.

Strengthening support for foster carers

Supporting and retaining foster carers will remain central to our work.

Building on the National Commitment, Foster Wales will continue to work towards greater consistency in support, learning and development opportunities, wellbeing initiatives and practical benefits for carers across Wales. New approaches will focus on listening to foster carers, understanding their experiences and using their feedback to shape future services.

A major focus over the next two years will be the launch of a refreshed Learning and Development Framework, alongside new digital learning opportunities and specialist training pathways. Foster Wales will also continue to explore how financial support and allowances can be strengthened to ensure local authority fostering remains sustainable and attractive for carers.

Improving stability and outcomes for children

Everything Foster Wales does is ultimately focused on improving outcomes for children.

The next phase of our work will focus on increasing placement stability, strengthening support during the first year of fostering, expanding access to respite and peer support, and evaluating initiatives such as Big Welcome to understand their impact on children's experiences.

We will continue to share learning and good practice across Wales, helping local authorities develop innovative ways of supporting children, foster carers and families. Particular attention will be given to supporting children with more complex needs and ensuring that local fostering services are able to respond effectively to changing patterns of demand.

Working together as one foster Wales

One of the greatest strengths of Foster Wales is its ability to bring together the expertise and experience of 22 local authorities.

The next stage of development will focus on strengthening this collaboration even further. New national resources, staff support tools, shared policies, practice-sharing events and learning opportunities will help ensure successful developments in one part of Wales can benefit children and foster carers everywhere.

The continued development of our governance arrangements, regional structures and national partnerships will help ensure Foster Wales remains sustainable, influential and able to respond effectively to future challenges.

Using data to drive improvement

Foster Wales has significantly strengthened its use of data and performance information. Looking ahead, new dashboards and reporting tools will provide richer insights at local, regional and national levels, helping services understand demand, identify trends and target resources more effectively.

By combining data, professional expertise and the voices of foster carers and children, we will continue to build an evidence-based approach to improving fostering services across Wales.

The next chapter

The story of Foster Wales is still being written.

The first five years have been about building foundations: establishing a national identity, creating stronger partnerships, developing new infrastructure and demonstrating the benefits of working together. The next phase is about growth, sustainability and impact.

Our ambition remains unchanged: to ensure that every child who needs foster care has the opportunity to grow up in a safe, stable and loving family environment, as close as possible to the people, places and communities that matter most to them.

Together, we will continue working to build better futures for local children.



working together, and with our foster carers, as one connected team, foster wales will build better futures for local children

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