Future of Foster Care Consultation

Analysis of Responses

Final Report

October 2025

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Contents

Executive Summary

A public consultation on the Future of Fostering in Scotland ran from 24 October 2024 to 6 February 2025. The consultation had 36 questions which asked for people's views on the future of fostering, based on a flexible fostering approach. It also asked for opinions on how people could be encouraged to become foster carers and what support foster carers need to continue in the role. Alongside other consultations and events held in 2024 and 2025, this consultation helps the Scottish Government to keep The Promise.

This report presents an analysis of 103 consultation responses from 55 individuals and 48 organisations. It also includes notes from 21 consultation events with children and young people, foster carers, and other professionals. The report also notes findings from a Who Cares? Scotland report based on their conversations with 42 children and young people.

Vision of foster care

Many respondents were positive about the vision for the future of foster care and felt it was in line with The Promise's aims. However, many others felt it would be difficult to achieve the vision because of current issues such as limited funding or a lack of experienced foster carers. Respondents suggested the vision could be improved by including more information about the need for support for foster carers and possible new responsibilities for foster carers and detailing what needs to happen for the vision to become a reality.

Flexible fostering approach

Using a flexible fostering approach, and the principles behind this approach, were largely supported by respondents, who also gave examples of where the elements of a flexible fostering approach are already happening. When developing a flexible fostering approach, respondents recommended that things to consider could include: training and support to help foster carers take on more responsibilities, providing more support for children and birth families, taking an approach that considers each child or young person as an individual, and being clear about the roles of other professionals in a young person's life.

Respondents gave different levels of support for the proposed elements of a flexible fostering approach but, overall, were more supportive than not. For example, many agreed that foster carers could have a bigger role in supporting families at the edge of care or that foster carers should have more short breaks. On the other hand, issues with a flexible fostering approach could include possible risks to foster carers when working with birth families, especially in their homes, and foster carers being expected to do tasks that are usually done by other professionals, such as social workers.

To improve the flexible fostering approach, respondents suggested that foster carers should have better terms and conditions including better payments, have their roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and get more support. The Scottish Government could also help by making sure their proposals are carefully considered, implemented in the same way across Scotland, and by engaging more with foster carers to understand their needs.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

Various comments were made about IFAs. Positive comments included that IFAs can be better for foster carers to work for than local authorities, they help to make sure there are

enough foster carers, or they can provide support for children who need specialised care. However, others thought that IFAs should have a very small role, or no role, in the future of fostering. Over four fifths (84%) felt IFAs should have the status of a charity. Reasons for this were that organisations should not make a profit from fostering, that any money made by IFAs would be used to improve their services, that it would help meet the needs of children, and that it could improve the regulation of IFAs. However, some felt IFAs should not need to be charities if, for instance, it led to fewer foster placements.

Over three quarters (78%) supported limiting how much local authorities pay to IFAs. Some called for more research on this topic. Most respondents (90%) agreed that IFAs should pay their foster carers at least the Scottish Recommended Allowance. However, some respondents worried that these changes might reduce the number or quality of foster carers. Respondents felt the Scottish Government could support local authorities when they pay for placements with IFAs by making sure contracts between local authorities and IFAs are fair and cost-effective, and finding ways to reduce the need to use IFAs.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

Overall, respondents were positive about the suggestions in the consultation paper to recruit more foster carers. Using a national recruitment campaign received the most support. However, some felt these ideas could have limited success or felt that local approaches could be more successful. Suggestions for how recruitment could work in practice included working with fostering services, using foster carer networks, using targeted approaches to attract a range of different types of carers and identifying places where future foster carers could see or pick up materials.

Retention: Learning, Development and Practical Support

Four fifths (83%) felt there was a need for a new learning framework for foster carers to support their training and skills development. It was noted that this could make training and development more similar across Scotland. Suggestions included providing more support to foster carers so they had the time and opportunity to go to or deliver training, making training flexible and easy to access, and using more digital and online learning. Frequently mentioned topics for training that could be useful for a flexible fostering approach included having specialist training for foster carers looking after infants and very young children, how to work with birth families, and how to conduct assessments. Suggestions for how the 2017 Standard for Foster Care published by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) could be updated to make it more helpful included linking it to The Promise or adding details about various topics.

The most common types of practical support that respondents felt foster carers would welcome were more support from and socialising with other carers, help around the home or with childcare costs, counselling or mental health support, and access to short breaks.

Retention: Financial Support

Almost half of respondents (47%) felt the current financial model for foster carers – the pay and allowances they receive - was not effective, while 14% felt it was effective, and 28% felt it was somewhat effective. The most common view was that foster carers' terms and conditions need to improve by, for example, paying them a salary instead of them being self-employed, having the same value of payments across Scotland and making sure that

payments increase each year. There were often calls for higher fees and allowances to attract new foster carers and encourage existing carers to continue in the role.

Over four fifths (82%) agreed there should be a national approach to fees and additional payments for foster carers. It was felt this would be simpler, clearer and fairer for carers. However, the need to have some flexibility was noted by several, for example, because of differences in living costs in certain areas or because some foster carers might have specialist skills. Suggestions on what additional payments could cover included travel costs, sick pay, caring for disabled children or costs at the start of a placement.

Almost all respondents (92%) felt that foster carers should have a retainer fee when they do not have a child placed with them. Respondents thought this would support carers who may not have another income and provide more financial stability. Most (96%) also agreed there should be a national approach to continuing care allowances as this would be fairer and ensure there is a consistent approach across Scotland.

Many respondents agreed that fostering services should be more open about their work, for example, by having a legal requirement to publish information about their fees and allowances. This could help people decide if they want to become foster carers or which agency to work with. However, some thought that this might not be useful or necessary.

A National Register of Foster Carers

Respondents supported creating a national register of foster carers. Those who agreed felt this could strengthen regulation and benefit carers and children by improving the status of carers and leading to better matching with children. Respondents felt it would be important to make sure data in a register is protected and kept up to date. Respondents most commonly felt a register should be managed by central government, with other suggestions including the SSSC, AFKA (who hold the adoption register) or the third sector. However, several thought a national register is not needed because current processes work well or because creating and maintaining a register would take too much time.

Several thought that including details about training and skills development on a national register could be useful. Reasons for this included that it could mean carers do not need to repeat training if they move to a different area, and that it could make it easier for foster carers to focus on learning and development. However, others were worried it could put pressure on foster carers to do more training or make fostering too much like a job.

Respondents felt a national approach to matching children with carers would be helpful. They felt it could help keep children close to the area they know and ensure they have the best match with carers. While most agreed, some were worried it might be hard to put into practice and could cause problems with current placements. Ideas were also shared about how the Scottish Government could help local authorities plan resources for foster care. Suggestions included making better use of existing data, sharing information, developing a common data set, and making sure data requirements are not too complicated.

Status, Recognition and Value

Many respondents supported a national charter for foster carers. They thought this could help clarify what is expected from foster carers. However, they often said that just having a set of guidelines is not enough and that actions need to happen, too. They suggested that

a charter should be created with input from foster carers and other professionals. It should also ensure that the child's voice is central to the charter. They also thought the guidelines in a charter should match other existing documents and processes about fostering.

When asked how government could improve the status, recognition, and value of foster carers, respondents often felt carers should have the same status as other professionals who support children and families. They also felt more financial support is needed, cultural change is necessary, and that carers should be paid salaries and have employment rights.

One third of respondents (34%) thought that the current rules for foster carers making decisions about children are clear, while two thirds (66%) felt they are not. Respondents thought the rules were too complicated or that decisions often depended on a social worker's judgement or legal issues. Some mentioned difficulties when birth families had different opinions, saying clearer guidelines would help. However, a few thought the current rules worked well. Some respondents wanted foster carers to have more decision-making power. Most agreed that extra guidance would help foster carers make better decisions. However, a few respondents, especially from local authorities, disagreed, thinking the current guidance was good enough but needed to be more widely used.

Allegations and raising concerns

Most respondents (91%) thought the national guidance for dealing with allegations and raising concerns about foster carers should be updated. They wanted clearer steps to follow and quicker timeframes. They also wanted better support for children and young people during this process, and to make sure the rules fit with current child protection laws. There were also calls to make people more aware of how past trauma can contribute to allegations and concerns. Others felt that foster carers need more support and protection if complaints are made about them, as this can be stressful and damage relationships.

Respondents also agreed that foster carers should have a right to raise concerns and a clear way to do this. There were different views on whether this should be managed at a local or national level, but respondents suggested using more guidance, providing more money, or training to review and update current processes. However, some respondents felt the current rules and practices were good enough and did not need to change.

Other issues

Other issues were raised by respondents in the final question or throughout the consultation. They mentioned the need for wider changes to the care system, housing and cost of living support for foster carers, listening to and supporting children and young people, and more resources or information. Some suggestions included investing in services to support children and young people and providing better financial support or benefits for carers. Respondents also wanted more details on specific parts of the consultation, such as explaining certain terms, being aware of other approaches, or considering the impact of the proposals.

Conclusions

Overall, there is support for the for the proposals in the consultation. The views and ideas shared by the people who took part give the Scottish Government more helpful information to help finalise their plans for the future of foster care in Scotland.

1. Introduction

Background

A public consultation on the Future of Foster Care ran between 24 October 2024 and 6 February 2025. The consultation set out a vision for the future of foster care in Scotland that prioritises children's experiences, and meets their many and varied needs, in a changing sector and society. It proposes a flexible approach to fostering, that builds on the unique skills and qualities of foster carers, good practice and innovation and is underpinned by comprehensive ongoing support for foster carers. The proposals have been developed in partnership with stakeholders, including the voices of children, young people, families and foster carers.

The Scottish Government seeks to ensure fostering is fully aligned to the national approach to supporting children, young people and their families in Scotland - Getting It Right for Every Child. In other words, it is intended that fostering be child-centred, providing a strengths-based, holistic approach to supporting children, young people and families when it is needed, for as long as it is needed.

In addition, the Scottish Government is committed to The Promise, which aims to ensure that children and young people will grow up loved, safe and respected living in the family home, and that there will be enough support to make that happen, with extra help during difficult times. This will be achieved through collectively focusing on support in the early years, whole family wellbeing support and tackling child poverty. It is intended that, over time, this will increase the number of children who can be supported to live with their birth families. However, it is recognised that for some children, alternative family care across all settings, including foster care, will be needed to ensure their wellbeing and protection.

The consultation is part of a wider set of related public consultations and engagement to support the delivery of The Promise. These include the recent consultations about 'Moving On' From Care Into Adulthood, The Children's Hearing Redesign and Developing a Universal Definition of 'Care Experience'.

The consultation paper first sets out the strategic context, including the vision for the future of fostering. It then sets out proposed elements of a flexible fostering approach, including the potential role of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) in delivering foster care. Proposals relating to the recruitment and retention of foster carers are then detailed, including a recruitment 'offer', frameworks for learning, support, allowances and fees and decision making, a national register of foster carers and guidance on managing allegations against foster carers.

Respondent profile

Public consultations invite everyone to express their views; individuals and organisations interested in the topic are more likely to respond than those without a direct or known interest. **This self-selection means the views of respondents do not necessarily represent the views of the entire population.**

In total, 103 consultation responses were received. Almost all were submitted via the online consultation platform, Citizen Space. Those received in an alternative format, for example, an email or PDF document, were reviewed separately by the research team.

Individuals provided 55 responses to the consultation; the remaining 48 responses were from organisations (see Appendix A for list of responding organisations). To aid analysis, organisations were grouped by the nature of their work. Table 1 shows the number of each type of respondent.

Table 1: Respondent profile

Respondent	Number of respondents	% of total sample
Individuals	**55**	**53%**
Organisations	**48**	**47%**
- Local authorities (incl. HSCPs)	16	16%
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	14	14%
- Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)	5	5%
- Social Work / Youth Justice	4	4%
- Other	9	9%

The analysis also included notes from 21 engagement events - 10 with foster carers, six with professionals, three with young people and one with local authorities (See Appendix B for full details). These events were an open forum for attendees to discuss the proposals, broadly structured around the consultation topics. The discussion at the events aligned very closely with the themes arising in the formal consultation responses so most are not reported separately here. However, where unique perspectives were raised, these have been noted in this report.

This report also incorporates relevant findings from a report produced by Who Cares? Scotland which summarises views expressed in their engagement with 42 care experienced young people aged nine to 25.

Analysis approach

The Lines Between was commissioned to provide a robust, independent analysis of the responses to the public consultation. The main purpose of consultation analysis is to understand the full range of views expressed and, where possible, using closed questions, to quantify how many respondents hold particular views. This report provides a thematic analysis of responses based on the analysis approach outlined below.

Reflecting the number and knowledge of respondents, it is impossible to detail every response in this report; some, especially organisations, shared lengthy submissions reflecting their specific subject matter expertise. These responses are referenced where possible. Full responses to the consultation, where permission for publication was granted, can be found on the Scottish Government's consultation website.

Similarly, the nature of some of the proposals outlined in the consultation means it is impractical to fully repeat or explain these within this report. Further information on the proposals can be found in the consultation paper.

Quantitative analysis

The consultation included 12 closed questions. Not all respondents answered every question. To compare across sub-groups, this report presents the results of the closed questions **based on those who answered each question**. Each results table shows:

- The percentage of respondents **from the total** sample of 103 respondents who selected each response (grey row).
- The number and percentage response among those who answered each question, broken down by individual and organisation responses (rows including and under “All answering”).

Appendix C provides a full breakdown for each question, including a breakdown by each type of organisation answering. Please note that the row percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis identifies the key themes across responses to each question (see Appendix D for a list of all consultation questions). The research team developed a draft coding framework based on a review of the consultation questions and a sample of responses. During the coding process, new codes were created if additional themes emerged.

In a small number of instances where a response received via email or in a PDF document contained information that did not align with specific questions, analysts exercised judgment about the most relevant place to include this material for analysis purposes.

Notes from the engagement events were reviewed to identify any differences in opinion compared to the main sample and to identify any new themes. The themes evident in the events typically aligned with those evident in the main sample, but this report notes any additional or unique perspectives.

Where appropriate, quotes from a range of the 103 consultation responses are included to illustrate key points and provide useful examples, insights and contextual information.

When reviewing the qualitative analysis, we would ask the reader to consider the following:

- Many respondents repeatedly raised the same issues or suggestions at multiple questions, regardless of the specific focus of the question. These views are all included in this report, but analysts exercised judgment about the most relevant place to include each theme to avoid repetition.
- The detailed nature of responses from many individuals suggests that they are heavily involved in the sector in some way. However, as it is not possible to identify their roles or the nature of their work, individual respondents are referred to as ‘individuals’ throughout this report.

- Qualitative questions were included in the consultation to allow respondents to elaborate on the views they recorded at the closed questions. However, not all respondents chose to comment, and those who did provided varying levels of detail. Therefore, the qualitative analysis can only be based on the information provided by those who commented.
- It is possible that some respondents have not fully read or engaged with the consultation paper, leading to answers which do not directly address the questions. These answers have been noted in the report.

Weight of opinion

This report presents the themes identified in responses from most to least commonly mentioned. All themes, including views shared by small numbers of respondents, are covered; a view expressed by a very small number of participants is not given less weight than more general comments shared by a majority.

Similarly, all responses have an equal weighting. We recognise this means a response from an individual has the same weight as the response from an organisation which may represent many members, but this approach ensures all views are presented.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended questions does not permit the quantification of results. However, to assist the reader in interpreting the findings, a framework is used to convey the most to least commonly identified themes in responses to each question:

- Many respondents, 30 or more respondents, a prevalent theme.
- Several respondents, between 15 and 29 respondents, a recurring theme.
- Some respondents, between five and 14 respondents, another theme.
- A few / a small number, fewer than five respondents, a less commonly mentioned theme.
- Two/one respondent; a singular comment or a view identified in only one or two responses.

2. Vision for Foster Care

The consultation paper sets out the strategic journey for foster care in Scotland so far. It notes that there are currently over 3,000 foster families providing children and young people with an alternative, safe, nurturing and loving home. These foster carers work as part of the 'team around the child', which forms the scaffolding that is responsible for the wellbeing and development of the child or young person.

The paper highlights current challenges for foster care, including wider workforce issues. While the number of children coming into care is decreasing, there is a shortfall in the number of foster carers needed to provide foster care. The paper reports a current shortfall of around 400 foster carers, an estimate provided by The Fostering Network. In addition, children's needs are increasingly diverse, with an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and those who have more complex needs and trauma.

The vision for foster care aims to reflect and embed the commitment to Keep the Promise and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, now implemented by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. The consultation paper notes that the voices and experiences of children and young people, families, and foster carers are central to the vision and will continue to be part of ongoing conversations about how to deliver The Promise collectively.

The vision is set out on page 11 of the consultation paper as follows:

> Our vision is for Scotland's children to experience a **flexible fostering approach** which continually evolves to meet their specific and unique needs in a changing society and sector. This includes alternative family care, which prioritises children's experiences, and embeds within it maintaining family time, supporting families and managing cultural differences or complex needs. It is underpinned by listening to the voice of children and young people, upholding their rights and ensuring they feel safe, loved and respected. We will improve the current fostering system and provide ongoing support for caregivers to develop their skills and knowledge, so they can nurture the children in their care, and play their part in delivering The Promise.

Q1. What are your views on our vision for foster care?

Almost nine in ten of all respondents provided a comment at Q1. Positive comments about the vision were most prevalent, followed by concerns. Comments on specific elements of the vision were also commonly made, such as on the flexible approach, how to improve current fostering arrangements or alternative family care arrangements.

Positive views on the vision

The vision was positively received by many respondents, two thirds of whom were organisations. Comments included that the vision was welcomed, forward-thinking, and comprehensive. Several left comments suggesting the vision aligned with The Promise. It was felt that the vision captured the need for a flexible approach, that its aspirational message was helpful and that it provided a route map for the future of foster care.

"CELCIS 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." – CELCIS

Concerns about the vision

Perceived issues with the vision were raised by many respondents, half of whom were organisations. Views included that the vision would be difficult to achieve as it did not recognise constraints in the system, such as a lack of personnel or legislative requirements, or that foster carers required more recognition or support to enable greater flexibility within their role (see 'Improving support for carers' below). Other comments indicated the vision was too long or not accessible for those outwith the sector. Specific suggested word changes to enable more positivity included using 'strengthen' instead of 'improve', or to avoid use of the word 'managing'.

"It needs to be acknowledged that the regulations and standards that govern fostering at times creates barriers to the flexible approach. An example of this is when a relative of the foster carer wants to care for the child/ren overnight and this requires an assessment and approval process, which is in line with appropriate due diligence to safeguard children. There are challenges when asking foster carers networks to engage in an intrusive and timely process which is also resource-intensive for the fostering service. There needs to be a balance between safeguarding and bureaucracy if the vision for flexible fostering is to be achieved." - North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

"The vision would be strengthened further by ensuring there is a clear commitment to implementing existing duties and responsibilities. It must also include clearer reference to supporting foster carers and to addressing the current recruitment and retention challenges. It is critical that existing legislative duties around support to foster carers and children are met." – The Promise Scotland

Comments on the 'flexible approach'

Flexibility in fostering was highlighted by several respondents, with most endorsing a flexible approach to adequately meet the needs of families or to attract a diverse range of foster carers. A few noted that a flexible approach had already been adopted or raised concerns about such an approach, for instance, foster carers working in the homes of families or how a fostering household could effectively be maintained as part of a Step-up, Step-down model[1]. These issues are more fully addressed in Q2 and Q3.

"As noted in the consultation paper, several elements of the 'flexible' approach set out have been tried and had some success. The question we need to be asking is why did they fall by the wayside? What were the barriers to continuing and developing them? As the Independent Care Review already acknowledged, the answer is staffing, resources and finances." - UNISON Scotland

[1] A Step-Up, Step-Down model is a flexible approach to supporting families, where support is increased ("step-up") when needed and reduced ("step-down") as families gain capacity, aiming to prevent children from entering care and improve outcomes.

Suggestions for 'improving the current fostering system'

Several respondents provided a range of suggestions for how to improve the current fostering system, referred to in the vision statement. These included addressing issues detailed in the consultation paper such as foster carer recruitment, training and support, the importance of meeting the needs of children and young people, improving systems and processes to address bureaucracy or delays and updating Care Inspectorate guidelines. Suggestions to better meet the needs of children included strengthening permanency arrangements such as long-term foster care placements, reducing placement disruptions, prioritising supporting children to remain at home and responding compassionately to behaviours that challenge. A few respondents queried what was meant by the phrase 'improving the current fostering system'.

> "The vision is not clear about what is meant by improving the current fostering system. Some improvements will require to be resourced as will providing ongoing support for caregivers to develop their skills and knowledge. We think the vision should include reference to the system being well resourced and ensuring that all stakeholders – children, caregivers, families - receive the right help at the right time." - Scottish Adoption and Fostering

Comments on the underpinning principles

The underpinning principles for the vision - based on Getting it Right for Every Child, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Promise - were commented on by several respondents. These can be summarised as listening to the voice of the child, upholding rights and ensuring children are safe, loved and respected. These principles were welcomed, but respondents suggested more work was needed. Further work was suggested, for instance, to:

- ensure the principles were truly embedded in practice.
- ensure provision meets the unique needs of children.
- be more explicit about the need for consistent, loving relationships across the seven elements of flexible fostering.
- clarify that the needs of children should take priority over those of their parents, such as during direct contact with families.

Participants at an engagement event called for young people to be involved in decisions about which family is right for them, to be provided with honest and transparent information, for example, about how long a placement would last.

Other aspects the vision should cover

Ensuring adequate support for foster carers was reflected in the vision was recommended by several respondents. The importance of taking the views of foster carers seriously, addressing challenges and carer 'burn out' - such as by enabling access to short breaks for carers or ensuring support to allow foster carers to undertake their role effectively - were all raised.

Some respondents suggested further areas that should be included in the vision. These included paying attention to social workers' role in supporting fostering, the need to

provide whole family support to foster families including to kinship carers, embedding anti-racism approaches and highlighting the specific needs of those with disabilities.

The vision needs more detail

Some respondents felt the vision required more detail or was too vague. Areas where it was felt more specificity would be helpful included further defining roles and responsibilities of those involved in the fostering system and reflecting the diversity of carers when any role expectations are set. Others suggested the need for more detail around the meaning of ‘flexibility’ and ‘complex needs’, for concrete actions to accompany the vision, and to ensure families can clearly understand what they can expect from foster care.

3. Flexible Fostering Approach

Proposals for a flexible fostering approach are set out in Part 5 of the consultation paper.

The proposed seven elements of a flexible fostering approach reflect existing or emerging practices of foster carers, as well as more innovative aspects that may not yet be in place. The intention is to build on the existing skills, experiences and qualities of foster carers, with additional training and support provided where needed. The consultation paper notes that not all elements of the flexible fostering approach will be appropriate for every child. The intention is for foster carers to continue to provide alternative family care, but to build their capacity to adopt additional roles in a broader arena. The different elements proposed are to:

- Deliver high-quality alternative family-based care that provides a positive family experience for infants, children and young people in the foster carer's own home.
- Build the potential and capacity of existing foster carers to support and facilitate family time[2] where appropriate.
- Have a role, in some situations, to facilitate reunification with the birth family for children in their care.
- Have a role in supporting families on the edge of care to enable more children to remain at home with their birth family. It is noted that short breaks as part of a Step-Up, Step-Down model can be crucial in enabling this to happen.
- Extend child-centred short break provision to existing foster carers and families.
- Use 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.
- Potentially, where 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.

Q2. What are your views on the proposed flexible fostering approach?

Almost nine in ten of all respondents provided a comment at Q2. Most prevalent were themes on existing care arrangements, building on foster carer skills, comments on supporting families, positive views of the approach, the importance of an individualised, child-centred approach and comments on the roles of other professionals involved in supporting families. Some also raised points around the short breaks element of the flexible approach, which is considered in the analysis of responses to Q3.

Comments on existing care arrangements

Across the questions, comments were provided that described existing arrangements for the delivery of foster care. These were most prevalent at Q2, where several respondents mentioned this theme, though some also raised it at Q8, Q11, Q13 and Q14 in particular. To avoid repetition, these views have been summarised here.

[2] Family time refers to the intentional interaction and togetherness of family members during a specific activity, environment or time frame which can be simple or complex, and is important for building relationships and creating memories for children and young people in care.

Many of these comments expressed the view that elements of the flexible fostering approach already existed, with examples provided by respondents. For instance, attendees at an engagement event noted that one local authority offered a 'blocked bed' payment to create capacity to facilitate flexible fostering.

> "Most elements of the flexible fostering approach outlined already exist across Scotland. Bringing them together in one vision/description of what fostering might look like in Scotland will, in the view of many members, be beneficial to providers helping to put a spotlight on what is possible, and the benefits of this to children and carers, thus, ensuring that the various strands of fostering support are available more widely. Home support services, which this element of the proposed flexible fostering service describes, already exists though in a different form. Though more often applied in situations where a family needs assistance to care for a child with a disability, it does exist as part of family support services for families with other challenges. Agencies are registered as 'home support' agencies and employ staff to carry out support functions, including overnight care in some situations. SWS suggest exploration of this approach as part of family support for families in crisis or edges of care is more appropriate." – Social Work Scotland

Many respondents commented on their own experience of providing foster care, such as a perception that approval processes took too long, explanations of training available or received, setting out motivations for entering and continuing in delivering care and views on foster care providers.

> "By all accounts, there are incredible foster carers doing great work to support children and young people, as well as their birth families across the country. Despite this, our discussions revealed the number of challenges inherent in the provision of foster care. We know about foster carers threatening young people with termination of placement, we heard about 28-day notices being handed in for what others may consider 'normal' teenage behaviour, and we heard about the difference in support for foster carers between local authority areas." - Includem

Building on foster carer skills

Recognising and building on foster carer skills was advocated by many respondents. They noted that foster carers undertook a skilled role and that a flexible approach involved a diverse set of skills among foster carers necessitating access to quality training or peer support. This issue is further discussed in Q18.

> "Foster carers should receive training and support to give them the knowledge and skills to develop positive relationships with the children they care for. We believe this is also vital to ensuring foster carers are confident in delivering the flexible fostering approach, particularly in providing supporting to birth families, facilitating family time, or strengthening transitions." - Place2Be

Comments on supporting families

A range of views were provided by several respondents on whether foster carers should work alongside families. Mostly, respondents were positive about this idea, with reasons

given that it can help provide continuity of care for children, maintain contact, facilitate reunification within families, and supervise family contact.

However, some raised cautions, such as possible clashes in culture or parenting styles between parents and foster carers or questioning how this role would be possible for foster carers given other responsibilities. One organisation felt it was unclear how the flexible approach would be perceived by families and highlighted that it can be difficult for professionals to explain to families how decisions have been made in a way that makes sense to everyone involved and avoids coming across as too punitive, harsh or critical.

Concerns were also raised by several respondents about foster carers staying in parental homes. These views are incorporated into the analysis of Q3.

Maintaining sibling relationships was a recurring theme among the children and young people who contributed to the Who Cares? Scotland engagement report. Key considerations in this area were ensuring a gradual approach to any sibling reunification, that an appropriate venue and activities were important in fostering good relationships, and that young people should have a say in their wider relationships.

Support for a flexible fostering approach

Several respondents at Q2 and several at Q3 expressed positive views on the proposed flexible fostering approach. Comments highlighted the elements being necessary, offered general support, or suggested the approach was ‘exciting’ or ‘innovative’. Reasons for support included that it could lead to positive outcomes and help to meet the needs of families, support better joint working, offer greater fluidity for carers working with families, and encourage innovation, if it is built on best practice.

Views on the roles of other professionals

The importance of the team around the child was mentioned by several respondents. The need for social workers to have the capacity to assess and support foster carers to adopt a flexible approach was most commonly highlighted. Concerns raised included the ability of social work teams to achieve this given current resource levels, for instance, due to high caseloads or paperwork impacting an ability to undertake relational work. One respondent raised the lack of space in local authority buildings for therapy or training carers as an issue. Others raised concerns about carers taking on roles normally undertaken by others, such as social workers, social work assistants and family support workers, or carers not being treated with respect by other professionals, for instance, CAMHS. CELCIS highlighted interagency approaches it considered useful such as Family Group Decision-Making and NSPCC’s work on establishing a strong team to support reunification.

> “Not enough opportunity or time for communication and joined-up working between family placement and Children & Families staff – several workers in both Children & Families and family placement teams raised the need for more joined-up working. Both carers and children need ongoing input from practitioners who understand the challenges and who can provide a framework of support. This is amplified if workers and carers are able to work together in partnership.” – UNISON Scotland

The need for an individualised, child-centred approach

The emphasis on adopting a tailored approach that meets the needs of individual children and young people was supported by several respondents, who reiterated the need for individualised, child-centred approaches. However, a few felt this would be difficult to achieve using the flexible fostering approach, such as when attempting to structure flexible care around a child's plan or alongside other caring roles or that current practice was not child-centred. The need to ensure carer safety, to balance a flexible approach with other caring responsibilities or to only use the approach with children for whom it is appropriate were recommended by respondents.

> "This flexible fostering approach is grounded in relational/secure base values which is crucial in ensuring children's needs are to the forefront and the service can adapt to the ongoing assessment." - Individual

Perceived risks for foster carers

Several respondents highlighted risks for foster carers associated with the flexible approach or the need for robust risk assessments to enable carers to work in a family home safely. Concerns raised included a lack of regulation of foster carers compared to other professionals, safeguarding or allegation issues and conditions in the family home such as health and safety considerations, hygiene and fire checks.

> "Risk – the level of risk involved at the individual and organisational level if a carer is in another person's house, including the risk of allegations, the carer's own wellbeing. This is a role which other family support/home support or residential professionals would not undertake at the moment except on rare occasions and for very short periods and not on their own. Are we therefore asking something of foster carers in terms of task and risk which we would not ask of other caregivers?" - Social Work Scotland

Concerns about a flexible approach

Several respondents at Q2, as well as some at Q3 and some at Q16, raised concerns over the proposed approach. Views included that it was not realistic in the current climate of resourcing constraints and that associated implementation costs could outweigh benefits, that foster carers were being viewed as a way of filling gaps in provision or that the role encroached on the roles of other professionals or required greater levels of protection, such as insurance. Attendees at an engagement event, representing those in local authority fostering teams, in addition to other respondents, commented that foster carers were unlikely to be available or have the capacity to undertake a flexible role, with carers being expected to take on more responsibilities now compared to the past. One respondent felt the approach did not address inherent procedural complexities of a flexible approach. This included the decision-making that would need to take place, who the decision makers would be, or the intended timescales for any such decision-making. For instance, they noted:

> "The 'no order' principle of the children's hearings system is an important one, and as such would be engaged by a flexible fostering approach. However, we are unclear about how the transition between 'no order' and the need for a statutory order would work – we have

similar questions about the move between section 25 arrangements and a compulsory supervision order." – Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

The SCRA further highlighted research that found children were often unaware of the specific legislation or arrangement used for their protection, and that there was no clear route into a section 25 arrangement. Further, children did not have to attend court or Hearings as part of decision-making for a section 25 arrangement, resulting in such orders not being tested in court and a lack of procedural safeguards.

Other themes

Other themes mentioned by some included that it would require recruitment or negatively impact retention of foster carers, perceived changes to the foster carer role such as a flexible approach requiring greater skill level or responsibility for foster carers, and that capacity building within the system would be necessary to ensure a timely response.

"There is concern around the geographical location of the flexible foster carers in relation to the child's home which could result in significant time for the young person spent travelling and changes to infrastructure would be required in relation to the cross-boundary nature of care arrangements." – West Lothian Council

Q3. What are your views on the seven different elements in the flexible fostering approach?

Seven in ten respondents left a comment at Q3, most of whom commented on each element separately. As a result, this section addresses each element in turn, ordered by the prevalence of comments. Several respondents also left comments for and against a flexible approach in general, which were included in the analysis at Q2.

Foster carers staying in the family home

Either cautious support or disagreement with the suggestion for foster carers to stay in the family home was raised by many respondents. The benefits of this approach were recognised by some, such as those set out in the consultation paper, at times when immediate support is needed or during family crises. However, it was widely felt that practicalities would need to be addressed, notably how this could be reconciled with other caring responsibilities or to ensure the safety of carers (see 'Perceived risks for carers' in Q2). It was suggested that some carers would not wish to stay in family homes, or that certain carers only could be involved in this, such as those specially trained to do so. Attendees at one engagement event noted that there had been concerns about foster carers offering to stay in other foster carers' homes.

Mixed reactions to this proposal were given by children and young people with care experience who contributed to the Who Cares? Scotland report. Discussion raised concerns over family dynamics, for instance, parents becoming more distressed or suspicious of foster carers, logistical challenges, and confusion about roles potentially outweighing perceived benefits. Attendees suggested short break provision could serve as an alternative. However, others felt there could be benefits to the approach, such as having extra support and reassurance, having more consistency, and reducing the need

for other transitions, such as changing schools. A majority of children aged 15 and under who contributed to the Who Cares? Scotland report were supportive of this idea.

> "It would benefit the child as it would keep them in their local community, at the same school and with their friends, minimising the disruption they experience. We envisage that this would only be used in rare circumstances and that it would require further consideration of both the legal and practical parameters, responsibilities, oversight and regulation to determine if it is a workable aspect of flexible fostering." - NSPCC Scotland

Supporting families on the edge of care

Many respondents commented on the idea that foster carers could support families on the edge of care. Most expressed a view that this could be useful or that this was already the role of family support workers. Having sufficient capacity within the fostering system or the need to pay carers a retainer to enable them to take on this role when required was emphasised. Other suggestions for making this work included paying foster carers a salary, ensuring a robust plan was in place to support this work or ensuring sufficient support was in place for families. A small number were against this proposal or raised concerns about the risks to which children may be exposed in the family home. Children and young people with care experience who contributed to the Who Cares? Scotland report viewed this proposal more favourably than the one above, as it was perceived as a way to preserve relationships while avoiding disruption associated with changing homes.

Foster carers mentoring or training new carers

This proposal was positively received by many respondents, some of whom described existing initiatives in this area, and the Fostering Network noted that 63% of foster carers surveyed in their 2024 State of the Nations survey rated the support they received from other foster carers as excellent or good. It was felt useful as a way to help retention, to tap into carers' expertise and knowledge, though determining the quality of input was considered important, given that experience is subjective. Ways this could be implemented included providing training to carers to enable them to undertake this role, for carers to be supported by a lead professional and paying contributing carers.

> "Whilst we support the use of high-quality foster carers in supporting new foster carers or kinship carers, we also recognise that a foster carer who has been caring for a number of years may not always have the skill set required to provide therapeutic care. They may have experienced burnout and compassion fatigue or may normalise children's extreme behaviours and mental health difficulties due to repeated experiences. The literature shows this can be a barrier to carers seeking support for children in need. It is essential therefore that foster carers are robustly reviewed before offering mentorship or support." - University of Glasgow

Extending short break provision

Many respondents at Q3, and some at Q2, commented positively on the proposal for foster carers to receive or provide short breaks. Suggestions were given for how to implement this beyond the existing provision. These included ensuring children, especially young children, were already well-known to the carer providing the break, using carers who solely provided short breaks or using foster carers at the start of their caring journey

to build experience, and changing the culture so that it was viewed as acceptable for carers to benefit from a short break or to use terms such as ‘sleepover’, ‘weekend away’ or ‘day out’ to align with the language used by families.

Carers facilitating reunification with parents

Comments about foster carers facilitating the reunification of children with their families were made by many. It was felt that appropriate scaffolds of support or safeguards should be built to facilitate this role through multi-disciplinary working, with sufficient time given to carers to attune to the needs of children and to develop relationships with parents. In the Who Cares? Scotland report, children and young people with care experience emphasised the importance of gradual, natural reunification, with some suggesting trusted adults, though not necessarily foster carers, could provide this role. Cautions were raised that managing complex relationship dynamics can be difficult or that if carers were reticent, this could be reflected in children.

A few raised concerns about foster carers being involved in this way, such as expressing views that other professionals were more suited to this role or that foster carers would not wish to provide this type of input. Two respondents highlighted that foster carers did not have a formal role as foster carers in Continuing Care arrangements, with consequences for remuneration and their changed status in relation to supporting young people.

Carers facilitating family contact time

A range of views were expressed by many respondents about this proposal, from those advocating the approach to others who disagreed that this should be part of the fostering role. Examples of existing practice in this area were given. Perceived benefits included that it could enhance a sense of security or a realistic view of parents among children and encourage greater joint working between social workers and carers - such as when undertaking assessments.

Challenges with this approach were also noted, with views expressed by respondents that:

- Assessments were currently being undertaken by skilled practitioners such as social workers, and if this was expected to be a role of foster carers, it would require them to be upskilled or could change the nature of the relationship with birth families, who may then be less trusting of foster carers.
- Facilitating contact time could be complex, challenging and time-consuming for foster carers, especially when contact time was very regular, such as daily visits, or if foster carers experienced it as distressing, overwhelming and felt unsupported.
- Foster carers' capacity could prevent them from facilitating contact time, such as when contact time involves multiple relatives or if other children live in the foster carer’s home.

Ways to mitigate against these challenges were suggested, such as ensuring contact time was set out in the child’s plan, providing enhanced training and remuneration for foster carers, raising awareness that this is now a foster carer role, using part-time foster carers to facilitate contact time, and working alongside social workers. Training and support to enable foster carers to undertake this role was recommended, for instance, on how to

conduct assessments or how to counteract biases or cultural differences. One respondent suggested that the rights of brothers and sisters should be included in this element.

High-quality alternative family-based care

Many respondents supported this proposal, and it was noted that this is already a core function of foster care. In the Who Cares? Scotland report, children and young people with care experience noted the value of foster carers performing this role, and expressed scepticism about proposals that could significantly alter it. To achieve high-quality provision, enhanced training or a national learning framework were recommended. Practice development opportunities were viewed as relevant for assisting carers in overcoming their own adverse childhood experiences, embedding relational models of support, and ensuring children's needs are met.

"All foster carers have been given training on Trauma Informed Practice and the Nurture Approach. They have monthly reflective supervision, peer support in terms of a Buddy system and access to Support Groups. In terms of therapeutic support, we provide therapeutic input from our current staff group, who have been trained in various therapies, we have a weekly support group for foster children and as mentioned previously we employ a Play therapist and make use of CAMHS." - North Ayrshire HSCP

Implementation issues

Considerations for the implementation of a flexible fostering approach were given by several respondents, including:

- A potential overlap in the roles of foster carers and other professionals, such as social workers, with a need to define boundaries for where carers should operate.
- How the rights of children would be met, such as undertaking Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments, ensuring their safety, ensuring their views are heard, and they have access to independent advocacy. One respondent suggested that GIRFEC and SHANNARI indicators could be reviewed to ensure that trauma experienced by children with disabilities is addressed.
- The need to consider whether existing foster carers were willing to working directly with birth families, and whether this might discourage new applicants, and the impact the proposals could have when foster carer provision is already insufficient.
- Adding an objective around helping keep siblings together or close to each other.
- Addressing current issues within the system, such as the need for further resourcing, for more family contact or support centres, and focusing on recruitment, retention and improving support for foster carers.

Q4. What implications does a flexible fostering approach have for how fostering is funded and how foster carers are remunerated?

Over three quarters of respondents left a comment at Q4. Most prevalent were themes that foster carers would require further financial support or a change in their role, that more work was needed to explore how a flexible approach would operate or that training and support was needed for foster carers.

Improved remuneration for carers is needed for any enhanced role

Comments were provided by many respondents calling for enhanced conditions of service to reflect changes in the role required to enable the flexible fostering approach. Mainly this involved providing improved financial payments to reflect greater responsibilities, though some felt more investment in support for carers and families was required. A few suggested a range of levels of foster carers could be created, for instance, to reflect different specialisations or to reflect skill levels.

> "Funding must be adequate to reflect the complexities of the role, including the requirement for training and the outreach work that form part of these responsibilities. It is clear that we need to explore different solutions in our attempt to recruit foster carers and adequate remuneration is key to ensuring that people feel valued and sufficiently rewarded for such a key role." - Fox Covert Early Years - City of Edinburgh Council
>
> "A scale of progression based on skills, experience, training etc should be formalised for every local authority." – CAN

In addition, several respondents suggested specific elements that should be included in remuneration packages or to improve terms and conditions for foster carers. These included making the role salaried, on-call and unsocial hours payments, retainer fees, providing pension contributions, holiday and sick pay and paying insurance coverage. Attendees at one engagement event suggested pro rata payment could be made if holidays are not taken.

More work is needed to identify implications

In order to answer this question, several respondents felt more work was needed. Suggested areas where more consideration was needed included:

- Planning and identification of the total funding required to implement the proposals, considering the number of children requiring care and the nature of their needs.
- How specific elements should be funded, such as how to retain carers for the Step Up, Step Down model or how short breaks would be funded.
- How foster carers can be supported to receive a consistent income, particularly if different elements of care are paid for separately.
- How to ensure remuneration levels present an attractive offer for foster carers.

Additionally, some respondents sought clarification of how the role of a foster carer in a flexible fostering approach would align with family support workers or services, for example, whether terms and conditions would be similar to support practitioners. According to several respondents, the increased complexity of the role implied by the flexible fostering role would have implications for further learning development and support for foster carers. This is discussed further at Q17 and Q18.

Q5. How can the Scottish Government, working with you, support the delivery of the flexible fostering approach?

Four fifths of respondents commented at Q5, with a range of suggestions provided. The most prevalent themes were to provide more resources (see Q36), improve the status and recognition of foster carers (see Q26) and to provide more training and development opportunities (see Q18). Analysis of comments on these issues made at Q5 has, therefore, been incorporated in these other sections.

Promote national consistency

The need for the Scottish Government to promote a consistent fostering approach across Scotland and sectors was advocated by several respondents, two thirds of whom were organisations. This issue is considered further in various questions across the report. Singular views included that the Scottish Government could encourage fostering services to sign up to the Fostering Network's 'Keep Connected' principles, ensure alignment with developments such as The Promise and Children's Hearings Scotland or lead the way in developing 'fostering friendly' policies and legislation.

> "In October 2024 Children's Hearings Scotland was proud to become accredited as a Fostering Friendly employer in a programme run by the Fostering Network to help organisations actively support fostering and foster carer employees. CHS values the contribution that foster carers make to society and would encourage the Scottish Government to take steps to support other organisations in Scotland to become Fostering Friendly employers who recognise the need for flexibility in a person's working arrangements when they also undertake a fostering role which is crucial to supporting Scotland's children and young people that are in need of care and protection." - Children's Hearings Scotland

Work with and understand carers

The need for the Scottish Government to understand and listen to foster carers was highlighted by some respondents, mainly individuals. Comments were generally brief, but views included that this should occur at a local level and that it should involve listening to carers with considerable experience or those caring for young people. Attendees at one engagement event felt foster carers were not listened, or that their views were not taken seriously, including when video evidence was produced.

> "Listen to us…HEAR us…We want the best for our children and will always put them at the forefront of everything we do…We may not have the answers but will be able to share the experiences we have already faced when delivering our fostering role as is today - some of which actually does meet the flexible approach." - Individual

Provide more support

Views that the Scottish Government should provide more support for foster carers or children were raised, with each theme highlighted by some respondents. Supports the Scottish Government could facilitate for foster carers included IT resources such as helping keep a digital record of life story work, facilitating strong support networks and ensuring other team members in the team around the child offer appropriate support to foster carers. Ensuring the needs of children are met through enhanced support such as therapy, third-sector support and independent advocacy was recommended by some respondents (see also Q36).

"Many of the families and children and young people we work with have had adversarial experiences of statutory services leading to a lack of trust and resentment. Further, statutory services are often associated with scrutiny, preventing foster carers, or children and young people in foster care from speaking openly about their experiences, their worries, as they fear further intervention by the state. The third sector is well placed to support families and individuals in these circumstances." – Includem

Other themes

Other themes mentioned by some respondents included the need for the Scottish Government to address recruitment and retention, the need to identify and roll out best practice and the need to work with specific groups in developing a flexible approach. Organisations suggested for working alongside the Scottish Government included the Care Inspectorate, COSLA and local authorities, and work with employers to develop 'fostering friendly' policies. The need to consider specific aspects was noted by some respondents, with a few highlighting the need to promote the safety of foster carers or a few raising singular considerations, notably addressing housing issues of foster carers, recognising the flexible approach might not be suitable all children and acknowledging a large number of foster carers work as couples.

"Creative funding projects to support foster carers to work in different ways and to test out some of the approaches in Scotland e.g. Step Up Step Down. Properly evaluate the impact of different approaches, robust data around the care experienced community and effectiveness of outcomes and interventions is urgently needed. Scottish Government could share messages about the flexible approach and what it looks like in practice." - Scottish Adoption and Fostering

4. Independent Fostering Agencies

The consultation paper sets out that Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) provide around 31% of foster placements in Scotland, with local authorities providing the rest. IFAs must register with the Care Inspectorate and there are currently 25 registered IFAs.

Evidence cited in the consultation paper suggests some placements could be provided more cheaply than by purchasing them from IFAs, and that children do not always have access to the most appropriate placement to meet their needs or in appropriate locations. However, anecdotal evidence suggests some carers feel better supported by IFAs compared to local authorities. The Scottish Government, therefore, sought respondent views on the future role of IFAs in foster care provision.

Q6. What is the role of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) in the future of fostering?

Almost all respondents commented at Q6. Although not directly answering the question, the most prevalent theme was comments on IFAs being more attractive for foster carers compared to local authorities. The next most prevalent themes, which highlighted opposing views, were that IFAs should have a limited or no role, that they are well placed to provide specialist support, and the role of IFAs in out-of-authority placements.

IFAs are more attractive for foster carers to work for

Many respondents, two thirds of whom were individuals, expressed a view that IFAs were more attractive for foster carers to work for than local authorities. Most commonly, it was suggested that IFAs provided enhanced remuneration and support for foster carers in comparison to local authorities. Other views included that IFAs also provided more or better support for children, that some carers are allowed to work alongside their caring role, that IFAs paid for qualifications for foster carers and that IFAs are more successful at recruitment. As a result, it was suggested that the issue of IFAs being more attractive than local authorities for foster carers would need to be addressed in order to reduce their use.

> “I considered several agencies before I became a foster carer; I know other potential foster carers that went with the council and had several social workers through the assessment period, and thereafter, little consistency for supervision. I fostered through an IFA, the training was regular, professional and practical. Supervision and record-keeping was crucial and the fostering agency paid for my SVQ3 qualification. The IFA were recruiting and training whilst local authorities were not, hence their success.” - Individual

IFAs should have no role or a limited role

Several respondents felt IFAs should have no role or a limited role in the future of fostering. Views included that IFAs should be phased out, less relied upon, or used for specific purposes only such as those noted below. Reasons for taking this view included the belief that only local authorities should have a role in fostering, to make it easier to achieve consistency across Scotland and to better meet the needs of each child.

"They should be phased out and all the factors that make being an IFA foster carer appealing should be applied to being a local authority carer." – Individual

To ensure sufficient provision of foster carers

The role of IFAs in providing additional capacity in foster carers was highlighted by several respondents. IFAs were seen by these respondents as being able to 'top up' local authority provision. This was felt to be particularly relevant given the national shortage of foster carers and that while this situation remained, there was a continuing role for IFAs. For example, Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership described its ongoing commitment to using IFAs, through investing almost £40 million in IFAs over a four-year period to support a range of fostering placements.

IFAs could provide specialist support

IFAs could continue to have a role in providing specialist support, according to several respondents. Provision for those with additional or the most complex needs was most commonly mentioned by respondents, though other placements IFAs could continue to support included children on the edge of care, older children or large sibling groups.

IFAs' role in out of area placements

Several respondents felt the use of out of area placements should be minimised and that IFAs role in such placements should be limited. Suggestions for restricting use included using such placements only for permanent arrangements or to cater for specific needs that cannot be met locally, such as for safety reasons. It was also noted that out of area fostering can cause issues in how the Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA) for foster care is calculated. The SRA was introduced in August 2023 by the Scottish Government, with a review currently underway.

"While IFAs are not required to pay SRA, it should be noted that the SRA came into effect when many contracts were already tied into existing frameworks. The SRA was calculated on the number of children across Scotland, not only with LA, therefore it is the children who are potentially experiencing inequality by nature of where they are placed as the funds are not passed on for their benefit." - Care Visions Fostering

To replace or supplement local authority provision

A few respondents felt it important to retain IFAs to enable choice, such as a wider range of placements or for foster carers to determine whom they wished to work with and to allow independence from local authorities. For instance, Scottish Adoption and Fostering recognised that some foster carers may have previous negative experiences with large organisations and would, therefore, not feel comfortable working for a local authority.

Another organisation felt IFAs could work more seamlessly across local authority boundaries, which could help reduce administrative burden and allow for efficient use of foster carers in meeting the needs of children. It felt both local authorities and IFAs would benefit from sharing training, cross-local authority protocols and transparency of funding to work better together.

Other themes

Concerns around the marketisation of care were raised by several, such as the use of IFAs resulting in a more limited role for local authority fostering or profiting from fostering. Some also felt there should be more monitoring and regulation of IFAs, while some others felt IFAs should be non-profit making or providing general views on IFA provision. Some of these issues are expanded upon further in the next question.

Q7. Should we require all IFAs to have charitable status?

The Promise makes it clear that 'Scotland must avoid the monetisation of the care of children and prevent the marketisation of care'. Section 59(3) of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 setting out that IFAs must be voluntary bodies, required to operate on a not-for-profit basis.

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	55	11	34
All answering (%)	**68**	**84**	**16**	**-**
Individuals	41	80	20	-
Organisations[3]	27	89	11	-

Of those answering Q7 (66% of all respondents), over four fifths (84%) agreed that all IFAs should be required to have charitable status, with 16% opposed. A majority of both individuals and organisations were in favour, at 80% and 89% respectively.

Seven in ten respondents left an open comment at Q7. The most prevalent view was that fostering should not be profit-making. Other themes included that charitable status should be required to ensure decisions were made in children's best interests, that any profits should be used to advance the IFAs' mission, and that being a charity meant improved regulation and scrutiny of IFAs.

Yes, because fostering services should not make a profit

By far the most prevalent theme, raised by many respondents and across various engagement events, was that IFAs should have charitable status as this would mean they would not be profit-making, which was viewed unfavourably. For instance, respondents felt that requiring IFAs to have charitable status was appropriate because organisations should not profit from children being in foster care and that it could prevent the privatisation of care or a drain on public resources. Some respondents highlighted that this would align with the recommendation of the Promise to avoid the monetisation of care.

[3] Tables including a breakdown of responses by organisation type are provided in Appendix C.

"It is acknowledged that there is a requirement for IFAs to operate under the "not for profit" principle. However, it is unclear whether this is met. Moving to a charitable status could be seen as more palatable and perceived as giving back to society." - Dumfries & Galloway Council

Yes, to meet the interests of children

Some felt that charitable status was needed to ensure that IFAs 'put people over profit' and make decisions in the best interests of children rather than for financial reasons.

"There is a risk that companies aiming for profit do not fully work in support of family reunification as the loss of a child in a placement is a financial loss for their business." - Who Cares? Scotland

Yes, to redivert surplus funding to advance its mission

Being a charity would mean any surplus revenue is used to advance the mission of an IFA, according to some. It was felt this could lead to more investment in the service so children would directly benefit, rather than funds going to shareholders or senior managers, for instance. One respondent expressed the view that some IFAs were "highly secretive" and could be based outside Scotland, meaning surplus revenue would not impact Scottish communities as much as if it were re-invested in charities based in Scotland.

Yes, to enhance scrutiny and regulation

Some respondents felt IFAs should have charitable status to ensure regulation by OSCR, the Scottish charity regulator. Reasons included that financial information would be audited, that organisational outcomes would need to be evidenced and that greater transparency would be required, for instance, due to the requirement to publish accounts. Greater transparency of what is covered in payments to IFAs was also sought by attendees at an engagement event.

"This would at least check their financial position and give service users the ability to check the finances of individual organisations." - Grandparents Apart UK

No, for various reasons

Some respondents felt that charitable status should not be required for IFAs. Two felt this could reduce the number of fostering placements, while singular reasons included that IFAs should not be used, that a mix of both local authority and charity provision was preferred, or that IFAs should be free to invest their revenue where they chose.

Other views

Several respondents were unsure how to answer or requested more information to be able to answer this question, such as an awareness of the advantages or disadvantages of IFAs having charitable status, or more information about the demand for foster care and the potential role for independent providers. A few felt there should be parity between local authorities and IFAs, for instance, to ensure fees are fairly applied and to create more transparency. Three respondents felt the organisational type was not relevant, all of whom

cited a 2022 Competition and Markets Authority market study into children's social care that reported that provider type did not determine the quality of care.

Q8. Should we limit how much local authorities can pay to IFAs?

All children placed with IFAs are placed by local authorities who pay the IFA the rate agreed with the IFA. This may be in the form of a fee, allowance and management fee or a single payment where elements are not broken down. Placements can be purchased by local authorities via the Scotland Excel Foster Framework and also by the local authorities' own contracts or occasionally on a spot purchased basis.

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	54	16	30
All answering (%)	**72**	**78**	**22**	**-**
Individuals	44	77	23	-
Organisations	28	79	21	-

Of those answering Q8 (70% of all respondents), over three quarters (78%) supported limiting how much local authorities can pay to IFAs, while 22% were opposed. Over three quarters of individuals (77%) and organisations (79%) supported the proposal.

Over seven in ten respondents left an open comment at Q8. Views were wide-ranging and largely split between how payments to IFAs could be achieved and reasons why such payments should be limited. To structure this section for ease of reading, reasons for agreeing with a limit are given first, as these were most prevalent. These are followed by views against setting a limit, and then other issues that were raised.

Reasons for setting a limit

The most prevalent view was that fees should be capped or a limit set on what IFAs can charge, which was supported by several respondents. Suggested ways to achieve this included using a similar method to the interagency payments for adoption, i.e., a transparent set amount, ensuring the cap reflects accurate costs of providing a high-quality service, and placing a cap on management fees. Factors to take into account included how flexibility can be maintained for different types of placements and the need for clarity over amounts set for different allowances, fees, and payments.

"Any limit would require to be with a range, dependent on the needs of the child, their care plan and how this is being met by the IFA." - North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

Several respondents expressed a desire for parity between local authority fostering services and IFAs, and felt a limit on payments to IFAs was a way to achieve this. Views included that fees should be standardised across local authorities and IFAs so that foster carers receive the same rate regardless of the provider they work for. This aligned with views expressed by attendees at one engagement event.

"They should all be required to be on a framework, and all be paid the same. The cost of IFA care arrangements is significantly impacting on local authority resource. It is more than double the cost to pay for an IFA care arrangement in comparison to a local authority foster carer and often enhanced fees are requested." – West Lothian Council

Several respondents reiterated that limits on payments to IFAs could help ensure that meeting children's needs remains their focus, such as enabling them to stay in their area and providing better support to their carers.

Some respondents felt that limiting fees paid to IFAs would help ensure that public finances are used effectively and efficiently. These respondents expressed a view that too much was being paid for some residential or IFA placements and that setting a limit could prevent too much from being paid for future placements.

Reasons for not setting a limit

Comments on not limiting payments to IFAs were made by some respondents. Reasons included that this could result in reduced quality, reduced support for IFAs foster carers, risk providers leaving the sector or result in payments which do not cover the costs of care.

Other issues

Some respondents suggested further research was required to limit payments to IFAs effectively. Suggested areas for review included:

- Consideration of various business models operating in the field, across small to large providers, and whether a limit would stifle investment.
- Identifying the amount required for various components of placement costs – allowance, fee and management elements.
- Determination of the mechanisms and timing of any uplift in fees.
- Exploration of differences in spending between local authorities and IFAs, for instance, resulting from increased specialist placements.
- Work to define the minimum fee and create a framework that accounts for the diversity of fostering experiences.

The need for a national approach or national guidance was mentioned by some. Suggestions included the need for framework agreements with maximum amounts to be paid agreed between local authorities and IFAs, a national allowance with levels of progression, the use of a central register of foster carers, and greater regulation to enhance transparency and guidance. One respondent suggested prohibiting IFAs from asking for retainer fees and one local authority requested flexibility:

"We would also ask for the ability to negotiate additional costs rather than being instructed to pay." – Perth and Kinross Council

Q9. Should IFAs be required to pay their foster carers the Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA)?

Unlike local authorities, IFAs are currently not required to pay foster carers the SRA for providing foster care. The consultation sought views on whether IFAs should be required to pay their foster carers the SRA. See Q6 for more information on the SRA.

Of those answering Q7 (71% of all respondents), 90% agreed that IFAs be required to pay their foster carers the Scottish Recommended Allowance. Although 10% opposed this proposal, all were individuals. All organisations who answered supported this proposal.

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	64	7	29
All answering (%)	**73**	**90**	**10**	**-**
Individuals	44	84	16	-
Organisations	29	100	0	-

Two thirds of respondents left a comment at Q9. In line with the quantitative results, most comments supported the proposal. The most prevalent themes were that this would be more equitable and fairer for foster carers, general positive comments, that it could create consistency across Scotland and that it would create a level playing field between local authorities and IFAs.

Yes, IFAs should pay their foster carers the SRA

Several respondents felt that it would be more equitable if IFAs paid their foster carers the Scottish Recommended Allowance. Comments included that it would mean all carers being treated the same, that it would reduce disparity in payments between carers, that the rate was required to cover caring costs, and that it is the fairest approach.

> “Foster carers should be subject to a national approach to allowances in addition to assessment, preparation and support expectations. This can promote an equitable approach to recruitment, retention and agency standards.” - Adoption UK Scotland

General support was given by some respondents, two thirds of which were organisations. It was recognised that IFAs paying their carers the SRA would ensure the costs of caring are paid to carers. However, it was also felt that the agreed SRA should be the minimum amount payable to carers, with the potential to pay more.

> “These allowances are designed to help foster carers cover the costs associated with looking after a child, and ensuring the recommended allowance is paid helps create a more stable and supportive environment. The SRA also allows for a stronger and uniformed approached to this component of the annual fee review process that is applied to the national framework.” - Scotland Excel

Achieving consistency across Scotland was another reason for some to agree with the proposal. However, comments tended to be brief with little explanation given. Some respondents, including attendees at one engagement event, also felt this approach would create a level playing field between local authorities and IFAs, help address recruitment

issues in local authorities, or improve transparency. Similarly, some respondents also felt the proposal could help address the challenge of carers moving to IFAs that provided greater payments.

No, IFAs should be able to decide the level of allowance

Two themes highlighting disagreement with the proposal were each raised by a few respondents who were mostly individuals. A few explained why foster carers benefitted when IFAs could determine their allowance rate, such as an ability to receive bonuses or enhanced payments, or that it helped IFAs to recruit and retain carers. Two suggested children benefited from IFAs being able to set their own allowance rate, with one suggesting this allowed IFAs to provide a better quality service to children.

Q10. What more could be done nationally to support local authorities when paying for placements from IFAs (including forecasting, market shaping and procurement)?

Just under two thirds of all respondents commented at Q10. The most prevalent themes were comments on procurement, to reduce reliance on IFAs, the use of a centralised approach and for greater transparency.

Strengthen procurement arrangements

Several respondents suggested procurement improvements when paying for placements. These included using a centrally managed national procurement framework, specifying limits on how much IFAs can charge, making payments by bed space, not allowing exceptional uplift requests, mandating the use of Scottish Excel for procurement, reviewing Excel's Individual Placement Agreements, and using penalties when contracts are not met.

"As of 2024, the national contract provided by Scotland Excel covers 68% of the IFAs in Scotland. A move away from multiple arrangements to a single universally used national framework would support consistency for IFAs, purchasers and foster carers. A single national contract would also support the consistent implementation of improvements identified through this consultation and beyond. It would permit national reporting covering all purchased provision in Scotland, facilitating greater understanding of the sector and potential market shaping. A more detailed knowledge of IFA financial structures would allow a more transparent approach to costings." - Scotland Excel

A few respondents called for improved interactions between IFAs and local authorities and a few suggested improving processes or access to data.

"Both providers and purchasers would benefit from the publication of aggregated data through a single source, and this could be segmented along demographic and regional lines. This would aid budgeting activities undertaken by local authorities, as well as contract development by Scotland Excel and business planning by providers." - Scotland Excel

Reduce the reliance on IFAs

Some respondents, two thirds of whom were individuals, felt that reducing reliance on IFAs was a way to support local authorities. Strengthening local authority provision was viewed as a key way to achieve this. Suggestions included focusing on recruitment of foster carers, ringfencing payments to carers, providing 'top up' payments to local authorities to cover the difference between IFAs and local authority fees, or Excel advocating more strongly for local authorities.

> "The first step is to make local authorities less reliant on IFAs in the first place, by improving local authority recruitment and retention strategies." - CAN

Use a centralised approach

Using a centralised approach, particularly a central register of available IFA placements or reducing the use of local arrangements, was recommended by some. These views included that there could be a Scotland-wide forum to consider consistency issues or to have a national register of foster carers. Two respondents used similar wording to note concern about having 32 different purchasers (i.e. local authorities) and felt regional purchasing consortia were not the way forward either, having heard of problems in England where this model had been implemented.

Greater transparency or scrutiny is needed

Greater transparency or regulatory scrutiny was recommended by some. The need for financial transparency of IFA income and expenditure to ensure children's needs were being met was highlighted in particular. Price caps, improved regulation and ensuring consistency were suggested ways to achieve this.

> "There is little to no difference in the level of care or support available to children in IFAs yet it is costing significantly more, so this needs to be publicly available to see. Transparency is key." – Individual

Other themes

Some respondents felt meeting children's needs should be a priority when placements are funded, with a few raising concerns around the use of IFAs, such as the high cost of placements or that placements were not in the best interests of children, for instance, due to a perception IFAs prioritised organisational growth. Greater effort to retain local authority foster carers was considered a way to reduce reliance on IFAs according to some respondents.

5. Recruitment of Foster Carers

Part 6 of the consultation paper sets out plans to increase recruitment of foster carers in Scotland. It sets out a recruitment 'offer' involving national action to recruit more foster carers within local authority fostering services, developed through significant engagement with key stakeholders. The recruitment 'offer' consists of five key parts:

- A national recruitment campaign funded by the Scottish Government.
- Targeted national recruitment approaches to recruit diverse foster carers.
- Working with local authorities to develop joint national and local communications, including developing a national toolkit for local authorities to use locally.
- Creation of a Foster Scotland brand.
- Ensuring the Scottish Government's online presence is up to date, clear and easy to navigate, ensuring that prospective foster carers and current foster carers can find all the information they need easily and quickly.

Implementing these activities is intended to achieve a range of outcomes. These include increasing the recruitment and retention of a diverse range of foster carers and enabling better outcomes for children and young people in care. In addition, it is hoped to raise public awareness of foster care and increase understanding of the care system. Views were sought on the proposed 'offer' as well as what else could be done to increase foster carer recruitment.

Q11. What are your views on the recruitment 'offer' described in this section of the consultation document?

Four fifths of all respondents commented at Q11. Most prevalent were views supporting the proposed approach to recruitment. Suggestions were given for how any campaign could be delivered, and support for foster carers was highlighted.

Support for the recruitment 'offer'

Several respondents provided positive comments about the recruitment 'offer', including that it was a 'very good', 'positive' and 'comprehensive' approach. Perceived benefits were that the approach would be successful in recruiting a diverse range of carers, that it could allow more children to be cared for nearer to their community or provide a greater choice of carers during matching of children to foster carers (hereafter referred to as 'matching').

Several respondents, three quarters of whom were organisations, specifically supported the idea of a national campaign. This was viewed as helpful for local authorities, for instance, by freeing up their resources or to achieve a greater reach than could be achieved locally. It was also viewed as a way of increasing consistent understanding and appreciation of the role of foster carers.

"The funding and structure from a national recruitment campaign will allow local authorities an increased opportunity to promote family-friendly policies and can showcase what local authorities offer." - Aberdeen City Council

Agreement with creating a Foster Scotland brand was mentioned by some respondents. Where reasons were given, these were similar to support for a national campaign, i.e. that it would assist in creating a sense of belonging for foster carers, enable a better focus and understanding of the foster carer role, and allow local authorities to raise awareness of their offer and reach a wider pool of prospective carers. Attendees at one engagement event suggested the Promise logo should be on promotional materials.

> "This approach to branding, while retaining the local duties and flexibility of fostering agencies, will enable a better focus and understanding of the task of foster care, enabled by expertise which is often not available in local areas. Scotland is a small country and utilising Scottish 'branding' will be beneficial. We believe that it will also contribute to better public perceptions of why children may need alternative family care and a resultant reduction in stigma." - Social Work Scotland

Concerns with the proposed 'offer'

Some respondents raised concerns with the proposal, with some others raising potential issues with any national campaign and some disagreeing with the need for a national Foster Scotland brand. Most commonly, views were expressed that the 'offer' would have no or limited impact, that it excluded recruitment of carers for non-local authority providers or that a national approach might work against the concept of foster care being rooted in local communities. A few respondents felt a national 'brand' was a waste of money.

> "For the purposes of recruiting foster carers, we feel a localised approach to targeting foster carers within Glasgow to support our children and young people within their local community will achieve the best outcomes for children, young people and foster carers. We are unsure if a national approach to recruitment would facilitate a localised, organic response to the diverse range of families' needs, conveying the importance and value of existing support networks." - Glasgow City Health & Social Care Partnership

Other issues

Several respondents commented on support for foster carers, with two calling for more specificity on 'having better supported foster carers', mentioned in the consultation paper. Two respondents commented on the reference to reducing the number of foster carers that retire or de-register, both advising caution around this and the need to acknowledge that people will wish to retire at some stage.

Q12. What more can the Scottish Government and local authorities do to recruit foster carers?

Four fifths of all respondents commented at Q12, and suggestions given at Q11 on how the recruitment 'offer' could be delivered are included here. The most prevalent themes were suggested ways to deliver any 'offer', the need for adequate support for carers, using existing carers to encourage others into caring, providing more information especially at an early stage, and suggested topics to include in any campaign.

Suggested ways to deliver any recruitment 'offer'

Several respondents at Q11, and several at Q12, gave a wide range of suggestions on how the recruitment offer could be delivered. These included using:

- Developing recruitment campaigns with input from people with experience of foster care, as well as foster carers, to help avoid triggering or demeaning messaging.
- A joined-up approach with fostering services, so that enquiries can be directed to local providers.
- Word-of-mouth testimonies from children or using celebrities, sporting icons or business people with previous care experience to raise awareness.
- Targeted approaches that address diverse needs and reach local communities, for example, to address financial barriers or time constraints in rural or urban areas.
- Regional preparation groups across local authority areas or using national online preparation groups.
- A long-term approach to providing information and support to prospective and existing foster carers.
- National resources, such as a database or website that maps out fostering services or links to Fosterline Scotland, a helpline for foster carers.
- Places to promote fostering include television, social media, billboards, drop-ins, or stalls in public buildings such as supermarkets or children's services.

Ensuring a realistic view of fostering in any campaign was raised by several respondents at Q11; this was reiterated at Q12 by several who called for accurate information to be presented at an early stage of a foster carer's journey. The challenges of being a foster carer were felt important to reflect in any campaign, along with addressing the stigma that children in care can experience.

Some suggested types of information they would like to see provided to prospective carers, such as emphasising core requirements and areas where flexibility could occur, for instance, whether carers can also undertake paid employment. Other suggestions included emphasising the desire to keep children in their communities, explaining why foster carers are needed, the positive impact of fostering and the need for foster carers to be trauma-informed. Attendees at an engagement event also suggested foster carers needed to receive trauma-informed training.

Several respondents, some of whom drew upon their personal experience, suggested using existing carers to encourage people into foster care. Ways to do this included paying foster carers to run stalls at events or during informal days, encouraging interested people to contact their local services, and using personal stories in any campaign. However, this suggestion was qualified, with the current perceived lack of support and recognition of foster carers meaning this approach may not be effective.

"Only half (50%) of foster carers we surveyed in Scotland said they would recommend fostering to others who may be considering it. Alongside the national recruitment campaign, the Scottish Government should therefore prioritise increasing role satisfaction among the current foster care population to retain more carers and increase word of mouth recruitment." - The Fostering Network

A few cautioned against oversimplifying the caring role, for instance, moving away from past slogans that suggested all that was needed was a spare bedroom. One felt prospective carers would want to know about fees and payments to determine if fostering was financially viable for them. However, comments were made by children and young people with care experience who contributed to the Who Cares? Scotland report suggested that advertisements should not include remuneration rates as "it shouldn't be about money".

> "Fostering is not a "one size fits all" or even "one size fits most" but is a delicate and sensitive process that should put the needs of the child at its core." - Staf

Support for foster carers

An increased focus on ensuring support for carers was highlighted as important by several respondents. This was felt to be a good way to retain foster carers and encourage word-of-mouth recommendations. Supports for foster carers suggested by respondents included training on strategies to support children and respond to challenging behaviour, more support when allegations are made, providing therapeutic services 'as standard' and more support from social workers. Those with care experience consulted by Staf in preparing its response also suggested there could be benefits in training foster carers alongside other people working with children with care experience, such as residential care workers.

> "Foster Carers are not entitled to any time off/breaks regardless of how challenging their role is! There are no other volunteer workers on a fixed fee who are treated this way, to my knowledge. Foster Carers who are treated fairly are the best people to recruit as we thoroughly enjoy the role." - Individual

Other themes

Other themes mentioned by some included the need to consider and address foster carer retention, to identify and adapt best practice from elsewhere and to target recruitment to attract carers for specialist foster care roles, such as young people or those with disabilities. A few suggested providing a wider range of pathways into foster care, such as beginning by providing short breaks, or to offer incentives to people such as payments in kind e.g. council tax reductions, free public transport or use of leisure services.

6. Retention – Learning, Development and Practical Support

Issues relating to the retention of foster carers were set out in Part 7 of the consultation paper, and it was recognised that recruitment and retention are inextricably linked. This chapter presents the analysis of questions that explore the need for and value of learning, development, and practical support for foster carers.

Q13. What is your experience of the SSSC 'Standard for Foster Care' and do you find it helpful?

Views were sought on experiences and perceptions of the Standard for Foster Care, published in 2017 by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). This sets out learning expectations for foster carers at different learning stages: pre-approval, post-approval and continuous professional development.

Around three quarters of all respondents left a comment at Q13. Equal numbers provided positive or negative comments on the Standard. Thereafter, themes included having no or limited awareness of the SSSC Standard for Foster Care, suggested areas for development and examples of similar support offered by other agencies.

The SSSC Standard is helpful

Several respondents expressed a view that the SSSC Standard is helpful. Reasons included that it provided insight into legislation, demonstrated the simplicity and complexity of caring, ensured an understanding of the need for pre- and post-approval and continuous professional learning, that it was a 'great safeguarding tool' and that it offered a 'comprehensive and standardised' training programme.

"The Standard works for our local authority. We use them as a framework for our carers, for both pre- and post-approval training expectations. In addition to this the standards are helpful to promote needs led approach to unplanned learning needs which are required to promote safe practice and meet the needs of children and young people on an individual basis. The standards provide a pathway for Continuous Professional Development which the fostering service promote with the provision of in-house training, online training and bespoke training in line with individual learning needs." - Aberdeen City Council

The SSSC Standard is not helpful or not used

Comments that the Standard is either not helpful or fully implemented were given by several respondents. Challenges highlighted in using the Standard included that there is no formal requirement to use it, or that it is poorly publicised, overly prescriptive, or not user friendly e.g. it contains significant amounts of information or is too complex. Others commented that the Standard had not been well implemented or not been used. A lack of awareness of the Standard was expressed by several respondents, mostly individuals.

"Reflecting the diversity of the fostering population in our area, some carers have found this more helpful than others. Whilst we retain reference to the SSSC Standards our professional development discussions are less focused on linking carers training to the Standards."- East Ayrshire Council

Suggested areas for development

Areas where improvements could occur in light of new developments were suggested by several. In terms of making the Standard more robust, recommendations included updating the descriptors, ensuring sufficient capacity exists to assess, review and deliver any new national learning framework and to take account of the work of The Promise. Some respondents recommended designing learning opportunities that took account of caring roles and enabled people to attend, such as events during school hours or online.

"It would be helpful for one set of competencies to be developed nationally that could be used as standard across the sector and used consistently by all agencies – e.g. local authorities, independent agencies and Care Inspectorate alike." - Barnardo's Scotland

Topics respondents felt should be better integrated into the Standard included:

- How to address the impact of complex trauma, and therapeutic parenting.
- Self-care and wellbeing of carers, and dealing with the emotional impact of caring.
- Support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children with complex needs.
- Child development, including the needs of infants and young children, and brain development.
- Insight into a child's perspective of being in foster care and what they value from carers.
- Clarifying the role of independent advocacy as distinct from the type of representation foster carers could offer children and young people.
- Support for those leaving care in the form of Continuing Care provision.

Alternative learning materials

Some respondents outlined other forms of learning or standards for foster carers. Two highlighted the Care Inspectorate standards, with others mentioning organisations or qualifications including TURAS, the Fostering Network, NEST and SVQs. Training from local authorities was also highlighted, though views varied as to the usefulness and quantity of such provision.

"The Care Inspectorate standards are much better at covering what support, learning and development foster carers need to care for a child." - Individual

"Luckily my local authority have a fabulous training program. I have completed my SVQ 4, I have attended 3 x 22 week trauma/attachment training schemes. Plus, so many training events that I've lost count." – Individual

Q14. Should there be a new national learning framework for foster carers which could also be a pathway for continuous development?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	57	12	31
All answering (%)	**71**	**83**	**17**	**-**
Individuals	46	78	22	-
Organisations	25	92	8	-

Of those answering Q14 (69% of all respondents), 83% agreed there should be a new national learning framework for foster carers which could also be a pathway for continuous development, while 17% disagreed. Both individuals and organisations supported the proposal at 78% and 92% respectively.

Four fifths of respondents left a comment at Q14. The most prevalent themes were comments on how a framework could operate, views that a national framework would encourage consistency across Scotland (see Q15) and support that foster carers would need. One individual and East Ayrshire Council felt a framework would not be a good use of resources, particularly if current arrangements are satisfactory.

Ways a national learning framework could operate

Many commented on how any framework could operate, including at Q15, which have been incorporated into the analysis below. Considerations that could be addressed in any national learning framework included:

- Ensuring individual learning styles are reflected.
- The use of a variety of training formats such as in-person, live online, shadowing, and self-learning, as well as opportunities that include practical elements. One suggested providing training about life story work ‘as standard’.
- The need for a clear implementation plan that includes responsibilities for delivery and includes ‘Pathways’ planning and meets a diverse range of ages and needs of children and young people, such as specialist support needs.
- Identifying whether such a framework would have unintended consequences.
- Considering use of core or foundational elements supplemented with optional and specific elements or peer mentorship programmes and addressing whether training would result in qualifications.
- To align or integrate with other frameworks, such as the Skills and Knowledge Framework for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Who Cares? Scotland model of training, the 2023 Learning and Development Framework produced by Staying Together and Connected National Implementation Group or the Fostering Network and AFKA Cymru framework for post-approval training.
- The use of online materials, such as a centralised ‘hub’ of resources. One respondent suggested an app, individualised to each local authority, that allows training to be uploaded and captures learning and reflection.

Several respondents commented on whether training should be mandatory. Views varied, from those who felt at least a minimum level of training should be required to those who felt compulsory training may be off-putting, not relevant, or challenging for some to attend. Attendees at one engagement event expressed a preference for a qualification on completion of training, to offer a sense of achievement. At another engagement event, attendees noted carers currently had nothing to show for the training they had received and were not interested in training if the aim was to make them 'do more with less', and advocated a motivational rather than punitive approach to training.

> "It seems that some foster carers are well informed and take on professional development in a variety of forms, but other foster carers seem to attend no training/support groups. There should be an expectation that all foster carers participate in ongoing training/ development/support groups and reflective supervision. Foster caring is a complex task and this needs to be recognised - typical parenting approaches for example may not work or can make matters worse!" – Individual
>
> "The development of trauma training and resourcing is a positive step, particularly for foster carers working alongside children who have experienced significant trauma. In addition to pilot programmes in 2025, ongoing trauma-informed training must be integrated into the continuous professional development (CPD) framework for all foster carers". – Promise Scotland

Respondents felt any learning framework could cover topics aligned to those suggested in Q13, with some also suggesting topics at Q18, incorporated here. Other suggested topics included first aid, confidentiality, legal frameworks, safeguarding, and restorative practices. Respondents recommended the need for specialised training or to address 'new' components of the flexible fostering approach, such as understanding the specific needs of children, communication or case recording skills, de-escalation techniques, how to help children process family time and how to undertake reflective practice. The needs of specific children mentioned by respondents included brothers and sisters, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and those with specific disabilities, where training could address topics such as lifting and handling training or autism. Attendees at one engagement event suggested all members of a fostering family should have access to training, given they were all impacted by caring for children, while attendees at another event called for training for young people in foster care.

Support required for foster carers or children

The need for support for foster carers to enable them to attend training or supplement training was mentioned by some, with some others also commenting on support for children. Suggested supports foster carers may require included providing study leave, childcare, recognising practical experience or demands on time.

Attendees at one engagement event called for a career pathway to be in place. One respondent highlighted that younger foster carers may be more likely than older ones to seek recognised qualifications and may be more incentivised to become a foster carer if there was a more defined career development structure in place:

"Fostering as described under the previous paragraph [of the consultation paper] has little appeal to younger generations – whilst they share the same altruistic ideals, they want more practical support, recognised qualifications, and a professional status along with an acceptable balance between leading a professional life (e.g. continuing their own career, combining this with fostering) and fostering …Younger generations may not share the same values, ideals and expectations." – Individual

Q15. What more can the Scottish Government do to nationally support the learning and development of foster carers?

Three quarters of respondents provided a wide range of comments at Q15. The most prevalent themes were that the Scottish Government could help promote consistency of learning and development for foster carers, that digital resources could be developed and that training should be flexible and accessible.

Promote consistency

Nationwide consistency was advocated by several respondents at Q14, expressing a view that a national framework would help achieve this. Similarly, several respondents at Q15 felt the Scottish Government could help promote consistency. Perceived advantages of increased consistency included equal access to learning opportunities, greater standardisation and an ability to transfer learning or have learning recognised across providers. It was suggested that the Scottish Government could assist in greater consistency through standardising training, such as through a centralised resource, devising learning pathways or setting criteria or targets. A few suggested specialist roles could be created such as a national learning coordinator, or to review workforce planning.

"At the moment there are 32 different local authorities and all the IFAs all offering their own training and identifying different priorities. There is a lot of content out there, but to have it gathered in one place would be helpful." - Individual

Develop digital resources

The need for online or digital resources was highlighted by several respondents. These were considered useful for allowing foster carers to access training at a time and location that suited them. Ideas included developing a national online portal or app that could contain free, accredited courses or video-based content. At one engagement event, attendees suggested a suite of online training for carers to undertake independently would benefit social workers as they would not need to be so involved in delivering or monitoring training, and was considered more practical for foster carers, especially those who do not live close to training centres.

"The Scottish Government could support the delivery of the national learning framework through the provision of an online hub with useful knowledge for carers to draw on as they need it; links to training available to them; and signposting to wider support. For example, we provide a free Parenting Smart website which includes an FAQ-style database of hints and tips for parents to support their children and young people." - Place2Be

Make training flexible and accessible

Several respondents highlighted a need to ensure that training and development opportunities are flexible and accessible. Issues raised included that training should be provided locally, offered at times that suited carers, and with childcare available if needed. Less common views included funding carers to attend training, a call for in-person events and ensuring flexibility to address local issues. These views were also raised by attendees in some engagement events. Attendees at one event suggested having a day system for foster care that could enable those with children at school to take up some flexible fostering roles.

Source high-quality resources

The need for high-quality training was highlighted by some respondents. Comments indicated that relevant and high-quality training should be sourced or developed, such as developing a foster care SVQ qualification weighted towards practice and reflection or on therapeutic parenting approaches. Attendees at one engagement event noted that some local authorities had paid carers to undertake SVQ qualifications and supported the idea of a bespoke SVQ in foster care. Others suggested the use of existing resources, such as Who Cares? Scotland 'Care Aware' training, a learning and development framework for foster carers used in Wales and a pilot that integrates the assessment of potential foster carers with a standardised qualification.

Other issues

Some respondents raised the need for more peer support. These comments are incorporated into the analysis of responses Q17. Some also suggested topics to include in training, that mirrored those outlined in Q13, Q14 and Q16.

Q16. 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?

Almost three quarters of respondents left a comment at Q16. The most prevalent themes were suggested topics to include in learning and development opportunities, the need for training or support for foster carers, ways to deliver training or support, and types of support needed by infants and very young children.

Topics to include in learning and development

Specific knowledge or skills required by care givers to meet the needs of infants and very young children were mentioned by several respondents. Comments emphasised the need to achieve responsive attunement, with an awareness of child health and development and how to support trauma or attachment issues, health conditions and disabilities. In addition, ways to deal with practicalities involved in providing quality care were considered important, such as how to access support or information, developing routines, infant feeding, safe sleeping practices, car safety and how to contribute to planning processes.

The most mentioned topic for training or support was to address foetal alcohol syndrome, such as how to spot symptoms, supporting drug withdrawal in babies, providing enhanced support for pregnant women to help them overcome addictions and ensuring a comprehensive support plan is put in place following a prompt diagnosis.

A few suggested specific training resources they felt were useful, such as:

- mandatory bespoke training for all Children's Panel Members on Adverse Childhood Experiences and the effects of childhood trauma, developed from a partnership between Children's Hearings Scotland and NHS Scotland;
- the Solihull two-day foundation course;
- training from foster care providers such as Barnardo's and TACT
- the PACE model of practice;
- NHS TURAS online trauma training;
- the BUSS model of training related to the early years, and;
- the 'Foster to Adopt' model that includes Concurrent Planning.

Education or support for foster carers

Several respondents called for improved access to relevant learning and development resources or support for foster carers to help meet the needs of infants or very young children. Comments varied regarding whether sufficient resources exist to help foster carers support these children. East Ayrshire Council called for the development of a national framework for this age group, focused on recruitment, training and support with a health-led package of approved development and mandatory training for foster carers. A few called for recognition of the learning and experience of foster carers, such as having a 'badge' that indicates a certain level of training and experience. A few called for full information about children to be shared with foster carers and a few called for better access to therapy or mental health support for carers (see Q17).

> "Develop specialised, relationship-focused, infant mental health training for all registered foster carers in Scotland who may be providing care to babies, infants and very young children. This should draw on: the substantial evidence base around infant mental health; expertise within the nascent infant mental health landscape in Scotland; the specialism developed through NSPCC infant and family teams." - NSPCC Scotland

Ways to deliver training or support

Similar to those raised at Q14 and Q15, several respondents left comments about the delivery of training or support to foster carers. Over and above views expressed in these earlier questions, comments included the need to ensure up-to-date advice is provided given rapidly changing knowledge e.g. on safe sleeping practices, to provide individualised practice-based support e.g. through peer mentoring, to offer ongoing support to enable attendance at things like baby massage or baby and toddler groups or to have a toolkit of flexible parenting approaches that support recovery and healing. Attendees at an engagement event noted that experienced foster carers would have different training requirements compared to new carers.

> "I am also conscious that support, training and advice to carers of young infants goes out of date very quickly and that within our team, we would not be up to date on the latest advice. The health and safety template checklist we use still refers to plug socket covers, which are not recommended now. Local authority fostering teams use practices (such as re-using cot mattresses and car seats) that are not to be recommended." - Individual

Support for infants and very young children

Focusing on ensuring the best support for infants and very young children was advocated by some respondents. Suggestions included:

- Providing child-friendly venues for family time.
- Not overly relying on short breaks for those under age four and not using them for babies under 18 months due to the impact of disruption.
- Having more social opportunities such as in nurseries.
- A 'baby box' given to foster carers at the start of each caring journey.
- Providing up-to-date equipment and finances to purchase items for newborns, suggested by attendees at an engagement event.
- Specialist infant mental health support.
- Having realistic, safe caring agreements.
- Speeding up decision-making processes.

Qualities of good foster care with infants and very young children were also suggested, including love, care, nurture and attunement, a focus on touch and close proximity and building a sense of safety and trust.

Other issues

Some respondents felt carers should be involved in designing or delivering learning and development opportunities. Some others felt improvements were needed at the matching stage to ensure a good match between carers and children (see Q32). This view was endorsed by attendees at an engagement event where it was noted that social workers would need to know carers well to ensure good matching. A few called for enhanced support for birth parents, such as expanded prenatal care, perinatal mental health support, and parenting programmes. The NSPCC suggested that the Scottish Government should "consider the potential benefits to infants of permitting Dual Registration of Carers as Foster Carer and as potential Adoptive Parents", to help address delays in making placements and for formal recognition of the role of foster parents in contributing to legal decision-making, particularly for infants.

Q17. What other practical support would help foster carers?

Two thirds of respondents left a comment at Q17. The most prevalent themes were enhanced support from other workers, specific suggestions for practical support, training for foster carers (addressed at Q16) and the need for more mental health support for carers or for children and young people.

Improved support from other workers

Comments on support needed by foster carers from other workers, particularly social workers, were given by several respondents, with some also raising this issue at Q16. Views were wide-ranging and included the need for collaborative opportunities in training, such as involving health or social care practitioners in training delivery or to attend alongside foster carers. Training for others working in early years was highlighted such as for social workers, midwives and health visitors, and education professionals.

Specific practice or training suggestions included:

- Social work and care: social worker training on how trauma impacts infants and very young children, access to independent advocacy, increased communication between foster carers and social workers, social worker or clinical supervision, use of family support workers to strengthen placements and support during challenging times for foster carers, such as dealing with allegations or if children run away.
- Health: specialist health visiting support, midwives entering the crucial information on child medical records regarding prenatal alcohol and drug use and other teratogens[4].
- Education: play therapy training that includes infant observations, the use of checklists and logs to track behaviour and responses over time, and support workers located in education or employment-related establishments.

Specific suggestions for practical support

Practical support suggestions were made by several respondents. In order of prevalence, these included:

- Some suggested childcare should be provided to enable carers to attend meetings or training, or that they should be reimbursed for refreshment costs associated with meetings held in the foster carer's home.
- A few who called for help with transport such as help paying for costs associated with needing larger cars or public transport costs.
- Help meeting housing costs, such as accessing larger houses, support to achieve property extensions or adaptations, and a Council tax discount (see also Q36).
- Help keeping foster carers safe, e.g. contextual safeguarding, such as when travelling at night to pick up a young person or when visiting birth family homes.
- Access to digital connectivity and IT devices such as laptops or mobile phones.
- Practical help around the home, such as with gardening, cleaning and washing.
- More community interaction and support or an ability to pursue personal interests.
- Recognition that support is still needed, even when placements are going well, an issue raised by attendees at one engagement event

> "Foster carers, like other caregivers, are not a homogenous group. Their needs differ and so also does the practical support which will assist them to undertake the fostering task. An open approach which ensures that carers are able to access the support they need, practical, psychological, and emotional and which may be needed for a specific child is the important factor; and being able to do so without criticism or stigma." - Social Work Scotland

Counselling or mental health support

A similar proportion called for more counselling or mental health support for foster carers or for children and young people. These themes were each raised by some respondents, and was also raised by some at Q4, addressed here. Issues raised included that carers experience vicarious trauma, in other words, the psychological and emotional impact of

[4] A teratogen is any substance, agent or process that, when exposed to a developing fetus, can cause birth defects or other developmental abnormalities.

exposure to trauma experienced by others. This was also raised attendees at an engagement event. It was also noted that caring for many of these children or young people presented challenges such as lack of sleep when allegations are made, responding to challenging behaviour, and compassionate fatigue or burnout. Suggested supports included access to counselling, wellbeing opportunities such as free gym memberships, and infant mental health interventions to support the quality of the caregiving relationship. One suggested the continued provision of access to Pathways support that incorporates learning opportunities, peer support and access to clinical and therapeutic consultations for carers.

Some also called for improved therapeutic support for children and young people to help reduce the likelihood of adverse impacts of trauma, such as addiction, offending behaviours and suicide. The importance of timely and sufficient support for children and young people was emphasised, with some referring to the importance of ensuring timely access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or the need for specialist mental health support for care experienced young people from CAMHS.

> "A significant proportion of children and young people in Glasgow being supported in foster care have complex needs, including children and young people with disabilities, neurodiversity, mental health and trauma. Thus, it would be helpful if Scottish Government could help to increase the priority for appropriate specialist support for children in foster placements and reduce wait times, for example, in relation to CAMHS and Community Paediatrics. The Community Mental Health and Wellbeing funding has been strongly welcomed and has provided an infrastructure of support for children, young people and families/ carers at tier 1 and 2 level, with the potential to expand such initiatives." - Glasgow City Health & Social Care Partnership

Facilitate more social or peer opportunities

Enabling ways foster carers can meet or learn from other carers was recommended by some respondents at Q18 and some at Q26. Ideas included reducing isolation through building communities of support, peer mentoring, peer support groups and networks offering emotional and practical support and hiring a soft play venue with refreshments.

> "Better resourced social work services so that foster carers can be better supported and that we have time to organise social groups/outings and celebration events celebrating achievements of foster carers and children and young people in care." – Individual

Enable short breaks for carers

Some respondents called for foster carers to be able to access short breaks, either to obtain a break from caring or to attend meetings, training, or therapy. A few responses revealed the tension between foster carers being perceived as competent by providing care at all times, and the need for them to be able to have a break. It was highlighted that people did not always understand why foster carers might need to obtain a short break. The Promise Scotland highlighted that children should only ever stay away from their home with other people whom they trust and have an ongoing relationship with, and that it should be a fun, enjoyable experience for them.

"During our discussions about support, access to short breaks was frequently mentioned and must be considered an integral part of the support on offer for kinship and foster carers. This should include, where possible, the child or young person to ensure families have access to positive experiences." - Includem

Q18. What, if any, additional learning and development would be needed for the 'flexible fostering' approach?

Six in ten of respondents commented at Q18. Aside from comments on ways to deliver training or topics to include detailed above in Q14, Q15 and Q16, the most prevalent themes were the need for foster carers to better understand how to work effectively with birth parents, the need for assessment skills and concerns about the flexible approach.

Support to work effectively with birth parents

More training for foster carers on understanding the needs of families and how to work effectively with birth parents were raised by several respondents. Understanding the impact of challenges faced by birth parents, such as poverty, health, housing issues, addictions and family dynamics, was considered important for foster carers. How to provide safe support, setting expectations and boundaries, facilitating family time, and an awareness of what matters to escalate were considered valuable topics training could address. Skills that foster carers were considered to need to work effectively with birth parents included diplomacy, sensitivity, and an ability to overcome cultural divides and maintain positive relationships while also being a 'critical friend' to encourage change.

The need for assessment skills

Some respondents highlighted the need for enhanced assessment skills for foster carers. In particular, calls were made for greater knowledge of child protection processes and how to undertake different types of assessments, such as risk, lone working, health and safety, home, or parenting assessments. In addition, understanding the boundaries of foster carers' role in making professional assessments or decisions and an understanding of what to look for when making a professional judgement was considered important.

"Foster carers might need more training on how to work with families in a wider context, how to do parenting assessments, more about risk assessments as well." – Individual

7. Retention – Financial Support

This chapter presents the analysis of further questions about the retention of foster carers, with a focus on financial support. The consultation paper explains that foster carers, while remunerated, are self-employed for tax purposes. Foster carers' remuneration includes:

- A weekly fostering allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child
- Fees reflecting the expertise and nature of tasks undertaken by foster carers
- Additional payments to cover one-off expenses.
- Retainer fees for a time-limited period may or may not be paid to foster carers to allow them to be available to receive a child into their home.
- Continuing Care allowances, in which some fostering services will continue to pay an allowance and fee to a foster carer where a young person remains in that placement after their 18th birthday.

Q19. How effective is the current financial model for foster carers?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Effective	% Somewhat Effective	% Not Effective	% Don't Know	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	11	23	35	5	26
All answering (%)	**76**	**14**	**32**	**47**	**7**	**-**
Individuals	50	18	28	52	2	-
Organisations	26	8	38	38	15	-

Of those answering Q19 (74% of all respondents), almost half (47%) felt the current financial model for foster carers was not effective, compared to 14% who felt it was effective and 28% who felt it was somewhat effective. Individuals were more likely than organisations to view the model as not effective, at 52% compared to 38% of organisations. However, seven of the ten local authorities who answered Q19 felt the current model was effective to some extent.

Just under two thirds of respondents left an open comment at Q19. The most common themes in order of prevalence were to improve terms and conditions for foster carers, to standardise payments and to build in an annual increment.

Improved terms and conditions for foster carers

Many respondents at Q19 called for improved terms and conditions, including foster carers becoming salaried and enhancing remuneration. The need to enhance remuneration packages for foster carers was repeatedly raised across multiple questions, particularly at Q2, Q11 and Q12, with comments made at those questions included in the analysis below.

Comments across these questions highlighted a preference for foster carers to hold a salaried position with associated employment rights, instead of being self-employed as currently. This specific issue was also raised at Q26 and advocated by attendees at an engagement event. Foster carers having employment rights was viewed as providing

multiple benefits such as enhancing the financial and employment security of carers, resulting in them being more valued, and having a positive impact on children as a result of the increased financial stability of their carers. Rights respondents expected would be included in a salaried position included paid leave, sick pay, pension contributions, being paid to attend meetings and improved access to trade union representation.

Across questions, issues raised included calls for increased rates of fees and allowances. Views expressed were that current fees for carers are insufficient and do not adequately recognise their skill and experience or the demands of the role. This was also raised across engagement events. For instance, participants at one event noted that while they felt they were some of the better-paid carers, they still felt the rate was insufficient, and they had to regularly use their own savings to make ends meet. According to these respondents, retention and recruitment could be improved if these changes were made.

> “The biggest hurdle is always going to be the low rate of payment under the Scottish Recommended Allowance. This is a 24/7 role with sometimes challenging children due to their previous circumstances. Raising children who have gone and are going through very traumatic times is even harder and to receive less than minimum wage for doing the 'job' makes it difficult to attract good potential candidates.” - East Ayrshire Council

Standardisation of payments

Several respondents called for standardised payments across Scotland and payment types, with some commenting generally or specifically on allowances and fees. Standardisation was suggested to increase transparency, equity, and consistency between carers. It was also suggested that it could reduce competition between local authorities and IFAs, as there are currently differences in payment, and aid in the recruitment and retention of carers in some areas.

Increases in payments – annual increments, retainer fees and additional payments

A need for a higher allowance to reflect expenditure was suggested by some respondents. This was suggested to support recruitment and retention of foster carers, prevent foster carers from being out of pocket and facing financial challenges, reflect increased costs as children age, and meet the different needs of different children. It was noted that current allowance payments are currently insufficient to meet costs of care.

Some respondents suggested building in an annual increment to allowances and fees, to reflect inflation, the increased cost of living and greater costs as children grow up. A lack of increases over the years, meaning payments have not kept pace with inflation, was noted.

The desire for retainer fee payments was noted by some respondents and attendees at an engagement event, including the need for standardisation. Respondents highlighted challenges in not having retainer fees, namely putting foster carers under financial stress when they do not have a placement. This is detailed further under Q22. Some respondents also requested additional one-off payments for the individual needs of children or the standardisation of payments for birthdays, Christmas and holidays.

Other themes

Some respondents made general comments that the current financial model for foster carers is ineffective and does not adequately reflect the complexities of the role, and requested a review and improvements. A small number commented that money is not a motivator for foster carers or that the allowance for children should be kept separate from payments for foster carers. Conversely, a few noted that the current system is effective and well understood and that the SRA helped to provide consistency in payments.

Q20. Do you think there should be a national approach to fees for foster carers?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	63	14	23
All answering (%)	**79**	**82**	**18**	**-**
Individuals	49	82	18	-
Organisations	30	83	17	-

Among those who answered Q20 (77% of all respondents), over four fifths (82%) agreed there should be a national approach to fees for foster carers while 18% were opposed. Over four fifths of both individuals (82%) and organisations (83%) supported the proposal.

Almost three quarters of respondents commented to explain their answer. The most common themes were suggestions for what a national approach to fees for foster carers should look like, that it would provide greater clarity, and that would be fair.

Suggestions for a national approach to fees

Several respondents made a range of suggestions about what a national approach to fees for foster carers could include, such as the introduction of a national minimum fee which may support carer recruitment if published, fee increases, and standardised fees potentially with some flexibility. Comments similar to that in Q19 were made, calling for employment status and salaries for foster carers. A desire for a national approach beyond fees was expressed, to include allowances, additional payments and retainer fees.

Benefits of adopting a national approach

Several respondents thought that a national approach to fees for foster carers would achieve more certainty, transparency, simplicity, clarity, and consistency across areas and agencies, allowing for easier movement for foster carers between them. A recurring theme was that a national approach would also create parity, fairness, and equity. Namely, it would reduce variation across the country so that foster carers are paid the same for doing the same job. It was also thought to support foster carers' feeling valued and respected.

“Yes, we need to eradicate the potential detriment that some carers can experience depending on who they are approved by. We want to see foster carers be remunerated fairly and proportionately for the complex task that they undertake.” – East Ayrshire Council

It was noted by several respondents that a national approach could improve recruitment and retention of foster carers. Some detailed that nationwide consistency could also help to reduce competition between areas and agencies. In turn, it was thought that this could help to reduce children being placed out of their area and give carers more choice on where they foster and for which agency.

> "Local authorities currently use fees (as do agencies) to outbid others. This puts us in competition with each other, and if foster carers are recruited by an agency/local authority that is not their own local authority this leads to children being placed out of area. We need to end this practice now." - Individual

General support for a national approach was expressed by some respondents.

Vary by needs, cost of living and experience

Several respondents felt that fees should vary. Views included that this could cater for different children's needs or ages, particularly by paying more to carers undertaking specialist placements. Some at Q20 and some at Q21 suggested varying fees to take account of the cost of living, which was noted to be higher in certain areas. The need for regional cost differences - such as council tax and housing costs - to be reflected within fees or an additional payment was also suggested. Some felt that fees should vary to recognise different levels of carer experience or knowledge, and the type of care provided.

Other comments

Two respondents disagreed with a national approach and highlighted complexities in implementation, for example the potential it could lead to some foster carers receiving less money than currently, reducing recruitment or risking foster care family breakdowns.

Q21. Do you think there should be a national approach to additional payments?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	59	13	28
All answering (%)	**74**	**82**	**18**	**-**
Individuals	47	85	15	-
Organisations	27	78	22	-

Among those who answered Q21 (72% of all respondents), 82% felt there should be a national approach to additional payments while 18% did not. A clear majority of individuals and organisations agreed with the proposal, at 85% and 77% respectively.

Two thirds of respondents commented at Q21. The most common themes were that a national approach could create fairness, suggestions for what additional payments could be provided for, and general expressions of agreement.

Agreement and benefits

A recurring theme was that a national approach to additional payments could help to create parity, fairness, equity and consistency across areas. It was also suggested that it could streamline support and reduce the number of foster carers moving between local authorities for increased payments.

General expressions of support were made by some respondents, noting standardisation would be beneficial. A small number noted a national approach could minimise competition between agencies and areas, resulting in fewer carers moving between areas and fewer children being placed out of area. One respondent commented that for events such as birthdays, costs for food and presents are the same across the country and there should not be variation in additional payments.

Purpose of additional payments

Some respondents suggested what additional payments should be made, introduced or increased for. A range of individual suggestions included:

- The cost of petrol for rural carers
- Home insurance and excesses
- Emergencies
- Damage to home or items in home by children
- Sick pay
- To cover periods between placements
- Clothing and shoes for children
- Starting placements
- Birthdays, Christmas and holidays
- Additional qualifications and roles
- Caring for children with complex additional needs

Suggestions for implementation

Another theme was suggestions for implementation. These included the need for set criteria, associated funds, minimum payments that can be added to by local authorities, and guidance on good practice. A small number expressed the view that additional payments should be at the discretion of local authorities or IFAs.

Disagreement

Disagreement with a national approach to additional payments was expressed by a small number of respondents, suggesting that there could be unintended consequences to consider. A few individuals commented that circumstances and needs are too variable to have a national approach and highlighted the potential negative financial implications for local authorities if no extra funding is provided by central government.

Q22. Should the financial model for foster carers include a retainer fee for when a foster carer does not have a child placed with them?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	65	6	29
All answering (%)	**73**	**92**	**8**	**-**
Individuals	48	94	6	-
Organisations	25	88	12	-

Around seven in ten of all respondents (71%) answered Q22, with high levels of support for the proposal overall (92%) and among both individuals (94%) and organisations (88%).

Almost two thirds of respondents provided a response to explain their answer at Q22. The most common themes, from most to least prevalent, were that retainer fees would help with carer recruitment and retention, could recognise that foster carers may not have other income, and provide carers with financial stability and predictability.

Benefits of a retainer fee

Including a retainer fee for foster carers was thought by several respondents to help with recruitment and retention. It was suggested that a retainer fee could make carers feel valued and respected, could be beneficial for carer wellbeing by reducing stress and burnout, and reduce uncertainty between placements. These benefits could, in turn, help recruit and retain carers generally and within specific agencies and areas.

> “When a child leaves there is a period of mourning, and for everyone’s mental health you should be able to take time to heal without the added burden of financial stress.” - Individual

Several respondents thought a retainer fee would recognise that carers may experience periods of not working or with reduced or low income if they do not have a placement. As some carers may be reliant on their foster carer's income to pay their mortgage and bills, periods without a placement can mean they need to find other temporary work. It was, therefore, noted by several respondents that a retainer fee could help provide carers with predictability and financial stability. It was also noted that some essentials, such as car and home maintenance, are ongoing and need to be paid for, even if a child is not currently with a foster carer. Other brief comments supporting a retainer fee noted it was more realistic and like other jobs where people are paid for breaks or being on call.

> “Improving financial security for carers through a system of retainers is important. Many do not feel the income is sufficiently secure to get by if, for whatever reason, they don’t have a child or children placed with them.” – UNISON Scotland

Some respondents noted the need to ensure the right placements and matches are made when considering the introduction of a retention fee. They thought that a retainer fee could support this by encouraging placement changes or rejections if they are not the right match rather than foster carers keeping with their placement or accepting unsuitable placements out of financial need.

Considerations for implementation

How a retainer fee could be achieved within the existing financial model was explored by some respondents. This included suggestions that retainer fees should be consistent with clear conditions and should be time-limited, with one specifying a maximum of 28 days. Conversely, one respondent suggested a retainer fee should be available indefinitely if the foster carer is approved and available, including during allegation investigations. Other singular comments suggested a fee should cover when carers are supporting a child to move onto another placement, and that it should be implemented in the same way as additional payments.

Some respondents expressed a view that a retainer fee should only be paid in certain circumstances, such as if the carer is available for another placement, or when a match has been made but the child has not yet moved in.

Other themes

Another theme was disagreement with a retainer fee, with comments that it is unnecessary in practice and is already happening. Some raised concerns about paying retainer fees, including that it could require substantial change to the existing financial model and increased costs for local authorities and IFAs, while one commented that it should be up to agencies to determine whether they pay a retainer fee.

Q23. Do you think there should be a national approach for Continuing Care allowances and fees?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	72	3	25
All answering (%)	**77**	**96**	**4**	**-**
Individuals	48	96	4	-
Organisations	29	97	3	-

Among those answering Q23 (75% of all respondents), almost all (96%) expressed the view that continuing care allowances and fees should be governed by a national approach.

Just over two thirds of respondents left a comment at Q23. The most common themes in order of prevalence were the need for Continuing Care, greater consistency in Continuing Care allowances and fees, and the current Continuing Care system.

Need for continuing care

Many respondents used this question to comment on the need for funded Continuing Care for young people. They detailed current challenges, highlighting that many young people are not ready to leave care and need ongoing support to transition into adulthood. The lack of funding for foster carers to provide this ongoing support was highlighted, with some using their own funds to support these young people. Respondents highlighted that a national approach for Continuing Care allowances and fees may help to mitigate this, a view endorsed by attendees at a few engagement events.

Greater consistency and fairness

Several respondents highlighted the need for greater consistency, standardisation and clarity in the fees and allowances for Continuing Care across IFAs and local authorities. Some supported a move to a national approach to reduce any disadvantage experienced by carers or young people based solely on where they live.

> "There are inconsistencies across the country in what allowances are paid to young people who are in Continuing Care, and the Scottish Recommended Allowance does not stipulate what the allowance should be or include Continuing Care. To prevent this postcode lottery a national approach should be considered to continuing care allowance" - North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

Brief statements in support of a national approach for Continuing Care allowances and fees were made by some respondents. Where detail was provided, it was felt this could help to create parity, fairness, and equity and minimise disadvantage to young people.

Implementation considerations

Some respondents made comments on changes required and considerations for a national approach, including calls for:

- Additional funding from the Scottish Government to make the proposal feasible.
- Allowances for children with complex needs, such as disabilities, within Continuing Care.
- Minimum rates, which local authorities can increase, with variable options to adapt to individual needs.
- Reduced allowances that cover food and household costs, with the young people in Continuing Care placement taking some financial responsibility.

Q24. Would an enhanced framework of transparency with a legal requirement, for example, on local authorities and independent fostering agencies to publish foster care allowances assist foster carers and wider recruitment and retention?

Four fifths of respondents left a comment at Q24. Most commonly, respondents gave their general support to the proposal, though less-mentioned themes included that transparency might not be helpful, consistency is needed, and an enhanced framework could help potential carers make more informed decisions.

Support for an enhanced framework

Many respondents agreed with the proposal for an enhanced framework, with comments ranging from a brief 'yes' to fuller explanations, such as the need for clear information or that it would act as an incentive to maintain minimum allowance rates.

Some also suggested the proposal would promote consistency, for similar reasons to those outlined in Q9, or felt it would be more aligned with other arrangements for the use of public funds. A few respondents felt it could help with recruitment or retention, for instance by managing expectations or promoting equity for carers.

Some respondents supported the proposal, noting that greater transparency would assist carers or potential carers in making informed choices about what agency to work with or whether they can financially afford to become carers. Attendees at various engagement events shared these views.

> "Yes, greater consistency and transparency in this area would make it easier for foster carers to independently research agencies and make an informed choice." - Individual
>
> "In our view, an enhanced framework of transparency for local authorities is a positive step." – Includem

Transparency may not be helpful

Contrasting with the theme above, some respondents, two thirds of whom were individuals, commented that transparency may not be helpful. Reasons included that the proposal:

- Could create uncertainty among carers or that people would be primarily attracted to fostering for the fee rather than to meet the needs of children.
- Would not allow fair comparisons due to differences in fees, allowances and support across agencies.
- Could create more competition between agencies including that it might encourage foster carers to move between agencies, drive up fees or allowances, or price smaller agencies out of the market.

A legal requirement is not needed

Some respondents expressed the view that a legal requirement was unnecessary, for instance, if fees were standardised or because allowances were already published.

> "There is no need to legislate for publishing foster care allowances. COSLA will continue to work with the Scottish Government and member authorities, as well as the IFAs they work with, to encourage publication of allowances." - COSLA

Suggestions for implementation

Although they did not directly answer the question, some respondents gave suggestions for how this proposal could be introduced. Ideas included using a central register, a national payment scheme with regional weighting, and providing guidance on national standards including what the clothing allowance should cover.

8. A National Register for Foster Carers

The consultation paper sets out and requests the views on the development and maintenance of a national register or database of foster carers (Q29 to Q33). Suggestions for a national register or database were raised in 2022 within the ongoing Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI). A range of options for a national register were presented in the consultation paper, such as options for it to sit independently from national and local government. The paper suggests that a national register could increase public protection, improve the ease of mobility across fostering agencies and increase safeguarding for children. It was noted that a register could support a national approach to planning and matching foster carers with children and young people.

Q29. What are your views on a national register for foster carers in Scotland?

Four fifths of respondents left a comment at Q29. Many expressed support for a national register, noting it could enhance regulation and safeguarding and benefit carers. However, it was also noted that it may not be necessary and that it could be too resource-intensive.

Enhanced regulation

Many expressed support for a national register leaving brief comments suggesting it is needed, would be beneficial, and is a good idea. It was felt that a national register could improve service quality, information sharing, monitoring, and data collection. Attendees at one event also felt this way, viewing it as a way to prevent out-of-area placements,

Several respondents noted that a key positive of a national register with a centralised approved carer list could be enhanced regulation and improved safeguarding of children. A current gap in regulation in this area was highlighted. One respondent suggested the national register could be used to investigate carers where standards are not upheld and to standardise qualifications, accountability, reviews, and training.

“I think it's important that foster carers are regulated in the same way other childcare workers are” – Individual

“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. The main function of the register must be for sharing information regarding registration decisions nationally to support safeguarding.” – Centre for Excellence for Children’s Care and Protection (CELCIS)

Benefits for carers and children

Some respondents highlighted potential benefits for carers of having a national register, particularly that it could increase the status, recognition and value placed on the role. It was also felt that a national register could support communication with, and development opportunities for, carers, and increase their ability to transfer to other local authorities.

A reduction in bureaucracy and administration was noted by some respondents as another potential benefit of a national register. In particular, it could reduce assessment duplication if carers move between services or local authorities and facilitate transfers. A small number suggested it could maximise the use of carers due to there being fewer gaps in placements and helping to support matching.

National register is unnecessary and resource-intensive

Conversely, several respondents expressed the view that a national register was not needed or necessary, suggesting it duplicates existing safeguards and processes that do not need to change or provides little benefit or improvement. Participants across engagement events shared this view.

> "In terms of regulation, there are already clear processes for approving and reviewing foster carer registration through fostering panels. All fostering services are regulated through the Care Inspectorate. It is therefore unclear what the national register would contribute to this." – COSLA
>
> "We already have robust safeguards in place such as references from previous agencies and local authorities as part of assessment and transfer processes. We would question what an introduction of a national register would do that we are not already doing." - Aberlour

Some respondents generally disagreed with the national register. This included individual comments that it could be unhelpful and not the right approach to improving safeguarding, that it could have a negative impact on the recruitment of future foster carers, and concern about how it would work in practice given a current lack of consistency nationwide. Some respondents commented that a national register would be too resource-intensive. In particular, the cost to the government to implement, additional bureaucracy, and challenges in keeping the national register up to date were noted, as was a call for resources to be prioritised on care over a national register.

Suggestions for implementation

Various suggestions for implementing a national register were made by several respondents. Learning from other national register approaches, such as the Safeguarders Panel in the Children's Hearing System, was recommended when developing this proposal. Suggestions included the need to ensure that a national register is:

- Confidential, with appropriate safeguarding and data protection.
- Kept up to date.
- Developed with organisations representing foster carers.
- Set up so carers can view and comment on their file.
- Including the skills, experience and learning undertaken by carers.
- Able to be used for matching.

Some respondents did not want the register to be used for matching, stating they wanted matching to remain local and using current systems, and expressing concern that a national register could lead to national matching. This is discussed further in Q32. A few

respondents expressed caution that the national register needs to clearly benefit children and not act as a barrier to the recruitment of foster carers.

Need for more information

The need for more information was raised by several respondents and a small number suggested further consultation. They expressed a view that the benefits and purpose of a national register were unclear and between one and a few respondents each called for more information on:

- The risks of a register and mitigations.
- Data protection, safeguarding and consent issues.
- Whether easier or improved matching would be possible through a national register.
- What information would be held, who would have access to the register, and who would be responsible for maintaining it.
- Clarity on the alignment with existing arrangements, such as with the Care Inspectorate activities and Fostering Panels.

Other comments

Other singular comments were made, including a desire for easier mechanisms to transfer between agencies but not through a national register, and a suggestion for regional registers rather than a national register.

Q30. If a register is introduced where should the register be held?

Just under two thirds of respondents commented at Q30. Various views were detailed, and there was no clear consensus on where the proposed national register should be held.

Central government

Some thought the register should sit within government, with respondents either specifying the Scottish Government, government-level generally, or central government. Comments stated this would be necessary due to the level of information and learning provided by the register, because the government is responsible for funding social care, and that it should not be held by an independent organisation.

Specific suggestions

Some respondents suggested specific independent organisations. Suggestions included AFKA, which holds the adoption register, The Fostering Network, a professional body, and the third sector, with others simply calling for an independent body to be responsible.

"The register should be held by a third sector organisation who can coordinate information sharing and support of data being held in a safe and well-managed way." – Adoption UK Scotland

Suggestions for a register to be held by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) were highlighted by some respondents, noting they have the structures and processes for registering childcare workers. Some respondents commented that a register should be held nationally or centrally – though not necessarily by government - so that information is

consistent and transparent, noting it could be resource-intensive for local authorities to manage. A small number suggested it could be held by The Care Inspectorate as they inspect fostering services. Holding it at a local level, such as within local authorities or IFAs, was suggested by a small number.

Other comments

Some respondents were unsure and requested further information on who would have access, the purpose of a register, and data protection, or called for further consultation. A few commented that the register should be held securely. One respondent commented that carers should know who has accessed their information and why, while another commented that the national register should be able to be accessed by local authorities.

Q31. What are your views on the potential to linking continuous professional development to a register?

Three quarters of respondents left a comment at Q31. While positive comments were most common, a variety of perspectives were detailed.

Reduction in training repetition and further benefits

Several respondents made general positive comments and agreed with the linking of continuous professional development (CPD) to a register. It was mentioned that this linking could be useful for the sector by reducing the repetition of training when foster carers relocate, giving greater priority to CPD and providing oversight of skill levels.

As noted by some respondents, the linking could help demonstrate carer knowledge and skills. It could allow for consistency in training and quality of care for children, show carers' experience, and identify instances of a lack of CPD. Some also suggested that making access to training and CPD easier could improve the quality of care being provided.

"I think this would be helpful when looking at the skills and experience needed to best support individual children and young people." - Individual

Considerations if implemented

Other factors to consider regarding the linking of CPD to a register were made by some respondents. This included:

- The need for training records to be kept up to date on the register.
- Whether it could support matching.
- Concerns it could negatively impact foster carer recruitment and retention.
- The need for CPD to be consistent and monitored for quality

Some respondents questioned whether, given the lack of employee and professional status of foster carers, they should be required to undertake CPD. However, there were also comments that this could be a positive step towards a more formal status and a few respondents made general comments that CPD is already expected.

Providing additional support to address barriers to CPD was advocated by some. This included suggestions for paid study leave to complete CPD, childcare availability, supporting carers to learn in styles suited to their own needs, ensuring there is mandatory CPD and upskilling, and making foster carers feel supported through training.

Reasons for disagreement

Concerns with linking were made by some respondents. It was thought this could over-professionalise foster care, create additional pressure and burdens on carers and potentially result in some being disadvantaged if they only have mandatory training. There was a concern that a record of training or CPD may not be accurate or kept up to date.

Some respondents expressed the view that linking a register with CPD is not necessary or that existing processes are sufficient and should be kept as they are. Brief comments disagreeing with this suggestion were made by some respondents, with comments that it would not work for foster carers and would have little benefit. Another theme was that linking to CPD or other training could be unfair to some carers who might not have as much formal training but do have more experience, knowledge, and skills. Respondents noted that experience and testimonials are also important. A few felt that IFAs or local authorities should be responsible for recording their own carers' training and CPD.

> "I feel there is a lot of pressure on training which I agree is necessary, but the number of training courses attended does not determine how good the carer is" - Individual

Other comments

Some respondents requested further information on the purpose and benefits of linking, whether this would support matching, whether carers would be disadvantaged, details on how the current CPD systems work, and what information would be held on a national register before considering whether it should be linked to CPD. One commented that a national framework of learning would be helpful instead.

Q32. What are your views on a national approach to foster care placement matching?

Three quarters of respondents commented at Q32. A range of views were detailed, with a focus on supporting placement matching that best suits children's needs.

Prioritise the right placement matching

Several respondents highlighted the need for foster care placement matching to focus on ensuring a placement matches the needs of each child. Support for a national approach was given, if it was to result in better matches; however, there was also a concern that this may not be the case. Respondents emphasised the need for lasting, happy, successful, culturally matched placements and for matching to happen more often. Alternatively, Staf highlighted the need to be open and honest when matching had not worked well, such as where relationships became strained after the 'honeymoon' period, to allow healthy exploration and a change in placement if necessary.

"The full matching process is critical in getting it right for children and families for it to be successful match and therefore a database would need to ensure that a database is limited and matching needs to be progressed through the relevant agency or authority." - Aberlour

Support children to remain close to their home, community and local area

Several respondents advocated for children being kept close to their homes, families, and communities. They felt a national approach could conflict with this priority and current commitments which are in place to support continuity in children's lives in terms of consistency of services, existing relationships with family and peers, and education. Similarly, several respondents suggested that placement matching should remain at a local level and not through a national approach. Comments supported retaining local placements, concern that a national approach could make this more difficult, and that it may result in more out-of-area placements against the best interests of children.

"This has to be done at a local level. A national approach to matching would cause significant confusion, blurring of boundaries and legal status leading to risks and lack of clarity around who is responsible for what. There are already challenges experienced locally when a child is being cared for in our area but is the responsibility of another local authority area being cared for in an IFA." – West Lothian Council

"A key proposal within this consultation is that children in need of foster care should be kept in their local community wherever possible and multiple moves, which can destabilise a child and further traumatise them, should be minimised. There is compelling evidence that multiple moves and placement instability is a predictor of negative development outcomes for children and young people. CHS fully support any work to address the availability of stable, foster placements in a child's local community so they can maintain friendships and key relationships which lead to better outcomes." – Children's Hearings Scotland

Reasons for agreement with a national approach

Brief comments in support of a national approach to placement matching were a recurring theme. Some respondents thought a national approach would be useful for national matching or relocating, where local placement options are not possible or suitable, or where a national relocation is better for the child - for example, for safety reasons, where there is no contact with birth family members or when a child wants a fresh start in a new area. One respondent highlighted that foster carers and their skill sets in a different local authority might better suit the particular needs of some children.

"All children in Scotland must be treated equally, regardless of which local authority they reside within. For this reason, we believe a national approach to foster care placement matching could be a positive move, if it is linked to ensuring there is an end to inconsistency in funding and support for children depending on which local authority they live in." – Barnardo's Scotland

Concerns and considerations

Several respondents disagreed with this proposal. This included comments that a national approach would not support matching, concerns about challenges and complexities in implementing this proposal, and a concern that this could disrupt placements.

> "Disruption of foster care placements is harmful to both the child and the foster carers and increases the possibility of future disruption to the child. It should be avoided as far as possible. A national approach to foster care matching simply would not have the flexibility to respond to immediate need and be nimble enough to cope with changing demand." – Scottish Association of Social Work

Some respondents requested more information. This included how a national approach to foster care placement matching aligns with keeping children and young people in their local community and maintaining connections and the benefits and scope of a national approach. Other less common reasons for disagreeing included:

- It is unrealistic in practice as placements tend to occur in crisis management rather than through matching.
- This approach could create additional bureaucracy and system complexity, reducing efficiency.
- Local authorities are reluctant to share resources with other local authorities.
- Placement matching should be done by those well known to the child and with the child's voice taken into consideration.
- That this proposal is unnecessary and that the current system is sufficient.

Q33. 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?

Just under two thirds of respondents commented at Q33. A range of themes was evident depending on how respondents interpreted the question.

Benefits from improved data collection

In terms of building an evidence base, a recurring theme was the need to improve data collection through improved data sharing, developing an agreed data set across the country, and to better use existing datasets and information collected. It was suggested that improved data collection could support the understanding of the number of carers and placements, support analysis and the identification of trends, and enable the comparison of data across the country. It was noted that the Care Inspectorate already has data which could be used. However, one respondent suggested that the questions they use for data collection need improvements to support data accuracy. Another respondent commented that extra data requirements should not be too cumbersome for local authorities.

> "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).” – CELCIS

Some suggested practice changes that may be needed to support better data collection, such as supporting social workers and carers to complete forms and record information.

Other comments

Some called for greater funding and investment to support local authorities with resource planning (see Q36). A small number of respondents commented that a national register could have a role in resource planning. One respondent questioned whether the Scottish Government should have a role in data on placements to support local resource planning.

9. Status, Recognition and Value

The consultation paper reports feedback from fostering services, foster carers, and those representing them, that more needs to be done to improve the status, value and respect given to foster carers. This chapter presents the analysis of responses to a number of questions which sought views on how this could be achieved, including proposals about:

- Establishing a national charter of support for foster carers and fostering services that would be co-designed with carers and local partners.
- Further guidance to help foster carers in decision-making.
- How to respond to allegations and processes for raising concerns.

National Charter

Q25. What are your views on the proposal for a national charter of support for foster carers?

Three quarters of all respondents commented at Q25. The most prevalent themes were support for the proposal, that a national charter must be backed by action, that a charter was not necessary, and that a charter would clarify expectations for foster carer support.

Support for a national charter

By far the most prevalent theme was agreement with the proposal for a national charter of support for foster carers. Comments included that it 'made sense', was a 'good idea', and that it was 'needed' and 'welcomed'. Other views included that it would help carers feel valued, potentially reduce the need for IFAs and promote carer credibility on an equal footing alongside other professionals.

"Key insights shared by foster carers indicate a warm reception to the idea of a national charter of support." - Safe Families and Home for Good

Any charter must be actioned

To be meaningful, several respondents and attendees at an engagement event felt any charter for support for foster carers would need to be backed by action. Views suggested that a charter was good in principle but would require implementation, such as through allocating resources, ensuring it was legally enforced and monitored and that cultural change among social workers would be needed, such as attitudinal change or to increase their capacity to offer support. One suggested way to promote adherence to a charter was to align the charter with the Care Inspectorate's role, as this could enable a redress mechanism in cases where the charter is not being upheld.

A charter is unnecessary

Several respondents felt a charter was either unnecessary, for instance, because existing support was already included in foster care agreements or set out in organisational guidance. Some highlighted that the Fostering Network already had a national charter in place. Some left negative comments, indicating a charter would not be useful, that it would not create meaningful change, that it was not a priority, or that it could be perceived rigidly,

so that support outwith the charter would not be offered. Attendees at one engagement event felt a register would not give rich data about matching placements. They, and others attending the Community Placement Subgroup event, expressed the view that a charter would be of little value.

> "Fostering services by law are required to ask foster carers to sign a fostering agreement which specifies what foster carers can expect from the fostering service and what the fostering service can expect from foster carers, so this is already in place." - Individual

A charter would clarify the expectations of foster carers

The ability of a national charter to clarify the expectations of foster carers and promote consistency was highlighted by several respondents. Consistency across Scotland, as well as between local authorities and IFAs, was mentioned. It was suggested that improved consistency resulting from a charter could create a better understanding of the role of foster carers. A charter was also viewed as a way to provide a clearer framework of rights, responsibilities and support, such as making remuneration explicit, setting out the role of foster carers in decision-making or how carers should be treated.

> "A national charter would help set out national expectations. A charter would be helpful in terms of carers seeing national support for what they do." - Perth and Kinross Council

Views on how a charter could operate

Views on how a charter could be introduced were raised by some respondents, including:

- The child's voice should be centred in the charter, including engaging with them to develop a charter, and that it should be aligned with the Promise.
- A charter should be developed in conjunction with foster carers, frontline workers and other stakeholders.
- Alignment with existing processes and documents, such as the Care Inspectorate's Quality Framework for fostering, adoption, and adult placement services and health and social care standards, is required.
- It should describe a new culture around foster care, for instance, considering the balance between foster care as a vocation and the professionalism of the role.
- An independent complaints body is needed.
- IFAs should be able to contribute to its development.

Aspects that a charter should cover were also suggested, such as carer, professional, and agency responsibilities, the introduction of automatic 'relevant person' status in children's hearings, e.g. to secure the rights of carers to fully participate in a child's hearing and care planning and ensuring that carers have full information about a child.

> "Any charter needs to set out responsibilities of foster carers, not just of agencies and above all, children should be centred. Nevertheless, a national approach to this area is positive."- Stirling Council

Q26. What else could national government do to increase the value, status and recognition of foster carers?

Almost three quarters of all respondents commented at Q26. In addition, respondents left comments on the issue of increasing the value, status and recognition of foster carers throughout their responses, particularly at Q11, Q12, Q15 and Q25. Those comments have been incorporated into the analysis of this question.

A range of views was expressed, with the most prevalent themes being that foster carers should have comparable recognition or status with other professionals working to support children and families, that more financial support or support in kind should be given, that cultural change is needed, and that carers should have employment rights or be salaried.

Carers should be treated the same as other professionals

More respect and recognition should be given to foster carers, similar to that afforded to other professionals, according to several respondents. Views included that the skills of carers should be respected, that the role should have legal standing, that they should be registered with the SSSC, or that other professionals should be more open with foster carers and enable access to relevant meetings. For instance, some called for foster carers to be granted automatic rights to be a 'relevant person' in the Children's Hearing System or to advocate on behalf of children in child protection cases. The need to avoid a perception of foster carers being 'glorified babysitters' was raised by a few respondents, including attendees at various engagement events.

"Just for you to remember we are doing a great job trying to support these young people. We are human, though, and like most parents will make mistakes. Try not to be so hard on us when we do. We do this job because we care and want to improve the lives of all young ones, to give them a loving and supportive home. All we ask is for you to recognise this." – Individual

Provide more financial support or support in kind

Several respondents called for improved financial support or benefits in kind to better value the role of foster carers. Views expressed were similar to those raised in Q4. Additional points raised included paying the minimum wage, building in annual increments, for instance, to take account of inflation, offering tax breaks, and separating the fee from the children's allowance. Attendees at one engagement event suggested reduced-price tickets to attend the cinema or parks.

"Give us allowances that increase with inflation so that we don't have to fight for the means to be able to provide for Scotland's most vulnerable children." - Individual

Cultural change is needed

The government could enhance the value, status and recognition of foster carers by supporting cultural change, according to several respondents. This could be by raising awareness of what foster carers do and how it benefits children and young people, while

addressing stigma towards children in care. For instance, some suggested national awareness campaigns or holding recognition award events for foster carers.

The Promise Scotland called for the vision and plan to be strengthened to ensure the specific needs of groups that face discrimination in and around the care system are properly understood and reflect, including those of black and minority ethnic communities. Others suggested addressing the knowledge and attitudes of social workers such as reviewing the content of social work education or having student placements in foster services.

Staf called for a shift in thinking around retention, noting that there should be recognition of the valuable role foster parents could make to a successful model of lifelong care. They felt this could be achieved through enabling an environment that continued to support relationships beyond the formal fostering part, bringing the family experience of those in foster care closer to that of their non-care experienced peers.

"The national campaign mentioned earlier is a good opportunity to increase the value, status and recognition of foster carers. Aligning this with the Each and Every Child recommendations could help in ensuring a campaign that profiles the valuable work of foster carers and challenges preconceptions that the public may hold." - COSLA

Place more trust in foster carers

The need for carers to be taken seriously or trusted by other professionals was emphasised by some respondents, two thirds of whom were individuals. For instance, attendees at one engagement event suggested foster carers felt scrutinised or constantly assessed and that this was not consistent across Scotland. Calls were made to include carers in decision-making forums when advocating for the child's best interests such as requests for funding, within children's plans or Children's Hearings, or in shaping policy. This is detailed more at Q28.

Other themes

Other themes highlighted by some respondents were to give carers employment rights (see Q19), provide more training or qualifications (see Q14-15), provide more support to carers (see Q17), introduce a register of foster carers (see Q29), and provide more social opportunities or peer support (see Q17).

Day-to-day decisions

The consultation paper states that day-to-day decisions made for children by foster carers depend on the local authority, safeguarding of the child's health, development, and welfare, and parental agreement. Existing Scottish Government guidance supports this.

Q27. Is the existing framework under which foster carers can make decisions clear?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	22	45	33

All answering (%)	**69**	**33**	**67**	**-**
Individuals	45	33	67	-
Organisations	24	33	67	-

Of those answering Q27 (67% of all respondents), two thirds (67%) felt the existing framework is not clear, compared to 33% who felt it is. Similar results were recorded by both individuals and organisations, with 67% of each group expressing the view that the existing framework is unclear.

Three in five respondents left a comment to explain their answer. The most common themes, in order of prevalence, were that the existing framework for decision-making is too complex and requires simplification, that decisions often depend on social worker discretion, and that the existing framework is generally clear.

Complex and requires simplification

Many respondents felt that the current framework under which foster carers make decisions is unclear, noting that there is a lack of information, that it is inconsistent, ambiguous, and creates additional layers of bureaucracy. This was found to be challenging for foster carers and knowing what decisions they could make. Calls were made for updated guidance with good practice, along with updates to the framework, and having a centralised national framework.

Dependent on social worker, legal status and area

Several respondents detailed that guidance on foster carer decision-making is often at the discretion of social workers. They noted that this can result in unclear and changeable guidance, slow responses, and issues with changes in social workers.

Some respondents highlighted differences in decision-making depending on the legal status and medical consent of children, resulting in case-by-case decision-making. A small number of respondents highlighted a lack of consistency across different local authorities, resulting in inconsistent application of the framework and advice given to foster carers.

Generally clear

The existing framework for foster carer decision-making was felt to be clear by several respondents, such as being easy to read and understand. Specific areas of the framework respondents highlighted as being clear included those about permanence planning, placement agreements, decisions that social workers need to make for children in foster care and parental responsibilities.

Views of birth families

Challenges when birth families hold different views around decisions for the child to foster carers were highlighted by several respondents. These respondents expressed the view that decisions made by parents are not always in the best interest of the child. They also suggested that decision-making can be dependent on the relationship between parents and social workers. Some respondents advocated for foster carers to have increased decision-making abilities and support in making decisions for children in their care, such as for haircuts, school trips and other day-to-day decisions.

"This is a challenging area and there is a balance to managing risk. As the Promise illustrates, and as we support other types of carers, we need to adopt a strength-based approach to support dialogue between birth parents and foster carers and enable family life. If carers can pass an assessment to become a foster carer, it makes sense that they can be trusted as competent to make day-to-day decisions." – Stirling Council

Q28. Would further guidance, for example, good practice, be helpful to support decision-making for foster carers (sometimes called delegated decision-making) be helpful? If yes, please explain what you'd like it to include.

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	58	10	32
All answering (%)	**70**	**86**	**14**	**-**
Individuals	44	80	20	-
Organisations	26	96	4	-

Of those answering Q28 (68% of all respondents), most (86%) agreed that further guidance would be helpful to support decision-making. Four fifths of individuals (80%) and almost all organisations (96%) favoured this approach.

Just over half of respondents commented at Q28. The most common themes were suggestions for what guidance could cover, that further guidance would provide clarity and understanding for foster carers, and general agreement with the need for further guidance.

Suggestions for what further guidance should cover

Several respondents suggested what further guidance should cover, identifying existing gaps and where additional clarification would be beneficial. They requested a simple guide with good practice examples, and guidance on decisions about haircuts, medical needs, taking children to church, shoes and clothing, diet, ear piercings, sleepovers, weekends away, school permission slips, and school trips. It was also suggested to have guidance for when birth families hold a different view. One respondent suggested having a launch and awareness raising of the new guidance. Rather than new guidance, some respondents suggested updating the existing 2015 decision-making.

Support for further guidance

Some respondents made general comments on the need for further guidance on decision-making, noting it would be useful for foster carers and that there is currently a gap in existing guidance. Further guidance was felt to provide greater clarity and understanding of decisions that foster carers can make to support children in their care. Two respondents commented that improved guidance can support normalising life for children and young people, with foster carers able to make decisions without needing to check with social workers or birth families. One respondent noted the need to ensure that further guidance does not negatively impact foster carer recruitment by placing too much decision-making responsibility on foster carers.

Disagreement

Disagreement with having further guidance was noted by some respondents, mainly local authorities. They expressed the view that there is already existing advice and that this needs to be applied more widely, rather than developing further guidance.

Allegations and raising concerns

The consultation paper sought views on managing allegations and raising concerns, explaining that the 2013 managing allegation best practice guidance was published by the Scottish Government and that improvements to this allegation management practice were suggested within a recent survey of foster carers. Existing policies within local authorities for foster carers to raise concerns without adversely impacting on themselves were noted, along with how foster carers are well placed to highlight child protection issues.

Q34. Should the Scottish Government update its guidance on managing allegations against foster carers?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	59	6	35
All answering (%)	**67**	**91**	**9**	**-**
Individuals	42	88	12	-
Organisations	25	96	4	-

Among those answering Q34 (65% of all respondents), most (91%) agreed that the Scottish Government should update its guidance on managing allegations against foster carers. High levels of agreement were recorded by both individuals (88%) and organisations (96%).

Seven in ten respondents commented at Q34. The most common themes in order of prevalence were reasons why the guidance should be updated and to increase support for foster carers.

Support and reasoning for the need for updated guidance

Many respondents supported updated guidance on managing allegations against foster carers and highlighted areas they thought were most in need of updating. Issues raised by some respondents, in order of prevalence, included:

- A general need to update the guidance, such as for regular updating or to refresh language and take account of best practice and research learnings.
- To improve procedures relating to managing allegations, to clarify timescales and processes such as information sharing, roles and responsibilities, assessments and monitoring and outcomes of allegations.
- To ensure a positive experience for children and young people, such as by adopting the Scottish Child Interview model, centralising children's views, including those of very young children, embedding children's rights and advocacy, and addressing the

need for trauma-informed and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder-informed approaches.
- A need to update the guidance in relation to current child protection procedures, for instance, to review whether children in foster care should be included in the Child Protection Register.

A few respondents highlighted the following issues worth updating:

- To address social worker contact with foster carers or families, such as social worker inspections, to build relationships with children and young people and to ensure regular home visits to reduce the risk of placement breakdown.
- To incorporate implications of social media use in relation to allegations.

> "The Scottish Government should ensure processes and guidance uphold recommendations from the UN Committee on the rights of the child, including: Access to justice - ensure children have access to confidential, child-friendly and independent complaint mechanisms, including those in foster care. Combatting violence and abuse - develop measures to prevent violence against children in alternative care; investigate all cases of abuse and ill-treatment of children in alternative care, ensure adequate sanction of perpetrators and reparation for victims, and ensure expert support for child victims." - Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Need for increased protection and support for foster carers

Calls for increased protection and support for foster carers following allegations were made by many respondents, the majority of whom were individuals. They highlighted that allegations can have negative impacts on foster carers and can be damaging to relationships between foster carers and other services.

The need to include allegations in initial training for foster carers was advocated by attendees at an engagement event, as it was felt that this may influence whether someone wishes to proceed with their training or not. It was also highlighted that allegations can lead to people leaving foster caring, a point raised at another engagement event. It was noted that foster carers do not always feel like they are treated with respect and listened to following an allegation.

Suggestions for improved support for foster carers in these instances included:

- Increasing communication with foster carers throughout the allegation process.
- Providing HR, emotional and legal support for foster carers, similar to what is available to social workers.
- Offering therapy during and after allegations, and the need to view allegations through a trauma-informed lens, were points raised by attendees at one engagement event.
- Ensuring that allegations are investigated.
- Treating foster carers as innocent until proven guilty.

Increased communication with social workers and protections when social workers make allegations against foster carers were also highlighted Attendees at an engagement event

suggested foster carers should have access to advocacy while allegations are investigated. Union support for foster carers was also suggested.

> "We heard about poor and delayed information sharing with foster carers during periods of investigation, and even after investigations were concluded. In most of these cases, inadequate staffing in the local authority, or a lack of clear responsibilities for communication with foster carers were identified as the cause of this. Foster carers explained that the lack of information sometimes caused them more distress than the allegations as uncertainty continued to impact the family." – Includem

Other considerations

Some respondents expressed the view that there should be increased recognition that prior trauma experienced by children and young people can be a contributor to making allegations. Suggestions were made for allegation processes to be trauma-informed, and providing additional support for children and young people in these instances.

> "An allegation against foster carers can sometimes come from a child or young person unable to manage and struggling to communicate this due to experiences of trauma. Guidance should be focused on trauma-informed practice so that when issues arise, they are dealt with sensitively and support is given to get to the root cause of the allegation, whether it be a genuine safety risk or because of other things going on in a child's life." - Aberlour

Introducing guidance to create consistency across local authorities was suggested by some respondents. Individual suggestions were made that this could take the form of a charter, multi-agency guidance or a national allegations protocol. Some respondents expressed a view that foster carers should continue to be paid their fees while they are under investigation for an allegation.

A few respondents provided comments about what more can the Scottish Government do to ensure that allegations against foster carers are dealt with quickly and fairly. Singular comments included that the Care Inspectorate already ensure that timescales and standards are met, capacity and timelines can be impacted by concurrent police investigations or child protection, both of which are necessary, and to remind foster carers about their right to access advocacy. Two respondents commented that existing guidance is sufficient, while one respondent noted the need to ensure that children have access to confidential and independent complaint mechanisms.

Q35. Is there a need for the Scottish Government to take action in [relation to raising concerns]? If so, please explain why and what would be helpful, for example best practice guidance?

Almost two thirds of respondents commented at Q35. The most common themes, from most to least prevalent, were the need for policies and procedures to support and encourage foster carers to raise concerns without any adverse impact, that action is not required and, conversely, reasons why action is needed.

Requires policies and procedures

Several respondents thought it would be beneficial for policies and procedures to be in place to support and encourage foster carers to raise concerns. Suggestions varied between these being provided by an agency, local authority or taking a national approach. A range of suggestions were made for the form these could take, including:

- Having options for foster carers to talk to independent third parties to raise concerns, in order to talk openly and in confidence.
- Creating a Scottish Government policy on raising concerns.
- Developing best practice guidelines and or standards at a Scottish Government level, to promote a consistent national approach across local authorities and agencies for raising concerns.
- Ensuring consistent following of guidelines across local authorities.
- Having whistleblower rights and protections, to protect foster carers and encourage the sharing of concerns.

> "National Guidance is needed to support [local authorities] but also would make process clearer and feel more supportive to carers themselves." - Individual

Some respondents suggested that more resourcing and education would be helpful. Suggestions included investment and resourcing for local authorities, improving the availability of guidance, greater resourcing for investigations, and training and supervision about raising concerns. One respondent suggested working with Police Scotland to review the process.

Ensuring that foster carers have full information on the processes and timelines for raising concerns, so they know what to expect, was also requested by some respondents.

Unnecessary for the Scottish Government to take action

Comments that there is no need for the Scottish Government to take action in this area were made by several respondents. It was suggested that current policies, procedures and support provided by IFAs and local authorities are sufficient and that it is not a role for the Scottish Government.

> "Speaking from an IFA point of view, I am always encouraged to raise any issue around safeguarding, policy, best practice, etc. and feel my concerns are taken seriously and acted upon without detriment to my standing with the agency." – Individual

Reasons why action is needed

Several respondents explained why they felt action is needed regarding foster carers raising concerns. They noted the need for foster carers to be able to raise concerns without consequences, to be listened to and have their concerns acted on.

Improving and addressing social worker practice was also suggested by some respondents. Challenges were highlighted around foster carers raising concerns about social workers either regarding a child's welfare or unprofessional behaviour of social workers.

10. Other issues

This chapter covers the final question which invited views on anything not covered by the consultation questions. It also contains certain themes that were raised repeatedly across multiple consultation questions but were not directly aligned to a particular question.

Q36. 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.

Almost three quarters of respondents left a comment at Q36. The most prevalent themes were that wider system changes are needed, comments about housing and cost of living support for foster carers, and to better consider the needs of children and young people.

Wider system changes

Many respondents highlighted the need for wider system changes to support the future of foster care. In addition, a few or some respondents raised this issue at other questions, notably Q2, Q6, Q10 and Q11; those comments are included in the analysis below. Key points raised included the need for broader changes within society and the care system, as well as the need for a fundamental review of how foster carers should work alongside families and other health and social care professionals. Some respondents called for greater consideration of the role of kinship care alongside this consultation, highlighting the need for greater support and protections for kinship carers and taking into account their role in the care system along with foster carers.

The need to tackle broader societal issues, which could help to prevent children from being in foster care and improve the support they receive, was also raised. This includes tackling unmet needs, poverty, housing issues, substance use, mental health, and violence against women.

Other changes suggested included:

- Addressing bureaucracy in health and social care to speed up decision-making or to improve data quality, such as foster carers making direct referrals to day care or outreach support, a view endorsed by participants at an engagement event.
- Reviewing the role of foster care in relation to other professionals or family members, such as: ensuring foster carers have the equivalent of Parental Rights when caring for a child; reviewing consent and permission arrangements; the ability to hold social workers accountable; and empowering carers and other professionals to make decisions, particularly when those go against a parent's wishes.
- Providing more resources in early years or health and social care to address recruitment, training needs and delivery, including conducting thorough reviews to identify and eliminate systematic racism and cultural biases within the foster care system, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all families.
- Whole system changes such as those that support "interconnected support systems that enable individualised responses across the continuum of care", cultural reform that focuses on family support while prioritising the safety of children, and that address changing mindsets and offer transformational leadership.

- Ensuring The Promise is fully actioned, such as focusing on the pace of change and accountability, so intended outcomes are realised.
- System changes to directly support improved outcomes for children and young people such as legislative changes so children who enter care at birth are not still in care when attending school, to improve the transition to Continuing Care arrangements or increasing practical support to families, such as funding a cleaner.

Housing and cost of living support for foster carers

The need for greater housing support for foster carers was highlighted by many respondents. Difficulties in accessing affordable, quality housing were highlighted, as were limitations depending on the size of houses that are able to be accessed. It was noted by some that bigger properties can enable foster carers to take on more children and, in particular, support keeping siblings together. Providing existing and prospective foster carers with additional support to access housing was suggested. Working with housing departments and coming up with creative solutions, such as giving foster carer loans for extensions, was suggested. Other comments highlighted challenges with damage to foster carers' homes and taking into account housing challenges in foster carer recruitment.

Several respondents highlighted the need to reduce costs related to caring, including addressing cost of living challenges, reflecting on how this can lead to difficulties in recruiting and retaining foster carers. This issue was also raised by attendees at an engagement event with professionals. Cost-related issues were wide-ranging, including: financial support with new placements; more financial support to cover bills such as heating, electricity, clothing and food; fees for supporting young people past age 18; calls for increased foster carer fees; requests for discounted or no council tax; and salaries, pensions and benefits for foster carers.

Consider the views and provide more support for children and young people

The need to further consider the views and needs of children and young people was highlighted by several respondents and by children and young people with care experience who contributed to the Who Cares? Scotland report, as well as to keep their needs at the centre of decision-making. This includes considering the needs of siblings, children and young people with disabilities, young people over 16, children and young people with FASD, cultural and religious needs, social and emotional needs, and other individual needs. Specific housing needs, such as for those with disabilities, were also noted.

Several respondents called for greater support for children and young people, particularly the need for access to information and advocacy, housing, education, and mental health support for those aged 18 and over. Attendees at one engagement event also highlighted the need for mental health support and advocated for automatic access to advocacy services.

The need for increased resourcing

The need for increased resources to support the fostering system and enable implementation of the proposals to develop a flexible fostering model was raised across questions, particularly in Q2, Q6, Q11, Q12, Q15, and Q33, as well as some at Q36. Comments on resourcing are considered here to avoid repetition.

Many comments highlighted the need to invest in social care services, as well as in fostering, to support the proposals. Perceived reductions in funding or under-funding of health and social care supports led to calls to increase funding for resources such as social workers, family support services as well as therapeutic interventions. Additionally, investment in IT and data systems or administration support was requested. A 'spend to save' mindset was advocated by attendees at one engagement event, recognising that enhanced support to enable children to remain at home was more cost-effective than other forms of care.

In turn, increased investment was viewed as a key way to strengthen support for foster carers, for instance, through having more time to communicate with or receive support from social workers. In addition, there were calls for more funding to enable key objectives of the proposals to be realised, such as employing or training more foster carers, increasing support for families at the edge of care and for family and community care-based options, and building capacity in local areas to respond to a national recruitment drive. Perceived benefits for children and young people from enhanced funding included more appropriate placements, improvements in listening and responding to their views, improved interactions with people supporting them and access to timely support.

> "Without staff and resources, how do we accomplish this?" As a first step, we suggest a thorough analysis is conducted of the staffing needed to deliver the flexible fostering approach at local levels. Currently, workers are under huge pressure to deliver the status quo of current day-to-day work of recruiting, assessing, training and supporting foster carers and supporting the children in their care. Moving to the new approach will create additional challenges in terms of staffing." – UNISON Scotland

The need for more information

Across questions, calls were made for more information or respondents expressed uncertainty regarding how to answer. These comments were most prevalent at Q29, but also mentioned in particular at Q7, Q10 and Q33, with comments consolidated here.

Areas where more information or clarity was sought by respondents included:

- Information on how the proposals would be implemented, with one suggesting small-scale pilots to test the flexible fostering model prior to rollout.
- Information on IFAs to enable an informed view of them, such as the pros and cons of IFAs having charitable status.
- Understanding why the SSSC Standard for Foster Care has not been fully implemented - for instance, attendees at one engagement event suggested this was due to being kept in draft format for so long and launched softly.
- On how the national recruitment approach would align with local government and the third sector.
- Undertaking detailed impact assessments on the proposals.
- Explanation of terms such as 'market shaping', 'forecasting' and exploration of the best mix of providers to achieve desired outcomes.
- Consideration of whether there would be unintended consequences of foster carers being registered with the SSSC.
- Knowledge of potential alternatives to the current financial model for foster carers.

11. Conclusions

A range of individuals and organisations with detailed knowledge and lived experience participated in the consultation, sharing their time, views and experiences on the future of foster care in Scotland. This report provides a high-level summary of the consultation responses. For more detail, readers are encouraged to read individual responses, where permission was given for publication, via the Scottish Government's consultation website.

High levels of support for the proposals on the future of fostering were evident across the consultation questions, particularly from organisations, though sometimes support was qualified. The proposed vision was welcomed by many, though challenges were identified with implementing it, such as existing system pressures or that it could require improved terms and conditions for foster carers.

It was noted that many of the elements of the proposed flexible fostering role are already being developed across Scotland, though implementation was considered inconsistent by respondents across sectors and geographic areas. While most of the elements of the flexible fostering approach were supported, concerns were raised over how realistic or achievable these aims were. Challenges with foster carers' capacity to take on an extended role were raised, as were perceptions that other members of the team around the child, such as social workers or family support workers, were better placed to undertake certain roles. Concerns were raised, in particular, over the proposal for foster carers to stay in the homes of birth families.

Respondents agreed that Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) should be required to have charitable status and should not be able to make a profit. They also highlighted the need for a level playing field between local authorities and IFAs, with some respondents expressing views that there should be less reliance on IFAs in the future.

Developing a national recruitment 'offer' to improve recruitment within local authority fostering teams was welcomed. This was seen as helpful in coordinating recruitment efforts and enabling a more effective use of local resources. However, respondents felt better remuneration, improved status, and consistent access to learning and development opportunities could also support successful recruitment and retention of carers. Calls were made for foster care to become a salaried role, for improved support and respect from others in the team around the child, and for training to be flexible and accessible. Ways to support those undertaking specific roles, such as caring for infants or those with additional support needs, were emphasised, with a call for more resources to enable this such as practical support or bespoke training.

Views varied on the value of a national approach to matching or having a national register for foster carers, with questions raised over how a register would operate. Conversely, there was extensive support for updated guidance on dealing with allegations and for a national approach to Continuing Care allowances and fees.

Overall, there is widespread support for the proposals included in the consultation. Alongside other evidence, the consultation responses provide valuable and informative evidence for the Scottish Government to draw upon when finalising their proposals.

Appendix A: List of organisations

The following organisations responded to the consultation and gave permission for their responses to be published.

Aberdeen City Council
Aberlour
Adoption UK Scotland
Barnardo's Scotland
CAN
Care Inspectorate
Care Visions Fostering
CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection)
Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (University of Strathclyde)
Children's Hearings Scotland
Clackmannanshire Council
Common Weal
COSLA
Dumfries & Galloway Council
East Ayrshire Council
Fox Covert Early Years - City of Edinburgh Council
Glasgow City Health & Social Care Partnership
Grandparents Apart UK
includem
North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership
NSPCC Scotland
Perth and Kinross Council
Place2Be
Project Esperanza
Safe Families and Home for Good
Scotland Excel
Scottish Adoption and Fostering
Scottish Association of Social Work
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
Social Work Scotland
South Lanarkshire Council
Staf
Stirling Council
The Fostering Network
The Promise Scotland
The Scottish Social Services Council
Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)
UNISON Scotland
University of Glasgow
West Lothian Council
Who Cares? Scotland

Appendix B: List of engagement events

Date	Audience	Type of event	Number of attendees (if known)
9/12/24	Young people	Online engagement with The Fostering Network's Young People's Board	4
12/2/25	Young people	Falkirk Champs Board	6
27/02/25 27/03/25	Young people	Heavy Sound, East Lothian	4
7/11/24	Foster Carers	Edinburgh in-person event	12
12/11/24	Foster Carers	Glasgow in-person event	15
13/11/24, 14/11/24, 20/11/24, 29/1/25	Foster Carers	Online engagement sessions	30
25/11/24	Foster Carers	Angus outreach event	6
4/12/24	Foster Carers	Online engagement session - Network Natters	3
30/01/25	Foster Carers	Clacks outreach	6
4/2/25	Foster Carers	Renfrewshire engagement event – foster carers	33
29/10/24	Professionals	AFKA professionals community of practice	10
6/11/24	Professionals	Online engagement session	10 Registered
21/11/24	Professionals	Online engagement session	16 registered
3/12/24	Professionals	Online engagement session	20 registered
30/1/25	Professionals	Online engagement session	8
28/11/24	Professionals	IVP Forum	7
20/11/24	Local Authorities	Online engagement session	10

Appendix C: Quantitative analysis

The consultation included 12 closed questions which asked respondents for their views on the future of fostering. This appendix details the responses to these questions.

Not all respondents answered every question. Some may not have answered as they hold no strong view on the question, or it may not relate to their area of knowledge or expertise. Where those who did not answer the closed questions expressed a view in their open comments, this has been noted in the qualitative analysis.

To allow comparisons across sub-groups, the tables below present the results of the closed questions **based on those who answered each question**.

For clarity, each closed question shows:

- The percentage of respondents **from the total sample** of 103 respondents who selected each response (grey row).
- The number and percentage response **among those who answered each question**, broken down by individual and organisation responses (rows including and under “All answering”).

Please note that the row percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Q7. Should we require all IFAs to have charitable status?

Audience	**Sample size (n=)**	**% Yes**	**% No**	**% No answer**
All respondents (%)	103	55	11	34
All answering (%)	**68**	**84**	**16**	**-**
Individuals	41	80	20	-
Organisations	27	89	11	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	13	100	0	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	3	100	0	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	4	50	50	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	2	100	0	-
- Other	5	80	20	-

Q8. Should we limit how much local authorities can pay to IFAs?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	54	16	30
All answering (%)	**72**	**78**	**22**	**-**
Individuals	44	77	23	-
Organisations	28	79	21	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	14	100	0	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	4	25	75	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	4	25	75	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	100	0	-
- Other	5	100	0	-

Q9. Should IFAs be required to pay their foster carers the Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA)?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	64	7	29
All answering (%)	**73**	**90**	**10**	**-**
Individuals	44	84	16	-
Organisations	29	100	0	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	14	100	0	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	5	100	0	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	4	100	0	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	100	0	-
- Other	5	100	0	-

Q14. Should there be a new national learning framework for foster carers which could also be a pathway for continuous development?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	57	12	31
All answering (%)	**71**	**83**	**17**	**-**
Individuals	46	78	22	-
Organisations	25	92	8	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	10	100	0	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	5	100	0	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	4	50	50	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	100	0	-
- Other	5	100	0	-

Q19. How effective is the current financial model for foster carers?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Effective	% Somewhat Effective	% Not Effective	% Don't Know	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	11	23	35	5	26
All answering (%)	**76**	**14**	**32**	**47**	**7**	**-**
Individuals	50	18	28	52	2	-
Organisations	26	8	38	38	15	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	10	10	60	30	0	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	3	0	0	67	33	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	5	0	40	40	20	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	3	0	33	33	33	-
- Other	5	20	20	40	20	-

Q20. Do you think there should be a national approach to fees for foster carers?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	63	14	23
All answering (%)	**79**	**82**	**18**	**-**
Individuals	49	82	18	-
Organisations	30	83	17	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	13	92	8	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	5	80	20	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	5	60	40	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	100	0	-
- Other	6	83	17	-

Q21. Do you think there should be a national approach to additional payments?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	59	13	28
All answering (%)	**74**	**82**	**18**	**-**
Individuals	47	85	15	-
Organisations	27	78	22	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	11	91	9	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	5	80	20	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	5	60	40	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	0	100	-
- Other	5	80	20	-

Q22. Should the financial model for foster carers include a retainer fee for when a foster carer does not have a child placed with them?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	65	6	29
All answering (%)	**73**	**92**	**8**	**-**
Individuals	48	94	6	-
Organisations	25	88	12	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	10	80	20	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	4	100	0	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	5	80	20	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	100	0	-
- Other	5	100	0	-

Q23. Do you think there should be a national approach for Continuing Care allowances and fees?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	72	3	25
All answering (%)	**77**	**96**	**4**	**-**
Individuals	48	96	4	-
Organisations	29	97	3	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	11	100	0	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	6	100	0	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	5	80	20	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	100	0	-
- Other	6	100	0	-

Q27. Is the existing framework under which foster carers can make decisions clear?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	22	45	33
All answering (%)	**69**	**33**	**67**	**-**
Individuals	45	33	67	-
Organisations	24	33	67	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	10	40	60	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	4	0	100	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	5	40	60	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	2	100	0	-
- Other	3	0	100	-

Q28. Would further guidance, for example, good practice, be helpful to support decision-making for foster carers (sometimes called delegated decision-making) be helpful? If yes, please explain what you'd like it to include.

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	58	10	32
All answering (%)	**70**	**86**	**14**	**-**
Individuals	44	80	20	-
Organisations	26	96	4	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	11	91	9	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	4	100	0	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	5	100	0	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	1	100	0	-
- Other	5	100	0	-

Q34. Should the Scottish Government update its guidance on managing allegations against foster carers?

Audience	Sample size (n=)	% Yes	% No	% No answer
All respondents (%)	103	59	6	35
All answering (%)	**67**	**91**	**9**	**-**
Individuals	42	88	12	-
Organisations	25	96	4	-
- Local Authorities & HSCPs	12	92	8	-
- Policy / Advocacy / Support	4	100	0	-
- Independent Fostering Agencies	4	100	0	-
- Social Work / Youth Justice	2	100	0	-
- Other	3	100	0	-

Appendix D: Consultation questions

Our Vision

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

Flexible fostering approach

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

3. What are your views on the seven different elements in the flexible fostering approach?

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

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

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

6. What is the role of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) in the future of fostering?

7. Should we require all IFAs to have charitable status? Please explain.
   Yes / No

8. Should we limit how much local authorities can pay to IFAs? If so, why, and how would we do it?
   Yes / No

9. Should IFAs be required to pay their foster carers the Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA)?
   Yes / No

10. What more could be done nationally to support local authorities when paying for placements from IFAs (including forecasting, market shaping and procurement)?

Recruitment

11. What are your views on the ‘offer’ described above?

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

Learning, development and practical support

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

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

Yes / No

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

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?

17. What other practical support would help foster carers?

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

Financial Support

19. How effective is the current financial model for foster carers? Is there an alternative? Please explain your answer.
Effective / Somewhat effective / Not effective / Don't Know

20. Do you think there should be national approach to fees for foster carers? Please explain your answer.
Yes / No

21. Do you think there should be a national approach to additional payments? Please explain your answer.
Yes / No

22. Should the financial model for foster carers include a retainer fee for when a foster carer does not have a child placed with them? Please explain your answer.
Yes / No

23. Do you think there should be a national approach for Continuing Care allowances and fees? Please explain your answer.
Yes / No

24. Would an enhanced framework of transparency with a legal requirement, for example, on local authorities and independent fostering agencies to publish foster care allowances assist foster carers and wider recruitment and retention?

National Charter

25. What are your views on the proposal for a national charter of support for foster carers?

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

Day to day decisions

27. Is the existing framework under which foster carers can make decisions clear?
Yes / No

28. Would further guidance, for example good practice, be helpful to support decision making for foster carers (sometimes called delegated decision making) be helpful? If yes, please explain what you'd like it to include.
    Yes / No

National Register of foster Carers

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

30. If a register is introduced where should the register be held?

31. What are your views on the potential to linking continuous professional development to a register?

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

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

Allegations

34. Should the Scottish Government update its guidance on managing allegations against foster carers? If yes, please explain what you'd like to see updated or added.
    Yes / No

Raising Concerns

35. Is there is a need for the Scottish Government to take action in this area? If so, please explain why and what would be helpful, for example best practice guidance?

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.

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

This publication is available at **www.gov.scot**

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80643-211-0 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, October 2025

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS1656626 (10/25)

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