



PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

Fostering Service Annual Report

April 2018 – March 2019

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the activity of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019. It includes information about the recruitment, assessment, approval and de-registration / resignation of foster carers. Information is also provided on other aspects of the service such as complaints and allegations.

2. The Structure Of The Fostering Service

- 2.1 The Fostering Service continues to be based at 106 Essington Road, Willenhall. During 2018/19 the service comprised of the following:
- 2.2 Group Manager Provider Services - the primary objectives of this role are:
- Responsible for the service planning and management of all local authority fostering and adoption services.
 - Registered Manager of the Fostering and the Adoption Service.
 - Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) for the Adoption Service
 - Line Manager for the Residential Services Manager who has responsibility for the Local Authority children's homes
- 2.3 Recruitment and Assessment Team - this team is responsible for all marketing, recruitment, training and assessment activities. They undertake the assessments of mainstream and family and friends foster carers. The team provides supervision and support to carers until their first annual review. A full time customer services officer responds to all enquiries from adults expressing interest in becoming foster carers or adopters. There is also a recruitment and promotions officer who has been instrumental in the production of new marketing materials and the coordination of new marketing events. The team also provides assessment of friends and family members to become a connected carer under the Fostering Regulations or to apply for a Special Guardianship Order.
- 2.4 Support and Development Team - this team is responsible for providing supervision and support to temporary and permanent carers, including family and friends (known as connected carers). They also provide a duty service which ensures there is always someone available to deal with concerns or questions from foster carers. The team also completes permanence assessments and is responsible for the submission of reports to the annual foster carer reviews.
- 2.5 Fostering Reviewing Officer - the remit of the Fostering Reviewing Officer (FRO) changed in October 2018 as a result of internal review. The FRO now undertakes all first reviews of foster carers, reviews of carers following concerns and allegations and every third subsequent annual reviews. All reviews chaired by Fostering Reviewing Officer are submitted to Panel for a recommendation.

3. Service Development

- 3.1 Progress has been slower than expected especially in respect of ensuring the quality and timeliness of support to existing fostering households, recruitment of

mainstream carers and the transition of family and friends carers to Special Guardianship Orders.

3.2 The following developments have progressed:

- 3.2.1 The Mocking Bird model of household support and supervision was successfully implemented. It was launched in July 2018. The model is based on the appointment of a "Hub Carer" who provides support including overnights stays for looked after children for 6 to 10 households. Two hubs have been in operation since September 2018. A further two hubs are due to go live by the December 2019. The programme has met all fidelity checks set by the licensee, the Fostering Network. Programme leads have been invited to speak at both local and national conferences.
- 3.2.2 A full review of the marketing strategy was undertaken in light of the developments within social media. The review found that the service was a leader in the region with the website design and use of FaceBook as well as starting to make good use of Twitter. However, the gains could not be fully realised without a Customer Relations Management (CRM) tool. Investment in such a tool and training of staff in the use of the software was completed by March 2019. Early signs are that the customer journey from enquiry to assessment has significantly improved and more targeted campaigns are now possible.
- 3.2.3 An independent audit of the service was undertaken in February 2019 with findings presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in July 2019. This audit highlighted a range of operational issues that required addressing in particular the development of specific performance reports and redesign to ensure more effective assessment and supervision of friends and family foster carers.
- 3.2.4 A new allowance and fee structure was the subject of consultation in 2017/18 and was successfully implemented in April 2019. This fee structure has scope for the inclusion of specialist carers - specialist parent and child foster carer has now been identified and a pilot household in operation. Findings from this will be reviewed by the autumn of 2019.
- 3.2.5 The completion of SGO assessments by Supervising Social Workers in the Support and Development Team was reviewed with a number of recommendations on changes to permanency planning practice being identified. This included how the transition should be tracked by the service and how support plans could be considered and signed off in a timely way.
- 3.2.6 The role of the Fostering Reviewing Officer has been reviewed. This confirmed the short fall in capacity to complete all annual household reviews on time along with a completed record that meets regulatory requirements. A revised remit was agreed and implemented in February 2019.

- 3.2.7 Further changes have been made in Mosaic, the recording system, to ensure that data requirements are met.
- 3.2.8 Work with Walsall Fostering Care Association has continued. Their future role in the recruitment and support of fostering households has been reviewed. The outcome of the review will be fed in the service level agreement that should be in place by March 2020.

4. Recruitment

4.1 Foster Carer Recruitment – National Picture:

- 4.1.1 The Fostering Network annually calculates recruitment targets, estimating the number of foster families that fostering services need to recruit during the next calendar year across the UK. The figures take into account a number of factors including the percentage of the foster carer workforce leaving each year and the rise in the numbers of children in care.
- 4.1.2 Within the West Midlands the Fostering Network calculate that a further 850 fostering households would be required in order to meet the rising demand for local family based placements.
- 4.1.3 Recruitment is still taking place in what could be described as an “overcrowded market” with Local Authorities competing with Independent Fostering Agencies and Voluntary agencies.

4.2 Fostering Service Recruitment – Response:

- 4.2.1 A Recruitment and Promotions officer experienced in digital marketing was appointed in October 2018. This appointment has been instrumental in the changes on website and Facebook accounts. Her expertise has meant the full revision of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy. This has subsequently been agreed by the Recruitment and Retention Strategy Group chaired by Commissioning Manager in June 2019.
- 4.2.2 During 2018/19, 35 public events were held in and around Walsall (including those during Foster Care Fortnight.) This is a slight increase from last year. Attendance at information sessions at key community venues has declined over the previous 12 months and these sessions were reduced to one per month. However, with the improved social media output the frequency of these events has recently returned to twice a month. From these events, 15 approaches were made, resulting in 10 enquiries / applications. From digital and online media, 69 approaches were made, resulting in 35 enquiries/applications. Other enquiries are by word of mouth or other advertising.
- 4.2.3 The continued decline in enquiries, initial visits and approvals compared to the previous year is of a concern. However a review of the enquiry pattern suggests an improvement with the appointment and work of the marketing

officer and introduction of CRM starting to realise an upturn. This is seen in the marked upturn during January when the first of digital media promotions was organised. A further event is planned for September 2019. The conversion rate remains sound – at 13% which suggests that marketing is targeted appropriately.

4.4 Enquiry levels;

Fostering	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Enquiries	105	120	109	111	116	135	95
Initial visits	34	71	67	62	75	57	39
Approvals	8	9	17	18	21	13	12
Conversion rate	8%	8%	16%	16%	17%	10%	13%

4.5 Total requests for information and enquiries:

Month	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
April	11	6	14	16	6	15	40
May	28	8	35	11	19	26	18
June	12	19	14	22	3	22	10
July	17	26	13	7	8	16	15
August	8	15	8	18	6	13	13
September	17	30	10	22	7	36	14
October	8	15	12	18	8	45	15
November	13	24	5	12	7	20	12
December	7	9	6	3	4	3	8
January	17	26	26	7	17	8	102
February	16	20	18	15	10	4	50
March	13	15	15	8	21	21	24
Total	167	213	176	159	116	254	321

4.6 Information Requests And Enquiries By Source Of Marketing Methods

	Word of mouth – carer referrals	Word of mouth – other	Event	Media – local & national	Other service publications	Posters & banners	Leaflets	Walsall Website	Google Search	Face book	Other	Total
14/15	41		27	3	4	0	1	91			9	176
15/16	16	17	2	2	3	0	0	18	88	1	2	159
16/17	13	17	24	11	3	3	6	26	55	49	13	220
17/18	8	12	8	8	2	1	5	119	24	51	16	254
18/19	6	1	6	0	0	0	0	81	1	115	103*	321

* Most of these were received via e-mail

- 4.6.1 We continue to pay £100 to the Foster Carer Association for each? foster carer that they (and the foster carers) help us recruit; this is currently being reviewed.
- 4.6.2 Of the 12 families approved, the source of their initial enquires was as follows Google (1), Internet (2), Word of Mouth (carer) (1), Word of Mouth (other) (1), Walsall website (4), Walsall employee/event (1) and Other (2). The previous year 3 carers transferred in with Walsall children already in placement; there was 1 last year.

5. Assessments and Approvals

- 5.1 Of the assessments which led to the 12 approvals, all were undertaken by social workers in the Recruitment and Assessment team. The average timescale of the recruitment process from receiving the prospective applicants offer to panel date was 190 days; this is a further improvement on last year's performance of 225 days. The timescale from beginning the assessment to presentation at panel was also down from 183 to 150 days.
- 5.2 The target of approving the majority of foster carers within 8 months was met. However the completion of the assessment is still over 4 months. A further review of the assessment process will be undertaken as part of the Improvement Action Plan arising from the independent review of the service.

5.3 Approvals

Type of carers	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19
Mainstream approvals	15	20	8	9	15	18	21	13	12
Mainstream de-reg & resignations	8	17	10	12	15	12	17	20	16
Mainstream gain/loss	+7	+5	-2	-3	0	+6	+4	-7	-4
Short-Term Breaks (STB) approvals	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
STB de-reg & resignations		0	0	2	1	0	0	2	0
STB gain/loss	0	+2	0	-2	+1	0	0	-2	0
Overall gain/loss	+7	+7	-2	-5	+1	+6	+4	-9	-4

5.4 Although the net losses are not as significant as in 2017/18, it is clear that further work is required to ensure that recruitment is able to cover the resignations / de-registrations. In terms of the 16 resignations, the reasons given were allegations & concerns (4), family circumstances (5), change of carer/not suited to fostering (4), became Staying Put carer (2), Issues re policy, skills levels, payments (1). There were no transfers to IFAs.

6. Supervision, support and reviewing

6.1 Supervision - The fostering service delivers effective regular supervision to all foster carers in line with their need for support, supervision and personal development, as detailed in the policy for foster carer supervision. The service has reviewed the broad training and development needs of foster carers as a consequence of feedback from supervision, and provided training opportunities to meet identified gaps; for example, the courses on looking after Muslim children and combating extremism.

6.2 Visits - According to the fostering service regulations, at least one unannounced visit is undertaken to each fostering household each year. The frequency of unannounced visits is recorded on the electronic system and monitored via the foster carer annual review process. In 2017/18 compliance at the end of financial year was 90%. The performance at the end of 2018/19 continued to be 90%. Monthly performance reports which will provide Managers timely information around the compliance with supervision will be introduced in 2019/20.

- 6.3 Walsall Foster Care Association (WFCA) - The WFCA provides support to carers through a variety of activities:
- Distributes a quarterly newsletter
 - Offers a buddy scheme to carers
 - Assists in recruitment activity
 - Participates with the service in developing and reviewing policies and procedures
 - Supports carer training
 - Runs coffee mornings and support groups
 - Organises social activities
 - Is involved in regular communication meetings with the service
- 6.4 EDT - Foster carers can access support and advice out of hours via the Council's Emergency Duty Team (EDT). All foster carers have the contact details for EDT and reports from carers who have used the service are positive. Carers use the service to report significant events and to seek guidance. On occasions social workers have visited carers' homes out of hours, most usually in response to children exhibiting disruptive behaviour.
- 6.5 Psychological support - the Fostering Service continues to make good use of the regular consultation surgeries provided by Flash Service – the Tier 2/3 CAMHS service. The Hub Carers with the Mockingbird Service use this service to consult on the support they provide to the households in their hubs. Supervising Social Workers support foster carers to make use of the advice and support attendance by children requiring intervention.

7 Permanence

- 7.1 Walsall has a commitment to ensure that a child's need for a permanent home is addressed and that a permanence plan is made at the earliest opportunity. The aim is to ensure that each child has an agreed permanence plan in place by the second Looked after Review.
- 7.2 The expectation is that all children under the age of 16 will have a permanency plan; this can range from an eventual return home, a long term placement with a foster carer, a Special Guardianship Order, a Child Arrangement Order, or Adoption. For those 16 plus, the expectation is that their permanency plan will be addressed through their Pathway Plan.
- 7.3 An Adoption and Permanence Panel was established in January 2016 in order to give long term fostering the same gravitas as adoption, and family finding was transferred to the Adoption and Permanency Team.
- 7.4 The post of permanency co-ordinator was created in 2016 to track and monitor all permanency plans. All children with a care plan of long term fostering, adoption and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) are monitored in respect to timeliness and to prevent delays for our looked after children. The full time post

for SGO post order support has also supported families in progressing SGO applications as a means to achieve permanency with the confidence that this support will be offered after the order is granted. In 2017-18, 34 SGOs were granted, In 2018/19 26 SGO were granted.

- 7.5 A monthly meeting has been to consider all extraordinary support plans for foster carers considering SGO has been established and reviewed. This meeting has been able to assist in identifying the key support issues for prospective Guardians and will asisit in the further development of post order support.

8. Family And Friends As Carers And Special Guardianship Support

- 8.1 Family and friends arrangements are often very complex situations with families struggling to come to terms with the reasons why the children have become looked after. Family and friends carers receive the same level of supervision as mainstream carers. The Skills to Foster training tailored specifically for family & friends carers was introduced in 2015-16 and continues to be offered to Friends and Family carers.
- 8.2 Potential carers within the children's own family or friendship network are identified by the children's social worker. In order to ensure referrals for assessment of such carers are viable the Service has introduced the practice of children's social worker and assessing social worker visiting the prospective carer together to decide if an assessment should proceed. Such visits have been found to greatly assist in the determination of the viability of the connected person placement. Despite this finding the practice of joint visits remains variable with just over 50% referrals subject to a joint visit. Work will continue to promote the joint visits.
- 8.3 In addition to this the Service continues to along with provide Safeguarding and Family Support Service to provide feedback on the quality of the viability assessments and as well as developing the understanding of the children's social worker in relation to requirements should the kinship carer be assessed as foster carer.
- 8.4 On 31 March 2018 there were 72 Family and Friends carer households caring for 113 children and young people. This is a decrease 11 households from last year but remains a higher proportion both nationally and with our statistical neighbours

9. Placement and Resources Team

- 9.1 The Placement and Resources Team commissions all external fostering and residential placements, when our internal provisions are exhausted or not available. The service will approach Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) usually in line with the regional framework and consider the fees depending on profile and any issues. Costs are always negotiated subject to contracts / when the LA is working off contracts for spot purchasing. The team provides the monitoring of external placements as part of the quality assurance at an

external placement panel with senior managers and partners that reviews external residential places.

10 Staying Put

10.1 The provision for 'Staying Put' has ensured that many young people are now able to remain with their carers for a much longer period of time after their 18th birthday and this year has seen 20 young people and their carers accessing this opportunity. However, this does result in less placement availability for other children and young people. For the period 2018/19, 18 out of the 20 Staying Put arrangements were for internal foster carers, which is a similar figure for last year. Although this continues to represent a challenge around managing the availability of fostering places it remains important to ensure offer of staying put is made to every young person in foster care.

11 Placements

11.1 The breakdown for placements as at the 31 March 2018 was as follows

Year	Temporary	Permanent	Family and friends	Short term breaks	Total
12/13	194	40	122	8	364
13/14	184	61	124	6	375
14/15	134	99	120	5	358
15/16	112	80	120	5	331
16/17	126	68	129	7	330
17/18	141	75	123	7	346
18/19	112	62*	110	4	288

* this includes 1 child placed with a fostering to adopt carer

11.2 It is a significant concern that number of children with in house foster households is the lowest it has been since 2012/13 both with short terms carers and permanence carers. This is linked to the slowdown in recruitment and the failure to recruit sufficient carers to cover resignations, retirements and terminations.

11.3 The Recruitment and Retention Strategy Group, having reviewed and analysed the data, is clear about how Mockingbird and the strengths of the support model can not only be used as unique selling point but also retention tool. A review of the trends since March suggests a small improvement – however this remains a significant challenge. This will be monitored by the group who report directly to Head of Service

12 Complaints, Allegations and Children Missing from Care

12.1 Complaints - during 2018/19, the fostering service received 7 complaints from the following sources:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| • Children | 2 |
| • Foster carers | 4 |
| • Grandparent | 1 |

12.2 Of these complaints, 2 were by children about the finances used by the foster carers, 2 were about the placement of children, 2 were about a lack of support to foster carer. All were resolved at Stage1.

12.3 Allegations - There were 16 allegations against Local Authority Foster Carers which is monitored under Regulation 36 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. These are under the category of Physical 12 Emotional 3 and Neglect 1. Of these, 2 resulted in child protection investigations being instigated. Following the allegations being submitted, 12 resulted in no further action being taken. Of the remaining 4, 2 continued fostering with additional monitoring and 2 were referred to the Fostering Panel to have their approval reviewed.

12.4 Missing from care - of the care population as of March 31 2019, 9 children had been reported missing from care on a total of 43 occasions. This is a reduction from the previous year.

12.5 Incidents of physical restraint - no incidents of physical restraint were reported in 2018/19 similar to 2017/18.

12.6 Notifiable events (Regulation 36, Schedule 7 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011) - as well as the allegations, there were a further 10 Notifiable Events. The majority related to missing episodes, illness or accidents within the foster home. Regulation 35, Schedule 6 requires us to monitor other activity such as minor accidents and injuries and the administration of medication. Of these there were 2 minor accidents or illness, 7 missing from care.

13 Fostering Panel

13.1 Central Membership April 2018 – March 2019;

Chris Dennison	(Chair)
Jan Toplis	(Vice Chair / Independent / Social Worker)
Catherine Mitchley	(Vice Chair / Independent)
Sue Partoon	(Vice Chair / Independent)
Carol Moore	(Vice Chair / Social Worker / Independent)
Surinder Kumari	(Independent / Social Worker)
Deloris Walker	(Independent)
Bob Heighway	(Independent)
Alan Paul	(Independent)
Ann Burford	(Independent)

Balbir Kandola	(Independent)
Ruth Cherrington	(Independent)
Sharon Thompson	(Independent)
Councillor Amers Kudhail	(Independent)
Kim O'Shea	(Social Worker)
Nicitta Hanley	(Independent)
Kimberley Hull	(Independent)
Maxwell Gregory	(Independent / Social Worker)

13.2 Quality Assurance

13.2.1 A quality assurance tool is sent to all panel members to comment on the reports presented to panel. The form is completed by panel members. The Panel Advisor collates the feedback on the quality of assessments and reports back to their manager. Some common themes that were reported in last year's report continue to be a feature in this year's report – albeit with the Chair noting that there had been some improvement. As part of the learning for Service the Panel Cahir has asked the Managers to ensure the following:

- Ex-partners being sought and approached for their views.
- Children's views must be sought (as appropriate)
- All family members who are likely to be involved in fostering must be interviewed
- The safer care aspect must include evidence of in-depth discussion with applicant.
- Recommendations can at times not be consistent to the main body of the report.
- The inclusion and quality of professional analysis varies widely from one report to another
- The 'so what' question should be answered after each key descriptive section in the form of analysis. This should not take the form of further description.
- Wherever possible the assessor should draw on theory, practice and research evidence to support their analysis.
- Too much description in assessments – analysis is highly variable across the assessment presented.

14. Future Service Delivery

14.1 In view of the challenges above, there are a number of areas for service development for the coming year. They are:

- Continued use of the CRM tool to ensure the taken of enquiries via key social media platforms is both timely and effective.
- Further rollout of Mockingbird with two hubs developed and the recruitment of additional Fostering Liaison Officer.

- Implementation of design changes in light of the review of the annual foster carers reviews process and undertaking of kinship assessment and SGO assessments.
- Establishment of dedicated men's group through Mockingbird Hub 3.
- Development of additional specialist schemes in respect to adolescents who are on the edge of or in residential care via Mockingbird Hub1
- Introduction of performance management reports across the assessment and supervision.
- Introduction of new the service agreement with the FCA.

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