

**FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2017 – 2018
CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

1. Introduction

This report provides the detail of activity over the financial year April 2017 to March 2018 and service development plans for the forthcoming year.

2. Highlights

On 31 March 2018 there were 225 children and young people looked after in mainstream fostering households compared to 222 children on the 31st of March 2017. This represents an increase of just 3 children in the last year.

In the year 2017 to 2018, twenty four new households were approved to be carers. This included: nineteen mainstream fostering households, four Kinship fostering approvals and one new Link Care household. Included in these numbers were four transfers of agency carers to Cambridgeshire County Council which provided accommodation for ten children. Fourteen foster families resigned from the Council's fostering services in the year 2017 to 2018, leaving a net gain of ten households, four of which were Kinship households. As of 31st March 2018 there were a further twenty assessments in progress, which carried over into following year.

There was a total of sixty seven Special Guardianship Orders awarded, which is an increase of eighteen children from the previous year and an overall increase of 26% children being placed.

Carers approved under Regulation 24 (temporary approval) remained highly consistent with the previous year and twenty six households (forty two children) were made subject to this approval with four household's becoming fully approved.

At the end of the reporting year, there were fifteen active Link carers, seven of which were retained carers and eight were traditional Link Care. There were thirty two established placements and five children in introductions The Link service offered 1092 day and night accommodation, reflecting the capacity that services can offer.

Gill Blose, resigned from her post as Fostering Group Manager during this period and Fiona McKirdy, resigned from the post of Head of Service for Countywide and Looked after Children in mid-April 2018.

3. Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel is chaired by an Independent Chair and is scheduled to meet fortnightly. The panel met on thirty occasions during 2017-2018, which is the highest number of panels in the last five years.

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

The Policy and Practice Standards Manager whose role it is to provide independent advice to the panel as Agency Advisor, has remained a vacant post. More latterly the role has been shared by two managers from the Performance and Quality Assurance Service. The lack of a permanent Panel Advisor has impacted on the panel process and the quality of work being presented, as well as robust feedback which would influence and improve practice. This has now been resolved.

Summary of Panel Recommendations (April 2015 to March 2018)

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of panels	22	23	27	25	30
New Approvals	11	32	29	28	24
Resignations/Deregistration	26	14	15	22	14
Matches (numbers of children)	16	27	37	28	31
Change of approval outside Reviews.	19	22	4	6	4
Reviews	35	46	40	39	58
Progression	13	16	16	14	3
Best interest	0	0	25	13	-
Total number of actual cases presented	89	127	155	182	167

The Panel continued to take on additional duties including the matching of children and reviews, none of which are statutory requirements. A review of Fostering Panel arrangements is underway.

4. Marketing and Communication

In 2017 to 2018 the Fostering Recruitment Team received 365 enquiries from the public seeking information about becoming a foster carer. In the same period twenty four new households were approved. As of the 31st March 2018, twenty households were in stage 1 and 2 of the assessment process and these carried over to the next reporting year.

A wide range of marketing and communications activity has taken place throughout 2017 and 2018. This included the following;

Foster Care Fortnight

In May 2017 recruitment activity was run in conjunction with the national Foster Care Fortnight campaign. A range of awareness raising activities took place including the use of social media advertising, local press coverage and commissioned advertising.

New Carers Celebration Event

Also in May 2017, the Council's third annual New Foster Carers Event took place. All carers approved over 2016 to 2017 were invited to a welcome event held in May 2017. 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.

Volunteers Week

In June 2017 the Family Link Service was promoted as part of Volunteers Week with carers featuring in a video about their work. This information was shared through social media and received press coverage.

Summer Roadshow

Throughout July 2017 and March 2018 the Fostering Recruitment Team attended community events across Cambridgeshire utilising promotional stands. These events included the Rose Fair at Wisbech, Aqua Fest at Ely, Huntingdon Carnival and Whittlesey Carnival. The team also used a promotional stand at a recruitment event at Tesco's in Huntingdon.

Information Sessions

Due to a change in approach to responding to enquiries, Information Sessions became less frequent (with the Recruitment Team prioritising quicker responses to enquiries with initial visits). Four information sessions took place which were held in Ely, Cambridge and twice in Huntingdon.

September recruitment campaign

A new recruitment campaign was launched in September 2017. Specific magazine advertising was used to reach experienced parents. Editorial items and adverts were placed in the following local publications; Retirement Life, WI Cambridge and Simply Huntingdon. Articles were also placed on social media and in local newspapers.

Sons and Daughters Month

In October 2017 the service celebrated Sons and Daughters Month focusing on the role of foster carer's birth children within the fostering task. Anglia television reported on this activity interviewing a foster family from Ely. Certificates and thank you letters were sent to all birth children of foster carers.

Supported Lodgings Campaign

A new campaign was launched specifically targeting the recruitment of Supported Lodgings Carers. BBC Look East and Radio Cambridgeshire covered this campaign featuring interviews with both carers and young adults leaving care. The campaign was also publicised through social media and local press.

Long Service Awards

In October 2017 over a hundred foster carers, children and young people attended the foster carer's Long Service Awards Event with foster carers receiving awards in recognition of fostering for Cambridgeshire County Council for five to forty years. This event generated good local press coverage and social media content.

New Year recruitment campaign

The New Year fostering campaign in January 2018 included radio advertising along with press and social media coverage.

5. Cambridgeshire Approved Households (as of 31 March 2018)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Total Number Approved Households	101	112	125	133
Total Number of Beds	197	219	252	271
Short breaks households	30	27	13	16
Short break beds	61	62	55	26
Kinship Foster Carers	23	34	25	28
Kinship beds	30	56	38	38
Supported Lodgings	-	-	-	9
Supported Lodging Beds	-	-	-	9

The combined number of all types of approved fostering households including Short Breaks, Kinship Care and Supported Lodgings, was 186. The optimum number of potential placements that could be provided through this service was for 344 children and young people.

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

There are other reasons why it is not possible to utilise all foster carers to their full approval. This includes foster carers being temporarily 'on hold' for a period of time which can either be at their own request for personal or family circumstances or at the request of the service due to complaints or investigations into allegations. Often carers are not used to their full approval due to the needs of other looked after children already living in the household.

6. Mainstream fostering occupancy rates

As of the 31st March 2018 there were 187 children living with 'in house mainstream' foster carers, which included foster carers providing short-term and long-term care and accommodation. This number is identical to the number of children and young people living with foster carers on the 31st March 2017. The number of children and young people living with long term and permanently matched foster carers increased by five over the reporting period.

In addition a further thirty eight children were living in kinship foster care arrangements (an increase of three children when compared to the last reporting year) and 113 children were placed with emergency or short term foster carers (a decrease of five children). Seven young people were living with Supported Lodgings carers and thirty two children linked to Link Carers.

	Long term	Short term	Kinship care	Total
31/03/2017	69	118	35	222
31/03/2018	74	113	38	225

7. Complaints and Allegations

There were four allegations concerning foster carers during this reporting period. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) process was instigated in relation to all of these allegations, three were resolved with no further action being taken.

There was one complaint concerning a standards of care issue. The complaint was upheld and resolved through additional training.

8. Child's Voice

The Fostering Services actively seeks to support children and young people to share their views about their experience of being looked after by the Council.

Practitioners within the service use a range of tools to support children and young people to feedback their views including the use of Mind of My Own (MOMO) during visits, annual reviews and to inform their foster carer's professional development plan. Fostering Social Workers ensure children are seen regularly and spoken to as part of foster carer supervision and children and young people are encouraged to communicate their views in a range of verbal and visual ways.

7. Placement endings

The in-house fostering service provided accommodation to 388 children throughout the 2017 to 2018 reporting year. This is an increase of 6% when compared to 2016 to 2017 where 366 children were reported to be living with in house foster carers.

Throughout the reporting period, a number of children who became looked after did return home and other young people move into independent living arrangements. In addition there was significant movement of children from in house foster carers to agency foster carers and arrangements through positive care planning.

These included:

- Children moving into adoptive placements
- Children moving to a concurrent placement (placed with a foster carer who could adopt)
- Children returning to live with their parents
- Children moving into kinship (family) arrangements
- Children being made subject to a Special Guardianship Order
- Children moving to specialist mother and baby provision
- Young people staying with their foster carers under Staying Put arrangements
- Young people moving to semi-independent living
- Young people moving to independent living arrangements

There were also twenty nine children and young people who moved from in house foster care accommodation due to foster carers not being able to meet their needs. This cohort of children are currently being reviewed to ensure learning is captured to inform how the service could further support foster carers.

These included:

- Young people moving to residential care
- Children moving from in house carers to agency carers

The reasons for children moving to agency carers included:

- Carers resigning
- Children being accommodated with emergency carers moving to better matched carers
- Children with behavioural complexities moving to more specialist carers
- Children moving due to incompatibility with other children living with the foster carers
- Children moving to be nearer schools

- Children moving as per their safety plan
- Children where in house carers gave notice

Over the year, eleven children experienced unplanned placement endings.

These included:

- Young people aged seventeen and above exercising choice about returning to live with either family or friends
- Children moving either as a result of concerns about quality of care or as a result of allegation investigations.

8. Short Breaks Care

At the end of the reporting period there were fifteen active carers providing accommodation and care for thirty two children. Unlike mainstream foster care, the service provides children with a variety of care arrangements, therefore a more accurate way of identifying the capacity of this part of the service is by the overall number of nights and days provided under the Short Breaks Scheme. The service currently provides 1350 nights and days for children and young people with complex physical needs and challenging behaviours.

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

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

9. Kinship/Connected Person assessments

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

In 2017 to 2018 there were 173 referrals for Kinship assessments compared to the previous year where there had been 141 new referrals. This is an increase of 18%.

Of these:

- 127 referrals were made in respect of children in care and 46 referrals of children not in Care
- A total of 43 Special Guardianship Orders were awarded in relation to Looked after Children, which was 34% of the total referrals made
- A total of 24 Special Guardianship Orders were awarded in relation to children who were not looked after
- There was a total of 67 Special Guardianship Orders awarded which was a 26% increase from the previous year (18 children)

12. Step Parent Adoption

A function of the Kinship Assessment Team is to undertake Step Parent Adoption assessments. The Step Parent Adoption Service now has a dedicated Social Worker undertaking assessments and developing the service which has resulted in more timely responses.

	2016-2017	2017-2018
Enquiries made.	46	55
Assessments	20	26
Orders made	15	16

12. Private Fostering

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to monitor the safety and wellbeing of children and young people living in Private Fostering arrangements (PFa). Private Fostering arrangements are made between parents or carers with parental responsibility and another individual in order that they can take on care of their child for a period of longer than twenty eight days. This arrangement should be reported to the Local Authority for assessment and monitoring.

In this reporting period there was a total of eighty three notifications of private fostering arrangements, however the majority of these were from language schools relating to children and young people attending short courses running over twenty eight days.

Notifications	New PFa arrangement	Children at start of year in PFa	PFa arrangements that ended	Number of children in PFa at year end.
83	62	27	64	25

Overall in this reporting period, sixty two new Private Fostering arrangements were made. As of 31st March 2018 there were twenty five children being privately fostered in Cambridgeshire in the following arrangements:

Reason for Private Fostering arrangement in 2017-18	Number of children
Overseas child attending language schools	18
Overseas child attending mainstream schools	2
Child separated from parents	2
Child living with extended family members from abroad	2
Parent deceased	1
Total Children	25

13. Fostering Reviews

The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011. The reviews are written by the Supervising Fostering Social Worker and either presented to panel and endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker or submitted to the Agency Decision Maker for consideration. All the completed reviews are scrutinised by a Team Manager who monitors compliance with the regulations before final ratification.

The current format of fostering reviews includes Personal Development Plans, feedback from children and young people, their social workers and other professionals working with the fostering household. The Service is giving consideration to using a new format which has been developed by CORAAM BAAF but there are some difficulties integrating this into the ONE database which Cambridgeshire's Childrens Services currently use.

In this reporting period, fifty eight annual reviews were presented to Fostering Panel, which included twenty six first reviews and there was 98% attendance by the foster carers at Fostering Panel.

14. Fostering Support Groups

There were six support groups provided across the county, three of which were general support groups for foster carers held across the county in different geographical bases (including Wimblington (Fenland), Huntingdon (Hunts) and Cambridge (South Cambs). The Fostering Support Groups meet on a six weekly basis for peer support, information sharing and training. Speakers are invited to the groups to talk about specific topics, including resources available in the local community.

There is also a group run specifically for male foster carers which is under review due to variable attendance.

Another group is held specifically for level 6 carers who look after children and young people with complex needs and additional vulnerabilities. This group receives clinician support and is well attended.

The LINK service runs support groups once a term and is open to all carers.

In addition, an active Peer Mentoring Scheme is in place for all new County Council foster carers. Mentors are recruited from amongst more experienced foster carers and are carefully matched to optimise support opportunities.

Mentors are recruited, interviewed and trained and meet three times a year with the foster carers they are supporting. The Peer Mentors help new carers to understand the requirements of their role. New carers often need help when children are transitioning for example to adoptive placements and typically this arrangement is in place for six to nine months but can be available for longer.

The service is looking to recruit new Peer Mentors and as the service grows with more carers being approved via the proposed fostering recruitment campaign, there is likely to be an increased demand for mentors. It is an expectation that all foster carers wishing to increase their skill level will either participate in the Skills to Foster training courses or become a Peer Mentor in line with their Professional Development Plan.

At present there is no formal process for meeting with and consulting with a representative group of foster carers. In 2018, a Cambridgeshire Foster Carers Association (CFCA) will be established and it is envisioned that the CFCA will select representatives from each support group to join a committee of foster carers.

The CFCA will meet regularly with Senior Leaders from Cambridgeshire County Council to ensure the following:

- Robust channels of communication and feedback
- Partnership working with Corporate Parenting and Fostering Services
- Development and improvement in all aspects of fostering
- Promotion of good practice
- Establishing the identity and representation of foster carers as a professional group

15. Training

In 2017 to 2018, three hundred and sixty e-learning courses and sixty five 'lecture room' training courses were delivered to foster carers. The Skills to Foster course and the newly introduced supported lodgings training scheme were delivered to:

	Jun 2017	Sep 17	Jan 18	Feb 2018
Number of households	8	7	11	
Part attended as transfer in households.	1		2	
New training for Supported Lodgings.				4

The service will develop to meet the anticipated increase in demand from the additional investment in fostering marketing over the next three years which will lead to a significant increase in the number of Skills to Foster courses that run each year. Four courses are currently planned to run in 2018 to 2019.

16. Budget

There were no issues identified in regards to spend to budget.

17. Conclusion

The Fostering Service experienced a busy year across all its functions. In addition to the recruitment and support of foster carers, the service undertook Kinship Assessments, provided a Short Break fostering service, undertook Private Fostering Assessments and Step-parent Adoptions. The service worked closely with commissioning colleagues to provide urgent accommodation for looked after children across Children's Services and also provided out of hours support and advice to foster carers. In addition to the dedicated fostering trainer, social workers in the service also provided regular training for foster carers both pre and post approval, participated in marketing activity often during evenings and weekends and ran a successful Peer Mentoring Scheme and facilitated Foster Carer Support Groups.

It is noted however that although twenty four new fostering households were recruited during this reporting year, fourteen households also resigned. This provided a net gain of only ten households, four of which were kinship carers. In response to this, the service remains committed to further development and the continual improvement that is necessary to meet the increasing demands for in-house and in county accommodation for our looked after children.

The service will also ensure compliance with all of the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and to support this requirement an audit of the service against these standards and regulations will be undertaken in 2018 and early 2019. The service will also establish a Fostering Development and Delivery Board to support this task which will be administered by a range of stakeholders including Elected Members, Senior Leaders from Children Services, Commissioners, Foster Carers and Young People. In recognition that the retention of foster carers is also key to success, the service will facilitate the establishment of a Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association to raise the voice of foster carers within the organisation, ensuring foster carers are supported and adequately developed and to establish a forum for communication and feedback that will influence service delivery.

In addition to the above, significant investment has been made available to the Fostering Service to support growth through a focussed marketing campaign. A three year recruitment campaign is being developed which will include a multi-platform approach to reach out to potential carers with the support of campaign partners from local organisations and businesses all coming together under the Fostering Services new branding of 'Team Cambridgeshire'.

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