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CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L

Corporate Parenting Board Meeting

Thursday, 13 July 2017

Dear Councillor

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - THURSDAY, 13TH JULY, 2017

Since the agenda was published the following report has been amended and I am now able to enclose it, for consideration at next Thursday, 13th July, 2017 meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Agenda No Item

- 7 **Amended Wolverhampton Fostering Annual Report April 2016 to March 2017**
(Pages 3 - 30)

Report of
[Michelle Earp Gaskell, Senior Social Work Manager – Fostering to present report]

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Corporate Parenting Board

13 July 2017

Report title	Wolverhampton Fostering Annual Report April 2016 to March 2017	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Service Director Children and Young People	
Originating service	Looked After Children	
Accountable employee(s)	Michelle Earp- Gaskell	Senior Social Work Manager
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Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to receive, observe and provide feedback on the Fostering Annual Report for 2016/17.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To enable the Corporate Parenting Board to have a clear understanding of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service between April 2016 and March 2017.
To seek endorsement of the progress and developments within the service in supporting and developing foster carers to meet the diverse needs of our Children & Young People.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Fostering Service Annual Report, which is attached, highlights the work of the Fostering Service for the period April 2016 to March 2017. Under the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, the Fostering Service must provide the executive side of the Council with written activities of the Fostering Service.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- 3.1 The report continues to show improvements in the recruitment process of fosters carers through targeted marketing activity. The service is striving to meet targets to increase the number of local foster placements for Wolverhampton children, which will help to reduce the reliance on Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements.
- 3.2 The Fostering Service is helped in supporting carers and children through partnerships with schools and health services. Within Children's Services, there continues to be effective working relationships between the Looked After Children's Teams and Locality teams.
- 3.4 The intention is to continue to expand the foster carer community and develop skilled and capable foster carers who can meet the needs of a diverse range of children and young people.
- 3.5 As a means of consulting foster carers and to ensure their views are incorporated and reflected, a Participation Group of Foster Carers has been set up, this group works with Fostering Managers, Social Workers and the Policy writer. The group are currently working together to review the Fostering Handbook which has been updated to offer a more a comprehensive guide to fostering.

In addition, the Foster Carers Participation Group has been formed to facilitate consultation with foster carers in respect of updating policies and procedures. This group is made up of both newly approved and long standing foster carers.

- 3.6 The Foster Carer Forum and Support Groups have been amalgamated to encourage attendance as this was historically poor. There have been ten Support and Focus Forums planned during this year, these are taking place in the mornings and in the evenings to try and ensure accessibility to Foster Carers who work. Attendance of the Support and Focus Forum continues to grow.

- 3.7 In March 2017 iMPower were commissioned by City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) to support the development of the in-house fostering service. The ultimate goal is to enable greater in-house placement sufficiency, and better use of resources. The project concluded in May 2017 with 3 key findings and provided the Fostering Service with a report detailing findings of the primary research work undertaken to understand staff values and culture in relation to fostering service objectives and processes.

The project concluded in May 2017 and identified that the Fostering Service currently lacks capacity to provide the volume of placements required and identified three key areas of growth to increase and improve capacity including Increasing enquiry generation, improving enquiry handling and developing the support and supervision offered.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The approved budget for 2016-17 for the Fostering Service was £5.4 million
- 4.2 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

NM/03072017/S

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 Under the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, which came into effect on 1 April 2011, the Fostering Service must provide the executive side of the Council with written reports on the activities of the Fostering Service.

TC/04072017/F

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 We want to have continuous improvements in securing local foster placements, for children from all backgrounds including those of ethnic minority communities, and disabled children and their families, to ensure equality of access to services for all Wolverhampton children who are Looked After by the local authority.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no identified environmental implications.

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 There are no known human resources implications.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 There are no known corporate landlord implications.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 Appendix 1 – Comments from the Children in Care Council.



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ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT APRIL 2016– MARCH 2017

Author: Michelle Earp-Gaskell – Interim Senior Social Work Manager (Fostering)

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1. 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.

2. The Fostering Service comprises of the following:

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. 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. The marketing function is well supported by colleagues in Marketing and Communication Services. The Recruitment Team complete all Initial Assessments of prospective Foster Carers following enquiries made via City Direct. If the Initial Assessment proves positive the Full 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 eight months inclusive of stage 1 and stage 2. 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.
- 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 general public, professionals, parents and children. The assessments, training, and support of Private Foster Carers is also the responsibility of the Fostering Service.
- 2.7 Special Guardianship**
In June 2014, the responsibility for the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Orders moved to 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.
- 2.8 Post Approval Training of Foster Carers**
Approximately ninety 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.
- 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.

2.10 **Social work staffing**

The Fostering Service enjoys a full complement of 15 full time qualified Social Work posts, and two full time equivalent unqualified posts.

2.11 **Staff training**

There is a Workforce Development Plan in situ which includes a wide range of training and development 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. Two members of the Fostering Service are awaiting results having completed Level One of the Practice Educator's Award through Wolverhampton University.

3. The Fostering Service Objectives:

- To provide a comprehensive good quality foster care service to all children looked after by City of Wolverhampton Council.
- To provide looked after children in foster care with a positive experience of family life, which promotes their physical, emotional, developmental well-being, and happiness in an environment in or close to their community.
- Work in partnership with partners across the Children and Young People's Service as well as with health, education and other allied professionals to achieve best outcomes for children and young people in foster placements.
- To work in partnership with Foster Carers to enable them to provide warm, safe and caring family environments, so that children's emotional health and development is promoted.
- To work in partnership with Foster Carers so that they understand the importance of working and co-operating with schools, to ensure access to available opportunities to promote children's attendance and their academic achievements.

4. Recruitment of Foster Carers:

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 2016/17, the service has enhanced the quality of enquiries with a small 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-one fostering households approved in 2016/17. 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. Therefore, whilst we have only increased our foster care numbers by one carer we have increased our placement capacity by 21.

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 2017/18.

4.3 As we are aware 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 new 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 City Direct and Fostering Duty Workers are available to respond immediately to callers who want more information. Training sessions are continuing to be offered by the Social Workers in the Recruitment and Assessment Team to the Customer Service Officers. In addition, Customer Services and the Fostering Service continue to further develop their relationship to improve outcomes and timeliness for responding to initial enquiries in regards to prospective carers.
- 4.5 The Recruitment and Assessment Team continue to work closely with Marketing and Communications and there is a plan in place for on-going recruitment campaigns.
- 4.6 Recruitment is sustained by three periods of campaign activity throughout the year in Foster Care Fortnight, 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 on Facebook and other sites, social media posts and PR, a Chronicle wrap, radio advertising, email marketing and communication through partner organisations including West Midlands Police, Wolverhampton Homes, University of Wolverhampton, City of Wolverhampton College and the Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust.
- 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 a bi-monthly information evening at the Molineux. The team also attend other relevant events to promote fostering recruitment including the Living Well event. 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 Alpha Beta testing has also been carried out on the fostering landing page on the council website to establish which imagery and key messages have resulted in the longest dwell time and conversion rates. This is constantly being monitored and revised accordingly.
- 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 2016/17 this figure is 10.8%. Last year the conversion rate in Wolverhampton was 8.7% so we have seen an 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 are being 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.

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 2017/18

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.
- The needs of own birth children.
- 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.
- Safeguarding concerns and/or previous involvement with Social Care in relation to the parenting of their children.
- Significant life events.

4.16 In the last year we have undertaken sixty-four initial assessments, with thirty-one 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.

4.18 In March 2017 iMPower were commissioned by City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) to support the development of the in-house fostering service. The ultimate goal is to enable greater in-house placement sufficiency, and better use of resources. The project concluded in May 2017 with 3 key findings and provided the Fostering Service with a report detailing findings of the primary research work undertaken to understand staff values and culture in relation to fostering service objectives and processes. (See Summary)

5. Preparation and Assessment Courses:

- 5.1 The preparation and assessment 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. We run 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 thirty-one households attended the preparation courses with twenty-eight progressing onto the full assessments. Two applicants were not approved at the Fostering Panel due to issues arising during the Form F assessment and a further four assessments were abandoned due to various reasons, including financial issues and debt management, safeguarding concerns and accommodation issues.
- 5.3 During 2016/17 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			
	31 March 2014	31 March 2015	31 March 2016	31 March 2017
Family and Friends	45	50	62	71
Internal foster carer placements	158	171	186	193
IFA placements	382	343	268	247

To make more progress in terms of higher proportion of internal carers, our carers will need to be more ready, willing and able to care for Looked After Children with more complex needs.

6. 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 factual 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 were successful in extending their partnership with Wolverhampton in May 2017.
- 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 will receive a revised Fostering Agreement.
- 6.6 As of 31st March 2017, there were one hundred and fifty approved mainstream fostering households, which offered a total of one hundred and seventy-eight placements. There were nine Foster Carers on Adoption Leave who have offered adoptive placements or Special Guardianship to a further ten children. In addition, there are three fostering households currently dormant due to ill health, of these it is unlikely that two will 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 2017 there were thirty-nine approved households offering fifty-nine placements.

7. 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. An updated assessment will be completed and presented before Fostering Panel for approval. 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 thirty-six Long-Term placements for children via the Linking and Matching process. Six 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 and external resources.
- 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.

- 7.4 This year we have participated in the CoramBAAF Activity Day as part of a pilot scheme for Coram BAAF. An Activity Day for Fostering is a new concept following the success of Adoption Activity Days. The focus of an Activity Day for Fostering is to find loving, stable homes for children who need to remain permanently looked after under foster care arrangements. Activity Days for fostering are designed to speed up and improve the process of matching children with a wider range of prospective Foster Carers and allow prospective Foster Carers to directly meet a range of children waiting for permanence in a prepared, supported, safe and fun environment.

Our Activity Day was held on 03/12/16 in collaboration with Walsall MBC Fostering Team. Sixteen children attended on the day with ten fostering families also attending. Although there were no direct matches for the children on the day, the overall feedback was the day was a success and enjoyed by all who attended.

8. Family and Friends Foster 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 sixteen 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 2016 – March 2017 there were thirty-nine Family and Friends Carers approved which provided a total of fifty-nine placements for Looked After Children.
- 8.4 During the period of 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 there were thirteen positive Form C Assessment approvals. These assessments were completed within internal resources. A further twenty-two Form C Assessments were commenced or completed. Some were of negative outcome and others did not progress to Panel for various reasons i.e. change in Care Plan and applicant's withdrawal. There were nine ongoing Form C assessments on 31st March which were all being undertaken by the Social Workers within the Friends and Family Team.
- 8.5 The Family and Friends Team have undertaken ninety-one Viability Assessments of which twenty-nine were Schedule 4 (temporary approval) Assessments from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

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 Initial 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. There were two courses delivered this year in October 2016 and February 2017. These were attended by five prospective Foster Carers (three prospective households) in October 2016 and eighteen prospective Foster Carers (twelve prospective households) in February 2017. This is a total of twenty-three prospective Foster Carers (fifteen households). To ensure there is frequent availability of the Skills to Foster Training there are plan for the course to be held four times a year with the training being evenly distributed at quarterly periods.

In 2016/2017 five Family and Friends Foster Carers have either undertaken or are in the process of completing the KEEP Standard training and five have either undertaken or are in the process of completing the KEEP Safe training.

9. 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. 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.

- 10.5 Prospective Family and friends Foster Carer's are expected to attend the Skill to Foster preparation course which has been designed to meet the needs of the 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 is high on the agenda for this current financial year. A total of eleven Special Guardianship Orders were granted in financial year 2016/17 with a number in the process to be filed this year.
- 10.8 The tracking of Special Guardianship Orders and Support Plans is regularly monitored and reviewed using the SGO Action Plan

11. 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.
- 11.2 Our focus is placement stability, reducing placement moves and improving outcomes for children. With this in mind 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 special 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 twenty-five '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.
- 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 2016 – 31st March 2017, one hundred and sixty-five Foster Home Reviews were undertaken as detailed below. During the same period, last year, one hundred and fifty-six Foster Home Reviews were undertaken.

11.7 Throughout this review period twenty-eight newly registered Foster Carers have been reviewed, eleven being Family and Friends Foster Carers. All newly registered Foster Carers are reviewed within six months of first registration.

Mainstream Foster Carers	136
Connected Persons	28
Shared Care Foster Carers	1

11.8 **Summary and Conclusion:**

- Annual Foster Home Reviews have been completed in respect of one hundred and sixty-five Foster Carers during the year to March 2017.
- 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.
- Completed unannounced supervision visits have increased by one percent to seventy six 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 KEEP and Nurturing and Attachment training.
- Consultation feedback from children and professionals remains low and must continue to be addressed.
- The good standards of Foster Carer's records have been maintained.
- Regular supervision of Foster Carers is of a good level.
- A high percentage of Foster Carers have completed their TSDS workbook.

11.9 **Future Development Recommendations for the Safeguarding Service:**

- To work collaboratively with Social Workers, IRO's and Young People to elicit a higher return of feedback reports for the reviews.
- To produce a report format for Supervising Social Workers to use to report to the Independent Fostering Home Reviewing Officer the competency of the Foster Carer prior to the Foster Home Review.
- To continue to consult with Fostering Service to ensure Fostering Standards are maintained and improved where weak as identified in the report.
- IFHRO will as part of the review process scrutinise the Delegated Authority process for each Foster Carer.
- IFHRO will as part of the review process monitor the completion of the annual Health and Safety checklist for each foster home.
- IFHRO will as part of the review process monitor the completion of the children's Life Journey work.
- IFHRO will as part of the review process monitor the renewing of Foster Carer's Safe Care statements.

11.10 **Future Development Recommendations for the Fostering Service:**

- Fostering Service to improve attendance levels of Supervising Social Workers to foster home reviews.
- Fostering Service to ensure that all newly approved Foster Carers receive the required support and visits.
- Supervising Social Workers to provide a written report to the IFHRO on the competency of the Foster Carer.
- Fostering Service to ensure Foster Carers keep updated Life Journey work for all children in their care.
- Fostering Service to ensure Foster Carers have Safe Care Statements in place which are regularly reviewed and updated.
- Fostering Service to ensure all Foster Carers have at least one annual unannounced supervision visit.
- Fostering Service to ensure all Foster Carers have a signed Delegated Authority Document for each child in placement and that it is regularly reviewed as part of the child's Care Plan.
- Fostering Service to complete an annual Health and Safety check for all Foster Carers and place a copy on the Foster Carer's CareFirst file.
- Maintaining placement stability for children and young people in foster placements is a high priority in achieving positive outcomes. The Fostering Service works closely with Children's Social Workers, Children and Mental Health Services, the Youth Service and

other allied professionals recognising the importance of different approaches in supporting Foster Carers and children in foster care.

12. Foster Carers Learning and Development:

- 12.1 Wolverhampton provides a comprehensive programme of learning and development to Foster Carers. This begins before they are approved, whereby prospective Foster Carers attend the Skills to Foster course. Foster Carers are also encouraged to make use of a wide range of resources for alternative methods of learning, including on-line training.
- 12.2 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.
- 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. Repeated non-attenders at training could result in the Foster Carer being charged for their missed training at £50 per day.
- 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 agree.
- 12.5 'Keeping Foster Carers Supported' (KEEP) is a sixteen-week programme for Foster Carers designed by Treatment Foster Care, Oregon. It aims is to equip carers with a variety of practical skills for caring and parenting.
- 12.6 We utilise two stands of KEEP these being 'KEEP Standard' which is specifically aimed at children aged under twelve years and 'KEEP Safe' aimed at those twelve and over. The course provides Foster Carers with a framework for understanding behaviour and developing strategies to strengthen the relationship with the children in placement by enhance their self- esteem, giving praise, positive attention, and tangible rewards.
- 12.7 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.
- 12.8 To develop and enhance the training and development of Foster Carers a full-time Training Social Worker was appointed in 2016. 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. The coordinator is developing a system to record completed training and in the future, it is hoped that all training available will be advertised by this system and Foster Carers will be able to us it to book their own training.

- 12.9 This year 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. This event will be repeated annually following its success.
- 12.10 In February 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.
- 12.11 The Foster Carer Forum and Support Groups have been amalgamated to encourage attendance as this was historically poor. There have been ten Support and Focus Forums planned during this year, these are taking place in the mornings and in the evenings to try and ensure accessibility to Foster Carers who work. Attendance of the Support and Focus Forum continues to grow.
- 12.13 As a means of consulting Foster Carers and to ensure their views are incorporated and reflected, a Participation Group of Foster Carers has been set up, this group works with Fostering Managers, Social Workers and the Policy writer. The group are currently working together to review the Fostering Handbook which has been updated to offer a more a comprehensive guide to fostering.
- 12.14 At the end of March 2017 out of the 151-approved mainstream Foster Carers, 140 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.
- 13.5 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, the way Members are asked to give feedback to the agency has changed slightly. The individual feedback forms have been replaced by 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.

- 13.4 It has been 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 will be 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 twenty-six meetings to meet the demands of the service. Nineteen of these meetings were planned with a further seven being call as additional Panels. One Panel was Court directed for one case, another

two Panels were converted from an Adoption Panel to Adoption and Permanence 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 no longer an option.

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 has been a real 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 twenty-six 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	2016/17
Meetings	26
Matters Heard	201
Approvals	23
Deregistration	2
Resignations	19
Deferred	4
Foster Home R	36
Connected Person Carers	12
Matches	36
Long term F BID	38

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 has been 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.

In January 2017 Panel Members had their first Away day which they felt was a very productive day. Members could 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 Parents and Foster Carers utilising the Service. This included 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.

- 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.
- Finally, to ensure that the Restorative Practice Training and principles be rolled out to Panel Members and 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.

14 Complaints and Compliments

- 14.1 There were three formal complaints received about the fostering service during the year 2016 – 2017 – one was received from an Advocate on behalf of a child. This was lower than the previous year, and compares favourably with the national average of 18% of complaints that were from fostered children. There were also three informal complaints received which were managed and responded to at a lower level.

14.2 The complaints received were around poor communication and quality of service. 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 This year has seen the addition of three Private Fostering champions within the Fostering Service, they will be responsible for increasing the awareness of Private Fostering both internally with all City of Wolverhampton employees and with partner agencies.

15.3 As part of the Fostering Improvement Plan quarterly 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 is a clear 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.

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 have set up a quarterly 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.

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 eight notifications. Subsequently, eight Private Fostering Assessments were considered, 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/ren 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 will shortly be provided with a new Fostering Agreement which will widen 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.

17. Working in Partnership / Feedback from User participation:

17.1 As mentioned above there has been an introduction of the Focus and Support Forums which encourage Foster Carers to come together and share their feedback and practice issues with management and staff from the Fostering Service. It is hoped that by having an open approach Foster Carers will feel they have been listened to and that they can facilitate changes within the Service.

17.2 In addition, the Foster Carers Participation Group has been formed to facilitate consultation with Foster Carers in respect of updating Policies and Procedures. This group is made up of both newly approved and long standing Foster Carers.

17.3 The Private Fostering Forums have been set up on a quarterly basis, 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. Summary:

- 18.1 The Fostering Service has undergone a challenging year in respect of changes in management at all levels. Nevertheless, there has been a significant amount of development and improvements made across the service as described and outlined above. As we enter a new financial year we continue to strive for improvements. Plans are in place to support this and are subject to ongoing review.
- 18.2 The Family Values fostering review project concluded in May 2017 and identified that the CWC Fostering Service is providing placements that are better value for money, and can often offer better outcomes than external agencies. It also identified that the Fostering Service currently lacks capacity to provide the volume of placements required and identified three key areas of growth to increase and improve capacity. This included
- Increasing enquiry generation.
 - Improving enquiry handling.
 - Developing the support and supervision offer.
- 18.3 A further area of improvement is the implementation of Restorative Practice. Many of the staff members have either attended or had training dates provided. The training will also be provided to all Foster Carers to ensure that a universal practice is adopted in working together to support children and families. It is hoped that Restorative Practice will further strengthen the relationship between Foster Carers and the Fostering Service staff. Restorative Practice is derived from a theory which builds on the importance of valuing relationships, understanding feelings and being able to professionally challenge whilst maintaining a high level of support; it is hoped that the outcome of this approach will greatly improve placement stability.

19. Future Service Development/Challenges for the next year:

- Reduce the number of children placed in external foster care placements. This will be achieved by increasing internal capacity by recruiting new carers in addition to stretching and developing existing carers so that they are enabled to consider an increased number of children placed, a variation in age groups and complexity of need.
- Contribute to the reduction in the numbers of children who are looked after through increasing the numbers of permanence orders secured through Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Orders. This will continue to be supported through the Permanence Strategy.

Key Improvements

- The focus on Private Fostering needs to continue to be strengthened. This needs to include ongoing awareness training for partner agencies and newly qualified and recruited Employees.
- To develop existing and newly approved carers to provide for the diverse range of children's needs, to promote understanding, resilience of carers and placement stability.

- To develop the awareness and knowledge of Staff in providing good quality supervision to Foster Carers which is supportive and provides challenge through reflection and discussion.
- To continue to review recruitment materials and processes and implement the recommendations from the Family Values Project undertaken by iMPower.
- Update all statutory materials in line with regulatory requirements.

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