



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

7 NOVEMBER 2016

**LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE STATUTORY QUALITY
ASSURANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT:
FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2016 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2016**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to bring to the Committee's attention the activity of the Fostering Service during the period 1 April 2016 to September 2016.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Service. It undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering.
3. Under the National Minimum Standards (25.7) all Fostering services are required to provide one half year and one annual report to the Local Authority Executive regarding the activity and work of the Fostering Agency and Fostering Panel.
4. The annual report for the period ending 31st March 2016 was considered by Children and Families Overview Scrutiny Committee on 13th June 2016.

Executive Summary

5. As of September 30th 2016 there were 498 children in our care.
6. The Fostering Service has 209 mainstream and kinship carers approved (some connected carers are temporarily approved).
7. In this period there were 146 children placed with in-house mainstream carers (compared to 131 in March 2016), and 81 children placed with kinship carers (compared to 80 in March 2016).

8. 134 children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency placements (IFAs). This is an increase of 18 since March 2016 as result of an increase in demand for sibling placements and unaccompanied asylum seeking (UASC) placements.
9. On the 30th September 2016 there were 51 children living in private residential type provision (other than IFAs) – of these 37 are placed in independent children's homes, 12 in independent living and 2 in residential schools.
10. There are 2 children placed in an NHS/Health Trust provision.
11. 4 young people were living in Leicestershire's children home, Welland House.
12. As of 30th September 2016, there were 31 UASC in our care under Section 20 of the Children Act. Of these, 1 was placed in an in-house provision and 30 in private provision (IFA and semi-independent accommodation). 7 of the 30 UASC transferred to Leicestershire County Council care as part of the National Transfer Scheme. The UASC team works with a further 27 young people who have a legal status under Leaving Care.
13. In the year we approved 7 new foster carers at panel (excluding Connected/Kinship carers). This has been a slow start to the year because of issues with the use of the market portal (Tribal) and the need to stagger mainstream campaigns with targeted campaigns.
14. 10 foster carers were deregistered - 7 retired, 2 adopted children in placement, and 1 was deregistered by the authority for practice reasons.
15. In the same period, there were 28 new kinship fostering households approved and a similar number of kinship carers left the authority as the children in their care were made subject to Children Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order.
16. A further 11 foster carers are scheduled to go to panel between now and December with an expected deregistration rate of 6.
17. The target net growth for 2016-17 is 15 in-house carers.
18. Children/carers not specified in the above include children placed for adoption, those placed with parents (under regulation 17 and 19) and those children placed under S17 (Children Act 1989).
19. The service (including Adoption) has a budget of £22,301,116. The projected spend for the year is £22,240,000.
20. The sufficiency strategy as outlined in the Service's Market Position Statement has allowed the Council to respond to the increase in Looked After Child numbers, within the current budget envelop.

Background

21. Our strategy for the Fostering and Children in Care Service is focused on the following key activities:

- Increasing market share in Leicestershire's fostering provision including our 'in-house' foster carers, kinship and connected carers and supported lodgings;
- Increase the number of specialist foster carers to enable children and young people's return to their family's care or local provisions;
- Recruitment of specialist short-term foster carers who can work with young people with emotional-behavioural needs and their parents to promote positive relationships;
- Introduction of dedicated support to promote positive relationships between young people and their carers, stabilise placements and improve community integration;
- Improved outcomes through promotion of an all service-all provision focus on the 'Golden Triangle' and in doing so ensuring that our children and young people are safe, achieve and enjoy good health-wellbeing;
- Making best use of our resources through improved commissioning arrangements across social care, health and education, use of the placement's framework, use of decision-making panels.

22. In April 2015 the Fostering, Adoption and Placement Service restructured to improve sufficiency functions and address the growing pressure on the placement budget. The remodelling saw the introduction of:

- Brokers (Placement commissioning and contract monitor)
- Commissioning Manager
- Contract Manager
- Business Analyst and Project Manager
- Additional recruitment staff.

23. The Service's first Market Position Statement was published in June 2015, and is the primary document driving activity across the service.

24. Following extensive consultation in December 2015 to the proposal to close Greengate, one of Leicestershire's in-house ran children homes for up to seven young people, was approved at Cabinet in February 2016. The home closed on June 22nd 2016 following the successful transition of the one resident to an appropriate move on placement. The staffing budget was transferred to the Fostering Service to develop a new team with the aim of supporting placement stability and developing our specialist fostering placements, called the Dedicated Placement Support Team.

25. In July 2016 the Service Manager of Fostering and Adoption left the service and a new Service Manager was appointed.

Current Position

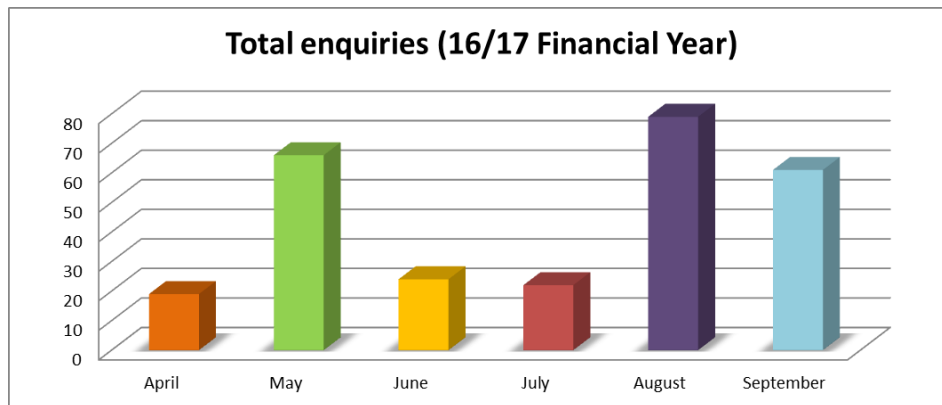
26. The fostering and placement/commissioning support teams within the service work closely with locality colleagues and partners through the decision-making panels

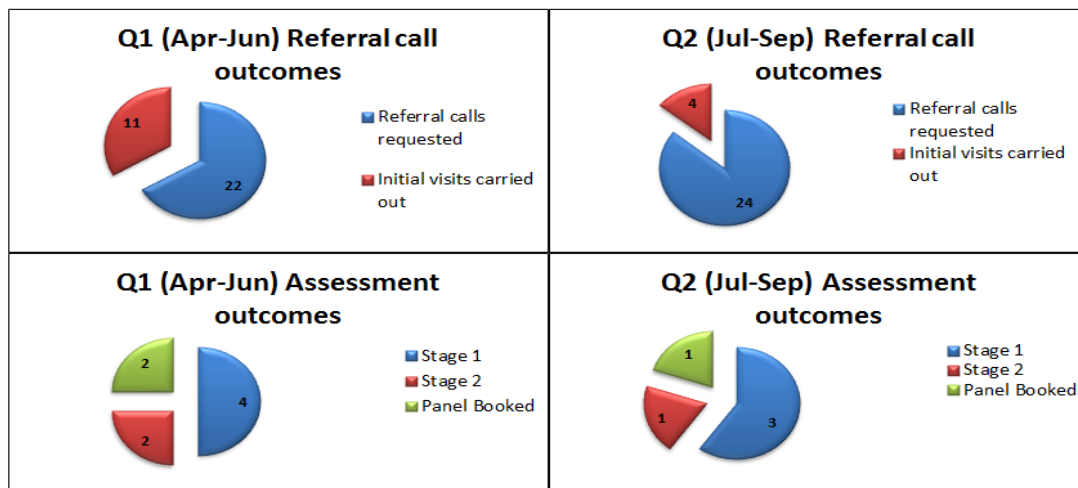
(Permanence Panel, Placement and Resource Panel and the Integrated Children's Panel). Through these panels, children's needs are considered to ensure that care planning is focused and timely, the provision is appropriate and meets the child's needs.

27. Recruitment:

- Since the remodelling in April 2015, the Placement Commissioning unit within the service has a dedicated recruitment focus, priorities and targets. These commissioning priorities are set out in Market Position Statement, June 2016.
- The evidence provided in this Statement helps the Council and its commissioning partners to take a strategic approach to understand and meet the needs of Leicestershire's most vulnerable children by focusing on priority supply issues, commissioning priorities and developmental needs.
- Current priority supply and services issues include:
 - a. Sibling placements
 - b. UASC placements
 - c. Supporting lodgings for young people with mild-moderate learning difficulties or emotional-behavioural needs
 - d. Responding in a timely and appropriate way to placement instability, support to return home, adolescent developmental crisis, attachment issues.

Activity in relation to recruitment can be best understood through the graphs below:





The data above was extracted from the FPT database on the 29th September 2016 at 9.41am and is only a reflection of what is recorded on the database.

A referral call is a call that occurs before an initial visit is carried out and acts as a short opportunity for the assessment team to decide if an initial visit is needed or not.

28. Fostering Panel Activity:

- Between April-September 2016, the service approved 7 new in-house foster carers at panel.
- 10 in-house carers are no longer working with us- 7 retired, 2 adopted children in placement, and 1 was deregistered by the authority for practice reasons.
- Therefore the net increase in new mainstream fostering households is -3 for the period April- September i.e. there has been a reduction in overall numbers.
- In the same period, there were 28 new kinship fostering households approved. A similar number left the authority as the children became subject to Children Arrangement or Special Guardianship orders.
- In the same period 2 kinship households were deferred for further work by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), and 1 household was not approved.
- During 2015 several local authority and independent assessors were commissioned to meet statutory deadlines and the ongoing sufficiency needs of the service in relation to increasing foster carer provision. This flexible approach will be used within commissioning rules in the coming period as it has proven successful and cost effective.

Brief details of the current recruitment campaigns are provided below.

Specialist carers:

- Four week Facebook campaign ongoing from 24 September 16 with 5 leads generated so far;
- The service currently have adverts for One2One and Parallel carers on EMSS, Indeed.com and Leicester Mercury;
- The service is awaiting approval from birth parents for a case study press release which will be featured in the Leicester Mercury;
- Contingency planning for external commissioning of level 6 carers has begun.

UASC Carers:

- Four week Facebook campaign ongoing from 03 October 16 with 15 leads generated so far;
- Ivan Ould - Radio Leicester & Capital FM radio interview broadcast.
- UASC Fostering information event booked for Monday 17th October 2016.
- There will be a constant “dripping” of messages via “other” social media (Twitter / Facebook) and our blog.

Supported Lodging providers:

- Four week Facebook campaign due to launch when UASC campaign ends.
- Generic fostering recruitment continues in the background, which includes regular posting on Facebook, contacting ‘warm’ enquiries that we have spoken to previously but were unable at that point to proceed, and promotion of the ‘find out about fostering’ events.

Word of Mouth – Foster carers toolkit:

- The flyers and information for our foster carers’ toolkit were finalised in time for a pilot launch in April 2016.
- The official launch took place in September 2016 with a presentation to carers at County Hall.

Locality events:

As well as the popular ‘Find out about Fostering’ based at County Hall which run every three weeks, locality events are booked in Sure-start centres around the county.

29. Foster Carers and Fostering Profile:

During 2015 and early in 2016, the number of complaints from foster carers escalated. Generally, carers reported feeling un-supported, felt they were made subject of allegations when the issue really related to lack of support. The issues related both to a changeover of staff and high supervising social worker caseloads. Morale appeared to be low for some of our foster carers.

30. In May/June a survey was launched for all of our carers to ascertain their views on:

- The level of support and communication from the fostering team;
- The level of support and communication from the Children in Care Team;
- The Training offered;
- Involvement in locality groups;
- What the fostering team was good at;
- What the fostering team could do better;

31. We had a response from 70 carers, who told us that:

- In general they were happy with the service but felt that we could improve our communication;
- Our training schedule was good, but would like training in the evenings and weekends;
- Wanted managers to be more visual and accessible;
- Wanted us to be more creative in the way we communicated with them.

32. In response to the survey, the Fostering Service:

- Ensured all carers had an allocated worker;
- Realigned resources to increase supervising social worker capacity reducing caseloads from 25+ to 17;
- Received visits within regulatory timescales;
- Managers from the service attended locality groups;
- Scheduled quarterly meetings with Leicestershire Foster Carers Association;
- Implemented a monthly Fostering Newsletter delivered to all carers to update them on events, training, staff changes, information from other services – education, health and localities. This has been a huge success;
- Returned to a more accessible/hands on approach service;
- Organised social events to allow for networking and relationship building. The “Foster Family Fun Day” was a great success, attended by over 100 people;
- Scheduled events throughout the year – Children who Foster Event, Foster Carer Recognition Event;
- We also recruited a permanent Team Manager to the team, ensuring the team had the support, advice and supervisory overview required;
- We introduced a complaint log, which initially was reviewed quarterly with the Head of Service and Assistant Director;
- We met in August and there were no new complaints from foster carers evidencing that our actions as identified above are successful;
- We implemented a Foster Carer tracker to report on visits to carers, unannounced visits and statutory checks are undertaken at the required frequency;
- We implemented a Foster Care Case Allocation tracker to ensure all carers have an allocated worker.

33. **Dedicated Support Team** - In June 2016 the Dedicated Placement Support Team began operation. The team consists of:

- 1 x Team Manager
- 1 x Assessing Social Workers
- 4 x Team Support Workers
- 1 x Training Co-ordinator
- 2 x level 6 carers (One2One carers).

34. The role of the team is to provide support to foster placements that are experiencing difficulties and to prevent breakdown. Provide support to One2One foster placements where a more intensive support package is required; to work with parents / carers to prevent breakdown; to work with the Parallel Carers, the young person and their family to support re-unification; to provide time limited intensive support to maintain placements and return home.

35. Since June 2016, this new team has worked with 35 children and young people. Examples of their success include:

Young person B moved from a residential home. He now has 100% school attendance and the school have written a compliment letter. He is due to return home in October;

Young Person L has worked very hard with his family and the dedicated support team to repair his relationship with his family. He will return home in October;

Young Person H has returned home from residential care;

A's kinship carer requested readmission to care. A's behaviour was difficult. The family have now stabilised, other agencies involved and A is still living within his family.

36. The impact of this team is that placement stability has increased month by month. In April 2015, placement instability was 15%. By May 2016 the service had maintained instability within the 12% band and by the end of August 2016 within the 10% band for 2 months; and 9.45% for September 2016. The 2016 target is 9%.

37. It must be acknowledged that other developments within the service have contributed to the improvement in placement stability (introduction of the three decision-making panels, revised authority levels for independent/private placement search, use of a placement framework, contract monitoring, improved care of and relationship with our foster carers and reduced supervising social worker caseloads etc).

38. Independent Visitors:

All Looked After Children should have access to an Independent Visitor. We currently have 33 visitors attached to 33 young people. Some of these visitors have been providing support to a young person for over 7 years, supporting them and their carers through some difficult times, such as supporting transition to supported lodgings, support to a young person when a carer passed away, being part of the happier times like attending the young person's graduation and being Maid of Honour at the visitors wedding. These visitors play a crucial role in supporting our children and young people and are areas of our service that needs to be developed.

39. Kinship Carers (Formerly Known as 'Connected Carers'):

- Kinship foster care is a formal arrangement where a child is looked after by the Local Authority and placed with a relative, friend or connected person. 'Relative of Friend' is defined as a: grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or by marriage), step-parent, or friend of the child;
- A 'Connected Person' is anyone who has a pre-existing connection to a child through their extended network. This may be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a child-minder, a teacher, a youth worker, although these are not exclusive categories (National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations 2013);
- This case law lead to an increase in the formality of assessment of a large group of carers in Leicestershire and subsequent directives from the family courts to complete assessments in shrinking timescales has had a significant impact on assessment and supervisory capacity in the Fostering Service;
- Currently we have 5 full time assessing Social Workers, completing 5 assessments at any one time and team of 3 supervising social workers supporting connected carers (those carers who are foster carers and those who require support post the making of a Children Arrangement or Special Guardianship Order). This was initially a team of 2 but the caseloads were too high and resource was moved from within the service to improve care received by connected cares. The case loads are still too high and management are looking for means to best support this team and the carers;
- Our Kinship carers are a major growth area due to PLO and the requirement to look within a Child's own family network when initiating proceedings;
- We have also had to commission external assessments due to the capacity of the team and the requirements to complete assessments within short Court timeframes;
- We are now consulting to implement the new BAAF Kinship proforma, (Form C). This encompasses all the required information and will ensure consistency in information.

40. Emotional Permanence:

- Children are placed permanently within their families or with other connected persons through Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders (replacing Resident Orders). They provide a legally secure foundation for building a permanent relationship between the child and their special guardian, while preserving the legal link between the child and their birth family;
- SGO orders and the related support needed by these carers is a continuing growth area within the authority;
- We provide financial support to 246 children subject to SGO orders in place compared to 224 in March 2016;
- We provide financial support to 64 children subject to Residence/Child Arrangement Order, which is a fairly stable figure;
- Special Guardianship Support has now been identified as to receive support from the Adoption Support Fund. The service is required to complete an assessment of need to access the fund on behalf of the funding. The assessment demand has escalated significantly over the past year without the additional support to local authorities to complete these assessments and support with commissioning of the services to meet the identified need;

- The fostering and placement/commissioning support teams within the service work closely with locality colleagues and partners through the decision-making panels (Permanence Panel, Placement and Resource Panel and the Integrated Children's Panel). Through these panels, children's needs are considered to ensure that care planning is focused and timely, the provision is appropriate and meets the child's needs.

41. Development and Training:

- Staff development and their engagement in the development of fostering services is a key priority and will help to deliver improved outcomes for children. In order to ensure the Fostering Service is working consistently with the locality teams the Growing Safety methodology is undertaken in all of the work the service does;
- The Head of Service and Service Manager regularly audit foster carer supervision records to determine the baseline of use of Signs of Safety by the supervising social workers. The outcome of the audit will be to determine what developmental activity/training is needed to ensure Signs of Safety is used meaningfully to inform the support and training needs of foster carers to best meet the outcomes of children and young people in care;
- Over the next year Signs of Safety will be a fully embedded form of practice in the Fostering Service and will be used to help carers improve children's readiness for school, to choose and for adulthood;
- We have produced a new Fostering Training Programme for 2016/17 and this is published on our website. This can be found at: <http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/fostering/training-and-support-for-foster-carers>
- We also publish forthcoming training in our Monthly Newsletter to ensure maximum application and attendance;
- We are creating episodes within FWI to ensure Core Training renewal is pulled through to the Supervising Social Worker to ensure these remain up to date.
- We are linking in training attendance into Annual Reviews for carers to ensure we have a skilled fostering service, developed to meet the needs of our children
- We have funded two workers to attend Theraplay training, a therapeutic sensory approach to aide children to recognise and self-regulate their feelings and emotions. Workers will work with carers to incorporate these approaches in their parenting of our children;
- Each team within the service has a Storyboard which they in supervisions and team meetings to track progress against priority activities, targets and key performance indicators based on the outcomes for children.

42. Payments to carers:

- We recognise that the new payments scheme was introduced on 1st April 2013 and payments are made through the children's social care database, Frameworki. The new scheme was introduced to ensure fairness, transparency and an emphasis on payment for evidenced skills;
- Simultaneously the long standing practice of making additional payments to carers is being addressed and reduced. The central feature of the new scheme is

that carers are paid for their skills and abilities and there are defined additional benefits for key expenditure such as start-up grants, and clothing when a child comes into care or begins school;

- Matching our payments to Independent Foster Carer Agencies is being reviewed to make our position more attractive to recruit new carers and encourage transfers to the Local Authority;
- A business case will be presented to the Departmental Management Team in November 2016 to propose a new payment structure that will improve the in-house recruitment success by making the Council more competitive with independent fostering agencies;
- The proposal will also simplify the payment structure and make caring for adolescent children more attractive.

Resource Implications

43. People Implications: Over the past year, the service has seen a change in practice, has embraced commissioning principles, has worked to targets and has achieved success in recruitment. It is believed that our fostering team are best placed to support our children and carers and there is support for our strategy to move to having a significantly greater market share of provision placed within the Council. The managers and staff also understand that within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, increased in-house provision is most cost-effective and will ensure that the money at our disposal is used in the most effective way to provide the best care.

44. The managers are aware of the strategy and are assisting with the future plans i.e. what the service will need to look like to support the expansion. A service structure proposal will be provided with the business case to change the foster carer payments to escalate recruitment.

45. Due to the rigour of the care planning, care support and new commissioning arrangements, the service is currently operating within the budget envelop, despite an increase of LAC numbers over a 4 month period. The three areas of projected overspend or risk within this budget are:

- SGO allowances
- Independent Fostering Agencies
- Residential provision.

Circulation Under Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Officer(s) to Contact

Paul Meredith
 Director
Paul.Meredith@leics.gov.uk
 Tel: 0116 3057441

Sharon Cooke
Assistant Director
Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk
Tel: 0116 3055479

Nicci Collins
Head of Strategy
Nicci.Collins@leics.gov.uk
Tel: 0116 3054504

Joss Longman
Service Manager
Joss.Longman@leics.gov.uk
Tel: 0116 3053288

Equality and Human Rights Implications

46. The Choices Sufficiency Strategy and Market Position Statement identified priorities for recruitment, support and training of foster carers.
47. The Market Position Statement has been refreshed for 2016-17. The Market Position Statement uses demographic and statistical information to identify the most vulnerable and highest needs. Priority action, supply needs and development issues related directly to the analysis of this information.