

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



INTRODUCTION

The annual report on fostering provides a comprehensive overview of the year's progress, challenges, and achievements within the fostering service. This document is designed for all stakeholders, including foster carers, social workers, management, and external partners, offering a clear summary of key developments and future priorities.

Leicestershire Fostering Service is governed by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for fostering services.

The Fostering Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose are available to all staff, foster carers, supported lodgings hosts, young people, parents and other professionals.

Key Messages

- **Increased Placement Stability:** This year saw a notable improvement in placement stability, with more children experiencing longer-term, consistent care. This has contributed to better emotional and educational outcomes for young people in foster care.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** We recruited 13 new fostering households. Our target was 17, recognising the national downward trend in recruitment. We lost 21 fostering households due to:
 - Retirement from fostering
 - Children remaining post 18
 - Adoption of foster child
 - Life circumstances – health, separation making fostering no longer viable as enhanced support and training, have also reduced turnover rates.
- **Our conversion whilst in assessment remains high 63%**
- **Training and Development:** A comprehensive training programme was delivered, focusing on trauma-informed care, safeguarding, and compassion fatigue. Feedback from carers highlighted the value of practical workshops and peer support sessions.
- **Child-Centred Practice:** There has been a continued emphasis on listening to the voices of children and young people. Regular forums and feedback mechanisms have informed service improvements and policy updates.
- **Retention activities –** We held our second Festival with over 170 attending, held wellbeing events for our carers, activity days for our children who foster and our foster children.

Challenges

- **Demand for Placements:** The demand for foster placements continues to outpace supply, particularly for sibling groups, teenagers, and children with complex needs. Addressing this gap remains a priority.
- **Support for Carers:** While progress has been made, some carers report needing additional support, especially when managing challenging behaviours or navigating complex systems.
- **Transition to Adulthood:** Preparing young people for independence remains a challenge, with ongoing work to strengthen pathways and support networks for care leavers.
- **Due to national shortage of adopters** many of our babies are remaining with the foster carers for longer periods impacting on capacity and child's care planning
- **Our staff retention remains high, with minimal staff turnover, evidencing staff morale remains high and committed to the service.**

Looking Ahead

- Expanding Carer Recruitment: Continued investment in targeted recruitment campaigns, with a focus on underrepresented communities and specialist carers.
- Enhanced Support Services: Plans to introduce new support groups, respite care options, and digital resources for carers to support recruitment
- Partnership Working: Strengthening collaboration with health, education, and community partners to provide holistic support with recruitment activities
- Innovation in Practice: Continuing to develop our models of care, including therapeutic fostering and early intervention strategies.



Conclusion

The past year has demonstrated the resilience and dedication of everyone involved in fostering. While challenges remain, the commitment to providing safe, nurturing homes for children and young people is unwavering. By building on this year's achievements and addressing ongoing challenges, we aim to create even better outcomes in the year ahead.

Thank you to all foster carers, staff, and partners for your support and invaluable contributions.

The fostering service remains committed to improving the outcomes of young people through achieving permanency at the earliest opportunity, supporting families to enable children to remain within their communities.

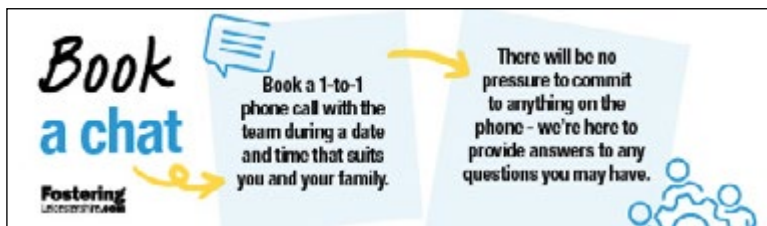
OUR FOSTERING SERVICE

Leicestershire Fostering Service is managed by:

- Joss Longman – Service Manager
- Heather Hughes – Assistant Service Manager
- Denise Betteridge – Recruitment Manager
- Emily Moss – Assessment Team Manager
- Rachael Young – Team Around the Child (TAC) Team Manager
- Rebecca Allen – Kinship Assessment Team Manager
- Fred Luneta – Kinship TAC Team Manager
- Helen Taylor – Dedicated Support Team
- Emma Lowe – Supported Lodgings Team Manager

FOSTERING RECRUITMENT

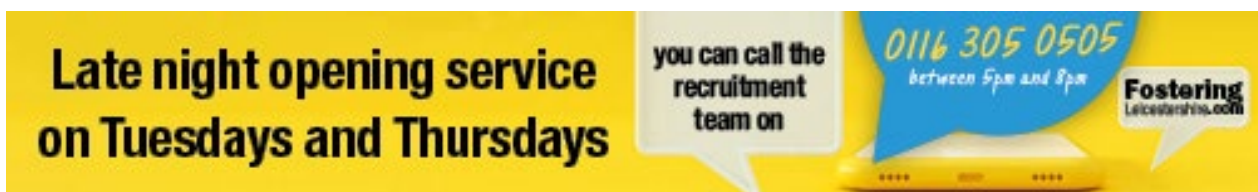
What did we do?



In August 2024 we introduced our new 'Book a chat' function!

Capturing RFI's 24 hours a day

Making it easy to arrange a time to discuss fostering



We introduced our 'Flexible hours' to be open 8-8 on Tuesdays and Thursdays

This also provides more opportunities for us to make contact with people who may be working during the daytime.

410 Requests for information to 46 Initial visits	11% conversion
19 Stage 1 starts from 46 Initial visits	41% conversion
12 approvals from 19 Stage 1 starts	63% conversion

Events attended in Leicestershire:

2024/25 was a difficult year for fostering recruitment on a national level, reflecting the national struggle to recruit carers.

During this time, our new dedicated Communications officer commenced her role and the positive impact made in our media activities and presence.



What we plan to do more of and / or do differently:

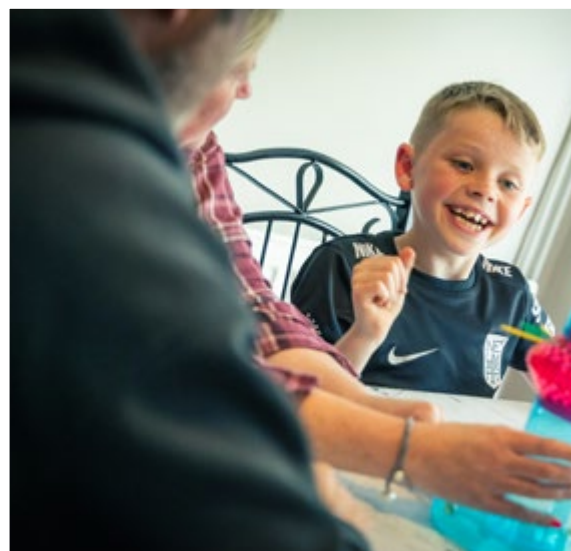
- Next year, we are hoping to acquire a fostering recruitment minibuss. This will provide transport for us and enable us to be more present at various events around the county. For example, we plan to attend 'Park-runs', festivals and pop-up events at local country parks:
- We will be focusing on the quality of enquiries from applicants. Ensuring that the content of our adverts are clear and concise, with suitable images. In addition, we will be maintaining our quality approach to potential applicants, ensuring that we only progress applicants to assessment where there is a high likelihood of them achieving approval. This practice also enables the service to make cost effective use of the Assessment team time by early 'filtering' at the front door. In addition, there is less potential for IRM issues and/or complaints to the service. This is underpinned by our 'transparent, clear and open' policy to potential applicants.
- We will be focusing on our USP (Unique selling points) which include the amazing array of support on offer for our foster carers and embellishing this on our website and social media presence.
- We will be growing our connections with local communities, ensuring we are present and available to all.
- We will continue to work with the whole service to understand the needs of our children and young people so that we can focus on the skills our foster carers need as well as searching for new opportunities to engage with potential applicants.
- We will continue to grow our 'we're not looking for Perfect people', just great people' image to encourage people to make contact at any stage of their interest. This will allow us to expand our 'keeping warm' connections.
- We plan to create digital application forms so that our applicants have the option to complete their lengthy applications online.
- We plan to generate more 'word of mouth' enquiries and explore how we can move this forward with our foster carers.

FOSTERING AND ADOPTION ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team continues to remain a stable team in terms of staff retention. We bid farewell to a long-serving member of the team and of LCC who was retiring, who had worked for the service for 35 years.

Team Development work continues via the Champions within the team, who represent areas such as Equality and Discrimination, Private Fostering, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and UASC Foster Carers, Signs of Safety, and Short Breaks.

In terms of Private Fostering, the team successfully led two lunch and learn training sessions in 2024-2025; reaching over 70 LCC staff members. An area for development in the coming year will be about the new Coram BAAF Form F. We also want to continue to develop practice around PACE and therapeutic parenting, as well as building upon the success of our provision of private fostering training to LCC staff.



Fostering Assessments

Approvals:

12 Mainstream Foster Carers	1 Specialist Carer	Total 13
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Our target for the year was 17 x mainstream approvals. 65% of all completed cases in 2024-2025 concluded with an approval. This percentage split remains comparable to previous years.

Any progression to assessment is processed via a PTAD (progress to assessment decision meeting) looking at strengths and vulnerabilities. A balanced approach is taken to all applications and a very much “can do approach” we also need to be realistic of applicants’ circumstances and ‘creative’ in our approach and understanding of peoples’ circumstances.

“Foster carers say that they feel well supported. They are offered consistent and reliable support from their social workers. Foster carers feel that their voices are valued and listened to by the service. There is a family ethos in the fostering service, and the foster carers understand and value this approach”
(Ofsted, 2024; 6).

Closures

The year saw 7 x closures in assessment.

Of these 7 x cases, 2 x households had a change of circumstances, and were therefore, no longer in a position to foster (these assessments we envisaged, would have concluded positively).

Our withdrawal / closure numbers for 2024 – 2025 were lower than previous years (7, compared to 8 in 2023-24, and 10 in 2022-23).

Private Fostering

We worked with 18 x private fostering households in 2024-2025.

- 10 x of these households we concluded positively, recommending that the carers were suitable private foster carers.
- 2 x of the 18 cases concluded with negative recommendations, due to safeguarding concerns (with 1 of the children in these situations becoming looked after because of the concerns).
- 5 x cases closed in assessment, with 1 of these being because the child became looked after, therefore, the private fostering arrangement ceased.
- 1 x case remained in assessment at the end of the financial year.

The quality of our private fostering assessments was praised within the 2024 LCC Ofsted Inspection. Inspectors met with assessing social workers from the team and subsequently reported:

‘Children who live in private fostering arrangements are assessed by knowledgeable and skilled social workers, who support them, visit them regularly and know them well (Ofsted, 2024: 5)’.

Quarterly meetings continue between managers across different service areas, with the aim of sharing updates about private fostering from different service areas. The Assessment Team also continues to work closely with a representative from the LCC Communications Team, in their effort to maintain impetus regarding our statutory obligation to raise awareness about private fostering.

Non-Agency Adoption

For many years the service had no dedicated worker for this role, and workers were managing these assessments against completing Form F assessment. This led to a significant backlog of families waiting – we now have a dedicated worker and a casual worker supporting these applications.

In 2024-2025, we saw 15 x households granted Adoption Orders. In 2024-2025, they completed 13 x initial visits. This rate of initial visits + completed assessments / Adoption Orders, allows us to continue to work through the existing (but far shorter) waiting lists. We saw the waiting list for initial visits (for new applicants) remains under 20 for much of the 2024 – 2025 financial year, which is positive.

Where a full assessment and submission to Court is deemed appropriate for a family, we would like to achieve completion of non-agency adoption applications (including Court Hearings) within two years of having received an applicant's notification to adopt, however, our average [median] within the 2024 – 2025 financial year was 2 years and 9 months due to the backlog.

Targets for 2025/26

- Recruitment of 14 mainstream foster carers (stretch of 17)
- Recruitment of 2 Specialist Carers
- Complete Non-Agency Adoptions from application to Court Order within 2 years
- Develop process with our adoption colleagues for overseas adoptions.
- Work with our colleagues within TAC to develop carers Terms of Approval / potential matching examples prior to approval.



TEAM AROUND THE CHILD

The statutory support and supervision for all Leicestershire County Council mainstream fostering households is delivered by Supervising Social Workers in the Team around the child Team. A team of experienced Social Workers (SSW) work tirelessly to support our foster families.

Whilst we have gained 13 fostering households this year, we have sadly seen 21 Fostering households resign or retire from fostering. We offer an exit interview to all carers and whilst we are sad to lose carers, we recognise that families have to resign for a number of reasons for their own wellbeing and family welfare. Reasons for resigning include personal circumstances, ill health, bereavement, or because the children they care for are remaining under a different arrangement- SGO, adoption or Staying Put. We are pleased that outcome is the best outcome for those families.

Achievements in 2024-2025

- Enhanced our Therapeutic Parenting training offer with involvement from Dr Anna May (Clinical Psychologist), Dyadic Development Psychology Practice and Reflective parenting, as well as joining CATCH training hub which offer carers a more varied approach to learning.
- Developed wellbeing resources for carers including mental health workshops, wellbeing days and training on compassion fatigue.
- Implemented wellbeing plans, which all carers and staff have been asked to discuss as part of supervision and support.
- Stability meetings take place where carers are struggling to meet the needs of children. We have seen an increase in requests for meetings during the year. TAC team works closely with the Dedicated Placement Support Team and Children's Social Workers in supporting the whole family.
- Following feedback from carers about the importance of their children we have a more robust programme for our Children who foster and have held events such as Laser Quest, Bowling and Crazy Golf which have been very well attended (35-40 children at each). We now include a session during the Skills to Foster' to speak to potential carers' children about fostering and to get to know a little more about them and their personalities.
- We work with a local charity called 'Yarn Bomb'. They offer carers and children in care a chance to reflect and develop self-care strategies and positive affirmations through creative activities.
- 'We are family' is our mantra and we continue to provide opportunities for the whole of LCC fostering to come together as a family. We have our annual Festival, regular picnics, park walks, easter egg hunt, bingo nights and a Celebration event. All which were well attended and had positive feedback.
- As an agency, carers inform us that their best form of support is from other foster carers. We have a number of locality support groups that meet monthly including a Men's Group. All of these are coordinated by carers themselves providing a safe space for carers to voice fears, anxieties and challenges. Joss, Heather and Rachael meet quarterly with Locality Support Group (LSG) Leaders to get updates from the group and to listen to feedback. The Service and Assistant Service Manager regularly meet with the Chair and Vice chair of LFCA (Leicestershire Foster carers Association). This Association supports carers in managing any areas of conflict with the service in order to find resolution.
- We have updated and written new policies and procedures in order to continue to improve practice and make it more consistent amongst practitioners. These policies before having Senior Managements approval are shared with LSG leaders and LFCA for feedback. We have introduced a new Individual risk assessment for all children in placements and a new policy for carers who were a couple and are now caring as a single carer
- TAC team Manager, SM and ASM are constantly reviewing how practice can be improved and carers better supported. We receive regular feedback from Panel – during a Quarterly business meeting to address any concerns. In addition, we regularly meet the Agency Decision Maker to discuss areas of improvement, carrying out audits to evidence areas of challenge or vulnerability.

The year ahead- 2025/26

- We are aware that the service is presented with the increasing challenge in finding suitable homes for children who are coming into care due to the lack of carers across the UK. With this in mind, we revisit carers that are on hold to explore if anything has changed whilst respecting their right to take a much-needed break. We intend to explore our list of respite carers to consider obstacles preventing them from being able to offer short term care and if there is anything more than service can offer to support this.
- TAC team work closely with recruitment team to myth bust around reasons why members of the public may rule themselves out of fostering, working with our current carers on recruitment campaigns and thinking about targeted campaigns for specific children who need a loving home. We intend to hold a special 'Foster carer fortnight' where carers will share positive stories of life in a fostering family and the difference this has made.
- We will continue to support therapeutic parenting approach to caring for children in care. We will be working with CAMHS to offer group consultations as a way of offering more carers access to specialist advice and support. Reflective parenting has received a lot of positive feedback and so we will be offering follow-on support groups on a drop-in basis.
- Our staff members who have completed DDP level 1 will be increasing their skill level by attending L2 training. We hope this will enhance the support offered to our carers.
- We will continue to focus on areas of practice which require attention, including helping carers to understand the traumatic impact of family time on children, their birth parents and carers. Another aspect which has a positive impact upon communication is the twice-yearly joint visits between CSW and SSW. This needs to be audited to ensure this is taking place.
- A focus audit will be taking place about how we capture the voice of children in care, throughout the year, and how this influences change. This is both for those children in care and those who are children of carers.
- Fostering Reviewing Officers will be asked to Quality Assure SSW review practice ensuring there is consistency of high standards across the service.
- Corambaaf encourages Foster Services to facilitate foster carers returning to foster panel on a regular basis. This is a way of ensuring independent oversight of service delivery, support and carers practice, as well as celebrating length of service as foster carers. We will consider introducing carers returning on a 5-yr cycle.



KINSHIP ASSESSMENT TEAM

Within our team there is a collective investment not only in the right outcomes for our children and families but in ensuring that we provide consistently high quality assessments, with individualised training and support at the core to meet the needs of carers and the caring needs of our children to provide them with that sense of belonging and self confidence in their identity and future to enable them to meet their own individual outcomes.

We cannot achieve that in isolation – and as a team we have developed a strong, cohesive and connected group together, who provide one another with the support to achieve and achieve within our own professional and personal awareness through a culture of training, mentoring and care that extends to one another. It is at the heart and core of who we are as a team – and it means that our outcomes are strong, evidence based and secure – and that the pressures placed on us are met and exceeded.

Our future aspirations for the forthcoming year is to continue to provide the consistency in high quality and individualised assessments to our carers, adapting and learning through their journeys and the themes that arise to ensure that assessments are relevant and effective not only in determining the care planning for our children, but in equipping our carers to meet childrens ongoing needs.

IVA Overview

Since this support offer has been in place there has been a year-on-year increase in the referrals and requests for the completion of IVAs.

Year 1 (2022/2023)	133 IVAs completed
Year 2 (2023/2024)	185 IVAs completed
Year 3 (2024/2025)	281 IVAs complete

Statistically:

Year 1-2 had a	39% increase
Year 2-3 had a	52% increase

Overall from April 2022 - March 2025 this is a 111% increase in the volume of referrals being received and completed.

Assessment overview

We have completed 178 assessments (42 we carried into the current financial year), these are the assessments either in pre-proceedings or proceedings – of those only 7 have become long term looked after as Kinship TAC families – with the remainder of our positive assessments leading to SGO, child arrangements order or children continuing to be cared for by their parents – but with options within their family where-ever possible. From the 2024/2025 cohort of assessments 39 SGO orders have been made directly from the assessments completed by this team and leading straight into orders.

We continue to work in partnership with our locality teams and legal services extending our assessment offer to include those private law SGO applications made directly by the carers. We undertook 22 Private SGO assessments last year. This work has enabled carers to have applications progressed in a timely manner and has significantly reduced the delay and drift on private applications that were pending assessment in other teams. This is a growing area, with 12 private applications in assessment for the 1st quarter of 2025/2026.

Private Fostering Post Approval Support

The team has a dedicated social worker in place to support and enable our private foster carers, with consistency and oversight in supporting them in their role as private foster carers, and often into the transition to holding longer term CAO orders for the children in their care.

Feedback:

“I feel privileged to have worked alongside you through this daunting process, it'll stay with me forever.”

“Thanks for everything, you are very professional and skilled at what you do, a credit to the social care system.”

“Thank you for treating us with respect and understanding and valuing Traveller culture.”

“The support I received from start to finish was amazing; I could not have wished for a better person to support and help me.»

“I feel more confident to manage behaviours. I have reflected on the things you have helped me see and made positive changes.”

“You have given me ideas I had never thought of.”

“The support has been fantastic. I have now joined a Kinship support group and am active with groups on social media.”

KINSHIP TEAM AROUND THE CHILD TEAM

We have been able to maintain the stability of the kinship placements with 0% of placement breakdowns. More children have also been granted permanence with their kinship foster carers in 2024/2025 compared to the previous year.

We have been able to maintain an excellent team performance data of 92% and above in supervision home visits, annual reviews, unannounced home visits and DBS check records.

We have been able to support our kinship foster carers to significantly improve the records of logs with the highest of 81%, which is the highest record in the history of the team.

We have been able to implement the kinship care practice guide, and kinship care strategy including having regular meetings with other professionals to discuss and review our offer for therapeutic support, training and housing. However, housing remains a big challenge for the team.

We have continued to work with the National Kinship Charity, including inviting the kinship care charity staff to our team meeting and events.

We have continued to devise robust training and support plans with our foster families to ensure that the families are well supported.

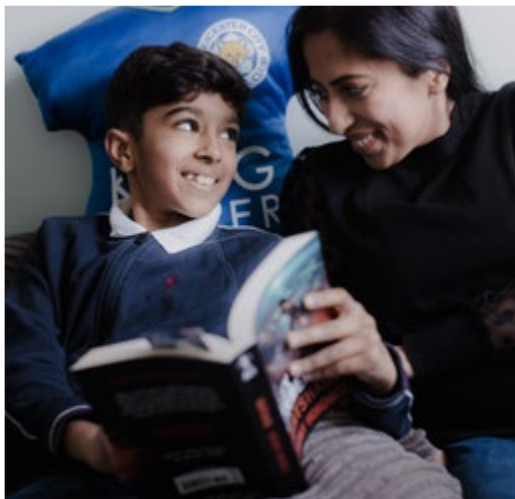
We have continued to support our newly approved kinship foster carers with completion of their TSD standards and the skills to foster course.

We have continued to promote and to support our kinship foster families through the SGO process, and 5 kinship foster families have been granted SGO.

We have continued to have regular POD meetings for the team though these have not always been held monthly.

We have developed 2 new kinship support groups and continued to support 4 kinship support groups.

We have been able to support three student social workers in the team, but unfortunately, we have not been able to return one of these in term as the fostering service is currently not offering the ASYE programme to newly qualified social workers.



Areas for Development for Next Year:

- To work closely with the National Kinship Care Charity to devise robust skills to foster training for our newly approved kinship foster carers.
- To work alongside TAC team to improve our therapeutic offer both to the children in kinship care and to the kinship carers.
- To implement and develop the support plans within Fostering and Form K for all carers.
- To work closely with the National Kinship Care Charity, kinship foster carer support group leaders and other key partners/ stakeholders to coordinate available services, and to develop 3 more kinship carers support groups.
- To continue to use the 'high support, high challenge, and high expectations' approach, and our kinship support tool kit to ensure placement stability, and an increase in permanence and SGO offers.
- To actively organise and offer 3-4 family events specifically to kinship foster families this year.
- To establish a robust mentoring and pudding 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.
- To continue to support kinship foster families who are having housing problems/issues and living in overcrowded homes through collaborative working with the housing operational managers and housing associations.
- To maintain an excellent team performance data of 95% and above in supervision home visits, annual reviews, unannounced home visits, medicals, DBS check records, foster carer training, TSD standards and logs.
- To continue to embed the kinship care practice in the team, and to implement the kinship strategy through POD and team meeting discussions.
- To continue to promote and to maintain specialism/ championship within the team to enable staff development and career progression.
- To continue to prioritise and to offer staff well-being through various physical activities and events to enable a healthy and strong team.



THE DEDICATED PLACEMENT SUPPORT TEAM

“A highly skilled support team provides additional help to those carers during times of need. This intervention is underpinned by therapeutic values and has been successful in helping to ensure that children experience stability in a home that is helping to enhance their sense of identity and belonging”.

Ofsted 2024.

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, in order to enable them to increase placement stability through timely, flexible and creative 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, in order to achieve positive outcomes.

The Work of DPST is Aimed at:

Supporting rehabilitation home for young people, for whom that is their care plan, and supporting everyone to manage the transition effectively.

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, in order to increase their sense of wellbeing and resilience, and for them to feel safe and held in what is sometimes a challenging role.

Running a range of activities and events for carers and the children in their care, aimed at increasing connections and building bonds, as well as having fun!

Attending all meetings held in regard to the young person they are working with, contributing to any relevant assessments, and providing reports for carers' annual reviews/panel.

Being available outside normal working hours, to ensure carers can access support when other services may not be available.

2024/2025 Placement Support

Between 01.04.2024 and 31.03.2025 DPST worked with 51 children, living in 53 placements, whose cases were closed by the start of this year. Another 13 cases that were open during that period remain open.

The team worked with 5 of those young people during more than one period of intervention, with the focus being different for re-referrals.

The breakdown of 53 placements by type was:

The trajectory planning for 1 young person and their parent was supported by DPST, with rehabilitation home achieved, the team were also involved in supporting 3 children following their return home.

1 young person was supported with being prepared to step down from residential to a fostering placement, unfortunately that placement has now broken down, but the support will continue.

2024/2025 Development and Activity

Towards the end of the last financial year, DPST began to focus on an additional piece of work, aimed at supporting the cohort of children in residential who are 13 and under. The aim is to identify any barriers to a transition to a family-based placement being successful. The initial intervention will be with staff and the child/young person, with DPST continuing to support the new carers, once they have been identified.

Therapeutic Life Story work, to further support those children where that is identified as a need. Half the team are attending 6 days' training in July 2025, with the remainder attending in November 2025.

Having run a wellbeing group for teenagers in care since 2023, DPST are in the process of revising that offer, and workshops for carers.

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

- The cohort of specialist carers currently consists of 7 households with the capacity to offer 10 placements, matching permitting.
- 1 household resigned in April 2025, although they have become Staying Put carers for the young person in that placement.
- 1 household was recruited this year, and a young person was placed with them promptly.
- There are currently 8 young people placed with a specialist carer as their main placement.
- 1 carer is offering respite, until they are in a position to offer the department a full-time placement.
- Regular focused 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.

Plans for 25/26

We know that our Dedicated Support Team is unique to Leicestershire and provides invaluable support to families both internal and external foster placements, this will continue with evaluation forms to measure the impact the team has. We also want to strengthen the offer through working to provide life story work to children stepping down from residential care.

Continue to offer retention events to both families and groups

Targeted groups for teenagers

Implement DDP with our families in need of this support

SUPPORTED LODGINGS SCHEME

Leicestershire has been running a supported lodgings scheme for a number of years and was registered by Ofsted in December 2023 under the Supported Accommodation Regulations 2023.

We have 30 Supported Lodgings Hosts who together offer 39 placements for young people aged 16 to 21. The team is responsible for recruiting, assessing, and supporting these hosts to help young people achieve their best during their placements.



With the implementation of the new regulations, we have introduced a number of new systems to support and promote outcomes for the young people and support our hosts:

- An online Supported Lodgings Handbook
- Young Peoples Guide
- Annual Review of Hosts including feedback from hosts, the service, stakeholders and young people
- Access to and expectation of training for hosts
- Locality Support Groups including wellbeing walks

This year we recruited 5 new hosts to the scheme. Many young people remain with the hosts post 21yrs on a private arrangement, which although this means we lose a host it is a positive outcome for the young person.

The team also support our young people in Staying Put Arrangements. Currently we have 51 young people staying put. They undertake 6 monthly monitoring visits and work closely with the young person's PA to ensure it remains appropriate.

Plans for 2025/26

Implement Regulation 32 monitoring – a six-month overview of the scheme

Increase recruitment campaigns with targeted recruitment in specific Leicestershire localities

Have a recruitment target of 5 host families

Increase of voice work by developing age appropriate / more creative ways of gaining feedback from our young people.

Undertake voice audits.

FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR REPORT

This report refers to the functioning of Leicestershire County Council Fostering panel for the year 2024/25. The Fostering panel is constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 2011.

Independent Panel Chair's Comments:

This last year has been a time of consolidation for the panel and the development of our working relationships with the service and with each other.

We have a new vice Chair, Thure Johansen, and we are very pleased to have him in this new role after his regular attendance as an individual panel member.

The most significant change over the last 12 months has been the introduction of the 5-year standard for foster carers to attend panel. This is something that we believe is an excellent way of understanding foster carers' journey, ensuring standards are met and that the Local Authority is supporting them in their challenging role.

We understand it's daunting to come back to panel if you haven't been to one for many years, however we hope that carers will find it a useful and supportive experience to validate their role or to support them in meeting the required fostering standards.

We look forward to seeing more of you over the coming year.

Sue Tribe

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

Mohamed Patel

Summary:

- The agency has a Central List of 25 panel members, in accordance with Fostering Regulations, Guidance 2011.
- We have two Panel Chairs, three Vice Chairs (one newly recruited) and seven social work representatives, two of whom are independent and five are employed by Leics Children and Families Service.
- 36 panels were scheduled (3 panels a month) with 28 panels being held.
- All panels are held face to face.
- Quarterly Business meetings are held with the Service (SM/ASM/TM's) and the Chairs/Vice Chairs providing the opportunity to raise concerns, practice themes etc.
- Chairs/Vice Chairs meetings take place on a quarterly basis, which has supported development and a consistent approach
- The number of kinship foster carers seeking approval has continued to fall, this is primarily due to the focus on securing permanency via SGO's and to a lesser extent Care Arrangement Orders (CAO), as part of care proceedings.
- Part of Panel's role is quality assurance. The quality of reports presented is overall felt to be of a good standard: 63% considered 'Good', 19 % 'Excellent' and another 19% 'Adequate'.
- The feedback received by attendees at Panel is consistently high.

Work overseen by Panel:

- 12 mainstream carers approved
- 1 Specialist Approval
- 16 kinship carers approved
- 4 negative kinship assessments
- 19 First review
- 5 Review following concerns (this includes one review which panel did not recommend continued approval which was overturned by ADM)
- 4 reviews for a change in approval
- 2 reviews following a change in circumstances.
- 5 deferrals
- 26 Closures
- 2 Closures with Concerns
- 5 Reg 25



Panel Development

There have been occasions when it has been identified that applicants have specific learning needs and/or neurodiversity, as a means of adjustment questions have been provided a short time before entering panel. This approach has proved both popular and beneficial and has now been rolled out to all attendees. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Returning carers to panel on a 5 yearly basis has been agreed and began in 2025. This supports good practice by providing independent oversight. This will gradually be phased in to avoid the need to hold additional panels, and we estimate to have all foster carers returned to panel for a review by 2030.

Feedback from attendees to panel continues to be collected and monitored.

Interim reports are now submitted to panel. These inform panel of significant delays in reviews, a change in circumstances (for example foster carers have separated) or when allegations are being investigated. This allows Panel and ADM to have oversight and identify areas of work to be completed for the forthcoming review.

The Panel Advisor and Panel Chair now meet the week before panel to discuss forthcoming cases and to address any concerns.

Timescales for reading panel papers has been strengthened in order for issues or concerns to be raised with the Panel Advisor and Chair. Thus, reducing the likelihood of deferrals.

Applicants/carers now have access to panel member's biographies when attending Panel

Panel members' training day was held in March. The Practice Excellence team facilitated a reflective case discussion on a kinship case. A session was also held to give members an insight into Reflective Carer Training that our carers attend.

The Panel Advisor is a member of the East Midlands Panel Advisers' Forum, which provides the opportunity to share good practice and highlight areas of development.

We have continued to develop diversity within our Panels to reflect the community we live in. We now have 3 members who have personal experience of kinship/SGO arrangements. But work continues to involve a young care experienced individual.

The way we collect and collate feedback has changed which has made it easier to monitor quality of reports and now includes monitoring of ADM recommendations.

Objectives for 25/26

To recruit a young care experienced person to panel.

To ensure panel members complete mandatory training on: GDPR, Equality & Diversity and Safeguarding.

To update job descriptions and contracts for panel members/chairs/vice chairs to reflect the changes in practice.

Work to ensure consistency across panels is ongoing.

To further improve the quality assurance role of panel.

To monitor and address the delays in gaining medicals for assessments and reviews.

AGENCY DECISION MAKER OVERVIEW

This year has seen the fostering service continue with stable leadership across assessment and TAC teams, and there has been greater consistency for children and families across SSW allocation and support. They are a service who know themselves and their carers well. There is a clear focus on carers wellbeing and retention though building meaningful relationships and purposeful practice.

There is a spread of experienced social workers and early career social workers alongside support staff and established leaders. Partnership working across other services is increasingly integrated into practice.

The number of fostering families has been maintained at 126 households, with new families becoming approved equaling those leaving and this places us below the targets for growth and sufficiency. I have noticed increasing numbers of mainstream families being approved for respite only and carers resigning soon into their fostering career and in reality, this points to a reduction in overall fostering placements available and will reduce sufficiency, which is not ideal in an increasingly pressurised and demanding climate.

Due to national demands around placement sufficiency and lack of adopters, there are delays in care planning and achieving timely transitions to permanence for children in short term arrangements meaning that these arrangements are frequently extending beyond 2 years (short term) and this is contributing to further pressures on placement sufficiency.

Kinship numbers are decreasing overall, and that is in large part a result of the development work in Kinship Assessment around IVA's and all options assessments which underpinned by the greater practice and financial support via SG develop work and overarching Kinship Strategy.

The service benefits from knowledgeable and confident social workers and managers who have a good understanding of the role and responsibilities of a supervising social worker and fostering regulations. New Snr Practitioners are also making significant contributions to learning and development around evidenced based practice and professional curiosity which will build skill over the coming months.

I look forwards to the new mosaic build, making the review process smoother and information more accessible and transparent.

Strengths

- There has been significant development in the kinship assessment team and the impact of the developmental work across Initial viability assessments, PLO tracking and quality of assessment/ support planning means timely and robust outcomes for these families.
- Working relationships with CIC and Permanence teams are stronger and I see regular evidence of working in partnership, specifically around care planning and risk management.
- Assessing social workers in both Kinship and Mainstream are knowledgeable and effective social workers.
- Overall, there is a good level of stability in the SSW support to families, and fewer changes in social workers over this year.
- Carers offer consistent positive feedback about their experience of the service and feeling supported by their SSW, TM, ASM and SM.
- Developmental work completed by ASM on assessing support carers and changes in circumstances for carers both offer a greater rigor informing the reviews and increasing evidenced based SSW analysis underpinning practice.
- Fostering households are now being presented back to fostering panel every 5 years for independent oversight and there is also an increase in using updates to panel and [presenting complex assessments

to panel for independent oversight, all of which signals a service that are committed to ensuring rigor and quality assurance underpin decision making.

- There is increasing evidence across Kinship services of the impact of the Kinship Support Strategy, leading to more children leaving our care via an SGO both at the end of care proceedings and following a period of support via Kinship TAC where the rigor and oversight of the SGO panel is evident in respect of support planning and pace.
- Increase in successful ratification of permanence for long term caring arrangements via permanence panel.
- DPST remains a valuable resource across both Mainstream and TAC for skills development and stability support for carers and Carers feedback is positive about the benefit and impact of this service.

Areas for development

- ADM recommendations being actioned consistently, and evidence of progression of actions across the review year – ADM audit, ADM feedback and fostering panel advice has identified this as an area in need of improvement but there is a need for more to be done to evidence change in practice.
- Grip and oversight over the medical review cycle is regularly a barrier in annual fostering reviews, apparently rooted in a lack timely submission of medical review papers from service as well as medical Advice being not being meaningful or timely.
- There are too frequent occasions where reviews are 'lost' in the process between FIRO and ADM, and therefore result in delays in ADM decisions being achieved and lack of effective means of tracking the review process to conclusion, this is despite the best efforts of the FIROs and I am hopeful that the new mosaic build will do some way to addressing this.
- Childrens voice being sought and critically the impact/influence that their voices have on our assessment, planning and support needs to be stronger across both Kinship and Mainstream, including bottom lines around children being seen in placement, even if they have respite only arrangements in place.
- I would like to see greater evidence of training hours being tracked across the review year and greater evidence of the impact of this training on fostering practice. – TSP's risk being vague and generic and it would be a good piece of work for the Senior Practitioners to look at practice improvement in this specific area.
- Recent audit activity about the experience of transfer from Kinship assessment to Kinship TAC offers food for thought around how we smooth this process
- The use of network meetings across TAC services could be an area where there is much to gain.
- Implementation of the Afdit model would be useful in building skill and strengthening analysis around cultural competency and supporting transracial placements.
- Application of ex-partner reference policy in assessment would benefit from a relaunch.



INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

The Figures

87	current Independent Visitors
24	independent Visitors approved from April 24 to March 25
10	Independent Visitors ended in the role during this period. 8 due to personal circumstances and 2 due to inconsistency in visiting patterns. Of those that have left the scheme 3 are maintaining contact with their young person informally outside of the scheme, which is a real positive for the young people.

Achievements

- Recruited more male IVs – target 5 recruited 8.
- Extended support to IVs through online group supervision
- Monthly Support groups set up at various locations across Leicestershire - run by IVs for IVs
- The first National Independent Visitor Day was held on the 15th of Jan 2025. This is to be an annual event -LCC coordinator part of the national working party.
- Chairmans celebration event held in March - 10 IVs invited under the category of amazing stories.
- We successfully link IVs into foster carers events as part of the fostering community.
- Recruitment stands through IV contacts – (2 Haymarket events and a work based event at an IT company in Derby) and in conjunction with the Fostering Recruitment Team - Leicester Pride, Cosby Yarn Bomb, Scarecrow Festivals in Heather and Lubenham and Market Harborough Carnival Day to name a few.
- Successful annual joint activity with IVs and young people – this year supported by the Space Centre
- Good news stories from IVs for media campaigns – longest serving (11 years), youngest (20 when started), male IV, 1st year as an IV, couple undertaking the role together. This has generated additional enquiries.
- 1 of our IVs has gone on to become an approved foster carer for LCC and 3 ex foster carers and 2 members of LCC staff through internal promotion have become IVs in this period.
- Face to face group supervision events 3 times a year.
- Continue to produce information sheets for IVs to support them in their role.
- Coordinate and chair quarterly regional meetings for IV coordinators
- Attending quarterly national IV coordinator meetings - aim of both meetings is to share best practice from across the country to inform practice in Leicestershire.
- Member of the LCC volunteer management network
- Communication Plan in place and 6 weekly scheduled meetings held with our communication team responsible for fostering Leicestershire communities to promote the scheme.

Areas for Development

- Develop a video for young people explaining the IV role.
- Develop more robust processes for young people staying on the scheme beyond 18.
- Continue to find ways to support young people in OOC placements.
- Produce more good news stories for Leicestershire chatters, social media to raise profile of the IV Scheme
- Some pictures of our IVs and events attended
- Some of our male IVs at a Group Supervision evening
- Chairman event in March 25
- Picnic in the park to celebrate national volunteer week – June 24

Feedback From Young People

“Boxing has changed my life, and I am a different person now. I am more confident, more mature, and I am able to project a better voice now. My IV helped me make this change and he encouraged me, and he believed in me. This would not have happened without the support and encouragement of my IV.”

“My IV visits regularly and is one of the best people that I have ever met. I didn't have any trust in anyone before, but I learnt to trust my IV.”

“I love it' I am doing lots of different and new activities and having fun. I like my IV and get on well. They are very easy to talk to.”

“My IV has cheered me up and he changed me because a year ago I was lazy.”

Feedback from IVs

“I have to say Em has inspired me to go for the Supported Lodgings role, Seeing the young lady she is turning into has been a joy, which I hope to still do for many more years to come (until she gets fed up of me)! I don't think she realises the positive effect she has on me.”

“He is a joy to be with. He always wants us to play, getting us to climb trees and play hide and seek in country parks. He has made us feel young again, even though we might ache the next day! He recently asked us if we would be still in his life when he has grown up – we assured him that we would be! We can honestly say that we feel joyful after each visit and are really fortunate to have met him. We are sure that there are so many benefits for our young person, but, equally, there are so many for us.”

“I have found it incredibly rewarding and would wholeheartedly recommend the Independent Visitor role to others.”

“Having taken on the role in late 2023, I haven't looked back...I have found the role to be rewarding in many ways and if I only make one small positive difference to the YP I am paired with then the whole experience has been worthwhile”.

“Over the last 11 years I've been matched with two young people, each for many years, from teens into early adulthood. I love that I can build a meaningful, friendly relationship with a young person. I've learnt a lot about things I didn't know a thing about beforehand, I've been played music I might not personally choose and had my nails painted and decorated in ways I didn't know the terms for 11 years ago, but mostly I've learnt a fair bit about what it's like to be a young person in care from two brave and smart young people I feel privileged to have met and spent quality time with”.

