

FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2016 - 2017

1. Introduction

This Annual report should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Statement of Purpose 2016-2017 and the Annual Report of the Fostering Panel Chair 2016-17.

The Statement of Purpose sets out the legislative and regulatory context under which Cambridgeshire County Council carries out the functions of the fostering service.

This report provides details of activity over the financial year April 2016 to March 2017 and plans for the forthcoming year.

2. Highlights

- On 31 March 2017 there were 191 children and young people looked after in mainstream fostering beds compared to 151 on the 31 March 2016. This represents an increase of 26%.
- Recruitment of new fostering households continues to be positive. April 2016 to March 2017 saw 27 mainstream households approved at fostering panel (10 of which were transfers from IFAs) compared with 21 households last year. This represents an increase of 29%. The approvals created 49 beds compared with 40 beds last year
- There were 4 kinship regulation 27 approvals during 2016-17
- A high number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) fostering households have transferred into the Service, 10 households compared to 12 households in 2015/16. In 2015-2016 this provided 19 vacancies and in 2016-2017 this created 16 vacancies as well as bringing 9 Cambridgeshire children already in placement.
- As at 31 March 2017 there are a further 18 stage 2 assessments in progress and a further 15 enquirers have been invited to apply. This work will carry over into 2017/18.
- There has been continued demand for Kinship assessments with 141 new referrals between April 2016 and March 2017 compared to 99 in the previous year. This is an increase of 42%. There were 49 Special Guardianship Orders granted during this reporting period compared with 38 the previous year, an increase of 29%.
- During this year there were 26 new regulation 24 kinship fostering approvals made. Regulation 24 allows for temporary approval as foster carers of people connected to the child for 16 weeks pending a full fostering assessment.
- The high volume of applications for both mainstream fostering and kinship (connected persons) assessments has placed additional strain on the service. We started the year with 3 social work vacancies in the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team, however all posts have now been filled.

3. Foster Panel

The Panel is chaired by an Independent Chair and meets fortnightly. The panel met on 25 occasions during 2016-2017. The Panel Chair's report acknowledges another year of steady progress in the quality of work presented by the fostering service (see attached report). Panel members joined the fostering service for a training event on Child Sexual Exploitation and radicalisation and have been given access to e-learning in order to complete Safeguarding refresher courses.

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

The Policy and Practice Standards Manager who undertook the role of Agency Advisor to the panel was absent through sickness from October 2016. The Panel Advisor role has been undertaken by various managers and senior social workers in the service but sadly they have not had the capacity to quality assure panel papers prior to panel. This has resulted in the panel deferring two recommendations as important information had not been covered in the panel reports. The post holder has now left the council and the post will be advertised.

Summary of Panel Recommendations (April 2015 to March 2017)

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Number of panels	22	23	27	25
New Approvals	11	32	29	28
Resignations/Deregistration	26	14	15	22
Matches (numbers of children)	16	27	37	28
Change of approval	19	22	4	6
Reviews	35	46	40	39
Progression	13	16	16	14
Staying Put Approval	5	2	4	7
Best interest	0	0	25	13
Total number of actual cases presented	89	127	155	182

5. Marketing and Communication

In 2016/17 we received around 300 new fostering enquiries. There was a total of 28 new fostering households approved and 18 households in stage 1 and 2 of the process have been carried over into the new financial year.

The recruitment team developed a new approach to responding to new enquiries, with social workers covering the enquiry phone line on a rota basis. The opportunity for them to speak directly to potential carers and immediately book visits if appropriate has resulted in an increase in the number of initial visits being completed. A more consistent approach to following up enquiries has also been implemented.

2017/18 has seen a wide range of marketing and communications activities take place:

- In May 2016 our second annual New Carers Event took place. This was well attended and very positive feedback was received from carers and professionals. The follow-up press release achieved good coverage in local press and on social media.
- A campaign took place in May 2016 to tie in with national Foster Care Fortnight. Due to increased investment in marketing, radio advertising campaigns took place along with bus advertising and social media activities.
- Over the summer our Summer Roadshow continued to grow with staff attending an increased number of events across the county with our promotional stand. We particularly focused on events near the Peterborough border (Yaxley and Whittlesey).
- In widening our target area to include Peterborough we have also negotiated an advertising package for Peterborough's most-read newspaper and organised a promotional day and bill board advertising at Queensgate Shopping Centre.
- The annual Long Service Awards event took place in September at The Oliver Cromwell Hotel in March, with carers receiving awards from the Chairman of CCC in recognition of periods of long service from 5 to 25 years.
- The 2016/17 Christmas and New Year campaign included radio advertising, bus advertising and PR activities.
- In February we marked LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week with a range of PR activities which included an interview on Gaydio.
- An interview also took place on Huntingdon Community Radio to promote the Link Service and encourage potential Link carers to come forward. We have experimented with using case studies and anonymised profiles for children

looking for Link carers and placed ads with these messages in local press and on social media.

- 6 drop-in Information Sessions were held across the county
- The Marketing and Communications Manager continues to also provide support to teams across the service, working in areas such as Private Fostering. She has also managed projects to implement new initiatives, including the production of ID cards for foster carers.

6. Marketing objectives 2017/18

The Marketing and Communications objectives for 2017/18 include:

- Further development of Information Sessions to maximise their effectiveness and increase attendance levels
- Continue to increase the presence of the Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering Service brand in the Peterborough area
- Work in communities where we currently have a shortage of representation among our foster carers
- Encourage all colleagues from Children Families and Adults Directorate (CFA) teams and beyond to get involved in foster carer recruitment

7. Cambridgeshire Approved Households (as at 31 March 2017)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Total Number Approved Households	101	112	125
Total Number of Beds	197	219	252
Short breaks households	30	27	13
Short break beds	61	62	55
Kinship Foster Carers	23	34	
Kinship beds	30	56	

- 107 fostering households are approved children aged 5 years plus.
- 38 approved households fostering households offering 70 beds live in the Cambridge Area are approved
- 59 households offer 126 placements are based in the Fenland area 28 households offering 52 placements are based in the Huntingdon area.

Fostering households are often approved for one or two/three if siblings usually due to bedroom space available and in Cambridgeshire we only allow siblings (if appropriate) to share bedrooms. Where the carers are not used to their full approval, this is usually due to a single child having been placed thus restricting the use of the shared bed. On 31 March 2017 a total of 6 beds were vacant and a further 5 were available for respite and short term emergencies only.

8. Mainstream Fostering Occupancy rates

On 31st March 2017 there were 191 children placed with in house foster carers this is a increase in occupancy compared to 151 in mainstream fostering beds in use on 31 March 2016.

In addition further 31 children were placed with regulation 27 kinship foster carers and a further 13 in regulation 24 kinship placements

On 31 March 2017:

57 children were in long term/permanent beds this is an increase 14 over the last financial year.

There were 134 children were in short term/emergency foster care compare with 108 the previous year.

9. Fostering Reviews

The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2001. The reviews are written by the supervising fostering social worker and either presented to panel and endorsed by the agency decision maker or submitted to the agency decision maker for consideration. All the completed reviews are scrutinised by the team manager who monitors compliance with the regulations before final sign off.

There is currently a review of the forms and format of reviews which will involve consultation with foster carers, fostering social workers and foster panel. Current format includes formal Personal Development Plans and feedback from children, their social workers and other professionals working with the fostering household. The Service is giving consideration to using the new format which has been developed by BAAF and this is currently being trailed with a small number of fostering households.

100 reviews were carried out in this reporting period, 38 reviews of foster households were presented to the Foster Panel and 5 changes of approval terms were presented and 15 requests for progression were heard by panel. All first reviews

were presented to Foster Panel within a year of the carer's approval as required by the regulations.

A particular recurring theme for fostering social workers is the challenge of obtaining feedback on carers from children's social workers. It is a requirement in the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 that this feedback is provided for a foster carer's annual review, fostering social workers continue to find it difficult to get responses to requests from feedback from children's social worker units for the foster carer reviews.

The Fostering Panel also felt that the Personal & Professional Development Plan (PPDP) appears to be underused and not necessarily fulfilling its purpose as well as it could be and would benefit from a renewed focus. It would be beneficial for annual reviews to reflect on the previous years' PPDP and to identify gaps in order to prioritise this learning for the following year. The service is planning to utilise the role of the fostering trainer to support a more focussed approach to foster carer PPDP's.

10. Outcome of OFSTED inspection of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2012. The outcome of this inspection was judged as GOOD all recommendations have been acted upon.

This year the fostering service was inspected as part of the wider social care inspection and contributed to the overall judgement as "Good".

11. Short Breaks Care

NUMBER OF CARERS AND SKILLS LEVELS

April of YEAR	Basic	Extra	Plus	Retained	TOTAL households
2013	10	8	10	6(140 placements)	34
2014	11	8	9	6 (40 placements)	34
2015				5 (40 placements)	27
2016	11	8	8	6	27
2017	1	2	6	4 (22 placements)	15

There are 15 carer households approved specifically for short break care and currently provides placements to 55 children with disabilities. There are 4 retained foster carers providing short breaks to 22 children and young people. 2 foster carers can offer short break care in addition to short or long term foster care.

Referrals for short breaks were received in 2016-17, This compares with previous years as below.

2010-11 - 20 referrals

2011-12 – 18 referrals

2012-13 – 19 referrals

2013-14 – 18 referrals

2014-15 – 18 Referrals

2015-16 17 Referrals

2016-17 30 Referrals

Short break summary

This has been a challenging year for the Link Unit, following the Fostering Service restructure last year the unit was carrying 1.5 social work vacancies and a half time senior child and family worker vacancy. This left a 25 hour Child Social Workers (CSW) and 32 hour Senior Social Worker covering the Service. Unfortunately the CSW went on long term sick leave. The Senior Social Worker step in to cover, we informed Carers, Service Users and the Disability Service that we were prioritising carer supervisions and reviews; in order to meet Regulations and National Minimum Standards and ensure that current placements were safe and meeting children's needs.

The matching process for children and short break carers is carried out at monthly meetings and the Link Team Manager now attends the Disabled Children's Managers meetings. Short break carers also offer day care placements to support families who have a child with a disability and care has also been provided by carers in the child's own home. The overall aim is to improve the range of support and flexibility of the service. This Service received 30 referrals this financial year and despite the challenges were able to match and introduce 13 children and young people with Link carers.

In addition to short break care there are a number of established 'shared care' arrangements for children with a disability. This is where the child spends two or more nights per week with a foster carer and the remaining time at home with parents. These arrangements allow the child to remain part of their birth family and avoid the need for full time care. I am pleased to report that by March 2017 the Unit had recruited and inducted four new staff members and the CSW is returning from sick leave in April 2017. The Unit is now fully staffed

13 Fostering Support Groups

The Service has continued to see a decline in the number of carers attending Fostering Support Groups despite the Services response to carers requests for additional support groups to be organised in across all three main geographical area. Interestingly however there has been an increase in numbers of carers attending a support group run in the Ely area by one of the foster carers. The service is providing

funding for the venue and the carers seem to enjoy the more informal nature of the group.

The purpose of the service led support group is to provide support for each other, maintain contact with the service and wider children's social care through the attendance of visiting speakers, such as Virtual School, Lac health, IRO's and Children's participation to name a few. Further work is required with foster carers to see how they would like future groups to be run.

2015/16 saw the launch of a Men who Foster support group, there have been a number of additional meetings this year and although attendance has remained small the group continues to evolve and we have seen some new participants attending the group. Recruiting social workers will continue to actively engage new male carers with the group.

Foster carers are represented at recruitment events and information sessions and give a talk to prospective foster carers at the skills to foster training. Two fostering households gave a talk at a specialist recruitment event set up by the Cambridge refugee resettlement group. The carers have developed particular skills in careering for a number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people over a number of years. The event was very well attended and feedback was very positive with people commenting on how inspiring they had found the carers to be and how they brought the joys and complexities of caring for this vulnerable group of young people to life.

The fostering service continues to provide an effective out of hour's advice and support service for foster carers. Carers have access to an out hours duty fostering social worker 7 days per week, Fostering Service Manager and Team Managers also provide additional 24/7 cover on a rota basis.

14. Kinship/Connected Person assessments

The Kinship assessment team has worked with 189 families within the year 2016/2017. This represents an increase in Kinship Team involvements of 81.73% This year has also seen an increase of 42.42% in the number of Special Guardianship assessments referred to the service (up from 99 in 2015/2016 to 141 this financial year) and recent months have seen a real increase in activity which has lead significantly increased pressure upon the assessment team.

Referrals

Number Referrals	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Number referrals	65	99	141
Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) Made	34	38	49

Child Arrangement Orders (CAO's)made	-	-	7
New fully regulated carers			9

Reported outcomes

The cases that have had active involvement between the April 2016- April 2017 have the following reported outcomes:

Positive Recommendation	Negative Recommendation	Withdrawn from the assessment
2015/16 -29	2015/6 -10	2015/16 -32
2016/17 -66	2016/17 -27	2016/17 42
2015/16 Total= 104 2016/17 Total 141		

Special Guardianship Orders made in the year 2016-2017:

49 children became subject to Special Guardianship Orders between the 1st of April 2016 and the 31st of March 2017. An increase of 53.12% from last year when 32 children were made subject of SGO's.

Use of additional workers

Despite being fully staffed for the majority of the year the increase in referrals and work being undertaken by the Kinship Assessment Team has meant that some work has been undertaken outside normal staffing arrangements the table below show how this work has been allocated.,

Method of assessment:	2015/16	2016/17
Independent Social Workers	13	12
Relief staff	6	2

Agency Workers	5	6
----------------	---	---

Increase in Regulation 24 requests

A brief analysis appears to evidence that six Regulation 24 placements were agreed in the year 2014- 2015. Within the year 2015-2016 it rose to 22 households an increase of 266.6% and in 2016/17 26 reg 24 placements were made.

Step Parent Adoption applications

A function of the Kinship assessment team is to undertake Step Parent Adoption assessments.

The step parent adoption service now has a dedicated worker to undertake assessments and develop the service. This will see a more timely response to court requests for reports and better service to clients.

Statistical Information

<u>Title</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Enquiries made to Cambridgeshire County Council	46
Assessments completed	20
Orders made	15
Assessments awaiting allocation	16

Kinship team Aims:

The Kinship assessment team's aims for 2016-2017 were as follows:

<u>Aim</u>	<u>Result</u>
Undertake case Audits	Case Audits have been completed and lessons shared with the team in team meetings
Seek feedback from service users to ensure they feel equipped to meet the needs of the children they are caring for	Feedback is requested on a quarterly basis and service user feedback is saved in the kinship folder
Develop a Kinship carers handbook	The first draft of this is completed
The introduction of Placement Planning meetings	This has been successfully introduced and is now consistent

Seeking the views of Independent Reviewing Officers for Reg25 extensions	This occurs the majority of the time, however there is room for improvement
New Reg24 carers being visited within the first week of placement	This remains inconsistent due to late referral's and client and worker availability.
Ensuring that Regulation 24 carers have 6 weekly supervision	This is both tracked and ensured.

Aims for this year are as follows:

Aim
Attain feedback from the unit as well as clients
Introduce Special Guardianship Audits
Introduce new Special Guardianship Support Plan
All Regulation 24 cases are visited within 7 days post decision being made
More contact planning meetings
Reports to be reduced to fifteen to eighteen thousand words

15. Private Fostering 2016/17

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to monitor the work with private fostering cases. Private Fostering arrangements are made between those with parental responsibility and another individual to take care of their child for a period of longer than 28 days. This arrangement should be reported to the Local Authority for assessment and monitoring. The Local Authority has had a dedicated senior social worker for the task working part time alongside a dedicated newly qualified social worker. This function now sits in the Kinship Support and Private Fostering Unit which is a new Unit within the Fostering Service, the Unit was established in October 2015 following a wider Fostering Service consultation. There is a Private Fostering Annual report due to be presented to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in July 2017.

PRIVATE FOSTERING ACTIVITY IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

This year saw a significant decrease in the number of Private Fostering notifications with number dropping by 54.20% from 107 notifications to 55, this significant drop appears to be as a result of a number of Language School shortening the duration of their courses to under 27 days which means that the host families no longer need to be

assessed under Private Fostering regulation. This raises safeguarding concerns as host families will no longer require assessment yet the children still remain vulnerable as they are not in their home land and often speak very little English.

16. Complaints and Allegations

There were 6 allegations concerning foster carers during this reporting, this is the same figure as last year. All allegations were discussed with the LADO, 5 were followed up as by the fostering service and children's social workers as single agency enquiries. In 2 of the cases the police did speak with the alleged perpetrators but no action was taken.

In 2 cases the allegations related to the carers work and not their fostering setting and 1 case there was no formal allegation but the police discussed the historical issue with the carer. None of the allegations were substantiated

There were 3 formal complaints this financial year, 1 was related to a kinship reference with the referee being concerned that issues she had raised were referred to in a court report. However in investigating the complaint we were satisfied that referee could not be identified by the information contained in the report, they had not been promised confidentiality and as a professional working with children the information was needed for the court.

The other complaints were not specifically about the service but were part of wider complaints about children's social care

17. Training

In the financial year April 2016 to March 2017 there were 71 scheduled training courses, of these 61 ran, 7 were cancelled and 3 were postponed. There were 629 overall attendees.

Skills to Foster Course This is a preparation course which is undertaken prior to approval by all fostering applicants and runs across 6 days

- In May 2017 training dates ran with 3 households, 2 for fostering and 1 for Supported Lodgings. A 1 day experienced carers course for IFA carers transferring to CCC ran with 4 households at the same time, all were at Alconbury Memorial Hall.
- July ran with 5 households, a large number of participants were invited but did not commit to attending the course
- In August the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team and Fostering Support Team ran a Children Who Foster Skills to Foster session with 7 children from 4 households to look at how fostering would affect them.
- September Skills to Foster ran with 9 households and was run by the FRAT team, I assisted in preparation and planning, however, did not deliver the course.

- We booked November Skills to Foster, however, it was moved to January 2017 due to changes in staffing of the FRAT team and new members starting it was felt it was better to move it to a later date. A one day course for experienced carers transferring still ran in November with 4 households. The January course had 5 households.
- March Skills ran with 4 households booked on, although more households were invited many couldn't attend the dates invited to.
- A total of 34 households who attended Skills across the year.

A number of courses came back into fostering from Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption after some negative feedback on how the courses were presented; these are now run by the Fostering Trainer. 9 new courses were also added across the training year, including PREVENT awareness training and some others were delivered by the specialist clinicians team.

Feedback for fostering run courses and clinician run courses continues to be positive. On some clinical courses carers have asked for case studies so this will be added into the courses going forward. In the phase one consultation of the Children's Change Programme it was considered that the clinical input into the fostering training programme was withdrawn. Feedback about the benefits of specialist clinicians delivering some of the courses to foster carers was provided to through the consultation and we were pleased with the decision to maintain clinical input to the fostering service until Oct 2017.

We have used ME learning as our e-learning provider the last year, 23 modules were allocated in the first 6 months of the year where we directly purchased the modules from ME learning on a one by one basis, after 6 months we bought an access licence from them for 15 modules and use is below, with 199 being accessed:

- Autism awareness – 20
- Bullying and cyberbullying – 23
- Cultural awareness in safeguarding – 9
- Domestic abuse – 16
- Effective communication with children – 11
- Emotional abuse – 23
- Equality and diversity – 8
- E-safety – 18
- Human need – 10
- Neglect 14
- Physical abuse – 11
- Safeguarding – 6
- Understanding behaviour – 16
- Child Sexual Exploitation – 14

Currently the costings for ME learning are high, £4000 for a continued provision for the next year, though compared to buying individual units over the same period this is a cost saving. Management decision is needed on how to proceed.

The training brochure is going out in April this year, a flyer has been circulated with April and May courses already. The brochure was delayed due to several factors, one being the decision on clinical input; we were also advised that Training Manager, the booking system, was no longer continuing after March 2017. This has now been extended until July 2017 and will run on a month by month basis until a suitable replacement has been found. A further delay was that due to restructuring in Workforce Development and them becoming part of LGSS the person that delivered the disability training left the service so the future of a large proportion of the courses co-run for CSS and Link and carers of children with a disability were not planned. For the second year we have produced the brochure within the fostering team, rather than use a designer, at a significant cost saving.

From links the Fostering Group Manager made previously with the Cambridge Refugee Council we made contacts with Save the Children who delivered a two-day training course for us in July 2016 on caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. ECPAT UK and the Refugee Council also delivered a training course on asylum seeking and separated children for us in February 2017 where on both we had a mix of carers already carers for USAC and others who are interested in doing this in the future.

18. Budget

The service came in under budget as predicted

19. Summary

This has been a busy and year for the Fostering Service. There has been an increase in the number of children requiring foster care and a significant increase in the number of children needing long term placements. The team has continued to work hard to try to keep young people in local Cambridgeshire, in-house placements thereby enabling them to maintain links with their families and communities.

The overall level of the work across the Service has continued to increased significantly and has brought with it the challenge of meeting the individual demands of the various timescales across different parts of the service, in addition to the increase of work the service was also carried a number of vacancies throughout the year and has been inducting new staff.

In addition to recruiting and supporting foster carers, the service is responsible for undertaking connected person's assessments (kinship), providing a short break fostering service and carries out private fostering assessments and Step-parent adoptions. The service works closely with CFA Access to resources and provides a Duty Service each day to identify any urgent and emergency placement required

across Children's Social Care. In addition to the dedicated fostering trainer, social workers in the service also provide regular training for foster carers both pre-approval and post approval. In order to meet the needs of the foster carer training and undertake marketing activity workers across the service often work during the evenings and weekends. The service runs a successful Foster Carer mentoring scheme and monthly support groups in three geographical areas.

The successful recruitment has brought new challenges to the service; the majority of new recruits this year are new to fostering and have required high levels of support during their placements and throughout their first year of fostering. That being said 11 of the 28 new households transferred in from IFA's bringing Cambridgeshire children with them. This has resulted in significant saving from the placement budget spend.

Other challenges included the transfer of long term Family Finding from the Adoption Team and the development of a Family Finding Unit in October 2015, the Unit is staffed by a full time CSW and 1.5 Social Workers the unit are working with 109 open long term family finding cases.

The service has risen to the challenges of implementing the new model however the recruitment of 81 new fostering household over a three year period has impacted on the capacity of the Fostering Support Team and the Fostering Recruitment Team to meet the demand and recent feedback from carers indicated that they were feeling the impact in respect of their supervising social workers capacity to support them. This is being addressed through an action plan that has been developed following work with a Placement Consultant

The Kinship Assessment Team saw another dramatic increase in demand for Kinship Assessments. The unit ended the financial year fully staffed however the increasing numbers of kinship referrals mean that the team are always working to full capacity. The Team have worked hard to implement a new policies and procedures and to improve practice through development of forms and templates and more robust assessment formats that meet new standards and regulations related to Kinship work.

The Service has seen a number of Senior Management Changes, The Head of Lac left in August 2016 and there were a number of interim Heads of Service until the recent appointment of a substantial Head of County wide Services and Lac. There have been 2 new Agency Decision Makers and the Fostering Group Manager will be retiring in May 2017 the post has yet to be recruited to.

20. Developments for 2017/18

Following on from the CFA transformation consultations; the Service will be involved in a number of innovative programmes over the coming Year. The authority is

adopting a No Wrong Door approach to residential Service entitled The Place and this will also involve development of foster carers to link with The Place.

Target: 40 New Fostering and 10 Supportive Lodging Settings, we have recruited a Senior Social Worker on a fixed term basis to lead on the Supported Lodging Project.

Recruitment of new carers:

- Increase marketing, web presence and carer participation in recruitment activity.
- Bolster the fostering recruitment and assessment team to enable them respond quicker to enquiries
- Improved fee entry level to encourage new carers who are looking for a substitute income.

Target: 60 NEW CARERS RECRUITED BY APRIL 2019

Support for all of our carers when they need it most

- The creation of a 'wrap around service' to include further therapeutic input and an improved 'out of hours' provision. This project will be known as the Hub and is based on the "Mocking Bird Model.

The next financial year will bring new challenges and exciting developments as we develop the service further to ensure that we have the right resources in the right place.

The assessment team, fostering support team, family finding team and access to resources team will need to continue to work closely together to ensure that gaps in provision are identified and that we are recruiting the right carers for the right children at the right time.

The Kinship Team and they will be working closely with colleagues in the units to provide clearer understanding of kinship regulations and support their development in carrying out more robust viability assessments and taking into consideration the number of Kinship applications that are withdrawn following the Kinship Teams involvement we will need to explore more closely what could have been done differently in the earlier viability stage to ensure that applicants were more informed as to both the role they are considering taking on but also the implications for the long term.

We will need to continue to monitor referrals levels to ensure that we have sufficient resources to meet the level of demand for assessments and ensure that they are completed within timescales set by the court.

The Kinship Support and Private Fostering Unit is still relatively new and there is much to be developed, the Unit will be undertaking Adoption Allowance reviews having successfully reviewed 140 SGO/CAO during 2016/17. Other areas for development include;

- Kinship foster carer support groups
- Work with Fostering Service trainer to improve training offer to Kinship foster carers which takes into account their specific needs
- Close links with Kinship Assessment Team to ensure a seamless transition from assessment to support and to ensure that SGO support plans are robust.

In respect of private fostering we will be raising awareness of private fostering by:

- providing training on private fostering for professionals within the council including through corporate induction events as well as through the Local Safeguarding Children's Board training program
- providing clear information and guidance about private fostering on the council's website including links to other organisations that can provide help and support
- distributing newly developed information leaflets and production of information leaflets and posters in alternative languages for key groups, and ensuring they are available on the council's website and in the places parents, carers and children and young people are likely to go, including:
 - schools, nurseries and children's centres
 - council offices and libraries
 - GP surgeries and health centres and hospitals
 - including features on private fostering in the parish council magazine and district council booklets which have high distribution rates across the county, and also providing features to the local press
 - closer liaison with local faith groups, churches and places of worship, voluntary and community organisations
 - Encouraging partner agencies who are members of Local Safeguarding Children Board to raise awareness and provide training to their staff.

The Link service will continue to build on the development of a skilled and professional range of short breaks carers who are able to meet the needs of children

with complex needs. They will continue to work closely with colleagues in disabled children's services and health and will consult with children and their families as well as the carers to ensure that we provide safe and responsive short breaks to meet the needs of the children and young people referred.

Jill Blose

Fostering Group Manager