



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
8 NOVEMBER 2022

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present an overview of the activity of the Leicestershire Fostering Agency between March 2021 and March 2022.

Background

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Agency and undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering.
3. Under the National Minimum Standards (NMS) (25.7), all fostering agencies are required to provide a report to the Executive¹ regarding the activity and work of the Fostering Agency and Fostering Panel. This report provides information about the Service's work during 2021/22. The full report can be found at the Appendix.

Summary of Report

4. The service operates within a competitive market, with both surrounding local authorities and private providers of placements. As such, ambitious priorities and targets were set in the following areas:
 - 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,
 - Ensuring that carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care.
5. A range of work is completed by several teams within the service to ensure priorities and targets are met:
 - The Recruitment Team - enhancing the overall recruitment and experience of prospective foster carers,

¹ The executive in Leicestershire is the Lead Member and Scrutiny Members.

- The Assessment Team - to assess prospective foster carers and to ensure quality reports are presented to the Fostering Panel,
- The Team around the Child – supporting foster carers to provide the best possible care,
- The Kinship Team – to assess prospective foster carers who are known to the child (for example, family or friends),
- The Dedicated Placement Support Service – supporting specialist carers, assisting children to move or remain in family-based placements and recruitment, assessment, and support of independent visitors (and matching to children).

6. There have been a number of achievements delivered by the Fostering Agency in 2021-22, that include:

- Maintained placement stability during COVID-19,
- Strengthened the support offered to carers to promote placement stability,
- Continued to provide face to face support for families,
- Implemented the Defining Children and Families Services for the Future programme fully into the service, focusing on recruitment and utilisation of carers,
- Continued to develop a Mentoring Scheme for new and inexperienced carers,
- Increased the capacity of the Dedicated Placements Support Team to offer more support visits, advice to foster carers and children who have more complex needs,
- Increased the number of Independent Visitors to provide support to children and young people,
- Maintained excellent staff retention,
- Improved performance around recruitment of carers from the previous year,
- Increased the utilisation of in-house placements vs independent fostering agencies.

7. A performance overview for 2021-22 is as follows:

Recruitment Targets for 2021/22

- 35 Mainstream Foster Carers
- 5 Specialist Carer
- 15 Supported Lodgings Providers
- 55 in total

Recruitment Approvals 2021/22

- 20 Approved fostering households (creating 30 placements)
- 1 Approved One2One Carer
- 12 Supported Lodgings Carer households
- 9 Kinship Carers
- 21 Independent Visitors

Other activity

- 365 Fostering enquiries generated, received & serviced,
- 70 Initial visits in applicants' homes,
- 53 Progressed to Stage 1 of assessment,

- The current conversion rate is 51% from assessment to approval, this is 7% higher than national average, and continues to increase year on year,
- 8 Private Fostering approvals,
- 13 Adoption Orders Granted (non-agency adoption),
- 67 Cases worked by the Dedicated Placement Support Team to maintain placement, step down from residential care / planned move.

8. An overview of targets for 2022/23 includes:

Marketing

- Ongoing mainstream fostering campaign
- Support Lodgings campaign
- Specialist Carers
- Targeted recruitment for siblings

Recruitment

- 25 mainstream foster carers
- 2 specialist carers
- 10 supported Lodging's carers
- 20 new independent visitors

Retention

- Continue to use all forms of media though an intensive recruitment campaign to achieve stretch targets
- 27 Mainstream Carers (net 25)
- Specialist Carers
- 12 Supported Lodgings
- 20 Independent visitors

9. The service recognises that the targets are lower than last year, but they are considered to be realistic and achievable. The service will also push for higher recruitment figures, called stretch targets. There is an awareness of the national shortage of carers and recruitment campaigns have been revised to reflect Leicestershire's Carers for Leicestershire's Children, including revised radio and media campaigns.

10. An overview of priorities for 2022/23 includes:

- Introducing Key Performance Indicators for each team to identify and track performance, implementing action logs to be reviewed within weekly performance meetings. to the aim will be to implement this across all teams post approval,
- Continuing with membership of The National Association of Therapeutic Parenting, encouraging more carers to become involved in training and webinars,
- Reviewing practice standards across the service ensuring recognition of race, equality, diversity, and inclusivity,
- Developing reflective supervision across all service areas,
- Implementing automated performance reporting post approval using Tableau reporting and dashboards,

- Developing enhanced payments for carers able to care for teenagers and sibling groups. These are two key groups which the service struggles to place both in the internal and external market.

Appendix

Leicestershire Fostering Agency Annual Report 2021-22:

Officers to Contact

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