

CEL CIS's Response to the Scottish Government's consultation on 'Future of Foster Care'

February 2025

Our vision

1. What are your views on our vision for foster care?

CEL CIS welcomes the Scottish Government's renewed approach to foster care and the creation of a vision for foster care could act as a 'guiding star' to the foster care sector. We are fully supportive of the foundation of The Promise that "where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way" (The Independent Care Review 2020). Foster carers know that to support a child, their families must also be supported. Those across the children's services workforce also understand the importance of working with families to ensure children can remain or return to safe and loving families. Children who cannot stay with their family deserve services that work with them and their families for as long as is needed. For these children, we must ensure that the focus of foster carers is, first and foremost, the interests of the child or children that they care for.

We strongly support a flexible and evolving approach to foster care, which will ensure that all children get the safety, security and love that they need to thrive and develop. However, we have significant concerns about some elements of the consultation's proposed flexible approach to foster care. There are a multitude of practicalities and risks that would require to be attended to, and in the context of a national crisis in foster carer recruitment and retention, these matters must be addressed with urgency. Whilst CEL CIS's Consultants with lived experience also support many aspects of the flexible fostering model, with some supporting the extended role of foster carers providing support in birth families' homes, many also share these concerns.

"I feel like it is too much of an ask, I feel like it can already become challenging to be a foster carer, adding more training/weight on their shoulders may put people off wanting to help children and young people" - CEL CIS Consultant with lived experience

CEL CIS agrees with the statement in the consultation paper around "listening to the voice of children and young people, upholding their rights and ensuring they

feel safe, loved and respected” (Scottish Government 2024, page 11), and that prioritising children’s experiences is key in decision making, but we suggest that the priorities for alternative family care should start with children’s wellbeing. In some circumstances of children’s lives, their needs can be different from their wishes (Lefevre et al. 2019, Morrison et al. 2019), especially where children have experienced trauma, adversity or disruption to their key relationships. Skilled assessments that include children’s experiences but prioritise their wellbeing are essential. Therefore, reference to children’s wellbeing needs is preferable to a framing of participation solely in terms of their voice. We also note that, in practice, a focus on children’s views or voice has often been interpreted to mean that children who are non-verbal, either due to their developmental stage or due to additional support needs, have been deemed unable to give a view.

We note that the vision in the consultation paper states: “This includes alternative family care, which prioritises children’s experiences, and embeds within it maintaining family time” (Scottish Government 2024). Although family time is something that services would strive to offer children and young people, we would strongly caution against family time being positioned as, or assumed to be, always unilaterally positive for all children in alternative family care. We know that spending time with their parents, and members of their wider family, can be an extremely positive experience for many children who are cared for by foster carers. However, we also know that some children do not have access to any family and that some children may be at risk of significant harm within their pre-existing family relationships. Supporting high-quality time with family members requires sufficient resource, including the skills and a case load that enable social workers the time to prepare, travel, and support family time. Additionally, a child’s needs and wishes may change over time, so any arrangement will require regular review. Consequently, CELCIS would suggest that a more nuanced approach around family time be taken to reflect that decisions about a child spending time with their family members should always be carefully considered, based on the individual needs and wishes of each child, that it is suitably supported, and frequently reviewed, to ensure it continues to be in the child’s best interests.

The vision includes the ambition of “supporting families.” If this is to be read as supporting the birth family of a child who is in foster care, this would be a fundamental shift and would require an entirely new approach to recruitment of foster carers, fostering regulation changes, and changes to registration categories. A foster carer’s primary role is to support the child in their care, and therefore any wider engagement with the child’s birth family would only be undertaken if it were in the best interests of the child. A foster carer should be a child’s safe place, and this should be the primary role for a foster carer. Whilst there are models where foster carers support parents, which work well for children and their parents (as seen for example in Mannion et al. 2023), we would urge caution in any statement or position that could be interpreted as a

blanket approach to practice. Supporting families requires a significant amount of specialised support, resources, knowledge, and time. Consequently, we would recommend that any proposed model of foster care allows for foster carers to opt out of undertaking significant direct work with families. This would not mean that foster carers would stop supporting, or facilitating, family time or supporting the child to regularly keep in touch with their parents, in situations where this has been agreed as the most appropriate support for the child they are caring for. Foster carers routinely support families in this way and there is a need to further recognise this crucial part of the foster care role.

CELCIS welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to supporting foster carers, however support provision should go beyond skills and knowledge development and should include support for their wellbeing and that of their families. The commitment and care foster carers offer are the most valuable resources in foster care provision, but we know that foster carers and their families can often pay a high emotional and physical toll for the care they offer to our babies, children and young people. As such, CELCIS would encourage the Scottish Government to add support for the wellbeing of foster carers and foster carers' families to their vision.

Sources

- Lefevre M, Hickle K, Luckock B, 'Both/And' Not 'Either/Or': Reconciling Rights to Protection and Participation in Working with Child Sexual Exploitation, *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 49, Issue 7, October 2019, Pages 1837–1855
- Mannion, E., McCormack, D., Downes, C. and Turner, R.N. (2023) [An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Lived Experience of Concurrent Caring](#), *Adoption Quarterly* 1–31.
- Morrison, F., Cree, V., Ruch, G., Winter, K., Hadfield, M., & Hallett, S. (2019). [Containment - exploring the concept of agency in children's statutory encounters with social workers](#). University of Sussex.
- Scottish Government (2024) *Future of Foster Care Consultation*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government (page 11)

Flexible fostering approach

2. What are your views on the proposed flexible fostering approach?

General

CELCIS agrees that a more flexible approach to fostering in Scotland would be hugely beneficial to children, families and foster carers. The current system creates barriers for children, necessitating moving between different homes and caregivers as a child moves through the care system. While division of foster care into segmented short breaks, interim, and long-term fostering feels helpful

to services in terms of recruitment and management of carers, we know that this does not reflect the reality of the journey that most children in foster care experience and the impact this has on their young lives. A more adaptive and flexible system would be hugely helpful and would reduce some of these pressure points for services.

Overall, we agree with the premise of the consultation that relationship-based practice needs to be prioritised, enabled and supported in Scotland's approach to foster care, and our Children's Services Reform Research study highlighted the importance of this across children's services (Ottaway et al. 2023). A more flexible approach to fostering would be a helpful move towards achieving this. Current child-centred practice in foster care ensures that although they will not be living at their parental home, children remain at their school, are able to see their friends and family, and continue to attend clubs and hobbies, unless in rare circumstances where it is a risk to them to do so or where they live is very geographically isolated.

We urge caution around the proposal that "foster carers may, in some situations, have a role in supporting birth families". Whilst we agree that there should be a focus on supporting birth families, we feel this suggested model would involve foster carers carrying out what is a different, important and highly skilled function. Foster carers are hugely skilled and committed to providing care to children and there is a need for a clear rationale for this fundamental change in thinking, in which the role of supporting the whole family - currently performed by social workers and family support workers - should be carried out by foster carers. This view is echoed by some of CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience:

"I'm feeling like foster carers are being asked to do the job social work are meant to do but don't have time to" - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Learning from the Family Group Decision Making model shows us how powerful it can be for services to step back and allow a child and the adults around them who are important in their lives to make decisions, with services supporting them to create safe boundaries (Spolander et al. 2024). Foster carers and families can and should be brought together to reach decisions that keep the child at the centre and respect foster carers' expertise.

- i. **As part of the child's plan, foster carers may, in some situations, have a role in supporting birth families whose children are in foster care, to facilitate reunification of the child or young person with their birth family.**

This is an area of practice in which foster carers are already integrally involved – albeit in relation to supporting the child, and not directly supporting the birth family. Current practice is for foster carers to be part of children's carefully

planned transitions home to the care of their parents. This clear reunification plan should include the support that foster carers will need from professionals to help them to support the child they are caring for to return to the care of their birth family. CELCIS supports the continuation and development of this practice. Research from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) around the importance of reunification and how to create a strong and supportive shared approach to this important work may be a helpful reference point (Hyde-Dryden et al. 2015). This work speaks to the importance of the 'team around the child' and their family working together to reach the right decision around reunification the first time it is required, so as not to re-expose children to the trauma of repeated failed reunification attempts.

It may be more important to think about the system around the child, and what the implications are for the foster carer/s when a child is reunified with their family. In our current system, there is no straightforward way for children to transition back to their previous foster carers with whom they already have a relationship if reunification to their birth parent/s doesn't work, even if the child is away from the care of their foster carers for only a few days. This could be addressed within the flexible fostering approach by increasing capacity in foster care so the child's foster home with the foster carers can be held and not required very quickly for another child. This would also enable the foster family to offer more support to the child and their family during reunification.

Foster carers are always closely involved in supporting the transition of children and young people to move from their foster home to another home. This is particularly true when a child may be moving to live with permanent carers, or when considering Continuing Care arrangements. In Scotland, we have made significant progress in our understanding of the importance of maintaining relationships for children as they grow and develop into adulthood. This is reflected in the current practice of foster carers across the country who are made aware of its importance from the period of their recruitment, throughout their assessments, and into practice. This is something which can and should be supported to continue through training, supervision and carers' support services.

ii. **Foster carers may be well placed to have a role supporting families on the edge of care to enable more children to remain home.**

CELCIS welcomes the evaluation of the Step Up Step Down model that was referenced in the consultation regarding supporting families on the "edge of care". As noted in the consultation, the Step Up Step Down approach requires specialist and highly trained foster carers to support the mentoring of parents. Considering this, CELCIS are of the view that any consideration around this suggestion, and its corresponding recruitment requirements, needs to take cognisance of this. It would be especially important to attend to the amount of

high-quality professional support and supervision that is required to assist foster carers in this complex role, and the implications of this given the current context of many social work services in Scotland having substantial vacancies. CELCIS would urge caution around developing a model that draws on elements from specific programmes, such as Step Up Step Down, without full consideration of the evaluation/s of such programmes. Further, a failure to implement all elements of an existing model or programme, including aligning requisite resource, risks the model or programme not being delivered with fidelity – and consequently, not meeting the desired aim of supporting children, young people and their families. The role of the foster carer would also require to be aligned with early help and family support services and would not operate in a vacuum of services.

iii. **Building on existing short break provision, regular breaks, which are also child centred, would be provided to existing foster carers, or to families experiencing difficulties.**

Many parents, including those whose children are not in need of care and protection, need short breaks to attend to their own wellbeing, and for their children to have fun staying with friends or relatives. These often occur naturally in their networks, communities and family groups. Short breaks are equally crucial to foster and kinship carers, supporting their well-being and reducing the risk of compassion fatigue (Ottaway and Selwyn 2016). This should be built into the support given to foster carers from the very beginning and should keep the children being cared for at the very heart of considerations. Offering support that meets families 'where they are' is essential if a family is going through a period of crisis. Proactive planning of short breaks ensures that a child will be enabled to have more ongoing supportive relationships, more opportunities for growth and fun, and more loving and safe doors open to them during these times. A strength-based model of short breaks ensures that the child and carer can both benefit, and stops children experiencing unnecessary, disrupting and traumatising moves, as evidenced in fostering approaches such as the Mockingbird Model (Ott et al. 2020). It also aligns with ordinary parenting, where often other family members and family friends offer additional support to, and spend time with, a child. This is essential, and part of the rich network of raising a child within a family and a community.

There is a wealth of learning from the many community-based short break services and professionals who offer this form of support to families. Examples include the [Family Based Respite model](#) that offer children at risk of becoming 'looked after' a regular break with a committed short break carer, giving their families time to get back on track as well as a supportive relationship to help them build up skills, resilience and community support. The Step Up Step Down service also offer some of this provision. A mapping exercise could be undertaken to look at the models of fostering currently in use across Scotland,

with consideration given to data and research support to gather a detailed view of current approaches, what works, and where there are gaps.

CELCIS also echoes the Scottish Government's view that effective fostering services need to be well resourced and supported. The additional complexity of models such as Step Up Step Down and Short Breaks requires close management and support due to the changing circumstances and risks involved. Maintaining a positive and constructive relationship with their fostering agency and the social work practitioners who support them has been identified as one of the most crucial factors in foster carer support.

- iv. **Alongside professionals, we propose using more experienced foster carers who no longer wish to foster full-time, to mentor new foster carers, deliver foster carers' training and share practice and knowledge... this could be expanded to providing support to kinship carers, and those who are fostering to adopt.**

Peer support, through formal and informal groups and buddying and mentoring schemes, provides emotional and practical support for carers and reduces the isolation some carers experience. Evidence from Mockingbird and similar models that offer this support are clear in this regard. Evidence shows that children have a sense of security, love, community, and growing awareness of their rights, and that their relationships with their brothers and sisters feel right for them. Foster carers who experience this support have felt a sense of interdependence and interconnectedness and reported to be less likely to deregister than other foster carers (Patmisari et al 2024, Ott et al. 2020). Models like this enable foster carers to learn from one another, and to talk about problems or issues with people who understand these issues, which is especially valued.

Foster carers must be at the heart of all training and support offered to them, and this is now the case with many fostering services. Foster caring has traditionally been seen as a linear process, with carers recruited, assessed, and approved for a specific type of fostering. This has created a system that necessitates multiple home moves for children and young people, and barriers for carers. A flexible fostering approach would enable carers to begin a specific role and to follow the child by undertaking different types of caring to reflect the child's needs. It would also enable carers who cannot foster full time to offer several types of fostering or fostering support. Consideration must be given to how financial compensation would be managed for these carers.

We note the additional proposal here within the consultation paper to support "kinship carers, and those who are fostering to adopt." Whilst we welcome further support being offered to kinship carers and prospective adoptive parents, we cannot lose sight of the unique aspects of these models of care for children. Some aspects of foster care may be applicable, but care must be taken to

ensure that the specific needs of kinship carers and prospective adoptive parents are met.

- v. **Potentially, the facility, where it is appropriate, for a foster carer to stay in a family home, for a short time, to provide immediate support and care at times of family crisis... An opposite proposition might be that a child and birth parent live with a foster carer, and we would also welcome your views on that.**

CELCIS welcomes creative and imaginative ways to support families to stay together, but we are not convinced of the rationale to ask foster carers to perform this role rather than other parts of the workforce that are currently providing this support. We ask that the Scottish Government further explores the roles of different professionals and carers in alternative family care. Foster carers are hugely skilled and committed, but carrying out an additional family support role is a notable change and there are a number of considerations and risks that must be weighed if progressing the first proposition.

Evidence from existing models and approaches

There are a variety of models, services and professionals in Scotland that provide support to families who are struggling to offer their children the care that they need; many of these support children to be able to remain living with their families, if this is safe for them. Similarly, there is evidence from international models that offer support to families in their homes. Some models offering support to families in their own homes utilise support from foster parents. This includes the Fostering Families model in England, in which foster carers develop a supportive relationship with a family where there is a risk of their children coming into care, providing bespoke support that offers a support network to these families (Ash & Mayo 2024). Other models to consider include the Mockingbird model that co-ordinates mutual support amongst foster families (Ott et al. 2020), or models such as Parent and Child Foster Care, where parents move into a foster carer's home to access support for parenting (see Luke and Adams 2018 review of international Parent and Child Foster Care models).

It must be noted that there is a lack of evidence of existing models in which foster carers provide support whilst moving to live with birth families, so this must be considered further. There must also be exploration of evidence, both in Scotland and internationally, from the broad range of approaches to family support services, social workers, healthcare or other practitioners working in family homes to supporting families so children can remain in their home.

Roles of the family support workforce and foster carers

The ask for a foster carer to move into a family home would be fundamentally different to a foster carer providing care for a child in their own home. This would represent a paradigm shift in the model of foster care in Scotland, requiring a new approach to foster carer recruitment, regulation, and

registration. It is unclear if the proposal is for a foster carer to cohabit with the child's family, or for a foster carer to care for a child in the family home when their birth parent/s are not staying in the home. There are risks and disruption involved in either approach. There is a need for a clear rationale about why the highly skilled and committed family support workforce would not be better placed to manage the complexity and risk in supporting families who are in greatest need, enabling foster carers to focus on their primary role, supporting the children they care for.

The impact on children being cared for

A foster carer should be a child's safe place, and a child's wellbeing should be the primary concern for a foster carer. Whilst we strongly agree that going into care from the family home can often be a very traumatising event for children, it is possible that feeling like your family is replaced by someone new will also be highly traumatic and confusing for a child, as well as for the family around them. This must be explored further.

Proposed additional requirements of foster carers

To undertake this role, even temporarily, the responsibilities foster carers have needs to be fully understood. A foster carer would be required to have no personal caring responsibilities, such as looking after their own children or parents, a home that could be left unattended for periods of time, a job that would enable them to move or commute from a different location, and no personal commitments that require regular attendance. These risks and disruptions must be assessed and managed, but they are considerable, and this may not be a role that would be simple to recruit to. This must be carefully considered in the significant context of the current national crisis in recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Foster caring as an unpaid role

Currently foster carers receive a fee, but this seldom equates to minimum wage, as well as an allowance to meet the needs of children in their care. A foster carer is not employed by their fostering agency and therefore does not have the legal and employment protections of members of the social care workforce. This means that the only locus they have for being in a family home is consent, which can be quickly withdrawn.

It must be remembered that a foster carer, as a volunteer, does not have (unless from a previous/ current career role) the same professional knowledge in terms of supporting an adult with their own challenges as members of the social work and social care professions. These practitioners undertake substantial training and education, to university degree level in the case of social workers. They must also adhere to and maintain certain standards, that are monitored by their regulatory body, and benefit from supervision to support their practice by other professionals. All of this is required to support a birth parent in these circumstances and a foster carer does not have this level of knowledge and

skill.

Practical and safety considerations

There would need to be consideration and clarity over where the foster carer would live and sleep in an occupied house, as not all families have a spare bedroom. A carer would need their own room to sleep rather than share or sleep in common areas. In the context of a housing crisis in Scotland, this proposal does not seem viable.

The homes of foster carers are closely managed in terms of bedroom sharing, health and safety, hygiene, and fire checks, etc. The safety of a carer and children must be assured in this proposed model. There may be a need for inspections to carry out necessary repairs on the home prior to the foster carer moving in, if there are support needs around management of the home, as well as purchasing of additional bedding or kitchenware if required. A child would need support amidst these disruptions.

There would also need to be consideration of who would have responsibility for everyday tasks and costs in a household including cleaning, bills, grocery shopping and cooking, and how to resolve a dispute if the foster carer is attempting to manage things in a manner that the family object to, as well as insurance considerations.

A foster carer living in the family home will also have to manage relationships with local friends, family and neighbours who may have their own feelings and views on the carer's presence.

The impact on birth parents and considerations for birth parents

This approach could have a significant emotional impact on the adults in a child's family, who might feel they have no 'safe' space away from services, judgement or assessment. As this approach would require the family to give up their right to privacy, there must be consideration of the impact of this type of consistent presence on their wellbeing.

If the proposition is for the foster carer to move into the home with the child, and for their parent/s to leave, this would require consideration of where the parent/s would go. This has implications for their ability to work; attend services; and meet any other needs, including emotional needs for safety and supportive connections, and work on ongoing issues without the security of their home base. Again, in the context of a national housing crisis, finding alternative accommodation may be difficult and costly, and could result in a parent losing access to many of the supports that they need.

If the model considers that the family are absent from the home through hospitalisation or prison, there are also risks to manage. These include health and safety in the home, which is assessed in foster carers' homes. There must

be assessments of whether the home is likely to be visited by others who carry risks the carers might not be aware of, such as any risks of violence, debt collection or those seeking personal information about the family. Also, there are insurance implications should anything in the home be damaged whilst the parent/s are not there.

Birth families moving in with foster carers

We note that the consultation paper includes an additional proposition under this element, suggesting "An opposite proposition might be that a child and birth parent live with a foster carer, and we would also welcome your views on that." The proposal that this element includes a family moving in with a foster carer would need considerable thought, and the views of current foster carers and their families will be helpful here. Given that we know many children go into care due to parental neglect and abuse, much care must be given to the circumstances of the birth parent/s involved. Again, this is a fundamental change to the current model of foster care and may result in a reduction in the number of prospective foster carers who feel that they could take on this role.

In comparison with models where foster carers move into children's houses, there is a wealth of evidence from models where families move in with foster carers that can be considered; including the considerations for services, matching, and support needs of children, parents and foster carers.

Sources

- Ash, Z. And Mayo, T. (2024) *Fostering Families: a relationship-based alternative to separating them*, Community Care
- Independent Care Review (2020) [The Promise](#), Glasgow: Independent Care Review
- Lerpiniere, J., Welch, V., Young, E., Sadler, S., Fitzpatrick, J.P. (2015). *Overseen but often overlooked: Children and Young People 'Looked After at Home' in Scotland. Report 2: Identifying needs and outcomes.* Glasgow: CELCIS.
- Luke, N., & Sebba, J. (2014). *Effective parent-and-child fostering: An international literature review.* Oxford: Rees Centre.
- Hyde-Dryden, G., Holmes, L., Lawson, D., Blackmore, J. (2015) *Taking Care: Practice Framework for Reunification Evaluation report*, London; NSPCC
- Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2020) [Contact between children in care or adopted and their families: Six key messages from research.](#) Nuffield Family Justice Observatory.
- Ott, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Pinto, V., Sanders-Ellis, D. and Trivedi, H (2020) *Mockingbird programme, Evaluation report.* London: Department for Education
- Ottaway, H., McTier, A., Manole, M., Anderson, M., Porter, R., Scott, J., Young, E., Fowler, N., Soraghan, J., McIver, L., Anderson, C.A. and

MacKinnon, K. (2023) [Children's Services Reform Research: Learning and Implications for Scotland Concluding Report](#). Glasgow: CELCIS.

- Spolander, G., Bolger, J., and Santos-Petiot, J (2024) Family Group Decision Making Evaluation Report: Children 1st and Scottish Borders Council Pilot Project, Children 1st

4. What implications does a flexible fostering approach have for how fostering is funded and how foster carers are remunerated?

A flexible fostering approach will require a complete review of the current financial arrangements in place for foster carers. CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience were clear about the importance of this, with many sharing the sentiment that "if this is what we are suggesting, then these new fostering roles require a full-time salary." Another consultant specified that "if this is going to be a much bigger role, then they need bigger statutory supports. Sick leave, annual leave (unless looking after a child), mental health support etc., so they don't reach burnout." There may also be a role for a collective union approach, should foster carers move more towards becoming "workers".

Currently the financial support for carers is based on the model of care they provide and the responsibilities and costs associated with this. Moving to a flexible fostering model, where the carers' role encompasses more than providing care for a child or children, would require an expanded and flexible financial support system. Decisions by foster carers on whether they can carry out other roles, such as mentoring, peer support or community-based family support, would need to be further informed about the financial support for this. Carers will need to decide if they can meet their own financial obligations whilst offering a high degree of flexibility in the service they provide and may choose a more consistent option. If we truly want our foster carers to be flexible and adaptive we need to offer financial compensation that allows them to do so.

5. How can the Scottish Government, working with you, support the delivery of the flexible fostering approach?

"Most of this is good practice we have seen before, in small pockets, in small teams, that simply hasn't been able to be rolled out. This is about bringing that practice into the spotlight, not reinventing the wheel." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Foster care agencies and support services are highly committed and passionate about the work they do, and there are many innovative practices occurring across the sector and many elements of the proposed fostering model are currently practice 'as is'. We recommend that the Scottish Government carries out a mapping exercise to gather information on the foster care sector in Scotland, including fostering agencies and fostering support agencies. For example, mapping the different practice models in use around the country would allow evidence to be gathered on current approaches and methodologies used.

This would support an improved understanding of existing provision, inform robust planning for any elements of the model proposed in this consultation that are developed, and an understanding of the potential impacts and costs associated with the proposed model, as well as ensure there is a clear understanding of the alternatives to the proposed changes.

This mapping exercise should include data that would act as a baseline; for example, an accessible national dataset of the number of existing foster carers across all fostering agencies and independent providers. This would allow effective evaluation of future implementation efforts, enabling learning to be taken from approaches found to be working well so that these can be further developed. The views of foster carers, their families, and of birth families who have experience of their child living with foster carers would be a crucial part of this work.

CELCIS's Children's Services Reform Research study highlighted the complexity that must be considered in any reform or significant changes to children's social care. Our findings outlined five foundations for implementing transformational reform programmes which are applicable to a change of the scale being proposed in this consultation (McTier et al. 2023):

- Understanding that transformational reforms are complex and take multiple years.
- A preparatory/ transition stage in place to establish governance and infrastructural agreements.
- Transformational leadership, with dedicated implementation staff and resources.
- Understanding of the alternatives to the transformational reform programme and their respective costs and impacts.
- Long-term cross-party commitment to the reform.
- Clear vision for the reform which is then further articulated into a theory of change.

Sources

- McTier, A., Mackinnon, K. and Ottaway, H. (2023) *Children's Services Reform Research study: Case Studies of Transformational Reform Programmes*, CELCIS; Glasgow
- Ottaway, H., McTier, A., Manole, M., Anderson, M., Porter, R., Scott, J., Young, E., Fowler, N., Soraghan, J., McIver, L., Anderson, C.A. and MacKinnon, K. (2023) *Children's Services Reform Research: Learning and Implications for Scotland Concluding Report*. Glasgow: CELCIS.
- Patmisari, E., McLaren, H., & Jones, M. (2024). *Reconsidering recognition in the lives of children and young people in care: Insights from the mockingbird family in south australia*. *Social Sciences*, 13(2), 81.

Recruitment of foster carers

11. What are your views on the recruitment 'offer' described in this section of the consultation document?

A funded recruitment campaign by the Scottish Government would be welcome. The additional resources offered by the government in respect of this campaign may be especially helpful for local authorities with limited resources. However, the readiness of services to undertake the potential stream of enquiries that may result from a national recruitment campaign should be considered. Relationships are key in every aspect of social work, including the recruitment of foster carers. Consideration of a central resource for initial enquiries may be helpful here too.

Research has shown clearly that when services are prepared and can be responsive, flexible, and consistent, this reduces the number of potential foster carers making enquiries who then drop out of the process (Baginsky et al. 2017, Thomson et al., 2016, Hanlon et al., 2021, Ott et al., 2023, Kantar).

A key relationship for prospective carers is with the assessing social worker. Consistency and honesty about what is involved in being a foster carer is vital for retention and establishing important foundations for future working relationships (Baginsky et al. 2017 and The Fostering Network 2023). Good tracking and recording systems also allow services to manage recruitment processes well. If these systems and processes are ineffective, trust can be damaged and difficult to regain, affecting recruitment. Services must be equipped to offer a sustainable level of support to carers long after they are recruited to ensure the retention of foster carers.

There is a wealth of accessible information about being a foster carer available online, but streamlining this to ensure cohesion would support recruitment. Furthermore, potential foster carers must be connected to assessing practitioners as quickly as possible to help convert their enquiries so that new foster carers can be recruited and supported efficiently (Ottaway et al. 2023). Any national campaign or resource must be relevant to Scotland's diverse populations, geographies and local authorities. Service development and design should involve fostering agencies, foster carers, and be informed by the experiences and participation of children and young people.

Crucially, a decision regarding the proposed new model of foster care would have to be made before any national recruitment campaign begins, so that potential foster carers know what the expectations would be of them (Foster Wales 2021, Ott et al.). As we have identified throughout our response to this consultation, the proposed model represents a fundamental change in the role of a foster carer in Scotland. Alongside this, all fostering agencies would need to be fully ready to support a new model to be able to then offer appropriate advice and support to prospective foster carers.

Sources

- Baginsky, M., Gorin, S., & Sands, C. (2017) [*The fostering system in England: Evidence Review. London: Department for Education.*](#)
- Foster Wales (2021) [*National Fostering Framework: Final Report 2018-2021.*](#) Foster Wales.
- Fostering Network (The) (2023) [*Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention in England: Key Research Findings and Recommendations.*](#) The Fostering Network and Centre for Evidence and Implementation.
- Ott, E., Wills, E., Hall, A., & Gupta, S. (2023) [*Foster carer recruitment and retention in England. Centre for Evidence and Implementation and The Fostering Network.*](#)
- Thomson, L., McArthur, M., & Watt, E. (2016) [*Literature review: Foster carer attraction, recruitment, support and retention.*](#) Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University.

12. What more can the Scottish Government and local authorities do to recruit foster carers? Please explain your answer below. You may wish to share successes and challenges of recruitment of foster carers in your response.

A decision on what model of foster care to recruit to (the current Scottish model, or the model proposed in this consultation) will be important before any next steps for any recruitment campaign can be taken.

CELCIS recommends that there are improvements to the promotion of the 'Foster to Adopt' model, including further consideration of concurrency planning. This could increase the number of foster carers available, while minimising the number of different homes and carers children live with. While this requires intensive support for prospective adopters and a careful matching process by sufficiently skilled practitioners, it is vital if we are to ensure that children feel safe and secure and have the least number of changes in caregiver and home as possible.

Recruitment campaigns should focus on attracting foster carers who can offer specific care for groups of brothers and/ or sisters or children with additional care needs, in addition to carers who can support a wide range of children's needs. Evidence shows that campaigns must also offer a realistic view of both the challenges and benefits of providing foster care to maximise the recruitment and retention of foster carers (Kantar Public UK, 2022). These campaigns would benefit from being co-produced with children, young people and foster carers.

Data about the needs of the children currently within the foster care system is organised in terms of the legal order, or basis, that children's care is subject to. This approach does not currently support a clear understanding of the needs of

children in the foster care system. There must be improvements in data collection and analysis. As well as this improving our understanding of the experiences of children in foster care, it is essential to enable meaningful decisions to be taken in foster care recruitment to target specific groups, or areas within the country. Data that can provide a national picture of what is happening in relation to tracking the recruitment process is essential. This needs to include journeys from the point of initial enquiry; recording the impact of recruitment drives across the country; recording matching considerations; outcomes for children; and data from exit interviews with former foster carers to inform how to drive improvement.

Continuing Care as a right and the default for all children in foster care should also be discussed with prospective foster carers at the earliest opportunity and throughout matching processes, so this must be included in a cohesive national approach to recruitment. Scotland will only get its responsibility to deliver Continuing Care for children and young people right if we can retain foster carers who have positive and supporting relationships with the children and young people they care for. Consequently, suitable and ongoing support from fostering agencies remains vital here.

Currently, prospective foster carers will often contact a number of fostering agencies before making the choice of which one to proceed with (Foster Wales 2021, Ott et al., 2023). This competitive element can give foster carers more choice, however it may also lead to a wasted doubling of resources for fostering agencies and prospective carers at the initial enquiry stage. A more comprehensive national 'front door' approach would address that and should be considered as a new efficient way to do this without limiting choices for potential foster carers.

In studies that have been carried out, the most frequent reasons carers have given for leaving fostering are retirement and ill health (Ott et al., 2023). However, a range of other reasons are also cited which, if addressed, could contribute to increasing recruitment and retention. For example, foster carers noted that they decided to change agencies for access to better support, greater respect, improved support if there were allegations made against them by children in their care, and improved pay and working conditions. The other main reasons for leaving were difficulties in the relationship with the fostering service or wanting improved support (Ott et al., 2023). Any national approach to recruitment needs to have in place ongoing, responsive support from the very beginning of recruitment throughout a carer's fostering experience.

Sources

- Foster Wales (2021) [National Fostering Framework: Final Report 2018-2021](#). Foster Wales.
- Kantar Public UK (2022) [Applying behavioural insights to fostering and adoption in England: Research report](#). London: Department for Education.

- Ott, E., Wills, E., Hall, A., & Gupta, S. (2023) [Foster carer recruitment and retention in England. Centre for Evidence and Implementation and The Fostering Network.](#)

Retention of foster carers - learning, development and practical support

13. What is your experience of the SSSC 'Standard for Foster Care', and do you find it helpful?

The introduction of the SSSC 'Standards for Foster Care' was a positive step offering a comprehensive and standardised training programme for fostering agencies to provide for their foster carers. However, this framework has had a limited reach and success due to a lack of implementation support. As the framework was finalised in 2017, this could be reviewed and updated, integrating learning from The Promise, child development, brain development and the impact of trauma on children and young people.

14. Should there be a new national learning framework for foster carers which could also be a pathway for continuous development?

Yes.

Foster carers require a wealth of learning to manage their roles, their own wellbeing, and to meet the needs of the children they care for. This learning should be consistent across all the agencies that provide this and should follow an agreed programme and standard of quality. CELCIS's research and improvement and implementation work shows that whilst essential, training alone is not enough to implement changes in practice. Foster carers need a package of training, support, and coaching.

There is a lack of evidence about the association between training and increasing foster carer retention, and mixed evidence relating to the association between foster carer training and building the quality of the relationship between foster carers and the children they care for, due in part to methodological limitations and a lack of longitudinal studies (Baginsky et al. 2017 and Hanlon et al. 2021).

There are clearer links between sufficient training and foster carer satisfaction, with foster carers indicating that they appreciate training which supports them to understand and meet the needs of children in care. Training which focuses on adult learning principles, and which carers can put into practice with the children they are caring for, is particularly valued.

As such, we would suggest that a new national framework should provide benchmarks for learning, rather than explicitly stated learning requirements, so that learning outcomes are set out, but specifics about how these are achieved

are not prescribed. This would also allow flexibility to enable fostering agencies to meet the diverse needs of the children and foster carers they serve. Foster carers could have an individual learning plan offering a pathway for their own development.

Sources

- Baginsky, M., Gorin, S., & Sands, C. (2017) [*The fostering system in England: Evidence Review. London: Department for Education.*](#)
- Hanlon, R., Simon, J., Day, A., Vanderwill, L., Kim, J., & Dallimore, E. (2021) 'Systematic review of factors affecting foster parent retention'. *Families in Society*, 102(3), pp. 285-299.

15. What more can the Scottish Government do to nationally support the learning and development of foster carers?

Foster carers require a wealth of learning to support their roles, their own wellbeing, and to meet the needs of the children they care for. This should be consistent across all the agencies that provide learning and should follow an agreed programme and standard of quality. A model that could be considered is the approach taken in Wales using a national learning and development framework, which details the expectations and quality required for foster carer learning (Foster Wales 2021).

Consideration should also be given to creating an ongoing programme of continuous professional development (CPD) and follow up coaching for carers from their fostering agency, whilst supporting the unique characteristics of individual foster carers' learning styles. Research evidence highlights the value of peer support and buddying systems for carers, which can counter isolation and meet support needs. Peer support can improve the likelihood of more positive, secure child-carer relationships, and has real value alongside the more professionalised approaches to learning. The way in which enhanced peer support could operate in Scotland will need careful consideration. There should be a focus on providing support rather than training; and forums with little purpose or direction have been found to be unhelpful (Baginsky et al. 2017, Ott et al., 2023, Thomson et al., 2016, Hanlon et al., 2021).

Sources

- Foster Wales (2021) [*National Fostering Framework: Final Report 2018-2021.*](#) Foster Wales.
- Baginsky, M., Gorin, S., & Sands, C. (2017) [*The fostering system in England: Evidence Review. London: Department for Education.*](#)
- Hanlon, R., Simon, J., Day, A., Vanderwill, L., Kim, J., & Dallimore, E. (2021) 'Systematic review of factors affecting foster parent retention'. *Families in Society*, 102(3), pp. 285-299.

- Ott, E., Wills, E., Hall, A., & Gupta, S. (2023) [Foster carer recruitment and retention in England. Centre for Evidence and Implementation and The Fostering Network.](#)
- Thomson, L., McArthur, M., & Watt, E. (2016) Literature review: Foster carer attraction, recruitment, support and retention. Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University. Available at: <https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/item/8q1wy/literature-review-foster-carer-attraction-recruitment-support-and-retention>

16. What, if any, specific support might be needed to ensure that foster care in Scotland is attuned to the unique and specific needs of infants and very young children?

We would suggest that a key support to ensure foster care is attuned to the unique and specific needs of infants and very young children would be the promotion of the 'Foster to Adopt' model, with further consideration of concurrency planning. Evidence from approaches in Northern Ireland outlines that whilst fostering to adopt places unique demands on carers, who will have specific support needs, this can be mitigated by the satisfaction carers have in understanding the benefit to infants (Mannion et al. 2023).

'Foster to Adopt' may have the dual benefit of increasing the number of foster carers, while minimising the number of moves children make between different caregivers. This is especially key when supporting babies and infants, who are undergoing the most significant and impactful period of growth and development that they will ever experience. In addition, any time spent with family members must support and be aligned to an infant's routine (Schofield and Simmonds 2011). Changes in homes and caregivers can result in children experiencing trauma and grief, which impacts brain development, and this must be reduced as much as possible. 'Foster to Adopt' would also help reduce the time it takes to ensure a permanent home and safe relationships which is currently unnecessarily long for far too many children in Scotland. A foster to adopt approach here will require intensive support for prospective adopters as well as a careful matching process facilitated by sufficiently skilled and supported practitioners.

Carers for babies and infants need to be offered training in a number of key areas including infant mental health, brain development, child development, infant communication, relationships, the impact of trauma, and risk. However, training alone is not likely to be sufficient, and a package of training, support and coaching is required to ensure that children see the benefits of these changes.

Sources

- Mannon, E., McCormack, D., Downes, C. and Turner, R.N. (2023) [An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Lived Experience of Concurrent Caring](#), *Adoption Quarterly* 1–31.
- Schofield, G., & Simmonds, J. (2011) [Contact for Infants Subject to Care Proceedings](#). *Adoption & Fostering*, 35(4), 70-74.

17. What other practical support would help foster carers?

Fostering skills grow in the context of a supportive, attuned relationship between the foster carer and their supporting social worker. These developmental relationships are key to supporting foster carers to be able to manage a challenging, complex and rewarding role to provide care for children and young people. They need to be supported to form committed, respectful and loving relationships with the children they care for, often in demanding circumstances. Foster carers require a web of support from their fostering agency, their own social worker, from peers in similar situations, from their family and their own personal networks. There are variations in the level of support offered across Scotland. This support must be consistent, flexible and delivered in ways that are constructive to minimise any sense that carers are being 'judged.' Services could seek to create support networks for foster carers, such as those demonstrated by the Mockingbird model or by creating relationship-building programmes (Ott et al. 2020).

Services also need to support foster carers to develop the skills to manage relationships with children's immediate and extended family. Historically, foster care and 'family time' were treated as distinct, however evidence and good practice have shown that children and their families need to be part of the 'team around the child' where it is safe for them to do so. Supportive relationships and communication between carers and families is especially key considering how many children leave care and return to the care of their parents and their family home.

Sources

- Ott, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Pinto, V., Sanders-Ellis, D. and Trivedi, H. (2020) [Mockingbird Programme Evaluation Report](#). London: Department for Education.
- Ottaway, H., Doull, K., Laura, Q., Anderson, K., and McMeeking, J. (2023) *Foster Care: a Literature Review and Summary Analysis to Support Planning for the Future of Foster Care in Scotland*. Unpublished – please enquire with CELCIS.

18. What, if any, additional learning and development would be needed for the 'flexible fostering' approach?

If foster carers were to undertake work with birth parents, then careful consideration needs to be given to their learning and development as currently this work is undertaken by highly skilled, educated and trained practitioners.

The flexible fostering approach suggested in the consultation could highlight and spread some existing best practice around Scotland, ensuring a standard and consistency of practice, regardless of where a child lives. However, elements of this approach would present a huge shift in current practice and CELCIS is concerned about the readiness of the sector to meet the scale of such changes: a high level of implementation support and the right staff with the right set of values, knowledge and skills would be required to support such a substantial overhaul of the learning and development of foster carers; and staffing and resourcing to support a much greater level of risk management and increased support needs. This would include transition to the new model and into current services to reflect the increasing complexity of the foster carer role.

In addition, this proposed flexible fostering approach would require an entirely new approach to recruitment of foster carers, fostering regulation changes, and changes to registration categories.

In connection to learning, we would also wish to reiterate the current status of fostering; that is, it is undertaken in a voluntary capacity with financial remuneration and compensation. That financial remuneration and compensation would have to be revised for foster carers offering different types of care. The intensity, risk and change of personal circumstances necessitated by aspects of the proposed model would require a significantly higher financial compensation than foster carers currently receive.

Retention of foster carers - financial support

23. Do you think there should be a national approach for Continuing Care allowances and fees?

Yes.

CELCIS supports a national approach to Continuing Care allowances and fees.

Foster carers are crucial to upholding the rights of young people in accessing Continuing Care provisions. Consequently, consideration of the right to Continuing Care should be discussed with prospective foster carers at the earliest opportunity. The understanding that Continuing Care should be the default starting position, alongside the importance of developing trusting long-term relationships, is an essential conversation and this should play a key part in

the recruitment conversations with prospective foster carers, and matching processes. Continuing Care can only be delivered if Scotland can retain foster carers who have positive and supporting relationships with the children and young people they care for. Consequently, suitable and ongoing support from fostering agencies remains vital here.

Currently, despite caring for the same young person whose needs may have increased and require further financial support, foster carers receive a lesser amount of financial support when they become carers under Continuing Care arrangements than when they were a foster carer for a child who was 'looked after'. Young people being cared for under Continuing Care are young people between the ages of 16 and 21 and are emerging into adulthood and more independent ways of living. They need support to develop their life skills, potential and wellbeing, including, for example, accessing driving lessons or going to college or university or starting employment.

Providing a standard, national, financial approach that adequately reflects the support required from a foster carer under Continuing Care could remove the current inconsistent level of support and align with the spirit of the "Staying Put" policy.

CELCIS also supports the uprating of all current financial support and allowances to reflect rising living costs.

Retention of foster carers - status, recognition and value

26. What else could national government do to increase the value, status and recognition of foster carers?

There are considerable complexities for foster carers in balancing the needs of the children they care for and the needs of the system they work with. Although foster carers undertake their roles on a voluntary basis with financial recompense, they must undertake training, undergo supervision, and work in an equivalent way to some practitioners and provide a loving, safe family and home for children. It is understandable that foster carers often feel conflicted and undervalued.

The care system needs to have a better understanding of the complexity of the fostering task and compensate foster carers accordingly. This is not a 'job' foster carers 'clock out' of at the end of the day - their role is to care, and to manage emotional and practical complexities all day, and every day and night.

It is vital to ensure that Scotland's foster carers are financially stable, and able to spend their efforts supporting children, and not managing finances and expenses. Sufficient financial support has been highlighted across research evidence as a significant factor in retaining foster carers across multiple

jurisdictions of the UK (The Fostering Network 2023). Foster carers across the UK have also highlighted issues with timeliness and accuracy of allowance and expenses payments, and that there can be complications around taxation and social security payment. In the context of the current cost-of-living crisis, this is even more challenging.

Foster carers value their experience and expertise being recognised and respected as a full member of the 'team around the child,' including at multi-agency meetings. Potential tensions can be present for some foster carers around managing a parenting role, which requires enormous levels of personal commitment to a child, and a professional responsibility, which requires training and qualifications as part of the practitioner network supporting a child. There is a lack of evidence about how to resolve this, but a recognition of the professionalism required by foster carers, including practitioners and services recognising and respecting foster carers' expertise, can contribute to maintaining positive and constructive working relationships, as can sensitive management of significant events such as when a foster care arrangement doesn't work for the child and carer.

The potential registration of foster carers in a national register would be a welcome opportunity to reflect the value and importance of this role and should be intricately linked to improvements to training and support. Nationally recognised qualifications could be considered, which would increase foster carers' skills and confidence, as well as recognising their continuous professional development. This would support the proposed flexible fostering approach outlined in this consultation, as carers could move between roles to respond to and follow the needs of children, or move to other roles such as training and coaching to suit their own circumstances. This dual role, however, would need to be accompanied with associated remuneration to reflect the complexity of their new role.

Sources

- Fostering Network (The) (2023) [Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention in England: Key Research Findings and Recommendations](#). The Fostering Network and Centre for Evidence and Implementation.

Retention of foster carers - a national register

29. What are your views on a national register for foster carers in Scotland?

CELCIS agrees with the proposal to develop a national register for foster carers as we believe this could offer a number of potential benefits for enhancing the care and support for children and young people through a more supported foster care system.

Benefits

- A key benefit of the proposed national register would be improved safeguarding by sharing registration decisions nationally. There is no national register currently and this means that a carer who has been deregistered or has resigned prior to deregistration could move to another area and re-register if they withhold information, without any previous concerns or information being shared or known to a different agency or service.
- A national register would better recognise the incredible work that foster carers do and reflect their skills and commitment.
- A national register could be a key lever in the creation of a national skills and training framework for foster carers, offering development opportunities. This capacity could be developed in a comparable manner to the SSSC register for social care staff.
- Alongside national registration, national standards and requirements could be developed and evidenced that would provide a driver for consistency and enable carers to move between agencies more easily.
- A national register presents an opportunity to gather data to help measurement, evaluation, and planning of the current system and of any future changes.

Whilst foster carers are already registered, this information is not shared nationally, so whilst this would be a change for foster carers, it would not constitute a significant change. There may also be useful learning from the model of the adoption register. The adoption register has a primary focus of matching, is open for adopters and children for whom adoption has been determined to be in their best interests and can be accessed through adoption agencies or by individual adopters. This could be a feature of the foster carers' register, but we would not suggest this be the primary focus.

Purpose

Clear communication about the purpose and function of a proposed register will be necessary to support planning and implementation.

The register must be mandatory for all agencies. Any potential benefits would be lost if this was implemented on an 'opt in' basis, resulting in inconsistent national coverage. The main function of the register must be for sharing information regarding registration decisions nationally to support safeguarding.

It would also offer additional intelligence for fostering assessments, such as the ability to access reliable information on previous fostering registrations, and contacts to gather information on foster carers' previous training and practice.

Considerations

“So, we want to professionalise foster carers by putting them on a national database, but we are going to moan about paying them adequately for this?” - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

If foster carers are being asked to take on substantially more responsibility in their role, including an expectation that they be part of a national register of foster carers, consideration as to their remuneration may be beneficial to reflect this change in function of the foster carer role.

32. What are your views on a national approach to foster care placement matching?

Matching is a highly skilled and nuanced process, which has the relationship between the supporting social worker, the foster carer, and the social worker for the child at its heart. It should be a joint process which consults carers as experts on their own skills and abilities. High quality matching reflects the depth and strength of this relationship between those parties and does not work well when it is carried out by practitioners unskilled in these specialist areas. While CELCIS would welcome local authorities working closely together to meet the needs of their children, we must ensure that matching processes are based on skilled relationship-based work, and support, wherever possible, keeping children living within their own communities.

It must also be understood that while all fostering agencies aim to keep the needs of the child at the centre of matching considerations, the current system creates barriers to this, as separation of financial and legal responsibilities across agencies entails complexity in inter-agency matching. Fostering agencies may be reluctant to commit their resources externally when it is not possible to predict their own resource requirements, due to the nature of supporting children and their carers on an ongoing basis.

The matching process could create a network of support for children, families, and carers in the system, increasing the carer’s and child’s network of support through short breaks with family members, approved relatives of the carer, or existing specialist short break foster carers. These arrangements would provide consistency for the child being cared for and could offer continued relationships and practical support should the child return to live with their parents or kinship carers.

33. How can the Scottish Government support local authorities with resource planning of foster carers including building an evidence base and data on placements, which also includes those outside local areas?

The context in which this proposed new model of foster care would operate in must be conducive to support it. Implementation Science tells us about the most

useful ways in which we can put research findings and evidence-based practices into real-world use – so that people can experience the benefits of these. Crucial to this, is an “enabling” context to support the implementation of new practices. The current context is far from enabling. Recruitment challenges, the housing crisis, and the lack of sufficient and sustained financial resources, must all be addressed to provide the required enabling context to support any proposed change in foster care in Scotland, and to support the people who would be at the frontline of implementing this.

Scotland is yet to systematically prioritise the kinds of data that will allow for a fuller assessment of quality in practice that will drive better support for workforces to make a meaningful impact in improving the lives of children, young people and families. This includes how data is collected, collated, and used for improvement purposes. Learning from approaches to foster care in Wales highlights the importance of robust data for performance management, understanding outcomes for children, and having a continuous improvement mindset (Foster Wales 2021).

Sources

Foster Wales (2021) [National Fostering Framework: Final Report 2018-2021](#). Foster Wales.

Wider Issues

36. Is there anything not covered in the consultation which impacts on fostering that you would like to tell us about, or take action on? E.g. housing, poverty etc.

Kinship Care

We note that, in practice, foster care and kinship care can often be complementary and interconnected, requiring similar supports and offering bespoke care. Any proposed new model of foster care will require to be cognisant of this, whilst also ensuring the uniqueness of each type of care is supported.

Continuing Care

In any model of foster care, discussion with prospective foster carers to understand Continuing Care as a right and the default for all children in foster care should take place at the earliest opportunity and throughout matching processes. Consequently, this must be included in any cohesive national approach to recruitment for foster carers.

Housing

The availability of affordable private and social housing in Scotland remains an ongoing and persistent issue; impacting children, young people and families in need of care and protection, as well as foster carers. Thirteen local authority areas in Scotland have declared a housing emergency, and the Scottish Government announced a national housing emergency in May 2024. This lack of affordable housing has an ongoing impact on the availability and capacity of foster carers, especially for caring for larger groups of brothers and sisters. A lack of suitable housing is also having a considerable impact on young people entering adulthood, which also impacts foster carers caring for young people in Continuing Care arrangements. As part of the proposed new model of foster care may require a parent living outwith their own home, housing considerations require to be fully thought through.

Considerations around a proposed new model of foster care

Attending to the enabling context in Scotland for this potential paradigm shift in the model of foster care proposed in this consultation will be vital for it to be implemented successfully. Recruitment challenges within the social work profession, the housing crisis, and the lack of sufficient and sustained financial resources, must all be addressed to provide the required enabling context to support any proposed change in foster care in Scotland, and to support the people who would be at the frontline of implementing this. In particular, the support for foster carers required of social workers within this proposed model cannot be underestimated and must be considered within the current context of reduced capacity within the social work profession in Scotland.

Readiness, with professionals, and children and their families, will also be crucial. Any new model should be co-designed with current foster carers and people who have experience of foster care. Ongoing and in-depth dialogue will be vital to fully understand the potential complexities, risks, challenges and opportunities. Buy in and support from all fostering agencies will be crucial too, and the challenging context within which such colleagues are operating in must be taken into consideration.

Small-scale testing would be beneficial for any proposed new model to ensure the issues, complexities, risks, and nuances are fully understood before it is made a national approach. This will require sufficient time and the support of change expertise to evaluate, reflect, and adapt the model – including taking account of geographical differences – before it is rolled out.

CELCIS welcomes this consultation as being the beginning of a necessary and timely conversation around the future of foster care in Scotland. Any new model needs to be carefully considered and co-produced before being tested and implemented. The consultation can provide a helpful platform to begin these conversations but many more are needed, across a wide range of people, to sensitively and carefully work through the development of any new model of

foster care in Scotland so that we may improve support for children, young people, their families and carers.

40. Further information about your organisation's response

CELCIS, the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, based at the University of Strathclyde, is a leading improvement and innovation centre. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care. We welcome the opportunity to submit our views in response to this consultation.

Contact

Kirsty Doull, Care and Transitions Lead, CELCIS
kirsty.doull@strath.ac.uk