

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2018 – 2019

JOHN HERON - CONSULTANT LEAD FOSTERING MANAGER

Background

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Services provides written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service. This report provides an overview of activity from the last financial year, April 2018 to March 2019, and the plans from the service for the forthcoming year (April 2019 to March 2020).

1. Executive Summary

Since the last annual report the fostering service has been through a significant reorganisation. The service has reduced the number of teams in order to improve communication and streamlined processes. This has also enabled the service to strengthen management arrangements and oversight by creating an additional Service Manager post.

The Fostering Service has also developed a Service Development Plan which will ensure service delivery is monitored and continually improving.

In December 2018 the Fostering Service was audited by Partnerships and Quality Assurance. The recommendations and learning points from this audit were included in the Service Development Plan and actions addressed.

The Fostering Service was also inspected by Ofsted in January 2019 as part of the ILAC inspection of Cambridgeshire's Children's Services and the service received positive feedback.

Early in 2018 the Fostering Service, in conjunction with PS.Media and Corporate Communications updated Cambridgeshire's fostering brand and devised a recruitment plan to attract new foster carers. This culminated in the launch of a major new recruitment campaign in September 2018.

In this reporting period, the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team (FRAT) recruited 24 new fostering households. This included 20 mainstream fostering households, 2 new Link carers, and 2 new Supported Lodging families. Eight of the 20 mainstream families were Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers who transferred into Cambridgeshire County Council. In addition, the Connected Person's Team assessed 11 new Connected Persons Foster Carers bringing the total of new foster carers for Cambridgeshire to 35.

As at 31 March 2019 there are a further 25 new assessments in progress. This work will carry over into 2019/20.

In this reporting period, 9 foster families resigned from fostering leaving an overall net gain of 15 households (26 including Connected Persons). No Foster Carers transferred to an IFA from Cambridgeshire.

On 31 March 2019 there were 241 children and young people looked after in mainstream fostering beds compared to 225 children on the 31st of March 2018. This represents an increase of 16 children (7%) in the last year.

There was a total of 42 SGO orders made in 2018/19 which is a decrease of 25 children from the previous year.

The number of Connected Person's Carers being granted temporary approval under Regulation 24 has remained consistent with the previous year. 26 households (32 children) were made subject to Regulation 24. Eleven households became fully approved under Regulation 27.

There are 15 active Link carers, 7 of which are retained carers and 8 are traditional Link Care. There are 33 established placements and 9 children in introductions.

The Support offer to Cambridgeshire Foster Carers has improved been with the establishment of the Foster Carers Association.

2. Fostering Service Restructure.

The fostering service has recently undergone a significant restructure alongside Cambridgeshire's wider Social Care Service. The Fostering service now sits with Cambridgeshire's Corporate Parenting Service working closely with colleagues within the Children in Care teams, the Rehabilitation and Placement Support (RAPS) Service and the Contact Service.

The restructure took place in November 2018 with the service bringing together its core functions to reduce from six teams to four with the aim of delivering a more focussed, child centred and efficient service to Cambridgeshire's Children in Care.

The service recruited two (new) Service Managers to strengthen management capacity and to oversee the delivery of the service and the range of functions within fostering.

Steve Crossman is the Service Manager responsible for the Connected Persons Team which includes; Connected Persons/Kinship Assessment of family members and/or members of the child's wider network to provide care and support within their own home and family unit. This also includes assessment of individual/s wishing to offer placements as part of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

Steve also oversees the Fostering Support Team who support, supervise and develop foster carers, carry out annual reviews and support training and development in line with the Fostering Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011

Despina Kaoura is the Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Recruitment & Assessment Team, the Family Finding/Matching Function of the service and also responsible for the Specialist Fostering Team which includes the LINK service (Short Breaks for Disabled Children), Supported Lodgings and Private Fostering.

FRAT/Family Finding	Specialist Fostering Team	Fostering Support Team	Connected Persons/SGO Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing/Recruitment activity • Retention activity/Events • Foster Carer Support groups • Enquiries • Initial Visits • Form F Assessments • Approvals • Foster Carer Training • Family Finding & Matching for permanence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of Link and Supported Lodgings Carers • Supervision/ support/ development of Link and Supported Lodgings Carers. • Coordinate Link Placements • Annual Reviews • Contribute to training of carers • Assess and coordinate Private Fostering Arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Carer Supervision & Support • Foster Carer Training & Development • Support Groups • Foster Carer Annual reviews • Fostering Duty • Kinship Carer Support • Long term Matching with in-house carers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinship Care Assessments • SGO Assessments • CAO Assessments • SPA Assessments • SGO Support

The fostering service aims to provide a high quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit new foster carers from within our diverse community. We prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children.

The service assesses foster carer applicants i.e. Mainstream Foster Carers, Connected Persons Carers, LINK Carers, Supported Lodgings Carers and those who offer Private Fostering. The service undertakes comprehensive assessments and checks to ensure that prospective carers are suitable and able to carry out their role. We supervise, support and develop carer's skills and knowledge in order that they promote and achieve the highest standards of care, safeguarding and outcomes for children in care.

The types of Foster Care offered includes;

Short Term/Time Limited:

Time limited placements across all skills Levels. However, level 6 carers would be expected to undertake assessments on children and young people in their care or undertake specified tasks.

Long Term:

Planned, permanent placements across Skills levels. Level 6 carers would be expected to provide permanent placements for children with significantly complex needs or challenging behaviours.

Respite:

Planned, child needs led support for placements and agreed support for carers across skills levels.

Support Care:

Part of a package of support (including day care and child minding) where carers provide planned time limited support to maintain children with their current foster placements and to prevent placement breakdown.

Children with Disabilities:

Short Term / Short Breaks provision and Long Term (Permanent) placements for children with disabilities.

Kinship Care & Connected Persons:

Planned and Court approved placements for children and young people within their wider network including family members or other with whom children have an existing and positive relationship

PACE:

The Local Authority has duty to provide accommodation to children and young people under the age of 18 who have been arrested and charged in relation to a criminal offence. PACE stands for Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which placed this duty. PACE transfers take place in order to limit the amount of time children and young people are required to spend in police custody with the young person being transferred to Local Authority accommodation overnight before being presented to court the following morning.

Supported Lodgings:

Supported Lodgings provides a young person with a room in a friendly home environment and the support and guidance of an adult living there.

3. Audit and inspections of the Fostering Service in 2018-2019

In preparation for the forthcoming Ofsted Inspection the Performance and Quality Assurance (PQA) service completed an audit which began in December 2018 and concluded four weeks later in January 2019. The audit highlighted a number of key themes and resulted in a clear action plan to address the identified issues.

The strengths identified included:

- Assessments of Foster Carers are generally comprehensive
- In the majority of cases the supervision of Foster Carers is carried out regularly
- There is evidence of good working relationships, trust and respect between Foster Carers and their Supervising Social Workers
- There is evidence of annual review processes being followed in detail
- Where provided, input from children in placement and their Social Workers enhanced carer reviews by 'triangulating' the lived experience of the child
- There is some evidence of the increasing use of ONE for systematically recording all aspects of the authority's interaction with Foster Carers

Audit findings also acknowledged some clear challenges and areas for development which included:

- Improving core systems and data reporting for management information
- That the service develop clear service standards which clarify the expectations of Social Workers
- Key processes such as DBS, safer caring and placement planning are reviewed to ensure consistency and quality
- That fostering supervision is made more robust and considers secondary carers in the wider household
- That there is an increased rigor on the quality assurance of placements by undertaking unannounced visits and improving the review process

Before the PQA inspection could be completed OFSTED arrived in Cambridgeshire to undertake the ILAC Inspection. Inspectors commented that they could see the improvements that had been put in place by the Fostering Service and that they were confident that this would be sustained. The inspection identified the following themes:

- That there was a strong training package for Foster Carers which is complemented by good support from their Supervising Social Workers.
- That assessments of carers are generally good, sometimes very good. Social Workers' recommendations about the terms on new carers are approved are specific and appropriate to individual carers' skills and circumstances. This helps to ensure that children are only placed with carers who are well matched to their needs. This has led to more stable and positive placements for children and helps to retain carers, because they are less likely to have children they cannot manage placed with them.
- That a strengthened approach to fostering recruitment is effective and beginning to yield results
- That carers receive regular supervision
- That development work needs to focus upon ensuring connected persons carers receive the same support at mainstream carer standard as most foster carers
- That further development work needs to ensure that matching children for permanence occurs in a timely way

4. Recruitment and Marketing

As part of the 'Transforming Outcomes for Children and Young People in Care' strategy PS. Media was appointed to work alongside Cambridgeshire's Corporate Communications and Fostering Services to devise and deliver recruitment campaigns in order to increase the number of in-house foster carers providing homes for Cambridgeshire children.

Prior to the launch of the Foster Carers Recruitment Campaign in September 2018 a number of recruitment activities took place. These included:

- The annual New Carers Event. All foster carers approved over 2017 to 2018 were invited to a 'Welcome and Thank You' event. This was the fourth event of its kind and was, as always, well-attended and we received positive feedback from carers. The event provided carers with the opportunity to network with other carers, professionals and agencies that support Foster Carers and Children in Care. The event included agencies such as the Virtual School, Casus (drug and alcohol services), Foster Talk and Nyas (advocacy service) giving carers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with agencies outside of fostering and social care. The follow-up press release from this event achieved good coverage in local press and social media.
- Foster Care Fortnight took place in May. This is a National Event run annually by The Fostering Network. The aim of the campaign is to raise the profile of fostering and to show how foster care transforms lives. Activity during Foster Care Fortnight included; paid social media advertising using video and images

gathered at the recent event to celebrate foster carer recruitment and radio advertising with Heart FM.

- In July a letter was distributed through schools which proved to be a highly effective strategy attracting more than 60 enquiries.

Alongside this activity and working in partnership, the three service areas (PS.Media, Corporate Communications and Fostering) undertook a number of actions in preparation for the launch of the first campaign in 2018. These included:

- Setting up of a focus group of existing Foster Carers, Cllr Simon Bywater, (Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee), PS. Media, Corporate Communications and Fostering
- Rebranding of all fostering recruitment materials to ensure the in-house Fostering Service stands out in the fostering market place.
- Refreshed the fostering pages on the Corporate Website
- Produced video content for use on the website and across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter etc).
- Identified a number of Foster Carers willing to give interviews to the press, TV and Radio.
- The identification of a number of local companies and organisations who agreed to become 'Campaign Partners' to support campaigns. These organisations agreed to carry our publicity materials on their websites and share our recruitment information within their staff groups. Others offered advertising space or printed materials. Campaign partners included organisations such as Cambridge United Football Club, Peterborough United Football Club, Heart FM, Stagecoach buses, Archant newspapers, BBC Look East, Cambridgeshire Police and Fire services and Network Rail.

The first campaign was launched on the 12th September 2018 at Abbey Stadium, the home of Cambridge United Football Club and was attended by the Deputy Lord-Lieutenant, Mrs Judy Pearson, Cambridgeshire County Council Elected Members, Senior Officers, Foster Carers and staff of the fostering service. The aim of the campaign was to attract enquiries from Cambridgeshire residents considering any type or age range of fostering. The concept for the campaign was '#TeamCambridgeshire' Join our Fostering Team.

The Campaign was supported by paid for advertising which included bus side advertising, Radio advertising with Heart FM, Website Optimisation, Google Adwords and Facebook Lead advert. The event also attracted attention from BBC Radio Cambridgeshire and BBC Look East.

Following the launch, the campaign was kept alive with further social media activity. In October the Six Steps to Fostering Video, featuring children from the Wild Cat Arts and Drama School, was published on Social Media. This was followed up with case

studies and interviews with Foster Carers in November. In December the New Year's resolution videos were featured on social media. In January a new campaign was launched focussed on recruiting Foster Carers for teenagers.

Outcomes

In the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 the Fostering Recruitment and Assessments Team received 391 enquiries from the public seeking information about becoming a foster carer. The team completed 138 Initial Visits (IV's) and 24 new fostering households were approved. In the same period 9 fostering households have retired from fostering leaving a net gain of 15 fostering households.

Enquiries	<u>391</u>										
<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Aug</u>	<u>Sept</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>March</u>
24	18	24	62	36	60	47	22	16	38	23	21
IVs	<u>138</u>										
<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Aug</u>	<u>Sep</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>March</u>
9	10	5	12	12	18	21	14	9	13	10	5
Approvals	<u>24</u>										
<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Aug</u>	<u>Sept</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>March</u>
3	2	2	0	4	1	2	2	0	5	1	2

There are currently 25 assessments in stages 1 and 2 which have carried over into 2019/2020. This currently represents a potential of a further 27 homes for children.

5. Fostering Panel

The Fostering Service has reviewed all panel processes and has removed non statutory functions to streamline the panels. This includes the formal matching of children and young people with their permanent Foster Carers. This is now managed through a separate process following the Children Act 1989 and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010. This has created additional panel time and reduced delay.

In December 2019 Sara Neville resigned from the role of Independent Panel Chair. In February 2019 Richard Holland was appointed as the new Independent Panel Chair. In the interim, Sarah Fletcher, the Vice Chair of the Panel chaired panel.

Additionally, Aidan O'Reilly, Permanence Practice development Manager has been appointed as Panel Advisor. The appointment further strengthens the ties between the service and the Panel ensuring that the child's plan is represented effectively when making decisions.

The Panel membership meets the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and there are currently 10 members on the central list.

The Fostering Panel met on 25 occasions during 2018-2019, and dealt with 171 cases.

	<u>2014/15</u>	<u>2015/16</u>	<u>2016/17</u>	<u>2017/18</u>	<u>2018/19</u>
Number of panels	23	27	25	30	25
New Approvals	32	29	28	22	24 (+ 11 Connected Persons)
Regulation 25 Extensions (Connected Persons)	-	-	-	-	18
Resignations/Deregistration	14	15	22	17	9
Matches (numbers of children)	27	37	28	31	19
Change of approval outside Reviews.	22	4	6	4	2
Reviews	46	40	39	58	70
Progression	16	16	14	3	18
Staying Put Approval	2	4	7	1	NA
Best interest	0	25	13	NA	NA
Total number of actual cases presented	127	155	182	168	171

6. Cambridgeshire Approved Households (as of 31st March 2019)

Total Number Approved Households	101	112	125	133	148
Total Number of Beds	197	219	252	271	289
Short breaks households	30	27	13	16	15
Short break beds	61	62	55	26	33
Kinship Foster Carers Including Reg24	23	34	25	28	18 + 12 Reg 24
Kinship beds	30	56	38	38	29 + 12

Supported Lodgings	-	-	-	9	11
Supported Lodging Beds	-	-	-	9	13

The combined number of all types of approved fostering households including Short Breaks, Kinship Care and Supported Lodgings, is 205. The optimum number of placements provided through the Fostering Service is 376, a net gain of 18 placements.

Fostering households are approved for one, two or three children. Often the approval can be one or two/ if siblings. This is usually due to bedroom space available and in Cambridgeshire we allow siblings (if appropriate) to share bedrooms. For the purposes of reporting the number of beds approved, the maximum number is reported.

There are other reasons why it is not possible to use all Foster Carers to their full approval capacity. This includes Foster Carers being on hold, either at their own request for example personal or family circumstances, or at the request of the service due to complaints or allegations. Often carers are not used to their full approval, due to the needs of other children living in the foster carer's home.

Each year fostering services can expect to lose a number of foster cares. On average fostering agencies can expect to lose 10% of their foster carers. Foster carers leave for a number of reasons. In the last year 9 foster carers left Cambridgeshire's fostering service. Of these; 5 resigned and 4 retired.

Of the 5 that resigned;

- 1 emigrated to Australia,
- 1 moved away from the area to care for elderly parents,
- 1 had a baby and no longer have accommodation to foster,
- 1 decided fostering was incompatible with own children's needs
- 1 resigned due to other commitments but has recently expressed an interest in returning

Of the 4 that retired;

- 2 retired on health grounds
- 2 retired due to age.

The 24 mainstream carers recruited in 2018/19 offer 34 beds. Therefore there is a net gain of 18 mainstream fostering beds in the year to 31st March 2019.

7. Mainstream Fostering Occupancy rates

On 31st March 2019 there were 200 children placed with in-house mainstream (Short-term and Long-term foster carers). This is an increase of 13 children (7%). A further 41 children were placed with kinship Foster Carers. 241 children were living with Cambridgeshire approved Foster Carers.

	Long term	Short term	Kinship care	Total
31/03/2017	69	118	35	222
31/03/2018	74	113	38	225
31/03/2019	69	131	29 + 12 Reg 24	241

Additionally there were 9 children placed with Supported Lodgings, 33 children linked to Link carers and 12 young people in Staying Put arrangements making a total of 295 children looked after by the service.

8. Placement endings

The in-house Fostering Service provided a total of 456 placements for children throughout the year. This compares to 388 in 2017/18 an increase of 68 or 17.5%. Some of these children had more than one episode of care. When this is taken into account the Fostering Service provided placements to 429 individual children, an increase over the previous year of 41 or 10.5%

Many children who become looked after during the year did return home. Other children and young people leave care or move to permanent placements.

Throughout the year there has been significant movement of children from in house to other placements through positive care planning. These include:

- 29 children moved to adoptive homes
- 1 foster carer adopted their foster child
- 2 children moved to a concurrent placement
- 32 children were rehabilitated home
- 21 children moved to live with extended family or friends through a connected person's arrangement
- 2 children moved to live with Special Guardianship carers
- 2 moved to a mother and baby placement
- 10 young people moved to semi-independent living
- 13 young people moved to independence
- 5 moved onto our Supported lodgings carers
- 5 children returned to their local authority
- 5 children returned to their IFA carers following respite

- 6 Young People were placed with PACE foster carers

A number of children also moved because the in-house service was not able to meet their needs. These include:

- 3 children moved due to carers not being able to meet their needs and no other in-house foster carer could offer a placement match
- 3 young people were moved to residential - 2 of whom were from emergency out of hours foster homes
- 1 young person moved to supported accommodation
- 5 children moved to agency carers in order to better meet their needs- ie nearer to school and/or cultural match
- 6 children moved from short term in-house foster carers to agency foster carer permanent matches
- 16 children who were placed in agency foster homes by Cambridgeshire's out of hours service due to there being no suitable accommodation in house
- 4 young people made allegations against their foster carers and subsequently moved
- 2 children moved after carer gave immediate notice on the care arrangement

Over the year, 6 children experienced unplanned placement endings that were not expected and they were not prepared for. Four children were moved after an allegation towards their carers either by that child, or another child in that foster home, none of which were upheld. Two carers served immediate notice due to not being able to manage the child's behaviours. This cohort of children are currently being reviewed to ensure learning is captured to inform how the service could further support Foster Carers to sustain children in their homes.

9. Short Breaks Care

At the end of this reporting period there were fifteen Link Carers providing accommodation and care for thirty three children. 2 new Link Carers have been approved this year, one of whom has been providing a time limited foster placement since approval due to the particular skills of this carer and the needs of the child living with them.

Unlike mainstream foster care, this service provides children with a variety of care arrangements, therefore a more accurate way of identifying the capacity of this part of the service is by the overall number of nights and days provided under the Short Breaks Scheme. The service currently provides 1443 nights/days for children and young people with complex physical needs and challenging behaviours. This is an increase of 93 or 6.8% compared to the same period last year.

The complexity of the children and young people receiving this support is increasing, with more complex children being offered a service due to their diagnosed disability and impact of family and environmental factors.

The Link Service has continued at full capacity with any vacancies being quickly filled with potential matches. If a vacancy equals a typical allocation for a Link child (24 nights) the service has capacity for 61 vacancies. At the end of March, 60.125 vacancies were used or earmarked with thirty three established ongoing placements, thus the service is functioning at 98.6% capacity.

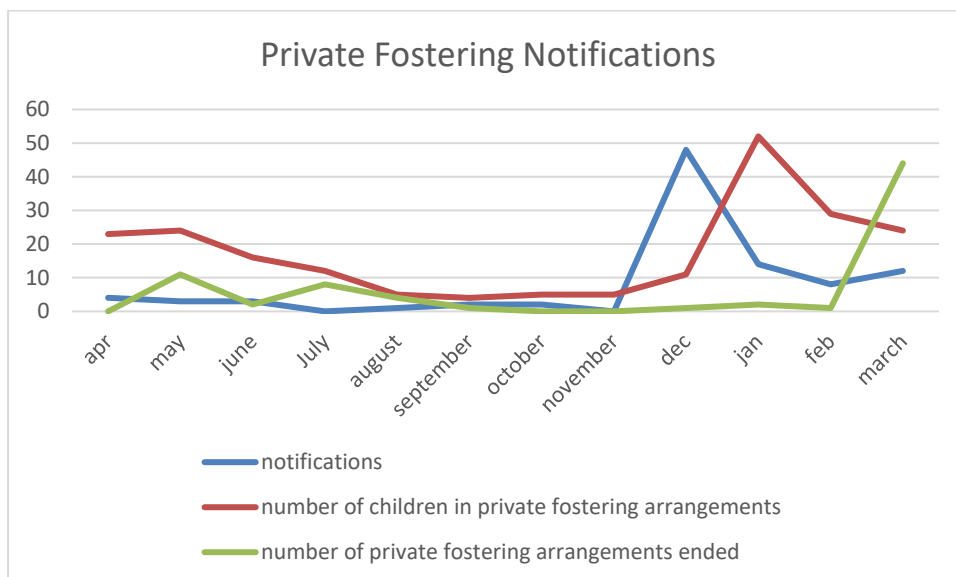
There is scope to develop and expand this service which has the proven potential to reduce the need for children becoming looked after by the Council or as an alternative to care.

10. Private Fostering activity in Cambridgeshire.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to monitor the safety and wellbeing of children and young people living in Private Fostering arrangements. Private Fostering arrangements are made between parents or carers who have parental responsibility for that child and another individual in order that they can take on care of their child for a period of longer than twenty eight days. This arrangement should be reported to the Local Authority for a safeguarding assessment and monitoring. However, this is not well understood by the public and children living in these arrangements are often under reported.

Since the restructure of the service in November 2018, the responsibility for Private Fostering functions have been transferred to the Specialist Fostering Team. Since this time a route and branch review of policies and procedures have been undertaken. A Communications Strategy and an Information Leaflet has been produced. The Statement of Purpose has also been updated and discussions have been held with the Language schools in Cambridgeshire to remind them of their duties under this legislation.

This approach has had an impact, there have been 97 notifications since April 2018, 82 of which have been received since the restructure. The majority of these were from language schools relating to children and young people attending short courses running over twenty eight days.



From December 2018 to March 2019, 74 children were living in Private Fostering arrangements. 17 of these are long term arrangements monitored by the safeguarding districts, 57 are language school notifications.

The number of children living within Private Fostering arrangements varies significantly over the year depending upon the activity of local language schools. As of 31st March 2019 there were 24 children privately fostered in Cambridgeshire in the following arrangements:

Reason for Private Fostering arrangement at 31 st March 2019	Number of children
Overseas child attending language schools	12
Overseas Children in Mainstream Schools	5
Child separated from parents	5
Child living with extended family members	2
Total Number of Children	24

11. Supported Lodgings

There are currently 11 Supported Lodgings Carers with capacity to offer 13 Supported Lodgings homes. Supported Lodgings carers offer accommodation within a family setting with the guidance and support of the trusted adult who lives there. Children in Care and Care Leavers between the ages of 16-21 are eligible for the service, however, for the arrangement to be successful the young person should not require a high level of supervision and should have a basic level of independence skills and commitment to education, training or employment.

At the end of the reporting year, eight young people were living in Supported Lodgings arrangements with an additional young person in a Staying Put arrangement and another unaccompanied young person in a foster placement with Supported Lodgings

carers. There were three vacancies at this point with an additional vacancy soon to be available, however as of 31st March 2019 these vacancies were being carefully considered for identified young people.

To optimise assessment and flexibility of resource, careful decisions are made about approval of Supported Lodging household with a trend for Supported Lodgings carers to be dual registered as Foster Carers to capture young people and unaccompanied asylum seekers who would manage in a household with less supervision and support than mainstream foster care. We have also endeavoured to ensure any household looking to retire from or withdraw from fostering due to change of circumstances is able to consider Supported Lodgings as a viable option for their family.

Our aspirations for the year ahead is to continue to grow this service and we aim to increase the resource and offer 15 more young people a home over the next 12 months). Crucially we will also focus on providing high quality support and supervision to retain and upskill our current carers with the aim of offering placements to a wider range of young people who require an alternative to shared accommodation.

12. Kinship/Connected Person assessments

Referrals

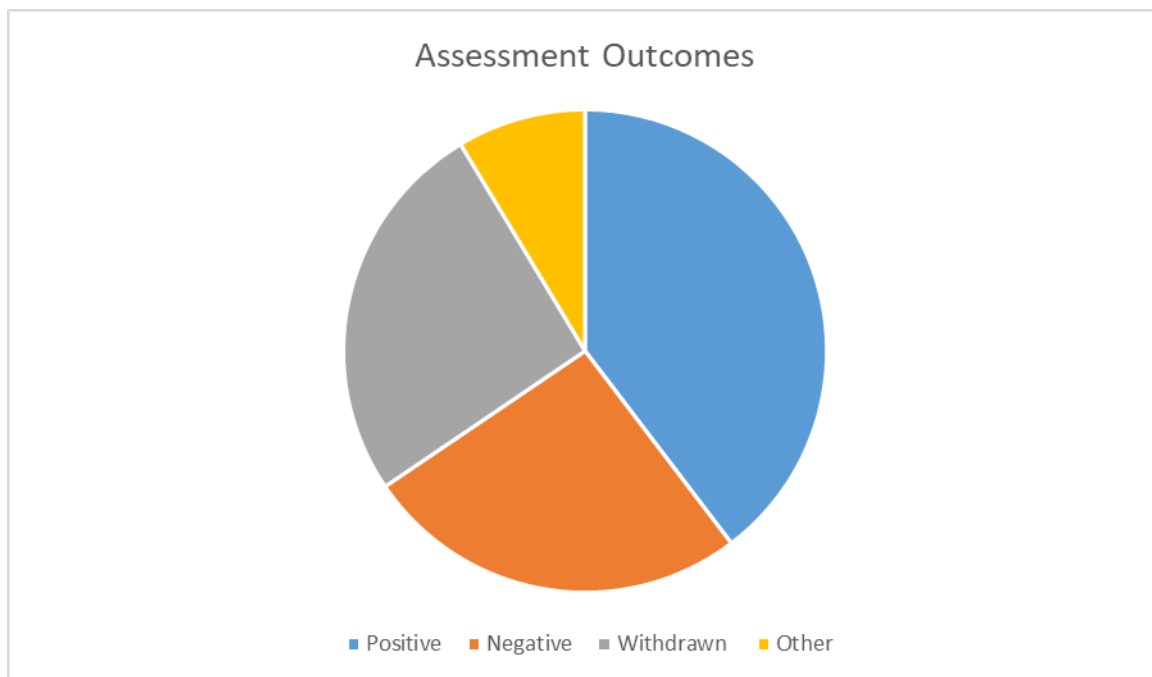
Number Referrals	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Number referrals	65	99	141	173	133
SGO's Made	34	38	49	67	42
CAO's made	-	-	7	-	-
New fully regulated carers-households			9	4	11

In 2018 to 2019 the Kinship Assessment Team received 133 referrals relating to 177 children. The team saw a reduction in demand for the first time since 2008 and the reasons for this are not fully understood at this time, however the Council did see an increase of children being adopted. Of the referrals received:

- A total of 37 Special Guardianship Orders were awarded in relation to Looked after Children
- A total of 5 Special Guardianship Orders were awarded in relation to children who were not looked after
- There was a total of 42 Special Guardianship Orders awarded which was a reduction of 25 from the previous year

- In the last year there were 26 Regulation 24 households and 32 children subject to Connected Persons Care under Regulation 24 which was an increase of two from the previous year

Of the assessments that reached their completion, 53% were positive and recommended Connected Persons Care and 38% were negative. A further 9% of assessments were completed and whilst the applicant was assessed favourably, an alternative plan was recommended for the child. There is currently a 26% withdrawal rate which is considered an acceptable level of attrition. The graph below demonstrates the outcomes visually:



13. Step Parent Adoption

Applications

A function of the Kinship Assessment Team is to undertake Step Parent Adoption assessments. The service now has a dedicated worker to undertake assessments and develop the service. This has seen a more timely response to court requests for reports and better service to clients.

Step parent adoptions.

<u>Title</u>	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Enquiries made.	46	55	49
Assessments	20	26	20
Orders made	15	16	16

14. Fostering Reviews

The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011. The reviews are written by the supervising Fostering Social Worker and either presented to Panel and endorsed by the Fostering Panel Agency Decision Maker or submitted to the Lead Manager for Fostering who is the Agency Decision Maker for non-Panel reviews. All the completed reviews are scrutinised by the relevant Team managers who monitor compliance with the regulations before final agreement.

The Fostering Service has recently revised the review process in order to streamline the procedure and ensure compliance with the Regulations.

The current process of fostering reviews includes Personal Development Plans, feedback from children and young people, their Social Workers and other professionals working with the fostering household as well as obtaining the views from the carers own children.

In this reporting period there were 70 annual reviews presented to Fostering Panel, 19 were first reviews and 109 non-panel reviews we approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

15. Foster Carers Support

Fostering Support Groups

Three bespoke county wide support groups are currently being offered to foster carers.

The first support group for mainstream carers is held across the county in different geographical areas; Huntingdon, Cambridge and Fenland. The groups meet on a monthly basis in each area and are well attended by foster carers across the county. The fostering support groups enable Foster Carers to meet with their peers and form supportive relationships to help them understand their fostering role, and share their experiences and provide opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. Various speakers are invited to all the foster carer support groups to talk about specific topics and offer any information about local activities within the community. Minutes from the support groups are sent to all foster carers regardless of their attendance so they are kept informed.

In addition to the mainstream foster carer support group, there is a specific Level 6 support group offered to Level 6 foster carers which is co-facilitated by a senior fostering Social Worker and a clinician to offer a systemic approach to carers who care for young people with complex and challenging needs. This support group is also well attended by Level 6 foster carers who find the therapeutic and systemic approach invaluable in enabling them to continue to care for children who present with varying degrees of complexities.

The Men who Foster support group is facilitated by a supervising social worker and a male foster carer. Attracting attendance at this group continues to be a challenge

although attendance has slightly increased from the last reporting period and the frequency of the meetings have been reduced to quarterly.

Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association (CFCA)

The Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association was formed at the end of 2018 by some of the Foster Carers from Cambridgeshire. The association is constituted with a Chair Person, two Vice-Chairs, Treasurer and Secretary and Events Manager. A Service Level Agreement has been drafted for use between Cambridgeshire County Council and The Foster Carers Association.

The aim of the CFCA is to raise the profile of all Foster Carers and to ensure that they are viewed as professionals by Social Workers and colleagues working with children that are looked after by Cambridgeshire. The CFCA will;

- Provide strong channels of communication between the Fostering Service and the Association
- Work in partnership with Corporate Parenting and Fostering Services
- Seek to improve all aspects of fostering
- Promote good practice
- Represent Foster Carers as a group
- Organise support and social events for Foster Carers

The formation of the CFCA will raise the profile of CCC Foster Carers, advance foster carers views and recommendations regarding the Fostering Service and support carers to provide to provide high quality care for the children they look after.

Currently the CFCA are in the process of setting up a website for all Foster Carers to access information regarding various issues and topics and for them to leave their views in relation to any fostering matters. This will ensure that there are robust channels of communication and feedback from foster carers to senior managers.

Peer Mentoring

As well as offering various support groups, there is the Peer Mentoring Scheme where Foster Carers offer support and guidance to all newly approved Foster Cares. The mentors are experienced, with at least five years of fostering experience and are approved at skills level 3 and above. Currently there are six active mentors who cover different parts of the county and offer their experience in different types of fostering from moving babies on to adoption, to adolescent and long term foster care. There are three supervisions a year for the mentors as well as additional support if it is needed. Mentoring remains a valuable resource aspect of fostering and mentees continue to offer positive feedback in relation to support received by them from the mentors.

My Family Who Fosters

The young people attending the groups chose to change the name from Sons and Daughters to 'My Family Who Fosters' as they felt that this fitted in better with their role.

There are two groups, each with a different aim. The first group has clinician input to help prepare young people whose families are in the assessment process. This is to prepare them for the fostering task ahead and for them to ask any questions and share their worries about the assessment process or the fostering task ahead.

The second group, 'Children Who Foster' is aimed at children whose families are already fostering. The aim of this group is to allow these children to feel valued in their ongoing commitment through a combination of fun based activities and outings. It is also a forum to allow them to share their feelings and experiences with their peers in a safe environment of shared experiences. Attendance for the second group remains low, however this is still in the early stages of establishing a core attendance. The group have had three meetings in this reporting period and have used various fun based activities to discuss and look at Safer Caring, Network of Support and a Greatest Memory Competition.

Long Service Awards

In October 2018, over 120 foster carers, children and young people attended the foster carer's annual Long Service Awards event with Foster Carers receiving awards in recognition of fostering for Cambridgeshire County Council. 18 households received awards ranging from 5 to 30 years. This event generated good local press coverage and social media content.

16. Complaints and Allegations Complaints and Allegations

There were 9 allegations concerning Foster Carers during this reporting period. Two of the allegations were against the same carer. Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) processes were instigated in relation to all of the allegations; all allegations were resolved with no further action being taken but to identify relevant training for four of the carers.

There were three complaints received from Foster Carers. Two complaints were made about the level of support provided by the fostering support service. The other concerned the Fostering Panel process. All three complaints were resolved informally by meeting with the foster carers who did not wish to pursue the complaint any further and were satisfied with the outcomes.

17. Child's Voice

The Fostering Service actively seeks to support children and young people to share their views about their experience of being a Child in Care, about their support and how they feel their needs are being met.

Practitioners within the Fostering Service use a range of tools, including a software package 'Mind Of My Own' to support children and young people to express their views about how they are being looked after. Practitioners ensure children are seen regularly and spoken to as part of Foster Carers supervision and are encouraged to communicate their views in a range of ways e.g. verbal communication and visual such as art photos, evidence of outings, experiences and opportunities etc.

The fostering service has been noted within Cambridgeshire County Council as a service which promoted the use of Mind Of My Own to gain children's views and enable their contribution, including to Foster Carer annual reviews to support decision making around continued registration of Foster Carers.

18. Training

In 2018 – 2019 Foster Carers enrolled on 417 e-learning courses. There were 72 'lecture room' training courses delivered to foster carers, an increase of 7 compared to the previous year, many of which had waiting lists.

During the reporting period there were 6 'Skills to Foster' courses provided for prospective Foster Carers from 49 households.

	April 2018	June 2018	October 2018	Nov 2018	Jan 19	March 19
No of households	6	6	4	6	6	9
Experienced Carers		3		3		6

This is an increase of 17 households (53%) attending 'Skills to Foster' training compared to the previous year.

19. Budget

The service budget came in as forecasted.

20. Summary

The Fostering Service has had a busy year. In addition to recruiting and supporting Foster Carers, the service is responsible for undertaking connected person's assessments (kinship), providing a Short Break Fostering Service and carries out Private Fostering assessments and Step-parent Adoptions. The service works closely with Commissioning colleagues and provides a Duty Service every day to identify any urgent and emergency placements required across Children's Social Care.

In addition to the dedicated fostering trainer, Social Workers in the service also provide regular training for Foster Carers both pre-approval and post approval. In order to meet the needs of the Foster Carer training and undertake marketing activity workers across the service often working during the evenings and weekends. The service runs a successful Foster Carer mentoring scheme and monthly support groups in three geographical areas. The service also provides out of hours support to Foster Carers and managers are available to our out of hour's emergency service.

During the course of the last year the Fostering Service has been through a period of transformation. The service has been restructured, reducing the number of teams from 6 to 4. This has created efficiencies, reduced duplication of functions and brought allied service areas closer together, ensuring that foster carers are fully supported. This has also enabled the management structure to be strengthened by allowing for an additional Service Manager post to be created to oversee the service.

The Fostering Service has also created a Service Development Plan in order to strategically manage and monitor the continual improvement and development of the service. This will form the basis of the Fostering Service Development and Delivery Board which is still to be established.

The number of Children in Care in Cambridgeshire has increased over the last year from 706 at 1st 2018 to 768 at the 31st March 2019 an increase of 9%. The Fostering Service has worked hard to meet demand. Over the last year there has been significant investment in fostering recruitment with 24 new mainstream foster families recruited over the year providing an optimum of 34 fostering beds. At the 31st March 2019 25 potential foster families were being assessed providing a potential of 27 new homes for children. Plans are in place to continue our recruitment efforts and to increase the range and choice of types of fostering homes we provide throughout 2019/2020.

The Fostering Service has also been inspected twice in the course of the last year, once by colleagues in PQA and once by Ofsted. Whilst this confirmed areas in which the service can be improved, both inspections recognised areas in which the Fostering Service is working well and has improved. Recommendations for improvement from these inspections have been actioned and strategies for further improvement have been put in place. The Fostering Service will welcome colleagues from PQA back in July 2019 when they will undertake a follow-up inspection.

The Fostering Service has also worked hard to improve the quality of support offered to Foster Carers. As part of this the service has worked with Foster Carers to establish the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers Association. Although this is now established it is still in an embryonic stage. The Service and the Association will work in the coming months to fully develop communication strategies and partnership working in order to promote foster care and Foster Carers in Cambridgeshire.

21. Developments for 2019/20

Over the coming year the Fostering Service will prioritise work in the following areas:

- **Establish the Fostering Service Development and Delivery Board.**

The Fostering Service has an ambitious development plan which will move the service into a space that acknowledges its outstanding contribution towards children and Carers. The Fostering Service Development and Delivery Board will ensure inclusion of stakeholders in the development of the service whilst holding the service to account by ensuring that the ambitious aims of the service are achieved.

- **Review Fostering Allowances and Remuneration.**

The current Foster Carer payment system is outdated and inequitable. The Fostering Management Team are currently reviewing the payment structure to ensure that the service is able to present an attractive offer to carers which will promote both recruitment and retention, whilst ensuring that there is a sustainable package of financial remuneration which is fair, consistent and well justified when considering the task of the individual carer.

- **Achieve continuous improvement through a culture of effective management oversight**

There is a clear expectation upon the Fostering Management team to ensure that there is strong leadership and accountability to the wider service. Significant attention is being given to streamlining current processes and transforming the service in order that it can deliver high quality placements through a performance driven culture. The Fostering Service has benefited from recent inspections which have promoted an understanding of the requirement for effective quality assurance through audits and management oversight which in turn can evidence the work that is being undertaken.