



As a service we aim to be:

F – forward-thinking and focused on the continued professional development of our staff and our carers

O – open to transparent communication and participation with our fostering families

S – safe, secure and stable in our provisions of care

T – trustworthy and reliable

E – encouraging and proactive in respect of our fostering families' education and training

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R – robust in respect of statutory and regulatory compliance

I – innovative in terms of service organisation and development of service priorities to support our children and families.

N – nurturing, supportive and caring

G – guided by best practice

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1. Introduction

Torbay Children Services were the subject of a full ILACS Ofsted inspection in March 2022 and the service were judged as good across all areas. Noted below are some of Ofsted findings:

“Services for children in Torbay have significantly improved. This improvement is demonstrable and making a tangible difference for Torbay’s children.”

“Strategic partnerships are now strong and there is good communication across both corporate and operational management. Despite this improvement, local authority senior leaders are not complacent”.

Specifically in relation to Fostering, Ofsted found:

“When family arrangements are not possible, most children live in alternative stable placements that meet their needs well and where they are making good progress. Children’s needs are well considered when matching and placing them with foster carers. When placements are at risk of breakdown, effective additional support is provided by the edge of care team and stability meetings are held to consider what other support can be provided to help make placements more resilient.

Assessments of foster carers are timely and generally of good quality. Foster carers spoken to by inspectors commented positively about the ease and timeliness with which they can access support, including out of office hours. All foster carers spoken with were highly positive about the support that they receive from their supervising social workers. Supervising social workers have achieved a good balance between professional vigilance and challenge and providing support to foster carers.”

The Children’s Continuous Improvement Plan outlines Torbay’s ambition to provide outstanding services for all children who call Torbay their home. As clearly outlined within the Corporate Parenting Strategy, this ambition applies most significantly to our cohort of cared for and care experienced children and young people. Our ambition for cared for children is that achieve the very best outcomes in all areas of their lives, and they are afforded the very best homes to live in, with carers that are ambitious for them, offering them the very best care. This is coupled with a professional team around every child, who work together with the same aim of achieving the very best that they can for the child whilst ensuring that the child has a voice, and can participate in and lead on their plan. This relational approach will demonstrate and evidence our restorative practice with children, young people and their parent and carers as a restorative Local Authority, an accreditation that was given to Torbay Children’s Services in March 2023.

Foster carers are the most extraordinary and selfless people offering care day and night to our most vulnerable children with complex needs and attachments. Foster care has been described as the “bedrock of the care system” however the most recently available annual statistics relevant to England provided by Ofsted demonstrate that the number of fostering households and foster carers, whilst at their highest ever levels, are not increasing at the pace required, due to the significant increase nationally in terms of the overall numbers of cared for children:

“Over the last 7 years, the general trend has been of a slow increase in numbers of places, with a 9% increase since March 2015. However, this increase has not kept up with the demand for places, with the number of children in foster care having increased by around 11% over the period to March 2020.”

[[Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)]

The Fostering Network State of the Nation Report [undertaken every three years and most recently published in December 2021] highlighted all but six of the fostering services who responded reported that they did not have a sufficiency of fostering families to meet the needs of children in their local area. Similarly, the Competition and Markets Authority’s study of children’s social care, published on the 10th March 2022, highlighted the challenges of recruiting foster carers in England, Scotland and Wales. The report also highlighted the gap between recruitment and demand, stating:

“There are widespread concerns that growing demand will mean that there will not be enough foster carers in the future.”

[[Final report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)]

In addition, there were 160,635 initial enquiries from prospective fostering households in the year ending 31 March 2021, but only 10,145 (6%) foster carer applications were received. This proportion has decreased from 12% in 2014 to 2015. While the number of initial enquiries is at an all-time high, the conversion rate of enquiries to applications is at an all-time low. Applications have decreased by 20% since 2014 to 2015. During 2020 to 2021, 32% of fostering applications from prospective households were approved. This is a decrease from 2015 to 2016, when 44% of applications were approved. Equally important is the need to retain those fostering families who are approved. In 2020-21, 30% of deregistered fostering households (1,470) deregistered within two years of their approval. The impact of this on the sufficiency of placements is significant, however more importantly, this can compound issues of placement instability, breakdown and high levels of placement moves for vulnerable cared for children. Therefore, there is a need for equal attention to be given to both the recruitment and retention of fostering families.

What are some of the barriers to recruitment and retention of foster carers?

The Competition and Markets Authority's study of children's social care and polling from foster carers from the Social Market Foundation identified the following barriers to recruitment and retention:

- Whilst many local authorities and independent fostering agencies have increased budgets for marketing and recruitment in an attempt to meet demand, this does not always increase the quality and viability of applications.
- Those who may be in a position to foster in terms of their skills and knowledge might not have the resources to be able to foster, for example they may not have a spare room, financial stability or sufficient time. The cost of living crisis has had a significant impact on this.
- Age was cited as a common reason for foster carer deregistration over the age of 55 with 61% of that group stating they felt too old to foster at this point.
- Factors impacting on retention included gaps in training and support, insufficient respite arrangements, affordability, gaps in placements and feeling unable to meet children's needs.
- Contrary to assumption, the recruitment and assessment process was not considered an undue barrier to recruitment. Those looking to foster see this as a necessary and proportionate process to assessment viability.

This document outlines how we intend to recruit additional skilled and enthusiastic foster carers over the next three years (2023-2026) building upon our established pool of foster carers, and their skill and knowledge, and how Torbay intend to continue to provide high quality support to all of their fostering families as part of our retention strategy. Our aim is to ensure that our foster carers are fully supported and receive on-going training and development to increase their resilience to offer the best care to our children. We will continue to consult with our foster carers to drive improvement within the fostering service with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for our children and young people.

This Strategy is linked to a range of connected plans and approaches, to provide joined up services that meet the needs of Torbay's children. The Strategy is aligned to our Sufficiency Strategy, which has been co-produced across the partnership.

2. Key Objectives for Fostering Recruitment in Torbay

Fostering recruitment remains a service priority for Torbay Children's Services, therefore the key objectives outlined with this strategy will focus our activity on building this aspect of our response to meeting the needs of Torbay's children.

There are clear benefits with placing our children with in-house foster carers due to the proximity of children to their community, schools, and families and networks. We intend to build on the foundations we have established and enhance our in-house services through these objectives.

Objective 1 – To increase our in-house foster carers and support our existing carers to develop their skills, training and resilience to meet the complex needs of our children. This will also offer a more varied group of carers to be able to offer a more comprehensive matching process to our children to ensure that our children receive the best care and support stability.

The Council has revised its communication and marketing strategy for the recruitment of foster carers and has adopted an ambitious and targeted approach to increase the number of in-house carers.

Key priorities

- To ensure that the assessment process, from the point of an initial enquiry, is timely and that the assessment process is robust and in depth, with the appropriate checks being undertaken in a timely manner to present at the fostering panel for approval of registration.
- To increase the number 'in house' specialist and intensive foster care placements to meet the needs of sibling groups, including children over the age of 10, adolescents with behaviours which challenge, sibling groups, children with disabilities and parent and baby assessment placements through resilience pathways of care.
- To recruit foster carers whose skills can be developed to meet the needs of Torbay children who need care services for short, medium and long-term periods, or who are being prepared to be reunited with own families or being placed in permanent living arrangements outside of their birth families.
- To support foster carers using a variety of means as part of a commitment to reduce disruption by supporting bespoke packages of support, guidance, and information at point of need.
- To ensure foster placement options reflect the ethnic diversity of the cared population.
- To ensure assessments of connected persons are timely and robust and that children, young people and their carers receive appropriate support.
- To reduce, where possible, the number of independent foster placements purchased by increasing and maximizing the use of our internal capacity.

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Objective 2 - Reduce the use of out of local area provision which may disadvantage our children and young people.

As of March 2023, 32 % (100) of cared for children were placed more than twenty miles from the address they lived in at the point of becoming cared for. The latest comparator figures show the national mean to be at 20% for children placed 20 or more miles away. There are many reasons a cared for child might be placed out of county and at a distance from the address they lived in at the point of becoming cared for, and significant analysis of our cared for population identifies many of these reasons to be in line with the distinct and bespoke wishes and feelings or best interests. For example, 10% of those children are placed for adoption, and 16% placed with family or friends in the locality of their address; similarly, in line with their wishes and feelings, 11% of this cohort are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who have expressly asked to be placed in more urban areas. Those children and young people who require specialist settings, such as secure or residential provision, are all placed more than twenty miles away from the address they lived in at the point of becoming cared for also. Whilst Torbay have undertaken a significant amount of work to safely reduce the number of children placed in residential settings, from 46 children in the 2018/19 to 16 children as of March 2023, due to the geographical location of Torbay, most residential provision tends to be at a distance, and clearly, the focus for the matching for these children needs to be based on the capacity of the provision to meet the needs of the child over locality.

Torbay will continue to develop and fully implement its robust commissioning framework for all provision types, to improve arrangements with local providers to meet the needs of cared for children and continue to decrease reliance on placements out of county. This is a critical objective, to ensure that those children who want and need to be placed in Torbay can be placed in Torbay, and to ensure that they are not isolated from their friends, family local area and networks to improve their long-term outcomes.

Torbay will aim to provide placements wherever possible and in line with the child's best interests to children and young people in Torbay and its local area (within the twenty mile radius). If a child must be placed out of the area, we will ensure they are not disadvantaged and have the same chances as all other children and young people. Torbay recognise the increased vulnerability of children placed at a distance from Torbay, and this is reflected in the Out of County Placement Protocol which advises of the specific role of the social worker, Team Manager and senior leadership team in supporting these cared for children and tracking and monitoring their placements, as well as particular expectations in terms of placement and care planning.

Key priorities

- To work with all providers to explore and agree strategies for maximising the availability of placements in-house at the point of need and reduce the reliance on agency placements.
- To develop the lens of care of external placements by utilising the appointed Placements Auditor to ensure enhanced placement quality assurance, and ensure that appropriate services are in place to support compliance and a robust responses to need.

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- To develop and implement a robust, evidence based and innovative market shaping strategy to ensure that the council can meet the diverse needs of all children who require a care solution.
- To reduce the number of residential placements purchased, and to develop and increase the number of highly skilled and resilient Torbay foster care placements, by developing our in house foster care service and preferred independent service providers to support our children's needs and plans of permanence to be met within the setting of a family home.

These two objectives fit within the wider objectives of the Fostering Service which include:

Torbay Fostering Service's objectives for service provision are:

- We want cared for children to live in an environment which is warm, stable and consistent to meet their needs.
- We want cared for children to have access to fostering homes which provide a safe, secure and nurturing base from which they grow into confident and happy young people who have aspirations for their future.
- We want cared for children to feel supported to achieve the best possible outcomes, not only in the short term but in the medium to long term too.
- We want cared for children to feel fully involved in their planning.
- We want cared for children to feel like they have a voice in the development of services designed to support them.
- We want social workers to understand the value of the fostering role and how their actions and practice can support the delivery of high-quality fostering services.
- We want to provide social workers with the relevant training and development opportunities to help them to under this.
- We want to provide fostering families with high quality and individualised training and development opportunities.
- We want to provide support of our fostering families which is personalised and inclusive of appropriate support for out of hours response.
- We want to continue to recruit fostering families who have a wide range of skills and experience, who can offer homes to a wider range of cared for children, including sibling groups, older children or those children who may have additional needs.
- We want to continue to recruit fostering families from a diverse background who can offer a range of homes for cared for children, thereby enhancing the quality of the matching process.
- We want to be a service which demonstrates its core values of equality and the value of diversity through its operational actions as well as its strategic review of practice, policy, training and development.
- We want to be a service which is compliant with the statutory, regulatory and legislative framework under which we work within daily.

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- We want to be a service which recognises learning opportunities and ensures that service delivery is robustly monitored, reviewed and developed.
- We want to develop a team approach, which centres on the child and their needs, and which ensures that all involved in supporting a child are focused on the achievement of best practice.

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3. Profile of cared for children by Torbay

Torbay continue to be corporate parents, as of the 31st March 2023, to 314 children; this overall figure also incorporated twenty-two Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who Torbay had welcomed either as part of the National Transfer Scheme or through representation as UASC by residents placed at local asylum hotels. This is a reduction in the numbers of cared for children, from 330 cared for children in August 2020 and a height of 362 children and young people in the 2018-19 period. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care however has significantly increased, from one in 2019-20; this also impacted on increase of overall numbers of cared for children from the end of 2021-22, due to the large numbers of residents from the dispersal asylum accommodation stood up in Torbay in September 2022.

There is service wide focus on safely reducing the number of cared for children in Torbay, with particular attention given to effective and impactful edge of care intervention to ensure children are able to remain at home with their parents, carers or family members, as well as post-Order permanence options such as safe reunification, Former Foster Carer Special Guardianship and continued exploration of viable family permanence options.

Children

Children	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of children in care at March 31st	354	319	299	314
Number of boys	177	163	163	178
Number of girls	177	156	136	136
Number of White ethnicity	328	291	264	264
Number of Asian ethnicity	1	2	2	5
Number of Black ethnicity	0	0	1	1
Number of Mixed ethnicity	25	25	23	24
Number of other or unknown ethnicity	0	1	9	20
Aged under 1	20	15	15	14
Aged 1 to 4	48	45	38	41
Aged 5 to 9	59	59	52	57
Aged 10 to 15	156	137	134	125
Aged 16 to 17	71	63	60	77

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Placements

Placement type - percentages	England			Torbay			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Foster care (U codes)	72%	71%	70%	76%	78%	76%	73%
Placed for adoption (A codes)	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%
Placed with own parents (code P1)	7%	7%	7%	3%	4%	5%	6%
Children's homes (code K2)	13%	14%	16%	9%	6%	6%	5%
Hostels / Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to Children's Homes regulations (code H5)				8%	6%	6%	9%
Secure units (code K1)				0%	0%	1%	1%
Residential schools (code S1)	-	-	-	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other residential (adult residential care homes, NHS provision, family centres, mother and baby units, YOIs or prison - R codes)	-	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Independent living (code P2)	3%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other (mostly unregulated foster placements with family / friends, code Z1)	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	4%

Please note: percentages will not always add to 100%.

The improvement in performance relating to the percentage of all children and young people placed in in-house fostering placement, including placement with Connected Carers, as a percentage of all children in care has been sustained at 62% in March 2023, an increase from 56% in 2019-20.

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In addition, there has been a sustained reduction in the use of residential care, with 16 children placed in residential provision as of March 2023 equating to of 5% of all cared for children; this is a reduction from 9% in 2019-20 and a further reduction from 6% in 2021-22.

At Torbay, we use performance data to tell us the story of our children and what they need. This understanding of the needs of our cared for children is used continuously to inform and enhance our fostering recruitment strategy and planning which continues to be focused on expanding the in-house placement options available to:

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

Permanency achieved for our children

There are times when a child's experience of a family or the complexity of their needs can mean that a short period of residential placement is required, to provide children with a period of containment to enable further assessment and planning to allow for their needs to be met. Torbay believe that every child deserves the opportunity to experience care in a family setting and we will always be seeking to support a child to step out of residential settings at the right time. Over the next three year, Torbay's ambition is to increase our resilience foster carer cohort to support and transition our children from residential homes and to develop our parent and children placement offer.

Some young people achieve better outcomes at sixteen or seventeen in semi-independent provision, which provide support and preparation for independence and transition work for young people who may find a family setting more challenging or who may be ready to embrace more independence.

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4. Foster Carer Cohorts and Enquiries

During 2022/2023, the fostering service received a total of 111 initial enquiries; as a result of these enquiries, eight mainstream fostering households were approved.

Years	Number of enquiries	Approvals	Conversion
2014- 2015	118	29	24%
2015- 2016	65	10	15%
2016- 2017	42	3	7%
2017 - 2018	86	10	12%
2018 - 2019	45	4	9%
2019 - 2020	51	2	4%
2020 - 2021	111	20	18%
2021 – 2022	99	9	9%
2022 – 2023	111	8	7%

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

As a baseline expectation, the Fostering Service aim to increase the net number of fostering households by a minimum of ten per year. As of the 31st March 2022, Torbay supported 81 mainstream fostering families; as of the 31st March 2023, Torbay supported 84 mainstream fostering

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families. In 2022-23, eight mainstream fostering families were approved, and five mainstream fostering families were deregistered, resulting in a net increase of three mainstream fostering families, thereby seven mainstream fostering families short of Torbay's target.

There are a number of factors which have impacted upon this performance. In the year 2022-23, 40 Form C/Special Guardianship assessments have been undertaken by the fostering assessment team, to explore the viability of permanence through kinship care. Similarly, as of the 31st March 2023, 20 cared for children were living with kinship carers under regulation 24 arrangements, on a temporary basis pending the completion of a Form C assessment and presentation to Fostering Panel. This is also reflected in the percentage of children who left care as a result of a Special Guardianship Order being made, which was 14% of all children who left care in 2022-23, higher than the England average.

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

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

There remain a number of factors which are impacting on fostering recruitment both locally and nationally, which also impact upon the number of approvals for mainstream fostering families in the 2022/23 year. The cost of living crisis continues to impact on families, and influence their position

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on whether now is the right time for them to foster, as evidenced by the eight applicants who withdrew due to family circumstances. This includes personal circumstances, such as adult children returning to live in their home, as well as financial considerations, such as the impact of any plan to reduce working patterns in line with a fostering role. Similarly, a number of fostering families have spoken about the uncertainty in relation to the specific recommendation of the government's 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy in regards to Regional Care Co-operatives, and some initial concern raised by fostering families of the loss of the bespoke and individualized approach to fostering support that the Torbay Fostering Service is able to offer to families.

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

Similarly, during 2022/23, the fostering assessment team undertook a total of 44 negative initial viability assessments in respect of potential family and friend carers; this can often create a significant amount of work which does not directly lead to impact on children in terms of their permanence outcomes. In recognition of this, and again to ensure that the capacity within the team is utilized and maximized, a new screening tool has been implemented, with the aim of reducing these high figures to a more proportionate level which does not impact as significant on the team workload.

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

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

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

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

Fostering Process

The process from point of initial enquiry through to assessment is robust and comprehensive. The fostering service aims to be open and transparent with prospective carers at all times, and particularly regarding the recruitment process and the reality of being a foster carer to ensure that applicants are fully aware of what the process and assessment will entail.

The process is outlined below:

- Receive the enquiry via a range of routes - email, website application to fostering@torbay.gov.uk or by telephone, face to face. In 2023-24, there will also be the potential for applicants to submit the enquiry through the Torbay Children's Portal, and this will then be received directly onto our reporting system.
- Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator to contact enquirer within 24-48 hours and complete an enquiry form and then arrange a face-to-face Initial Visit with a Fostering Assessment Social Worker within one week of enquiry.
- Initial visit to be sent to Fostering Assessment Team Manager by the social worker who undertook the initial visit within 24-48 hours with their recommendation.
- Fostering Assessment Team Manager to submit their recommendation within 24-48 hours and notify Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator with the recommendation whether to progress the application or decline the application.
- Applicant to be notified via email a copy of the initial visit with the recommendation made.
- If negative, the Fostering Retention, Recruitment and Events Coordinator will send a copy including a copy of the initial visit and advise the applicants of next steps, should they disagree with the recommendation made.
- If positive, the Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator will email a Stage 1 letter with details of the next steps. email application, medical and finance form and ask for these to be returned within 14 days. They will also email dates and times for upcoming Skills for Fostering training that needs to be booked and undertaken by the applicant/s.
- At that time, a panel date is booked within six months of the initial enquiry and the Fostering Assessment Team Manager is advised of this date.
- Once forms have been returned, they are quality assured by the Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator and then sent to Fostering Admin to start the checks.

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- The Fostering Assessment Team Manager is then advised that the forms have been returned and at that time, a Fostering Assessment Social Worker is allocated.
- Fostering Admin will then email the applicants and introduce themselves, explaining that they will be supporting the applicant's fostering application.
- The allocated Fostering Assessment Social Worker is then expected to make contact within one week of being allocated the assessment.
- During the assessment, the Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator will keep in touch with the applicant and see how they are progressing and if they have any questions or concerns.
- Enabling opportunities: if we have any potential enquirers who have not had significant of experience working with children, the Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator will email them details on how to apply for enabling opportunities. This will enable them to gain experience during their fostering assessment. This is followed up the Fostering Assessment Social Worker who has been allocated to their assessment.
- The fostering assessment team are working to deliver faster routes to approval for carers that are looking to transfer to become Local Authority foster carers from independent agencies – applications can be progressed within three months of enquiry.

All completed applications are progressed to the independent Fostering Panel for consideration. Once the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) ratifies the Panel's positive recommendation, the Panel administrator will then email the applicants a welcome letter and pack, and a service agreement to be completed and returned and signed as soon as possible.

The panel administrator reassigns the applicants to the Fostering Support Team Manager who will then allocate a Supervising Social Worker. The Fostering Assessment Social Worker support a handover with the new Fostering Supervising Social Worker and visit the new foster carers. The new foster carers will undertake an induction with the Fostering Support Team.

In 2023-24, the Fostering Retention, Recruitment and Events Coordinator will be looking at targeted marketing opportunities aimed at previous foster carers who may have retired or put a hold on their Fostering journey. Additionally, targeted marketing activity will explore birth children of current or previous foster carers who are now adults and have grown up and who may wish to start their own fostering journey.

As a Local Authority, we continuously review this process to ensure that people in assessment are supported in the most timely and comprehensive manner, to support the Panel and recommendations being sought. A priority for the next three year is to look to increase the number of new foster carers registered as long term foster carers, thus able to support children who are cared in terms of achieving permanence.

5. Marketing Activities

The aim of the marketing activity in over the next three years is to increase the number of Torbay Council foster carers and the range of available foster care placement options.

In addition to the range of statistics and reports highlighted within the introduction, the recent Care Review authored by Josh McAllister highlighted that there are not enough foster carers to meet the need of an increasing picture in terms of numbers of children are cared for by their Local Authority and therefore recruiting high quality foster carers should be a priority for all, and this is certainly the case for Torbay. This is even more critical given the recommendation within the Care Review that proposes that cared for young people should be offered the option of a Staying Put arrangement with their former foster carer if this is appropriate until they are 23 years old, which would see young people through higher education and into adulthood. Torbay Children's Services continue support our young people with Staying Put wherever possible and in the young person's best interest; in the year 2022-23, the percentage of eighteen year old care experienced young people Staying Put with their former foster carers increased to 39%, from 28% in 2021-22 [albeit this relates to a small cohort and is affected by the overall numbers of young people ceasing to be eighteen within the year]. Whilst Staying Put is an option for young people that Torbay fully support, and the Staying Put policy will be reviewed in 2023 in consultation with fostering families and children and young people, if the recommendation of the Care Review is adopted, this would have an impact on the capacity of existing foster carers to offer new placements to cared for children.

We also want to raise the profile of fostering in Torbay and raise awareness of the need for more more loving, accepting, supportive and stable homes in our area where our children can live and maintain their networks. We want to continue to dispel the myths of what is required to be a foster carer along the way. We want to increase the number of people enquiring about fostering as this starts to sow a seed, and starts a conversation; we want to highlight how fostering a child can bring the family a sense of enrichment, fulfilment, and joy, as they watch and support their foster children to flourish whilst knowing the integral part the fostering family have played in that.

A further aim is that the marketing activity will also increase retention rates of existing foster carers and create a more skilled and resilient cohort of fostering families available to our children that in turn will reduce the dependency on Independent Fostering Agencies.

We also aim to encourage partners, staff and the wider public to help promote becoming a Torbay Council foster carer.

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Torbay continue to aim towards a year-on-year net increase of ten fostering families. This is a realistic and necessary target in order to achieve the ambitions highlighted within this strategy, and a target which is monitored and tracked closely. As such, there is an equal need to consider both recruitment and retention to achieve this aim.

We aim to achieve our goals in a range of ways as set out below:

- Our range of marketing activity is varied in 2022-23, with a mixed marketing model incorporating attendance at events, social media campaigns, information sessions and awareness raising events. We will continue to attend various local events as well as having pop up stands in and around Torbay and Newton Abbot areas. This will provide for us to promote face to face opportunities for people wanting to obtain information on becoming a foster carer with Torbay Council. In addition to these events, we are actively promoting Fostering Information Sessions virtually. We will continue to monitor the impact of these events in terms of numbers of initial enquiries and conversions, in order to target our marketing activity and ensure the impact of this activity is maximised.
- We will continue to promote fostering on all social media channels on a weekly basis and update the Fostering Section on the Torbay Council Website. In addition, we will review and enhance the foster carers sections on the Torbay Family Hubs website, a one stop shop for information, services, support and guidance for all children and families in Torbay.
- In 2022-23, we started to actively promote fostering with Torbay Council staff, and are proud to now hold the Fostering Friendly employer status. We continue to build on this position and we will review, analyse and evaluate the ongoing implementation of the Fostering Friendly policy.
- We will build and develop our online and social media platform to support the online profile of our fostering services.
- The use of previous figures from 2022-23 in terms of the marketing potential for events is used to determine the viability of enquiries that we will receive, and this is now used to determine the events schedule in the future. We will continue to obtain and track key information in relation to how enquirers find out about fostering with Torbay Council as this plays a vital part in our recruitment strategy and marketing.
- We will continue to work with Torbay Council's Communications team, to develop a particular criterion for social media purposes and target our communication to specific demographics.
- We will use geographical enquiry data to target other areas outside of Torbay and those areas from which fewer enquiries are received. These areas are currently identified Newton Abbot, Dawlish, Teignmouth and Totnes. We will use promotional material, pop up street stands and attending libraries in these areas as well as putting up posters in supermarkets, libraries, sports, and youth centres.
- Nineteen events are planned for 2023-24, including pop up stands in town centres from April 2023 – Sept 2023. This is to continue to raise community awareness and highlight Torbay's fostering service profile.

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- We will actively target local businesses including schools, colleges, Devon & Cornwall Fire Service, Devon & Cornwall Police, and the NHS to become a Fostering Friendly Employer. We are hoping with the implementation of this new policy within Torbay Council will increase the numbers of Torbay Council staff who would be interested in fostering with Torbay Council.

Fostering Retention, Recruitment and Events Coordinator

The role of the Fostering Retention, Recruitment and Events Coordinator roll is extremely important within our recruitment and retention strategy. Whilst the purpose of this role within the recruitment process has been described above, the role is essentially twofold and is also integral to the continued expansion of the Torbay Corporate Parenting Offer, working with local businesses and attractions in obtaining discounts and free tickets to provide to cared for children, their fostering families and Special Guardians. Our families feel that they are being well looked after and the feedback in respect of Corporate Parenting offer is extremely positive. This feedback is shared with local businesses, and they also actively promote within their own organisations fostering with Torbay Council. An example of this is Torquay United who have a banner placed around their pitch, have a pull up and signs throughout to promote fostering with Torbay Council. As well as Torquay United, we have an annual event of Train of Lights with Dartmouth Steam Railway. In previous years, this has been televised on BBC Spotlight, highlighting this joint partnership and also shining a light on the support given to fostering families in Torbay.

Event schedule for 2023-24

6 th April 2023	Torquay Town Centre (pop up stand)
12 th April 2023	Newton Abbot Town Centre (pop up stand)
30 th April 2023	Teignmouth Community Day
7 th May 2023	Coronation Event
18 th May 2023	Torquay Town Centre (pop up stand) during Foster Carer Fortnight
25 th May 2023	Paignton Town Centre (pop up stand) during Foster Carer Fortnight
26 th May – 29 th May 2023	Food Festival
17 th June 2023	Armed Forces Day
2 nd July 2023	Galmpton Gooseberry Fair

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16 th July 2023	Carousel Community Project
26 th July 2023	Newton Abbot Town Centre (pop up stand)
2 nd August 2023	Brixham Town Centre (pop up stand)
9 th August 2023	Torquay Town Centre (pop up stand)
12 th August 2023	Newton Abbot Country Show
20 th August 2023	Lions Club Community Day
23 rd August 2023	Newton Abbot Town Centre (pop up stand)
31 st August 2023	Paignton Town Centre (pop up stand)
2 nd September	Torbay Pride

6. Analysis of 2022-2023 Marketing Activity

Events

28-29 May	Imagine festival	3 enquires
3 June	Jubilee weekend stand at Music on the Meadows	3 enquiries
18 June	Armed Forces Day pop up - Babbacombe	8 enquiries
June 30 – 2 July	Devon County Show	31 enquiries 1 in Assessment
July 23-24/30-31	Paignton Festival	2 enquiries
Jul/Aug	Torquay United Community Day	1 enquiry
Aug 6	Newton Abbot Country Show	1 in Assessment
Aug 21	Lions Club Community Day	3 enquiries
3 Sep	Marldon Apple Pie Fayre	3 enquiries

Over the nine events attended, a total of 56 initial enquiries were received in 2022-23, 22 of which were qualified leads (39%). It was fed back by existing and prospective fostering families alike that Marldon Apple Pie Fair was said to have been the best setting for a family audience; there are other fairs in keeping with this one which have now been added to the proposed schedule for next year. The volunteers who attended Newton About Country Fair did not collect enquiry forms, they handed out fostering information. We have recently received contact from someone who attended the show, and they are now in a fostering assessment. This highlights the dual role of event attendance in that this also raises the profile of fostering; whilst enquiries may not be generated in the immediacy, it can be that after a period of reflection a family comes forward having first considered fostering as a result of the information provided at an event.

Next steps include reviewing the stand presentation ahead of the next year and reviewing the volunteer briefs and key messages.

Enquiry analysis

In terms of general fostering enquiries, there have been a high number of enquiries from women who are the household decision makers, aged between 25 – 60. A more defined cohort from which a higher number of enquiries has been received is those between the ages of 40 – 60-year-olds, who may be retired, working part time or flexible hours or who have made the decision not to work for various personal reasons, such as looking after their own children.

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Foster carers have often come into contact with the fostering service before, either from first-hand experience of being a foster child or being raised in a family with foster children or working in a caring profession. One parent must be a full-time foster carer; however, this does mean that they can remain in part time work or be self-employed with flexible working hours, or work from home with flexible working hours. If you are a single person – you cannot be in work, unless you work full time from home with flexible hours.

There are a high number of existing foster parents who work part time in the care industry across domiciliary care and caring for vulnerable adults or NHS staff who work part time hours or who have flexible working arrangements. We also have a number of applicants who work in education which enables flexibility for fostering.

In terms of geographical location, there has been a high number of enquiries from the Brixham locality; this needs to be further explored, to understand the reasons behind this. This knowledge also needs to inform more targeted activity in Torquay and Paignton.

7. Feedback from Fostering Families

Ongoing consultation with foster carers takes place each year via thematic surveys looking at specific topic such as their participation within the professional groups working with the children, training and development, support systems within the inhouse fostering, developing back up carers and use of enablers and other support services.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have also used the feedback to expand the Corporate Parenting Offer by recruiting into the fostering service a therapeutic social worker who will support families and children with the aim of increasing foster carer resilience via the therapeutic parenting lens and stability for children. We will also be offering therapeutic training to all our carers and sharing resources and training from course trainers.

8. Focus on Retention

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The Fostering Network State of the National Report (December 2021) highlighted fostering families and their views in respect of the improvement of retention. This included:

- Avoiding delays within the assessment process. **Torbay have a robust process in place, as outlined previously within this Strategy, to ensure that fostering assessments are undertaken in a timely and robust way.**
- Better transfer processes for people who have already been approved to foster. **As above, Torbay aim to complete such assessments within three months.**
- General awareness raising of the role of a foster carer, involving open and transparent conversations to ensure appropriate applicants have clearer expectations. **This has been reflected in Torbay's assessment process.**
- Better pre-approval training to take place before and during assessment. **Torbay regular reviews the workforce and development opportunities for their fostering families. Skills to Foster is offered during the assessment process, and access is given to a range of other training opportunities both before and during assessment.**
- Valuing the contribution of fostering families make to a child's life and having good team around the child arrangements. **Torbay have undertaken a significant amount of work to enhanced relationships with our fostering families as outlined below.**

In 2022-23, the Fostering Service have worked hard to retain the number of foster families that we have by improving communication with management and the social work team. We have introduced a quarterly Foster Carer Newsletter as well as asking for feedback from our carers with regards to ongoing improvements to the service. In addition, we hold regular Foster Carer Workshops which promote consultation and participation, as well as information-sharing and joint working with our foster families.

We continue to develop and enhance our Corporate Parenting Offer. During 2022-23, we offered 15 competitions and free tickets to tickets to local attractions and events locally (this equated to over 1700 free tickets) and after each event, feedback of the event was requested. This feedback is shared with the local businesses who contribute to our Corporate Parenting Offer and used on their website to actively promote joint working with Torbay Council Fostering Service. Going forward into 2023-24 we have already agreed with 2 businesses to provide free tickets for our cared for children, fostering families and Special Guardians and hope to continue to expand upon this offer.

Support Groups

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Torbay Fostering Service also run a number of support groups, which are organised at various times throughout the year and through various platforms. Torbay are committed to learning from feedback and participation and are constantly looking for ways in which we can make our training as accessible and purposeful and meaningful for fostering families as possible.

It is intended that support groups provide an opportunity for fostering families to meet with each other and share their views and experiences of fostering; in addition, fostering families can access support, guidance and signposting through these groups, and receive information about recent changes to policies and guidance and practice.

Currently, Torbay Fostering Service offer:

- A support group run by CAMHS which offers support through a therapeutic lens.
- Special Guardianship Support group for all Special Guardians receiving support from the Special Guardianship Team.
- A general foster carer support groups which is held monthly face-to-face.
- Foster Carer Forums which are held quarterly.
- Foster Carer Workshops held bi-annually.
- Evening support groups and Connected Carer support groups.
- Single foster carers support group.
- Evening support groups.

Foster carers receive financial allowances which value and respect their skills, learning and commitment. Detailed financial information and guidance around expectations are made available to each foster carer. In addition to the financial support, our foster carers benefit from local discounts and offers from providers that have made a commitment to support Torbay's foster care families as part of the Corporate Parenting Offer. Paignton Zoo have made a pledge to provide all of our foster carers an annual family pass in addition to other local attractions providing discounted rates to access to foster carers.

Out of hours support

Torbay Fostering Service currently also have access to an out of hours team which offers direct support to fostering families whereby issues in relation to placement instability have been identified; this is operating through our Building Futures team and provides a weekly response until 9pm weekdays and a service on weekends 10-6pm Saturdays. In addition, the EDS (Emergency Duty Service) provides advice and support 24 hours, 7 days a week. This is a generic service and will provide a duty response in the event of an emergency.

Support during Allegations

Torbay Fostering Service also commission specialist support, for example mediation or advocacy services, in situations whereby this is required for foster carers through the allegation process. Fostering Service commissions, the independent individual support for foster carers from Fostering Network to support them through the investigation process.

Training

At Torbay, we believe that every moment of the fostering experience provides rich opportunity for learning and development; we are committed to supporting fostering families to grow and learn and develop their practice and recognise that this will be on an individualised basis, with at times a bespoke training need.

Fostering families begin their training journey during the assessment and approval process and build on this learning as they move on to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards. Fostering families receive a full induction, in order to enable them to understand the expectations of the fostering role, the key principles and values which underpin the fostering role and how they can best meet the needs of the cared for children they may be supporting and caring for.

Foster Carer training includes:

- Record Keeping for Foster Carers
- Safer Caring
- LADO Role and Allegations Against Foster Carers
- SGO PACE Training
- Delegated Authority for Foster Carers
- Paediatric First Aid
- Life Story Work
- Introduction to attachment theory and practice
- Grief, Loss and Change
- Family Time Supervision
- Bridging to Adoption
- Fostering Changes Training
- PACE Training
- Skills to foster (as part of the assessment)

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In certain circumstances, Torbay Fostering Service will explore alternative types of bespoke training for individual or groups of fostering families, where this is an identified need.

Sensory Connections

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

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

8. Three Year Plan

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Month/Year	Targeted Marketing Activity	Frequency	Policy or procedure changes
April 2022 – March 2025	Offering our Foster Carers Refer a Friend incentive	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> April 2022 – advised Foster Carers of the new incentive. Refer an Applicant Scheme now launched which will provide a £250 one-off payment to any existing foster carer who refers a fostering applicant, at the point the applicant is approved and accepts their first placement. This has already generated three high quality initial enquiries.
March 2022 – June 2023	Update of the Fostering section on the Torbay Council Website. The update will be including up to date events, incentives, and restorative language.	Reviewed every three months	Fostering Service Manager, Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator to work with Torbay Council Web Team to update the current website.
June 2023 – September 2023	Consult with fostering families on the enhancement of the Family Hubs website, to ensure this is a one stop shop for fostering families in Torbay in terms of signposting, advice and guidance.	Reviewed every three months	Fostering Service Manager, Fostering Retention, Recruitment & Events Coordinator to work with Family Hubs lead to update the website.

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March 2022 – ongoing	Weekly social media posts to promote Fostering with Torbay Council.	Weekly	A procedure for requesting for regular social media posts to be added needs to be created and implemented.
March 2023- Sept 2024	Developing the resilience of our fostering panel and panel advisors by a recruitment campaign to support development of panel membership and targeted training for Panel advisor role – lead by Fostering Service Manager.	One off	
Aug 2022 – ongoing	Running of Fostering Information Sessions on a monthly basis. This will be via Teams on an ad hoc basis if required.	Monthly	A new PowerPoint to be created and used during Information Sessions and the same information can be sent to all applicants awaiting an initial visit.
May 2023, 2024 and 2025	Childrens Services and Fostering Celebration Event. This is to be run on or around Foster Carer Fortnight.	Annually	
March 2023, 2024 and 2025	Foster Carer Workshop with Childrens Services Management, Chief Executive, councillors, and Foster Carers	Annually	
May 2021 – May 2024	Home for Good contract to promote Fostering.	Three year contract	Contract expires in May 2024

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March 2023	Fostering Friendly Employer Policy Update.	One off	HR Policy update
March 2023 onwards	Skills for Fostering training for new applicants Birth children Skills for Fostering training to be undertaken during assessment.	Monthly As and when	New training has been created and a new procedure has also been created and shared with the fostering assessment team and managers.
April 2023 onwards	Quarterly surveys to be undertaken with fostering families based on themes of their choice i.e. support groups, bridging to adoption.	Quarterly	
April 2023 onwards	A minimum of two collaborative audits to be undertaken alongside foster carers, based on arising themes identified through wider audits or feedback from fostering families.	A minimum of twice per year	
April 2023 onwards	Fostering Forums to be held at minimum quarterly and face to face.	Every three months	
April 2023-April 2024	Focused recruitment campaign based on the 'day in the life' concept, utilising video and testimonials from established Torbay fostering families.	One year campaign with results to be reviewed	

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April 2023	Event, enquiry and social media analysis to be ongoing and to inform reviews of recruitment and marketing activity.	Review every three months	
April 2023	Joint review with support from the Learning Academy of the fostering continued development and training offer.	Review every three months	