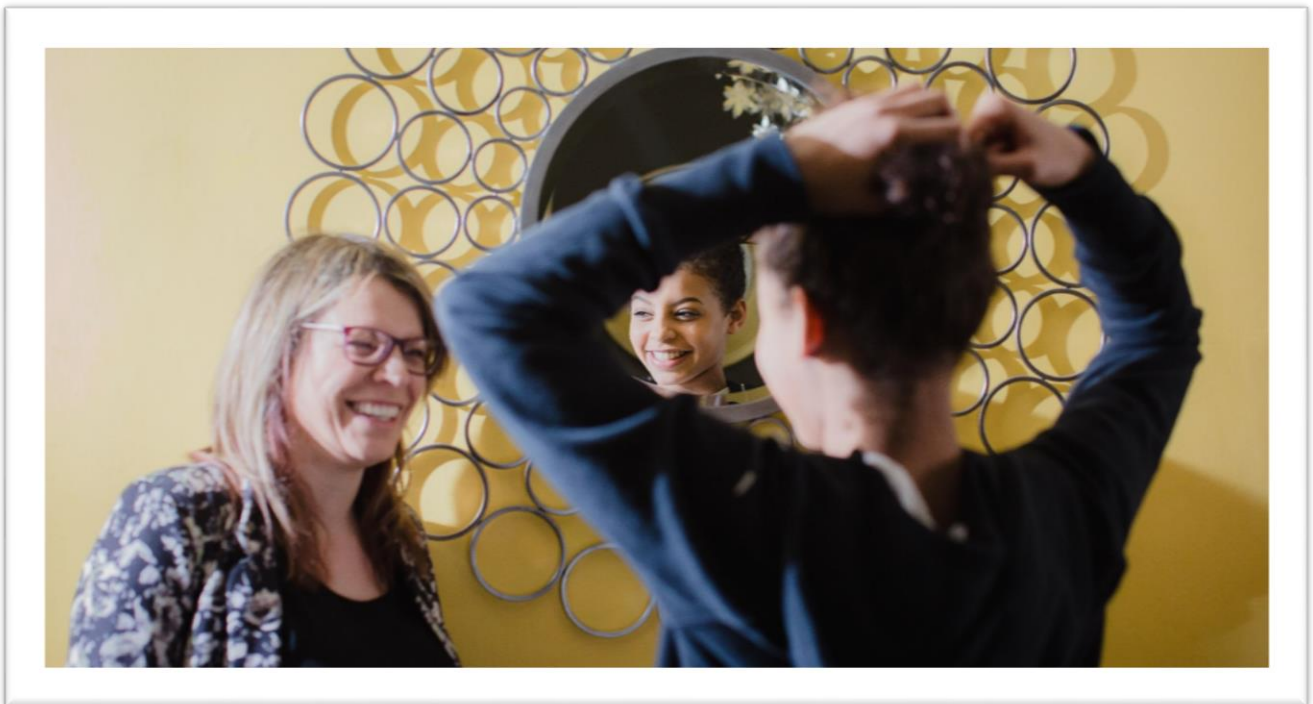


Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2019-2020



Our Service

Leicestershire County Council had operated a joint Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service since April 2015. In July 2019 we separated the two functions to have our own dedicated Fostering and Adoption Services. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000.

Leicestershire County Council's carers are part of our "Fostering Family". The service aims to listen and respond to our carers and over the years we have cemented our relationship, built on trust and transparency. Using their knowledge and experiences has also helped to shape the service and build upon our strengths.

The Fostering Service has two functions – recruitment and retention. A Service and Assistant Service Manager oversee the service.

Our successes for 2019/20 have included:

- Implementation of our revised Foster Carer Review Paperwork
- Ensured each foster family has an up to date chronology and that this chronology informs practice and foster carer development
- Reviewed and revised our Independent Visitors Scheme
- Developed joint viabilities when undertaking Connected Carers Assessment, which has and will continue to improve early permanence decisions
- Strengthened our Voice work with both foster and birth children, including Sons and Daughters support events and consultation.
- Increased the capacity of the Dedicated Placements Support Team to offer more advice to foster carers and children who have more complex needs.

The Fostering Service is led by Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and Virtual School, managed through a Service Manager for Retention and Recruitment with newly introduced Assistant Service Manager to support the Service. This role is not yet embedded but will lead on retention and support services for carers.

In September 2019 Leicestershire's Children and Family Service was inspected by Ofsted. Whilst the Fostering Service was not subject to its own inspection the feedback for the service was exceptional . The overall judgement for services for children in care, was **Good**

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 rise in Court ordered parent and child foster and residential placement requests.

This report should be read alongside the Recruitment and Retention Strategy which 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 Family Departmental Plan 2017 – 2021
- Children & Families Partnership Plan
- Continuous Improvement Plan – The Road to excellence 2017 - 2020
- Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Commissioning Strategy 2018- 2021
- Childrens Innovation Project



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 £2.8m to the overall Council savings

- For all Children and Family 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 Service reports monthly to the Lead Member Meeting, attended by Lead member, Director and Assistant Director.

Our Identified Tasks from 2018/19 Annual Report

- To offer self-service access to training of a range of courses for our carers
- Ensuring our carers feel part of the Team Around the Child by contributing their own reports to LAC reviews. Recognising they hold key information regarding the child / children reports for Children's ROA giving carers a greater voice in these meetings ensuring all important dates, activities and views relevant to the child recorded
- Development of Enhanced Carers 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.
- Continue to meet our recruitment targets for both mainstream and specialist carers
- Continue to work with our business partners
- Develop Locality support groups for our Kinship Carers
- Recruitment of 25 mainstream foster carers, 2 specialist carers and 3 supported lodgings providers.

As a Local Authority Fostering Service we recognize the competitiveness of the market and as such we aim to promote ourselves with our branding "We are Family". This philosophy and the respect we have for our carers drives relationship-based practice. The children and young people placed with our carers are our local authority children. This is an added motivator for carers who for Leicestershire.

We continue to drive our recruitment targets with the following focus:

- Increasing Leicestershire's market share of mainstream foster carers
- Increase in the numbers of kinship carers
- Increase the number of Supported Lodgings providers
- Increase Leicestershire's specialist foster carers
- Reduce the number of young people requiring residential placements by supporting them to return to family-based placements
- Ensuring our carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care.
- Retain our foster carers by listening to them and through providing support during difficult times

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. This is in its second year and we continually freshen our recruitment campaigns in line with current trends and local needs
- Ongoing Specialist Carers Recruitment – Leicestershire is one of the few local authorities that runs schemes for specialist carers. These carers care for our more complex children and young people, children stepping down from residential care, children with disabilities and parent and child placements.

- During 2019-20 we continued our success in recruiting specialist carers called One2One and Pathway Carers. .
- Ongoing recruitment of our Kinship Carers to care for children and young people with whom there is a pre-existing relationship either as a family member or a previous connection.
- Continued implementation of the revised Payments Structure for carers that recognises the skills, experience and commitment of our foster carers through payment for skills principles; we recognise our kinship carers as professional carers and as such they can progress through the levels after successful completion of training and completion of Training Support and Development Standards.
- Annual review and refresh of our Foster Carer Handbook with our carers, to promote understanding of advice, support and training available to carers
- Implementation of 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). We have continued to ensure the successful running of groups in all locality areas and maintained those with new leaders when previous leaders have retired.
- 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 can provide 24-7 support to carers when they need it most. Supporting placement stability through providing support, guidance and developing carers skills. This team also offers support to the specialist carers, ensuring that supervising social workers have low caseloads, can undertake high levels of visits and can respond when the carers need additional support.
- The successful Government bid to recruit for the East Midlands foster carers and Supported Lodgings for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

Recruitment Targets for 2019/20:

25 Mainstream Foster Carers
2 Specialist Carer
3 Supported Lodgings Providers
(Total 30)

Recruitment Activity for 2019/20:

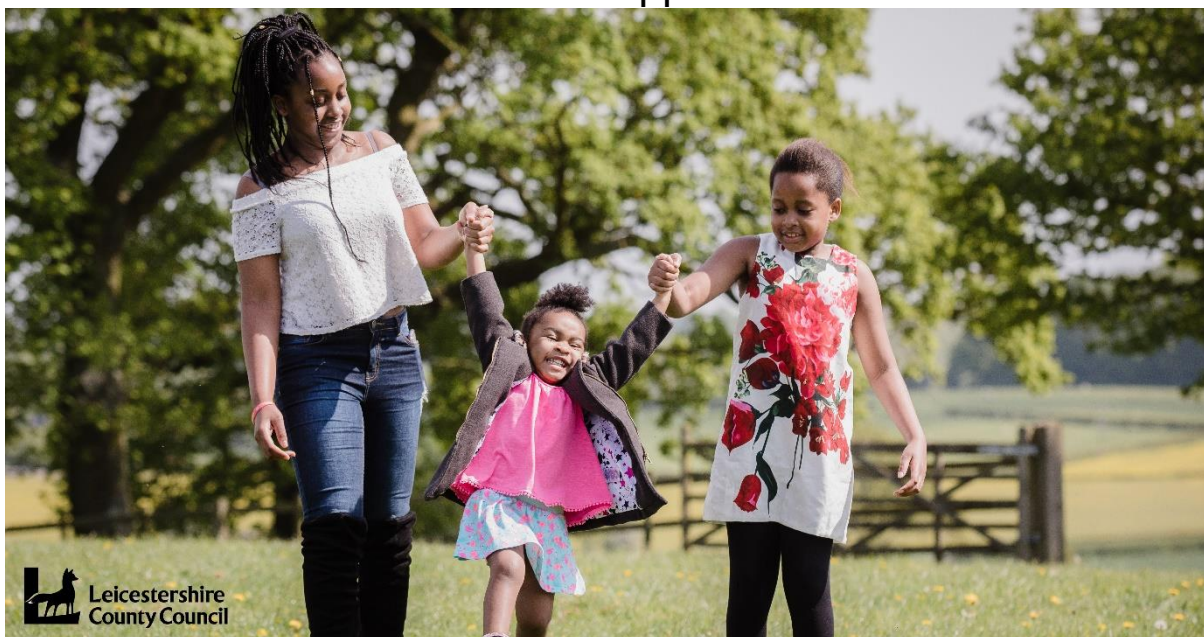
17 Mainstream Foster Carers
1 Specialist Carer
5 Supported Lodgings Providers
(Total 23)

Other recruitment Activity for 2019/20:

39 Kinship Carers

Net Growth in Carers for 2019/20:

11 Mainstream Foster Carers
1 Specialist Carer
4 Supported Lodgings Providers
39 Kinship Carers



Fostering with Leicestershire – ‘We are Family’

Roles within the Fostering Service

Our Fostering Service consists of six separate teams

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

Our digital strategy continues to support our recruitment having the flexibility to develop as our recruitment challenges change. This approach includes:

- A largely digital marketing strategy
- A 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.
- On line Portal, after approval all our carers recordings can be sent and uploaded securely.
- Virtual memory box, we are very proud that our foster carers can upload all the child`s memories – photographs, school certificates, and videos.

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

The Front Door of our Service – **The Recruitment Team**

Welcoming – Informative - Efficient



Our team is made up of:

- 1 Team Manager
- 1 Recruitment Enquiry Co-Ordinator
- 1 Recruitment Support Co-Ordinator
- 2 Initial Assessment Workers
- 1 (Casual) Initial Assessment Worker

The Recruitment Team are the '**Front door**' to our Service and as such, play a vital part in attracting, filtering and processing enquiries from members of the public who are interested in becoming foster carers and adopters with Leicestershire County Council.

The team provides a dedicated resource which manages all forms of contact, including contact by telephone, email, website, text message enquiries. Regular public events are held to welcome members of the public to find out more about fostering and adoption which are also the responsibility of this team.

The team manager works closely with colleagues in the Communications Team to create appropriate and cost-effective recruitment campaigns, based on projected Service requirements, using various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. They also utilise more traditional methods of posters, postcards and banners as well as Radio campaigns and adverts within Leicestershire publications and local business staff intranets.

It is vital that the service we provide is Welcoming and friendly, swift and efficient, informative and honest as well as ensuring that every enquiry is dealt with in a fair and non-discriminatory manner, representative of the key values and behaviours of Leicestershire County Council.

We are proud members of:



What do we do?

499 Fostering enquiries generated, received & serviced.

90 Initial visits in applicants' homes

54 progressed to Stage 1 of assessment

17 approved **fostering** households.

1 Approved Pathway Carer

5 **Supported Lodgings** Carer households.

Outcomes:

We have seen an **increase** in the **quality** of our enquiries for fostering & adoption.

This means an improved conversion rate:

1:5 fostering enquiries result in an **Initial visit**

1:6 initial visits are progressed to **Assessment**

3:5 applicants in assessment, progress to **approval**

'Improved Return on investment for Leicestershire's pound'



Reduction in applicants leaving the process:

2018/19 = 44

2019/20 = 20



This is a cost-effective method of ‘filtering’ enquiries at the ‘front door’ of the Service. It means less delay for applicants, with clear, swift, consistent and fair outcomes to their enquiry.

This allows us to increase time spent on enquiries with a higher likelihood of progressing further.

Improved value for money due to the costly filtering of high enquiry numbers carried out at the beginning of the process, making better use of the **availability of Assessment capacity of the service**.

Improved ‘filtering’ of applicants at the enquiry and initial visit stage has added to the reduction of applicants leaving the assessment process:

We are making effective use of the assessment service.

Carer Retention is improved.

Our Fostering Events 2019/20

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 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 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.

144 people attended our ‘Find Out About Fostering’ events in 2019/20.

71 people attending our events requested initial visits from

Some of our fostering campaigns:

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

Your love and support could help a child in care's confidence soar. If you've ever thought about how you can make a ...see more



Leicestershire County Council

FOSTERINGLEICESTERSHIRE...
Are you considering fostering? Children in... [LEARN MORE](#)

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

Could you make fostering your New Years resolution and show a child in care the magic of Christmas in 2020?



Leicestershire County Council

FOSTERINGLEICESTERSHIRE...
Make 2020 the year you foster [LEARN MORE](#)

👍 13 5 shares

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

Being a teenager can be hard. Being a teenager in care, without any family support can be harder. Could you open ...see more




Leicestershire County Council


Be the difference.
Change a life.
fosteringleicestershire.com [Learn More](#)

👍❤️ 109 4 comments 7 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

Could your parenting experience help you to support and guide a young person in care and teach them essential life skills?



Leicestershire County Council

Could you foster?
Could you change lives?
fosteringleicestershire.com [Learn More](#)

👍 24 12 comments 2 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Some highlights of 2019/20 team activity

April 2019:

Adoption in Leicestershire
Sponsored · ···

Little brothers and sisters want to be just like their older siblings. Could you help us keep them together by adopting more than child?

working together
Adoption East Midlands www.adoptioneastmidlands.org.uk

ADOPTIONEASTMIDLANDS.O...
Adoption can change lives... [LEARN MORE](#)

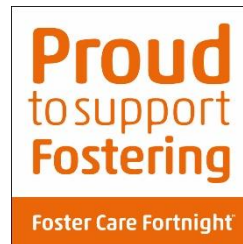
LinkedIn adverts for Specialist carers

Leicestershire Cricket Club Community Brochure for 2020 – feature advert

Adoption campaign for ‘Siblings’.

May 2019:

Foster Care Fortnight 2019



June 2019:

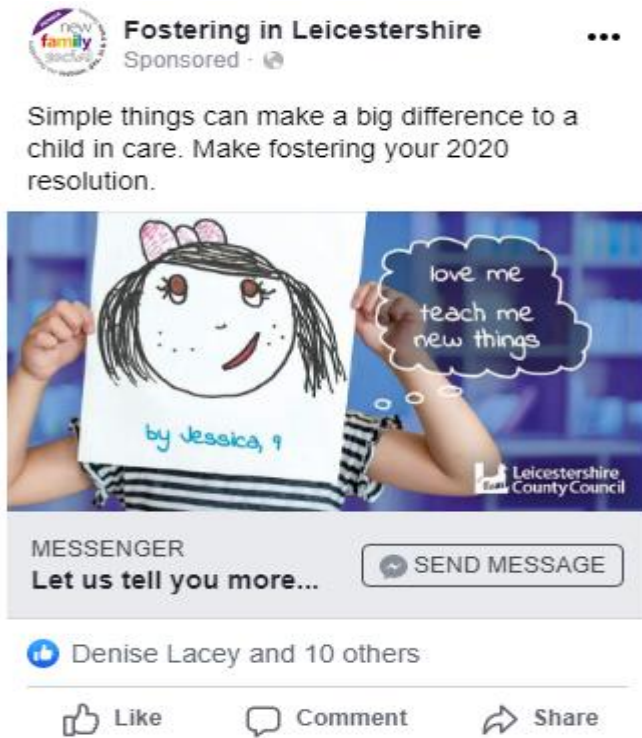
Fostering allowances updated & publicised:
Specialist fostering brochure created and released.



July 2019: Adoption Brochure updated and released.
Independent visitor leaflet updated.

Leicester Park & Ride bus Adverts

August 2019: What makes a good foster carer? – Launching a drawing competition for our children



Fostering in Leicestershire Sponsored · 🌐

Simple things can make a big difference to a child in care. Make fostering your 2020 resolution.

by Jessica, 9

love me
teach me
new things

Leicestershire County Council

MESSANGER
Let us tell you more... [SEND MESSAGE](#)

👍 Denise Lacey and 10 others

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Over the year children in care told us what they believe makes a good foster carer. The winning images were used in our Campaigns



Fostering in Leicestershire Sponsored · 🌐

Simple things can really mean the most to a child in care. If you think you could make a difference to a child's life, we'd love ...see more

by Sophie, 8

keep me safe
treat me kindly

Leicestershire County Council

You can make a difference
Working? Renting your house? M...
FosteringLeicestershire.com [Learn More](#)

👍❤️ 16 3 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

September 2019

Staff intranet appeal for foster carers
Letters to SEN schools



WE ARE FAMILY



November/December 2019:



Promotional video created about the 'foster carers' transfer process' for our Website.



January 2020:

We held a photo shoot at Bradgate Park to enhance our library of images available to use in our campaigns.



February 2020:

Supported Lodging & Specialist videos out.



created, campaigns & press releases sent

March 2020:

'Spread the word' leaflet created to encourage our foster carers to promote our service.

Covid-19 response:

We created Leicestershire County Council Foster Carer's 'Closed' Facebook group to enable the service to remain connected to our carers. This has proven to be extremely positive with 102 members since it was created in early March 2020.

Our colleagues in the Communications team promptly created 'rainbow' logos and appropriate images for us to use specifically during this period ensuring our messaging remaining 'current' and in line with the national picture:





Thank you, Cards & Hampers:

In recognition of the additional support that our carer's provided to our looked after children during the 'Lockdown' stage of Covid-19, in agreement with our senior management Team, the recruitment team co-ordinated the sourcing and distribution of our 'Thank you' cards to carers as well as over extremely well received 'Thank you Hampers' which were delivered to all our carers households where our children and young people were placed – all our foster carers and supported lodgings providers.

We ensured that our hampers included ingredients to suit dietary requirements (including Gluten Free/Vegetarian) and that overall, they provided an activity to encourage carers to spend time baking and cooking with our children. We received many images of our children baking and enjoying the contents as well as an overwhelming number of Thank you messages to the service for the 'thoughtfulness of the hamper' during what was a very stressful time for many of our carers.





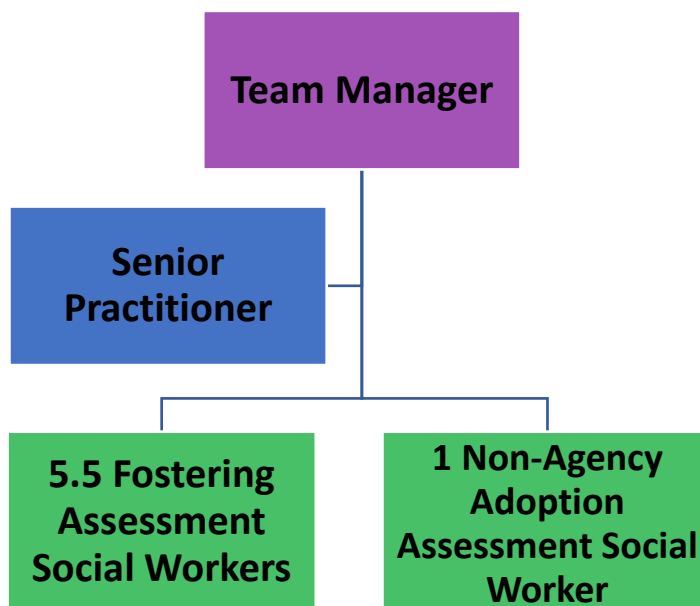
It's been a busy year for the team which in turn ensures that we are continuing to welcome people into the service and support them to progress along to our colleagues in **The Assessment Team**.

The Journey has started – The Assessment Team

After a re-structure of the service in 2015 the Assessment Team initially was responsible for both Adoption and Fostering Assessments. In August 2019, however, with the adoption service preparing to align to the regional adoption agency agenda, the responsibility for agency adoption assessments was relinquished to the Permanency Team. The Assessment Team, therefore, are responsible for:

- Mainstream Fostering Assessments
- Jointly overseeing the Mentoring Scheme (for new Foster Carers)
- Private Fostering Assessments
- Non-Agency Adoption Assessments
- Leading on the delivery of Skills to Foster Training

Assessment Team Staff Structure:



Assessment Team Update:

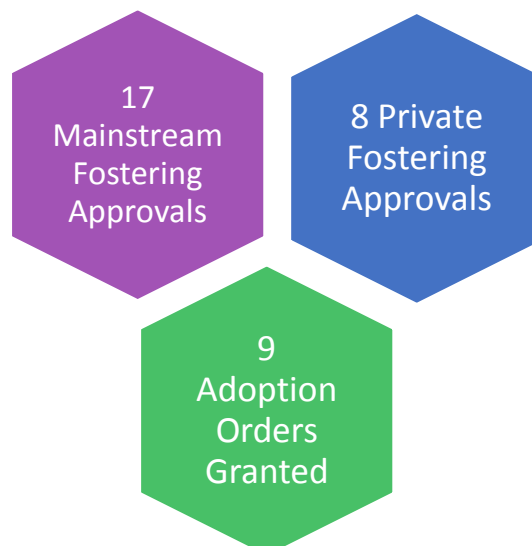
The Assessment Team - whilst experiencing some staffing changes in the last year - remains stable and settled. The team is made up of experienced, flexible, enthusiastic and competent social workers.

At Leicestershire County Council, the two-stage process of fostering assessments are merged – meaning that all assessments could be considered ‘fast tracked’. This has benefits for our applicants, who, after deciding they would like to foster, want to be approved as quickly as possible and for the service, as we have approved carers ready to take placements of children in far shorter timescales than previously achieved.

When the decision was made in the 2018-19 financial year to fast-track all fostering assessments, the aim was to reduce the timescales for completion of fostering assessments from 7-9 months to 4.5 – 6 months. All cases are booked onto Fostering Panel on allocation, with 4.5 – 5 months being allowed for completion of the assessment. The Assessment Team in 2019-20 averaged 6.5 months per assessment, with several assessments being taken to Panel within 5 months. On consideration of those cases which took longer than our 4.5 – 6-month goal, there were justifiable reasons for delay, as opposed to their being drift e.g. additional work identified with birth children in assessment / applicants undertaking significant house renovations. Assessments completed by external, private agencies took longer and there is added delay in processing during the expression of interest and checks phase. Overall, this increased the timeframe from stage 1 to approval to 9 months. There is clearly room for improvement here.

Approvals:

In 2019/20 the Assessment Team approved the following number of carers:



We achieved and superseded our target for net growth in respect of mainstream assessments in 2019/20. This is significant progress and a positive step forward in growing our cohort of carers and, ultimately, making savings for the Local Authority by reducing reliance on private fostering agencies.

In 2018/19 we predicted that we were likely to progress more private fostering and non-agency adoption assessments than the previous year; this prediction was correct e.g. 2 Adoption Orders granted in 2018/19.

The 17 mainstream approvals created placement capacity of 23 additional placements in 2019-20. Of these approvals - 5 households could take sibling placements, 1 is approved to provide emergency placements, 1 is approved for parent and child and 13 of the households have 'short term' in their terms of approval.

In addition to this, 1 specialist carer was approved and 5 supported lodging providers.

6 carers left the organisation, called a resignation, for a range of reasons like retirement and one carer left as they did not agree with a child's care plan.

Withdrawals and negative conclusions within the assessment process over 2019/20 reduced greatly compared to 2018/19; 20 households withdrew / concluded negatively this year whereas 44 households concluded in 2018/19 (most withdrew). The following is a breakdown of the reasons for withdrawal / negative in 2019/20:

- Personal Circumstances 60%
- Negative Conclusion (before withdrawal) 15%
- New Job 10%
- Change of Interest (to another scheme) 10%
- Bereavement 5%.

The reduction in withdrawals in 2019/20 is an indicator of a more robust assessment process - both in respect of management decision to enter assessment and the quality of assessment process which applicants experience.

What we plan for 2020/21

Recruitment of 25 mainstream foster carers, 2 specialist carers and 5 Supported Lodgings carers

Fostering Mentoring Scheme:

Alison Thompson (Assessment Team Senior Practitioner) and Vanessa Petch (Team around the Child Team Senior Practitioner) are the coordinators for the Fostering Mentoring Scheme.

Having two dedicated 'champions' for the mentoring scheme, has provided the impetus for this area of the service to be strengthened. Over the past year we have made improvements to the scheme which has resulted in all applicants being offered a mentor and, when they indicate they want one, applicants

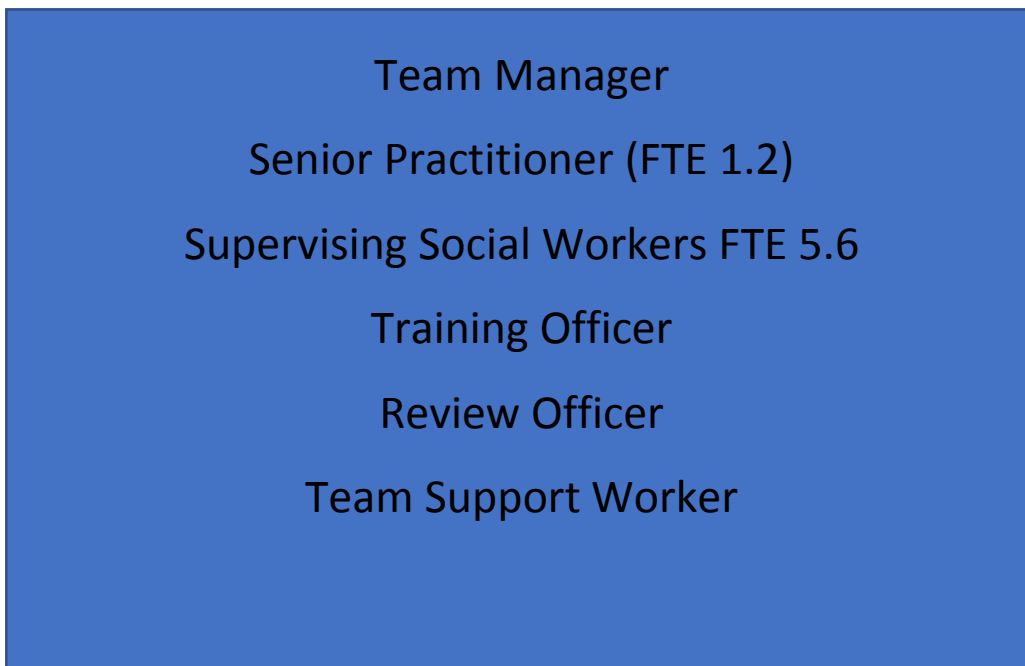
being matched to a mentor more quickly. A copy of this year's Annual Mentoring Report is attached as Appendix 1.

Skills to Foster Training

In 2019/20 the Assessment Team took a lead in reviewing both the way in which skills to foster training was delivered, and the programme's content. We subsequently made changes which included co-delivery of training with staff from the Dedicated Placement Support Team and the Team around the Child Team. This joint working has just begun, and we hope to be able to report upon its success and the feedback from applicants within the next Annual Report.

Supporting Leicestershire's Carer – Team Around the Child

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



We are very proud of our Team Around the Child Team, working with our foster carers to achieve the best for the children they care for.

As our co-hort of post approval carers grow we have new ways to support our carers and ensure they have the correct levels of support. Our carers expect a high level of service from us. On an annual basis we undertake a Foster Carer Retention Survey. We ask carers to review a number of areas, from the support they receive, the training we provide, the support they receive from not only the Supervising Social Worker but also the Child's Social worker. We want to know how the training has been received and what we can do better. The highlights of the survey are presented below:

In 2019/20 Our foster carers told us:

97% enjoyed our fostering events

90% 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

85% 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.

Next year we intend to develop our Foster Carers Survey to reflect all the carers that sit beneath our fostering umbrella to encompass both recruitment and retention and the development journey, this will include mainstream carers, connected carers, specialist carers and supported lodgings providers.

Areas of development during 2019/20.

- Foster Carer Forum – In 2019/20 we have continued to develop our work with the Foster Carers Forum. This has been useful to discuss policies and practice with foster carers to gain carers views and opinions. We hope to include Kinship carers in this forum in the future.
 - Mentoring Scheme- Our mentoring scheme has been developed, we have reported the success of this scheme with the Assessment Team Feedback.
 - Foster Carer Handbook – During the year 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 training programme continues to grow from strength to strength having a range of training for all our carers – mainstream foster carers, kinship carers and our own supported lodgings providers. Our feedback from carers is that they value the training and see it as one of the most important areas they value. Each year we develop further training, both on line and in. A copy of our training programme is available on request.
 - Our on-line portal has been live for some time. For some carers this has been a sharp learning curve, but we have been fortunate to have a dedicated worker from business support to support carers whilst they develop their skills. The On-line portal consists of:
 - ✓ Fostering Service information
 - ✓ Foster carers admin box
 - ✓ Virtual memory box.
1. 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.
 2. Foster carers admin box - This enables our carers to have their own virtual filing cabinet where they can upload all of 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.
 3. Virtual Memory Box. Carers are able to scan and upload photographs, videos, school reports, certificates of achievements and penpal 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- We have managed to retain caseloads as near to 16 as possible. Over the year we have seen 3 Private Fostering Post Support moved over to the service.
- Being valued, 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.
- 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 Childs voice feedback to better hear the voice of the child
- Due to difficulties with Covid restrictions several training events were held by webinar and a range of eLearning courses were offered

Retention Activities;

Engagement with carers is essential to communication – knowing 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. Team Manager and Senior Practitioners stay in regular contact with Locality Support group leaders and visit quarterly.

We supported Locality support groups social activities such as summer picnics, Christmas crafts Annual Celebration event – An evening to celebrate our carers – Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Providers and Independent Visitors

Annual Celebration event – was put on hold due to Covid 19 but we ensured our carers know they are valued. We sent them a hamper, a card and a number of communications from senior management.

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. This year we had a growing number of birth children who joined a trampolining event and Christmas Snowdome event

To support foster families in managing the Covid crisis TAC carried out door step visits to speak to carers and children/ kept in regular contact with Locality Support Group leaders/ arranged for a hamper of treats and activities to encourage foster families.

What we plan to develop in 2020/21

- Development of Enhanced Carers Pathway allowing carers opportunity for professional development and recognising the additional skills some carers demonstrate and require in their fostering role to parent therapeutically

- Offer a range of new and bespoke training courses including 'how to manage loss' how to manage stress and anxiety' offering connected parenting
- Offer of regular therapeutic parenting workshops led by a psychotherapist/ consultant for carers to explore how to therapeutically manage the challenging behaviours of traumatised children, offering bespoke professional input
- Joint working with the Permanence Team to develop a training module for foster families moving children onto adoption.
- Signs of safety case pod meetings to include a broader range of professionals including attendance of foster carers
- Develop Carers Information Evenings by including topical discussions, such as enhancing a child's understanding of race and ethnicity. Inviting speakers with expert knowledge and wisdom on specific areas of interest.

The Kinship Team (Connected)

The Kinship team has dual roles, to assess and support kinship carers

Kinship Care is unique to local authorities, within Leicestershire we have experienced a significant growth in our kinship carers year on year. At March 31st we had 76 kinship carers which is the highest amongst our neighbouring local authorities.

In October we entered a joint working arrangement with the locality teams to undertake joint viabilities as part of pilot scheme to ensure that:

- Kinship were alerted to the possibility of placements at the earliest opportunity
- Support was provided to the locality to understand the processes involved
- Support provided to locality at Family Group Meetings to understand the role of a foster carer
- Joint viabilities with potential family members were undertaken

The pilot was for 4 months and we could recognise the benefits of providing this level of service. The pilot made recommendations for future development.

As a service we also recognise that there was a significant piece of work required to develop our Kinship carers post approval to ensure they achieve their Training Support and Development Standards and the 28 hr Post Approval Training.

Our Plans for 2020/21

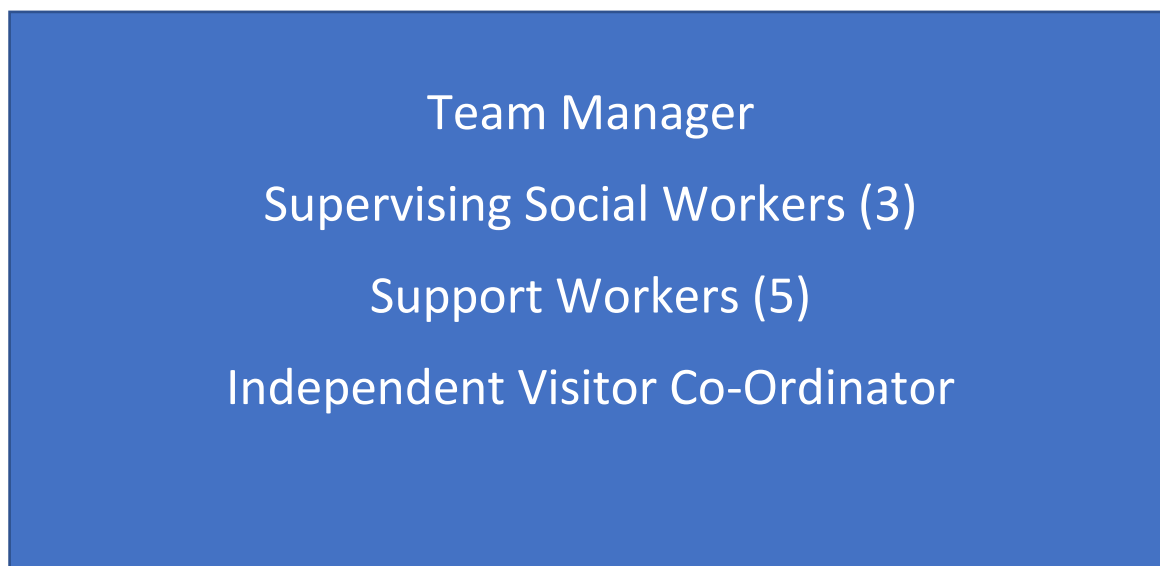
- Develop our joint viability offer to all localities
- Where there is a pre-existing relationship with the child we seek permanency at the earliest opportunity through a Special Guardianship
- Build in an 8-week review for all assessments so we are tracking against the Child's Care Plan
- Develop our assessments to ensure they are evidenced based and identify the impact for the child
- Develop our Kinship Care Information evening to make carers aware of the expectations of being a kinship carer. We hope to involve our SGO Support Team so both outcomes can be explored
- Increase our SGO support offer to carers if this is the chosen route.
- Work with our Fostering Panel / ADM to identify learning opportunities to develop our assessments.

- Split kinship assessment and kinship approval (TAC) so both areas receive a higher level of support and scrutiny.
- Work with our training co-ordinator to develop more bespoke training both virtual and on line.
- Be clear of the expectations to our Reviewing Officer so that this is reflected in Foster Carer Reviews.

The Dedicated Placement Support Team

Leicestershire's *Dedicated Placement Support Team* has been in operation since 2016. This team is able to support foster placements to promote stability, support our specialist One2One, Pathway carers and young people in Staying Put and Supported lodgings arrangements. The team can offer the right support at the right time to maintain placement stability. In our recent Inspection Ofsted recognise this as one of Leicestershire's "Unique Selling Points".

The team consists of:



The team is responsible for:

- Supporting and promoting placement stability for young people living in our specialist foster care provision who most challenging behaviours
- Supporting our mainstream foster carers and young people stepping down from residential placements to return to family-based carer. This includes working intensively with families and young people and other professionals.
- Preparing return home trajectories and offering support at evenings and weekends to maintain the arrangement.
- Recruit and support Supported Lodgings Carers
- Supporting Staying Put Arrangements where there are no other foster children in placement. This includes both internal and external carers.
- Working with carers to understand the therapeutic needs using theraplay techniques
- Providing activity events to engage with both carers, foster children and birth children.

Placement stability has continued to improve currently this is at 4.3%. The team will work with carers to stabilise placement when difficulties arise. Over the last year the team has received:

- 74 referrals for placement stability. This is for LCC children and young people placed in both in house and external foster placements placement have managed to remain within their current placement with intervention from support workers from the team
- 4 young people have returned home from either foster care or residential placements
- 3 young people have 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.
- We have seen the requests for support increase and during the year the case load has increase to 8 on occasion.
- We also saw the resignation of one of our one2one carers, this was due to family circumstances
- Two Social workers with specific responsibility for the Supported Lodgings Scheme and Staying Put. Although this role is a specific role within Fostering, as a regulated service we feel in order to maintain a smooth transition for our young people we need to retain oversight with workers who have been known to the young people, and carers who receive bespoke support.
- The service has **27** Supported Lodgings Providers with **35** young people in placement, approving 5 carers this year. Our annual target is 3.
- **11** prospective Supported Lodgings in assessment
- **20** young people who have Stayed Put in their foster placements
- **90%** of our young people in Supported Lodgings have remained stable in their placement
- **3** young people have moved into Supported Lodgings from Residential Placements, out of County, and are all stable at present.
- We successfully recruited a further **1** Pathway Carers so in total we have:
- 2 pathway carers offering 4 placements
- 2 one2one carers offering 2 placements and 1 Specialist foster carer for children with complex needs offering 2 placements.

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.

Development for 2020-21

- We will continue to recruit to our specialist schemes. We appreciate that the scheme is bespoke and very intrusive to foster carers and we anticipate growing the scheme by 2 carers each year.
- Due to the success of our Supported Lodgings Scheme we have increased our Annual Target to 5 carers per year.
- Develop our Supported Lodgings Providers in line with the Staying Put Policy. Many of our young people enter our SLP providers and remain with them until they are 21 whereupon this becomes a private arrangement.
- Future resource/staff capacity as the schemes grow to ensure they receive the right support at the right time.
- 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:

The service lost 14 foster carers this year, of which 8 were connected carers. This was less than the predicted 20 carers.

We are pleased to note that we continue to have a number of carers who have remained with the service for over 25 years. We anticipate with the growing impact of Covid 19 several of our carers will review their fostering capacity. We anticipate a number of carers going on hold due to health concerns.

Fees and Allowances

In Leicestershire we revised our fee structure was implemented in September 2018. We continue to recognise the national fee structure of foster carers and this is reflected in the payments annually.

Our Training

At the point of assessment our foster carers receive support and training to equip them for the task ahead. In line with our "We are Family" we use the skills of all our teams to ensure we prepare our Foster Carers in our bespoke Skills to Foster preparation training. On online presence also has video clips from both foster carer and service experience of the support available to our carers. The Skills to Foster provides a safe space for carers to discuss any worries and seek reassurance from the service.

The training we provide is valued and important part of the support, preparation and development of foster carers, including specialist foster carers. 90% of our Foster Carers identified that they were:

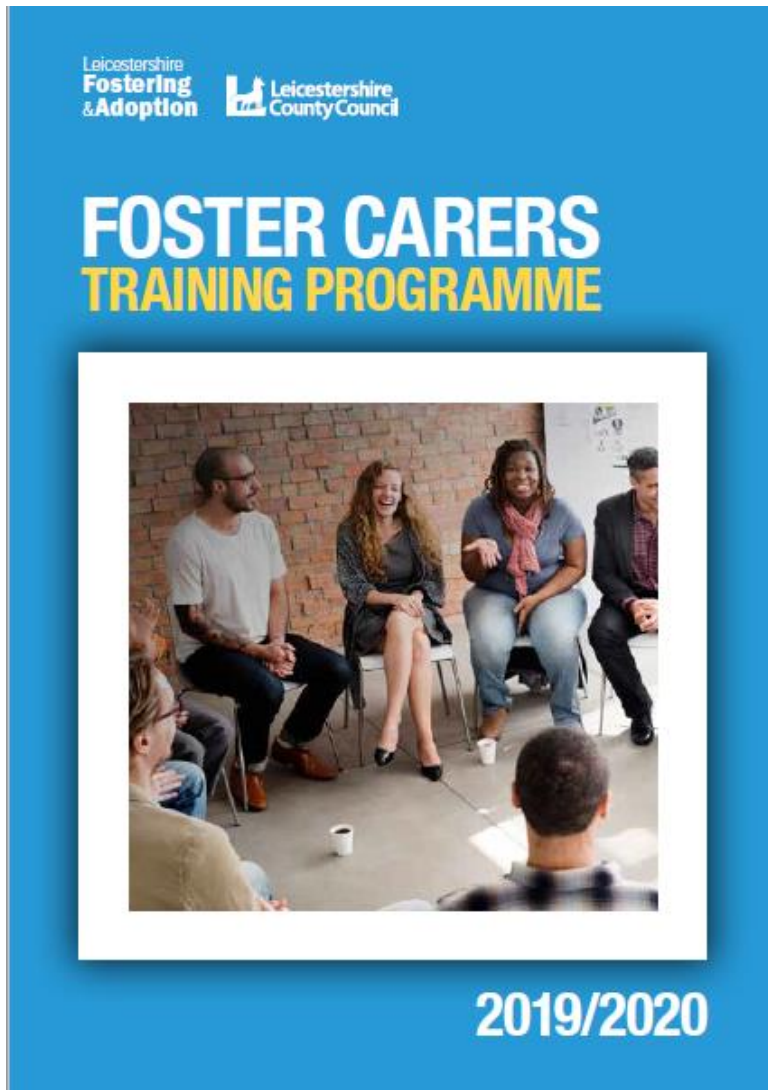
- Happy with training provided
- Felt training was relevant
- Relevant and useful
- Helped me with the children in my care

We have developed our [training programme](#) to ensure we grow the foster carers` knowledge, skills and development. The feedback we receive feeds our training programme for the following year. This

year we have developed both our training days and our virtual forums. The service has continued to develop our eLearning 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 also has monthly training themes where carers in their own time can develop their skills and knowledge in key areas – child development, self-harm and caring for traumatised children to name a few.

We also welcome Special Guardians onto some of the specific Kinship training.

The Ofsted Inspection of Leicestershire's Children and Families Service recognised that our carers were well trained and well supported.



We have a dedicated training co-ordinator for the service 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
- TSD's - 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 in order to gauge their experience with our venues /carers etc. 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

- Develop our therapeutic parenting offer for all foster carers
- Develop more online opportunities for carers to learn including on line forums
- Involve our carers in the delivery of training

Report from the Independent Reviewing Officer

During 2019/20 we undertook 167 Foster carer reviews, an increase of 32 from the previous year reflecting the growth of kinship carers.

In July 2019 we implemented revised Foster Care Review paperwork reflecting Leicestershire methodology of Signs of Safety. 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 include chronologies in all assessments highlighting all the key information of the fostering career. This is an expectation of all reviews and reported upon monthly.

We also ensure feedback from:

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

We have shared our paperwork with Safeguarding and Children in Care Team to ensure they own the reviews. Where it is recognised that other professionals are consistently not contributing we then feedback to their appropriate manager, we are clear as the collective Team Around the Child we require full participation.

First reviews are presented to Fostering panel. Prior to this taking place the reports are reviewed by a manager to ensure consistency and good practice.

We continue to drive the feedback from both foster children and birth children and have revised the paperwork to make it both age appropriate and child friendly. The new pamphlets are designed to have open-ended questions and to allow the children / young people to identify areas that could be better in their placements.

Case file audits are undertaken by senior managers to ensure chronologies are on carers files.

Generally, our carers continue to feel supported, they appreciate the support from the TAC team Manager and the availability of the Service Manager. One the biggest concerns raised is the timeliness of payments due to steps not being completed on the recording system.

Carers generally feel the service values them as carers, they feel listened to and they are safe within the service.

During reviews there is a difference between the expectations of kinship and mainstream carers, and I am concerned that for some kinship carers do not fully understand the changing role from being a family member to foster carer.

Plans for 2019/20

- Ensure chronologies are available on all carers
- Ensure all reviews have feedback from all professionals
- Identify opportunities to allow for feedback to be received from older young people via Mobile app / on line
- Gain feedback from all young people placed within the previous 12 months
- Ensure an audit is undertaken on the voice of the child.

Leicestershire Foster Panel Chair Report

This report refers to the functioning of Leicestershire County Council Fostering panel for the year 2019/2020. The Fostering panel is constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 2011.

There are four Fostering teams that present work to the panel.

1. PANEL FUNCTIONING

Panel members receive the paperwork at least five working days in advance to enable them to read the paperwork and prepare for the discussion. As the Chair I observe that all members devote take considerable amount of personal time to reading the paperwork and come well prepared. This is seen by the questions asked and the general discussions that are had. Panel members have a good understanding of their role and remit, especially as it relates to panels Quality Assurance role. Panel members always open to developing their knowledge base and are keen to understand legislative and regulatory changes.

Panel members. All where that they need to declare any conflicts of interest where professional interest is declared this is recorded in the minutes, on the rare occasion that there is a personal conflict-of-interest panel members notify myself, the Panel Advisor and Panel Administrator in advance to ensure that the panel member is not sitting for the said item or that panel.

❖ Panel: frequency

On average the panel sits twice month. During the year 2019/2020, there have been 24, main panels and 6 extra panels. The need for extra panels during this year has been largely due to the increase in the number of connected persons assessments and court demand. All the extra panels have been chaired by the two vice chairs.

❖ Membership

The agency has a Central List of panel members, in accordance with Fostering Regulations, Guidance 2011. There has been a consistent panel membership for several years. The Panel Advisor left at the end of February and the post is currently held by the Foster Independent Reviewing Officer on a temporary secondment. The transition has gone very well, and panel benefits from her insightful and dynamic approach as it relates to ensuring that only work that is ready for panel, is presented in a bid to reduce the number of cases deferred by panel as statutory checks not being returned.

4. PANEL DEVELOPMENT

❖ Reviews of Panel Members

All panel member reviews have taken place, albeit that some were delayed due to the Chair being on bereavement leave.

All panel members have shared that they have enjoyed being on panel and that they have learnt a lot about the processes of panel and see that they and to take a valuable

New Panel members have offered suggestions for improving the induction process for future new panel members, specifically many have talked about the need for more than just an observation and then starting their first panel - suggestions include, highlighting what sort of questions and areas that they should be looking for in the paperwork.

Both new and existing panel members have also contributed to ideas for the annual panel training.

The panel chair's review took place on 4 June 2019 and included feedback from all panel members and the agency. Her review was attended by the Agency Decision Maker and Panel Advisor. Following the Chair's return to work, a meeting was held between the Chair, Service Manager and Agency Decision Maker to again discuss concerns that the service has about the work of panel and the contribution of the chair, to what the agency view as difficulty in the panel and service working together.

❖ Panel Training

Panel training took place on 15 November 2019 and external trainer was provided, and the feedback was very positive, ideas for future training include:

- Updates on Specialist Foster Carers
- Serious Case Reviews

❖ Business Meetings

Following the last Chair's Annual Report, it was acknowledged that the business meetings were not been held consistently and as such a plan was put in place to ensure regular quarterly meetings.

Due to service demands and as previously mentioned, the bereavement experience by the chair these have not always been held however there is a commitment to these meetings by all parties. In the main the discussions include quality of work presented to panel and any changes to the service.

Prior to the meeting the Panel Chair and that Panel Advisor will ask panel members if they have anything that they would like raised at these meetings for discussion. The discussions held at these meetings is then shared with the wider panel, it usually at the meeting following the business meetings to assist panel in their quality assurance/critical friend role.

4. TASK OF PANEL

Panel makes recommendations on whether to approve prospective carers or whether they continue to be suitable to be Foster carers; these recommendations go to the Agency Decision Maker who then either ratifies or rejects panel's recommendations, thereby making a decision. This qualifying determination allows applicants the right of appeal to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

The panel work includes:

- Applications for prospective Foster carers.
- Application for family and friends (Connected Persons) carers child specific.
- First Annual Reviews (Home Reviews) and other reviews, which discussed continual approve or extension of approvals or standards of care.
- De-registrations/terminations of carers.
- Regulation 24 extensions
- Quality Assurance

5. OVERVIEW OF WORK PRESENTED TO PANEL

i. Foster care approvals (mainstream, some with multiple TOA)

TYPE	NEW CARERS
Long – term	1
Short – term	14
Parent and child	1
Respite	1
Specialist carers	1

Under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the fostering panel considers applications related to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for specific children who are about to be placed with them or are ready placed with them. In many cases Connected Persons Are temporarily approved as Foster carers by the Agency Decision Maker, so that a child is immediately placed with them. This temporary approval last for up to 16 weeks and can be extended for a further 8 weeks upon presentation to the fostering panel, prior to the full assessment being carried out.

ii. Family and Friends (Connected Persons)

Family and Friends	70
Connected Persons	0
Support carer for Family and Friends/Connected Person	1

During the year 2019 – 2020, 39 Connected Persons/Family and Friends were approved. This represents an increase of 8 carers compared to 31 approvals in the previous year.

Considering the approvals of Connected Persons applications continue to provoke thought and discussions about whether due to the complexities of give and families the identified carers can meet the needs of the children, given the inherent risks factors associated with birth family. Panel continually must weigh up the legal processes that are underway of these applications, including the local authorities care plan, which often can mean consideration being given to Special Guardianship Orders/applications.

iv. Reviews

❖ Annual Reviews

34 First annual Foster Carers Reviews have been presented to panel with all carers being viewed as suitable to carry on being carers. 21 Mainstream approvals and 13 Family Friends/Connected Persons.

❖ Standard of Care

The local authority has presented two cases to panel, with concerns regarding the standard of care, with the recommendation of continued approval. Panel has disagreed with one of these recommendations, and the Agency Decision Maker has also ratified these recommendations. This has not led to any carers requesting that the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) review their case.

v. Terminations of approval

❖ Resignation

During the year 2019 – 2020, 21 Foster / kinship carers have submitted their resignations. Reasons given are as follows;

Reason	Number
Retirement	0
Change of circumstances	7
Moving to Independent Fostering Agency	1
Moving to another Local Authority	0
Dissatisfaction with agency/Local Authority	2
Other	4

❖ Deregistration

Reason	Number
Standard of care	1

No contact	0
Child/ren no longer placed with the Family and friends/Connected Person (change of care plan)	8
Unwilling to take placements/unavailable	6

6. COMPLAINTS

Complaints received from applicants	0
Complaints received from social workers	0
Complaints received from managers	0
Complaints received from others	0

7. FEEDBACK TO PANEL

Observers

The pool of observers to panel generally include social work students, new staff members as part of their induction or staff members recently recruited to the fostering teams. The aim largely being to demystify the process, particularly for those who have a pending case to present to panel for the first time.

As well as senior managers usually the Agency Decision Maker, specifically to observe the Chair as part of the chair's annual review.

- Panel Evaluation

The panel/authority has a process of asking, social workers and applicants/Foster carers to complete a short feedback form of their experience of attending panel. The questions relate to whether they found the experience from invite through to attending panel satisfactory. All parties are asked to rate/grade their response. These responses are correlated and presented to panel either, after each panel or quarterly. Overall, there is no adverse comments about the experience.

8. OBJECTIVES FOR 2020/21

- Review the current evaluation/feedback forms, to get more than a statistical sense of the experience of panel.
- Ensure that the minutes of panel are circulated in a timely manner, considering the need for a flowchart, so that the service and panel members are clear about each other's expectation.
- Transparent discussion by the Service with Panel about the working relationship between the fostering teams and panel (specifically the Chair). Consideration whether there needs to be a discussion between Chair/Vice Chairs, Service Manager, Agency Decision Maker and Director, about panel as a critical friend.

- iv. Service to review whether they want a change of membership and Panel Chair
- v. Recruitment of a permanent Panel Advisor

Arlene P Weekes

Independent Panel Chair

Friday 29th May 2020

Statement by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), Helen Gronhaug

The independent position of the ADM in Leicestershire allows for a valuable opportunity to gain an overview of assessment and planning for children through both fostering and adoption panel activity as well as children's experiences of care through oversight of subsequent foster carer reviews. The direct report to the Assistant Director allows for improvement themes to readily feed into the Department's continuous improvement activity.

Overall, the quality of mainstream fostering assessments remains of a good standard which allows for timely decision making on fostering applications. While a much smaller number, the assessments for the specialist foster carer schemes require greater depth and exploration with preparation for meeting the needs of children who are placed on these schemes. The foster carer reviews of mainstream foster carers largely depict consistent support by the fostering service in their fostering role. In turn, there is wider feedback available of foster carers' performance for reviews from other professionals and the children's voice is sought. The team manager review report provides clear management oversight and direction promoting children's placement stability through identified support and in terms of carers' continuing development.

ADM continues to drive improvement in assessment quality and identify areas for development. This is the case in relation to assessment of Connected Persons. The Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2017 - 2020 identified; "As identified in the Support plans and subsequent care planning, as well as Connected Persons assessments are inconsistent in their depth and thoroughness with insufficient attention given to children's future needs." While the child's social worker routinely provides a summary of the child's needs and also a profile of birth parents, there continues to be delayed decision making on some Connected fostering applications due to gaps in the assessments – through deferral by Fostering Panel or when ADM has required further information. There have been occasions during this year where there has been a need for greater connectivity between the allocated social worker for the child and the kinship social worker at the outset and as the assessment progresses. The understanding of the child's potential safety within the family placement also needs to be more consistent. There is a need to strengthen the quality assurance function provided by the manager. ADM has advocated for routine evidence of team manager oversight through consistent use of compliance tool.

ADM oversight of connected foster carers' reviews highlight the need for greater oversight of supervision and post placement support. Requirements identified by ADM at the point of approval are not consistently referenced or actioned satisfactorily at the point of the carers' review.

As a result of the feedback provided, ADM agreed Connected Person's work as one of 4 Permanence Priorities with Head of Service responsible for fostering as well as being the lead for permanence. Consequently Practice Standards have been established for joint work &

information exchange between the assessing and child social workers. Further developments for practice on connected persons assessments and resulting support planning are envisaged following meeting between ADM, fostering managers and Panel Advisor.

There are occasions when ADM has not endorsed the agency or Panel recommendation. Joint learning from such circumstances as well as complaints and deferrals need to be more firmly embedded in the quarterly meetings between Panel Chair, Vice Chairs, Panel Advisor, Team Managers and ADM.

75 The Independent Visitor Scheme

The scheme supports children in care up to the age of 21. The scheme is open to all looked after children who are identified as benefitting from the service 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 2019/20 we have reviewed our Independent Visitors Scheme

In April 2019 the service had **38** approved independent visitors this increased to **41** by March 2020. However, **5** Visitors ceased being visitors in this period, 1 to become a foster carer, 1 to pursue a job opportunity in Canada, 3 as their matched young person reached 21 / no longer wished to have an independent visitor. The service currently has **36** approved independent visitors. There are a further **23** potential applicants awaiting assessment. There was a delay in starting these assessments due to restrictions in place due to Covid 19. Recruitment of male independent visitors continues to be a challenge nationally, but the service is working hard to try to address this, by both targeted and general promotion of the scheme.

During 2019/2020 the scheme has produced revised independent visitor packs and updated the handbook for independent visitors There is a robust development plan in place for future development of the service.

The scheme continues to produce a newsletter and group supervision/network events for independent visitors. Mandatory training has been identified for all new independent visitors; Prior to matching LCC 40-minute online course – Essential awareness in safeguarding for children and adults, within 6 months of starting the role LCC 1 – day Essential awareness in safeguarding for children and adults, alongside additional training, alongside additional training through LCC fostering service. Independent visitors have been invited and attended the yearly celebration event.

The independent visitor coordinator is embedded in the regional network events for independent visitor coordinators and has offered to be a representative on national working parties. The coordinator has access to national information and resources through the on-line Huddle platform, all of which informs local practice

Developments for the 2020/21

- A full-time coordinator has now been recruited and has been in post since March 2020.
- Continue to prioritise the recruitment of new independent visitors and specifically males and look at future advertising campaigns considering gaps in provision and needs of young people We currently have 23 people waiting for assessment of those 3 are male.
- Continue to monitor the list for children waiting, looking at matching when we have an appropriate independent visitor approved/available. Currently there are 17 children waiting,
- Capture correct information through mosaic electronic system. Mosaic has been updated to capture independent visitors
- Arrange annual meet and greet meetings for new and existing visitors. These were being planned but are currently on hold due to Covid 19
- 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. This will be encouraged once these are re-established following the lifting of Covid 19 restrictions
- Explore mentoring for new independent visitors. All existing independent visitors have been approached to look at supporting new independent visitors
- Establish a robust process for feedback & review of the scheme to inform future practice. This works is ongoing
- Promote the scheme internally. This works is ongoing

- Consider resource implications in terms of staffing levels and funding. This continues to be monitored and is captured in budgeting forecasts of the fostering service

Developments identified for 2020/21

- Establish a robust training plan
- Continue to recruit more males to the scheme
- Consider options for out of county placements, alongside national discussions/developments
- Recruit more male independent visitors, those who can support children with additional needs and out of county placements
- Continue to promote the scheme internally and externally
- Continue to review processes for feedback and review of the scheme
- Embed independent visitors in the fostering service community

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 a number of 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

We are pleased to report our locality groups have been re-vitalised. We now have 5 locality groups based across Leicestershire. They are very vibrant groups who are supportive of the service, yet feel comfortable to challenge / raise any concerns.

Most meet on a monthly basis, they are very social groups and are facilitated by the carers. Details of the meeting times are advertised in our 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.

We recognise the impact our locality groups have on our carers, they challenge the service when they feel we have not provided the best, they support carers through their first year and they provide ongoing support when placements are made.

Another valuable source of influence is their involvement in our staff recruitment. This year they have assisted in the recruitment of social workers, Team Managers and Assistant Service Manager.

Complaints and Allegations

We continue to provide many forums for carers to raise and resolve issues. Both the Team Managers from the Team Around the Child, and Kinship will 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. As a result of managing concerns quickly and efficiently last year we received no formal complaints.

During 2019/20 we had 4 allegations of those:

- All were referred to LADO
- Of those 2 had an outcome of no further action
- 2 led to Position of Trust Meetings which led to Reviews following concerns
- Of those one household were de-registered
- Of those 1 carer resigned

Our Quality Assurance

Within our Fostering Service we seek to ensure that all areas of our work achieve excellence, we have developed our review paperwork to gain further feedback and will continue to develop this.

As a service we constantly look for evidence to evidence the impact we make gaining feedback at every opportunity.

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.

As a service we also have team / 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 has enabled teams to identify learning, resources, and performance targets to improve the service.

Within the service we have an agreed auditing schedule:

Service Manager – 4 Themed audits per year

Team Managers – 1 Case file audit per month

The audits are then used to develop the key areas within the service.

The findings from the audits are then presented back to the team with a timeline of improvements.

The audits form part of the departmental Quality Assurance Strategy, to consistently raise practice through the use of effective management oversight. A report is provided to our senior management team with actions to be followed to ensure improvement.

This year they included:

- Chronologies - Reviewing the quality of chronologies to ensure consistency
- Voice and Choice
- Foster carer reviews

- Foster carer review feedback

A Final Word from the Service Manager, Joss Longman

I have been in post for 4 years and when I reflect upon the journey of the service I am incredibly proud, as a service we have developed our “We are Family” and I see this reflected in the daily practice of the team, from the enquiries we receive, where we capture the availability of applicants from foster care to Independent Visitor, the timely response of visits and how we support our carers through the process of approval.

Our placement stability has improved, and with the Dedicated Placement Support team we work to minimise any disruption to placements quickly. Having workers who are flexible and can provide the right support at the right time has been crucial to this.

The new review paperwork is strengthening our impact and expectations to other professional 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 stability had been identified and at risk of disruption, and they have supported a number of children stepping down from high cost placements into supported lodgings placements. 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 clear processes when inviting the right carers through to assessment.

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 (net 14)
 - 2 Specialist carers
 - 5 Supported lodgings
- We will continue to look for further opportunities to develop our carers and introduce the therapeutic model to all our carers
- Introduce forums to support our carers through Covid 19 pandemic. We have introduced a private Facebook site to ensure we are always available in these uncertain times
- Where it is safe and right to do we will continue to visit our carers face to face.
- Develop our Supported lodgings scheme, we recognise the wealth it brings to the service for our older children who continue to need support when coming into care at an older age
- Develop our Staying Put processes to ensure we capture all arrangements and provide the necessary support
- Welcome the USAC foster scheme “A Place to Call Home”, as the hosting authority and look forward to the scheme going live in July.
- Increase our Reviewing Officer capacity as a net growth of foster carers continues.
- Continue to develop our Signs of Safety Approach to all areas of our service, including reflective supervision and embedding PODS.

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 feel very proud of my carers, my staff who continue to go that extra mile and the tenacity of my Team Managers

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J Longman', written in black ink on a white background.

Joss Longman

Fostering Mentoring Scheme 2019 – 2020Annual Report (June 2020)**Introduction**

Alison Thompson and Vanessa Petch are the coordinators for the fostering mentoring scheme. Over the past year we have improved the process of getting applicants matched quicker following their responses to wanting a mentor. We recognise that individual assessing workers still need to be prioritising these meetings and based on this year's figures in comparison to last year it is evident that this is taking more of a priority.

During the Covid-19 lockdown period, we are continuing to prioritise our applicants having a mentor and emails have been sent to new applicants who are in assessment; where they have responded positively, matches have been found and meetings set up either virtually or through phone conversations.

Figures and Analysis 2019 - 20

	Number of applicants who received a written offer	Number of applicants who responded	No of applicants accepting offer	No of applicants declining offer	No response to written offer
Q1 April- June	8	8	6	2 Reasons: 1 x knows a F/C 1 x not wanting a mentor	0
Q2 July-Sept	6	6	6	0	0
Q3 Oct-Dec	7	5	5	0	2 2 x applicants withdrew
Q4 Jan-Mar	5	5	4	1 Reason: relative fosters	0
Total	26	24	21	3	2

	applicants who want a mentor and have been matched	Applicants where match not made.	Agreement meetings taken place	Agreement meetings cancelled/delayed after match due to applicants withdrawing or on hold	Agreement meeting still to take place

Q1 April- June	4	2 Reasons: withdrew from assessment process after accepted and before matching.	3	1	0
Q2 July-Sept	6	0	5	1	0
Q3 Oct-Dec	5	0	3	2Reasons: both on hold	0
Q4 Jan-Mar	4	0	1	2 Reasons: 2 x withdrawn	1
Total	19	2	12	6	1

Analysis of Figures

Quarter 1

- More applicants receiving a written offer than the same quarter the previous year.
- Although 2 applicants did not want a mentor all of those contacted did respond back.
- Where applicants were matched and not withdrawn, all the agreement meetings took place.

Quarter 2

- Although the number of applicants receiving a written offer dropped from the same quarter the previous year the number of responses received is higher than the previous year.
- Applicants are now being contacted only when they are in the assessment process and have an allocated worker which means we have a lower number being contacted than this time last year where we previously contacted after the proceed to assessment decisions meeting.
- In comparison to the same quarter last year there are a lower the number of applicants overall who withdraw after being contacted about mentoring, the number of applicants not responding to the mentoring email this quarter was 0.

Quarter 3

- Of the 5 applicants who responded to written offers all of these wanted a mentor.
- 2 applicants are on hold but the other 3 now have mentors.

Quarter 4

- Numbers are lower than the same quarter last year.
- Over the whole year 26 applicants were contacted and in total, 24 applicants responded with 21 of these indicating that they wanted a mentor. 19 matches were made, 2 withdrew before matches were made. 12 agreements were set up, 6 withdrew and one is yet to be completed.

- Over the whole year and discounting applicants who withdrew, there is only 1 where a meeting has still to take place. In comparison to the previous year, this is an improvement as there were 8 that still needed to take place.

What is Working Well

- Assessments are now being completed in house which provides a much smoother transfer between assessment and TAC team.
- Agreement meetings are being held much quicker following matching.
- The majority of the applicants are all responding to the offer of a mentor
- Panel feedback has been positive about the mentoring scheme.
- Joint working between the Assessment and TAC Teams, which gives the TAC team better insight and understanding of the carers coming through assessment.
- Successfully matched newly approved Foster Carers with existing Foster Carers who have offered quality support and mentoring.
- Both Teams have the mentoring scheme on the team meeting agenda
- Both senior practitioners meet on a regular basis to discuss carers that need to be matched to a mentor and attempt to make this a smoother process.
- Mentoring payment is a good incentive and appreciated by the foster carers

What are we Worried About

- Lack of foster carers who are willing to be mentors which means that some locality areas have limited mentors available.
- Team members from both teams are now starting to recognise the importance of the mentoring scheme, however, sometimes there is a delay in their response.
- Current spreadsheet for mentoring is not up to date and user friendly for both Senior Practitioners to access and complete.
- Training for mentors has not yet been offered.

What Needs to Happen

- We need to do a recruitment drive to get more approved foster carers to be mentors.
- A joint meeting/training session for both the Assessment Team and TAC Team to go through the requirements and expectations of the mentoring scheme.

- Devise a spreadsheet that is user friendly for both Senior Practitioners to access and add details of Mentors and Mentees included within this spreadsheet to incorporate dates etc and if the Agreement Meeting has taken place.
- Agree training for mentors and ensure each mentor attends this training.
- Timescales for agreement meetings need to be a priority, especially for the figure table.

Feedback from Mentors

I enjoy mentoring the new foster carers. When you first start as a carer it can be a bit overwhelming So it useful to talk it over with other carers introducing them to the locality group is great as they can then build their own circle for support.

On one occasion one family I mentored had a birth child a similar age to mine who was struggling to get her head around fostering so we all had a coffee together and she was able to chat with my daughter who managed to put her mind at rest.

It's a great way of making the new carers feel part of the fostering family when we started I didn't know any foster carers, HW was my mentor 7 years ago ,some you remain close to, others will make their own way

1. *There seems very little structure to the mentoring.*
2. *How are mentors allocated to new carers as there seems to be some favouritism?*
3. *I found out recently that a mentor from Narborough was mentoring a couple from Blaby, I have offered numerous times only to be told there are no new carers in my area!*
4. *I have mentored a couple in Hinckley, but this was very tricky as the carers both worked full time and due to distance was very hard to meet up.*
5. *There is no training/expectations or supervision for mentoring.*

Feedback from Mentees

We found the scheme amazing and to be honest we probably would have quit if it wasn't for Paul & Marie. They were so friendly and inviting, told us the good and were honest about the bad. We found it easier to ask them questions and they were able to point us in the right direction if they didn't have the answer. I think trying to match mentor to new carers would be the main priority.

The mentoring for us has been a very positive experience.

Our mentor has been very good in advising and providing practical support to us throughout our first placement. Emotional and psychological support to actually lending items to us.

It is highly recommended for new starters. You feel that you have support from someone who is directly in your position both in terms of child care experience as well as how the overall familiarity with the processes and systems. You get answers to a lot of questions very early on. Your mentor depending on their personality could be your go to person when it comes to discussing fostering related issues and challenges. Your mentor can be very helpful when it comes letting the placement go and moving on support.

Firstly, it was absolutely crucial that we were allocated a relevant mentor and by relevant we mean someone who cares for a similar type/age of placements. For example, we preferred to foster up to 2 years age group at that time but our first mentor was only mentoring teenage group. This was looked into by our SSW who then quickly changed our mentor to someone who was caring for babies. And it worked great for us in terms of overall support. This is not to say that we had any issues with our first allocated mentor Who was equally more than happy to welcome and help us.

Secondly, our mentor has been proactive in getting in touch and finding out how we were doing throughout the placement. And we suggest that all allocated mentors take the same approach of proactive contact rather than waiting for foster carers to initiate since at early stages there is a lot going that can overwhelm carers and mentoring support could be forgotten at the start.