

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019





OUR SERVICE

Leicestershire County Council continues to operate a joint Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service. This arrangement has been in operation since April 2015 following a service review. Whilst we operate a joined up service we also ensure that the Fostering Service is subject to its own set of standards. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000.

From July 2019 the service will separate to run both The Fostering and Adoption Services separately in preparation of the Adoption Regionalisation Agenda.

Leicestershire County Council's carers are part of our "Fostering Family". The service aims to listen and respond to our carers and over the last three years we have grown our relationship built on trust and transparency. Their knowledge and experiences have helped to shape the service and build upon our strengths.

Over the last two years the service has engaged with consultants to help us:

- Review our recruitment processes
- Operate within a competitive market
- Set ambitious recruitment targets

As a service we benefitted from their knowledge and skill base and were able to refine our recruitment processes. In March 2019 the service was able to take back the running of the service with one dedicated Service Manager for the recruitment and retention functions of fostering supported by an Assistant Service Manager. Our carers receive the same service from the point of enquiry through to approval and post support. We recognise that recruitment and retention hold equal importance.

A summary of other developments implemented in 2018/19 is provided below:

- After a consultation with our carers we implemented our revised Skills Based Payments structure from September 2018
- Revised our Supported Lodgings Policy and Scheme
- Consulted and revised our Foster Carer Review Paperwork
- Revised and implemented our Mentoring Scheme
- Developed our Foster Carer Forum
- Launched the new Foster Carer Handbook

The Service is led by Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and and Virtual School. Fostering is managed by a Service Manager for Retention and Recruitment with a newly introduced Assistant Service Manager to support the Service.

The demand for placements has continued to grow, with an increased demand for sibling groups, care for teenagers and those with complex needs resulting from experiencing multiple traumas during their childhood or complex needs arising from disability. We have also seen a rising trend in older teenagers coming in to care as a result of adoption breakdown.

The Recruitment and Retention Strategy is part of the overall Care Placement Strategy 2018- 2021. It is a dynamic strategy, geared towards supporting the recruitment of new foster carers to meet the assessed needs as determined by the need's analysis; and is integrally linked with other key strategic plans and strategies for the Council:

- Children and Families Departmental Plan 2017 – 2021
- Children & Families Partnership Plan
- Plus, other ones
- Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Commissioning Strategy 2018- 2021

Other key planning documents are:

- Service Delivery Plan
- Marketing Plan
- Market Position Statement
- Adoption and Permanence Strategy
- Therapeutic Wraparound Service Development Plan
- Commissioning Plan

Principles

- Where it is right to do so, all children will be supported to remain within the care of their families or communities with connected carers
- Where this is not possible, early permanence with adoptive families or foster carers will be sought to promote a sense of emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging
- Children and young people's voice will be respected, and we will actively seek their engagement in decisions about their needs, their future and the provision of services
- High quality placements and provision of support to parents and carers to meet the needs of children and young people.
- Where possible and right to do so, children and young people should be placed within Leicestershire with Leicestershire carers to maintain a sense of connectivity with their community.
- Parents and carers are an integral part of the service, to be involved in planning for the child and service provision to ensure that the very best care is provided to our children and young people.

Objectives

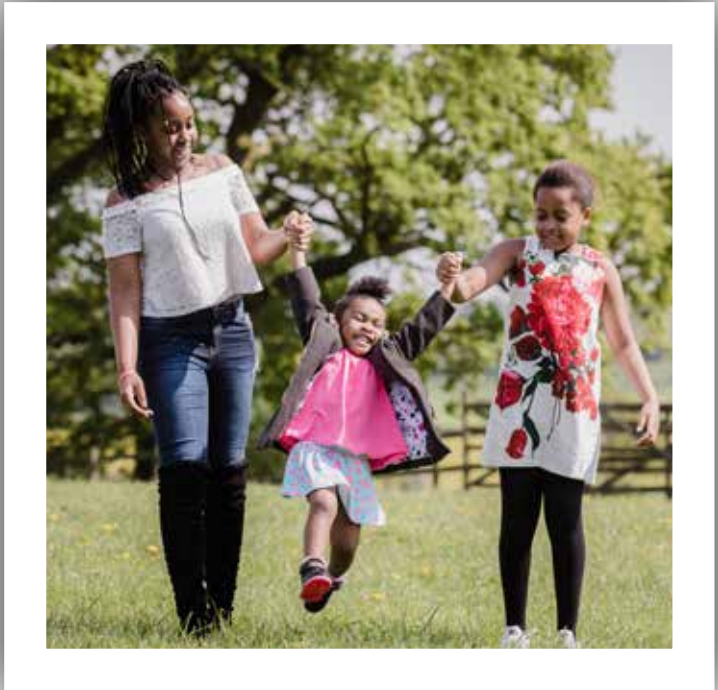
- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement for looked after children in Leicestershire County Council, which will meet needs, and support good outcomes, now and into the future.
- Meet the recruitment targets agreed on an annual basis
- Contribute to the Council savings in Children's Services
- For all Children's Services employees to recognise their contribution to supporting the recruitment and retention of foster carers, and recognising their value as part of the professional service delivered to our children in care

The Fostering Service reports monthly to the Departmental Management Team.

Our Identified Tasks from 2017/18 Annual Report

The service recognised that it operates within a competitive market, with both surrounding local authorities and private providers of placement. As such, ambitious priorities and targets were set in the following areas:

- Increasing Leicestershire's market share of mainstream foster carers
- Reduction of young people requiring residential placements
- Increase in the numbers of kinship carers
- Increase the number of Supported Lodgings providers
- Increase Leicestershire's specialist foster carers
- Revise our Fostering Review paperwork
- Ensuring our carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care.



A range of work was completed to achieve these priorities including:

- Increased and dedicated marketing support with an ambitious marketing plan focused on digital platforms and promoting Leicestershire County Council's beliefs and values represented by the new 'We are family' brand
- Specialist Carers Recruitment - Nationally, the recruitment of foster carers is challenging. Recruitment becomes more complex when foster carers are needed for children with particular needs like older children, those who have complex trauma needs, children with disabilities and those babies who require a placement with a parent.
- During 2018-19 the service continued its success in recruiting specialist carers called One2One and Pathway Carers - specialist carers for our more challenging young people.
- Completion of our 3rd annual foster carers survey and an improvement plan to address issues raised by carers including a revised training program
- Revised Payments Structure that recognises the skills, experience and commitment of foster carers and the role foster carers play in working with families in partnership with the Council. The payment scheme is based on the payment-for-skills principles recommended by the Fostering Network, and the Standards for Foster Care developed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to ensure that all foster carers receive induction, training and support
- Revised Foster Carer Handbook to promote understanding of advice, support and training available to carers
- Revised Foster Carers Review paperwork that draws to the fore the strengths and developmental areas of our carers and informs how best carers may support specific cohorts of children
- Revitalised the locality hub support (Peer to peer support, provision of information)
- Specialist Carers Support – The right support at the right time is very important to carers. One of the service's unique selling points is the Dedicated Placement Support Team, which is able to provide 24-7 support to carers when they need it most. The team aims to improve the skills, knowledge and competency of carers which has an overall impact on the wellbeing of children in their care and promotes placement stability

FOSTERING WITH LEICESTERSHIRE – ‘WE ARE FAMILY’

Roles within the Fostering Service

During 2018/18 the Service consisted of the following teams:

- Recruitment – Fostering and adoption
- Assessments – Fostering
- Team around the Child – Support
- Kinship – Assessment and support
- Dedicated Placements Support – Placement Stability, Independent Visitors, Supported Lodgings Scheme, Staying Put, Specialist Foster Carers

There has been a significant investment in recruitment, and this generated improved performance in relation to enquiries from prospective foster carers and adopters; increased numbers progressing to initial visits and to assessment.

The Digital Strategy is central to marketing. This includes:

- A largely digital marketing strategy
- new website geared towards the customer needs and experience for prospective foster carers
- Surveys and “keep in touch” mechanisms via electronic communications, to provide excellent customer service, and manage feedback.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to share information about fostering, and about what to expect, at each stage of the journey, including access to forms and training information.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to upload documents, for safe and confidential access, storage and visibility.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to read the Final Form F and confirm amendments and agreement.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to become part of the Fostering Community In Leicestershire County Council, with access to information, events, policies, procedures, and forms.

The detailed Marketing Plan for 2018-21 underpins the activities to secure more Leicestershire Foster Carers and is available on request.



First Point of Contact – the Recruitment Team

Over the year this team has provided the first port of call to all potential foster carers and adopters, working with our Communications Team to encourage carers to approach Leicestershire County Council through active recruitment campaigns via:

- Social media, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter campaigns
- Using Google Ad-words – attracting people to our website
- Local radio adverts
- Local media through regular press releases and radio interviews.
- Recruitment campaigns at local sporting events – Leicester Tigers and Leicester City
- Attending local events including 'Leicester Pride'
- Targeted recruitment in specific Leicestershire target areas

We are proud members of:



Members of the public can choose from a variety of ways to get in touch, including telephone, email, by completing a form on the website, attending one of our events or sending a text message to the team. Our dedicated enquiry officer responds to enquiries promptly, aiming to be back in touch within 2 hours of the original enquiry (in working hours).

We have used the opportunities to launch press releases and ensure our campaign are particularly strong within Fostering Fortnight, LGBT fostering & Adoption week as well as Sons and Daughters month to celebrate 'fostering families and their children'.

The Recruitment Team consists of:

1 Manager
1 Recruitment Co-Ordinator
1 Recruitment Support Co-Ordinator

The Council has invested in a dedicated Recruitment Team, to enable and enhance the overall recruitment and experience of prospective foster carers. The priority for this team is to set out a friendly, informative, and welcoming first point of contact with the prospective carer, which meets their needs and impacts on the customer decision to select Leicestershire County Council, over other agencies, for their journey to foster.

Some key values and behaviours are essential for encouraging those ready to begin the journey to approval and those who may not yet be ready, but will choose to foster in the future. Research indicates that people typically take 2 years to contemplate and find out about fostering. Their initial contact will be highly influential in determining whether they will return to the Council when they are ready.

Values and Behaviour

- Positive, friendly and welcoming- recognising that people are usually apprehensive when making their first approach.
- Open and respectful - Anyone is free to make an enquiry. Even if fostering is not right for them, at this time, they may know someone for whom it is the right time.
- Positive and informative -The enquirer relies on the service to tell them about next steps and provide more information about fostering.



Our Recruitment Activity

Over the year we generated and received **720** initial expressions of interest in becoming foster carers.

We carried out **142** requested initial visits, requiring an Initial Assessment worker to visit their home to discuss in more detail the options around becoming a foster carer.

Of those **142** initial visits, **71** converted into fostering applications and were progressed to Stage One.

This resulted in **25** Mainstream Households being approved.

In addition, a further **9** households were also approved:

2 Specialist – Pathway Carers

7 Supported Lodgings Providers

In total, 34 households were recruited, assessed and approved in 2018/19.



Initial assessment visits are carried out, this is where our Initial Assessment workers will visit potential applicants in their homes to discuss their interest regarding fostering. A full written analysis of the report is on Mosaic within 48 hours of the visit.

Once the initial assessment visit has been typed into a report onto Mosaic, the Recruitment Team Manager will then take this report to a 'Proceed to Assessment' decisions meeting, with Fostering Managers, to discuss and decide whether to progress to assessment or not.

Following on from this decision, Mosaic will be updated with the decision, and feedback is given to applicants either over the telephone or in some cases, through a home visit by the Initial Assessment worker.

If it is decided that the applicants should proceed onto assessment, the Initial Assessment workers will then made arrangements to collect the relevant paperwork from the applicants.

Once this paperwork has been collected, the Initial Assessment Worker will then collate and ensure all applicant details for Stage 1 are present, they will then submit with a 'task request' to Business Support.

At this point, the applicants move over to the Fostering Assessment team.

Snapshots of some of our most successful Fostering Campaigns:



Our Fostering Events 2018/19

Our Find Out About Fostering events continued to be well attended throughout the year. The events are held every 3 weeks in County Hall at 6:30pm in the evening and are advertised to the general public. Our events are relaxed and informal and provide an opportunity for people to come along to find out about fostering and hear from some of our foster carers, what it's really like to be a foster carer. Our current foster carers also engage in our information evenings to speak about their own experiences. We publicise our events through our social media and also contact individuals who have enquired with a text message reminder.

The event provides an opportunity for us to showcase the benefits of fostering with Leicestershire County Council, allowing us to focus on our 'unique selling points' for example, 'Leicestershire people caring for Leicester's children & young people' which emphasises that opposed to fostering for an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) who may be placing children from all over the country with their carers, fostering with us means you will look after Leicestershire children – meaning local school and contact visits – not in different counties.



Fostering Events 18/19

	12- Apr	2- May	24- May	7- Jun	Jul	Jul	Aug	Sep	Sep										Total
Attended	12	16	7	8	8	13	16	15	15	10	13	10	5	12	10	8	10	110	
Requested IV	9	12	6	6	6	11	11	10	10	8	12	8	2	6	9	7	9	81	

Foster Care Fortnight 2018

Our campaigns during Foster Care Fortnight (FCF) were all supporting FCF, throughout our social media platforms.



Proud
to support
Fostering

Foster Care Fortnight

Save the date...



Foster Care
Fortnight 2018
14-27 May

There has continued to be a demand for foster placements for the specific children and young people:

- Parent & Child Placements
- Siblings
- Teenagers
- Children with Complex Needs

Recruitment during 2018-19 has focused on mainstream foster carer recruitment as well as specialist to meet this demand, such as;

Pathway Carers – In 2018 we launched our Pathway Carers Scheme, a further specialist scheme for young people stepping down from residential care / One2One placements where their Care Plan is either a phased return home or long-term foster care whilst intensive work is undertaken to enable their return home. The carers work closely with the birth family and support them with behaviour management techniques, managing contact, working with education provision and health professionals. Many of the young people have experience multiple placement moves. During the year we successfully recruited 2 carers offering 3 places

Short Breaks – For carers wishing to provide respite care to children with disabilities for a minimum of one weekend per month.

Parent & Child Placements – There continues to be a drive from the Courts for these placements, skilled carers who enable parents to be placed alongside their child whilst an assessment is undertaken.

The Journey has started – The Assessment Team

Following the restructure of our service in April 2015 our Assessment Team combined with the Adoption Assessing Team. The team assesses:

- Fostering Assessments
- Private Fostering Assessments
- Non-Agency Adoption & they lead on the Skills to Foster Training.

The Assessment Team consists of:

1 Manager
1 Senior Practitioner
6.5 FTE Assessing Social Workers

Should the prospective carer and the Fostering Agency agree to proceed after the initial enquiry to become a foster carer and the initial visit, the actual assessment (Form F Assessment) starts and will be completed in 16 weeks. This will be completed by an allocated social worker.

Once a written assessment has been completed and the carer has been approved, this will become the carers fostering portfolio – it will be used to help match the carer with the right foster child.

In Leicestershire, Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments are merged to enable a better experience for prospective foster carers. This means that the two assessments are separate but run concurrently. This change, together with the use of external providers to complete assessments and increased focus on performance management will seek to reduce the length of time for assessment from point of initial visit to panel. The aim is to maintain reduced time of completion to 4.5-6 months (previously 7-9 months).

In 2018/19 the Assessment Team approved the following number of carers: -

- Fostering Approvals = 25
- Adoption Approvals = 33
- Non-Agency Adoption (Adoption Order granted) = 2
- Private Fostering Assessments Completed = 2

Early indicators for 2019/20 are that we are likely to progress more Private Fostering Assessments and more Non-Agency Adoption Assessments.

There have been changes to the Assessment Team during 2018-19 - the Initial Visit function transferred to the Recruitment Team and the responsibility for Stage One for Supported Lodgings was transferred to the Dedicated Placement Support Team.

As of July 2019, Agency Adoption Assessments and the Adoption Stage One Support Worker will be the responsibility of the Permanence Team; and one of the workers from the Assessment Team (0.5 FTE) will be seconded to the Connected Persons Team, to increase capacity and improve timeliness of responses.

Panel and Approval

Leicestershire's Fostering Agency has an independent panel with a broad range of knowledge, skills and experience. As well as this expertise, members also have access to legal and medical advice if required.

To improve the efficient use of Panel time, the following actions were initiated in 2018-19 and will be embedded in 2019-2020:

- The date of presentation to Panel will be set at the start of the assessment, and will be written in to the assessment agreement, and recording on the electronic system (MOSAIC).
- Approval will be confirmed by the Agency Decision Maker within 7 days of the Panel, and will be communicated to the Foster Carers by telephone and in writing.
- Monthly meetings between the business lead (Service Manager for Marketing and Recruitment), the Service Manager for Permanence and the Panel Chair to identify and resolve workflow issues.
- As Panel is shared with approval of Kinship (also known as Connected or Family and Friends) Carers, there will be a review of how these assessments are completed and presented to Panel.

Supporting Leicestershire's Carer – Team Around the Child

In Leicestershire, support is delivered through the Team Around the Child, which consists of:

Team Manager
Senior Practitioner (FTE 1.2)
Assessing Social Workers FTE 5.6
Training Officer
Review Officer

Support is offered through monthly visits from the supervising social worker, a training offer that is revised annually and supported by CAMHS and the Virtual School, the offer of CAMHS consultation sessions, locality hubs led by foster carers, community events, advice and support from Leicestershire's Foster Carer Association (LFCA) and the newsletter.

Areas of development during 2018/19.

- Foster Carer Forum – In 2018/19 we introduced this as a concept within our foster carer locality support group meetings. Moving forward this will include quarterly meetings that also include our virtual school and Corporate Parenting Team.
- Mentoring Scheme- The mentoring scheme is recognised by both potential carers in assessment and the Fostering Service as a valuable support in bringing carers into our fostering family. A revised mentoring policy and scheme has now been developed and all applicants are offered this as part of their assessment.
- Foster Carer Handbook – We took the opportunity to completely revise our Foster Carers Handbook, ensuring it contained all the vital information carers required as part of their fostering journey.
- Foster Carer Training Programme – Our carers told us through the annual survey that the training programme was one of the things they most valued from the service. Our training offer now includes more advanced training modules including specific and ongoing training for therapeutic parenting. We also recognise that carers use many different formats for training and have implemented many on-line training courses and specific therapeutic support pods using webinars.

A copy of our training programme can be found at <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/fostering/training-and-support-for-foster-carers> and click on the document 'personal development and training programme 2019'.

- On-line portal- During 2018/19 we trialled and successfully launched our online portal for our foster carers and Looked After Children. This online portal is made of 3 main areas:
 - ✓ Fostering service information – Carers can find guidance on how to use the portal and contact details for the support team as well as information on our fostering policies such as payments, the fostering handbook, training programme and the regular newsletters.
 - ✓ Foster carers admin box - This enables our carers to have their own virtual filing cabinet where they can upload all their documents such as child recording logs, mileage claims and expenses in a secure place via our online portal. This information is then uploaded onto our internal Mosaic system where payments can be processed in a timely manner and shortly carers will be able to access payment records. There are several folders for carers to access which holds their household profiles, safe caring policies, foster carers agreements, fire escape plans, training records and certificates as well as supervision records and annual review documents.
 - ✓ Virtual Memory Box - Carers can scan and upload photographs, videos, school reports, certificates of achievements and pen pal letters for the young people they have cared for into a confidential file unique to that young person. These records are kept safely for the young person who can have access to view the items at an appropriate time but are not able to edit or delete the content. We know the importance of maintaining these memories for our young people and the memory box offers a chronological timeline of their journey through care.
- Manageable caseloads for Supervising Social workers- Research informs us that the optimum caseload for workers should be 16. We have tried to maintain this to ensure our carers receive the right level of support when they need this.
- Being valued and being part of the Team around the Child - Foster Carers carry out a very important role in the understanding, assessment and care of the children placed with them. We believe that our foster carers should be included, involved in and contribute to decision making in relation to the child they care for. We do this through hubs, forums, surveys, reviews and the LFCA.
- The Fostering Service has continued to work with each foster care locality groups seeking different forums to receive feedback and offer support.
- Foster carers handbook ensuring that carers have a clear practice guidance and understanding of fostering policies and expectations
- Review paperwork has been revised including Signs of Safety and to give greater emphasis to the life experience of all in the foster home. We have also revised the child's voice feedback to better hear the voice of the child
- Put in place the new payments scheme following previous years consultation with carers

Retention Activities;

Engagement with carers is essential to communication – we want to know what our carers think and what is important to them. We have increased our Locality Support Groups and we have a carers forum which offers opportunities for discussion and feedback as well as a quarterly information evening. This is a sample of other events supported by the service:

- ✓ Locality support groups social activities such as summer Twin Lakes trip and Christmas parties, family fun day, Easter event.
- ✓ Annual Celebration event – An evening to celebrate our carers – Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Providers and Independent Visitors
- ✓ Sons and Daughters events offering opportunities for birth children to enjoy recognition for their commitment to fostering and for them to gain support from others birth children.

What we plan to develop in 2019/20

- Self-service access to training of a range of courses
- Carers reports for Children's ROA, giving carers a greater voice in these meetings ensuring all important dates, activities and views relevant to the child are recorded
- Development of Enhanced Carers (level 4) allowing carers opportunity for professional development and recognising the additional skills some carers demonstrate and require in their fostering role to parent therapeutically
- Joint working with the Permanence Team to develop a training module for foster families moving children onto adoption.

In Leicestershire a foster carers survey is sent out annually. In 2018, there was strong feedback from carers in relation to different questions regarding the support they receive. This is summarized below:

In 2018 Our foster carers told us:

97% enjoyed our fostering events

91% felt our training was excellent, relevant and useful

94% agreed / tend to agree that they meet with their supervising social worker often enough

97% Agreed / tend to agree that felt they could approach their supervising social worker if they had any worries

81% Felt they were listened to by the fostering service.

We have set priority actions for the forthcoming year to ensure the support and consultation we have with our carers continues:





The Kinship Team

During 2018 the Kinship Team experienced a degree of instability and the loss of a long-standing Team Manager. Jane Clamp, the new Team Manager, commenced her duties in October 2018. The staffing in the Kinship Team is once again settled with a renewed focus on timeliness and quality of assessments and working as part of a bigger team:

- We have improved the connection with locality Child Protection Teams to ensure there is ownership and understanding of the processes.
- The focus of work during 2018/19 has been about getting the right assessments into the Kinship Team in a timely manner.
- We have worked to improve the quality of reports being presented as negative assessments being presented at panel.
- To compliment and support this work we have released the Senior Practitioner in the Kinship Team to support locality social workers with the completion of Initial Viability Assessments.

Although this is in its early stages, we have received very positive feedback from the Locality teams and from the Fostering Panel:

- I would just like to say thank you to the Kinship SW for explaining the process to the child's uncle in a straight forward manner, so he was able to recognise the commitment needed as a connected carer. He was able to decide that he would be unable to commit to the fostering task
- Your input was really helpful, it allowed me to focus on the information being shared and observations of the carer & child and not worry so much about making sure I didn't miss anything in terms of process.
- You were clear, and explained our different roles and responsibilities well, and I felt that having someone from the Kinship Team was useful in terms of being clear with the proposed carer and what support she would get from who. I also felt that it helped to clarify for the carer that the role of kinship carer is a 'job' with clear responsibilities and a duty of care.
- Thanks to the Kinship Team support with the IVAs, it made such a difference and been great learning for us both. Your oversight and feedback has been invaluable in assisting us with the Initial viability assessments

Quality Assurance mechanisms introduced during the year include:

- The Team Manager screens all assessments.
- Court ordered assessments have agreed standards- that they have been presented to Fostering Panel and ADM before filing.
- A timeframe for completion of assessments and a process for early alerts has now been agreed with the court (12 weeks; early alert at 8 weeks if this is not likely to be achieved).

The Kinship Team has continued to be very busy and numbers being referred for assessment continue to rise. During 2018-19 180 Initial Viability Assessments were sent to the Kinship Team, this included positive and negative initial viability assessments.

Of these:

- 57 progressed to panel
- 33 were approved
- 24 were negative
- 1 - ADM was unable to decide as the applicants withdrew from the process

In terms of children placed under Reg. 24 of the Fostering Regulations, 27 placements were agreed (comprising single children, also sibling groups and parent and child placements).

The high number of assessments and the tight timescales involved have meant that the service has continued to commission external assessments to meet tight timescale and volume demands.

Development for next year

The service is confident that we can meet the demands of the assessments coming through, and our assessments are robust, however we recognise that Leicestershire has one of the highest post approval kinship caseloads in the East Midlands. There continues to be a growth in post approval where Special Guardianships are not the final Care Plan for the young people. This trend will continue to be explored through our Permanence Panel and in meetings with the judiciary. Service development priorities have been identified:

- To develop our locality Support Groups for kinship carers
- To improve the quality of our assessments and to ensure there is connectivity with the child care social worker we will once the IVA is approved, meet with child's social worker within 10 days to understand care planning/ background. This will ensure the background history and family dynamics is robustly assessed
- We will use Words and Pictures in our assessments to capture voice work
- We will meet with the field work team social worker prior to the end of the assessment to share assessment and outcome
- We will do a joint visit to the carers (the post support worker, assessing social worker and child's social worker) to explain the expectations and process if the assessment is positive
- We will develop PODS to undertake Signs of Safety supervision between assessment and post support to ensure the case is transferred well, promoting shared understanding of needs
- We will offer a bespoke kinship Skills to Foster for kinship carers
- We will ensure our kinship carers engage and complete their Training and Development standards within 18 months of approval.

The Dedicated Placement Support Team

Leicestershire's Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST) has been in operation for three years. This team aims to support foster placements to promote placement stability by Improving understanding of children's needs and best ways to meet these needs.

The team will work long term with specialist carers (One2One, Pathway carers, Staying Put and Supported Lodgings) and for set periods of time with children in residential care, kinship and mainstream foster carers.

The team consists of:

Team Manager
Supervising Social Workers (3)
Support Workers (5)
Independent Visitor Co-Ordinator

The team's priority outcomes:

- Placement stability
- Supporting children to home or to family-based placements or into independence.
- Promoting understanding of complex behaviours and how best to meet these needs when they arise.

The Supervising Social Worker works closely with the child's Social Worker and the team around the child, this includes CAMHS. At present there is a system whereby foster carers can book sessions through their Supervising Social Worker to discuss the child's mental health and any presenting behaviours DPST work in partnership with the MISTLE team, recently commissioned MISTLE of embedding therapeutic parenting with our foster carers, with a priority focus for young people placed in residential placements / stepping down into family-based placements.

DPST have also organised festive season craft events and are currently looking at 4 events over the summer for Fostering Family Fun days.

Feedback from the carers and young remain positive the main aspects around the support workers being available out of hours, being creative in their working with young people.

During 2018-19 Placement stability continued to be good (8%), with specific interventions offered. By the end of March 2019, the following had been achieved:

- 25 children were supported to remain within their placement
- 3 young people returned home from either foster care or residential placements
- 3 young people moved from high cost placement to either supported lodgings or to live independently 3 young people have remained at home with their parents after they had spent time in care previously but the family were experiencing difficulties with behaviours
- 25 Supported Lodgings Providers with 19 young people in placement.
- Approval of 6 Supported Lodgings Providers
- 3 prospective Supported Lodgings in assessment
- 90% of our young people in Supported Lodgings have remained stable in their placement
- 2 young people have moved into Supported Lodgings from Residential Placements, out of County, and are all stable at present.
- 20 young people who have Stayed Put in their foster placements
- We successfully recruited a further 2 Pathway Carers (In total we have 2 pathway, 3 one2one carers and 1 specialist foster carer for children with complex needs).

Developments for 2019-20

- We have a specialist recruitment month in September to attract new specialist carers and ongoing recruitment via our Social Media sites or staff vacancy pages.
- Develop our work with the MISTLE project
- The recruitment of long term One2One care for children with disabilities
- The recruit of 3 new Supported Lodgings Providers per year.
- Develop our staff team - we have 2 level 1Theraplay support workers, we now hope to support 2 further support workers to have additional qualified training e.g. in Therapeutic Parenting, DDP and Theraplay.
- The priority challenges the services faces are streamlining referrals, presenting a business case for a Senior Practitioner for the team and ensuring that all caseloads are manageable
- Develop our referral and feedback sheets to be in the Signs of Safety model with scaling questions and danger statements so we can evidence impact.

Retention overview

Our annual Foster Carer retention survey undertaken in October 2018 provides our carers with the opportunity to inform the service of how we are performing and where they feel we can make improvement. Year upon year our feedback has been more positive, and the approach of us asking pertinent questions and giving the carers the opportunity to rate our service.

Our foster carers tell us that this means:

- Keeping supervising social workers' caseloads low so that foster carers have a good level of support and advice
- Ensuring training is relevant to the needs of the children

Continually listening and involving foster carers in shaping the service.

“ There are more young people in long-term foster care than ever before, and we need to recognise that as a permanent option and make sure the resources and support are there to support the carers, and that is whatever the legal status,
Community Cares, October 4th 2017 ”



The service deregistered 16 foster carers this year, this was less than the predicted 25 carers.

An overview of foster carer loss is as follows:

- 2 Carers deregistered due to practice/safeguarding concerns
- 10 carers resigned due to retirement or life changing circumstances.
- 1 carer transferred to an Independent Fostering Agency
- 3 retired due to keeping their foster child post 18 as a Staying Put placement

We are pleased to note that we have a number of carers who have remained with the service for over 25 years. This year we said goodbye to our longest serving foster carers who had been carers for 42 years and provided placements for over 200 children and babies, preparing them for their forever families.

Fees and Allowances

Our Foster Carer Surveys completed annually since 2016 have told us our payments to foster carers are a significant element of the support and retention plan for fostering. The DfE review highlights that while fees are not a major issue for recruitment, the reward to foster carers for their role is key in retention. This is supported by findings from Fostering Network and our foster carer surveys completed over the last 3 years

In Leicestershire the revised fee structure was implemented in September 2018.

Our Training

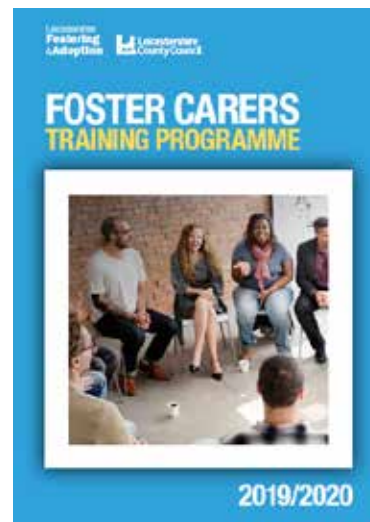
Foster carers are prepared for the role in pre-approval training through the Skills to Foster and continue to receive specific training through their development and additional, child specific training. This year and in line with Fostering Network revised programme we refreshed our Skills to Foster training programme. We have a “Team Approach” to the programme whereupon members of all the teams within the Fostering Service – the Team Around the Child, Dedicated Placement Support Team and Assessment Team co-deliver the training. This enables carers to meet the team prior to approval and be aware of our support offer.

The training we provide is valued and an important part of the support, preparation and development of foster carers, including specialist foster carers. 91% of our Foster Carers identified that they were:

- Happy with training provided
- Felt training was excellent
- Relevant and useful
- Helped me with the children in my care

A strong, training programme has been designed to match the learning and development needs of the foster carer population and National Minimum Standards and the service has expanded the training offer. The service has achieved this by developing our e-learning training hub. This means that carers can complete training in a more flexible manner. In addition to a set program of learning offers, the training hub has monthly training themes where carers can develop their skills and knowledge in key areas in their own time – this includes modules on child development, self-harm and caring for traumatised children. Our training programme has expanded to offer more advanced and varied courses to meet the needs of various placement types.

We have also combined some training events to include both kinship and Special Guardian carers. As the training is more inclusive, it brings in different perspectives and experiences. Our use of feedback from every event helps to review and develop the future training programmes to provide future bespoke and specialist training courses. Feedback from carer is seen as an essential part of the retention package for foster care and ensuring that training is relevant for both our new and more experienced carers. For 2018/19 the service is developing more training events focusing on a therapeutic approach.



We have a dedicated training co-ordinator who delivers training for all our carers both mainstream and kinship. In addition to our Core Training we also provide:

- 80 e-learning courses (for carers in the home or libraries)
- 40 live courses in venues booked by the Training Officer.
- CAMHS training
- LGBT, Therapeutic Parenting, Life Story Work, Drug & Alcohol Awareness, NHS Fayre, Safer sleep for babies and ASDAN independent living skills
- Training, Support and Development Standards - paper version or online assessment is available which can be completed on a tablet or mobile phone
- Level 3 Diploma for the CYPW at the carer's home.
- NHS Diana training for short break carers

Feedback/ Evaluations on training

- Evaluations are completed at the end of every training session by every carer and uploaded to each carer's records. They are evaluated by the trainer as well as the training officer and any issues, developments noted and actioned and are very relevant to assess and evaluate our current training courses.
- Trainers are also invited to provide feedback to gauge their experience of our venues and carers which again are actioned and reported where necessary.
- We have designed a new feedback form to scale the learner's progress and knowledge from the beginning of the training to the end of the training session.

Our Plans for the forthcoming year

- Continue to work with the Virtual School, Caring About Reading Scheme and the libraries to create carer and child focused training.
- Provide support to access the training and events organised by the Corporate Parents Team
- Develop the kinship/SGO support groups and events
- Complete the Learning Hub for all carers by the end of 2019.

Report from the Independent Reviewing Officer, Becky Edser

During 2018/19 we undertook 135 foster carer reviews.

All carers both kinship and mainstream carers engage in the review process and feel able to discuss their fostering year with the reviewing officer.

We recognise the good practice of holding reviews following concerns and this has been fully implemented within Leicestershire over the last year. This was originally met with some concern

from carers as carers presumed this would mean they would be de-registered, but through the

review process carers recognise that this approach supports transparency, learning and how to support both carers and the children or young people in their care. In some cases where there was a significant concern there will be a recommendation of a change of approval or de-

registration. During 2018-19 we undertook six reviews because of concerns about practice. There was a recommendation of de-registration for one foster family to Panel. From September 2018, I took over first reviews of foster carers prior to their attendance at Panel. It was felt that the Reviewing Officer's oversight was required for consistency and good practice.

We have amended the review paperwork to ensure the "Lived Experience" of the looked after child and the foster family was a clear focus. In Leicestershire we support the Signs of Safety Model and wanted our paperwork to follow, so the approach is reflected across the whole service. The paperwork has been revised for all participants to capture the views of:

- Foster carer
- Birth children
- Supervising Social Worker
- Independent Reviewing Officer
- Foster Child / Children

This will be implemented from July 2019.

Last year I raised concerns regarding the quality and lack of feedback we were receiving from professionals to contribute to foster carer reviews. In March 2018 feedback was 40% completion. This was raised with child care managers and we agreed to monitor the contribution of others monthly and provide updates. Month by month the contribution of professionals improved. As of March 2019, children's social worker contribution to reviews was 80%. We also called upon our Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to provide feedback as in some cases they are the professional with whom the child has had the longest relationship. As of March 2019, their contribution at foster carer reviews was 55%. Clearly there is a lot more work to be done with IROs.

Another expectation implemented in 2018/19 was the availability of a chronology on each foster carer's record, completed and updated by the supervising social worker. This was an action arising from a significant allegation against a carer and a subsequent audit of foster carer case files. The chronology is a valuable tool for undertaking reviews as it provides a timeline of events, decisions and developmental actions like training. Carers were initially cautious as to why they were being used, and whether this was a negative thing. I have advised it is for all carers and also identifies good practice examples. Case file audits are undertaken by senior managers to ensure chronologies are on carers files.

On the whole carers have welcomed the new fee structure and the opportunity to move onto a higher fee level in line with their experience and training. Importantly this now recognises our kinship carers for the contribution they make to children's lives and the service.

Moving forward we need to agree the progression process and requirements for carers moving onto the enhance level.

Carers report feeling safe within the service, feel more valued and listened to. Over the last year we have seen many of our carers go above and beyond for their foster children, which makes us as a service feel proud. Carers feel there is more stability in the fostering service and welcome the events the service provides to carers.

They have enjoyed the Foster Carer Recognition Events, and the Activity Days in the holidays.

OUR FOSTER PANEL

Annual report of the Leicestershire County Council Fostering Panel

1st April 2018 - 31st of March 2019

1. Introduction

This report summarises the work of the panel over a 12-month period. And should be read in conjunction with the statement of purpose produced by the agency.

2. Composition Of the Panel

The Agency is required to maintain a Central list of persons who are suitable due to their variety of skills, background and knowledge, and who can be flexible in their availability. LCC has tended to operate a panel A & B where members general stick to the one panel, however, can be called upon to sit on the other panel if the need arises. During this year there have been 2 new panel members (further 2 to be appointed by the beginning of June), appointed in a bid to increase representation of experienced individuals, medical background and diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity.

Name of Panel Member	Panel Role	Date Became a Panel Member
Arlene Weekes	Independent Chair	March 2013
Tony Richardson	Independent Vice-Chair	16 January 2013
Mohamed Patel	Independent Vice-Chair	20 September 2017
Fiona Booth	Independent Member	17 August 2016
Jacinta Barnard	Independent Member	19 July 2017
Anne Bridge	Independent Member	17 June 2015
Margaret Atkinson	Independent Member	22 August 2012
Ashley Scott	Independent Member	1 August 2012
Thure Johansen	Independent Member	30 January 2013
Rebecca Peters	LCC Social Worker Representative	21 January 2015
Amanda Hales	Independent Member	1 April 2015
Kendall Concannon	Independent Member	5 November 2014
Ty'rone Haughton	Independent Member	17 October 2018
Brenda Seaton	County Councillor	6 February 2019
Catherine Thompson	Independent Member	3 May 2017
Natashar Chimwaza	LCC Social Worker Representative	24 January 2018
Sandy Chamberlain	Training Co-ordinator / Kinship rep	July 2019

Action:

- Panel members reviews to be completed by the end of July 2019.
- Interviews for new panel members to take place June 2019.
- Training to be scheduled for the now well established panel members.

3. Panel Functions

The core function of panel has remained the same, namely, to make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on the following:

- the suitability of prospective applicants to foster;
- whether foster carers approvals to change to reflect the possibility of them being long term matched with a specific child or children.
- to consider the 1st annual foster carer review or any reviews the Agency deem necessary

In addition, the panel is available to provide advice to the agency of any cases that they wish panel to explore and to provide feedback upon these cases.

The Fostering panel met on 24 occasions and 5 additional panels were convened to address the Agency's workload, hearing a total of 131 cases.

New Fostering Approvals - 61

6 Month Reviews - 2

Annual Foster Carer Reviews - 32

Deregistration - 1

Deferred Cases by panel - 9

Change of terms approval e.g. Long-Term Matches - 2

Non-Approvals by panel - 24

4. Business Support

The role of the Panel Administrator is to:

- produce an annual schedule of panels,
- ensure that panel members are invited to panel ensuring quoracy,
- maintain the panel booking system and to liaise with the Panel chair and panel adviser in constructing the panel agenda,
- receive and distribute reports to panel,
- general liaison with the Panel chair and panel adviser,
- produce a record of the panel discussion by way of minutes and ensure that those are amended and circulated to all relevant parties,
- liaise with the ADM in relation to the decision (decision letter).

There has continued to be consistency in the Panel Administrator role, which is appreciated by all panel members.

Action:

- Administrator to attend minute-taker/administrator training.

5. Quality Assurance – function and feedback

The panel provide feedback for each case presented to it, this is collated by the Panel Adviser, verbally as each case is heard and a new form has been devised which many panel members complete at the time of reading the reports.

6. Prospective Foster Carers Reports and Connected Assessments

Generally, panel comment favourably on the quality of the above reports. There have been a few occasions, primarily when new assessors have been used, where it has been felt that the reports lacked detail analysis. Particularly as it relates to vulnerabilities of applicants and what support can be offered.

There has been a noticeable improvement to the quality of Connected Carers reports, this is due to the noticeably good working relationship between the Panel Advisor and the newly appointed Connected Team Manager. In turn the latter has a good relationship with the panel and has been open to the feedback about her team's work. She and her staff have also used the panel to present cases where she has sought advice. The manager clearly has a good knowledge of child protection and National minimum standards as it relates to connected assessments such that now the reports clearly evidence work to be undertaken, areas of vulnerability and give a clear view as to the care plan.

7. Home Reports/Annual Foster carers Reports

Again, these reports are of a relatively good standard, the major area of comment is in relation to inaccuracies in the data/details of existing foster carers. Generally, there is a sense that the relationship between carers and their supervising social worker is good.

Action:

- More diligence is needed in terms of basic information being checked as part of the management oversight of cases.

8. Other cases considered

There have been 6 Reviews Following Concerns/Allegations over the year there, which appears to be a low figure but this may be due to the working relationship between foster carer and SSW as mentioned above.

9. Agency decision maker

The ADM has endorsed 122 of the Panel recommendations and on 1 occasion did not make a decision, and 1 where the Panel recommendation has not been agreed with.

10. Agency Feedback

See 5 above

11. Feedback from Attendees

All attendees are given feedback forms after attending panel. This feedback is then typed by the panel administrator and then shared with panel at each panel under any other business. Whilst it is noted that these forms are often completed to date there has been no collation of these forms.

Action:

- Panel adviser and Panel Administrator to collate the data received from these feedback forms to establish whether there are any patterns which would suggest the need for panel to change its practise.

12. Summary and Conclusions

The agency and Panel have continued to operate in a context of considerable government change in relation to childcare services.

From the above there are a number of issues that require attention:

- explore the need for any improvements following the feedback on the experience of attendees coming to panel
- Panel member reviews to be undertaken yearly and on-time.
- Administrator to attend minute-taker/administrator training.
- Panel training to be identified.
- Continue with Annual Foster Panel training to incorporate updates on legislation and LCC Policies and Procedures

THE INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

The scheme supports children in care up to the age of 21. The scheme provides positive friendships and role models for our young people placed in foster care and residential care, with many friendships being maintained after young people have moved on from care and are living independently. The scheme assists with placement support and stability for both mainstream and connected carers.

During 2018-19 we have reviewed our Independent Visitors Scheme and put an emphasis on recruitment, training and support. There is a robust development plan in place for future development of the service.

At the end of March 2019, the service had:

- 38 approved independent visitors
- 7 Visitors retired/ceased being visitors as their matched young person reached 21/no longer wished to have an Independent Visitor
- 6 applicants being assessed.

Recruitment of male independent visitors continues to be a challenge nationally, but the service is working hard to try to address this, by promoting the scheme via local sporting venues, the Council website, links with police and fire service, and through approved independent visitors. In addition the scheme was promoted during national volunteer week in June 2018, and the support by independent visitors acknowledge.

During 2018/2019 the scheme has produced new practice standards and updated Policy, Procedure and staff guidance has recently been approved for the service.

The scheme has produced a newsletter and established group supervision/network events for independent visitors - 2 have taken place so far. Additional training has been offered through the fostering service. Independent visitors have been invited and attended the yearly celebration event.

In March 2019 at our Recognition Event we dedicated an award in memory of one of our inspirational Independent Visitors who had sadly passed away in December 2018. The Director recognised the contribution of this Independent Visitor and the words of the young person who spoke so fondly of her.



Developments for the 2019/20

- The current post holder works 0.5FTE. To develop the scheme further we need to recruit a full-time post holder. This will be progressed during the summer months.
- Continue to prioritise the recruitment of new independent visitors, specifically men and look at future advertising campaigns considering gaps in provision and needs of young people
- Continue to monitor the list for children waiting, looking at matching when we have an appropriate independent visitor approved/available
- Capture correct information through the electronic system
- Arrange annual meet and greet meetings for new and existing visitors
- Invite independent visitors and the children/young people they are matched with to fostering service craft and summer events to embed them in the service as a whole
- Explore mentoring for new independent visitors
- Establish a robust process for feedback and review of the scheme to inform future practice
- Promote the scheme internally
- Consider resource implications in terms of staffing levels and funding.

The Foster Carer Association

The Leicestershire Foster Carer Association (LFCA) has been running for a number of years. This followed the establishment of a committee who had determined the areas where foster carers and their families could be better supported.

Many of our LFCA have fostered for the service for several years and bring to the association a wealth of experience. The membership of the association remains low, but as a service we have linked them into our Foster Carer Forum so they can offer support to locality groups.

Developments for 2019-20

- Regular attendance at the Foster Carer Forum
- LFCA to be invited to attend locality groups to seek new membership and promote their role
- LFCA to work with LCC and be the neutral person to undertake exit interviews when carers leave our service.

Our Locality Support Groups

During 2018-19 our locality groups re-vitalised to ensure consistency of approach, local leadership through foster carers and focus on what will most help. We have 5 locality groups based across Leicestershire. They are vibrant groups who are supportive of the service yet feel comfortable to challenge or raise any concerns.

Most meet monthly. Details of the meeting times are advertised in the Newsletter. When a new carer is approved their details are provided to the co-ordinator to make contact and welcome to the support group. Many of our co-ordinators are also mentors so new carers are quickly inducted into their local group.

Bespoke training has been delivered at locality groups with guest speakers and our training co-ordinator. We have also supported the locality groups to hold Festive Season Parties, day trips and other social events.

The efforts of our co-ordinators are recognised annually at our Foster Carers Recognition Event.

Complaints and Allegations

Over the last year we have provided many forums for carers to raise and resolve issues. Both the Team Managers from the Team Around the Child, and Kinship Team meet with carers to discuss any concerns. The Service Manager is also available to meet with carers both as a group or an individual foster family and meets regularly with the LFCA. As a result of managing concerns quickly and efficiently last year we received no formal complaints.

We also had 4 allegations, of which:

- All were referred to LADO
- 2 led to Position of Trust Meetings which led to Reviews Following Concerns
- 3 had an outcome of no further action
- 1 household were de-registered
- 1 carer resigned.

Our Quality Assurance

Within the Fostering Service we continue to strive to achieve excellence and review the impact we have. We are constantly seeking ways to improve the service we provide to our children and families.

Twice yearly we hold Service Days where the whole team can reflect upon our achievements, develop our learning and where is the evidence of the impact we have made and jointly review or agree the next years' Service Delivery Plan.

As a service we also have specific service area Storyboards identifying:

- Where we were (our current position)
- What we have done
- What difference has this made
- What are our next steps

They are a very simple, clear way for teams to identify progress, learning, resources, and performance targets to improve the service.

Within the service we have an agreed auditing schedule. The audits form part of the departmental Quality Assurance Strategy, to consistently raise practice using effective management oversight. The schedule is as follows:

- Service Manager – 4 Themed audits per year
- Team Managers – 1 Case file audit per month

The findings from the audits are then presented back to the team with a timeline of improvements. A report is provided to our senior management team with actions to be followed to ensure improvement.

This year the audit themes included:

- Chronologies
- Review of chronologies - after feeding back initial numbers is the quality and quantity have increased
- Voice and Choice - how we capture the voice not only of the carer but the whole foster family
- Foster carer reviews – compliance and the feedback from other partners.

A Final Word from the Service Manager, Joss Longman

I am very pleased that through intensive consultation with our carers we implemented our revised skills based payments scheme. This has been positively received by both our mainstream and kinship carers. We now hope to build upon our skilled carers with training and development to build our cohort of enhanced carers.

Our retention of carers has improved. We deregistered fewer carers than was predicted and we recruited above our annual target for our Supported Lodgings Providers. Our Team Around the Child has developed its support to carers, and we see the impact of this through our carers actively engaging in service days, staff interviews, participation events and our retention survey

Our Dedicated Placement Support Team has supported over 70 children where placement instability had been identified and at risk of disruption, and they have supported several children stepping down from complex need, high cost placements into supported lodgings placements or return home. Our specialist carers have supported 5 young people in foster placements who either had stepped down from residential care, or would have escalated to residential care.

Our recruitment team have benefitted from engaging with recruitment consultants to ensure we have clearer processes and saw the launch of marketing plans and regular marketing meetings chaired by myself.

Moving forward our assessment team will be focussed on supporting our foster carers through the assessment process, embedding our “We are Family” philosophy at those early stages.

For the forthcoming year:

- Continue to use all forms of media in our intensive recruitment campaign to achieve:
 - 25 mainstream carers
 - 4 Specialist carers
 - 3 Supported lodgings
- We want to develop our Enhanced Carers Scheme and recruit and/or train more specialist carers to support our children and young people in most need
- Continue to develop our Signs of Safety Approach to all areas of our service, including reflective supervision and embedding PODS
- Develop our therapeutic parenting style with the support of MISTLE and build upon the skill set of the workers within the team
- We will continue to keep our caseloads at a manageable level to enable our social workers to deliver the right support at the right time for our carers.

I am very proud of my Team Managers, who take great pride in their positions.

Joss Longman, Service Manager, Fostering Service

