

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE



Wednesday, 12 July 2023

Democratic and Members' Services
Emma Duncan
Service Director: Legal and Governance

16:00

New Shire Hall
Alconbury Weald
Huntingdon
PE28 4YE

**Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald PE28
4YE
[Venue Address]**

AGENDA

Open to Public and Press

Meeting theme: Homes

1. Notification of the Chair and Vice Chair 2023/24

To note the appointment of Councillor Anna Bradnam as the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and Councillor Michael Atkins as Vice Chair for the municipal year 2023/24. These appointments were made by the Children and Young People Committee on 27 June 2023.

2. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

Guidance on declaring interests is available at <http://tinyurl.com/ccc-conduct-code>

3. Minutes - 29 March 2023 and minutes action log

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4. Petitions and Public Questions

5. Participation Report

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6.	Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association and the Fostering Service report	17 - 24
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The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee comprises the following members:

Councillor Anna Bradnam (Chair) Councillor Michael Atkins (Vice-Chair) Councillor Alex Bulat Councillor Anne Hay and Councillor Mac McGuire

Clerk Name:	Richenda Greenhill
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Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 29 March 2023
Time: 16:00pm – 17:15 pm
Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald
Present: Councillors A Bradnam (Chair), A Bulat, A Hay and P Slatter

Meeting theme: Health

63. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Nethsingha (Councillor Philippa Slatter substituting) and from T Stephenson, Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers Association (non-voting observer)

There were no declarations of interest.

64. Minutes – 16 November 2022 and Minutes Action Log

With regard to Minute 57, Virtual School Report, Councillor Bulat clarified that she was Chair of the Combined Authority South ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) Local Partnership. Subject to this clarification, the minutes of the meeting on 16 November 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

The action log was noted. Councillors requested that action log items 58-61 were actioned, and the action log updated to reflect this before the next meeting. Action required.

65. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

66. Participation Report

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a report on activities run by the Participation Team for children and young people in care. This included young people's involvement in: informal Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee meetings; the Virtual School's 'Usualising Care' project; the 'Every Word Matters' project and recording

studio session; an examination of suitable housing and the joint housing protocol by the Care Leavers Forum; a meeting with the Chair of the Children and Young People Committee and the Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council; the recruitment of foster carers, Anglia Ruskin university social work degree applicants and ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) newly qualified social workers; a youth leadership event hosted by the British Youth Council; and contact centre inspections. Future action by the young people included: a consultation on the impact of South Cambridgeshire District Council's services on young people; the Annual Children in Care Awards; a potential podcast through the 'Every Word Matters' project; and Easter activities chosen by the young people.

The Chair thanked officers for the work of the Participation Team.

In their discussion of the report, members:

- Asked that reports and project names used language that was accessible for young people and that a more meaningful phrase be identified to replace 'usualising care'. Officers undertook to raise this with the Virtual School, which was leading on this work. Action required.
- Expressed pleasure that the young people in care had been invited to engage with a South Cambridgeshire District Council task and finish group.
- Stated that they had used questions proposed by the Children in Care Council at interviews the previous week for the new Executive Director for Children, Education and Families.
- Learned that there were currently eleven members of the Children in Care Council, but that attendance at meetings varied due to after-school activities and other commitments. Meetings were arranged for different days to facilitate wider attendance. Care Leaver Forum meetings were attended by varying numbers of care leavers, and this tended to depend on the subject matter. In November, the Care Leaver Forum had hosted a 'meet and greet' event to encourage wider engagement and work to recruit new members was on-going.
- Were informed that Anglia Ruskin University had asked for input when assessing social work degree applications from two trained young recruiters bi-monthly for an eight-month period. There was a pool of around 20 trained and supported young recruiters.
- Asked whether Sub-Committee members would see the young inspectors' report on Cherry Lodge. Officers suggested that this could be added to the next informal Sub-Committee meeting so that the young people could present it. Action required.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with lead officers.

67. Report from Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association and the Fostering Service

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a standing report on the work of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA) and the Fostering Service. This included information on: the new transport booking portal; the establishment of a feedback loop system to look at how issues raised by the Foster Carer Forum but beyond the remit of the Fostering Service could be addressed; coffee mornings for potential foster carer applicants; the new Head of the Fostering Service; and payment of a further one-off £250 cost of living payment per household. Scheduled activity included: a questionnaire for the CFCA annual meeting and business plan; a summer picnic; preparations for the annual Children in Care Awards; incorporation of the national passport policy in the fostering induction pack; a review of payments to improve financial support; and work to facilitate access for children in care to their savings, especially when leaving care. The Easter Activity Day had been cancelled due to an increase in coronavirus cases, but the summer activity programme was scheduled to go ahead.

The CFCA currently had 163 registered households and the Fostering Service was continuing to work closely with the Association and with all of Cambridgeshire's foster carers. This included a carer retention working group which continued to meet monthly. Feedback in response to this had been positive, and in the 2022/23 financial year had led to the retention of 13 fostering households who might have been considering leaving fostering.

In response to the report, members:

- Noted that the foster carer recruitment campaign remained on-going. This would make a wider call for foster carers in response to concerns that focussing recruitment on certain groups might discourage some people from applying. The campaign used online platforms.
- Received confirmation that there was currently a net loss of foster carers to the county. Although the Council offered carers comprehensive non-financial support, movement away from the in-house service into private companies occurred predominantly due to the level of remuneration available. The Chair asked for data on the number of in-house foster carers leaving the service and the reasons why. **Action required.**
- Emphasised the need to ensure that the importance of foster carers was recognised throughout the Council.
- Expressed appreciation that a further one-off cost of living payment had been provided to foster carers. The member pressed that action should continue to be taken to improve foster carer retention.
- Were informed about a member champion role in Peterborough.

- Thanked the Chair and Vice Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association for their contributions.

It was resolved to note the report.

68. Health Report

The Designated Nurse introduced the health report, highlighting an above average completion rate for review health assessments completed within statutory timescales and improved access to dental services for children and young people in care. A health questionnaire had been completed by the Children in Care Council seeking their views about health appointments. The four responses received indicated that the young people preferred face to face appointments. This would provide useful evidence in discussions with health providers. Feedback on the format of the questionnaire favoured fewer and more use of multiple choice questions. There was evidence that questions were understood literally and this would be considered in future studies.

The completion of initial health assessments (IHAs) within statutory deadlines remained an area of challenge. The Designated Nurse gave an assurance that 100% of IHAs were completed, but acknowledged that the numbers completed within statutory deadlines were low. Since coming into post the Designated Nurse had requested further information to understand the delay in completing the IHAs within the 20 day timeframe. Members noted that nearly half of social care referrals were received after the 20 working day target. This may be due to other priority safeguarding activities taking place during that period or delays obtaining the necessary consents.

The Chair stated that the timeliness of IHAs was a continued area of concern for the sub-committee. She was reassured that the Designated Nurse shared this concern and partnership work with the Head of Corporate Parenting was planned to address this. She further noted that feedback from the questionnaire stated that a child had not understood the language used and emphasised the need for professionals to use accessible language.

The Head of the Assessment Service gave an assurance that he would work with managers within his team to see how the IHA referrals process could be expedited.

In their discussion of the report, members:

- Learned that a national audit had commenced to look nationally at delays in initial health assessment completion times.
- Noted that it was taking an average of 16.5 days in Cambridgeshire from an IHA referral being received to the assessment being carried out, so if referrals could be expedited the county was well placed to achieve the statutory 20 working day timescale.
- Were reassured that in all cases a child received a paediatric child protection medical assessment within 24 hours of entering care, so any immediate health needs would be identified at that point.

- Understood that a health action plan was formulated as part of the IHA which allocated responsibility for actions associated with the child's plan.
- Asked whether capping the number of IHA appointments to 15 per month would lead to a backlog.
- Promoted the importance of preventative measures in relation to dentistry to mitigate the impact of NHS dentistry service waiting lists. The Healthy Mouth Programme was already being delivered by Public Health and the Chair asked that the Director of Public Health should be asked what training in teeth cleaning and gum care were delivered in schools and pre-schools. Members also raised the possibility of using unspent central government resource to deliver private dental care nationally for children in care. **Action required**
- Agreed that data from the NHS England national audit would be shared with the Sub-Committee when available. **Action required.**
- Recognised that children responded to the questionnaire freely, adding additional options and comments to questions. The Designated Nurse acknowledged respondents' expressed preference for multiple choice questions, but noted that this could limit the responses received.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officer.

69. Performance Scorecard

The performance scorecard demonstrated that of the 644 children in care, 191 had been placed with in-house foster carers; 91 were in independent living accommodation; 59 were in residential care; and 13 were with their parents.

In response to the report, members:

- Asked whether the average caseload was high in comparison to other local authorities, especially for Independent Reviewing Officers. Officers advised that IROs caseloads were well within the guidance of 72 cases. Children's social worker caseloads were higher than would be wished and an active recruitment campaign was being undertaken with the aim of reducing caseload numbers over time.
- Were reassured that the service considered the Ofsted rating of schools attended by children in care. Officers would avoid placing a child or young person in a school with a rating below Good. However, if a child was settled in a school which subsequently received a lower Ofsted rating they would need to consider whether a change in school was in the child's best interests. It might be considered more

appropriate to put in place an additional support package, in liaison with the Virtual School.

The Chair noted that the time taken to achieve adoption had increased and asked whether there was a strategy in place to improve this. Officers stated that the service aimed for permanent placement where possible, although for some children a long-term placement took more time and this impacted permanency figures. The Head of the Regional Adoption Agency was asked to provide an update to the sub-committee on permanent placements. Action required.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officer.

70. Sub-Committee Workshop and Training Plan

Details of a relational and developmental trauma and loss workshop taking place on 27 April 2023 would be recirculated to members after the meeting, alongside information on the Peterborough Asylum and Refugee Community Association (PARCA). Action required.

It was resolved to:

Note the sub-committee's workshop and training plan.

71. Agenda Plan

It was resolved to:

Note the sub-committee's agenda plan.

(Chair)

Action Log

Summary

The Action Log is a list of all of the things that people have been asked to do at earlier meetings. It is included at each meeting so that members can check that everything is being done. It was last updated on 20th June 2023.

Minutes – 16th November 2022

	Report title	Officer	Action	Update	Status
58.	Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report	Ricky Cooper	Noted that the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) had no dedicated resource going forward and was developing a business case. The Assistant Director for Regional Adoption and Fostering would discuss this outside of the meeting with the Executive Director for Children’s Services and the Head of the RAA.	22.06.23: The RAA is fully resourced.	Completed
60.	Performance Scorecard	Ricky Cooper/ Michaela Berry	Officers noted that some slides on training to interpret data on missing children had been produced and could be shared with councillors.	28.06.23: The scorecard data presentation has been amended so that it is more easily interpreted by the young people. Training if still needed will be included in the training plan 2023-2024.	Completed
60.	Performance Scorecard	Myra O’Farrell/ Michaela Berry	Clarified that the statistic on page 132 should read that the time children had been in care was 127 days and requested that this data was specified in future reports.	28.06.23: This data is now included in the scorecards.	Completed
60.	Performance Scorecard	Ricky Cooper/ Service	Requested sight of the pathway planning workshop presentation for social workers. A report on this would be taken to the next meeting or a workshop arranged.	22/06.23: The Service Manager for Leaving Care is developing further training in the writing of Pathway Planning. Following the roll-out of this	On-going

	Report title	Officer	Action	Update	Status
		Manager for Leaving Care		new training the slides will be shared with members.	
61.	Sub-Committee Workshop and Training Plan	Ricky Cooper/ Service Manager for Leaving Care	To consider the inclusion of a possible workshop on Care Leaver Pathways.	22.06.23: As above.	On-going

Minutes – 29th March 2023

	Report title	Officer	Action	Update	Status
64.	Minutes and minutes action log	Ricky Cooper	Councillors requested that action log items 58-61 were actioned, and the action log updated to reflect this before the next meeting.	22.06.23: Responses above.	Completed
66.	Participation Report	Claire Hiorns	Asked that reports and project names used language that was accessible for young people and that that a more meaningful phrase be identified to replace 'usualising care'. Officers undertook to raise this with the Virtual School, which was leading on this work.	15.05.23: The term has been used for very specific reasons. It has been used in place of normalising because normalising suggests that having care experience is not normal, whereas usualising is about threading care experience through conversations / the curriculum etc. so that it part of common language and understanding in school. This was explained when the child and young person's report was shared with the Children in Care Council (CiCC). The	Completed

	Report title	Officer	Action	Update	Status
				headteacher of the Virtual School would be happy to discuss this with the CiCC.	
		Ricky Cooper/ Anna Cullen	Asked to see the young inspectors' report on Cherry Lodge. Officers suggested that this could be added to the agenda for the next informal Sub-Committee meeting so that the young people could present it.	22.06.23: Cherry Lodge is a residential facility owned and operated by Peterborough City Council, so not a matter for CCC.	No further action
67.	Report from Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association and the Fostering Service	Ricky Cooper	The Chair asked for data on the number of in-house foster carers leaving the service and the reasons why.	22.06.23: The Fostering Annual Report which will be presented to the Sub-Committee will cover the number of approvals and deregistrations. Where carers are indicating that they wish to resign, they are visited by a team manager and all actions/remedies are considered to prevent resignation.	Completed
68.	Health Report	Jyoti Atri	The Sub-Committee noted that the Healthy Mouth Programme was already being delivered by Public Health and the Chair asked that the Director of Public Health should advise on what training in teeth cleaning and gum care were delivered in schools and pre-schools.	15.05.23: Briefing note circulated electronically to Sub-Committee members.	Completed
		Katie Liddle	The Designated Nurse offered to share data from the NHS England national audit with the Sub-Committee when it became available.	22.06.23: Results from the Pilot Audit for Health Assessments has not yet been shared. They will be shared with the Sub-Committee when available.	On-going
69.	Performance Scorecard	Jo Banks	The Chair noted that the time taken to achieve adoption had increased and asked whether there was a strategy in place to		

	Report title	Officer	Action	Update	Status
			improve this. Officers advised that the service aimed for permanent placement where possible, although for some children a long-term placement took more time, and this impacted permanency figures. The Head of the Regional Adoption Agency was asked to provide an update to the sub-committee on permanent placements.		
70.	Sub-Committee workshop and training plan	Richenda Greenhill	Details of a relational and developmental trauma and loss workshop being run by the Virtual School on 27 April 2023 would be re-circulated to members.	Sent to all Sub-Committee members on 29 th March 2023.	Completed
		Michaela Berry	Further information on the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Refugee Community Association (PARCA) to be shared with members.	<p>22.06.23: PARCA is a registered charity supporting refugees, asylum seekers and migrant communities in a range of areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreting services • ESOL • Education, Training and Employment • Housing and welfare matters • Phone Services • Youth Activities • Community Space <p>Corporate Parenting Services currently support children and young people who may benefit from the resource, and in many ways this is being offered through</p>	Completed

	Report title	Officer	Action	Update	Status
				<p>in-house interventions. We are currently working to strengthen partnerships by arranging to meet with the charity via our Team Meetings and ensure information is cascaded to front line practitioners, promoting community links and the right support at the right time particularly for Care Leavers who may no longer need us (i.e. 21+/ 25+) but would continue to benefit from community services.</p>	

Participation Report

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 12 July 2023

From: Service Director, Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: To ensure children and young people in care are empowered to express their voices and experiences to improve services

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officers.

Officer contact:

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Tel: 01223 706398 (office)

1. Background

- 1.1 The Participation Team continues to promote the voice of children and young people in care by offering a variety of opportunities for engagement and feedback, supporting Participation groups with projects and consultations, and ensuring action is taken as a result of feedback from children and young people.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The Participation Team continues to promote opportunities for children and young people under the care of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) through regular newsletters, as well as creating event-specific publications to encourage engagement. Recent newsletters have updated young people on the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC), Care Leaver Forum (CLF) and other participation groups including the Young Inspectors, Young Recruiters and Young Trainers, and have promoted other relevant opportunities with external organisations such as *IMO* (the Children's Commissioner's digital offering for teenagers in care and care leavers) and *Become* (the national charity for children in care and care leavers).
- 2.2 The Participation Team promotes the voice of children and young people in care, by offering a variety of opportunities for engagement and feedback. All feedback, including suggestions and ideas from children and young people is communicated to services on a regular basis, and responses on action taken is shared with the CiCC for final review.
- 2.3 The Participation Team organised fun face to face and virtual engagement activities in the Easter holidays for children and young people across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. These engagement activities enable children and young people to meet members of the CiCC and Participation Team and learn about different participation opportunities. The joint Summer programme has also been organised in consultation with the CiCC. The separation of the joint CCC and PCC Participation Team will impact the feasibility of future joint events and activities.
- 2.4 Children and young people fed back that they would like additional opportunities to work on art and create pieces for a face-to-face Art Exhibition. As a result, dates have been confirmed for three art sessions in the Summer holidays with a view to arranging an art exhibition in the October half term.
- 2.5 The CiCC continues to meet in person on a monthly basis to work on projects and consultation requests, meet professionals and give feedback on services. Recent guests have included Councillor Bryony Goodliffe (Chair of the Children and Young People Committee) and Stephen Moir (CEO of Cambridgeshire County Council), who attended to discuss current issues affecting young people in care.
- 2.6 The CiCC have been working on co-producing the Children in Care Awards and Celebration event, and the date and venue have been sent to all Children in Care, carers, staff and Corporate Parents. The group has been looking at activities, entertainment and refreshments for all age ranges, to make sure the event is fun for everyone.

- 2.7 The CiCC has been working with Peterborough CiCC with a project to raise awareness of mental health issues. The group reviewed a spoken word poem created by their Peterborough counterparts, and provided useful feedback and suggestions for the final video which was recently published.
- 2.8 The CiCC has been developing a project on frequently asked questions that young people have for their social workers. Through discussions the CiCC members found many similarities in the questions they have, but differences in how much information they receive. They agreed that it would be useful for general information to be available for all young people, so they don't always need to ask their social workers. They plan to work with the Principal Social Worker on developing an FAQ resource for children and young people who are in care.
- 2.9 Care Leaver Forum (CLF) members have been discussing their experiences and focusing on improving the support and preparation for young people leaving care. Recent discussions have included providing feedback to the Leaving Care Service on the Joint Housing Protocol. The Care Leaver Forum also supported a recent motion that was passed by Full Council for people who have spent time in care to be granted 'protected characteristic' status by Cambridgeshire County Council. One of the Care Leaver Forum members attended the meeting virtually and spoke about her own experiences and the importance of giving consideration to any disadvantages care experienced people may face.
- 2.10 The Young Trainers group continues to deliver training for prospective foster carers across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, as part of the Foster Carer Training programme. Young Trainers also successfully delivered their first training session to the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) Student Social Workers in collaboration with Workforce Development. The Young Trainers will be look at the overall training programmes for foster carers and social workers, to select other areas that they can contribute towards from a young person's perspective, and to explore ways to develop their current training sessions.
- 2.11 The Young Recruiters continued working with the Principal Social Worker to interview Newly Qualified Social Workers for the next ASYE places. The Young Recruiters previously worked on collating questions that can be posed to prospective foster carers and are now looking at questions that can be used on adoption panels.
- 2.12 Children and Young People across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire worked on the 'Every Word Matters' project, looking at the language used around children with social care experience, sharing views and feelings on certain words and suggesting alternatives. Children and young people recorded audio in a podcast format and shared views on what the final animation should look like. This will be used as a key training resource for professionals, as well as informing language used when meeting children and young people and in documents raising from policies to job descriptions.
- 2.13 The Participation Service commissioned two Leadership Training events for Children in Care across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The training, facilitated by the British Youth Council, was open to children and young people from the CiCCs, CLF, Young Inspectors, Young Trainers and Young Recruiters as part of their ongoing training and development. The sessions were followed by lunch for participants and fun activities. Children and young people gave positive feedback on the sessions which focused on confidence building and problem-solving strategies as well as leadership and decision-making skills. Following the success of these sessions, the Participation Team is working with the CiCC to decide further

development sessions for children and young people.

3. Alignment with the Council's ambitions

- 3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.3 Health inequalities are reduced.
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs.
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality.
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised.
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive.
The report above sets out the implications for this priority in section 2.

4. Significant Implications

N/A.

5. Source documents guidance

- 5.1 None.

Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association and the Fostering Service report July 2023

To: Corporate Parenting Sub Committee

Meeting Date: 12 July 2023

From: Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering Service

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: The Committee is being asked to note the work of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association and the Fostering Service.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report.

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Member contacts:

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1. Background

- 1.1 This is an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee from the Cambridgeshire County Council Foster Carer's Association and the Fostering Service.
- 1.2 As of 1st June 2023, there are 169 registered Foster Carers to Cambridgeshire County Council.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared to update the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on the continued participation activity and collaborative working between Cambridgeshire County Council's Fostering Service and the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers.

2. Main Issues

Overview of activity

- 2.1 Cambridgeshire County Council's Fostering Service continues to work in partnership with the Foster Carer's Association to ensure that Foster Carer's views are understood and to support service development.
- 2.2 Foster Carers representatives on the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association (CFCA) are: Tracey Stephenson (Chair), Kevin Arrowsmith (Vice Chair), Anna Williamson (treasurer), whilst Stuart Currie, Julian Ayres, Nikki Flowers, Jen Madams and Barbara Hall continue as Association members in support of the Chair and Vice Chair and committee business.

Fostering Working Groups – Progress Briefing

- 2.3 The Fostering Service strives to develop and improve the service we deliver to Children in Care of the Local Authority (LA) and the Foster Carers who provide this care on behalf of the LA. The Fostering Service recognises the wealth of fostering and life experience, knowledge and understanding Foster Carers come with. They have a great understanding of children who come into the care system through caring for children within their homes as part of their families. The Service values the individual skills which Carers bring with them to support the Foster Carer Community. The Service works closely with the members of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association (CFCA) and the Peterborough Foster Carer Committee (PFCC) but also with the wider fostering community throughout the year to ensure the voice and views of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foster Carers are heard and are central to plans for service development.
- 2.4 The current working groups we have are:
 - Recruitment Ambassador Working Group
 - Retention Working Group
 - Mentoring Working GroupAmongst other joint working to meet the needs of the service and the children we care for.

- 2.5 The CFCA has identified that they would like to see changes to how we provide end of year financial annual statements for tax purposes (Foster Carers are self-employed). In response we have a meeting set up in July between the CFCA and the fostering service to progress this to ensure changes are in place for next year. In addition, we have also set up a monthly meeting (starting in July) with the CFCA and the fostering financial coordinator to ensure any issues of finance are addressed and to support any creative ideas.
- 2.6 The Service alongside the CFCA is starting to look at how we can ensure that the children who foster (birth children of Foster Carers) are best supported. Historically support groups have been run and this is something that will be further explored to whether this will meet the needs alongside other creative ideas.

Retention of Foster Carers

- 2.7 We continue to host a monthly Foster Carer Retention Working Group, with Foster Carers working alongside Social Workers, Recruitment Officers and Managers to consider issues related to the retention of Foster Carers. This quarter we have put focus on the 'Cost of Living' crisis and the impact this is having on Foster Carers, the retention of applicants in assessment and newly approved Foster Carers. We have also put focus on recruitment activity as part of retention, since the more involved Foster Carers are with the service, the better the retention of Foster Carers. The Foster Carer Community still awaits the increase in Foster Carer Allowances for 2023-2024 as per Government Guidance and awaits the decision of the Local Authority on this matter. Foster Carers choose to foster for a range of reasons, but financial gain is not one of them, however Foster Carers need to receive adequate financial support to meet the needs of the children they care for, and expenses incurred.
- 2.8 Foster Carers have told us that they sometimes find it difficult to discuss money issues or emotional wellbeing matters. We have responded by asking Supervising Social Workers to promote with Foster Carers that we want them to feel able to discuss these matters freely with us and without judgment. We have also written a range of articles within the Fostering newsletter on financial matters and emotional wellbeing to promote this further. Foster Carers also have access to the Employees Assistance Programme the same as staff employed by CCC.
- 2.9 We have expanded on our informal coffee mornings and lunches with Foster Carers leading on this activity, to ensure that new Foster Carers and existing Foster Carers have increased opportunities to socialise with one another, and to share their knowledge and skill. This activity also lessens any risk of Foster Carers feeling isolated within their role.
- 2.10 The Fostering Service together with the CFCA continue to bring together the two Local Authorities through events held throughout the year. There are also a range of working groups, that include both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foster Carers.
- 2.11 We continue to ensure that for any carer considering leaving the service, we have cultivated a system whereby managers are informed of this immediately. The Foster Carer is visited by a manager and an action plan is drawn up to ensure that any issues are managed in a

proactive and timely manner. This approach is working well, with fewer Foster Carers leaving the service due to being unhappy with the fostering service.

Recruitment Ambassadors

- 2.12 The Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors from within the Fostering Community continue to work alongside the Service supporting recruitment activity and raising the awareness of fostering in their communities using their wealth of knowledge and experience of the fostering task. We currently have three Cambridgeshire Ambassadors and three Peterborough Ambassadors. All of the Ambassadors meet with the Recruitment Team quarterly to review the progress of work undertaken and to consider new ideas.
- 2.13 The Ambassadors are very proactive in researching recruitment opportunities within their local area and they have continued to support with a range of events in their local communities. They have also been working on a new initiative for the summer months, which focuses on picnics in the park. The concept is that picnics will be arranged, and the Foster Carers will be encouraged to bring along their family and friends. This enables the Ambassadors and Recruitment Officers to engage with family and friends in an informal manner and provide information about fostering should they wish to apply. In addition, these picnics are also good for the retention of Foster Carers.
- 2.14 One of the Ambassadors and a Team Manager have started a monthly online Q&A session which is focused on providing fostering applicants and newly approved Foster Carers with the opportunity to come along to the session, ask any questions and learn from others. This session has proved popular, and the feedback has been very good.
- 2.15 Ambassadors are very involved with creating case studies and videos for promotional purposes. They are also supporting the Council through speaking to CCC employees about the Fostering Friendly working policy to encourage staff employed by CCC to consider fostering alongside their current paid job.
- 2.16 The Ambassadors are supporting with creating content for the Foster Carer newsletter. We feel that if the newsletter content is predominately led by Foster Carers, then it will be more engaging to other Foster Carers.
- 2.17 The Ambassadors are also promoting the Fostering Service across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by assisting with the organisation of drop-in sessions which have a different focus to the established information evenings that we host. Instead, they are being advertised as 'Come and talk to a Foster Carer'. We feel that this type of event will be more appealing to the public, since most people who enquire are most interested in talking to a Foster Carer who is already in this role.
- 2.18 In addition to the Ambassadors, we are also widening our pool of Foster Carers that support generally with Fostering recruitment. There are several monthly meetings with Foster Carers who want to share their recruitment ideas with the Recruitment Team. Recently we ran a competition with Foster Carers to submit their recruitment ideas to be entered into a prize raffle. We had an excellent response to the competition and obtained some really good ideas for recruitment activity.

Mentoring Scheme

- 2.19 The Fostering Service continues to operate a peer Mentoring Scheme. The Mentors work in a structured one-to one relationship with a Foster Carer, with the main purpose being to support a Foster Carer to develop their knowledge, experience, skills and build on their confidence within the Fostering role.
- 2.20 In this quarter, there has been a significant change in terms of allocating Mentors to Mentees. Previously Mentors were allocated to new Foster Carers on approval, or where it was felt that providing a Mentor to a more experienced Foster Carer may be beneficial. However, we now allocate a Mentor to applicants during the fostering assessment. This provides the Mentor with the opportunity to develop a relationship with the Mentee prior to approval to enable the Mentee to be better prepared for the fostering role and for the Mentor to be able to actively support their Mentee when a child is placed.
- 2.21 We currently hold regular quarterly meetings (with a virtual option) with our Mentors to discuss any issues around mentoring and to provide updates regarding the fostering service. The fostering social workers who support the Mentors also give advice to colleagues regarding which Carers to refer and when to refer for a Mentor.
- 2.22 A Mentor's Handbook has been developed and disseminated to carers. We have arranged an in-person meeting for all the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mentors at New Shire Hall on 27 June 2023.

Fostering Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Focus Group Update

- 2.23 The Fostering Equality, Diversity & Inclusion focus group (which includes staff and carers) raised requests for changes to Liquid Logic (the children's data base) to include gender / pronoun preference on demographics. The Liquid Logic change board considered the proposals, the system requires selection of either male or female currently as this data is required by Government, however, the system has now been adapted to give a Mx option. Liquid Logic is continuing to investigate ways of being able to express gender preferences within personal profiles.

Feedback Loop

- 2.24 The feedback loop sets out Foster Carer experiences, views and feedback gathered through the Foster Carer forums in Cambridgeshire (the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association: CFCA) and in Peterborough (the Peterborough Foster Carer Community: PFCC). The feedback loop reflects Foster Carer voices from across the fostering community in relation to a range of topics they have chosen to provide feedback on or areas of specific challenge. For each new feedback theme there is a section for the Corporate Parent response which will be taken back to the Foster Carer forums, providing a transparent and open dialogue between Foster Carers, Children's Services, and the wider Council departments.
- 2.25 The Fostering Service continues to engage with Foster Carers via regular meetings with the Foster Carer Association/Community, Support Groups, the range of working groups discussed above in order to hear feedback directly from Foster Carers on what is working well and what Foster Carers feel needs to be considered or addressed not just by the Fostering Service but also the wider organisation relevant to caring for children in care. The

Fostering service will continue to engage the wider organisation to respond to the Feedback loop to continue to develop the service.

Changes

2.26 The Fostering Service is entering a period of transformation to enable it to be competitive within the commercial market and to support best practice. As part of this transformation, we will be looking at practice models which includes a network hub model to ensure the needs of our most vulnerable children and young people with complex needs and or whose behaviours challenge can be met in house. An example of such a network model is [Mockingbird](#) (there are other similar models that we are also exploring).

2.27 There have been some leadership changes within the Fostering Service with a change of Assistant Director and Head of Service. The new interim Service Director is Brian Relph, and he came into post on 26 June 2023. The new Head of Service is yet to be confirmed but it is anticipated that an interim will be in place at the point that the current Head of Service, Anita Hewson, leaves on 06 August 2023. Every effort will be made to ensure a smooth transition of the leadership team to ensure as little impact as possible to our Children in Care, Foster Carers and staff.

3. Alignment with the Council's Ambitions

3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

There are no significant implications for this priority

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

There are no significant implications for this priority

3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

There are no significant implications for this priority

3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

There are no significant implications for this priority

3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

- The Fostering Service ensures that children and young people are safe from harm and lead healthy lives. Children and young people are confident, resilient, thrive in their learning and engage positively and actively in their communities. The Fostering Service supports Care Leavers through the Staying Put Scheme and to learn independence skills.
- The Fostering Service ensures every Child gets the best start in life – with more children and young people in care finding permanent, safe and stable homes and support to care leavers to access a good, enhanced local offer that meets their health, education, housing and employment needs.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 None.

5. Source documents

5.1 None

Fostering Annual Report 2022 - 2023

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 12 July 2023

From: Interim Service Director, Fostering & Adoption

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: This report has been submitted to provide the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee with an overview of key activity within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Service for the year 2022 – 2023.

Recommendation: The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any questions with lead officers.

Officer contact:

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Member contact:

Names: Councillor A Bradnam/ Councillor M Atkins
Role: Chair/ Vice Chair
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Michael.atkins@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398 (office)

1. Background

- 1.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Service provides annual written reports on the management, outcomes and financial aspects of the Local Authority's Fostering Service.
- 1.2 This report provides an overview of the activity of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Service for the last financial year, April 2022 to March 2023 and covers the activity for both Local Authorities, reflective of the shared fostering service.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The purpose and content are fully detailed in the report.

3. Alignment with the Council's ambitions

- 3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

The entire report is aligned with this priority as the Fostering Service is responsible delivering safe, secure and local foster homes for Cambridgeshire's Children in Care.

- 3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

See 3.3 above.

- 3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality.

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

See 3.3 above.

4. Significant implications

4.1 Not applicable

5. Source documents

5.1 None



Fostering Annual Report

Cambridgeshire County Council & Peterborough City Council

Period Covered	01 April 2022 – 31 March 2023
Date Completed	30 May 2023
Name / position of author	Sue King - Service Manager Practice Standards and Household Review

Report Context

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Service provides annual written reports on the management, outcomes and financial aspects of the Local Authority's Fostering Service. This report provides an overview of the activity of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Service for the last financial year, April 2022 to March 2023 and covers the activity for both Local Authorities, reflective of the shared fostering service.

Executive Summary

The reporting period of 2022-2023 represents the second full year of operations for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Service, which launched on 01 December 2020.

There is a combined recruitment and assessment function, supervision and support function and a combined dedicated team that undertakes independent household reviews and monitors practice to ensure quality and compliance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards. There

are two supervision and support teams which oversee Cambridgeshire Foster Carers and one supervision and support team which oversees Peterborough Foster Carers.

The report outlines the development of the key areas of the service and the progress made in each.

Cambridgeshire County Council

In this reporting period, the service recruited 11 new fostering households.

22 fostering households resigned from fostering, giving an overall net loss of 11 households.

On 31 March 2023, 51% of children in foster care were living in in-house foster homes.

There was a total of 112 referrals for Special Guardianship assessments.

There were 14 assessed private fostering arrangements in place.

Peterborough City Council

In this reporting period, the service recruited four new fostering households.

12 fostering households resigned from fostering leaving an overall net loss of six households.

On 31 March 2023, 58% of children in foster care were living in in-house foster homes.

There was a total of 54 referrals for Special Guardianship assessments in the reporting period.

There were three assessed private fostering arrangements in place.

Audits and inspections

Fostering Service Self- Assessment 2023

What's working well

- Investment in a dedicated Fostering Resource Team has improved the sufficiency of use of in-house carers increasing the number of fostered children living with in-house carers.
- Focussed retention activity which has led to the service seeing a reduction overall in resignations of Foster Carers. There have been 31 mainstream/link households leave fostering across both Councils in 2022-23 compared to 47 in 2021-2022.
- A dedicated and bespoke Foster Carer training offer and opportunities for Foster Carers to become Ambassadors and to take roles as Mentors through our dedicated Ambassador and Mentoring Schemes operated and developed alongside the Foster Carer Community.

What needs to improve

- Increased number of enquiries to foster with high conversion rates through to approval to meet demand and in recognition of an aging population of current Foster Carers. The

conversion rate from enquiry to application in CCC in this reporting period was 14.5%, and in PCC the conversion rate from enquiry to application in this reporting period was 10%.

- Placing more young people with complex needs locally with carers and placement providers who are equipped and well supported to work with them.
- Embedding a practice of learning and action through the findings of audits, improved collection of the child's voice and ensuring annual review actions are progressed and monitored.
- Improving the quality of assessments and support plans for Special Guardians and Connected Person's Foster Carers which are co-written with colleagues to ensure continuity.

Priority actions

- To further develop our care arrangement offer to Foster Carers including the adoption of a practice model and further development of an in-house clinical offer and placement stability interventions. To develop a model of practice that supports the Family Safeguarding Model within operational social work teams that enhances our offer to Foster Carers that includes the support and integration of our clinical offer that supports placement stability and delivers direct interventions to children, young people and fostering households.
- Continue to improve and refine our fostering marketing and recruitment activity.
- To ensure that the child's voice is evident in all our practice, alongside that of the carer.
- To improve the critical analysis within Special Guardianship assessments and write child centred support plans in consultation with stakeholders as applicable.

Ofsted Inspections

Peterborough received a focused visit from Ofsted on 01 March 2023 when inspectors looked at arrangements for the front door services. Areas for priority actions were identified in respect of improving the timeliness of response to contacts, referrals and multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) enquiries about children and subsequent visits from Social Workers, and additionally in respect of the multi-agency arrangements and responses to children and young people at risk of extra-familial harm. There were no comments relating directly to the Fostering Service.

Cambridgeshire County Council received no Ofsted inspections during 2022-2023. Cambridgeshire County Council is awaiting an anticipated ILAC inspection which is imminently due. As part of that ILAC inspection, the Fostering Service will be considered in the overall findings for Inspectors.

Summary Fostering Households Year End – 31 March 2023

Cambridgeshire

The Fostering Service was supporting 169 Fostering Households which included:
138 Mainstream households (Professional Foster Carers)
9 Link households (short breaks for children with disabilities)
20 Connected Carer households (fully approved Kinship Carers)
2 Supported Lodgings households

Peterborough

The Fostering Service was supporting 84 Fostering Households which included:
73 Mainstream households (Professional Foster Carers)
1 Link household (short breaks for children with disabilities)
9 Connected Carer households (fully approved Kinship Carers)
1 Supported Lodging household

Core functions of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service's aim is to provide a high-quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit and support new local Foster Carers to therapeutically parent the children in their care.

The service prepares applicants throughout the assessment and training process. The service recruits foster carer applicants for the following types of fostering: mainstream / short term Foster Carers, Connected Persons Carers, LINK Carers, emergency, parent and child, respite, Supported Lodgings Carers, those who offer Private Fostering and PACE. [The Local Authority has duty to provide accommodation to children and young people under the age of 18 years 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 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.]

The service undertakes comprehensive assessments and checks to ensure that prospective carers are suitable to foster and able to carry out their role.

We supervise, support and develop the skills and knowledge of Foster Carers so that they can provide the highest standards of safe, therapeutically minded family-based care to our children and young people in care so that their outcomes are improved.

The service also supports young people to stay with their Foster Carers beyond the age of 18 years in a 'Staying Put' arrangement if this is considered the best plan for the young person. This is not a regulated fostering activity, and the young person, having left care, no longer has a Social Worker and the Foster Carer no longer has a Supervising Social Worker, but the young person continues to receive support, advice and guidance from their Personal Advisor who is employed by the Local Authority.

Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention

The 2022-23 Recruitment, Marketing and Communication strategy outlined the key aims and priorities for the Fostering Service in respect of increasing the number of Foster Carers, their diversity, skills and experience. The key priority was to recruit carers to look after teenagers and to look after children and young people with disabilities.

Since November 2022, the Fostering Recruitment Team have had a key focus on promoting fostering by having a physical presence in various community venues in the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire areas. These include information and drop in stands at eight libraries (Histon, Huntingdon, Peterborough Central, Yaxley, Orton, Chatteris, March, and Werrington) and a market stall in St Ives. Additionally, the team have had an in-person presence at three supermarkets (two Tesco stores and one Waitrose store) and one church hub (Bretton).

Alongside in person attendance in community venues, there has also been a significant amount of fostering promotional material distributed in poster and leaflet form in shops, cafes, gyms, public houses, beauty, hair salons and other venues where appropriate. In total the team have covered 32 towns and villages in the Cambridgeshire area and 16 in and around Peterborough.

Following the John Lewis 2022 Christmas campaign advert, which had a fostering focus, members of the recruitment team have attended the Partners Lounge at the Cambridge Grafton Centre John Lewis store to speak with Waitrose and John Lewis staff.

The following campaigns took place during the year:

DATE	CAMPAIGN
April 2022	LGBTQ+ Week
May 2022	Foster Care Fortnight
July / August 2022	Children at the Heart Campaign
September 2022	UASC mini appeal and Private Fostering Week
October 2022	Kinship Care Week
November / December 2022	All Hearts need a home and Sons & Daughters month
February / March 2023	LGBTQ+ History month and LGBTQ+ Week

The team has also hosted virtual information sessions monthly and have trialled an in-person information session at the Peterborough Weston Homes Stadium.

Over the next few months, the Fostering Recruitment Team will be attending further library and supermarket sessions, having a stand in John Lewis entrance, progressing the development of Foster Carer picnics in the park, and planning opportunities to talk about the difference between Local Authority & Independent Fostering Agency's unique selling points (USP) and the Refer a Friend scheme with Local Authority employees and Foster Carers.

Monthly Information Sessions for prospective enquirers have been held virtually either in the early evening or at lunch times. Virtual Information Sessions proved to be more successful in terms of attendance than the in-person events which the service previously held.

The Recruitment Team (Front Door to the Fostering Service) has three full time Recruitment Officer posts, which includes a Senior Recruitment Officer post whose role it is to support the consistency and the development of the team.

Fostering Recruitment Activity

Activity	Annual figure CCC 2020/21	Annual figure CCC 2021/22	Annual figure CCC 2022/23	Annual figure PCC 2020/21	Annual figure PCC 2021/22	Annual figure PCC 2022/23
Enquiries	329	239	179	161	78	104
Initial Visits	101	68	62	60	24	32
Application forms received	79	26	27	26	11	10
Attended Skills to Foster/ Journey to Foster	47	22	20	16	14	9
End of year assessments in progress (Form F commenced)	10	13	11	10	6	4
Approved	25	12	11	6	15	4
Number of resignations and de-registrations	19	35	22	6	12	9
Net gain	6	-23	-21	0	+3	-6

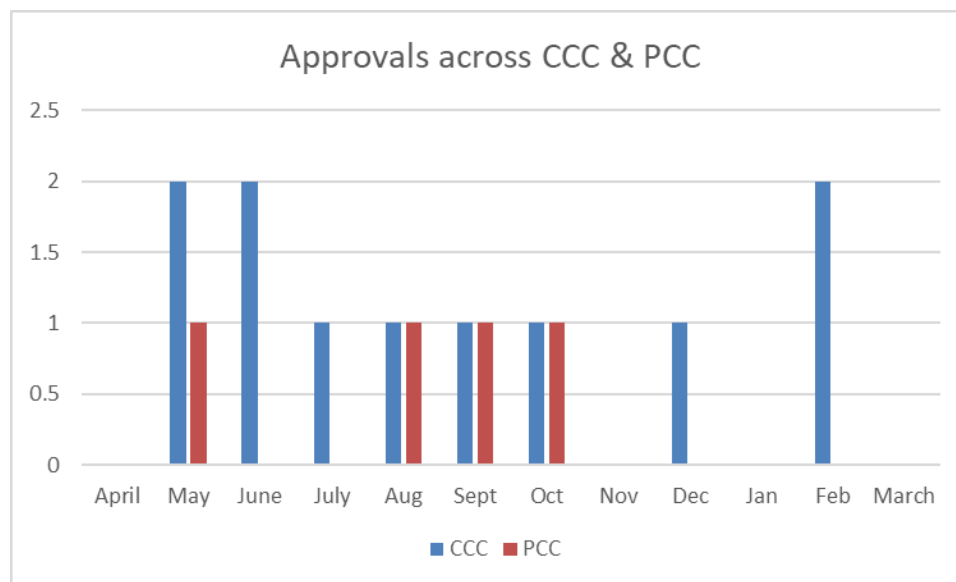
Cambridgeshire The conversion rate from enquiry to application in this reporting period was 14.5%

Peterborough The conversion rate from enquiry to application in this reporting period was 10%

During the assessment process a total of 15 applicants did not progress in Cambridgeshire which included the service closing six applications and nine where the applicant withdrew.

In Peterborough there was a total of 10 applications not progressing, four closed by the service and 6 who withdrew.

The total number of newly approved fostering households across the combined Councils for 2022-2023 is 15 (11 CCC/4 PCC). This is down by 45% compared to 2021-22 (when there were 27 approvals). There are currently 15 applicants in assessments across both Councils however this is down 29% compared to 2021-2022 in the same period.

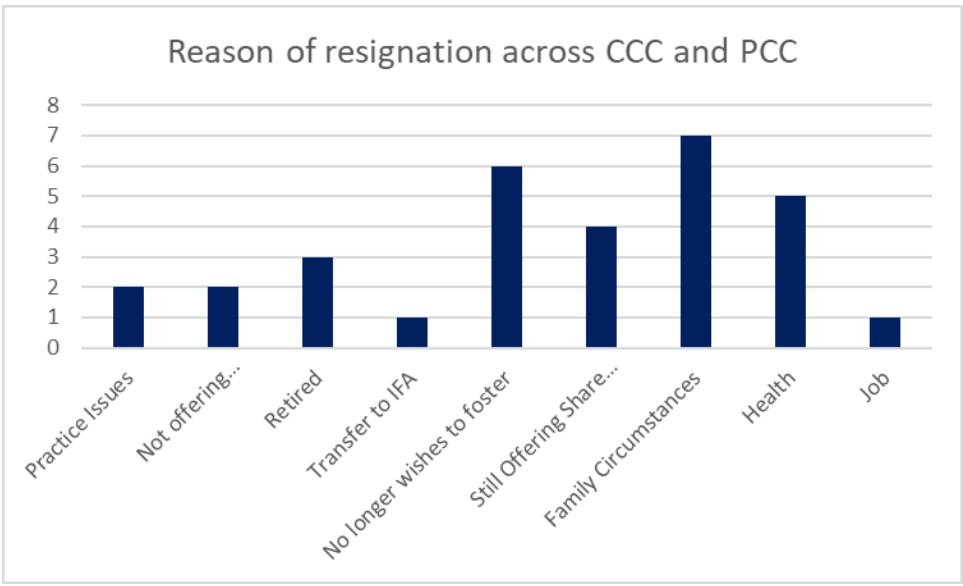


It is of note that the 11 new fostering households in CCC provided 12 beds plus four sibling beds. two of the Carers recruited were Link Carers and seven out of the 11 were within our target age range of offering care to young people aged 11+.

In PCC the four new fostering households have provided seven beds plus two sibling beds. Two of the four fostering households were in our target age range of being able to offer care to young people aged 11+.

Resignations

There have been 31 mainstream/link households (22 CCC / 9 PCC) leave fostering across both Councils in 2022-23 compared to 47 (CCC 35 / PCC 12) in 2021-2022. This highlights a decline overall in the number of resignations across both Councils, although an increase in PCC.



The main reason Foster Carers are leaving is due to family issues, no longer wishing to foster or ill health. Of note, only one carer has moved to an Independent Fostering Agency, two have chosen to leave following standards of care concerns and three have left but continue to care for young people either through Shared Lives, Staying Put or Adoption.

Both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are reporting a net loss of Fostering households and beds at the end of 2022-2023. Cambridgeshire has a net loss of 11 households with a net loss of 21 beds and Peterborough has a net loss of six households and a net loss of nine beds.

Occupancy rates

Neither Cambridgeshire nor Peterborough is reaching the target of 60% of children in care living in in-house fostering households. As of 31 March 2023, the split is 51% in in-house beds in Cambridgeshire and 58% in Peterborough. Additionally, there are currently 15 Cambridgeshire children living with Peterborough Foster Carers and 23 Peterborough children living with Cambridgeshire Foster Carers.

National Picture

Other Local Authorities are reporting a similar picture in terms of the challenges in recruiting new fostering households and an increase in the reporting of net losses. The reasons for this are not fully understood however the cost-of-living crisis is believed to be having a detrimental impact, as well as people reviewing their life chances post the pandemic, a competitive marketplace and foster care being a vocation and not a job.

Our priorities remain for the need to recruit more carers for children aged 11 years and older, carers who can look after brothers and sisters together and children with more complex needs and disabilities.

Foster Carer Retention

In this reporting period the Fostering Service has continued to focus on the retention of Foster Carers:

- The Retention Working Party involving staff and Foster Carers has explored how Foster Carers can be actively supported to stay with the Fostering Service and to understand the barriers that they experience in fostering. This is a very productive and positive group which has contributed to developments within the service. These have included specific support groups for Foster Carers of teenagers, a 'Question and Answer' support group for people in assessment and newly approved carers, to provide a safe space to check out the realities of fostering. The importance of allowances being paid in a timely way was raised by the group, which lead to weekly meetings taking place involving finance teams and senior managers. In addition, we made suggestions to simplify the accreditation matrix paperwork which were adopted, which enables Foster Carers to progress through the Skills levels. The group includes the two chairs from the Foster Carer committees. Their membership enables the service to understand the issues that are important for Foster Carers and develop a joint action plan to resolve the issues raised.
- Identified all Foster Carers who have indicated that they were considering leaving the service. Retention visits are carried out to discuss the Foster Carer's specific concerns and to seek a resolution where possible. In this financial year, a total of 15 retention meetings were held, resulting in 12 of the foster carers remaining with the service.
- Exit interviews were carried out to give Foster Carers leaving the service, the opportunity to give feedback on their experience of fostering. Most of the carers who decided to leave did so, due to a change in their own circumstances or ill health. There has been a very positive shift in Foster Carers no longer leaving the service, due to dissatisfaction with support offered by the fostering service. When the feedback has involved partner agencies, the fostering service ensures that the information is passed on to enable changes to be made where needed.

Safeguarding - allegations & standards of care

Allegations against Foster Carers, outcomes and timescales

Allegations against foster carers	CCC	PCC
The number of allegations against foster carers made by fostered children	2	0
The number of allegations against foster carers made by other sources	9	2
The number of children who have made allegations against their foster carers	2	0
The number of foster carers who have been subject to allegations	11	2
Information about the categories of alleged abuse		

Physical abuse	7	0
Sexual abuse	0	0
Neglect	4	1
Emotional abuse	0	1
Information about the outcome of investigations of allegations		
Concern(s) resolved - no further action	4	1
Continued monitoring for an agreed period	1	0
Concern remained, referred to fostering panel to review foster carer approval	6	2
Timescale for investigations		
less than 21 working days	6	1
22-30 working days (4 - 6 weeks)	0	0
31-50 working days (6 - 10 weeks)	4	0
More than 50 working days (> 10 weeks)	1	1

11 fostering households were subject to allegations during this reporting year, which is in line with the previous year where there were 10 fostering households subject to allegations.

Most investigations are carried out by Fostering Reviewing Officers who are independent of the Supervision Teams, providing objectivity to the process, although some are carried out by the Fostering Social Worker when appropriate. Following an allegation, a Foster Carer's suitability to continue to foster will be considered by the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker.

Being subject to an allegation or concern process can be very distressing for a Fostering Household and in recognising this, free and confidential emotional health and well-being advice has been available to Foster Carers through the Councils' Employee Assistance Programmes throughout the past year in addition to independent advice and advocacy.

Compliments and complaints

The following are a selection of the compliments received by the service.

Source	Summary of compliments about foster carers
IRO	Children have made excellent progress, (Foster Carers are) outstanding at meeting their cultural needs and advocating for them.
Child's Social Worker	The Foster Carer was very attuned to the young person's needs and ensured that their holistic needs were met consistently and appropriately.
Young Person	My Foster Carer is an awesome superhero, she's my idol. We have rough times, but we make it through. She's kind, she's bright.

Child's relative	She is the best thing that has happened for (child) she is like a friend, sister, mother, all in one and I am very happy to see them together (she) is very kind and a perfect person for (child).
Concerning staff type	Summary of compliments about our staff from foster carers
Fostering Social Worker	I'd just like to say how supportive the conversations with (my Social Worker) were. I felt listened to and valued. Her carers are lucky to have her as their Social Worker.
Fostering Social Worker and Service	I received excellent support from both Social Worker and Service Manager, who have offered exceptional support throughout - extremely pleased with the fostering service who have genuinely cared through a difficult time.
Fostering Team	They felt 'blessed' to be so well supported and they could not foster without the backup of the fantastic team around them.
Training	The training offer is more flexible, has a far greater menu, is more efficiently packaged/managed in the interactive brochure/booking process and accesses higher quality trainers than we have experienced previously.

Summary of complaints and outcome

COMPLAINANT TYPE	SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT	OUTCOME
CCC		
Prospective Foster Carer	Dissatisfied with the way that their enquiry to foster was handled and the outcome.	Not Upheld
Prospective Foster Carer	Poor service during assessment period.	Partially Upheld
PCC		
Foster Carers	Unhappy with decision about fostering allowance for a child with additional needs.	Partially upheld

Of the three complaints made, none were upheld, two were partially upheld and one was not upheld.

The service always seeks to speak to the complainant directly to understand the complaint fully, and to seek early resolution of any concerns. Learning from complaints is taken back to the service to improve practice.

Foster Carer training and development opportunities

There has continued to be a mixture of face to face and online training courses for Foster Carers in the last year. Practical courses such as First Aid and Positive Behaviour Support are now delivered face to face in several venues around Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. A recent Foster Carer Training Survey has indicated that there is an equal preference between face-to-face courses, e-learning courses and courses delivered online via Teams or Zoom. Carers report liking virtual training as it is more time efficient, although at times miss the opportunity to network directly with other Foster Carers.

Numbers attending

In the reporting year we have run 97 training courses with 911 places being taken up. Additionally, we have provided specialist courses for our Link carers and Foster Carers of disabled children. The Assisting People to Move course ran on two occasions, where eight participants attended. We also ran a Foundations for Attachment six-week course, led by Nicola Ellis from the clinician team, which had 14 attendees. A further two courses were commissioned through AC Education with eight attendees on the first of the courses and 18 on the second.

E-Learning

We have continued to offer e-learning modules with 251 Me learning courses being completed and 560 e-learning modules from the Foster Carer Training Hub have also been completed. There have been some benefits to the e-learning offer such as being able to offer material around recording and reporting whilst the recording policy was being updated and First Aid modules if there is not a first aid course running for a few weeks or carers are struggling to attend.

Special Guardianship Training

Our special guardian training has continued with 82 attendees over six courses. It is hosted by a member of the training team, an experienced special guardian contributing as well as a Social Worker from the special guardian support team from the Regional Adoption Agency.

Developments

Following the development of the Next Steps training we have, along with the Reunification and Placement Stability Service (RAPSS), evaluated the modules. We have noted that the content of some of the workshops is beneficial to a wider cohort of Foster Carers than those in the first year and so we will continue these workshops, widening the offer to other carers who would benefit.

We are currently setting up a new booking system for our training that should give Foster Carers an improved experience in managing their course bookings, there are options for carers to express an interest in a course if the date does not work for them or has already run, which can inform our planning. In addition, the ME learning e-learning modules that we have been using for the previous seven years can also be self-allocated via this booking system.

A highlight of our year was to run a day-conference called 'From Chaos to Cake' at the Weston Homes Stadium in Peterborough with 108 attendees, equally split between staff and Foster Carers. The speakers were Sarah Naish and Sarah Dillon, and the focus was on Foster Carers taking care

of themselves to therapeutically parent the children in their care. This was a very enjoyable event and received excellent feedback.

Carer consultation, engagement and support

Support Groups have operated for both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foster Carers throughout the year with face-to-face groups taking place four times a month in Cambridgeshire and once a month in Peterborough. Additionally, there are dedicated groups for some carers – the support group for teenage carers is held virtually and the support group for Foster Carers looking after children aged 0 – 5 years meeting monthly face to face.

Foster Carers have established their own informal support groups which take place in two locations, both of which meet monthly.

All new Foster Carers continue to be linked with a Mentor who is an approved Foster Carer prior to their approval to offer peer support in the early stages of their fostering career. They maintain contact throughout their career to offer advice as needed.

Events have taken place throughout the year for fostering households to meet with each other and staff including day trips to Wicksteed Park, a summer picnic and Christmas parties all of which were well attended. In addition, the New Carer event was held for the first time since the pandemic to welcome all new Foster Carers to the service along with the Foster Carer Award ceremony which also took place in person.

The Assistant Director has continued to hold virtual 'Coffee and Cake' sessions following on from the success of these informal events which began during lockdown and has also attended the support group in Peterborough in person. It provides an opportunity for all Foster Carers to ask questions and hear about developments in the service and wider children's services.

The Service Manager for Supervision and Support meets monthly with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association and Peterborough Foster Carer Community. Mandy Nicholson is the chair for Peterborough Foster Carer Community and Tracey Stephenson is the chair for Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association. The Head of Service joins these meetings on a bi-monthly basis.

Managers from the service also attend the committee and community meetings to hear about what is working well for Foster Carers and areas that need to be addressed or developed.

There have been no consultations with Foster Carers during the period, however the feedback given in the previous consultation about allowances identified the rise in the cost of living as a concern for Foster Carers. Consequently, two further payments were made to Foster Carers during the year in recognition of this.

Foster Carers attend the formal Corporate Parenting Committee in Peterborough and the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee in Cambridgeshire to represent Foster Carers and ensure their views are heard by Elected Members.

Foster Carer Newsletters from the Service provide updates to fostering households about changes and developments in the service.

Fostering Panel

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Panels have continued to operate separately and virtually during this reporting year. The business of the Fostering Panel is to consider Foster Carer's suitability to continue to foster or to be approved as Foster Carers (both as Mainstream Carers and as Connected Persons Carers), post allegation reviews, noting resignations, extensions of temporary approval and changes to Foster Carer terms of approval.

In Cambridgeshire, 27 Fostering Panels sat during the year and in Peterborough 11 Fostering Panels sat. Panel members have continued to receive medical advice and legal advice when required.

The Fostering Panel Adviser role was held by Stuart Stapleton for both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough until September 2022 when the new Fostering Panel Advisors, Claire Baxendale and Liz Devoti came into post.

Additional panels were convened to prevent drift and consider cases in a timely way. No panels were cancelled due to lack of quoracy.

In Cambridgeshire Richard Holland is the Panel Chair and Elaine Barry is Vice Chair.

In Peterborough Mick Cunningham is the Panel Chair and Fernley Copping is Vice Chair.

Panel training days were held for Peterborough on 25 May 2022 and for Cambridgeshire on 19 May 2022. A further Panel Members' event was held on the 31 January 2023.

Appraisals for the chairs and panel members have been carried out during the year in line with requirements.

A new Quality Assurance Feedback Form was introduced in March 2023 and the Advice Tracker updated and shared as part of the ongoing development to strengthen the links between the Service and the Fostering Panels.

Fiona Van Den Hout, Head of Service for Fostering and Supervised Contact, acted as Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Panel. Fiona left the service on 30 December 2022, and from this point Anita Hewson, Acting Head of Service for Fostering, Supervised Contact, (Family Time),

Reunification and Placement Stability Service and Family Group Conferencing, has acted as the Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Panel.

Heads of Service Sam Nour, Samantha Howlett, Fiona Van Den Hout, Myra O'Farrell, Michaela Berry and Mandeep Gill have acted as the Local Authority's Nominated Officers for Regulation 24 temporary fostering arrangements.

Management arrangements

The management of the service was carried out by Nicola Curley, Interim Service Director Children's Services across both Local Authorities until December 2022 when Elaine Redding was appointed Interim Service Director for Children's Services.

Ricky Cooper, Assistant Director for Fostering, Regional Adoption and Specialist Young People's Services has overall responsibility for the Fostering Service.

Fiona Van Den Hout was the operational Head of Service for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Service until 30 December 2022 when Anita Hewson became Interim Head of Service. There were three lead Service Manager posts during this reporting year, who in turn were supported by their Team Managers as follows:

Recruitment and Assessment:

Service Manager - Anita Hewson until December 2022
Interim Service Manager - Jo Spender from January 2023
Team Manager – Jo Laur
Team manager – Jenni Woodcock
Team Manager – Tasalla Shaiyen

Supervision and Support:

Service Manager - Despina Kaoura
Team Manager- Amanda Carter (covering maternity leave until July 2022) / Sharyl Acheampong (from July 2022)
Team Manager – Jayne Barrett McGrath
Team Manager – Mariepearl Camfield

Household Review & Practice Standards:

Service Manager - Sue King
Team Manager – Stuart Stapleton)

Interim Resource Team Manager – Amanda Carter (from July 2022)

Operational team meetings for staff and managers have been held monthly and both Councils have virtually provided corporate support opportunities for staff including monthly wellbeing sessions and briefings by senior Council Leaders.

Children in Care participation and consultation

The Service works closely with the Councils' Participation Teams who support children and young people in care to provide their views on specific topics via the Children in Care Councils and Care Leaving Forums.

The annual Children in Care Awards are held by each Local Authority and is an event that the whole fostering household is encouraged to attend. It is supported by staff from the Fostering Service.

The service attends the Participation Group and has collaboratively developed a service Participation Plan.

Young Recruiters have helped to interview applicants for social care roles, and Young Trainers have become an established part of the Journey to Foster training for prospective Foster Carers and continue to receive excellent feedback from prospective Foster Carers.

Feedback is sought from children and young people in care about their experience of living within house Foster Carers as part of the Foster Carer's annual review process which provides rich information about the day-to-day life for foster children.

PRIVATE FOSTERING

The Children Act 1989 and subsequent Private Fostering Regulations 2005 place a statutory duty on the Local Authority to monitor the safety and wellbeing of children and young people living in Private Fostering arrangements.

These arrangements are regulated by Fostering Regulations 2011, private fostering arrangements are made between parents or carers who have parental responsibility for that child and another adult who is not a blood relative, so they can take on the care of the child for a single period longer than twenty-eight days.

These arrangements should be reported to the Local Authority for a safeguarding assessment if necessary and a private fostering assessment and monitoring if approved.

Both Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council have private fostering procedures and processes in place.

In Cambridgeshire County Council there were 14 assessed private fostering arrangements on 31 March 2023. Of this figure, five were language schools, five were Homes for Ukraine and four were mainstream.

In Peterborough City Council there were three mainstream assessed private fostering arrangements on 31 March 2023.

There is a working group that meets monthly to monitor the implementation of the Private Fostering Strategy this is chaired by the Private Fostering Lead, Jo Laur, Team Manager Fostering Recruitment and Retention. An annual Private Fostering Report is submitted to the relevant safeguarding board for scrutiny of practice.

CONNECTED PERSON

Connected Persons fostering is regulated by the Care Planning Regulations 2010 and the Fostering Regulations 2011; it is also known as Kinship or Family and Friends Care. These Regulations govern situations when a child is the subject of an interim or full Care Order under section 38/31 Children Act 1989, when it is not safe for them to live with their parents, and they have a connected person who has nominated themselves to care for the child. Most of the connected persons assessments are completed on people who are related to the children they look after, and in most cases, they are grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings or other family members, but some are family friends.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to assess the connected person if a child is not able to live with their parents. The Fostering Service will then make a recommendation about the suitability of the connected person to care for the child throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

A connected person assessment can result in a negative or positive recommendation. If it is positive there can be several outcomes, depending on the risk and who needs to share parental responsibility. The legal options available to support the continuing relationship between the child living with the connected person are no order, child arrangements order, special guardianship order, care order or adoption.

The total number of connected persons' referrals received in Cambridgeshire County Council in 2022-2023 was 112 and in Peterborough City Council the overall number was 54. This equates to an increase in referrals of 22% compared to 2021-2022

During 2022-23 in Cambridgeshire County Council 30% of referrals occurred when the child was in a formal legal process or subject to Child Protection at the time of the referral and 10% of the total referrals were Regulation 24 referrals. Regulation 24 referrals occur when the child goes to live with their family or friend in an emergency and the carers are agreed as temporary foster carers.

In Peterborough City Council 22% of referrals were in formal legal process or subject to Child Protection at the time of the referral and 22% of referrals were Regulation 24 arrangements.

Priority Transformation Areas 2023 – 2024

The following areas have been identified as areas of transformation focus for the coming year. A transformation team is supporting the Assistant Director to develop the transformation plan.

- Benchmarking
- Model of practice
- Recruitment
- Marketing
- Review of Internal structure
- Workforce analysis

The four building blocks identified in the previous year also continue to steer the service to ensure that there is greater sufficiency of family-based care available, and to inform the transformation planning. These are:

- Recruitment
- Reputation
- Resilience
- Retention and Reward

CCC Corporate Parenting Scorecard

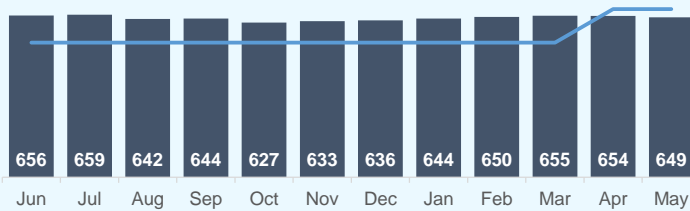
HEADLINE FIGURES

Number of children in care (CiC) on the last day of the month

649



Target: below 546

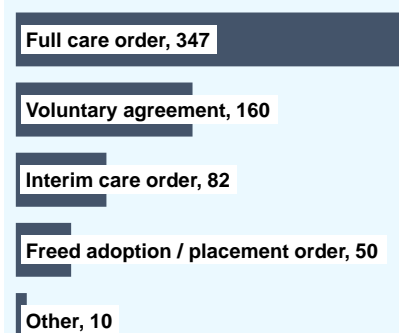


Staffing

	Staff	Average Caseload	Change*	Performance
Children in Care Qualified social workers	28	19	-	-
Leaving Care Personal Advisors	18	30	-	-
Independent Reviewing Officers	#N/A	#N/A	-	-

*Change in average caseload is from December 2021 to March 2022

Legal status of children in care



Length of time children have been in care



Key
Change since previous month
Performance against target

Stayed the same
Acceptable
Deteriorated
Poor

SERVICE STANDARDS

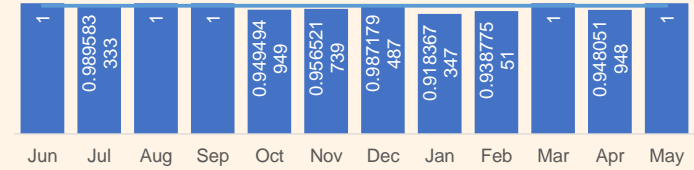
% of CiC reviews which were held on time (year to date, and during each month)

98%



175 out of 179

Target: above 98%



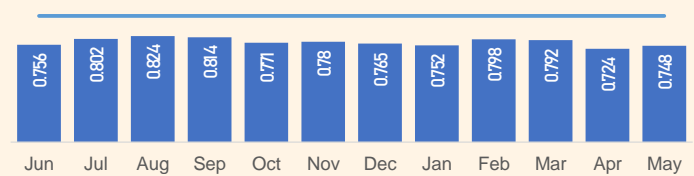
% of CiC statutory visits which were carried out on time (year to date, and during each month)

74.8%



468 out of 626

Target: above 98%



HOMES

Home Stability

3+ Homes

7.6%

49 out of 647



Target: below 9%

7.6% of children in Cambridgeshire's care had 3 or more different homes in the last 12 months. Out of those children who have been in care for over 2.5 years, 62.0% have been in their current home for two or more years.

In home 2+ yrs

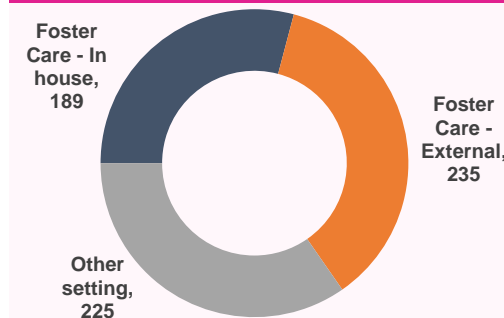
62.0%

147 out of 237

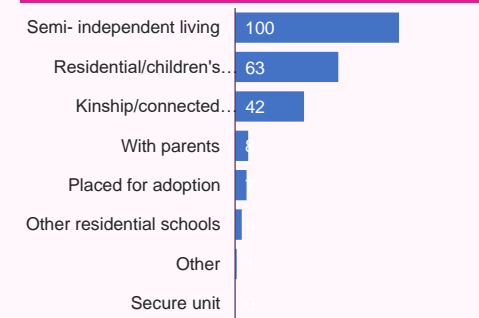


Target: above 68%

Type of home of children in care

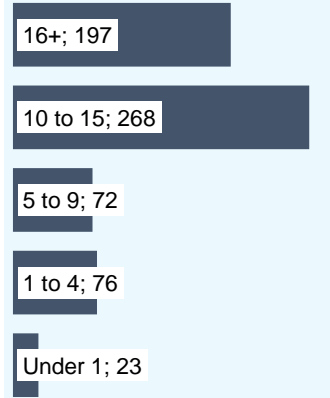


Other settings: breakdown



EDUCATION

Children in care by age group



% of school-aged children in care who have a PEP in place

99.7%

367 out of 368

A Personal Education Plan (PEP) was in place for 367 children in Y1 - Y11, who were in the care of CCC and on the role of the virtual school at the end of the Spring Term 2023.

% of school-aged children in care in good or outstanding schools

66.6%

269 out of 404

As of June 2022

66.6% of Cambridgeshire's children in care are taught in good or outstanding schools, as at the end of June 2022.

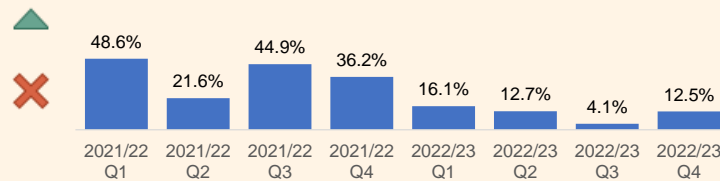
HEALTH - SERVICE STANDARDS

Children in care whose initial health assessment was completed on time (Year to date and by quarter)

11.8%

28 out of 238

Target: above 95%

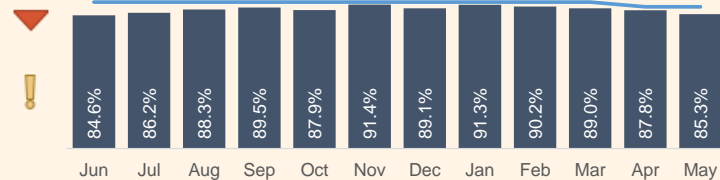


Children in care whose annual health assessment was completed on time

85.3%

388 out of 455

Target: above 93%

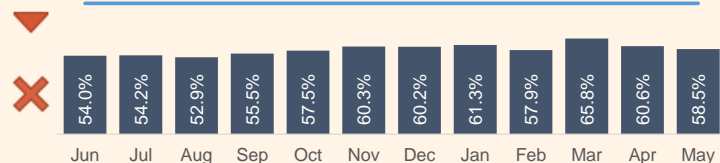


Children in care whose annual dental examination was completed on time

58.5%

266 out of 455

Target: above 90%



MISSING

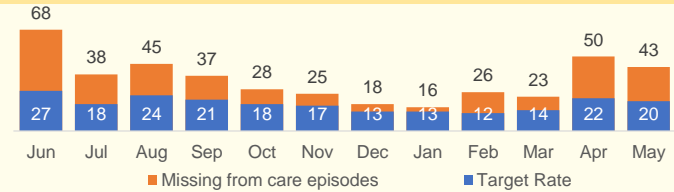
Children in care who go missing (with number of episodes)

20

Children

43

Episodes



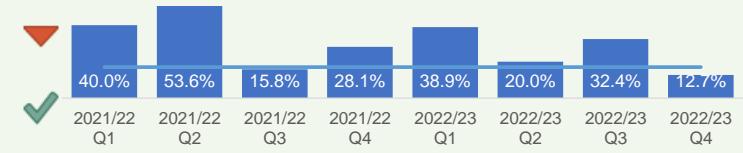
ADOPTION

% of children leaving care who are adopted (Year to date and by quarter)

27.9%

78 out of 280

Target: above 17%



Timeliness of adoption process

Time to placement

568

Target: below 400



For children adopted during the past 12 months, an average of 568 days passed between the child entering care and them moving into their adoptive home. An average of 313.0 days passed between their placement order being granted and approval of a match with their adopters.

Time to match

313

Target: below 183



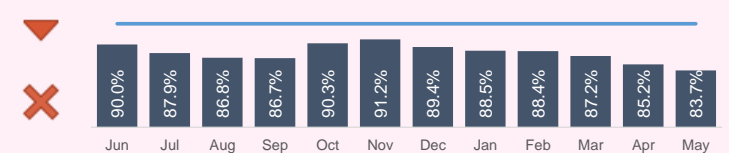
CARE LEAVERS

Care Leavers who have a pathway plan in place

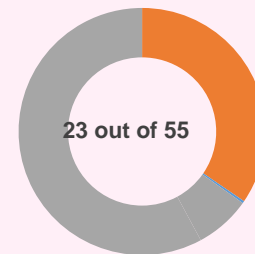
83.7%

479 out of 572

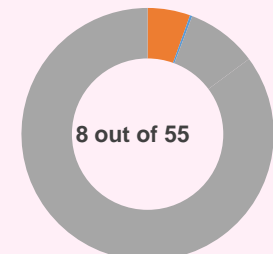
Target: above 95%



19 to 21 year old care leavers who are not in employment, education or training (NEET)



19 to 21 year old care leavers who live in unsuitable accommodation



Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022/23

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 12th July 2023

From: Service Director, Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: This report is submitted annually to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for review.

Recommendation: The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any questions with the lead officer.

Officer contact:

Name: Olly Grant
Post: Service Manager, Independent Reviewing Officers
Email: olly.grant@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07787 837944

Member contacts:

Names: Councillor Anna Bradnam/ Councillor Michael Atkins
Role: Chair/ Vice Chair
Email: anna.bradnam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Michael.atkins@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398 (office)

1. Background

- 1.1 The appointment of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002). Amendments to statutory guidance in 2010 embedded the IRO role further within 'Care Planning Placement and Case Review' and 'The IRO Handbook'.
- 1.2 The IRO Handbook states: 'The manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting panel. This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed.' (IRO Handbook 2010, page 48, paragraph 7.11.)

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 **Purpose of the IRO Service:** It is a key responsibility of the IRO to ensure that the local authority gives due consideration to the views expressed by the child within care planning. The core mechanism for reviewing the child's care plan and ascertaining the child's wishes and feelings is the child's 'Child in Care' (CIC) Review, which are held at statutory intervals. The IRO has a responsibility to monitor the local authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case. If the IRO has concerns with respect to drift or delay within the child's care planning, they will escalate the issue through the Case Alert and Dispute Resolution Protocol.
- 2.2 **Profile of the population of children in care:** There were 632 children in care at the end of March 2023.
- 2.3 **Performance of the IRO service:** Each IRO works with approximately 66 children in care, which is considered to be a moderate caseload. Over 99% of Children in Care reviews were in timescale during the year.
- 2.4 **Voice of the child in care planning:** This year 66% of children over the age of 4 attended their Reviews in person, although not all children and young people wish to attend their meetings. 26% conveyed their views via another person, met with their IRO separately or completed a consultation document.
- 2.5 **Observations of the operational practice and performance with children and young people in care:** Over the year, IROs raised 405 escalations to social care managers to prompt them to address the specific issues of drift or delay raised. This is comparable to the number of escalations raised the previous year. Most issues raised were in relation to issues with the child's holistic needs or rights being addressed.
- 2.6 **Unplanned endings of children's long-term placements:** Over the year 26 long-term foster placements ended prematurely and resulted in emergency moves to children. Nearly a quarter of these children were aged 17 when the placement ended.
- 2.7 **Impact of the IRO service:** There is evidence that decisions made by IROs during Children in Care reviews and where necessary any subsequent escalations, have positively impacted children. More detailed examples of this impact are described in the report attached. The IRO's independent oversight on planning for children enables them to support the social work team to keep focus on the needs and views of children and young people throughout their care journey.

2.8 IRO Service Action Plan 2023-24:

Objective 1: Strengthen IROs focus on possible Care Plans for reunification or options for moving into the care of wider family as the child gets older.

Objective 2: Finalise the Pathway Planning Project with the new version of the Pathway Plan being implemented.

Objective 3: Review the policy and procedures for IROs involvement with Secure Accommodation Reviews.

Objective 4: Review the IRO Escalation Protocol to ensure that it is as efficient as possible in its aim of challenging drift or delay on behalf of children where necessary.

Objective 5: Evaluate IROs methods of quality assuring the suitability of placements and support for children with disabilities living in residential care settings.

3. Alignment with the Council's ambitions

3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced.

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs.

Implications for this Ambition relate to improved pathway planning for care leavers.

3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality.

Implications for this Ambition relate to improved pathway planning for care leavers.

3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised.

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive.

Implications for this Ambition relate to improved care planning and suitable placements for all young people in care to achieve their full potentials.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 None.

5. Source documents

5.1 None.

Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

IRO ANNUAL REPORT

April 2022 to March 2023

Olly Grant
Independent Reviewing Service Manager
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Executive Summary

The Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Cambridgeshire as required by statutory guidance. This report covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Key highlights of this report are:

- The number of children in care rose by 35 this year (from 597 at the end of March 2022 to 632 at the end of March 2023).
- A total of 1,687 Child in Care Reviews were held this year.
- Feedback from children and families positively reflects the IROs' use of their skills to amplify the voice of the child in Care Planning.
- The IRO Escalation Protocol continues to be fully embedded across the service. IROs' use of Case Alerts and the Dispute Resolution Process continues to evidence the impact of their oversight of children's Care Plans.

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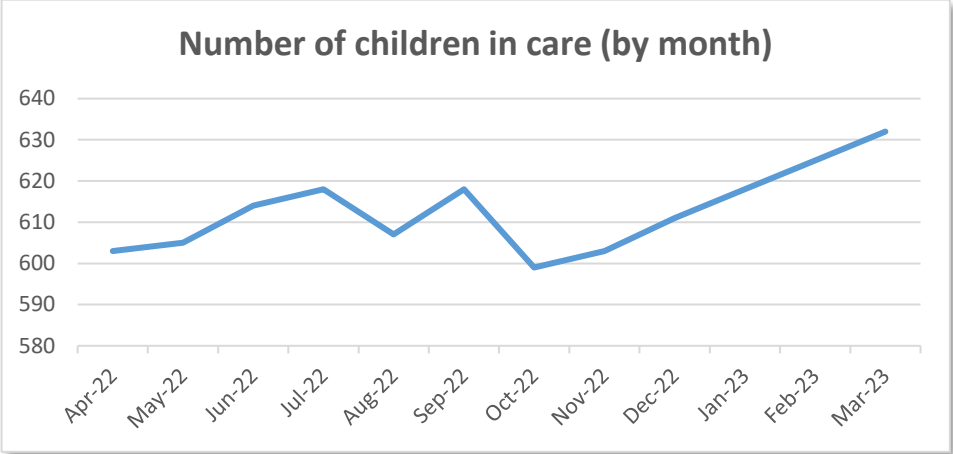
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1.0 Legal context of the IRO Service

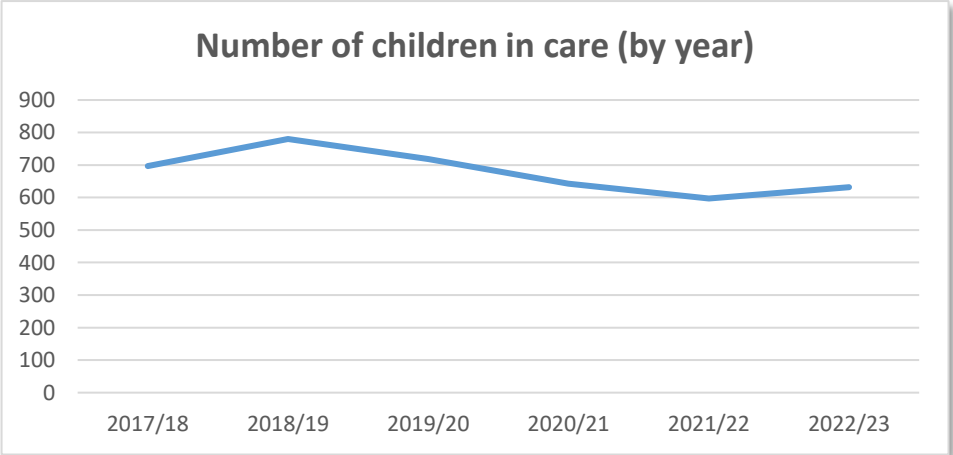
- 1.1 The appointment of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002). Amendments to statutory guidance in 2010 embedded the IRO role further within 'Care Planning Placement and Case Review' and 'The IRO Handbook'.
- 1.2 Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that every child who is looked after (in this report referred to as "in care") must have a Care Plan. The Care Plan must detail the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and the arrangements made to meet the child's day-to-day needs.
- 1.3 It is a core responsibility of the IRO to review the child's Care Plan and ensure that the local authority gives due consideration to any views expressed by the child within Care Planning. The IRO has a responsibility to monitor the local authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case.
- 1.4 The core mechanism for reviewing the child's Care Plan and ascertaining the child's wishes and feelings is the child's 'Child in Care' (CIC) Review, which are held at statutory intervals.
- 1.5 The IRO Handbook states: 'The manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting panel. This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed.' (IRO Handbook 2010, page 48, paragraph 7.11.)

2.0 Population of children in care

2.1 At the end of March 2023 there were 632 Cambridgeshire children in care. This number rose sharply in the last three months.



2.2 Over the past five years the overall population of children in care had steadily been reducing but now appears to be rising again.



2.3 There appears to be no clear theme or trend that accounts for the larger number of children entering care in recent months.

2.4 28% of new children in care have been asylum seeking young people over the past three months. This compares to 26% last year.

2.5 46% of new children in care over the past three months have been subject to care proceedings. This compares to 47% last year.

2.6 52% of Cambridgeshire’s children in care currently live outside of Cambridgeshire County borders. This is up from 44% one year ago.

3.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

3.1 In Cambridgeshire, the IRO Service sits within Safeguarding and Quality Assurance (SQA) and serves as a ‘critical friend’ to the organisation.

The wider functions of SQA include:

- The Child Protection Service: chairing conferences and quality assuring Child Protection Plans.
- The LADO Service: managing allegations against staff and volunteers working with children.
- Children’s Complaints and Feedback Team: addressing customer feedback including complaints, from across the People and Communities Directorate.
- Quality Assurance: carrying out audits and delivering workshops to support practice improvement as outlined in the QA framework.
- The Participation Service: engaging with children and ensuring their voices influence service development.
- Principal Social Worker: championing best social work practice.

Staff Team

3.2 The staffing establishment for the team is 9.0 IROs (full-time equivalent). Since December 2018 there has also been additional agency IRO cover in place to help to manage the volume of work for the team.

3.3 The stability of the staff team is good. Most IROs have been in post for over five years. There was an unusual turnover however at the beginning of 2023, when coincidentally one IRO retired, and two others decided to return to operational social work practice. Soon after, four new IROs were appointed, each of whom has brought complementary skills and new energy to the team.

- 3.4 The IRO service continues to have consistent and stable management and has done since 2017.

Staff Development and Support

- 3.5 Each IRO has 1:1 supervision once every 6 weeks with their line manager to reflect on performance, practice, development, and support, as well as access to informal supervision when needed.
- 3.6 Monthly IRO Team Meetings have continued to be held over the past year and have now completely returned to being fully in-person.
- 3.7 New IROs are given a thorough three-week induction before starting to case-hold, and each is allocated a designated 'peer mentor' from this time to provide additional personalised support while they are settling in.
- 3.8 In terms of training opportunities, staff have attended webinars and talks delivered by Making Research Count and NIROMP. Internally there have also been opportunities for embedding learning, such as bespoke refresher training in Motivational Interviewing and staff Away Days.

Workload demand

- 3.9 The IRO Handbook recommends a caseload for each full-time equivalent IRO of between 50 and 70 children. This volume of cases should allow the IRO to fulfil all their statutory functions to the best of their ability. In Cambridgeshire an average caseload of 66 per full-time IRO has been maintained through the year.
- 3.10 Effective business support staff use established systems to support the IROs. This does not include the typing of review reports, which the IROs complete themselves. IROs ensure that they distribute the decisions from CIC Review meetings to the responsible Team Manager within five working days of the review in accordance with the statutory guidance.
- 3.11 In Cambridgeshire the IRO service has responsibility for convening and chairing statutory Secure Accommodation Reviews (SAR) for all children living in a secure setting. Each SAR is chaired by a member of the IRO team and another member of the IRO team acts as one of the members of the decision-making Panel at the SAR. The child's allocated IRO also attends the SAR as an observer. In 2022/23 three Cambridgeshire young people were placed in secure accommodation.

3.12 The IRO service has responsibility for convening and chairing Placement Breakdown Meetings (PBM) when long-term matched foster placements come to an end. Over the past 12 months there have been 26 such placement breakdowns, which presents a significant commitment for IROs because, as well as chairing the PBM, the task involves in-depth preparation and the writing of a comprehensive report after the meeting.

4.0 Performance of the IRO Service

4.1 A total of 1,687 CIC Reviews were held in the year 2022-23.

4.2 In 2022-23 over 99% of CIC Reviews were held within statutory timescale, which is not significantly different from last year.

4.3 Most reviews are held face-to-face. The reviews take place wherever the child or young person feels most comfortable to be able to engage in the meeting; often this is in their foster home or semi-independent accommodation.

5.0 Voice of the child in Care Planning

5.1 There is an expectation nationally that children's views are sought for their CIC Reviews. This year 66% of children (over the age of 4) participated in their Reviews in person. This is a slightly higher proportion than last year (56%). 26% of children have preferred to engage less directly and have either just met on their own separately with their IRO or have given their views via another means.

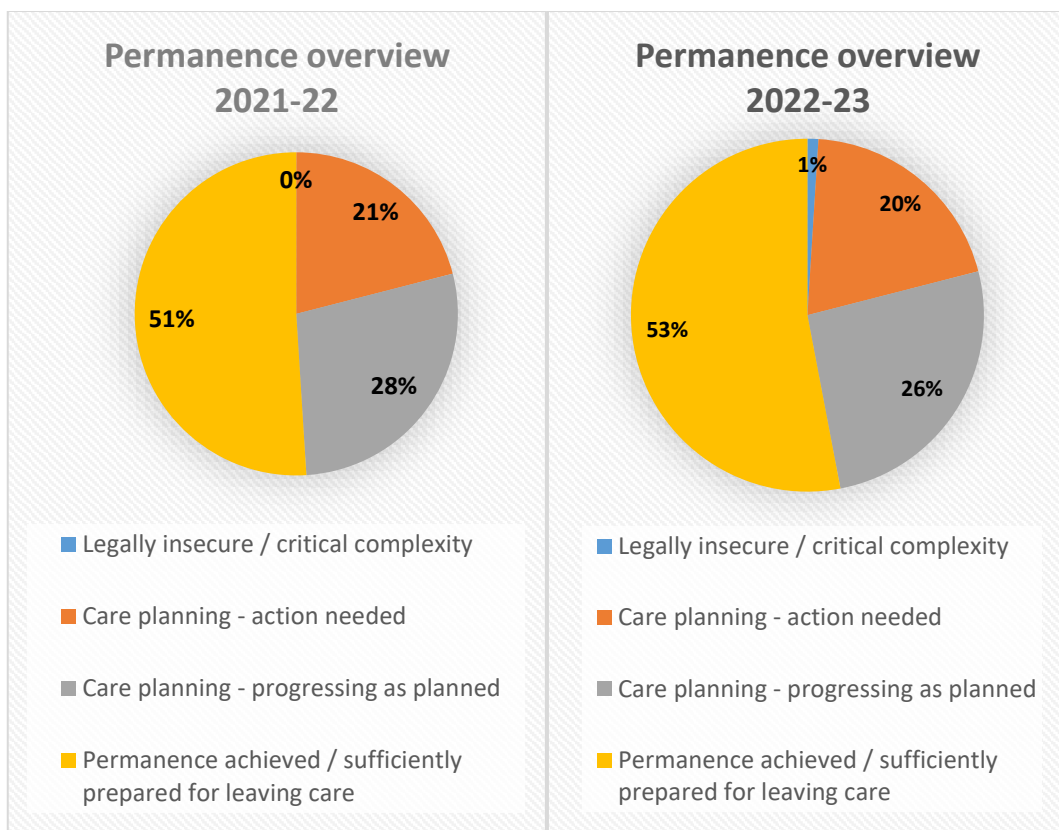
5.2 IROs routinely keep in touch with children and young people between Reviews, usually by visiting in person or otherwise via WhatsApp or phone if this is the young person's preference.

5.3 NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) provides advocates where they are requested by Cambridgeshire children in care. This year 14 children were accompanied by an advocate in their CIC Review, and 77 other children used advocates to support them with specific issues outside of their CIC Reviews.

6.0 Observations of the organisation's practice and performance with children in care

Permanence tracking

- 6.1 The IRO Service is instrumental in the monitoring and tracking of permanence for children in care. The IRO Service manages a Central Permanence Tracker (CPT) which is updated regularly from the outcomes of Reviews and escalations. The CPT is used to track any patterns and themes that indicate obstacles to permanence for children and areas where there have been improvements.
- 6.2 All children in care are colour coded on the CPT in relation to how effectively their Care Plans are progressing towards 'permanence' (i.e., where the child can achieve relative physical and psychological stability; a sense of 'being settled'). For 16-17-year-olds the CPT tracks the progress of their preparation for independence.
- 6.3 Over half of Cambridgeshire's children in care have an appropriate legal status and a well-matched stable placement that they can remain in until independence (coded green). This does not include adoption, as adopted children are no longer in care and therefore are not part of the children in care cohort.
- 6.4 The graphs below show that there has been a small degree of overall improvement over the last year in supporting children and young people to achieve permanence in a timely way, which is positive.



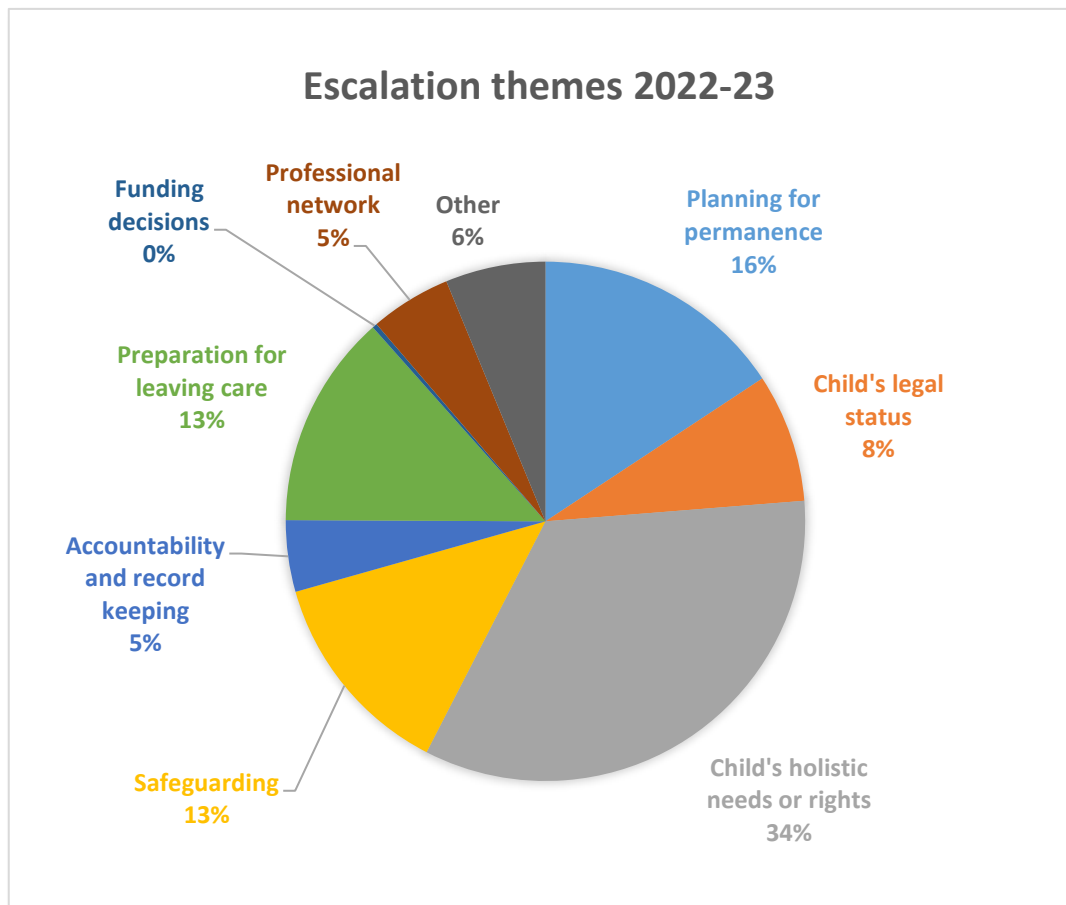
6.5 These graphs also illustrate that there are still a significant proportion of children and young people who need specific action in order to progress towards permanence. These children are at risk of drift and instability within the care system and are therefore the subjects of close attention and often escalations from IROs.

IRO Escalations

6.6 A core function of the IRO role is to seek resolutions to delays or problems that arise within Care Planning. It is a statutory responsibility of the IRO Service to have a formal process in place to raise concerns and to ensure that this process is respected and prioritised by managers. In Cambridgeshire this is referred to as the Escalation Protocol.

6.7 Over the 12 months between April 2022 and March 2023, IROs raised 405 escalations to social care managers to prompt them to address the specific issues of drift or delay highlighted. This number can reflect more than one alert raised on an individual case. This is comparable to the number of escalations raised the previous year (404).

6.8 The types of issues raised by IROs fell loosely into nine categories:



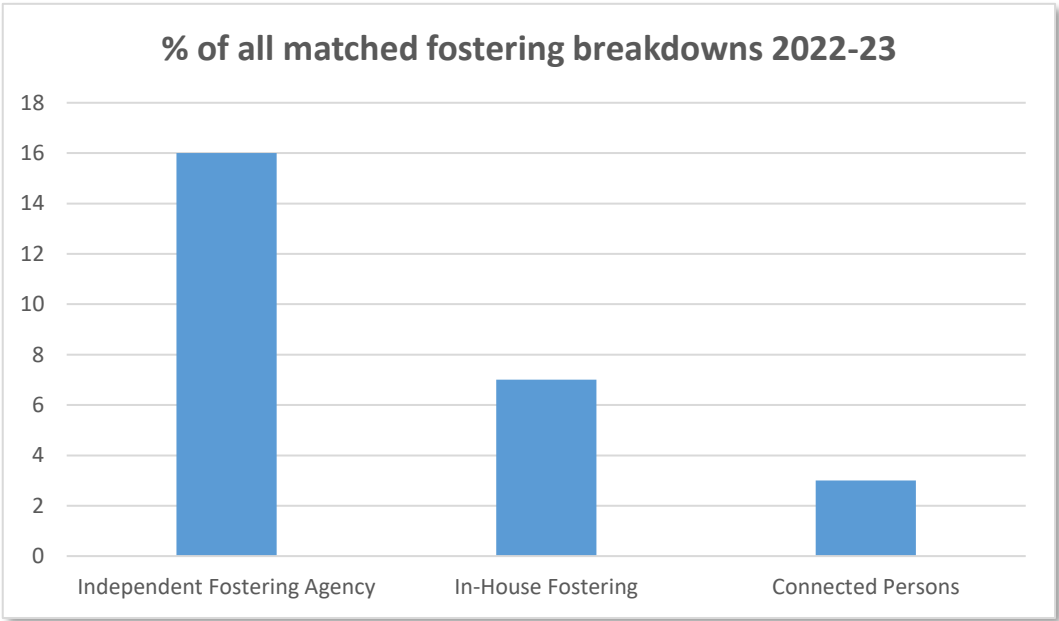
6.9 The above graph illustrates that most issues (114 over the year) were concerned with the child's holistic needs or rights. The alerts within this category included insufficient education arrangements, delays in addressing therapeutic needs and inadequate arrangements for the child to keep in touch with their family.

6.10 16% of issues raised related to concerns for the child's achievement of permanence within their timescale. Examples included delays in sibling assessments being completed and delays in formal matching assessments being completed to determine suitability of long term carers for individual children.

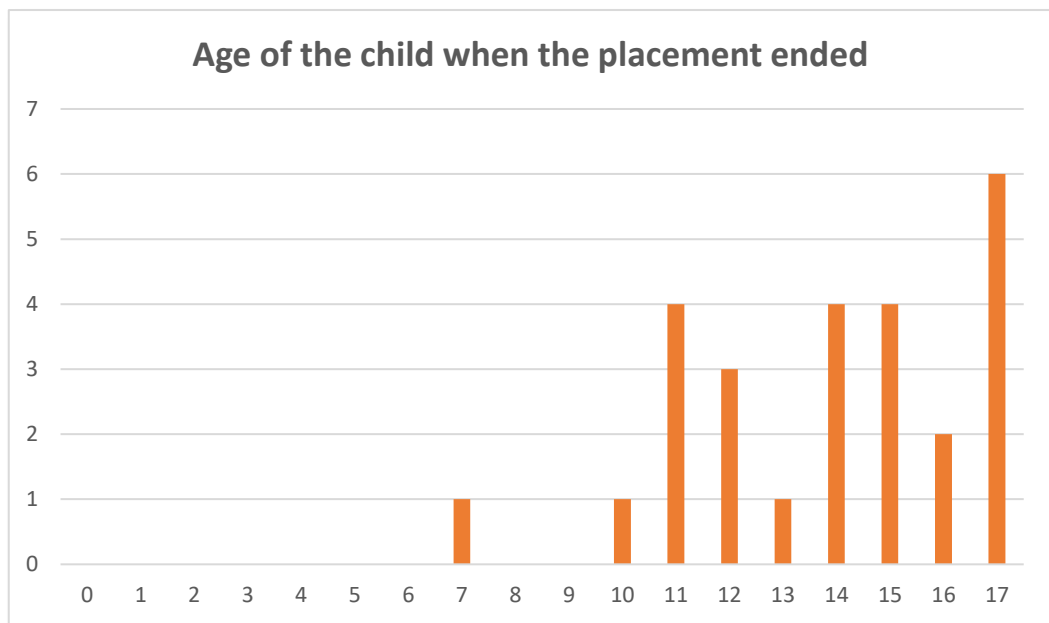
Unplanned endings for children in long-term foster care

6.11 The IRO Service takes responsibility for chairing 'Placement Breakdown Meetings' where there has been an unplanned ending of a matched foster placement.

- 6.12 A final report is produced by the chair for each PBM which includes recommendations and learning points. These are circulated to all attendees and to the service managers for Fostering and Corporate Parenting.
- 6.13 Both quantitative and qualitative data is collected by the IRO Service relating to sudden endings of foster placements that have been matched long term through PBMs.
- 6.14 Between April 2022 and March 2023 there were 26 long-term foster placements that ended prematurely. This is comparable to the number over the previous year (25).
- 6.15 Of those whose long-term foster placements ended, 58% were boys and 42% were girls.
- 6.16 The graph below illustrates that most matched fostering placements that broke down were provided by independent foster agencies.



- 6.17 Most children were teenagers when the fostering placement came to an end, and 23% were aged 17.



6.18 Themes of causal factors for placement endings included:

- Carers externalising their limitations in coping with the child; insisting that specialist assessments or interventions are needed for the child, and then serving notice where there are subsequent delays in these being commissioned or arranged.
- Lack of life story work / honest conversations with children about difficult aspects of their pasts, which are often delayed due to a child appearing 'unsettled' or 'not ready'.
- Some children who come into care later into adolescence find the routines and rules of foster care harder to assimilate.
- Insufficient information about the child being shared with proposed long-term foster carers prior to the match being agreed.
- Chronologies for children not being kept up to date on children's files, which means that decisions about their lives are not always informed by an analysis of their full life experiences.
- Lack of continuity of social workers; poorly managed 'good-byes' resulting in children believing they are not worthy of sticking with. Where there is inconsistency, a recommendation is to hold regular 'child's journey' meetings, to ensure that all those involved are aware of the child's history and how this may impact on the child's current and future presentation.

7.0 Impact of the IRO Service

Impact for children

- 7.1 Regular Reviews by IROs ensure that Care Plans are progressing for children and that there is always a meaningful purpose for the child to remain in care. IROs maintain a consistent overview of case activity through ongoing monitoring. This includes scheduled monitoring points between Reviews and the use of specific monitoring forms, which provide the social work team with a child-focussed short audit of progress against agreed actions set in CIC Reviews.
- 7.2 The escalations raised by IROs elicit management attention where there are issues causing drift or delay. Over the last year 74% of IRO alerts were resolved as soon as they were received by the relevant social work team managers. This is a significantly higher proportion than last year (63%), which suggests that team managers have had more capacity/capability to attend to the issue within the timeframes needed by the child and set out by the IRO. This avoided the need for further escalation to senior managers.
- 7.3 However, where the issue raised could not be resolved within the given timeframe by the team manager this year there was more likelihood of the IRO then having to escalate to senior managers. Of the 405 escalations raised over the year, 17 had to be formally escalated by the IRO applying the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP). This is significantly more than last year (7).
- 7.4 Significant issues raised within DRPs included:
- S had been made the subject of a placement order at the age of 10 after experiencing chronic intra-familial sexual abuse at home. S was desperate to be adopted and wrote to the judge to share her wish. She moved to prospective adopters soon after the placement order had been made, but her Care Plan subsequently became fraught with difficulties and delays. The local authority and S's prospective adopters found it hard to agree arrangements for commissioning therapeutic support for S.
 - The IRO observed the progress start and then falter several times and ultimately applied the dispute resolution process in order to focus the attention of all parties on resolving the obstacles to the adoption.
 - S was finally adopted in December 2022, aged 14. She was delighted.

- B is a 16-year-old boy who came to the UK in December 2022 fleeing persecution in Syria. He arrived alone and frightened after a journey by bus and lorry. He was aware that his uncle lived in Cambridge and so was upset to be placed with a foster family in Luton. Despite B's repeated requests to be allowed to be with his uncle there were delays in this being considered.
 - Using the dispute resolution process, the IRO brought the issue to the attention of the Assistant Director as there was concern that B's right to family life was being impacted by the delays.
 - This prompted an assessment of B's uncle to be undertaken by the social work team. This determined that there was no risk to B having contact with his uncle and in May 2023, to his joy, B moved in with his uncle.

- K was accommodated into local authority care in January 2022, when she was 12. There had been difficulties at home with her parents and it was unclear as to whether they would be able to manage and care for her consistently if she returned to their care. K was in limbo for months.
 - In light of ongoing delays in a permanence plan being determined for K, the IRO raised a DRP.
 - The local authority soon completed their assessment of parenting capacity of K's mum and dad, which concluded that she would sadly be at risk of significant harm if she were to return home.
 - A care order was made by the court in December 2022, and a plan was agreed for K to remain in care until she reaches 18.

Impact for the organisation

7.5 The IRO Service has composed and circulated the Positive Practice and Escalation Report on a quarterly basis. The report summarises current themes of escalations and raises awareness of ongoing areas of practice concern. The report also includes observations of positive practice that have been appreciated by the IRO Service and Child Protection Chairs on behalf of children each month, thereby offering the wider organisation regular balanced feedback.

- 7.6 To support practice improvement in Pathway Planning, a small working group reviewed the design of the Pathway Plan alongside members of the Care Leavers Forum. While there have been some obstacles to overcome in terms of the implementation due to systems protocols, it is hoped that the new Pathway Plan will go live by the end of summer 2023.
- 7.7 The IRO Service Manager has led on a series of training sessions for personal advisers, social workers and other staff which focussed on preparing young people for leaving care.

8.0 Feedback for the IRO Service

- 8.1 After each Review, the IRO business support team invite feedback about how the review was conducted, and whether they felt listened to by the IRO. Responses are received mostly from foster carers but also from schools, parents and occasionally from young people. The feedback is overwhelmingly positive overall, and attendees often comment that they feel a sound Care Plan has been agreed at the review.
- 8.2 Children and young people appreciate the consistency often experienced in the relationship that they have with their IRO. Most children get to know their IROs over a number of years; over half the IRO team have been in post for over five years, and one IRO has been with the team for 20 years. For example, one young man who had had to move suddenly from his long-term foster home to a new foster family he had never met before gave his IRO a big hug on seeing her. He had never shown her affection before but had known her for five years, and it was clear he felt relief in the familiarity. Others sometimes text their IROs out of the blue, which demonstrates their confidence that their IRO always has them in mind.

9.0 Review of the IRO Service Action Plan 2022/23

Objective	Outcome
Continue to review the existing mechanisms for a constructive feedback loop between the IRO Service and social care.	Regular liaison meetings between Corporate Parenting Service Managers and the IRO Service Manager have been diarised which promote communication between the different areas of the organisation.
Continue to progress the Pathway Planning Project, with IROs supporting the development of improved versions of Pathway Plan templates, for social workers and personal advisers to use as a basic tool when planning with young people preparing to leave care.	Six workshops have been delivered to staff across children in care and leaving care to support practice improvement. Work is ongoing to progress the implementation of the revised version of the Pathway Plan.
Review the format of consultation forms for children so that they can be completed quickly and easily via an online form as well as through paper consultation forms.	After consultation with the children in care council, it was agreed that the existing forms are sufficiently effective.
Review the existing format of the social worker's pre-review report which is shared with the IRO prior to the child's CIC Review, to make sure that this is sufficiently informed by the child's views and experiences.	A new version of the pre-review report has been built within the IT system and is now in its testing phase.
Integrate the local authority's 'Promise' to children in care into the usual agenda for CIC Reviews, so that children and young people can give their feedback directly in relation to whether they feel the commitments that the local authority has made to them are being delivered in reality.	All IROs now carry copies of the 'Promise' with them and use them as a tool routinely to help children to evaluate their own experiences of being in care.

IROs to strengthen their oversight of children missing from education or care.	IROs complete a Monitoring Form (similar to an audit) after each Review, which prompts them to consider whether the safeguarding protocol has been followed whenever a child has been missing from care. Any areas of delay are then challenged.
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10.0 IRO Service Action Plan 2023/24

10.1 Objective 1

Strengthen IROs focus on possible Care Plans for reunification or options for moving into the care of wider family as the child gets older.

10.2 Objective 2

Finalise the Pathway Planning Project with the new version of the Pathway Plan being implemented.

10.3 Objective 3

Review the policy and procedures for IROs involvement with Secure Accommodation Reviews.

10.4 Objective 4

Review IRO Escalation Protocol to ensure that it is as efficient as possible in its aim of challenging drift or delay on behalf of children where necessary.

10.5 Objective 5

Evaluate IROs methods of quality assuring the suitability of placements and support for children with disabilities living in residential care settings.

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Workshop and Training Plan

Each committee at the County Council has its own training plan to help its members learn more about the business that the Committee covers. Each training session is listed, and a record is kept of which members of the committee attend.

Subject	Desired learning outcome	Priority	Date	Responsibility	Format	Audience	Attendance	% of Sub-Committee members attending
Member Induction Programme: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee	To brief new and returning Members and Substitute Members on the responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee	High	Monday 12 July 2021	Nicola Curley/ Myra O'Farrell	Teams meeting	Members and Substitute Members of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee	Cllrs Ambrose Smith Bird Bradnam Bulat Goodliffe M King Slatter van de Ven	60%
Member Induction Programme: Safeguarding	To brief on Members on safeguarding issues.	High	08 October 2021	Charlotte Black/ Lou Williams	Teams meeting	All Members	Cllrs Bulat Goodliffe Bird Bradnam Coutts Cox Condron Nethsingha van de Ven	40%

Subject	Desired learning outcome	Priority	Date	Responsibility	Format	Audience	Attendance	% of Sub-Committee members attending
Corporate Parenting and Foster Care	To brief Members on their role as corporate parents, with a particular focus on the work of foster carers.	High	22 October 2021	Fiona van den Hout	Teams	All Members	Bulat Goodliffe Hay Slatter Nethsingha van de Ven	40%
Supporting the mental and emotional health needs of children in care/on the edge of care	The aim of this session is to introduce CYP Members and the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee to the clinical framework and how it supports our foster carers and contributes to the emotional wellbeing of children and young people.		7 April 2022 1.30 – 2.30pm	Alison Bennett	Teams meeting	All CYP and CPSC members	Cllrs Atkins, Bradnam, Goodliffe, M King, Hay, Hoy and Slatter	80%

Subject	Desired learning outcome	Priority	Date	Responsibility	Format	Audience	Attendance	% of Sub-Committee members attending
Journeys for children in care including types of placement, placement matching and seeking permanent placements			04 May 2022 12.30 – 2pm	Ricky Cooper	Teams meeting	All Members	TBC	
The Role of the Foster Carer	To brief Members of the role of foster carers.	Medium	21 October 2022	Ricky Cooper	Teams meeting	All Members	Cllrs A Bradnam, A Bulat, Cox Condron, Daunton, B Goodliffe, S King, S Taylor, Whelan, Wilson	40%
Contextual Safeguarding	To brief members on the contextual safeguarding approach		13 January 2022	Ricky Cooper Anna Jack	Teams	All Members	TBC	

Subject	Desired learning outcome	Priority	Date	Responsibility	Format	Audience	Attendance	% of Sub-Committee members attending
Member Induction Programme: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee	To brief new and returning Members and Substitute Members on the responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee	High	TBC July/Aug 2023 (from 2024 annually in June)	HOS CP / Service Director	Virtual	All CPSC Members invited		
Safeguarding & the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)	To brief Members on safeguarding issues and responsibilities	High	TBC Sept 2023	Service Director QAPI/ Janet Farr	Virtual	All CPSC Members invited		
Contextual Safeguarding	To brief member on contextual safeguarding approach	High	TBC Nov 2023	Service Director/HOS Youth Services	Virtual	All CPSC Members invited		
Meeting the Needs of Children in Care	To include briefings from Education,	High	TBC Feb 2024	Service Director/HOS CP	Virtual	All CPSC Members invited		

Subject	Desired learning outcome	Priority	Date	Responsibility	Format	Audience	Attendance	% of Sub-Committee members attending
	SEND, Clinical Team							

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Agenda Plan

Notes

The definition of a key decision is set out in the Council's Constitution in Part 2, Article 12.

* indicates items expected to be recommended for determination by full Council.

+ indicates items expected to be confidential, which would exclude the press and public.

The following are standing agenda items which are considered at every Committee meeting:

- Minutes of previous meeting and Action Log
- Workshop and Training Plan
- Agenda Plan

Summary

The Agenda Plan shows the dates and times of future meetings and what reports are expected to be considered. Unless otherwise stated, all public meetings will be held in the Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon PE28 4YE.

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Public Meeting

Meeting Theme: Homes

Date: 12.07.23	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	1. Notification of the Chair and Vice Chair 2023/24	Richenda Greenhill	-	29.06.23	03.07.23
	2. Agenda Plan	Brian Relph			
	3. Workshop/Training Plan	Myra O'Farrell/ Michaela Berry	-		
	4. Participation Report	Shalina Chandoo	-		

Date: 12.07.23	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	5. Performance Scorecard	Brian Relph/Michaela Berry			
	6. Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association report	Tracey Stephenson Anita Hewson	-		
	7. Fostering Service Annual Report 2022/23	Sue King			
	8. Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report 2022/23	Olly Grant			

Informal Meeting (Not open to the public)

Meeting Theme: Education

Date: 06.09.23	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	1.				n/a
	2.				

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Public Meeting

Meeting Theme: Education

Date: 15.11.23	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	1. Agenda Plan	Service Director		02.11.23	06.11.22
	2. Workshop/Training Plan	CP HOS			
	3. Participation Report	Participation			

Date: 15.11.23	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	4. Performance Scorecard	CP HOS/Service Director			
	5. Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association report	Tracey Stephenson Fostering HOS			
	6. Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022/23	Myra O'Farrell/ Michaela Berry/CCC CP HOS			
	7. Virtual Schools Annual Report	Claire Hiorns			

Informal Meeting (Not open to the public)

Meeting Theme: Health

Date: 17.01.24	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	1.				n/a
	2.				

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Public Meeting

Meeting Theme: Health

Date: 20.03.24	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	1. Agenda Plan	Service Director		07.03.24	11.03.24
	2. Workshop/Training Plan	Service Director/CP HOS			
	3. Participation Report	Participation			

Date: 20.03.24	Agenda item	Lead officer	Reference if key decision	Deadline for draft reports	Agenda despatch date
	4. Performance Scorecard	Service Director/CP HOS			
	5. Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association report	Tracey Stephenson Fostering HOS			
	6. Annual Health Report	Katie Liddle, Lead Nurse			