

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024





OUR SERVICE

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000. The Service's priority is providing children with confident and supportive carers.

Leicestershire County Council's carers are part of our "Fostering Family," an ethos we have continued to build upon over the last three years by listening and responding to our carers, being transparent in our decision making and policies and procedures.

The Fostering Service has two functions – recruitment and retention.

Our successes for 2023/24 have included:

Approved: 14 Mainstream Foster Carers, who can care for 24 number of children 3 Specialist foster carers who can care for 5 number of children, 3 Supported Lodgings Providers who can support 3 young people and 24 Independent Visitors

- Implemented a dedicated duty system to support our carers, place more children in house, keeping them in Leicestershire and closer to their communities and maintain 95% utilization.
- Increased the utilization of in-house placements compared to use of independent fostering agencies.
- Increased our capacity to assess and support independent visitors by appointing an additional worker.
- Maintained placement stability via the Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST)
- Supported 2 carers to achieve a Diploma in Therapeutic parenting.
- Continued to develop our Mentoring Scheme for new and inexperienced carers. We offered mentors to 14 carers in assessment, of which 12 accepted and will support through the assessment process and their first year of approval.
- Continued to offer our carers the right support at the right time to support stability.
- Increased numbers of Independent Visitors to provide support to our children and young people - approving 24 new IVs. Total number of IV is 75, matched to 72 young people.
- Developed our Fostering Newsletter for potential applicants who are considering fostering now or in the future.
- Excellent staff retention
- The development of the kinship assessment team and Initial Viability Assessment (IVA) work has seen the numbers of children achieving permanency through Special Guardianship Order (SGO) increase (total SGO achieved: 45)
- Registered to become a Supported Lodgings Provider with Ofsted (October 2023)

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.

Ensuring key information is shared with our carers in a timely manner is a priority, we continue to use our dedicated private Facebook page to share information, retention events and good news stories.

We provided many outdoor events for our carers including a Festival camping weekend based on wellbeing for all our carers. It was well attended by over 150 carers and their children and because we received such positive feedback we plan to run this again. We held picnics, wellbeing walks, crafting days in addition to our usual opportunities to meet with our foster carers.

As Leicestershire runs its own Independent Visitors Scheme and Supported Lodgings Hosts, we ensure they attend our events in line with our motto “We are Family.”

We developed our therapeutic parenting and trauma informed position ensuring both staff and carers were provided with training in this area.

We supported placement stability using our Dedicated Placement Stability Group to work alongside children and families to stabilise homes during tricky times.

We stepped down 2 young people from residential care into our specialist carers, and prevented four children going into residential care by placing with carers.

We have seen similar challenges to 2022/23 with large sibling groups and teenagers being the busiest area of referrals for foster homes.

With our defined kinship assessment team, we have continued to see the increase in the number of Viability Assessments for Kinship Care. With revised, clear processes in place, we have seen a reduction in Regulation 24 Fostering Arrangements and subsequently approvals in Kinship Care.

The Annual Report will provide feedback from the whole service, highlighting how we progressed our plans from last year and new targets for the forthcoming year.

This report should be read alongside the Market Position Sufficiency Statement for 2021-23 which provides the basis for commissioning decisions, setting out our intentions for improving life chances of children and young people in care. The statement sets out the current position and our objectives for placements for children and young people from within our internal services and those we source from the external market.

Other key documents include:

- Children and Family Departmental Plan 2020-2023
- Continuous Improvement Plan – The Road to Excellence 2021-2023
- Workforce Development Plan 2020-2023
- LCF Partnership Plan 2021-2023
- Voice Strategy 2020-2023
- CFS Equality and Diversity Guidance
- Ofsted Report 2019 (Inspection of children's social care services) and Focused Visit 11 May 2023

Ambitions

As a department we are passionate about improving the lives of our children and young people.

The CFS Departmental Plan sets out four clear ambitions:

- Help every child to get the best possible start in life.
- Help children and their families build strength, resilience, confidence, and capacity.
- Help children in Leicestershire to live in safe, stable environments and have secure attachments.
- Help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential.

Core Values

We believe that our core values and behaviours will ensure we take the right action at the right time so that Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people, and families:

Core Values and Behaviours that underpin everything we do

Aspirational

Being aspirational for our children and families

Being Curious

Being curious and paying attention to detail

Collaboration

Building strong working relationships.

Behaviours

Listening

Listening to what children and families tell us. Involving them in decision-making, development and evaluation of new and existing services.

Building Relationships

Signs of Safety (SofS) provides our approach and tools to work with children and families.

Outcome Focussed

Striving to improve the lives of the children and families whom we work with.

Being Accountable

Everyone is responsible and accountable for delivering high quality services

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 to the overall Council savings through sufficiency and utilisation of carers and reducing the amount of time children spend in care.
- 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.
- We will continue to look for further opportunities to develop our carers and introduce the therapeutic model to all our carers. At the time of implementation, we had just secured funding to provide training and support from the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting.
- Develop hybrid model of foster panels incorporating both virtual and in person panels.
- Introduce face to face foster carers forums and meetings following local and government guidance.
- Review our Practice Standards across the service ensuring we recognize diversity, equality, and inclusivity.
- Evaluate "A Place to Call Home," the regional UASC recruitment for foster carers and Supported Lodgings Providers.
- Increase Reviewing Officer capacity as a net growth of foster carers continue.
- Continue to develop a Signs of Safety Approach to all areas of our service, including reflective supervision and embedded into practice.

LCC Children and Family Service works to a key set of principles that underpin our work with children and families. These are:

- 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 absolute best care is provided to our children and young people.

What we did to achieve this

- We undertook our first "Festival" with our foster carers, Supported Lodgings hosts and Independent Visitors.
- We approved 17 foster carers (including 3 IFA carer transfers who had made an active choice to be part of our fostering family, recognising the level of support our carers receive). Our conversion in assessment remained at the same level as the previous year (65%).
- In terms of foster carers leaving the service we lost 12 Mainstream Foster Families; this is better than previous year (25). None reported dis-satisfaction with the service but changes of personal circumstances – moving out of the area, achieving permanency through adoption, or retirement.
- For Supported Lodgings we saw a significant reduction of approvals. 4 households were approved, compared to 12 the previous year.
- Recruitment activity was developed, using Facebook and the dedicated Fostering Leicestershire County Council website, Instagram, adverts played on Spotify.
- A WhatsApp account was set up so that carers could text us when making requests for information.
- Virtual and in person Information evenings were held.
- Fasttrack system for applicants who were already carers within an agency (IFA Transfers) or fostering with another local authority (OLA) was used.
- Skills to foster, mentoring meetings and assessments returned to face.
- The DPST has continued to support placement stability. The team supported 71 placements during the year, helping families to stay together, supporting 5 young people into family-based care or into independence from residential placements, and supporting 2 young people to return to their birth families.



Identified Targets from 2022/23 Annual Report

The Fostering Service works to an intensive recruitment strategy with the aim of achieving the following targets:

Recruitment Targets:

17 Mainstream Foster Carers	2 Specialist Carer	8 Supported Lodgings Providers	20 Independent Visitors	(Total 37)
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Approvals:

14 Mainstream Foster Carers	3 Specialist Carer	3 Supported Lodgings Providers	24 Independent Visitors	(Total 44)
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FUNCTIONS OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Our Fostering Service consists of five separate teams:

- Recruitment – Fostering and Adoption
- Assessment – Fostering, Private Fostering and Non-Agency Adoption
- Team around the Child
- Kinship – 2 Teams, Kinship Assessment & Kinship Support Teams
- Dedicated Placements Support – Placement Stability, Independent Visitors, Supported Lodgings Scheme, Staying Put, Specialist Foster Carers



THE RECRUITMENT TEAM

Welcoming – Informative – Efficient – Innovative – Flexible



The Recruitment Team consists of:	
1 Team Manager	
1 Recruitment Enquiry Co-Ordinator (Fostering)	
1 Recruitment Support Co-Ordinator (Fostering)	
2 Initial Assessment Workers (Fostering) plus 1 casual part-time	
1 Recruitment Enquiry Co-Ordinator (Adoption)	
1 Recruitment Support Co-Ordinator (Adoption)	

Our Fostering & Adoption Recruitment Team are the forefront of our service. This team's objective is to engage with members of the public who are interested in becoming foster carers or adopters with Leicestershire County Council.

There is a national shortage of foster carers and with a growing population of children in care, the Recruitment team continue to strive to be as ambitious, creative, and successful as possible.

Our enquiry process continues to welcome all at the front door, providing information in different formats to enhance understanding of fostering. The team provides a dedicated resource which manages all forms of contact, including contact by telephone, mail, website, text message enquiries. Regular public events and 'pop-up' events around the county are held to welcome members of the public to find out more about fostering and adoption which are also the responsibility of this team. Our popular 'Find out about Fostering' events are held regularly, some virtual and some in-person. We are lucky to have the support of our foster carers and are joined by two carers at each of these events.

'Find out about fostering' events held during 2023/24:	15	Total households attended:	95
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The team provide a comprehensive 'filtering' process at the 'front door' of the service, ensuring that we are transparent, open, and honest with enquirers as well as maintaining the highest level of quality, to be progressed to the Assessment Team.

The team manager works closely with colleagues in the Communications Team to create appropriate and cost-effective recruitment campaigns, based on projected demand and need, using various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. More traditional methods are also used, such as posters, postcards, and banners, radio campaigns, adverts in local publications and local business and staff intranets.

This team strives to provide a welcoming, friendly, swift, efficient, informative, and honest service. Every enquiry is dealt with in a fair and non-discriminatory manner, representative of the key values and behaviours of Leicestershire County Council.

At the beginning of the year, we updated the folders that we use to provide information to our applicants, also investing in some cotton tote bags to promote fostering with Leicestershire.



New fleeces to keep the team warm when we are out at events!



We continued to support local children's sporting activities by sponsoring them. The teams promote fostering whilst playing at locations all over Leicestershire as well as supporting and sharing our social media posts. We got to sponsor the first 'all girls' team too!!



Short break carers campaign:

Working closely with the Disabled Children Team, we were able to identify the skills required to provide this type of care. During 2023/24 one of the approved foster carers was for a Short Breaks carer..



Foster care fortnight 2023

The team visited Fosse Park (a busy Leicestershire shopping centre) to talk to people about fostering. During the weeks before, we promoted this event on social media and by displaying the above images at the location.

Video content was popular during this time particularly to promote events:



We continued to regularly 'myth-bust' to our audiences, as we understand that many of these 'myths' become barriers to people contacting fostering agencies.



Christmas and new year campaigns:

This year, we created a digital card, which was sent out to people who have been in touch with the Fostering team over the course of the year. This generated responses from several people and encouraged two people to make contact again with us and then to move forward with the process. We also advertised in the Pantomime programme, as we knew a lot of our 'target audience' may be attending.



We also launched a video message campaign featuring team members and foster carers:

Our 'Thinking of fostering' newsletter: now at 120 subscribers!

An innovative way to engage with people who are thinking about fostering but are not ready to take their enquiry any further currently. Our 'Thinking about fostering' newsletter features detail about the application process, case studies from foster carers and focuses on the benefits of fostering with LCC. This is emailed directly to subscribers' inbox each month. This keeps applicants engaged and when they are ready to progress further, they come to us..



The Communications and Media Team regularly release stories to the media and features regularly in Leicestershire matters (delivered to every home in Leicestershire).

“ FC Gemma: ‘Communication from both social workers has been fabulous. Our social worker, Jade, is very dedicated’ ”

“ FC Sarah: ‘Beth has been superb in supporting us throughout the year, in suggesting different ways to overcome challenges that we have faced’ ”

Kids on foster carers:

“ Bella (12): ‘They are kind, caring and funny’. I love my bed ... it is so comfortable!’ ”

“ Maia (5) ‘I like my foster mummy making good pancakes ... going swimming with her ... having my friends over. I want to stay with her forever and ever!’ ”

“ Baily (6) likes it when ‘Sheila takes me out to the woods ... how she loves me and my sister and when she gives me hugs’ ”



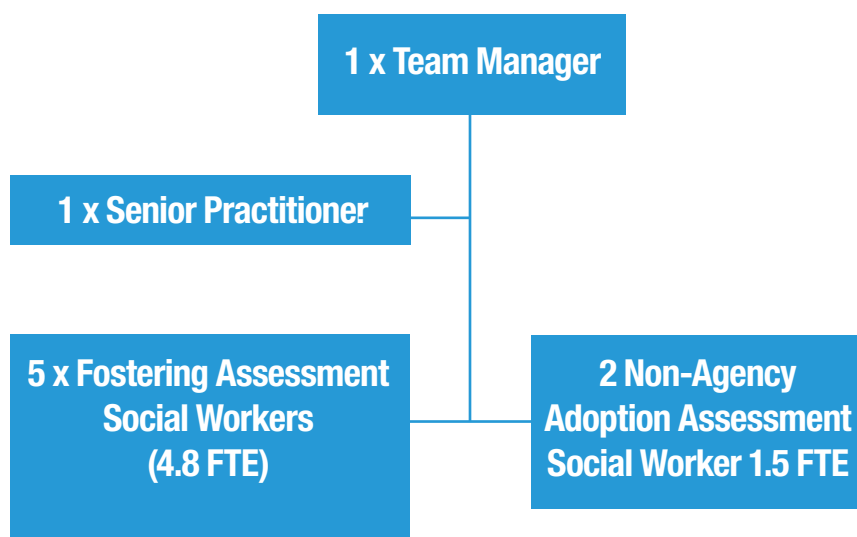
THE FOSTERING AND ADOPTION ASSESSMENT TEAM

CHILD CENTRED - CREATIVE – FLEXIBLE – PASSIONATE - THOROUGH

The Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team are responsible for:

- Mainstream Fostering Assessments.
- Leading on the delivery of Skills to Foster Training, which is jointly delivered with colleagues from the Team around the Child (TAC) team, and from the Dedicated Placement Support Team.
- Jointly overseeing the Mentoring Scheme (for new Foster Carers) with the TAC Team.
- Private Fostering Assessments.
- Leading on the requirement for the local authority to raise public awareness of private fostering, which has included offering training to all CFS staff, ASYEs and Social Work students.
- Non-Agency Adoption Assessments and submitting these to court.

Assessment Team Staff Structure:



Staff Satisfaction and Stability of the team:

As was reported for last year's Annual Report, the Assessment Team remain a stable and experienced staff group; no staff have left the service area in the last year. A part time casual worker has joined the team this year and she has supported the permanent Non-Agency Adoption Assessment Social Worker, to continue to reduce the waiting list for non-agency adoption assessments. The goal of clearing the subsequent significant backlog of non-agency adoption assessments is – after four years of dedicated work, mainly by one worker – just being realised. Our aim is to be fully 'up to date' with referrals by the end of this financial year.

Staff are supported via regular supervisions – with personal supervisions focussing on staff welfare, and personal and professional development, and case supervisions providing clear support to enable timely and thorough assessments. Monthly supervisions take place with staff of average 93% of the time (with the target average for CFS being 83%). Monthly team meetings and POD meetings are held, which provide regular opportunities for discussion and team development. There is a strong thread which runs through all our work as a team, and this is the idea of development, for example, work with Coram BAAF regarding private fostering.

In our endeavours to drive development and performance in this service area, work with partners such as those in health and from Fostering Network and Coram BAAF, continues. Further to this, we work with colleagues from different service areas within LCC to improve our practice, including the following:

- The Transformation Team, to improve our data reporting.
- The LCC health and safety department, to improve our practice relating to health and safety assessments.
- The Learning and Development Team, to create a private fostering homepage, where all staff can access information and training about private fostering.
- The LCC Communications Team, to progress work regarding raising awareness of private fostering.

Development is enhanced (both as a team and individually) by team members having 'Champion' roles for different areas of work such as Signs of Safety, Private Fostering, Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, Retention Activities, and Equality and Diversity.

The following is feedback from team members about their work for the team

What do you like about our Assessment Team and what do we do well?

“ I like our team as we are supportive to each other offering each other advice and being available to talk complex situations through. ”

“ I think we are creative and review what is going well and what we can do better. ”

“ I like that in our team everyone is friendly, approachable, and helpful. I also feel that we want the best for our applicants and are always striving to improve our assessments, training etc. ”

“ ...a recent example was how useful it was for me to take my case to POD and the suggestions from the team were helpful, despite it not being about fostering. I also like the development days we plan and that we can ask each other for advice - all that helps with producing strong, robust assessments where the child is always at the centre. ”

Overall Assessment Team Performance

Targets and Performance

Data is included below for private fostering and non-agency adoption, as well as for mainstream fostering, to highlight the other work completed by the Assessment Team, however, this additional data will not be considered in depth within this report but serves to highlight the additional functions completed by the team.

Mainstream Fostering

MAINSTREAM FOSTERING ASSESSMENTS 2023-24		
	Target / KPI	Actual
Approved Carers	17	15*
		*Plus 2 additional households changed their TOA to specialist

The service had set targets for the recruitment of mainstream carers and even though numbers entering the assessment period were lower than expected conversion from assessment start to finish is above average - conversion rate is 65%. Midway through the financial year, the KPI for completed assessments was reduced from 25 to 17. The assessment team have approved 15 carer households this year.

Data from 2022 – 2023 and 2023 – 2024 financial years: applications took 7.5 and 7.9 months on average, respectively (from formal receipt of appl. to ADM (Agency Decision Maker)); this is within the National Minimum Standards of 8m. Of the 31 approvals between 2022—24 showing: 3 were achieved within 5 months, 10 within 6m, 3 within 7m, 2 within 8m, 6 within 9m, 2 within 10m, 12m and 13m respectively, and 1 case just exceeded 17m. The reason for the delay was the carer pausing the assessment whilst we investigated health and personal circumstances. Whilst we know our reporting mechanisms could improve again, with improved tracking and regular ICMs, we have a much improved, thorough oversight of all assessments and in performance matters.

For those prospective carers who withdrew, reasons include significant life events that have impacted upon them like health and change of family circumstance. For some this has meant we have put their assessment on hold and then re-commenced, for others we have had to agree to ending the process.



The Assessment Team continue to complete robust assessments of foster carers. Feedback from Panel and ADM evidence this:

Examples of Panel feedback:

“ ‘Excellent Analysis—particularly impact of stepfather’s disclosure.’ ”

“ ‘Comprehensive and easy to read, with a lovely writing style which enabled the reader to form a conclusion. Analysis was very good, with a commentary on what we know, what we don’t know, and what mitigates the risks.’ ”

“ ‘A thorough and well considered assessment.’ ”

“ ‘Inclusion of family photos helped bring application alive.’ ”

“ The Assessment Team are consistently scored 7+ (often 8, 9 and 10) to the question - ‘Was the information provided of a good standard?’ ”

“ ‘Couple’s presentation was excellent—they had been prepared well.’ ”

“ Panel Chair and Advisor ‘...report that mainstream fostering assessments presented to panel are consistently of a good quality (Foster Link Audit, April 2024).’ ”

ADM Feedback:

“ ‘A well written report and issues were thoroughly addressed.’ ”

“ ‘Panel found the application to be very well written, thorough and easy to read. ADM in agreement with this.’ ”

The team was asked, what impact do their assessments make? They answered...

“ ‘The impact our assessments make, is to ensure any children in care has the opportunity for a good quality of life - by making sure our foster carers are the best they can be and that they have the ability to provide good care.’ ”

“ ‘Our assessments ensure any children are provided with stability and they can then hopefully achieve to their full potential. Another positive impact is that we have a pool of motivated, enthusiastic, and skilled foster carers who have the resilience to be foster carers for many years beyond our assessments.’ ”

“ ‘Thorough robust assessments provide the best level of safety and care for our children who need looking after to be safe and well cared for.’ ”

Private Fostering

At Leicestershire County Council, the First Response Service, Family Help / Family Safeguarding Service (depending on the needs of the child), and the Fostering Service, are all jointly responsible for monitoring, assessing, and supporting private fostering arrangements in the County. Private fostering Assessments of carers are undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team. Social Workers within this team assess the suitability and safety of these placements. After the assessment, the Service Manager (and Lead Manager for Private Fostering in the local authority) ratifies the assessment recommendation.

Support to privately fostered children and young people, following notification of the Private Fostering arrangement, is provided by the First Response Team initially, if the child is not already open to us. If the child is already open to the local authority, the (newly established) Family Help or Family Safeguarding Teams will be responsible for the Reg 7 visit (which follows notification) and for providing support to the child for the duration of the Private Fostering arrangement and sometimes beyond, depending on their CIN (Child in Need) status post-16 years old. After their assessment, carers are supported by a dedicated Supervising Social Worker from the Kinship Team.

The number of private fostering assessments worked upon by the Assessment Team, has increased year on year.

Financial Year	Number of Assessments / Private Fostering Arrangements
2016 – 2017	8 (all overseas students)
2017 - 2018	Unavailable
2018 – 2019	3
2019 – 2020	17
2020 - 2021	14
2021 - 2022	7
2022 - 2023	22
2023 - 2024	23

The Assessment Team experienced a significant increase in numbers of private fostering assessment referrals compared to previous years. This increase followed more determined efforts to raise the profile of private fostering around the local authority and with partner agencies.

The Private Fostering Champion within the Fostering Assessment Team (along with Team Manager support where necessary) undertakes the following Awareness Raising activities:

- Regular training to all ASYEs
- Regular training to all students who undertake placements with LCC.
- The team Champion undertook a lengthy round of training to all CFS Teams which came to an end approximately 12 – 18 months ago. Since this time however, the Assessment Team Manager and Champion have continued to attend team meetings, with the next one scheduled for April (FRCD (First Response Children's Duty)).
- Yammer posts during November 2023 Private Fostering Awareness Day (run by Coram BAAF) which promoted Coram BAAF training and the newly created video raising awareness about Private Fostering.
- Work has also begun on creation of a central homepage on the Learning Hub for all LCC staff to access learning and resources about Private Fostering. Assessment Team worker sits on Coram BAAF Private Fostering Forum, which informs our practice.

A full annual report will be available in due course, for the 2023-24 financial year regarding private fostering.

Non-Agency Adoption

NON-AGENCY ADOPTION ASSESSMENTS 2023-24

Adoption Orders

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The situation with Non-Agency Adoptions in Leicestershire is a continually improving picture. Our waiting list is now under 15 households for non-agency adoption initial visits. Since 2018, the Assessment Team has been successfully working upon clearing a backlog of non-agency adoption cases.

In 2019, there were over 100 families waiting for an initial visit, Year on year we have worked to reduce this number by July 2020, this was down to 30. With an average of 1.7 assessments adding to this waiting list each month, and 1 permanent worker, the task has been significant. The impact of this piece of work is that children are gaining permanency and stability within their family units without so much delay, soon to be with no delay.

Feedback from Families:

“ ‘Just wanted to say a Big Thank You for all your efforts and hard work getting T and B, M and K their family complete. We know they always have been, but this truly seals it.’ ”

“ ‘Dear Poonam, thank you for being so kind to us and for helping to make our dreams come true. From L and I (children)’ ”

“ ‘I just wanted to say thank you for all you did to help us get to this and how lovely and approachable you were always. I’m not sure of your managers address but I would like her / him to know how happy we were with your work if you could pass this on from us.’ ”

“ ‘We have just come back from the hearing and the order of adoption has been granted. Thank you very much or your help and support throughout the process—you made it possible for us!’ ”

Continuous Professional Development

- Work with PET and service led work, has resulted in development: celebrating our carers approval better, more thorough handovers to TAC, review of use of ‘homework’ sheets, and workers ensuring that they continually check-in with applicants throughout the process, writing Support and Wellbeing Plans for applicants in assessment, where necessary.
- Audit on 2022-23 carers explored themes and areas of development for our service area - these actions have been fed into Improvement Cycle Meetings (ICM)
- ICM data fed into all team meetings.
- KPIs and current performance factors in supervisions and other meetings such as the Midway Reviews.
- Work with partners in health, improved the process regarding health assessments, to the extent that we don’t experience any issues relating to delays.
- Joint Work on improvement of Skills to Foster Course (between DPST, TAC and Assessment).
- Joint work with the LCC health and safety team regarding our Health and Safety Checklist, which led to a review and improvement of forms.
- Joint work with Business Support re improvement of our Stage One task request forms—making the process easier to understand for all and therefore more efficient.

Our Aims for 2024-2025:

1. Although nationally there are more approved places than children in foster care, 'this does not mean that there are sufficient appropriate placements for children' Ofsted (2021). In 2022-23 – we know that matching carers against the places required for our children can be challenging. We use this challenge in our recruitment campaigns to highlight our current needs as well as achieving our target
2. We will continue to set ambitious recruitment targets with a continued to drive to place more of our children with our in-house carers. We have set targets of:

20 Mainstream Carers	5 Supported lodgings host families	2 Specialist Carers
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3. Work with the Transformation Team to ensure that data continues to be reported, and performance measured – with plans to improve some aspects of what we currently do.
4. Mentoring – We operate a mentoring scheme for our prospective carers, our aim is that 100% of our carers be take up the opportunity to have a mentor during assessment and the first 12 months of approval.
5. Seeing through all actions of the Audit of 2022-23 carers (concluding in May / June 2024)
6. Conclude the review of the Skills to Foster course (May / early June 2024)
7. Continued focus on performance, as we would like our average time in assessment (from application to ADM) to come down to under 6 months.



TEAM AROUND THE CHILD (FOSTER CARE & KINSHIP CARERS)

In Leicestershire, statutory support is delivered to carers through the Team Around the Child (TAC). We have one team who focus on supporting mainstream fostering households and another focusing on supporting kinship fostering households. Both team managers continue to work closely together to ensure that there is consistency amongst all foster carers and that they offer the same standard of care. Whilst this is the case, we continue to acknowledge the differing challenges faced by all carers and therefore by having the two teams we can offer that specialism. We are very proud of the work carried out post approval ensuring we work with foster carers to achieve the very best for the children we care for, and we are confident that our carers feel valued and supported through the services we provide.

The Team Around the Child consists of:	
Team Manager - Rachael Young	
1 x FTE Senior Practitioner (covering duty) - Tanzeem Kadar 1 x PT Senior Practitioner (3 days per week) - Vanessa Petch	
8 x Supervising Social Workers (SSW) -	
Veronica Yates	Donna Bradbury
Tinashe Daire	Jade Williamson
Deepti Daya	Emma Bowler
Zaimeen Ibrahim	New SSW to start in July 2024
Duty team:	
1x FTE Senior Practitioner (as cited above) 2 x Support Workers - Katie Papworth/Susan Booth	

A primary role for the TAC team is the retention of our foster carers and we continue to work hard to ensure that all carers feel supported, valued, and respected by the service. We understand how challenging the role of a foster carer can be, so it is essential that all our carers feel well supported by their SSW and the service and that there is close working relationship formed and maintained. Currently we have 116 approved fostering households, which includes the approval of 15 new households, with the resignation of 12 households (which is a reduction from 25 fostering households reported in the 22/23 annual report). A significant proportion of these resignations related to a change of the foster carers personal circumstances or as the result of foster carers securing legal permanence for the child/children in their care. Many of the resignations were anticipated as they are for the forthcoming 24/25 year.

We continue to have the very strong belief that Leicestershire's children should be placed with Leicestershire foster carers as we know that our carers provide the right care at the right time. We continue to work hard to ensure that we utilise all our vacancies ensuring that appropriate matches are made with our carers, we know that this is essential, and we are constantly striving to ensure that we continue to evidence how our young people are matched to their foster carers. We continue to exceed our utilisation target for the year which remains at 75% and we are consistently operating at over 90% considering those carers that have placements on hold. This is an area which we are incredibly proud of, and all the SSW continue to support the duty team to achieve this target and ensure that required levels of support are provided to our carers. As in 23/24 there continues to be a national shortage of foster carers, and this is an issue which the TAC team continue to navigate daily as the number of young people entering the care system continues to raise increasing the demand on our foster carers. Across the TAC team we continue to work together to ensure that all young people are well placed and the principles of working together are cemented in our weekly duty meetings to ensure that all young people's needs are well considered and matched appropriately. In addition, the team manager continues to work closely with the recruitment and assessment teams to support the recruitment of new foster carers and ensure that the service is area of where the greatest placement needs are i.e. siblings/teenagers/OOH.

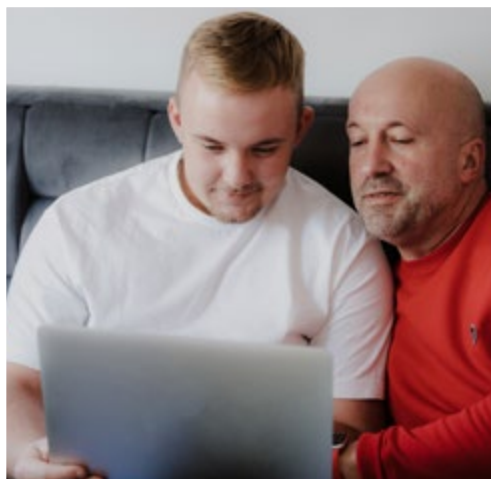
As a service we continue to receive resignations from our foster carers and as stated previously. It is positive that this year we have seen a reduction as 12 carers have formally resigned. This is line with the figures seen in previous years apart from the exception of 23/24 where 25 households ceased fostering. We are aware that our carers face their own personal challenges outside of fostering and that resignations inevitably will be received. We strongly believe that there is learning for the team and all foster carers are encouraged to participate in an exit interview so that there is some reflection from the team about the support and services provided. The exit interviews continue to be undertaken by the Fostering Reviewing Officer and information disseminated to the management team so that consideration can be given to the feedback, and it is incorporated into future services, if appropriate.

The TAC team are incredibly proud of all our foster carers and the care that they consistently provide our young people, and we will continue to strive to offer the very best service we can to ensure that all our carers continue to feel valued, respected, supported and heard. As a service we cannot express our appreciation enough to our carers and they are indeed truly an inspiration. Foster carers wellbeing, and positive emotional health is at the heart of our practice. In 23/24 we have begun to develop a suitable package of support including self-care, mental health and wellbeing workshops and webinars, wellbeing days, wellbeing plans and training to support carers to manage loss and grief and compassion fatigue.

What we did well in 2023/2024

- We have continued to show that we care about our carers and their families and have offered them a good level of support and supervision through a minimum of 6 weekly supervisions and regular contact. This helped us to identify where there were additional areas of need for any member of the fostering household.
- We have a good understanding of our carers; their families and we remain committed to supporting them to achieve our children's full potential.
- Whilst there have been 2 SSW leave the service this year, we have continued to offer consistent allocations and for many carers and children this has been the most stable working relationship within the team surrounding them. We have some working relationships extending beyond 20 years within the team.
- We have successfully recruited to the 2 SSW positions within the team offering increased stability to carers and reducing caseloads which in turn enables social workers to provide high quality care and oversight. Both newly appointed SSW have extensive experience working within fostering so have experience and an understanding of the fostering task.
- We continued to work well with the assessment team and ensured that there was a good handover at the point of approval, SSWs (Supervising Social Workers) were allocated prior to panel to support this process. We have observed an increase in SSW attendance at the initial panel which offers increased oversight of the carers experience and recommendations made by panel.
- All post approval handover visits to carers were undertaken in a timely manner to ensure the smooth transition from the assessment team to TAC. We recognise the importance of ensuring that there is a smooth transition between the services and that TAC SSW must understand the carer's experiences of the assessment process at the point of transfer, Form F's (the assessment form completed when assessing potential foster carers) (also need to be read to understand the fostering household at the point of TAC allocation).
- Most of our carer's report that they feel well supported and have a positive relationship with their SSW. This was reported in the most recent foster carers survey.
- We continue to have a utilisation rate of over 90% which far exceeds our 75% target.
- We have worked hard to support our foster carers on hold and have managed to reduce the number of fostering households on hold thus increasing our utilisation rate. Where needed we have changed, in conjunction with the foster carer TOA to enable them to either care for additional children or to reduce their TOA to better reflect their current circumstances.
- Well-being plans continue to be implemented across the team and for those carers with a plan it is having a positive impact as their SSW has a better understanding of the carers support needs and how as a service, we can support the fostering family more effectively. The foster carers own their own plans, and many carers have shared that they have found the process of completing these plans beneficial. By having an increased understanding of the foster carers support needs we can pre-empt instability and prevent compassion fatigue.

- We recognize the important role that our birth children play and the importance of providing them with support and showing that we value their involvement and care. Birthday cards are being sent out to all children and we established a 'children who foster council.' Unfortunately, attendance at this council was not as high as we would have liked to see (we know children have several activities after school), so we are now re considering how to support and recognise birth children outside of a council.
- All carers along with their SSW create a training and support plan, these joint plans are completed following annual reviews and ratification from ADM. These plans identify the areas of support, work and training for the forthcoming year and the plan that will be reviewed at each formal supervision (4 monthly).
- The duty team continue to work hard to ensure that matches are well made, carers are being kept informed about potential children matched to them and there is more consistency in the matching process and feedback from carers is positive. We continue to work with the commissioning services and localities to ensure that we have sufficient information about the needs of the young people and the timing of when placements are required so effective plans can be made.
- We respond swiftly to crisis 'and offer support where it is needed, stability meetings are arranged as soon as possible, and support plans reviewed in a timely manner. We continue to hold meetings at regular intervals until such a time it is decided by the whole team that the placement has stabilised. We have formed positive working relationships with DPST, and these have been instrumental in the stability/support meeting process. Our carers continue to value the support provided by DPST.
- We continue to work well with other professionals and relationships with Children in Care locality are overall positive. Our joint working has increased and as part of the well-being guidance it is expected that there will be increased joint visits at least every 6 months.
- Our mentoring scheme continues to be an effective way of supporting our new foster carer within their assessment period and the initial 6 months of their approval. All carers are provided with a mentor prior to their approval.
- We continue to be actively involved in running the skills to foster programme so that there is TAC oversight on the delivery and content of information. We have also been able to reassure future carers about the level of support provided by the team.
- We continue to offer a 'Men who foster' group which is running monthly and is led by an experienced male foster carer. This is an invaluable service for our male carers and provides them with a forum to share their views and experiences.
- SSW are working more creatively to ensure that the voice of the male carers is ascertained during supervisions as this has been lacking in previous years, we have carers joining supervisions during their lunch hour for example.
- We have recently offered additional carers the opportunity to complete the diploma in therapeutic parenting and remain committed to supporting other carers to become therapeutic caregivers, improve their learning and develop their skills. Last year 2 carers completed the programme, and we are proud of their achievements.
- All social workers across the service have had the opportunity to attend training on compassion fatigue to increase their awareness of the signs and how to support a carer in this stage. In addition, all staff attended an invaluable training course ran by Dr Anna May to increase our knowledge about the impact of trauma on the child. The latter training was also offered to foster carers and feedback was very positive.
- An SSW within the service has been attending children in care team meetings to discuss the role of the TAC team and the services which we provide. It is hoped that this will increase service delivery and joint working across the team.
- We have continued to work with the permanence team to develop the support provided to foster carers when adoption is a child's care plan.



- We continue to offer an extensive training programme with the brochure being updated on an annual basis. We recognise the importance of supporting our carers to develop their skill base.
- We continued to offer annual events to celebrate our carers and acknowledge the important role they play in caring for our children. Festival was a very successful event, and plans are being made for the 2024 event! Feedback was positive, and it was so lovely to see so many of our carers, children, IVs at the event.
- We continue to hold regular events throughout the year such as picnics and craft days which are well attended, we do like to meet and see our new carers at these events!
- We continue to offer information evenings to provide carers with the opportunity to hear about things that are happening in the service and provides us with the opportunity to hear carers voices and views. We have had hybrid meetings, and the last event was very well attended.
- Senior managers continue to attend the locality groups and meet regularly with locality leaders 4 times per year to share service information and hear what our carers are telling us. Locality leaders then have the opportunity to share information amongst their groups.
- We have established a new locality group which is in its infancy, and we hope that carers will find this beneficial.
- We implemented the annual pay increase for all our carers.

What we Plan to do in 2024/2025

- We will continue to support all our foster carers throughout their fostering career and ensure that we advocate on their behalf.
- We will continue to reduce the number of carers that are currently on hold to utilize all the placements available to the service. We have already seen a reduction in this area but there is continued work to undertake.
- Payments – we recognise the significant impact for our carers when payments are not correct, and we will continue to work with senior managers to ensure that improvements are noted so that all carers are paid correctly and on-time.
- All carers will have a meaningful well-being plan which clearly outlines what support we need to provide to ensure that all carers feel supported to meet their own needs and those of the children in their care.
- All carers will have a meaningful training and support plan which will be reviewed every 4 months to enable a review of the support being provided by the service.
- We will continue to develop the services which we provide to our birth children to ensure that their voices are heard and supported- this will be through events and consultations.
- We will continue our work with the permanence team to develop the transitional support that is provided to our birth children during adoption transitions. We are hopeful that there will be a consistent approach in this area so that all children receive the same standard of support.
- We will continue to support our foster carers to meet the NMS in relation to record keeping as we have identified that this is an area where additional support is required. This will be reflected in the carers training and support plan with clear recommendations about how the SSW and service intends to support the carers.
- We will continue to support all our carers to access the portal and additional training and support can be provided if needed.
- We will work hard to reduce the number of training events being cancelled as we are aware of the importance of supporting our carers to develop their knowledge and skill base.
- We will continue to support our carers to become therapeutic caregivers by offering additional training and opportunities for learning. We are considering developing an empathic listening scheme so that there is a greater level of support to carers by foster carers trained in therapeutic parenting.
- We will continue to work with the assessment and recruitment teams to ensure that the needs of our team are understood and reflected in recruitment campaigns.
- We will continue to make well matched placements and ensure that carers receive all the placement paperwork in a timely manner.
- We will continue to show that we value our carers through all the work that we do but in particular the provision of thank you events such as the annual celebration evenings.
- Continued work with our carers to ensure that they feel supported and are proud to work for LCC.

Children Who Foster

CWF Report June 2024

We have a small team of 3 Supervising Social Workers who champion our work with Children who Foster (CWF). Over the last 12 months we have been consistently trying to set up a Children Who Foster council and have attempted to run meetings on a monthly basis. The first meeting saw 7 children attend, however since this date we have had a decline in the numbers. We decided to reduce to frequency of the meetings, however we were still only seeing 2-4 children attending. We have currently put these official meetings on hold and are focusing on activities and other ways to get the voice of our CWF.

How many children/ young people are part of a fostering family? Age range?

- We currently have around 56 children for Mainstream with an age range from 1 – 22 years. However, our target for events is 5-18 years currently.
- We currently have around 28 children for kinship with an age range from 1-18 years.

Activities held so far.

- Outdoor pursuits, April 2023 – 22 children attended.
- Picnic August 2023 – 5 children attended.
- Bowling March 2024 (in place of official meeting), 4 children attended.
- Escape Room June 2024 – 14 children attended.

What do we want CWF to achieve?

- Our main purpose of the CWF is to ensure they have a voice, and we get a better understanding as to what it feels like for them to be part of a fostering household. We want to hear what is working well and what their worries are.
- We want our CWF to know that we recognise their importance within the fostering home and our events are a way of saying thank you to them for all that they do.
- We would like our CWF to develop relationship with other children and young people who foster, for them to support one another and discuss the challenges and the positives.
- We have discussed having a WhatsApp group for the older CWF, a member of staff will be present on this group but will not necessarily send messages, this would be a forum to develop relationships and offer support.

What do our YP who foster tell us?

- The first session of CWF council we have 7 children, this was a positive session, two of the children were able to talk about their experiences in an open manner. They talked about arriving home from school and the baby they have cared for over a significant time had moved and how this made them feel.
- One young person at our bowling event talked about how he struggled with a 5-year-old who was placed in their household. At this event we also had two siblings who were due to have a YP placed with them for respite of a similar age, they were able to put a positive stance on this and said they were looking forward having the young person come and stay.
- Two of our CWF talked about the difficulties of saying goodbye to a baby they had in their home for over a year, they said they were expected to say goodbye to him every morning before they went to school, not knowing if he would be there when they got home. This baby also had significant health needs meaning he needed stays in hospital, the older child said how much he used to worry about the baby.

How do we hope to capture their voice?

- At each event we will aim to speak to all the children afterwards, we will look to speak to the bigger group and then separate into smaller groups to capture their voice. We will be prepared with craft items to make it a more enjoyable exercise.
- We will ensure our SSW are capturing the voice of the children within their supervision visits and reporting any worries or concerns to the members of the CWF council team.

How will their voice inform our work?

- We will get a better understanding as to how they feel about being part of a fostering household.
- Positive example, currently, regarding one young person who was involved by Adoption SW in the baby's plan of adoption and the process to follow.
- We will be able to identify where the challenges are and be able to challenge other teams about how to best include our CWF.

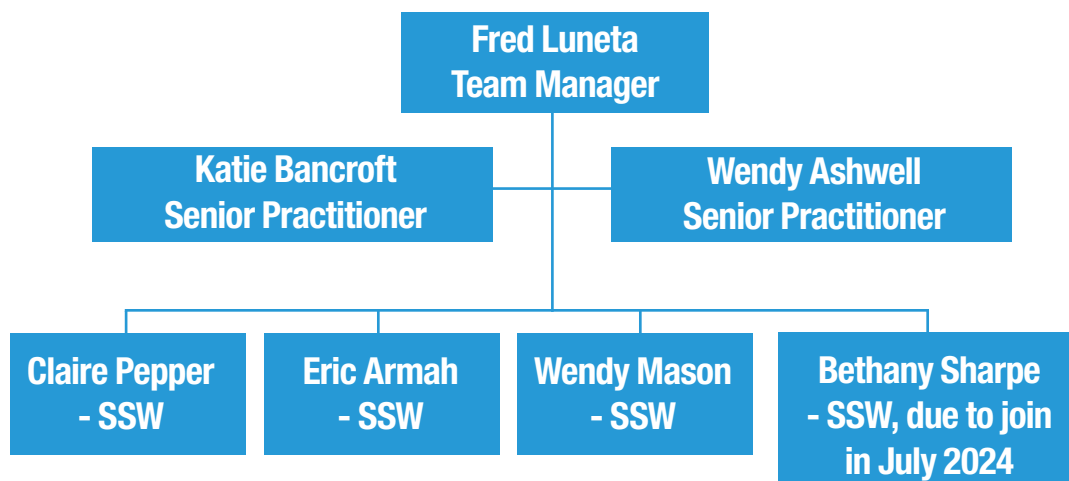
Our Vision - What needs to happen.

- Closer working with permanence team/CSW team to support our CWF through adoption processes.
- Sons and daughter's month (October) – A session to really capture their voice, a big event to attract many of them to this.
- Activity in Summer (August) at a local park, games to include rounders, capture the flag, cricket, (free activity, an ice cream for our CWF)
- Feedback questionnaire to be provided to the children at each event and an annual questionnaire (January 25) to inform our planning for the year ahead.
- Discussions around offering grief and loss training to our children (Sunrise)
- We need to encourage our staff to be on board and attend our events. We had three members of staff at the June event, and this was not sufficient to get to know the children and understand their views.
- Christmas movie night in December at County Hall (refreshments, popcorn etc)
- Consideration for a WhatsApp group – get our carers views on this.
- Photograph consent form to be written to allow photographs of the event to be shared in newsletters and other arenas to promote CWF.

KINSHIP SUPPORT TEAM

Team structure/ Staffing

The Kinship Support Team is part of the Team Around the Child (TAC), and it consists of two part-time senior practitioners, four supervising social workers (SSW) and a team manager. There have been some movements of staff within the team during the 2023/2024 period with some staff leaving and new staff joining the team. Below are the current staff in the team.



What We Do

Our focus is to support the approved kinship foster carers with the looked after children placed in their care by Leicestershire County Council. This includes:

- Providing monthly supervision home visit sessions.
- Supporting the kinship foster carers to meet the required fostering standards.
- Offering practical, emotional, and financial support on regular basis.
- Supporting and providing opportunities for the kinship foster carer's learning and development.
- Carrying out ongoing assessments of the kinship foster carer's ability and skills to continue to care for the children in their care.
- Carrying out statutory checks including DBS checks of fostering household, and unannounced and planned home visits to ensure that the placements remain safe and suitable for the children.
- Completing foster carer's annual review reports.
- Providing safe space for the kinship carers to meet regularly in their locality support groups including virtual and in-person support groups.
- Supporting kinship foster carers through the SGO process.
- Availability to offer support to kinship families to manage challenges and crises

What We Did Well in 2023/2024

The Team focused on stability within the kinship foster families. In order to ensure consistency, the team developed a kinship support toolkit, which we have continued to use to support the kinship foster families. The team has also used the high support, high challenge approach to supporting the kinship foster carers to ensure stability of the placements of the children in their care. With the introduction of the new kinship care strategy in December 2023, the team has been able to review support that is currently being offered to the kinship foster families. This is one of the areas that we will continue to develop further in this financial year. The team has also been able to monitor the team performance data more closely and to present the team performance data at a monthly (ICM) Improvement Cycle Meeting with the Service Manager. The team has continued to update the team performance tracker weekly, and this is another area that we will continue to monitor and to improve in this financial year.

On reflection as a team, we feel we have done well in the following areas:

- We have listened to our kinship foster carers and devised robust training and support plans to support the foster families.
- We have continued to complete 4-8 weekly supervision home visit sessions to offer practical and emotional support to our kinship foster families depending on the needs of each family.
- Most of the placements of the children have become stable and there were less stability meetings in 2023/2024 compared to the previous year. More children have also been granted permanence with their kinship foster carers in 2023/2024
- Kinship fosters carers have been supported to apply for SGO, and most of these who have applied have been granted SGO.
- We have devised well-being support plans for the kinship foster carers, which we will continue to monitor and update in supervision sessions.
- We have continued to support two kinships foster carer's locality support groups, and we are in the process of developing three more locality support groups this year.
- We have developed a kinship support toolkit, which we have used and will continue to use this year to support the foster families.
- We have introduced the high support, high challenge model to support the kinship foster families with the care of the children in their care. This is another area that we would like to develop further in this financial year.
- We have audited all our cases to ensure compliance of the statutory requirements.
- We have discussed the new kinship care strategy in a POD meeting as a team, and this has helped us to have a better understanding of the national strategy and expectations, and to review the support we are currently offering to the kinship foster families.
- We have continued to support the kinship foster families with regard to housing issues, as far as we are able.
- We have welcomed and supported 16 newly approved kinship foster carers who have transferred to the team from the kinship assessment team.

Overall, Team Performance

Performance Indicator	Average score/number achieved in the previous year
Foster carers supported in the previous year	68 - highest
Foster children supported in the previous year	102 - highest
Children progressed to SGO	5
Children progressed to Staying Put	3
Newly approved kinship foster carers in the past year	16

What we plan to do in 2024/2025

- To continue to provide robust support to the kinship foster families to ensure placement stability using the kinship support toolkit and high support, high challenge approach.
- To continue to actively listen to kinship foster families, to devise SMART and robust training and support plans to ensure that Kinship families are well supported.
- To implement fully the kinship care strategy once clear guidance have been provided.
- Improve our therapeutic offer both to the children and the carers who are in kinship foster care. We are aware we require a structured response to needs of complex kinship families who have experienced trauma.
- To develop three new face to face locality kinship support groups and one virtual support group.
- To work closely with the National Kinship Charity to coordinate available services and ensure that the kinship foster families are recognised and well supported.
- To continues to monitor our team performance data closely, and to aim to achieve a minimum of 80% on all our team performance indicators.
- To offer support to kinship families through the SGO process.
- To continue to be involved in 'We are Family' fostering events. Some will be specifically for kinship foster families.
- To identify specific training required by kinship foster families this year as part of their learning and development, but also to ensure that they are well supported and equipped to support the children in their care.
- To offer support to the kinship foster carers with completion of recording logs.
- To establish a robust mentoring scheme for the kinship, foster carers to ensure that newly approved kinship foster carers and those struggling with the care of the children are well supported by their peers
- To continue to support kinship foster families who are having housing problems/issues and living in overcrowded homes though this remains a challenge due to limited resources.



THE KINSHIP ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Kinship Assessment Team consists of:	
1 Team Manager	
1 Senior Practitioner	
4 Full time assessing social workers (Currently 3 - 1 beginning with team July 23)	
1 Full time SGO specific assessing social worker	
1 part time social worker – private fostering focus	
1 Full Time assessing IVA social worker	
2 Part time assessing IVA social worker	
1 Full time stage one support worker	
1 part-time SGO support worker (Beginning Feb 24)	
x1 Vacancies (Full time assessing social worker)	

The Kinship Assessment Team continues to develop in line with the kinship strategy in relation to the achieving a consistently high standard of assessment and support meeting the level of expectation we have for the carers and children we are working with and for, whilst ensuring that each assessment is individualised and tailored to meet the individual needs and enable the most thorough assessment, with support to achieve the best outcomes for our children – irrespective of the recommendation.

Kinship for the assessment team is inclusive of all Kinship care, with all our assessments giving consideration to all options from the very beginning, with carers having access to one off legal advice and the right to make informed decisions about the care routes that are available to the courts, but also carers having a voice within the assessment processes about their choices. This reduced both duplication and delay with every option being made available to the courts and locality teams informing the care planning.

Having increased information about care options and long term permanence for children has led to an increase in family orders being made, and a move away from the more historic fostering route and post support options, whereby children carry a child in care status and statutory intervention and oversight – there will always be cases where by Kinship fostering is needed, where the relationships are not yet established and/or there are additional complicating factors (primarily in relation to the children's level of need and/or the parent/family relationships). Those cases which do transition to post support where the primary reason is building or extending the relationship with the child living with them, are usually accompanied by a recommendation for an SGO at the point this is met, and if achievable within the 6-12 months the aim is that this can be achieved with the full assessment updated to avoid carers re-telling their story and have that fluidity in the transition to permanence orders, with continuity of workers and teams providing confidence and assurance.

The assessments take place with Kinship carers in all circumstances – family arrangements, 38(6) orders, S20/ICO – into Reg 24/25, and private law SGO assessments..

With the move away from fostering only Kinship assessment, we recognised the need for our package of support and inclusivity needed to extend to all our carers irrespective of whichever route they were undertaking care of a relative (or potentially undertaking care). To achieve this our offer has been as follows:

- Consistent and transparent information from the front door through to the conclusion of our involvement – verbal and written information
- Open access to all fostering training – this is both during assessment and post order.
- One of legal advice
- CAO (Care Arrangement Orders) and SGO payments in line with one another so there is no disparity across the orders.
- Support for carers to access additional funding where there are specific needs in relation to caring for children and the functionality of family life.
- Access to family support from the mid-way point of an assessment up to 6 months post order – this is to provide pragmatic support and develop confidence to move away from the oversight and input of social workers and enable care to be both sustained, but also that the community-based resources and additional training can be taken up by the carers. This is in addition to the post order SGO team offer, which the primary focus is on the AKSF and therapeutic needs that arise post orders. Our support is aimed at practical/hands on support alongside encouraging and supporting carers to access wider Kinship peer support such as via the Kinship charity.

In addition to this every assessment we undertake has a dedicated assessing social worker, who works with the family and the children, developing a deep understanding and awareness of their family dynamics, circumstances and needs – creating a bespoke assessment and support offer for each family – this can include accessing specific therapeutic training, external resources for example loss and grief, input via DDP (Dyadic developmental psychotherapy) Psychodynamic counsellors with specialism in family care. We use a wide range of creative and personalised tools to enable families to connect with not only the assessment process but to utilise and strengthen their own insight into caring for children who have experienced trauma and provide them and their own children with that true sense of belonging and family – whilst retaining the very best of their parents within the contact planning.

Stage one worker – chasing and tracking stat checks – including support network and additional ones for locality if needed. Bridges gap between families and social workers, enables carers to offload leaving SW able then to progress as much of the anxiety and internal worrying has been lifted.

Family network meetings take place within our assessments, exploring the family support that is around them both now and in the longer term and ensuring those circles of support are effective and meaningful both for the carers and the children.

We developed our chronologies to be holistic chronologies – incorporating both the carer and the child(rens) lived experiences

Kinship Strategy

The work we undertake is a constantly evolving process to ensure the carers and children have access both to a consistently high-quality assessment, but also that support and training remains meaningful, and we are on a constant journey of development and improvement. This includes as a team with monthly learning/training pods stemming from themes from assessment and research.

The recommendations made within the Kinship strategy are such a positive initial step in the process for Kinship carers, to receive the value, awareness, and respect within the wider government context of children care – both at our stage, and integral to the early involvement of services with family networks and families around the children to effect positive change.

We are all very aware that the Kinship strategy can only go so far at these initial stages – and do not yet cover the private law and family arrangements, with a risk of their remaining a two-tier system of support. However in the Kinship Assessment team for LCC we do not want to see that this limitation is there, and therefore we have actively decided that we will not simply follow this until change – we are actively seeking to provide carers in

those family placements and private orders with access to the support and training offer in the same way, and are exploring further ways to ensure they feel connected to other carers – through both the community based peer meetings but also in setting up our own sessions for all our Kinship carers.

This provides a robust and solid assessment of carers at the early stages – with an aim to the right carers coming through to assessment, reducing the level of withdrawals in assessment, reducing delay, and getting the right opportunities and outcomes for children within their families.

Our offer is to attend the Family Network Meeting prior to the Children Decision Making meeting, leading to an open dialogue with all family and parents, so that there is transparency in understanding the concerns but also the Kinship assessment process, expectations, and family support within that. This platform provides potential carers with every opportunity to understand the processes, and what we found is it gives them self-confidence to say what they can realistically offer in terms of care and/or support and is the early foundations to the assessment process. This is an area that is currently being strengthened through training and work across the locality teams.

The Initial Viability Assessment (IVA) support take up is very high, and what we have seen in these IVAs being completed across the two areas of the service, there is less challenge within the courts and from carer in respect to decision to progress or not. As a result of this we know that our assessments are consistently strong and evidenced based. Due to the time frames of the courts the high quality IVAs enable assessors to then focus on the key areas and identify a focus to their assessments.

The IVA Pod is over-seen by the Senior Practitioner and three part time assessing social workers, there is a tracked referral system and training is routinely provided on a rolling basis to the locality teams. When there are urgent issue cases, or the pod is at capacity the wider assessing team will complete IVAs to ensure we are reaching as many of the referrals as possible. If capacity does not allow, the expectation is clear that Children's Social Workers will undertake these, but we can offer support in talking through the recommendations and key issues.

Every IVA considers all options in Kinship and the majority of IVAs are for all options assessment – occasionally where families are very clear they do not want to foster and/or the fostering requirements are not met, we then look at these from an SGO/CAO perspective.

Every carer is given verbal information and written information including, the Kinship assessment information, a support number leaflet (which was developed to provide carers with contacts to support them, we are aware past trauma and/or negative recommendations etc impact and we want them to have access to support lines), consent form and also there will shortly be an over-view in relation to child trauma and a directory of community based services and links.

We are currently exploring training in ASI both in some IVAs where we have an awareness of past trauma as a tool to exploring this and early decision making reducing the need for carers to be re-exposed to further trauma in a negative IVA and triggering memories etc, but also within assessments with complex histories. We have planned shadowing of this 30th April and will decide about how and if this is appropriate to progress.

Comparable figures for 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 show a high increase in the volume of assessments being requested and completed.

- 2022/2023 122 IVAs completed – from the positive recommendations this was 55.4% of the assessments put through for full assessment.
- 2023/2024 211 IVAs completed – from the positive recommendations these were 94.5% of the assessments put through for full assessment (this does not include the 18 private SGO assessments completed as they do not have an IVA completed as carers are giving notice)
- Family network meetings referrals for the year 2023/2024 was only 5 – however for April alone we have had 2 requests these are from the team that we are collaborating with as a pilot to strengthen the FNM.

Assessment stats:

2022/2023	
136 full assessments	
23 SGO orders made for 30 children (including sibling groups)	6 cases to post support

2023/2024	
149 full assessments (43 were still active as of 31/03/2024) 106 completed	
64 positive recommendations for SGO for children to have an option for long term care within their birth family (including 7 transferred to post support) the overall outcomes were pending the decision making of pre-proceedings or care planning and tracked by locality via the PLO/Proceedings pipeline.	18 private SGO assessments (2 were still active as of 31/03/2024) – 17 were positive and one was negative.
13 negative recommendations for all options and 23 carers withdrew into the assessment. 5 cases were put on hold due to a change in the care plan.	10 cases to post support – high number of babies in proceedings relationships needed to be established/ proceedings concluded – 7 cases had recommendation of suitability for SGO dependant on the outcome of proceedings. The three that were not one was back up carers option only and the other two were teenagers (one would be too old by the time criteria for private SGO was met and the other complex family dynamics and behaviour needs of yp)

THE DEDICATED PLACEMENT SUPPORT TEAM

Leicestershire's Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST) has been in operation since 2016, its primary aim being to increase placement stability for children in care, which involves working across the spectrum of placements they live in. The team works holistically with everyone in the home, recognising the importance of listening, and giving everyone a voice. Support workers have a low caseload, to enable them to increase placement stability through timely, flexible, and creatively intervention, including working outside normal working hours. DPST intervention includes working directly with children and young people, or indirectly through work with their carers, empowering all to reach their own resolutions and solutions, to achieve positive outcomes.

The team consists of:

1 x Assistant Service Manager
1 x Team Manager
1 x Supervising Social Workers
7 x Support Workers

The SSW and TM are responsible for managing the specialist foster care schemes:

- We currently have 7 carers under this scheme with the capacity to offer 10 placements, matching permitting.
- We currently have 9 young people in placement.
- Regular focussed Learning Together bespoke events for specialist carers are being held, some with the support of a clinical psychologist, who can offer advice on a consultancy basis.
- Regular coffee mornings are being held between the team and carers, as an informal source of support, including peer support.

2023/2024 Recruitment Activity

Because specialist carers are those with previous experience of working with children and young people, it is recognised that they are people who would approach the LA with enquiries about the fostering task at the point that they have decided to make a career/life change. To that end a pilot targeted recruitment event was held in March 2023 and on our fostering website we hold videos and links regarding our specialist schemes

- DPST had a recruitment target of two Specialist Carers and approved one household in 2023. We also converted another specialist carers terms of approval to enable the household to take 3 placements.
- Two specialist fostering households are currently in the process of being assessed, one as the result of the targeted recruitment event, one household will be One to One, the other Pathway.

2024/2025 Development and Activity

- The aim is to increase the cohort of specialist carers, and to progress targeted recruitment activity following the pilot, taking forward the learning from event. This will be in addition to regular recruitment events and will be supported by effective comms. The first of the 2024 events will take place following the summer break and will be timed to ensure that those who are in currently in full time work to attend.

The DPST team of support workers are responsible for:

- Supporting and promoting placement stability for young people living in our specialist foster care provision for young people at risk of residential care.
- Supporting mainstream foster carers and the children living with them, where there are issues around placement stability.
- Supporting rehabilitation home for young people for whom that is their care plan.
- Supporting transitions, including supporting young people to move from residential to family-based care, and providing the scaffolding that enables positive outcomes.
- Working with carers to increase their understanding and implementation of therapeutic parenting, working within a framework of trauma informed practice, PACE/DDP, and learning through play/Theraplay.
- Supporting carers with empathetic listening, to increase their sense of wellbeing and resilience, and for them to feel safe and held.
- Running a range of activities and events for foster carers, the children in their care, and their own children. These are aimed at increasing connections and building bonds, as well as having fun!
- Attending all meetings held regarding the young person they are working with, contributing to any relevant assessments, and providing reports for carers' annual reviews.
- Being available outside normal working hours, to ensure carers can access support when other services may not be available.

2023/2024 Placement Support

- As of March 31st, 2024, 30 children were open to the team, who were living in 27 different placements. This is an usually low number for DPST, which usually stands around 42 children, and caseloads have since increased to that level.
- Between March 31st, 2023, and March 31st, 2024, 52 children were closed to the team, who were living in 47 different placements. Of that cohort:
 - Two young people were supported to return home to the care of a parent.
 - Two were supported to step down from a specialist placement to mainstream supported lodgings placements, as a positive care plan, in the context of their future as young adults.
 - One young person was supported to step down from residential to a mainstream placement, that being the successful outcome of their longer-term care plan.
- 34% of the children open to DPST between March 31st, 2023, and March 31st, 2024, were in kinship placements, 48% were in mainstream placements, including 4 IFAs. The remaining 18% were PWP or in residential/16+ placements.



Feedback from Carers re DPST Support Workers

“There are challenges in caring for my young person, but I found the DPST work around PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) parenting strategies really useful. I was so exhausted, that whilst I do know all about the information I was given, the reminders about putting it into practice were really helpful and I am better able to use the strategies in the moment. “

“We have been lucky to have DPST, they have gone above and beyond in their role and have made a big impact upon the young person, as well to us all as a family.”

“Thank you DPST for always helping and supporting our young person, and responding to their needs, wants and wishes, it's been a pleasure to work alongside someone who really cares. The young person is lucky to have you, you make a real difference to them, and they're very vocal about that.”

“Thank you DPST, your support has already been so beneficial, especially around the young person's self-esteem and confidence.”

Feedback from CSW re a DPST support worker:

“I just wanted to feedback how grateful I am for DPST support in working with my young person and what great practitioners they are. Having been met with resistance, the DPST worker persevered in a way that was sensitive to the young person's needs, by looking for another way to engage them. They have now formed a very positive relationship, the young person trusts the worker and will seek their views, as well as approaching them when things are not going so well, which is a very significant breakthrough with this young person. Communication has been good, enabling good joint working, and I feel very lucky to have had DPST support alongside me on this case.”

Feedback from Young People re a DPST Support Worker

“The DPST support worker has been like a parent to me, they have done more for me and to help me than anyone else, and if I was ever in trouble, they would be the first person I would call. The worker deserves a pay rise, there is nothing they say they will sort out that they don't, they always help rather than just saying they will, and they are the best. In all the years of being in care (and that's a lot) they're the one I'll never forget and am most thankful to.”

2023/2024 Development and Activity

DPST ran a pilot wellbeing group in 2023 for teenagers in care, sessions covered the areas (below) which are typically and routinely covered with young people on an individual basis, on the basis that they would like to spend time with other children in care discussing them:

- Healthy relationships & friendships.
- Health & hygiene.
- Sleep
- Vaping & smoking.
- Thoughts, feelings & behaviours
- Managing difficult emotions
- Self-confidence & self esteem
- Online and Personal Safety, including sources of support.
- Hobbies interests and their values.
- Wellbeing strategies & positive choices.

Wellbeing group feedback from the young people attending:

“It has been good to know that I am not the only one dealing with the problems I am, that it isn't just me.”

“Nobody here is judgemental; they are all understanding.”

“We were able to express ourselves and I felt comfortable saying what I wanted to.”

“We were all a team, and it has just been good to talk to people here.”

“This group is good about helping us to discuss things.”

“It has been good to see that other young people in care have the same problems that I do.”

“It has been good to be with people that understand because we have similar experiences and lives.”

Wellbeing group feedback from carers:

“I think for me and my looked after young person, it was all an extremely positive experience, on lots of levels. They are very shy and withdrawn and don't want to engage with activities outside the home, but after the first week I could tell they had enjoyed it and were happy to return, which is a result for them! That meant I knew he felt comfortable and supported. All the topics you covered are the things that we try to do at home, so you are reinforcing that for us, which means they doesn't just think it is just us nagging! “

“The girls loved it.”

“The wellbeing group was really positive.”

Wellbeing group feedback from professionals:

“I can see all the hard work that you and your team have put in, you have developed some lovely relationships with the young people. It really is a great group, so well done to the DPST team for giving a great platform and safe space for all the young people.”

“It is visibly clear the hard work you and the other staff members have put into the group and the young people. You can tell they have a lot of trust in you all and feel comfortable to express themselves.”

2024/2025 Development and Activity

- DPST will be increasing the group offer for young people in care based on positive feedback from young people and their carers.
- Link into recruitment forums like LinkedIn to advertise our specialist schemes.
- Use our carers to promote the schemes.

SUPPORTED LODGINGS SCHEME AND STAYING PUT

The Supported Lodgings Team consists of:

Team Manager - Emma Lowe
Senior Practitioner - Darren Blackburn
Assessing Supervising /Social Workers - Chloe Greaves and AnnMarie Reid

In October 2023 we registered our Supported Lodgings Scheme with Ofsted to become a regulated service. We currently have 35 Supported lodgings hosts offering 42 places for 16 plus young people.

Many of our current systems supported the new regulations, and to ensure compliance we have:

- Implemented an annual review process.
- Revised our assessment processes including a representative approval panel.
- Provided mandatory training to our hosts.
- Implemented recording logs for our hosts.
- Revised our recording systems on mosaic.

To support our carers in this transition we held regular meetings and briefings to discuss what it meant for the carers. We also implemented well-being walks and a locality support group.

Leicestershire is immensely proud of its Supported Lodgings Scheme, having been in operation for several years and working with our placements team we have successfully stepped down young people from residential care / high-cost placements into a family-based setting to develop their skills and independence whilst continuing to receive support. They continue to support young people post 18 and many go onto remain living there until they finish their studies / apprenticeships. .

Sitting within the fostering service enables our host families to feel included in all our social events and activities.

They can also access our training both mandatory and developmental to increase their skills and knowledge (have feedback and comments to be included at comms stage)

Our Plans for 2024/25

- To increase our recruitment of SLP hosts by holding targeted recruitment.
- Show case what SLP is to other agencies to increase awareness and further opportunities to place young people.
- Revise the ASDAN scheme.
- To undertake exit interviews for young people after they have moved on from hosts.
- To undertake exit interviews for hosts when they leave the scheme.
- Complete Ofsted registration process

Staying Put

We have 40 young people living in Staying Put Arrangements, our social workers undertake monthly monitoring visits to all providers to ensure the young people are achieving their outcomes, offer support to carers, and provide signposting.

Our Plans for 2024/25

- Work with regional neighbours to ensure our support offer is good enough and in line with 16 plus guidance.
- Continue to

THE INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

The scheme supports children in care. Children aged 7-21 who are identified as benefiting 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.

The scheme is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, approval, and ongoing support of the independent visitors (IV) and the matching of young people referred to the scheme.

During this period April 2023 / March 2024 the scheme has:

- Used the additional capacity to recruit, assess and support more Independent Visitors.
- Raised the profile of the scheme both internally through attending staff team meetings, and externally through leaflet drops and attendance at events for LCC.
- Continued to provide positive matches for children, and to provide positive endings for those relationships that are no longer wanted/needed. The children matched in Leicestershire exceeds the national picture per head of CIC as referenced by the NIVN National Data report.
- Linked in with local larger businesses to promote independent visitors.
- Involved our IV`s in all our retention activities.
- Continued to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme by gaining the voice of our IV`s and young people matched to.
- Undertaken a new comms campaign spotlighting the impact our IV`s have to be used across the service, and all social media – our website / Instagram and Facebook.
- Created opportunities to shine a spotlight on the amazing work IVs do. We now have a regular feature in the fostering newsletter, created a suite of videos of IVs talking about the role and its rewards to use for promotional purposes and to share with those enquiring and being assessed, and gathered testimonials from IV's and young people to use to promote the role.
- Strengthened links with the recruitment team and comms team.
- Created information sheets to enable IVs to develop their awareness/knowledge on specific topics including internet safety, mental health, and young people to name a few.
- Invited guest speakers at IV Network Meetings
- Recognised the important role IV play in our children live and ensure they are invited to all fostering retention events.

Current numbers on the scheme:

Independent Visitors

- We have 75 IVs however 4 ceased being visitors in this period due to personal circumstances.
- We have approved 24 new IVs in this period, up by 6 in the last period.
- We have 7 in assessment and 1 waiting to be assessed.
- The service currently has 75 approved IVs,

Young people

- 77 young people are matched with an IV.
- 8 are waiting to be matched. We have reduced this number by our increase of approvals this year. After the age of 21 this become private mentoring arrangements which is the reason we see a reduction of formal arrangements. Of which 5 are in OOC placements (18 males, 5 females) this is up by 7 from the last period although this is in part due to raising the profile of the scheme further and receiving more referrals.

Challenges in delivery

- Continue with our recruitment campaign for males' visitors.
- Recruitment of IVs for children in Out of County (OOC) placements remains a local and national issue. We are striving to address this through regional and national discussions.
- Recruitment of IVs for children with disabilities and additional needs remains a local and national issue. We are striving to address this through regional and national discussions and looking to strengthen links with LCC disability teams and special needs schools to explore options for recruitment.



Our Plans for 2024/5

- Continue with the help of existing IVs for recruitment, particularly males and those with skills/ knowledge of disability.
- Link our Independent Visitors Scheme onto our Fostering Website in addition to our LCC Volunteers Page so increase the capacity to recruit from different mediums.
- Continue to extend our training offer to IV's in line with LCC Trauma Informed practice.
- Encourage all IV's to be involved in our retention activities.
- Develop the scheme further by increasing capacity and accountability, with consideration of reviewing profile of co-ordinator and the embedding of an apprenticeship scheme allowing focus on Care Leavers.
- Increase our annual target to recruiting 25 new IV's.
- Using all recruitment events to have IV representation.

REPORT FROM THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

Our fostering reviews are undertaken by two part-time Fostering Reviewing Officers. Tessa Smalley will be joining me in this role in July 2024.

Reviews take place at minimum every twelve months and can be held more frequently if there is a change in circumstances in the foster home, or if extra help is needed to ensure that fostering standards are met.

We focus on putting the voice and experience of the child at the heart of the review process. It is lovely finding out about the various ways that our children are embraced by their foster families, and the dedication shown to them by our carers. We continue to value the views of foster carers' own children about their experiences of being part of a fostering family.

The overall feedback from foster carers from our reviews largely mirrors that identified in the foster carer survey, completed in December 2023. Despite a little more staff instability over the last year than usual, foster carers remain largely happy with the support received from their supervising social workers. They value good communication from the Children Social Work teams about care planning timescales and decisions being made about the children in their care, which remains an area of focus for us moving forward.

Foster carers will have noticed a change in the format of our review paperwork over the last few months following a change to a new computer system. We thank them for their patience around this!

Priorities for 2024/25

- To ensure all reviews are undertaken with timescales.
- To ensure reviews capture the voice of the child on every occasion.
- Ensure feedback is provided from the children's social worker and independent reviewing officer.
- To provide quarterly feedback to the service on themes.
- Foster carers need to be paid the right allowance, on time.
- Children's social work and permanence teams to update foster promptly on permanence planning and court decisions/timescales.
- Training offer to include a mixture of in-person, and virtual courses and learning

Ben Marchant

Fostering Reviewing Officer

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTER PANEL CHAIR REPORT

This report refers to the functioning of Leicestershire County Council Fostering panel for the year 2022/23. The Fostering panel is constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 011.

Independent Panel Chair's Comments:

"Panel have played a crucial role in the scrutiny of cases being presented. There have been a number of complex cases that have come to panel during the last year that we have had to carefully consider. The experience of panel members, from a range of professional disciplines and personal background, has meant our recommendations focus on the best interest of the child, and in regard to the national minimum standards.

We have two or three panels a month depending on the number of cases. All our panels are now face to face. This has been positively welcomed by panel members, carers, and social workers. We continue to play a crucial role in identifying areas of improvement service can make in respect of the quality of the paperwork and practice. We are also keen to gauge feedback from attendees to look at areas we can improve as a panel.

It's been a pleasure to chair the panel over the last year."

Mohammed Patel

AGENCY DECISION MAKER REPORT

The Fostering Service as a whole benefits from a stability in their staff team who are experienced and committed to supporting foster families to thrive, and this is evident in the ongoing placement stability that we see for our children and young people.

Whilst numbers of fostering applications are declining nationally the assessments that are coming to panel are comprehensive and evidence based and benefit from strong analysis, and there is clear evidence around how the development work across both TAC and kinship assessment routes is ensuring the offer is both robust and purposeful in its practice.

New Foster Carers benefit from a strong community of carers and mentors and a culture of shared learning, and the support from the DPST offer a valuable support resource, which, is agile and timely. The knowledge and skill base of the support workers in the team is diverse and this means that challenges can be supported quickly and we consistently see positive outcomes from their work.

We are seeing more families achieving permanency through SGO's both at the early stages of their care planning and following a trajectory of support under connected arrangements. The kinship offer is already ahead of many of the Kinship Strategy recommendations so we are in a good position to drive forwards continuing developments.

For the forthcoming year the focus will be on :

- Embedding the trauma informed practice principles for staff and carers
- Focussing on clear and individualised training and support plans.

Emma Bulgin

Agency Decision Maker

Retirement	5
Change of circumstances including health/ Covid vulnerabilities	18
Moving to Independent Fostering Agency	0
Moving to another Local Authority	2
Dissatisfaction with agency/Local Authority	5
Connected Carer gained SGO/ child turned 18/ alternative care plan agreed - Adoption	13
Other – transfer to supported lodgings	1

THE FOSTER CARER ASSOCIATION

The Leicestershire Foster Carer Association (LFCA) has been running for several 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 several years and bring to the association a wealth of experience. The membership of the association remains low as we have seen carers join locality groups based within their own localities.

In 2023/24 this continued to be the theme and with the impending retirement of its longstanding Chair as she retires from fostering, we have agreed that she will continue to support the group whilst we identify two vice chairs from locality to regenerate the association.

We advise our LFCA when there has been an allegation to ensure additional independent support is available.

Developments for 2024-25

- LFCA to be invited to attend locality groups to seek new membership and promote their role.
- LFCA to continue to support carers if subject to an allegation / investigation.

OUR LOCALITY SUPPORT GROUPS

We are pleased to have very strong locality groups across Leicestershire, they continue to offer both formal and informal support to foster carers in their locality.

Our locality groups meet in person, either at a carer home or at a neutral venue,

Most meet monthly, they are very social groups and are facilitated by the carers. Details of the meeting times are advertised in our Newsletter. When a new career is approved, their details are provided to the coordinator to make contact and welcome to the support group. Many of our coordinators are also mentors so new carers are quickly inducted into their local group.

We have also had a monthly kinship care support group, which is continuing to grow its membership.

Our Locality Co-Ordinators play a vital role in the recruitment of staff within the service, they support us by sitting on interview panels, provide feedback for new policies and procedures. We are very proud that two leaders have completed the National Diploma in Therapeutic Parenting. This ensures that key messages regarding the approach continues to be shared across their groups.

As a service we meet with them on a quarterly basis, we value the support and challenge they bring to the service.



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.

During 2023/24 we received formal 5 complaints.

The complaints that were upheld were in relation to communication and payments. Whilst we welcome challenge, we also need to listen to the concerns raised by our carers and take learning from them. In terms of ensuring we continue to improve our service we have reviewed our payments systems to ensure carers are paid without delay. We have also put in systems to ensure carers are made aware if their worker is absent for any period that our duty team will provide support and advice.

During 2023/24 we received 5 Complaints. Of those:

- 2 were upheld in relation to support needs from child's worker / not agreeing with timeliness of plans.

During 2023/24 we had 11 allegations of those:

- All were referred to LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer).
- Of those 2 had an outcome of no further action
- 4 Led to Position of Trust Meetings which led to reviews following concerns.
- 2 Fostering Households had a period of additional monitoring / support.
- 3 were reviewed / returned to panel.

During 2023/24 outcome of referrals to The Independent Review Mechanism:

- No referrals were made.

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. Our two events last year were focussed on being a trauma informed service and service reflection and development.

Across the service we undertake audits both for our service and across Children's social care. 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. Our focus this year has been our fostering journey and how we support our carers through the fostering journey to see if we have acted consistently if there are learning points and changes to practice required. We reviewed all 23 carers through the assessment process and this learning will be reflected in future practices.

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

A FINAL WORD FROM THE SERVICE MANAGER, JOSS LONGMAN

After the Covid years and times of isolation we embraced the opportunity to bring our carers together again, our children, both birth and fostered, our Supported lodgings hosts and our independent visitors to our very first festival – a festival to celebrate being together and to promote wellbeing. The camping event involved both the service, and our families held at a local campsite, where we enjoyed being together playing games, crafting and events to support our well-being. The event was attended by over 150 families, and it was a momentous success, so much so we will be holding another next year. It was our chance to say thank you for being part of our fostering family.

We know how important recruiting carers is to our service, and we have continued to keep our expected standards of carers, that are carers coming through need to be robust and most importantly that they can meet the challenges and rewards of our children.

We have continued to review and revise our kinship offer ensuring that the children have carers who know the expectations of their role, can offer the right support to the children and that permanence is achieved at the right time, we await the implementation of the Kinship Strategy in regulation, knowing that we have already started that journey, held at the King Power Stadium in May.

We have embedded therapeutic and trauma informed practice across our foster carers and we want to continue to embed this across the whole service.

We will continue to look at creative ways to advertise our service, and always be passionate at getting the right carers through assessment to care for our children and young people, this is embedded in all our assessments:

- Mainstream carers
- Specialist carers
- Private foster carers
- Non – Agency Adoption
- Independent Visitors
- Kinship Carers.

Our placement stability continues to remain strong, and the support we offer households is embedded within our service, we continue to ensure we provide the right support for our children and carers to support stability. We continue to receive positive feedback from our foster carer reviews, and QA alerts from Independent Reviewing Officers.

We have enjoyed a very settled staff team across the service and have welcomed a new Team Manager for the Supported Lodgings Scheme to support the implementation of the Supported Lodgings regulations.

Our management group is a very experienced group of managers, child focussed and passionate about our service.

Despite difficult recruitment times we are pleased to have recruited 15 new foster families for mainstream carers and a further 2 carers have joined the specialist scheme.

We are excited for the next year and to meet the challenges of recruitment with passion from both our recruitment and assessment team with supported from our dedicated comms officer.

For the forthcoming year:

- Continue to use all forms of media in our intensive recruitment campaign to achieve stretch targets:
 - 20 Mainstream Carers (net 16).
 - 2 Specialist Carers.
 - 5 Supported Lodgings.
- The registration of our Supported Lodgings Scheme with
- Continuing to develop our trauma informed practice to both our workers and carers.
- Strengthening our reflective practice in supervision of workers and carers. This journey has commenced, and we will continue to ensure this is fully embedded for all families.
- Continue to strengthen the service using Improvement cycle meetings to measure and improve performance. This will be extended to Private Fostering, Non-Agency Adoption, and Independent Visitors.
- Revise our reporting mechanisms via tableau reporting.
- Continue to strengthen our kinship offer informed by the kinship strategy

I continue to feel lucky to work in such a service that puts its children and families at the heart of its service and look forward to a year where we are busy recruiting, assessing and supporting carers, our retention activities holding the same importance as recruitment by a staff team supported and trained to meet their needs.

We look forward to the year ahead and our Festival#2



Joss Longman



Leicestershire
**Fostering
& Adoption**



FosteringLeicestershire.com