



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 4  
NOVEMBER 2025**

**FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the activity of the Fostering Service for the period 2024 -2025.

**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).
3. The Fostering Annual Report provides information regarding the activity of the Service during 2024/25.

**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 Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care, Leaving Care, and is operationally managed by a Service Manager.
6. Six key areas are supported within the Service:
  - 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; and,
  - The additional support to families through the Dedicated Placement Support Team.
7. A copy of the full annual report is appended to this report.

## **Summary of Report**

8. The report outlines the activity from each service area. Achievements over the year have included:
  - Approved 12 mainstream foster carers and one specialist carer, 13 in total, offering 20 foster homes for children and young people. This was set against a target of 14;
  - Approved five new Supported Lodgings Hosts;
  - Recruited 24 Independent Visitors;
  - Increased the number of Independent Visitors by 24, to a total of 87.
  - Held the 2<sup>nd</sup> 'Fostival' and the 3<sup>rd</sup> is planned for August 2026. This event is for foster carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts and Independent Visitors, giving them an opportunity to enjoy a two-day event, connecting with other carers and fostering colleagues, and taking part in well-being events hosted by the fostering team;
  - Registered and approved by Ofsted to run a 'Supported Lodgings Scheme,' with annual host reviews, training, and support provided to exceed required standards; and,
  - Reviewed and updated our Policies and Procedures to enable access to carers and hosts via Tri-x to guide and inform their practice with children and young people.
9. 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.
10. The Service has excellent staff retention and again has seen another year with a full staff compliment, without the need to use agency staff.
11. The Service has embedded and efficient ways to communicate with carers, ensuring carers are given the most up to date information from the Service, one of these being a 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. This has been an excellent forum to deliver up to date information to families and helps to keep foster carers and supported lodgings hosts connected and able to utilise peer support whenever needed.
12. Placement stability remained high, and where emerging issues arose that could impact on placement stability these were quickly managed with a timely and dedicated team around the child to maintain the foster home.
13. A Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST), Independent Visitors, and other partners such as Children in Care Social Work team and Virtual School, work closely to support children and carers to maintain placements when emerging challenges arise.
14. An early emphasis on permanency has decreased Court Ordered Placements (s38.6) and increased Kinship Care Viability Assessments. Updated processes have resulted in fewer Regulation 24 Fostering Arrangements and kinship approvals, but requests for viability assessments continue to grow; last year, 281 Initial Viability Assessments (IVA's) were completed.

15. Considerable progress has been made within Kinship Assessments to collaborate with Family Safeguarding and Family Help, providing support for IVA's and assisting families in pursuing appropriate assessments and permanency solutions for children, including long-term fostering, Special Guardianship, and Child Arrangement Orders.
16. The Annual Report provides feedback from the whole service, highlighting how it progressed plans from last year and new targets for the forthcoming year.
17. Nationally, foster carer recruitment continues to decline, with fewer potential carers entering assessment and approval compared to pre-Covid numbers. The Fostering Network estimates a national shortage of over 2,000 carers.
18. Within Leicestershire, the Service continued to experience low numbers of carers coming through to assessment, but those who come through to assessment there has been a high conversion rate of 63% of prospective carers going through from inquiry, assessment to approval.
19. The Head of Service is currently leading a working group which is establishing a strategy for attracting new foster carers and support lodgings hosts into the service. Best practice from other local authorities alongside identifying strategies used by Independent Fostering Agencies has been researched to inform a set of options that will be presented to the Directorate Management Team to consider. This will be reported upon in the Annual report for March 2025 to March 2026.
20. The Service has focused on staying visible and available to foster carers, supported lodgings hosts, and colleagues. Throughout the year, events have been organised such as picnics, crafting events, and other activities to foster connections among carers and staff. Retention remains as important as recruitment, ensuring carers feel supported after approval.
21. In addition, the Service organised consultation events for carers to connect with managers, receive updates, and share feedback. Regular meetings are held with local foster carers and aim to revive the Leicestershire Foster Carers Association.
22. With support from the Council's media and communications team, the Service will maintain recruitment campaigns focusing on siblings, teenagers, and children with additional needs. Targeted campaigns will be run in order to address common misconceptions and highlight the benefits of fostering for the council versus private agencies.

### **Overview of targets and priorities for 2025/2026**

23. The Service will continue to use all forms of media in intensive recruitment campaign to achieve the following stretch targets:
  - 17 Mainstream Carers.
  - Recruitment of 2 Specialist Carers.
  - Recruitment of 5 Supported Lodgings Hosts.
24. Although national recruitment is trending downward, the Service has experienced strong growth in enquiries and assessments this year and remain confident in meeting or exceeding our targets. Monthly performance meetings help us track trends and identify areas needing attention.

25. In addition to this, the Service has a planned programme of work that will include:
- Completing focussed audits on voice of the child to inform and influence future practice for both the workforce and carers;
  - Continue to develop trauma informed practice, for both staff and carers;
  - Continue to strengthen reflective practice and listening circles for foster carers to support their learning, development and support networks;
  - Develop mentoring scheme for kinship carers to develop their role;
  - Increase the knowledge base for staff by providing specialist training in life story work and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). This is a therapeutic model designed to support children who have experienced trauma, neglect, or disrupted attachments; and,
  - Continue to increase the Independent visitors scheme by 25 and exceed our target of 100 visitors.
26. Preparation will continue for the Ofsted inspection of Supported Lodgings Scheme. The Service is in a strong position going into this inspection.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

27. None

### **Equality Implications**

28. 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.
29. 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**

30. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2024/25

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

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