

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL



ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT APRIL 2017– MARCH 2018

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1.0 Introduction:

- 1.1 This report provides a description of the structure, aims and duties of The City of Wolverhampton Fostering Service and details the performance of the service over the last twelve months. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) requires that all Fostering Services provide written reports to their Executive or Trustees on a regular basis. In the case of Local Authorities, the 'executive' is the Elected Members of the City of Wolverhampton.
- 1.2 The Fostering Service is located within the People Directorate of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Fostering Service recruits, supports and develops Foster Carers to care for and support vulnerable children placed in their care. These placements include children placed with Friends and/or Family (Connected Persons Carers) by the Local Authority. The Fostering Service also assesses and monitors Private Fostering arrangements.
- 1.3 The activity of the service works in conjunction with the following legislation:
 - Children Act 1989
 - Children Act 2004
 - Children & Young Persons Act 2008
 - Care Standards Act 2000
 - Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
 - The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011
 - The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010 & Update 2013
- 1.4 The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted as part of a Single inspection of Children's Services in January 2017 and was rated 'Good'.
- 1.5 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to find sufficient appropriate Fostering provisions in its local area. The Fostering Service is committed to provide stability, care and security to looked after children and ensure that Foster Carers can meet the individual needs of children. As such the Recruitment Marketing Strategy outlines how we aim to provide placement choice. The importance of placing children within their family and friend's network, within their community and with their siblings remains paramount in securing stability for the child as well as ensuring their education is not disrupted and their well-being promoted.
- 1.6 The Fostering service seeks to provide a comprehensive and excellent quality foster care to all children looked after by the city of Wolverhampton. Foster carers provide looked after children a positive experience of family life within an environment that promotes their physical, emotional and health needs. Foster carers work in partnership with Health, Education and other allied professionals to ensure best outcomes for children and young people in foster placements. Working in partnership enables Foster Carers to provide a warm, safe and caring family environment ensuring that the children's emotional health and development is promoted and there is access to available opportunities to promote

children's attendance and their academic achievements thus maximising all opportunities for children to achieve their full potential.

- 1.7 In March 2017 iMPower were commissioned by City of Wolverhampton Council to support the development of the in-house Fostering Service. The goal being to enable greater in-house placement sufficiency, and better use of resources. The project concluded in May 2017 with a recommendation that the low levels of enquiry generation were the primary cause of the limited in-house Foster Carers growth. The Family Values project was developed and three workstreams were set up – **ENQUIRY GENERATION, ENQUIRY HANDLING and SUPPORT**. Each workstream meeting meets twice monthly, on occasions weekly and underpinned by a plan reviewed at each meeting to chart progress and achievements and to consider future objectives to focus on. A Steering group meets monthly to oversee the progress of the project and tracks completed and outstanding tasks for further focus.

2.0 Functions/Roles Within the Fostering Service:

2.1 Personalised Support Team

This team sits within the Commissioning arm of the People Directorate. It works in conjunction with the Fostering Service and is responsible for all placement searches for children and young people needing a Foster or Residential placement. The Placement Team hold the register of Internal Foster carers which details all placements and highlights any vacancies, the register is routinely updated by the Placement Team and the Fostering service. The register is available to the Emergency Duty Team who can make out of hours placements. All short-term placements are made via this team by the Social Worker completing a Placement Information Request via the electronic record on Care First. This should include the history of the child together with the presenting circumstances that have led to a placement being sought. In addition, the wishes and feelings of the child and their birth family should be included so that we can identify a suitable foster placement; for example, the right location to maintain access to school and contact with family members, and where possible matching the cultural and religious needs of the child.

2.2 Recruitment, Initial Assessments, Training, and Assessment of Foster Carers

The Service has responsibility for marketing, recruitment, training and assessing activities. Within the team is a dedicated marketing person from the Council's Marketing and Communication Services. The Recruitment Team host all the recruitment events and complete all Initial Assessments of prospective Foster Carers following enquiries made via City Direct, through the website and call centre and enquiries made at all the recruitment events which are planned throughout the year. If the Initial Assessment proves positive the Full Form 'F' Assessment is commissioned to Core Assets for completion.

2.3 Generic or Mainstream Fostering

The Fostering Service has a pool of generic Foster Carers to care for Wolverhampton's vulnerable children requiring a foster placement. The assessment is completed over an average timescale of six months inclusive of stage 1 and stage 2 which now run concurrently. Historically these processes followed each other however by running concurrently the time to approval has reduced by 2 months from 8 months, the assessment is then presented to the Fostering Panel who recommend their approval which is subsequently ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

2.4 Support and Development

The Service has responsibility for providing supervision, support and post approval training to all mainstream and Family and Friends Foster Carers. The assessments of existing Foster Carers who wish to secure permanent placements for the children in their care are undertaken within the Service. A new Linking and Matching Policy & Procedure has been written and is now utilised by all Children's Social Care staff.

2.5 Connected Persons Carers (Friends & Family)

The Service is responsible for the assessment, training, and support of Connected Persons Carers and Special Guardianship carers.

2.6 Private Fostering

This is regulated under the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The Service is responsible for raising awareness with the public, professionals, parents and children. The assessments, training, and support of Private Foster Carers is also the responsibility of the Fostering Service. There are 3 Private Fostering Champions within the service who regularly attend team meetings across Children's services, and within the voluntary sector and hold workshops to further increase awareness and understanding. The Fostering service supports Private Fostering Week in July each year and refreshes all material/leaflets whilst Private Fostering champions within the service deliver workshops and attend meetings to increase awareness and understanding.

2.7 Special Guardianship

The responsibility for the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Orders is that of the Fostering Service. This encourages a more joined up approach between teams with the completion of assessment being a joint activity between the Social Worker in Fostering and the Social Worker for the child. If the Care Plan for the child recommends Long Term Fostering with either mainstream or Family and Friends as a permanency option a Special Guardianship Order should be encouraged where this is deemed to be in the child's best interests, essentially removing the child from the care system, and transferring parental responsibility to the carer. A tracking tool has been devised and there is monthly oversight of progress to ensure permanency is achieved via SGO in a timely manner.

2.8 Post Approval Training of Foster Carers

Approximately eighty different courses are provided to Wolverhampton Foster Carers each year, these courses are provided by both internal and external providers and include on-line courses. The team has a full time Social Worker as a Training and Development Social Worker to assist in developing the learning opportunities for Foster Carers. The Social Worker is assisted by a Family Support Worker who facilitates some specific training events i.e. Buddy Training. During 2018/19 Thematic Training days have been developed offering a day's training with different workshops to attend and a Foster Carers Forum during the same day, this will maximise carers opportunities to attend multiple training combined with forums.

2.9 Independent Reviewing Officers

There is one Independent Reviewing Officer who undertakes all reviews of Foster Carers' households. The Independent Reviewing Officer is managed within the Safeguarding Service. The Independent Reviewing Officer completes a Foster Home Review annually which is shared with the Fostering Team and the Fostering Panel.

2.10 Social work staffing

The Fostering Service has a full complement of 16 full time qualified Social Work posts, and 1.5 equivalent unqualified posts. The Fostering Service is divided into three teams

- Recruitment and Assessment
- Support
- Family and Friends (connected persons)

Each team is managed by a Social Work Unit Manager.

2.11 Staff training

There is a Workforce Development Plan in place which includes a wide range of training and development opportunities for staff throughout the year. This includes staff briefings and Looked After Children staff conferences. All members of staff are subject to yearly individual annual appraisal and reviews. One member of staff in the Fostering Service is currently undertaking stage one of the Practice Educators award whilst two members of staff are completing level Two through Wolverhampton University. A further two members of staff will commence stage one in September 2018. All staff are currently attending bi-monthly Reflective Fostering sessions "Supporting Therapeutic Parenting" facilitated by a CAMHS Social Worker, this model will complement the training the same worker is also delivering to all Foster Carers likewise the innovative approach to the Supervision between carers and Supervising Social Workers currently being developed within the Fostering Service. Advanced Practitioners offer city-wide reflective sessions and workshops which can be accessed by Fostering staff.

3.0 Family Values Project

The Family values project has been in place since July 2017. It is a project developed following the report completed by iMPower with an aim to improve sufficiency and enable more looked after children to be cared for by in-house Foster Carers given that there has been an increased demand for Looked after children's placements and to maintain sufficiency, independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) have been used more frequently than would be wanted.

The Fostering Service is a provider to the council, with Foster Carers as professional staff delivering support to vulnerable children. It is by improving the quality of this role that the service can help deliver better outcomes for children and reduce the costs for City of Wolverhampton.

The Fostering service is also a customer-facing function, providing support and development to Foster Carers. It is by improving the customer-facing function, providing support and development to Foster Carer. It is by improving the customer-facing offer that

the council can improve its recruitment and retention, which enables growth and improved outcomes and cost for the council.

The Key growth opportunity areas for the service are –

- Increasing Enquiry Generation
- Improve Enquiry handling
- Develop the support and supervision offer to existing and new Foster Carers.

4.0 Enquiry Generation (Recruitment)

- 4.1 The Recruitment and Assessment Team continue to increase the capacity of the Foster Carer population and the quality of care offered. Through a comprehensive Marketing and Recruitment Strategy that works creatively with Foster Carers and the wider public in 2018/19, the service has enhanced the quality of enquiries with an increasing number of those coming from Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 4.2 There has been an increase in the number of approvals of internal Foster Carers, with twenty-two fostering households approved in 2017/18. During this period, we also deregistered 20 carers. However, whilst our net gain on paper is one carer, of the 20 carers that were deregistered none had been offering placements for a significant period and had sat on a dormant list or some have been de-registered due to allegations of harm to a child in their care. Therefore, whilst we have only increased our foster care numbers by one carer we have increased our placement capacity by 22.
There is a continued positive drive to further increase the number of approvals, enabling more Looked After Children to live with local foster families within the Wolverhampton area. It is anticipated that thirty fostering households will be approved in 2018/19 with a projected net gain of 26 carers.
- 4.3 We all know that Foster Carers can portray a realistic and positive view of fostering, we use several Foster Carers Champions who work with the Recruitment and Assessment Team to support the innovative marketing and recruitment campaigns. Alongside this, approved Foster Carers also support Information Sessions and the preparatory 'Skills to Foster' training for new applicants.
- 4.4 Telephone enquiries continue to be routed through Customer services and Fostering Recruitment Social Workers are available to respond immediately to callers who want more information and will arrange initial visits to further discuss. Training sessions are continuing to be offered by the Social Workers in the Recruitment and Assessment Team to the Customer Service Officers. The Fostering newsletter is shared with customer services staff to keep them updated with the latest news/campaigns to enhance their awareness & understanding, Customer Services and the Fostering Service continue to further develop their relationship to improve outcomes and timeliness for responding to initial enquiries regarding prospective carers. A Foster Carer regularly listens to recordings of calls to quality assess and suggests any changes to be made to scripts/information shared.
- 4.5 The Recruitment and Assessment Team includes a dedicated fostering marketing person and there is a Marketing and Communications plan in place for on-going recruitment campaigns.

- 4.6 Recruitment is sustained by three main periods of campaign activity throughout the year in Foster Care Fortnight in May and a recruitment week in September and January. These campaigns comprise a week or two weeks of information events at venues throughout the city using the recruitment bus and information stands. These are promoted through targeted digital advertising through Google AdWords and Facebook and other sites, social media posts and PR, a Chronicle wrap, radio advertising, email marketing and communication through partner organisations including the Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust, West Midlands Police, Wolverhampton Homes, University of Wolverhampton, West Midlands Fire Service and Bromford Housing. A new Fostering for Wolverhampton website was launched in January 2018 and has increased the number of web enquiries considerably.
- 4.7 Regular information events are held throughout the year which provide opportunities for prospective Foster Carers to meet the Recruitment Team to find out more about fostering. These are held on the first Friday of every month when we host a Fostering Friday roadshow in Queen Square and other high footfall locations. Also, bi-monthly information evenings are held at the Molineux. The team also attend other relevant events to promote Fostering Recruitment including the Living Well event and Wolverhampton PRIDE. These events are promoted heavily on social media, through PR and through the council's internal communication channels.
- 4.8 Targeted Facebook advertising is ongoing throughout the year and is refreshed with the new artwork developed for each campaign. The Fostering for Wolves Facebook page is also regularly updated with news, video case studies and events and shares national news and information from the Fostering Network.



- 4.9 This year's Foster Care Fortnight campaign was very busy the recruitment team met with and gave out information and talked to 49 people face to face about fostering for Wolverhampton. Over the campaign 17 web enquiries were received and 4 phone enquiries. So far 24 people have registered their interest, met the initial criteria and are in the process of being followed up by the recruitment team. As at 14/6/18, Twelve initial assessments have so far been booked.

Google AdWords campaign received over 300,000 impressions and 1,767 clicks.

Facebook campaign posts reached 30,194 people and Facebook ads reached 21,515

with 215 post engagements, 8,144 video views and 14 link clicks to the Fostering website.

During the fortnight there were 1,320 unique visitors to the website with the events and the payment & support pages being the most visited.

The launch of the regional Fostering Film 'There was a boy' was viewed by over 8,000 people and Free Radio covered the launch and interviewed one of our Foster Carers. The Chronicle wrap reached over 70,000 people locally and was seen by many of the people who attended the events.

- 4.10 We also attend the Regional Fostering Marketing Working Group attended by thirteen Local Authorities across the West and East Midlands and share examples of best practice and explore ways of working together across the region.
- 4.11 The national rate of conversion from initial enquiry to approval is 11% and based on Wolverhampton's statistics from 2017/18 this figure is 11.6%. Two years ago the conversion rate in Wolverhampton was 8.7% and last year it was 10.8% so we have seen a good improvement in our rates of conversion. We continue to focus on targeting our marketing and key messages to attract quality enquiries from people who meet the essential criteria.
- 4.12 Following Cabinet Approval in October 2015, revised 'Fees and Allowances' were introduced in January 2016. This was reviewed following further consultation and all carers were issued with a new Fostering Agreement. The revised Fostering fee recognises Foster Carer skills and experience and it is anticipated this will support the recruitment of new carers, together with assisting in retention. Fees and Allowances remain a key issue when the Local Authority is competing with Independent Fostering agencies and the Family Values Workstreams are currently reviewing Fees with a view to varying these to attract carers able to offer placements to sibling groups and to "more difficult to place teenagers"
- 4.13 During the year we have continued to experience a dropout of applicants between initial enquiry and initial visit. This is due to either the applicant deciding not to pursue fostering further, or the Fostering Service counselling out the applicant as they are unable to meet the basic requirements for further assessment. There are often general enquiries about fostering whereby the caller is simply gathering appropriate information to consider fostering rather than wishing to pursue an application at that time. Based on this evidence the Communications objective is:

Through targeted and sustained communication, generate 345 enquiries pro rata (86.25 per quarter) from residents to become Foster Carers to achieve the corporate target of 30 (7.5 per quarter) for 2018/19

- 4.14 It is critical that children in care are helped to develop strong, trusting relationships with their carers so applicants receive detailed information about fostering, clarity about the fostering task and the criteria for progression in the application process.
- 4.15 There are a range of reasons for ruling applicants out during the assessment process, for example:

- Accommodation issues, for example, lack of bedroom space, major home renovations.
- Issues on the DBS.
- Lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of fostering.
- Balancing work commitments and the fostering role.
- On-going or unresolved issues with personal situations/family backgrounds.
- Safeguarding concerns and/or previous involvement with Social Care in relation to the parenting of their children.
- Divorce/Bereavement.

4.16 In the last year we have undertaken 59 initial assessments, with 20 households progressing onto the Skills to Foster preparation training courses. During the Initial Assessment, a detailed discussion is held between the applicants and Social Workers from the Recruitment and Assessment Team, this covers:

- Applicant's motivation and parenting capacity.
- Appropriateness of accommodation and any health and safety issues.
- Any significant medical issues.
- Applicant's occupation and how this may impact on their availability to care for and meet the needs of a Foster child.
- DBS and any convictions.
- Composition of family members.
- Support network.

4.17 The dropout of applicants at this stage of the process is again due to either applicants recognising that they are unable to pursue fostering, this is not the right time for them to continue their application or the Social Workers counselling out applicants due to concerns with any of the above issues.

5.0 Skills to Foster (Preparation Training)

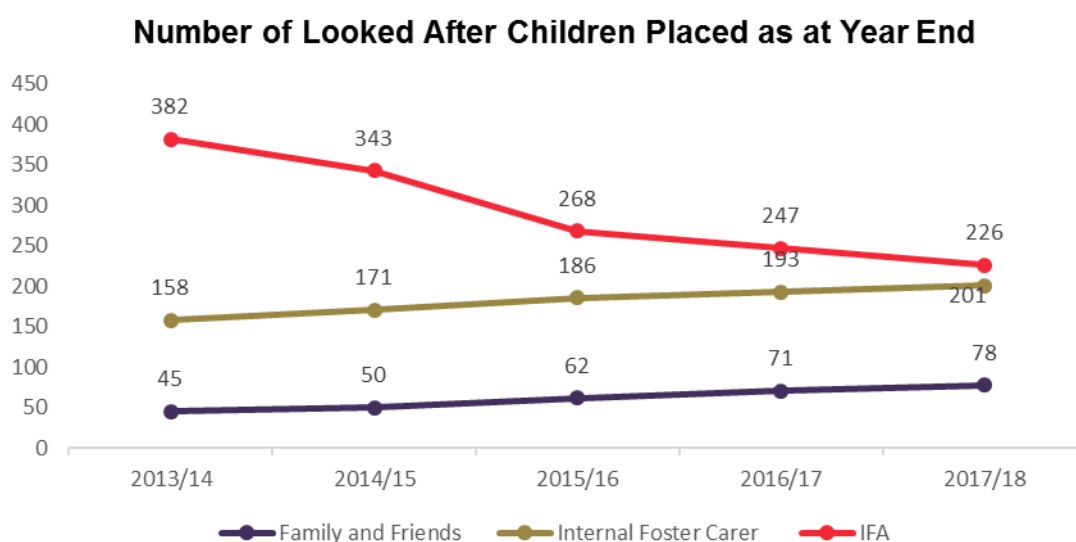
5.1 The preparation course follows the "Skills to Foster" programme, devised by the Fostering Network. Wolverhampton continues to be part of the Black Country Consortium, along with Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall. The Authorities work in partnership offering two places to any of the other local authorities on every course they run. Each of the local authorities delivers the course a varying number of times, with Wolverhampton running the course six times yearly. Wolverhampton runs the Skills to Foster course every other month offering applicants the maximum flexibility to attend at a time most convenient to themselves.

5.2 In total 20 households attended the preparation courses with 12 progressing onto the full assessments. One applicant was not approved at the Fostering Panel due to a perceived lack of experience in looking after children and a further 8 assessments were abandoned due to assorted reasons, including financial issues and debt management, safeguarding concerns, accommodation issues and a lack of honesty in the assessment process.

5.3 During 2017/18 the Sufficiency Strategy continued to review every aspect of the recruitment process to achieve ambitious targets to grow local capacity of available in-house Foster Carers. The need to increase the proportion of foster care placements with

internal Foster Carers remains. There have been significant improvements over the last four years as set out in the table below;

Type of Placement	Number of Looked After Children Placed				
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Family and Friends	45	50	62	71	78
Internal Foster Carer placements	158	171	186	193	201
IFA placements	382	343	268	247	226



This graph highlights the narrowing gap between Internal Foster Placements and Independent Fostering Agencies.

6.0 **Assessments:**

- 6.1 Assessments are part of the core work of the Recruitment and Assessment Team which enables the building of a comprehensive picture of the applicants. Evidence based, and analytical assessments are completed on all prospective Foster Carers to help understand their motivation and ability to care for children who have experienced loss, separation and trauma. Caring for such children requires Foster Carers with a degree of resilience and patience in understanding the needs and presenting behaviours of children who have experienced childhood trauma including neglect and abuse. In addition, to collating information the assessment explores the applicants own experience of childhood, their parenting skills, understanding of safeguarding children and ability to create a warm and nurturing home for children.

- 6.2 References are sought from a variety of relevant organisations, in addition to personal references supplied by the applicants.
- 6.3 The full fostering Form F Assessment is commissioned from an Independent Provider, currently this is Core Assets who are contracted until 2020. Quarterly meetings are held to review ongoing assessments and any concerns highlighted within the context of the contract.
- 6.4 Mainstream Foster Carers care for children and young people initially on a short term basis until their permanency plan is secured. This plan may include children returning to parents, or being placed long term with Friends, Family or Mainstream Foster Carers.
- 6.5 Foster Carers are approved under a generic approval category for children and young people between the ages of birth and eighteen years. If there is a smoker within the Fostering household, they will be approved for 5 to 18 years. This approval enables Foster Carers to care for children on a temporary and permanent basis. In addition, consideration, can be given to respite care and emergency placements. To bring all Foster Carers in line with the approval category all Mainstream Foster Carers have received a revised Fostering Agreement.
- 6.6 As of 31st March 2018, there were 152 approved mainstream fostering households, which offered a total of 201 placements. There were seven Foster Carers on Adoption Leave who have offered adoptive placements or Special Guardianship to a further eight children. In addition, there are seven fostering households currently dormant due to ill health, it is unlikely that they will all resume fostering. There are two further households who have chosen to be dormant due to family issues.

Family and Friends Foster Care is an area of growth and as of the 31st March 2018 there were 51 approved households offering 78 placements.

7.0 Permanency through Long Term Fostering:

- 7.1 The City of Wolverhampton Fostering Service seeks to achieve permanency for children and young people with a Care Plan of Long Term Fostering. Children needing permanent placements who are placed with Foster Carers who cannot offer Long Term care are referred to the Personalised Support Team. Placement Meetings will be convened to include the Child's Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker. Internal Foster Carers availability will be explored to offer permanency. Where there is no availability external provision would be sought. Those children who are placed with Foster Carers who wish to proceed to securing permanency in their care will have their Care Plan discussed at the Placement Meeting and subsequent Looked After Children's Review within the first year of placement. The Looked After Review paperwork where the linking & matching is ratified will be presented to the Fostering Panel. Permanent carers make a commitment to care for a child or young person until they reach the age of independence. These carers often go on to provide 'Staying Put' arrangements for young people to remain in the household post eighteen years.
- 7.2 This year the Fostering Service has secured 17 Long-Term placements for children via the Linking and Matching process. 12 of the Long-Term Placements were for sibling groups

of two or more children. Most of the Long-Term placements were secured for children with their current Foster Carers which were provided by both internal (6) and external resources (11).

- 7.3 The Child's Social Worker together with the Fostering Supervising Social Worker are responsible for progressing permanency for the child within the first year of placement where their plan is that of permanency outside the family. A new policy & procedure to reflect the Linking and Matching process was agreed in April 2018.

8.0 Family and Friends Foster Carers: (Connected Carers)

- 8.1 Local Authorities have a responsibility to consider members of the child's family, or friends (Connected Persons Carers) during Care Proceedings and when a child is facing the possibility of becoming looked after.
- 8.2 The Family and Friends Team work together with Locality Teams advising and completing joint Viability Assessments of prospective Family and Friends Foster Carers. The location of some relative Foster Carers can place an added pressure on the Service due to the time involved in travel. We currently have 20 out of city placements.
- 8.3 Family and Friends Foster Carers put themselves forward to care for children who are connected to them by association or relationship. They are assessed by the Service as to their suitability to provide appropriate care in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2011. From April 2017 – March 2018 there were 18 Family and Friends Carers approved which provided a total of 78 placements for Looked After Children.
- 8.4 During the period of 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 there were 28 positive Form C Assessment approvals. These assessments were completed within internal resources. A further 82 Form C Assessments were commenced or completed. Some were of negative outcome and others did not progress to Panel for assorted reasons i.e. change in Care Plan or applicant's withdrawal during the assessment process. There were 23 ongoing Form C assessments on 31st March 2018 which were all being undertaken by the Social Workers within the Friends and Family Team.
- 8.5 The Family and Friends Team have undertaken 101 Viability Assessments of which 25 were Schedule 4 (temporary approval) Assessments from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018.

Family Group Conferences/Family Meetings are required as part of the process for Family and Friends Foster Carers, to reduce the number of referrals for multiple Viability Assessments for the same child. This should, subsequently reduce the number of assessments which do not progress onto a full assessment during Care Proceedings. It will also allow for assessments to be allocated at the earliest opportunity to avoid delay in allocation, completion and restrictions in Panel availability.

- 8.6 Schedule 4 Assessments whereby Family and Friends Foster Carers are granted temporary approval require allocation of a Social Worker to supervise and assess the placement suitability within a sixteen-week timescale. An extension of eight weeks continues to be applied where required and a clear process is now being followed via Panel

and Head of Service to reduce the number of unregulated placements. These are likely to occur due to a delay in checks and references, rather than assessment completion.

- 8.7 In previous years, Family and Friends Foster Carers have been reluctant to attend training and maintain records given the nature of their relationships as the majority are grandparents. However, over the last year there has been a continued increase in numbers of Friends and Family Carers accessing training courses and completing their Training, Support and Development Standards.

Skills to Foster continues to be attended as part of the assessment process for connected carers. There were four courses delivered in 2017/18. These were attended by 64 prospective Foster Carers. This is a total of 51 prospective Foster Carers. To ensure there is frequent availability of the Skills to Foster Training there are plans for the course to continue to be held four times a year with the training being evenly distributed at quarterly periods.

9.0 Short Breaks (Shared Care) Foster Carers:

- 9.1 There is one approved short break Foster Carer providing shared care placements for disabled children. The Short Break Carers are usually professionals who work full time. They offer regular breaks to parents and carers who have children who have disabilities so that they can have a break from their caring responsibilities. We continue attempts to enhance this area within the recruitment and communication strategy for 2017/2018.

10.0 Special Guardianship:

- 10.1 In June 2014, the responsibility for the assessment and support for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) moved to the Fostering Service. Where the care plan is for the child not to return home, Family and Friends Foster Carers are encouraged to apply for Special Guardianship Orders, thereby replacing a Care Order and Looked After Child status, giving parental responsibility to the carer.
- 10.2 There is a full-time SGO Support Social Worker dedicated to the role of supporting and advising Foster Carers and Family and Friends Carers about the details of caring for children under the Special Guardianship Order should they consider this to be a future option. The SGO Support Social Worker is also able to discuss on-going support plans to ensure that the needs of the child and Special Guardian continue to be met.
- 10.3 There is a step by step flow chart to assist Social Workers in the SGO process to allow for a smooth transition. This also provides guidance on administrative tasks needing to be undertaken post the SGO being granted; this is fundamental in capturing the child's journey through care and informing any future support.
- 10.4 SGO's also feature within the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE's) Programme and Social Work Briefings to improve knowledge regarding family care arrangements, Special Guardianship and current policies in place. In addition to this the SGO Support Social Worker holds monthly Permanency Clinics which allows Children's Social Workers to drop in to discuss the available permanency options. This is further

supported by the Fostering and Adoption Advanced Practitioner who delivers city wide workshops to discuss permanency options.

- 10.5 Prospective Family and friends Foster Carer's are expected to attend the Skills to Foster preparation course which has been designed to meet the needs of prospective Foster Carers, this also informs them of the permanence options, processes and assessments involved. The SGO Support Social Worker has now implemented an SGO Training Module specifically for Family and Friends Foster Carer's which runs directly after each preparation course. This has been planned to inform the prospective Foster Carers of their options at the earliest opportunity.
- 10.6 The Supervising Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker jointly complete the Special Guardianship Report. The SGO Support Social Worker completes the Support Plan with the Social Workers involved and shares this with the Foster Carers or Family and Friends Foster Carer's. Special Guardians can now access all training that is currently offered to our internal Foster Carers and Family and Friends Foster Carers.
- 10.7 The Support Plan is reviewed annually by the SGO Support Social Worker who currently sits within the Family and Friends Foster Carers Team and post-SGO support remains high on the agenda for this current fiscal year. A total of 11 Special Guardianship Orders were granted in fiscal year 2017/18 with 14 currently in the assessment process to be filed during this year. The target to achieve 15 SGO orders 2018/19 is well on course and it is expected given the current progress that the target will be exceeded.

11.0 Post Approval supervision, support and reviewing:

- 11.1 All approved Foster Carers are allocated a qualified Supervising Social Worker. Following approval, the Supervising Social Worker is responsible for supervising and supporting carers, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support, challenge and direction to maintain a quality service, including safe care practices. This includes an agreement that they must work within the agency's policies, procedures and guidance. One Supervising Social Worker post has been protected within the support team to exclusively support and supervise Family & Friends (Connected carers)
- 11.2 Our focus is placement stability, reducing placement moves and improving outcomes for children. All our Foster Carers have direct access to local partners in health and education who also provide them with advice and support. Foster Carers provide placements for children and young people who present challenges and have a range of complex needs. All Foster Carers are offered support to meet these challenges. In addition, the Fostering Service provides training to Foster Carers to help them understand and manage the child's presenting needs.
- 11.3 Wolverhampton has a commissioning arrangement with Foster Talk who offer support to all of Wolverhampton's approved Foster Carers including; legal advice and expenses insurance cover, a 24-hour legal advice helpline, a 24-hour counselling support helpline, an education support line, a Social Work support helpline and access to discounts and exclusive offers via the use of a MAX Card.

- 11.4 There is a 'Buddy Scheme' in place where experienced Foster Carers provide support to newly approved Foster Carers for a period of three months (this can be extended if required). 'Buddies' offer support to Foster Carers requiring additional assistance for example, during an allegation. We currently have 43 'Buddies' and continue to work towards increasing the number of Foster Carers who offer the buddy support. All 'Buddies' receive appropriate training for their role. It is expected that all Level 3 carers become 'buddies' to less experienced or newly approved carers.
- 11.5 Newly approved Foster Carers are reviewed after six months and then annually thereafter by an Independent Reviewing Officer. This will involve the Foster Carer meeting with the Independent Reviewing Officer who will discuss the activity of a Foster Carer to ensure they continue to be suitable. The Independent Reviewing Officer will seek the views of the Foster Carer, the child in placement (subject to age and understanding), the Child's Social Worker, the child's Independent Reviewing Officer, the Supervising Social Worker and any other appropriate person during the review process. Views are collected using Consultation Questionnaires. The review is also an opportunity for the Foster Carer to review the service and support given to the children placed. An early Foster Home Review maybe requested by the Fostering Service where there are concerns about Foster Carers practice or where there have been allegations.
- 11.6 During the period 1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018, 173 Foster Home Reviews were undertaken as detailed below. During the same period, last year, 165 Foster Home Reviews were undertaken.
- 11.7 Throughout this review period 11 newly registered Foster Carers have been reviewed, being Family and Friends Foster Carers. All newly registered Foster Carers are reviewed within six months of first registration.

Mainstream Foster Carers	137
Connected Persons	35
Shared Care Foster Carers	1

- Overall, the Reviews have remained positive and the standard of Foster Care delivered to children and young people remains good. Trends emerging from reviews during the year relate to some poor support to newly approved Foster Carers, the number of reviews where the recommendation that Delegated Authority documentation needs to be put in place and reviewed, Life Journey work needing to be completed or updated and for the home Health and Safety check to be completed. There are also significant numbers of foster homes where a Safe Care statement needs renewing. These themes have been repeated over recent years and an Action Plan will be in place by June 30th, 2018 to address all deficits with additional oversight to sustain improved standards.
- Completed unannounced supervision visits have decreased by six percent to seventy percent.
- Foster Carer's generally report the continuing positive working relationships with the Fostering Service, other colleagues and agency partners.

- Positive feedback received from Foster Carers attending the Therapeutic Nurturing and Attachment training delivered by a CAMHS Social Worker.
- Consultation feedback from children and professionals remains stable at 50%, however must be improved.
- The good standards of Foster Carer's records have been maintained.
- Regular supervision of Foster Carers is of a satisfactory level.
- A high percentage of Foster Carers have completed their TSDS workbook.

12.0 Foster Carer Learning and Development

- 12.1 Training is a continual process and all approved Wolverhampton Foster Carers are offered new and refresher training courses to update their skills on a regular basis. Foster Carers are required to complete the evidenced based Training, Support and Development Standards work book within the first year of approval (first eighteen months for Family and Friends Foster Carers). The Fostering Service provides eight to ten mandatory training courses for all new Foster Carers and a range of development training opportunities. Over 2018/19 Foster carers will be offered the opportunity to receive Restorative Practice training.
- 12.3 Foster Carers' training needs are identified as part of their Personal Development Plan (PDP) and reviewed regularly during supervision. The PDP's assist in identifying gaps in Foster Carers skills and knowledge and to ensure that they can meet their obligations in accordance with their Fostering Agreement. Failure to attend identified training would result in the Foster Carer being in non-compliance with the Fostering Agreement and could place their continuing approval at risk. The PDP is now completed as a separate document and stored on the document hub for each Foster carer.
- 12.4 Approved Foster Carers who live a distance from Wolverhampton are offered the opportunity to complete their training on-line or with a local training provider where the funding has been agreed.
- 12.5 To access training Foster Carers can book courses through their Supervising Social Worker or by calling the office by telephone and speaking with their Supervising Social Worker, a Unit Administrator or the Duty Social Worker. There is also availability for Foster Carers to book on-line training via the Safeguarding Hub.
- 12.6 To develop and enhance the training and development of Foster Carers there is a full-time Training Social Worker within the Fostering Team. Her role is to strengthen the importance of continual development and to ensure that Foster Carer's training is targeted to meet the needs of children placed. Completed Training will be recorded on the Foster Carers file and reviewed during Supervision and their PDP.
- 12.7 In 2017 the Fostering Service successfully introduced a Conference for all Foster Carers to attend, this included a professional speaker during the morning, speaking to the whole

group about attachment and small group training workshop in the afternoon. The event was used to network and demonstrate to Foster Carers that they are valued in their role. A conference for Foster Carers has been arranged for July 4th, 2018 and will be repeated annually.

- 12.8 In December 2017, there was an award ceremony held to celebrate the successes of fostering and to award Foster Carers for their commitment to fostering by recognising their length of service. The event was supported by Senior Management and Local Authority Members. Following the event many Foster Carers contacted the Fostering Service to inform that they thoroughly enjoyed their evening.
- 12.9 The Foster Carer Forum and Support Groups have been amalgamated to encourage attendance as this was historically poor. There have been 10 Support and Focus Forums planned during this year, these are taking place during Training development days and in the evenings to try and ensure accessibility to Foster Carers who work. Attendance of the Support and Focus Forum continues to grow.
- 12.10 There is a Fostering Handbook of which a hard copy has been sent out to all Foster carers. The handbook contains pertinent information useful to carers and is regularly updated to reflect any changes.
- 12.11 At the end of March 2018 out of the 152 -approved mainstream Foster Carers, all have either completed or are in the process of completing the Training, Support and Development standards (TSDS). The Foster Carers who are in the process of securing Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders are not required to complete the TSDS. Newly registered Foster Carers are being supported to achieve the standards within twelve months of approval. This is facilitated by the TSDS workshops.

13.0 Fostering Panel:

- 13.1 The work of the Fostering Panel is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011. The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015. The Panel must advise on:
 - Reviews of approvals (Regulation 28), and monitor their effectiveness
 - Oversee the conduct of assessments
 - Give advice and make recommendations on any other matters referred
- 13.2 The Fostering Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Head of Service, for Looked after Children within ten working days of the panel meeting. The Head of Children in Need and Child Protection deputises in the absence of The Head of Service Looked After Children.
- 13.3 The Fostering Panel also have a quality assurance role, offering feedback on the quality and content of reports submitted and the presentation and knowledge of the social workers

attending, by way of a Performance Management Form. The quality assurance extends to how the Panel Members are prepared for their task.

- 13.4 The Adoption and Permanence Panels introduced to the panels the previous year continues to offer greater opportunities for the development of Wolverhampton's Permanency Policy. The Adoption & Permanence Panel complies with regulations. During this year, Members are asked to give feedback via one performance form completed by the Panel and fed back to the Management Team. This covers the quality of the paperwork submitted; practice and procedural issues and the overall analysis of reports submitted. All visitors attending the Panel are asked to complete a feedback form to inform on the overall service offered by the Fostering Panel. Despite making the feedback forms available in a variety of ways, e.g. in the invitation letter, not everyone is prepared to complete the form.
- 13.5 It continues to be a busy period for the Fostering Panel, with a steady flow of Foster Carer approvals, resignations and deregistration of Foster Carers. There has been a steady increase in the number of placements made with Family and Friends Foster Carers as in the previous year. Foster Carer's first annual reviews have been presented to panel, as have reviews requiring change of approval category, and reviews following concerns and guidance relevant to both Adoption and Fostering: Adoption agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012. The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous amendments) regulations 2013. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (amendments) Regulations 2015; The Fostering Regulations 2011. Panel Members from the Central List with both adoption and fostering experience makes up the Permanence Panel. The composition of Fostering Panels, terms of reference and functions are set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. This constitution and terms of reference provides the framework for the operation of the Adoption and Permanence Panel. It is reviewed annually.

The flexibility offered by the Adoption and Permanence policy ensures that both adoption and fostering matches; Family and Friends Assessments can be heard without delay with the options of utilising one of the four Panels a month. It also enables us to hear applications for Concurrent Carers and Foster for Adoption.

- 13.6 In line with good practice, and the Fostering Regulation (2011), there is an independent Chair and three Independent Panel Members, two with fostering experience, one previous Foster Carer. One Independent Member is also the Vice Chair. The Panel attendance remains high, demonstrating a high commitment from Members who have been Panel Members with Wolverhampton for some time. Three Panel Members have been trained up this year to Vice Chair positions and all three can sit on either Adoption or Fostering Panels as Vice Chairs.
- 13.7 The Central List consists of two previously Looked After Children, Foster Carers, Adoptees, Adopters; a birth relative who managed to trace his adoptive siblings and those that were Looked After and a Councillor. There is an over representation of women on the Panel and attempts are being made to resolve this to be more reflective of the communities in Wolverhampton, and the children for whom we are responsible. The number of Members to the Central List remains constant we are always looking to embrace new enquiries.

- 13.8 The Panel has access to legal and medical advice as required. It is not a statutory requirement for a legal advisor to be present, but legal advice must be accessible where required.
- 13.9 Wolverhampton Fostering Panel meets once each month and the Permanence Panel also meets twice a month with the capacity to hear a further six fostering cases over the month. Over the review period there has been 18 meetings to meet the demands of the service. 16 of these meetings were planned with a further 2 being on call as additional Panels. One Panel was convened to hear fostering matters that were Court led. This exemplifies the versatility and ability of the Panel and its Member to rise to the challenges presented.

In the main the work of the Fostering Panel focused on approvals of fostering assessments, Foster Carers de-registration due to safeguarding concerns, and not fostering due to remaining dormant, first and subsequent foster home review of Foster Carers, including changes of approval category, as were Family and Friends Foster Carers matters and Matches for Long Term Fostering. Children's Long Term Fostering Best Interest Decisions are agreed through the Virtual Panel since 2013. The approval of a plan of Long Term Fostering and match at the Fostering Panel is not a function of the Fostering Panel.

- 13.10 Development over this period continues to provide a flexible approach to the use of resources, such as the Adoption Panel as appropriate is utilised as an Adoption and Permanency Panel. This is so that there is a throughput and progress of children's permanency cases which would otherwise sit on a waiting list. This involves the formal matching of Looked After Children who have a plan of Long Term Fostering with Long Term or Permanent Foster Carers, and those who are placed with Family and Friends Foster Carers. This has offered the Service greater flexibility and expediency in securing permanency for Looked After Children. This continues to be a success and will continue going forward to support timeliness.

All Panels have now fully embraced paperless working; with the Panel matters being filtered through a dedicated secure site on the Share Point site. It is also accessible to the Agency Decision Maker ratifying the decisions and Panel Members. Visitors or observers to the site also have temporary access to follow the panel deliberation. All Panel matters are now dealt with electronically. Visitors from within and outside the agency have complimented us on the progress we have made with operating a paperless system, with a wealth of links to additional services for Members to access on the site.

- 13.11 Fostering matters have been heard at both the Fostering Panel and the Adoption and Permanence Panel giving a total of 32 Panels throughout the year. There are usually six items to the Panel agendas, with the capacity to hear up to four first foster home reviews and other notifications in addition. Panel admin are to be commended for enabling this to happen, especially with the complex and difficult tasks of recording the Panel meetings. The minutes produced for the Panels are of a very high standard.

Outcomes	2017/18
Meetings	18
Matters Heard	147
Approvals	21
Deregistration	9
Resignations	15
Deferred	1
Foster Home R	35
Connected Person Carers	18
Matches	17
Long term F BID	24

13.12 Training is offered to Panel Members to ensure that they understand their full responsibilities as Panel Members and that they are also up to date with the requirements and legislation relevant to children in care. Over the last year there have been increased opportunities for Panel Members to undertake joint training with the Fostering and Adoption Team. Panel Members are required to undertake the mandatory training offered by the council. The Learning Hub is accessible to them via the Panel Pods site where they access Panel documents securely. The induction programme for new Panel Members continues to be strengthened and has been modified accordingly by the Panel Advisor. There have also been opportunities to take part in training set up by partner agencies, which several Members have utilised. Panel Members are also able to access the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board training as required. On June 18th, 2018 all Panel Members were trained in Restorative Practice, they fed back that they found this training a useful exercise.

In January 2018 Panel Members held an Away day which they felt was a very productive day. Members discuss the Panel process and look at ways to make the Service more transparent for all who use the Service but more importantly for the many Adoptive Parent's and Foster Carers utilising the Service. The practice of having Adopters/Foster Carers and Social Workers into the meeting at the same time and appraising the Agency Decision Maker memo to be 'Hofstetter' compliant remains in place and is a successful change implemented last year.

13.13 Each Panel Member has a yearly appraisal which is conducted by the Panel Chair and the Professional Advisor. The appraisal consists of self- evaluation and a face to face meeting. The Panel Chair's appraisal is undertaken by the respective Agency Decision Maker for Adoption and Fostering. Other compliance requirements such as DBS checks and production of relevant practicing licences are also monitored under this process.

13.14 Complaints/Compliments: There have not been any major concerns received about the running of the panel. However, feedback forms from Panel Members and some Service Users always point to a good service with areas for improvement for which we constantly try to improve. Waiting times for applicant's cases to be heard have improved, although this still needs to be monitored, as there is room for further adjustments.

Future Development:

- For the Fostering Panel to continue to develop the use of Business Meetings between the Management of the Fostering Teams and the Panel Service.
- To ensure joint training is available for Panel Members and Social Workers within the Fostering Team.
- The newly introduced Panel Members Away Day to be further developed and for an increase in the membership of the Central List, especially of male members and birth relatives.
- To ensure that the Restorative Practice Training completed in June 2018 is fully utilised within the Panel processes and for the Panels to remain consistent and effective in producing an appropriate and successful service to the Looked After population of the city.
- For Panel Members to attend the Foster carers conference in July 2018
- For Panel Members to be invited to Fostering Away days to share practice and to improve relationships between the panel and the Fostering Service.

14.0 Complaints and Compliments:

- 14.1 There were 5 formal complaints received about the fostering service during the year 2017 – 2018– This was higher than the previous year, however compares favourably with the national average of 18% of complaints that were from fostered children. There were also 4 informal complaints received which were managed and responded to at a lower level. The Fostering service received 4 compliments.
- 14.2 The complaints received were around poor communication, quality of service, lack of Supervision, no respite offered, and no mileage allowance paid. At the same time, there have also been compliments in relation to the Fostering Service recognising Social Workers commitment in their job role to families and young people. The Fostering Service, upon investigating and reviewing complaints received continue to ensure that learning is disseminated to Staff and colleagues in order that adjustments and improvements can be achieved.

15.0 Private Fostering:

- 15.1 The Fostering Service is responsible for the assessment and monitoring of Private Fostering Arrangements in Wolverhampton, as stipulated under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.
- 15.2 There are three Private Fostering champions within the Fostering Service, they are responsible for increasing the awareness of Private Fostering both internally with all City of Wolverhampton employees and externally with partner agencies and the voluntary sector.

- 15.3 As part of the Fostering Improvement Plan Twice- Yearly Multi Agency forums have been set up to discuss the on-going importance of driving and developing processes that will ensure Private Fostering remains integral to our everyday practice. As Private Fostering Arrangements are in place throughout the City there continues to be a need to increase our awareness of these arrangements and report them through the correct channels, so they can be appropriately assessed in terms of safeguarding children. The Private Fostering Policy and Procedure was updated in January 2018
- 15.4 It remains the responsibility of all professionals to continue to raise awareness of what constitutes Private Fostering Arrangements and how to refer them for assessment and support. By taking a multi-agency approach we can together continue to raise the profile of Private Fostering thus increasing the number of referrals and safeguarding our children.
- 15.5 We recognise the complexities involved in understanding Private Fostering and what it entails and therefore wish to create a more collaborative approach and develop relationships across each sector in order that professionals can work together, answer queries and support each other in improving outcomes for children.
- 15.6 To coordinate the multi-agency, approach we facilitate a Twice-Yearly Forum which is attended by representatives from Health, Education, Strengthening Families, Early Intervention, Specialised Support, MASH, Wolverhampton Homes and Marketing and Communications to attend the meetings. This meeting is poorly attended with just one professional attending the meeting in May 2018.
- 15.7 Over the last year, the Service has continued to publicise Private Fostering through Schools, Health Services and at all fostering recruitment events. There has been a meeting with the Lead Safeguarding Officers to review and renew its publicity of their materials for through various uses.
- 15.8 The number of children and young people in Private Fostering Arrangements fluctuates, and this year there have been three notifications, one of which went on to Private Fostering Arrangement and one is currently on-going. All referrals received have been notified by the Children's Social Work Teams.
- 15.9 Management oversight is provided through supervision. In addition, the Private Fostering Assessment is approved by the Agency Decision Maker, Head of Looked After Children Services.
- 15.10 Private Foster Carers have access to the Fostering Service training.

16.0 Financial Package for Foster Carers:

- 16.1 In January 2016 the new Fees and Allowances were introduced.
- 16.2 Foster Carers receive a weekly allowance to cover all living costs associated to the child/children they care for. Wolverhampton rates follow those recommended by the Department for Education (DfE); and are paid in accordance to the child's age. Foster Carers are expected to open a bank account (preferably and ISA) in which they must save

a weekly amount for the child's future. The specified amount of money to be saved for children and the pocket money rates are again age related and are provided annually by the Fostering Service to all Foster Carers. Birthday, holiday and festival allowances are paid in addition to the above.

- 16.3 The Fostering Fees model is one which rewards Foster Carers in unity with their skills, experiences and expertise in meeting the needs of Looked After Children; in addition to the number of children placed, this is with a view to further encourage Foster Carers to consider sibling placements where they have capacity in their home. All Foster Carers have been provided with a new Fostering Agreement which widens their approval categories from birth to eighteen years. The revised reward model will provide greater placement choice and reduce Wolverhampton's reliance on external provision.
- 16.4 Foster carers can apply at Level Two to be considered as Level Three carers if they meet the expected required and have the relevant experience and expertise. A panel to consider these applications is to be set up and will be held twice yearly. A policy and procedure is currently being written to reflect this, Foster carers have been consulted and will be informed once the policy is agreed of panel dates.

17.0 Working in Partnership / Feedback from User participation:

- 17.3 The Private Fostering Forums have been set up twice yearly, this is to both raise awareness and guarantee that there is multi-agency approach to the professional responsibilities of notifying the Local Authority of Private Fostering Arrangements.
- 17.4 Senior Management and Lead Elect Members have continued to consult with Foster Carers in their attendance at Forums, events and recruitment. This has been a positive way of Foster Carers feeling they have had opportunity to share their views and experiences. Presence at the fostering events has provided Foster Carers with further recognition for the work they undertake with Looked After Children and, consequently this ensures Foster Carers feel valued by the Local Authority for their continued commitment.

18.0 Summary

- 18.1 There continue to be changes and developments within the Fostering Service and a new Senior Social Work Manager and Social Work unit manager – Support Team were appointed in August 2017. The compliment of Social Workers remains stable and currently the service employs 2 agency Social Workers whilst seeking to appoint replacement permanent workers during the year. There has been a significant amount of development and improvements made across the service as described and outlined above. As always, we continue to strive for further improvements.

18.2 The Family Values Fostering review project which concluded in May 2017 stated that the city of Wolverhampton provides placements that are better value for money and can offer more positive outcomes for children and young people. Three key areas of growth to increase and improve capacity were identified.

- Increasing enquiry generation.
- Improving enquiry handling.
- Developing the support and supervision offer.

18.3 Whilst the Family Values project has provided structure and parameters with clear objectives, participation in the workstreams and steering group has provided opportunities within these arenas to explore other ideas for improvement and development. The project has certainly elicited energy and excitement and the thought that there is a real opportunity to increase our cohort of mainstream and connected carers within a Fostering Service that is fully open to challenge and change. It is only by exploring and embracing these opportunities that we will truly as a service achieve our potential with our overall aim to improve the outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

19.0 Key Achievements 2017/18

- An additional 26 Children have been placed in Internal Placements 2017/18 as opposed to Independent Fostering Agencies
- Increased Enquiries supported through sophisticated media campaigns and digital advertising.
- A designated Fostering website launched and regularly updated.
- Governance for the Family Values project well established, a steering group and work streams meet monthly to monitor progress of the project.
- The “There was a boy” film promoting Fostering has been released in collaboration with the West Midlands consortium.
- The Foster Carer newsletter is published monthly and now includes a section “Fostering story of the month” Good news stories are being sought from Foster carers and Social Workers.
- An Easter Egg hunt was held at Bantock Park which was well attended and enjoyed by Foster Carers and Children & Young People.
- Increased participation by Foster carers in Advertising campaigns and in the Family Values workstreams.
- A policy outlining Escalation to Level 3/4 for Foster carers has been developed and panels will be set up twice yearly to consider applications from carers who apply to be Level 3 or 4 carers.

- The complete Foster Carers register highlighting vacancies and the status of all placements has been shared with the Placement Team, Emergency Team and managers working out of hours in order that ALL can make Internal Placements as appropriate.
- All Foster Carers currently on the “Dormant” list are regularly contacted and whilst unable to offer a full-time placement have facilitated respite to support other Foster Carers requiring a break.
- The Training Programme for Foster Carers 2018/19 has been revised, new courses and developmental days added to the calendar offering an increased variety of subjects and with built in Forums to maximise carers potential to attend both.
- Customer Service Officers trained in aspects of Fostering in order that they handle enquiries effectively and sharing pertinent information to Fostering to support applications. The Fostering newsletter is shared with Customer Service Officers to further enhance their awareness of the service.
- Enquiries are tracked effectively to pin-point origins of referrals to better inform campaigns going forward.
- The use of Twitter to be explored to maximise the Fostering Service capacity to reach a wider audience using Social Media.
- Therapeutic Reflective sessions running twice monthly for Fostering Social Workers and facilitated by CAMHS Social Worker to compliment the model of training (18 week-Nurturing Attachments Training Programme) to Foster Carers.
- The Personal Development Plan for Foster Carers to support their development and future training needs filed as a separate document to compliment Supervision.
- Free Swimming lessons for Looked after Children agreed by City of Wolverhampton Council
- Improved interface between the Fostering service and Housing which will improve opportunities for the service to support current carers and prospective carers in applying for House moves/bigger properties.
- Fostering Social Worker trainer has completed her Restorative “Train the Trainer” and will deliver Restorative training to the Fostering Panel Members and Foster Carers over the coming year.

KEY OBJECTIVES 2018/19

- To achieve the target of a net gain of 26 Mainstream Foster carers to provide for the diverse range of children’s needs.
- To achieve 15 Special Guardianship Orders.

- To Establish a Foster Carer Portal to enable access by all carers to training Information, Policy & Procedures and developmental information.
- To further develop existing and new carers to provide for children's needs, promote understanding, resilience of carers and placement stability.
- To continue to review recruitment materials and processes and continue to implement the recommendations from the Family Values Project undertaken by iMPower whilst being open minded to all ideas and development opportunities that will enhance and improve the Fostering Service.
- Update all Fostering Policies and Procedures.
- To further explore the Mockingbird Project and if this model should be considered by the Fostering Service.
- Continue visiting other authorities particularly those who have recruited high number of Foster Carers and achieved significantly improved outcomes. Consider their Fees & allowances and how these may influence an increased number of applications, particularly in carers offering placements to sibling groups.
- The focus on Private Fostering needs to continue to be strengthened and the profile promoted to increase awareness and understanding of this often-misunderstood area of care. Further training opportunities to be offered across Children's Social Care, with partner agencies and the voluntary sector.
- A Foster Carers Conference to be held on 4 July 2018 featuring keynote speakers, Lemn Sissay, International poet and broadcaster and two Looked after young people wishing to share their experiences and celebrate their successes.
- Further roll-out to Foster Carers and staff of our 18-week Nurturing Attachments Training Programme for parenting children with complex traumas.
- The "Buddy" system further developed and the number of "buddies" increased to 43 currently with an action plan to develop this role further.
- Supporting connected carers to secure Permanency via SGO within 12 months of approval as a connected carer.
- Deliver SGO preparation model to connected carers
- In line with SGO Action Plan, ensure post SGO support is robust and accessible.
- Ensure all Viability Assessments are completed jointly between Children's and Fostering Social Workers.
- Explore additional benefits for Foster Carers to access alongside those in place (MAX cards & The Fostering Network).

- Further support Peer support mechanisms.
- Further develop the Foster Carers Forum.
- To develop a separate media campaign to specifically target the recruitment of carers able to offer placements to teenagers.
- The Fostering Team are undertaking a sponsored walk for “Promised Dreams” and the event will be further sponsored by Fostering for Wolverhampton with banners promoting Fostering on display and all water provided to walkers sponsored by Fostering for Wolverhampton.
- Activities/Events for Foster Carers and Children & Young People to attend and take place over the year, planned so far, a Summer Picnic in the Park, Halloween Party & Christmas Party.
- All objectives /targets are integrated into Action Plans specific to areas of business and regular oversight and evaluation to monitor progress and ensure momentum is maintained.
- Deliver Restorative Practice training to all the Fostering Panel members and to all Foster Carers in cohorts of up to 25.
- Consider respite options for Foster Carers within the Family Values Steering Group given this is often a reason cited for Internal Carers resigning to apply to Independent Foster Carers.
- A working group to be set up within Fostering to revise the application form for level 3 & level 4 in line with the new panel in place to consider all applications.