



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
5 NOVEMBER 2024

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of activity of the Fostering Service for the period March 2023 to March -2024.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Under the Fostering Regulations 2015, Fostering Agencies are required to provide an annual report to the executive to note the activity and work of the Fostering Agency (Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service). To meet this standard, the Fostering Service submits an annual report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. The Fostering Annual Report provides information regarding the activity of the service during 2023/24. The report can be found within the appendix.

Background

4. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Service, involving undertaking all statutory duties for the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
5. The Fostering Service is led by the Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering and Adoption and is managed by a Service Manager.
6. The Service supports six key areas:
 - The recruitment of Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts, and Independent Visitors.
 - The assessment of Foster Carers, Private Fostering, Supported Lodgings Hosts, Independent Visitors and Non-Agency Adoptions.
 - The post approval Support and training of Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts, Private Foster Carers, and Independent Visitors.
 - The Fostering and Special Guardian Assessments of Kinship Carer
 - The post approval support of kinship care.
 - The additional support to our families through our Dedicated Placement Support Team.

Summary of Report

7. The report outlines the activity from each service area. The key achievements over the year have included:
 - Approved 14 mainstream foster carers and 3 specialist carers, 17 in total offering 23 places.
 - 3 Supported lodgings providers.
 - 24 Independent Visitors.
 - Increased the utilisation of in house carers.
 - Increased the capacity to assess Independent Visitors by appointing an additional worker
 - We now have matched 72 young people to visitors.
 - Have our second Festival planned for August 2024 for foster carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts, and Independent Visitors.
 - Diploma in Therapeutic Parenting being achieved by two carers.
 - Applied to register the Supported Lodgings Scheme with Ofsted, whilst implementing many of the Quality Standards within the new regulations – undertaking Annual Reviews of Carers and specific training.
 - Developed online Policies and Procedures to enable access to carers and hosts via a system called Tri-x.
8. The Fostering Service is managed by a Service Manager and Assistant Service Manager. These roles ensure that both recruitment and retention receive the same high-quality management oversight and service development.
9. Efficient ways to communicate are established, ensuring carers are given the most up to date information from the service, one of these being our private Facebook group, which is still used to disseminate information and to share good news stories, links to key research, good practice guidance and general wellbeing.
10. Placement stability remained high and where the Service recognised there were stability issues it was quickly able to build a team around the child to maintain the foster home using a Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST), Independent Visitors and working in partnership with other services such as Children in Care and the Virtual School.
11. A number of carers skilled in caring for teenagers were taking a break from fostering due to ill health or other personal circumstances which presented additional challenges with matching.
12. Focus on achieving permanency at the earliest opportunity has seen a decrease in Court Ordered Placements (38.6) and an increase in the number of Viability Assessments for Kinship Care. With revised, clear processes in place, there has been a continued reduction in Regulation 24 Fostering Arrangements and subsequently approvals in Kinship Care.
13. There has been significant developmental work within Kinship Assessments including an increase in staffing to undertake more specific targeted work – Special Guardianship Order (SGO) only assessments and private SGO applications.

14. The Annual Report provides feedback from the whole Service, highlighting how it progressed plans identified last year and new targets for the forthcoming year.
15. Nationally, the recruitment of foster carers has seen a continual decline with the number of potential carers progressing into assessment and approval, local authorities and agencies struggling to reach the numbers coming through pre-Covid.
16. Leicestershire has continued to experience low numbers of carers coming through to assessment, but those who come through to assessment a high conversion rate is achieved (65%).
17. The Service has continued to find ways to engage with our families, to be visible and available for carers. Throughout the summer various picnics were held for carers and staff to meet. Retention is as important as recruitment in ensuring that carers remain and feel supported post approval.
18. Consultation events were also held so that carers could meet with managers to learn of service updates and to give the Service an opportunity to hear their voice.
19. With a dedicated support from the media and communications team the Service will continue to drive recruitment campaigns, with a focus on siblings, teenagers, and children with additional needs.
20. Placement stability remains strong, and the support offered to households is embedded within the Service. This is regularly fed back during foster carer reviews.
21. Achieving Permanency at the earliest opportunity for children placed in Kinship Care, coming through for connected assessments, at the point of viability the Service can process whether this needs to be a full Kinship Assessment or can progress straight through as a Special Guardian Assessment.
22. The Service continues to be pleased with placement stability, yet again there has been evidence of the effective use of stability meetings to prevent placement disruption involving the team around the child approach – all the important people discussing how we can promote stability, the team around the child – involving the carers and their support too.

Overview of targets and priorities for 2024/5

23. The Service has the following key targets and priorities for 2024/25:
 - Continue to use all forms of media in our intensive recruitment campaign to achieve stretch targets: 25 Mainstream Carers (net 16)
 - Two Specialist Carers
 - Five Supported Lodgings
 - It has been recognised that these targets are lower than in previous years. recognising the current downward trend nationally in recruitment. The Service has targets for enquiries, Stage one starts and approvals which are monitored in monthly performance meetings
 - Focused audits on voice – monitoring the quality of feedback from children, social workers, and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) for carers in reviews, and using this in service design and development

- Continuing to develop trauma informed practice to both workers and carers
- Strengthening reflective practice in supervision of workers and carers
- Awaiting our Registration of a Supported Lodgings scheme with Ofsted.

Background Papers

Children and Family Departmental Plan 2020-2023 (refreshed 2024 – 26)

<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/0ec5130b-cb6b-4e05-8ed8-131ed6944b39/lcfs-department-plan-2024-26.pdf>

Continuous Improvement Plan – The Road to Excellence 2021-2023 (refreshed Achieving Excellence through Purposeful Practice 2024-27)

<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/1810e612-82ed-483b-8826-4755569d8a6b/cfs-achieving-excellence-through-purposeful-practice-24-27.pdf>

Workforce Development Plan 2020-2023 <https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/2b578526-acb7-4568-bb4d-a7fe3402d568/children-and-families-workforce-development-plan-2020-23-compressed.pdf>

Leicestershire Children and Families Partnership Plan 2021-2023 (refreshed 2024-26)

<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/5aaa1944-ff2b-4da3-9931-47f23af79c0d/children-and-families-partnership-plan-priorities-24-26.pdf>

Children and Family Services Voice and Influence Strategy 2020-23 (refreshed 2023-25)

<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/0385643a-0a54-4ae4-943f-cd1771773840/cfs-voice-strategy.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. None

Equality Implications

25. These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children in foster care, including disabled children, young children, and those from minority and harder to reach groups. The fostering Service has a diverse compliment of staff with representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.

26. The Fostering Service has an Equality and Diversity Action Plan in place which ensures that all staff are enabled to feel safe and supported, in addition to working towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to tackling inequalities - including relevant research, data, Quality Assurance activity and engagement with children, young people and families

Human Rights Implications

27. There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

Appendices

28. Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2023/24

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