

Corporate Parenting Board

6 January 2016

Time 5.30 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Oversight

Venue Committee Room 4 - Civic Centre, St Peter's Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1SH

Membership

Chair Cllr Val Gibson (Lab)

Vice-chair

Labour

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Stephen Simkins
Cllr Martin Waite

Conservative

Cllr Christine Mills

Liberal Democrat

Cllr Richard Whitehouse

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the democratic support team:

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Some items are discussed in private because of their confidential or commercial nature. These reports are not available to the public.

Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

- | <i>Item No.</i> | <i>Title</i> |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Apologies for absence (if any) |
| 2 | Declarations of interest (if any) |
| 3 | Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2015 (Pages 3 - 10)
[For approval] |
| 4 | Matters arising
[To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2015] |
| 5 | Schedule of outstanding matters (Pages 11 - 14)
[To consider and comment on the summary of outstanding matters] |
| 6 | Fostering Service Annual Report 2014/15 (Pages 15 - 40)
[To consider the Annual Fostering Agency report 2014/15] |
| 7 | To meet representatives of Foster Carers'
[To meet with representatives of Foster Carers' and to discuss matters of mutual interest] |
| 8 | Interim Adoption Agency Report (Pages 41 - 48)
[To consider the work of the Adoption Agency for the period 1 April 2015 – 30 September 2015] |
| 9 | Performance Management Data
[To consider the Performance Management Data for November 2015][TO BE CIRCULATED] |
| 10 | Exclusion of the press and public
[To pass the following resolution: |

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information on the grounds shown below]

Part 2 – items not open to the public and press

- | | |
|----|---|
| 11 | Councillors visits to establishments (Pages 49 - 54)
[To receive feedback on any visits to establishments undertaken by Councillors since the last meeting] |
|----|---|

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes - 11 November 2015

Attendance

Chair Cllr Val Gibson (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss

Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Stephen Simkins

Cllr Martin Waite

Conservative

Cllr Christine Mills

Liberal Democrat

Cllr Richard Whitehouse

Employees

Emma Bennett
Fiona Brennan
Carl Craney
Alison Hinds
Mandy Lee
Darren Martindale

Service Director - Children and Young People
Designated Nurse, Looked After Children
Democratic Support Officer
Head of Looked After Children
Consultant
COPE Team Manager/Virtual School Head, Community
Directorate

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence (if any)

No apologies for absence had been received.

2 Declarations of interests (if any)

No declarations of interest were made relative to items under consideration at the meeting.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2015

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2015.

5 Schedule of outstanding matters

Carl Craney, Democratic Support Officer, presented a report which appraised the Board of the current position with a variety of matters considered at previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, reported that she had yet to undertake a visit to Upper Pendeford Farm but intended to do so shortly. Cllr Peter O'Neill reported that he had yet to visit Merridale Street West but would be arranging to do so in the near future.

With reference to the role of schools in improving contact between Looked After Children and their siblings, Darren Martindale, Virtual School Head for Looked After Children reported that this matter had been raised with the Designated Teachers at a recent meeting but had not met with such support. It was not considered that schools provided the appropriate venue for such contact. Cllr Stephen Simkins suggested that schools had a pastoral duty of care to Looked After Children and that schools would provide a safe environment for such contact sessions. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, commented that if supervised visits were to be held these should be at the home of the Looked After Child or at the Contact Centre. If the visits were unsupervised it would be inappropriate for the Council to determine the venue.

Cllr Peter O'Neill questioned whether the Youth Zone could be used for such contact sessions. Emma Bennett, Service Director for Children and Young People advised that the number of venues for contact sessions was not an issue. Cllr Paula Brookfield referred to Minute No. 6 of the meeting held on 30 September 2015 and drew to the attention of the Board that the original suggestion had related to unsupervised visits. Cllr Stephen Simkins opined that if schools could be used for such visits the Council could dispose of the Contact Centre. The Service Director for

Children and Young People acknowledged this point but reminded the Board that a venue would still be required for visits for children under school age and again as previously discussed the contact centre was actually used for supervised contact rather than unsupervised..

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

6 **IRO's Annual Report 2014/15**

Mandy Lee, Safeguarding Manager - Children, presented the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service 2014/15. She reported that the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Service had a statutory duty for overseeing and ratifying the care plans for Looked After Children (LAC) via the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers. As such, the service was bound to provide the Board with an annual report that outlined the activity of the service, the impact for children and recommendations for service improvement that would enhance young people's experiences. Furthermore, she reported that a real challenge faced by the service was a lack of useful performance management data and that requests for such data had been outstanding from the past three annual Reports over a period of two years. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, sought clarification as to the type of information required. The Safeguarding Manager - Children explained that she required the Business Intelligence Service to treat the request as a priority. The Service Director, Children and Young People reported that the request had now been actioned.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss referred to paragraph 3.4 of the report inasmuch as it referred to caseload. The Safeguarding Manager - Children explained that the IRO Handbook recommended IRO caseloads of 50 – 70 children per IRO. Despite being fully staffed and having an additional agency IRO it had not been possible to achieve this recommended caseload due to the high number of LAC. She informed the Board that IRO's were also required to undertake Chairing duties at Child Protection Conferences and together with ensuring that reviews were undertaken on time it was not always possible to monitor LAC between reviews. She assured the Board that the statutory minimum duties were fulfilled. The Service Director, Children and Young People reminded the Board that caseload had now reduced significantly with additional opportunities created to monitor LAC between reviews.

Cllr Peter O'Neill referred to those LAC with mental health problems and who were remanded in custody and questioned where the reviews were undertaken. The Safeguarding Manager - Children reported that the reviews would be undertaken wherever the LAC was living and confirmed that the reviews would be undertaken by City of Wolverhampton Council employees.

Cllr Stephen Simkins referred to paragraph 3.4 of the report and the earlier comment that IRO's were also required to Chair Child Protection Conferences resulting in caseloads exceeding the recommended levels. The Safeguarding Manager - Children reported that three new IRO's had been appointed, some IRO's would only deal with LAC and not Child Protection cases and that some had a caseload of 70 or under. She advised that caseload management was important as every effort was

made to maintain a relationship between an individual IRO and a LAC. With the reduction in the LAC population caseloads were now more manageable. Cllr Stephen Simkins advised that he remained to be assured on the current position. The Service Director, Children and Young People advised that it was common practice for IRO's to combine their duties with Charing Child Protection Conferences as the roles complimented each other. She emphasised the importance of maintaining the relationship with the LAC and the family. In relation to this point, Cllr Stephen Simkins questioned the independence of the IRO. The Service Director, Children and Young People explained that the role of the Social Worker was entirely different. The Safeguarding Manager - Children explained that the term "caseload" referred to the number of LAC and the number of Child Protection Plans which were the responsibility of an IRO. The Service Director, Children and Young People assured the Board that there was no tension between the dual roles and that the high caseloads were being addressed through the reduction in the number of LAC and additional temporary resources within the service.

Cllr Martin Waite enquired as to the follow ups conducted after reviews and the actions taken to ensure that Social Workers were following the correct procedures and taking any necessary actions. The Safeguarding Manager - Children explained that this was the type of information which was required from the Performance Monitoring Data referred to previously. Cllr Martin Waite opined that after each review the IRO should be in a position to report back on any steps required. The Safeguarding Manager - Children reported that did happen and was how the RAG ratings were established and referred the Board to paragraph 5.2 of the report. She assured the Board that any issues arising were reported to her and the appropriate steps were then actioned.

Cllr Paula Brookfield commended the steps taken to maintain the relationship between IRO's and individual LAC in the face of the previous high caseload.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss enquired whether the Performance Monitoring Data, once available, would include comparisons with other local authorities. She also suggested that the next Annual Report include a case study with all names redacted to ease the Board in understanding the role. The Safeguarding Manager - Children explained that comparisons would only be possible on common elements.

Cllr Peter O'Neill referred to paragraph 7.2 of the report inasmuch as it referred to increasing LAC caseloads and the impact on the ability of IRO's to monitor progress of cases where some areas of shortfall had been identified. The Safeguarding Manager - Children explained that Ofsted required to know where IRO's had challenged the local authority. She confirmed that during the period of high caseloads it had not always been possible to monitor progress of cases but the situation had eased with the reduction in the LAC population.

Cllr Stephen Simkins questioned whether, in the event of an area of concern being established, it was possible to circumvent the system and for a report to be made direct to the Cabinet Member. The Safeguarding Manager - Children reported on the "dispute resolution" procedure which operated at Officer level and on the facility available for matters to be escalated upwards to CAFCAS and to the Courts. She advised that it had never been necessary to use the escalation measure. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, reported that if non –case specific matters could not be resolved

appropriately that the matter would be drawn to her attention. Cllr Stephen Simkins welcomed this assurance and reminded the Board that all 60 Councillors were Corporate Parents. The Service Director, Children and Young People confirmed that in the event of blockages within the system that the matter would be referred to the Cabinet Member. Cllr Stephen Simkins opined that this Board should receive early notification of any such issues. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, advised that such issues would be included within the Performance Monitoring Report considered at each meeting or be the subject of a report to the Executive Team with a view to securing the allocation of additional resources as had occurred when the LAC population had increased.

Cllr Rita Potter queried the level and quality of participation of LAC in the reviews. The Safeguarding Manager - Children explained that this varied depending upon the individual child but that it was the role of the IRO to establish ways of communicating with the individual child. Alison Hinds, Head of Service, Looked After Children referred the Board to the Performance Monitoring report which indicated a 91% participation rate of children in reviews. Cllr Rita Potter asked what steps would be taken if a child did not wish to or refused to participate in a review. The Head of Service, Looked After Children reported that it would be for the IRO to establish a way forward.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

7 **New Belongings**

The Head of Service, Looked After Children presented a report in connection with the New Belongings project. The project aimed to;

- Embed the principles of the Care Leavers Charter;
- Join up services to care leavers, as outlined in the Access All Areas report. This report called on Central Government Departments to improve the support offered to young people as they left the care system and in their early years after leaving care. It examined how working across government was essential to improve the support care leavers received and removed obstacles to their progress;
- Brought in the energy of local communities to support care leavers.

She reported that the project had been launched during “Care Leavers” week held during week commencing 2 November 2015. Furthermore, she reported on joint working with other Black Country authorities in a Cluster Group in which priorities were shared. A survey had been undertaken with Care Leavers to establish what was important to them and following the compilation of responses received an Action Plan had been prepared. She reported that work in relation to the project was being progressed through the Care Leavers Forum.

Cllr Paula Brookfield reported that the Mayor, Cllr Ian Brookfield and her, in her capacity as Mayoress, had met recently with representatives from the Care Leavers

Forum, and that a very positive response to this project had been indicated. It was considered to provide a platform from which to provide their views for consideration.

Cllr Peter O'Neill commended the initiative and also the use of the Care Leavers Forum to continue progressing this initiative. He enquired as to the actions being taken with regard to LAC currently classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). The Head of Service – Looked after Children advised that the Council was proactive on this issue and worked closely with Partners with particular emphasis on arranging Work Experience / Apprenticeship opportunities etc. Cllr Peter O'Neill enquired as to whether the NEET figures were monitored on a regular basis. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, assured the Board that this position was kept under review and reported to the Board through the Performance Monitoring report considered at each meeting. She suggested that enough work was not done with LAC or Care Leavers to promote opportunities in Further or Higher Education.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss referred to paragraph 6.1 of the report and queried whether the Council needed to think differently in relation to its dealings with the most vulnerable young people in society or whether this had already happened. The Head of Service, Looked After Children explained that the Council was very conscious of the extra help that could be required by Care Leavers and endeavoured to provide this.

Cllr Stephen Simkins advised the Board that Universal Credit was to be introduced across the Black Country shortly and, in his opinion, it was essential that Care Leavers were well informed as to their respective entitlements. Also, there appeared to be an increase in the aspiration levels of younger LAC to participate in Higher or Further Education. The Head of Service, Looked After Children, commented that joint working across the Black Country would assist in identifying solutions to common problems. She confirmed an increase in interest from Care Leavers in accessing opportunities for Further or Higher Education. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, assured the Board that access to benefits would be addressed.

Cllr Rita Potter welcomed the report and the initiative as it presented a better opportunity for Care Leavers to move on independently. She asked, however, what would happen if a Care Leaver decided to return to their original family home to reside with their family. The Head of Service, Looked After Children confirmed that this did happen in some cases. Cllr Paula Brookfield opined that in some cases Care Leavers who were struggling with leaving care would welcome an opportunity to return to the familial home. The Head of Service, Looked After Care, reported on the working relationship between the Council and Wolverhampton Homes and the amount of support available to Care Leavers.

Cllr Peter O'Neill referred to previous housing arrangements which had been made for Care Leavers which had failed due to a lack of management interventions and enquired as to the present arrangements. The Head of Service, Looked After Children commented that it was now the practice to review those provisions that worked well and to seek to expand such schemes. The Service Director, Children and Young People advised that the Council worked closely with Wolverhampton Homes in the provision of suitable accommodation but that not all Care Leavers required assistance from the Council following discharge from care. Cllr Stephen Simkins commented that in any event it was no longer possible to house Care Leavers in clusters as this would be contrary to Age Discrimination legislation.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss enquired as to progress with the “Talent Match” scheme. The Head of Service, Looked After Children, confirmed that the Council was working closely with the providers of this scheme.

Resolved:

1. That the implementation of the New Belongings Project across the City of Wolverhampton Council be supported;
2. That the New Belongings Action Plan be noted.

8 **Performance Management Data**

The Service Director, Children and Young People presented the Performance Report for November (data as at September 2015) and responded to a number of questions.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

9 **Exclusion of the press and public**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information contained in paragraph 1 of the Act, namely information relating to any individual.

Part 2 – items not open to the public and press

10 **Councillors visits to establishments**

No visits to establishments had been undertaken by Councillors since the last meeting of the Board (see Minute No. 5 above.).

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Corporate Parenting Board

6 January 2016

Report Title	Summary of outstanding matters	
Cabinet Member with Lead Responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Cabinet Member for Children and Young People	
Wards Affected	All	
Accountable Director	Emma Bennett – Service Director – Children and Young People	
Originating service	Governance	
Accountable officer(s)	Carl Craney Tel Email	Democratic Services Officer 01902 55(5046) carl.craney@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Recommendations for noting:

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to consider and comment on the summary of outstanding matters

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to appraise the Board of the current position with a variety of matters considered at previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board Board.

2.0 Background

2.1 At previous meetings of the Board the following matters were considered and details of the current position is set out in the fourth column of the table.

<u>DATE OF MEETING</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>LEAD MEMBER / OFFICER</u>	<u>CURRENT POSITION</u>
1 July 2015 and 30 September 2015	Review of Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	Emma Bennett	Report to 23 February 2016 meeting
1 July 2015	Details of casework, in terms of number of cases, of individual Social Workers	Emma Bennett	Report to 6 January 2016 meeting
1 July 2015	Academic achievements of Looked After Children and support provided to poor achievers	Darren Martindale	Report to 23 February 2016 meeting
1 July 2015 and 30 September 2015	Report back on visit to Upper Pendeford Farm	Cllr Val Gibson / Alice Vickers	Report to this meeting
30 September 2015	Report on "New Belongings" project to be circulated to the Board	Emma Bennett	Report circulated on 28 October 2015 and to be considered at 30 March 2016 meeting
30 September 2015	Briefing Note on levelling of inter-agency placement fees	Emma Bennett	Report to 6 January 2016 meeting
30 September	Report back on visit to	Cllrs Peter O'Neill	Report to a future

2015 Merridale Street West and Stephen meeting
Simkins / Alice
Vickers

3.0 Financial implications

3.1 None arising directly from this report. The financial implications of each matter will be detailed in the report submitted to the Board.

4.0 Legal implications

4.1 None arising directly from this report. The legal implications of each matter will be detailed in the report submitted to the Board.

5.0 Equalities implications

5.1 None arising directly from this report. The equalities implications of each matter will be detailed in the reports submitted to the Board

6.0 Environmental implications

6.1 None arising directly from this report. The environmental implications of each matter will be detailed in the report submitted to the Board.

7.0 Human resources implications

7.1 None arising directly from this report. The human resources implications of each matter will be detailed in the report submitted to the Board.

8.0 Corporate landlord implications

8.1 None arising directly from this report. The corporate landlord implications of each matter will be detailed in the report submitted to the Board.

9.0 Schedule of background papers

9.1 Minutes of previous meetings of the Board and associated reports.

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Corporate Parenting Board

6 January 2016

Report title	Wolverhampton Fostering Annual Report April 2014 to March 2015	
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)	Daphne Atkinson	Senior Social Work Manager
	Tel	01902 555059
	Email	daphne.atkinson@wolverhampton.gov.uk

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to receive, observe, and provide feedback the Fostering Annual Report for 2014/2015.

1.0 Purpose

To enable the Corporate Parenting Board to have a clear understanding of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015

2.0 Background

2.1 The Fostering Service Annual Report, which is attached, highlights the work of the Fostering Service for the period April 2014 to March 2015. 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 shows continuity and improvements in the recruitment process of foster carers through targeted marketing activity. The contact and enquiries now reflect more consistently the true nature of interest to the service, and has helped to provide a better evaluation of the marketing and communication strategy. 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 expensive Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. Placements have on the whole remained stable, with consistent supportive innovation such as Keep Foster Carers Trained and Supported (KEEP) an evidence-based intervention model, which is being funded by the Department for Education.

3.2 The Fostering Service is helped in supporting carers and children through partnerships with Schools and Health. The Fostering Service commissions the services of an independent organisation to provide additional support to carers through workshops, support groups and individual work with carers.

Within Children's Services, there are effective working relationships between the Looked After Children's teams and Locality teams.

3.3 The intention is to continue to expand the foster carer community and develop specialist fostering provision within the service.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 The approved budget for 2014/15 for the Fostering Service is £5.5 million.

4.2 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

[NM/15122015/O]

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/15122015/S]

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 The Council wants 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 The full report is attached

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**CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L**

**Updated version ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT
APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2015**

AUTHOR: DAPHNE ATKINSON – Senior Social Work Manager, LAC

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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 12 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 Children, and Young People Service of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Fostering Service recruits train and supports foster carers to care for and support vulnerable children placed in their care. These placements include Relatives and Friends (Connected Persons) foster carers where children and young people are placed by the Local Authority within their family network. The Fostering Service also assesses and monitors Private Fostering arrangements.
- 1.3 The activities of the service works in conjunction to 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 in 2012 and was rated 'Good' with no notice of requirement.
- 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 are able to meet the individual needs of children. As such Wolverhampton Recruitment Marketing Strategy outlines how we aim to provide placement choice, which promotes children's welfare, stressing the importance of placing children within their family and friend's network, within their community, with their siblings and therefore making sure the stability of their education is not disrupted.

2.0 The Fostering Service comprises of the following:

- Placement Team - This Team although it sits within the Commissioning arm of the People Directorate, 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, using the child's referral information, including the wishes and feelings of the child and their birth family to try to identify suitable foster placements. For example, the right location to facilitate access to school and contact with family members, and where possible match the cultural and religious needs of the child.

- **Recruitment, Initial Assessments, Training, and Assessment of Foster Carers –** The service have responsibility for marketing, recruitment, training and assessing activities. The marketing function is fully supported by colleagues in Marketing and Communication service.
- **Generic or Mainstream Fostering –**The Fostering Service has a pool of generic foster carers to care for Wolverhampton vulnerable children needing to be in foster care. In Wolverhampton foster carers are assessed over a six month period and their approval is recommended by the fostering panel, and ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.
- **Support and Development –** The service has responsibility for providing supervision support and post approval training to all temporary, family and friends and permanent carers. The assessments of existing foster carers who wish to consider permanent placements for children who are in their care are also undertaken within the service.
- **Family and Friends (Connected Persons) –** The service is responsible for the assessment, training, and support of Family and Friends (Connected Persons), foster carers.
- **Private Fostering –** is regulated under the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005. This is a regulated area of work and is inspected by OSFTED. The last Inspection was in 2010. The service is responsible for raising awareness amongst the general public, professionals, parents and children. The assessments, training, and support of Private Foster carers also fall under the remit of the fostering service area of responsibility.
- **Special Guardianship -** In June 2014, the responsibility for the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Orders moved to the Fostering Service. When the care plan is for a child not to return home, Family & Friends carers are encouraged to apply for a Special Guardianship Order, essentially removing the child from the care system, and transferring parental responsibility to the carer.
- **Post Approval Training of Foster Carers –** Approximately 90 different courses are provided to Wolverhampton foster carers each year. However this is an area for further development. There are plans to recruit a training officer post ,with lead responsibility for the training and development of foster carers.
- **Independent Reviewing Officers -** There are two Independent Reviewing officers who undertake all reviews of foster carers and are involved in aspects of service development. They are managed within the Safeguarding Service.
- **Social work staffing -** The Fostering Service enjoys a full complement of 14.5 full time equivalent qualified social worker posts, and two full time equivalent unqualified posts.
- **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 conferences. All staff are subject to yearly individual annual Appraisal and reviews.

3.0 The Fostering Service Objectives :

- To provide a comprehensive good quality foster care service to all children looked after by Wolverhampton City 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 and 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 environment, so that children 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 academic achievements.

4.0 Recruitment of Foster Carers

4.1 The Restructure of Children Services in 2014/15 was a time of considerable change for the service, which has built a good foundation for the future, and served to bring a renewed vitality, energy and focus to the staff ,enabling clear lines of accountability, and focus on enhancing the experience of looked after children and young people for whom we are responsible.

4.2 This has also led to an improved approach to increase the capacity of the fostering population and quality of care offered. Through a comprehensive refocusing of the marketing and recruitment strategy that works creatively with foster carers, and the wider public in 2014/15, the service enhanced the quality of enquiries to the service with a small number of those coming from Independent fostering agencies

4.3 Because we know that foster carers can bring the role to life by sharing their experiences and portray a realistic but not off-putting view of fostering, we use five core foster carers who work with our Marketing and Communication officer to support the new marketing and recruitment campaign. Alongside this, approved foster carers also support information days and preparatory training for new applicants.

4.4 As the number of children looked after in Wolverhampton has grown significantly over the last three years the need to recruit more foster carers has become increasingly important .As with other Local Authorities ,recruitment of foster carers has become an increasing challenge. This is made more difficult by the economic climate, and the housing market, as people increasingly have to resort to finding a job, rather than been at home and available to foster.

4.5 The factors above has served to influence changes to the fostering communications approach as past evidence has shown that previous campaigns were reaching a large audience and generating many enquiries but with little return in number of approvals.

4.6 Wolverhampton was also chosen to participate in the Department for Education (Dfe) initiative to improve recruitment of foster carers. The fostering service benefited from specialist advice and creative ideas which were utilised as part of the fostering communication and marketing action plan. The campaign artwork and imagery was

refreshed based on national research by the Fostering Network and the results of its survey. A Facebook advertising campaign was launched which ran until the end of March 2015, with regular reviews of how this was performing, to provide the 'drip drip' effect.

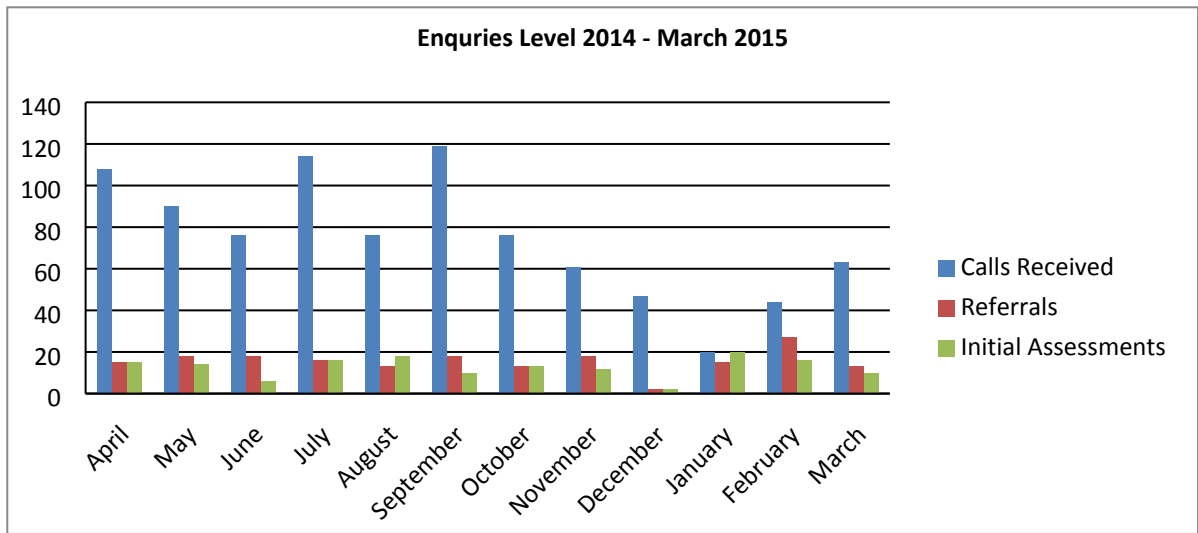
4.7 Telephone enquiries are routed through a dedicated call centre and dedicated fostering duty workers are available to respond immediately to callers who want more information.

4.8 There were a significant number of new ideas implemented to maintain the momentum of the fostering campaign throughout the year whilst spending the budget most effectively:

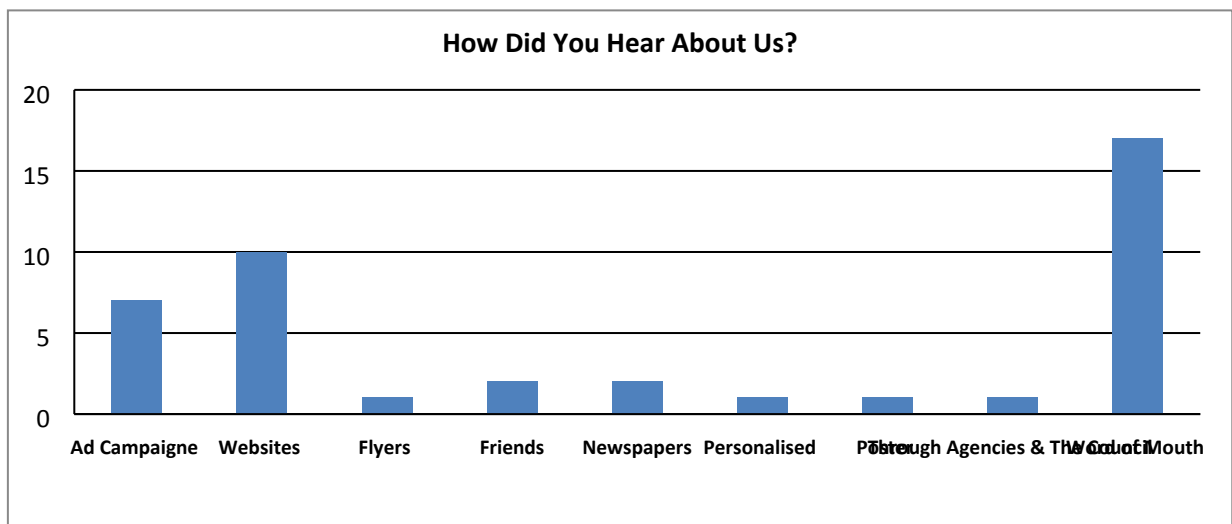
- Utilising the foster carers community as champions for recruitment events
- Consistent online and social media campaign
- Regular outreach events
- Two campaign bursts per year, one to include Foster Care Fortnight (1 to 14 June) using Fostering Network national campaign theme 'Make a connection.
- Focus on foster carers as customers Membership communications (benefits, newsletters, events)
- Customer service review
- Using data in targeted communication approach
Reviewing website content and developments to online engagement
- Campaign burst up to December 2014
- Commencement of information sessions in Bilston and the city centre
- Outreach work at the Christmas lights switch on events
- Increase in Facebook posts with messages related to the festive period Facebook reach to Wolverhampton audience (awareness) 67,646
- Email marketing
- Presentations to the Inter Faith Network and the discussion of opportunities for joint promotion
- Work with Wolverhampton Football Club who supported the campaign through an advert in their match day programme and the provision of their mascots to support the Fostering Friday launch
- A two week radio campaign
- An advert in the Express & Star as part of a sponsorship package
- Distribution of information through partners including Wolverhampton Homes and West Midlands Police

4.9 **Management Information Recruitment Activity 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015**

The table below illustrates the level of contact, enquires, and initial assessments from April 2014 to March 2015.



The table below illustrates the enquiries by source of marketing methods 2014 / 2015:



4.10 The most effective marketing methods in terms of generation of enquiries continue by a significant margin to be the internet and word of mouth through family and friends. This has remained constant in line with last year's data

4.11 During the year we have experienced a two percent decrease in the dropout rate between initial enquiry and initial visit in comparison to last year. The dropout rate of 73% between the enquiry and the initial visit is due to either the enquirer deciding not to pursue their application, the enquirer not meeting the basic requirements for fostering or the Fostering Team ruling out. There are also often general enquiries about fostering which are included in this number, whereby the caller is simply gathering appropriate information to consider fostering rather than wishing to pursue an application at that time.

4.12 It is critical that children in care are helped to develop strong, trusting relationships with their carers, so at this stage applicants now receive more detailed information about fostering, and clarity about the fostering task and the criteria for progression in the application process.

4.13 There are a range of reasons for ruling applicants out at this stage, for example:

- Accommodation issues, e.g., lack of bedroom space, major 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

4.14 In the last year we have undertaken 151 initial assessments, with 37 household progressing onto the Skills to Foster preparation training course. During the initial assessment a more detailed discussion is held between the applicants and social workers from the Recruitment and Assessment Team. This will cover:

- 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

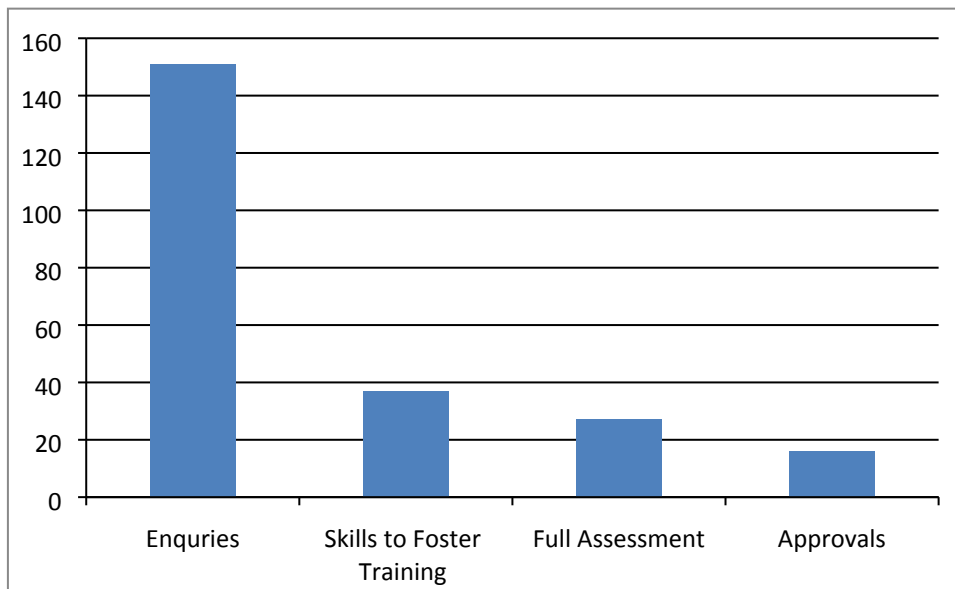
4.15 The dropout rate of 72% at this stage of the process is again due to either applicants recognising that they are unable to pursue fostering, or this is not the right time for them to continue their application or the social workers counselling out applicants due to concerns with any of the above issues.

5.0 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. These authorities work in partnership to jointly facilitate preparation courses for fostering at a minimum of twelve times per year. Each Local Authority is committed to hosting a minimum of three courses. The training is evenly spread over the course of the year, and held at different times i.e. evenings, weekends or during the day. This offers maximum flexibility to enable applicants to attend at a time most convenient to themselves.

5.2 All the statutory materials were updated in line with regulatory requirement, reframing the assessment process. Five 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses were facilitated in July 2014, September 2014, November 2014, January 2015 and March 2015.

5.3 In total 37 households attended the preparation courses with 27 progressing onto the full assessments. Included in this number of 27 were two applicants who were trained by one of the other partner local authorities due to the available dates and the applicants' convenience.



Wolverhampton figures for 2014/2015 indicate that 10.6 % of enquiries proceeded to approvals.

- 5.4 Research by Fostering Network (2015) shows that only ten percent of all enquiries preceded to approval and the journey to approval takes an average of 273 days.
- 5.5 During 2015/16 the Sufficiency Strategy aims at reviewing and improving every aspect of the recruitment process to achieve ambitious targets to grow local capacity of available in house foster carer, significantly increasing the numbers over a period of time and reversing the ratio of in house to independent agency carers so that 50-60% of all foster placements will be with Wolverhampton.

5.6 **Assessments**

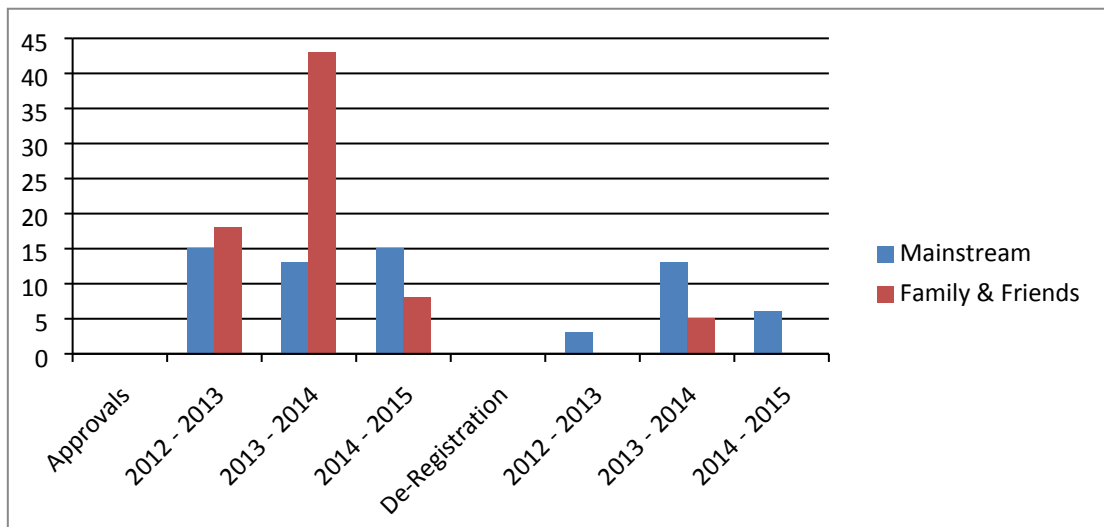
Assessments are part of the core work of the fostering team which enables the building of a comprehensive picture of the applicants. Evidence based and analytical assessments are completed on all prospective foster carers to help understand their motivation and ability to care for children who have experienced loss and separation and trauma. Caring for such children requires people with understanding, patience, and ability to understand and accept behaviours that are not usually the norm. In addition to collating factual information, assessment focuses on peoples own experiences of being parented, parenting, their understanding of safeguarding children and their ability to create a warm and nurturing home for children.

- 5.7 References are sought from a variety of relevant organisations, in addition to personal references supplied by the applicants
- 5.8 The full fostering assessment is commissioned from an independent provider, Core Asset
- 5.9 **Approved Foster Carers Activity as at the 31 March 2015**

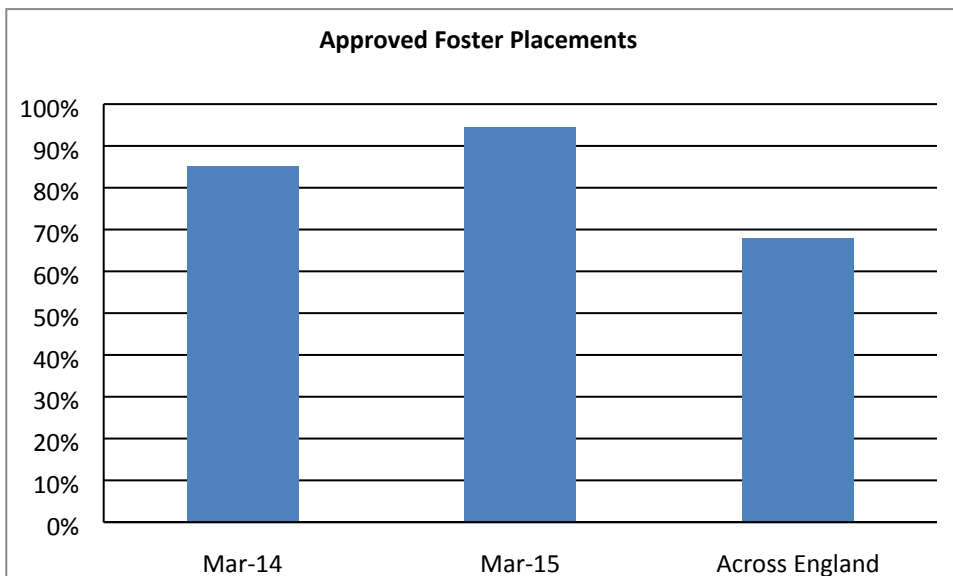
Mainstream or Short term foster carers, care for children and young people on a short term basis, until permanent plans are made for them. Therefore children and young people could be in placement for a few days a few months or two to three years

depending on the circumstances of their individual situations. The recruitment of carers as outlined above is in the main to recruit foster carers to care for this group of children

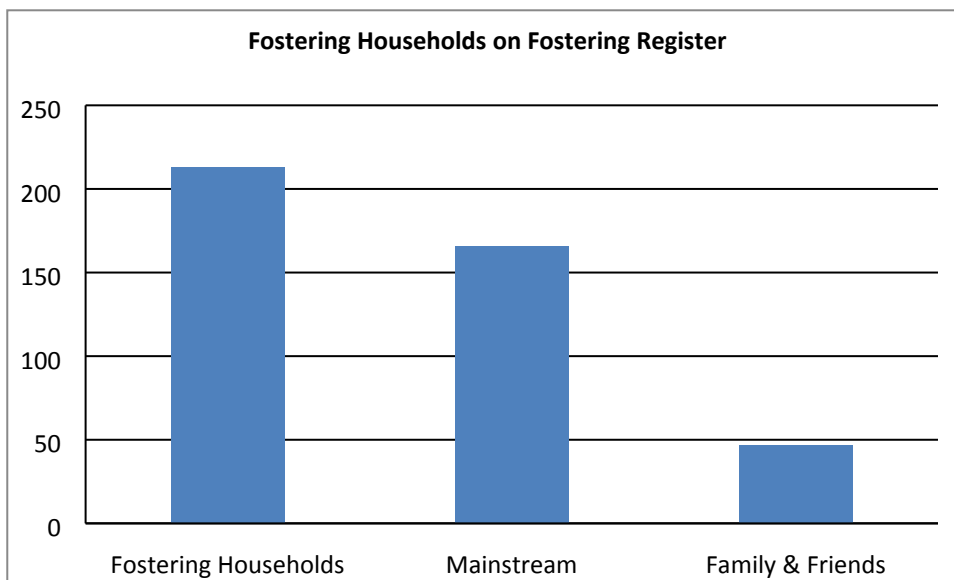
The table below illustrates the number of foster carers Approval for the last three years (2012/2013 2013/2014 2014/2015):



- 5.10 The concentrated focus saw 18 approved mainstream foster carer household. Foster carers are now approved under a generic approval category and are expected to take children between the ages of 0 and 18. This approval will enable foster carers to care for children on a temporary and permanent basis, and in addition they can consider respite care and emergency placements. This offers the service a wider potential of internal resource
- 5.11 At the 31 March 2015 there were 233 approved foster placements, of which 220 were filled (94. 4%) compared to 209 (85%) filled last year. This compares to just 68% of available places filled across England as a whole.

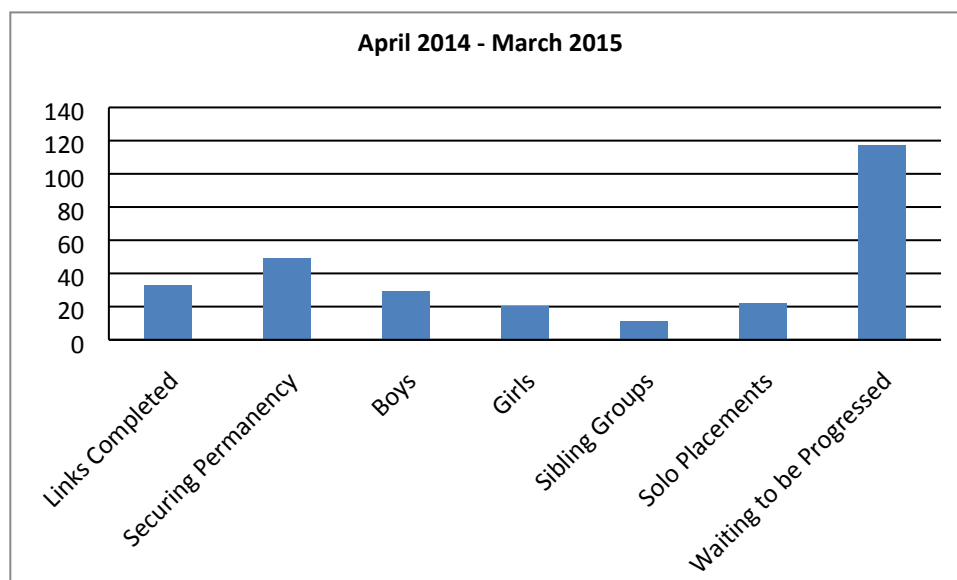


The table below illustrates the number of fostering household in 2014/2015:



6.0 Permanency through Long Term Fostering

6.1 Wolverhampton Fostering Service seeks to achieve permanency for children and young people when the care plan is fostering or long term fostering. Children needing permanent placements are referred to the Fostering Family Finder. The family finder builds a profile of the child/young person and works with the child's social worker to effect the permanency plans. Permanent carers make a commitment to care for a particular child offering permanency until the child reaches the age of independence. These carers often go on to choose to provide Staying Put arrangements in order for young people to remain in the household post 18 years.

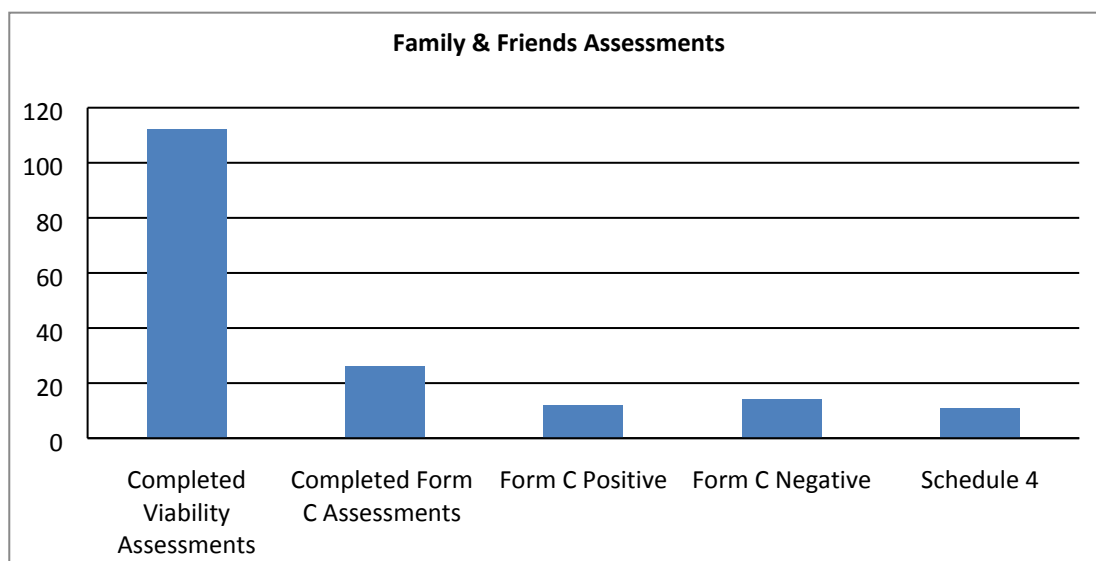


6.2 The fostering service secured 46 matches, a total of 52 permanent placements for children for whom the care plan is permanency, some of whom may not have been able to continue into permanency within their current placement arrangements, or who are in an external provision and wished to remain with their foster placements.

7.0 Family and Friends Carers (Connected Persons)

- 7.1 Local Authorities have a responsibility to consider members of the child’s family, or friend (connected persons) when a child is facing the real possibility of becoming looked after.
- 7.2 The 2014/2015 period, offered real challenges due to the balance that needs to be sought in terms of increase in requests for connected persons assessments, the timescales of which have been determined by the court and continuing to seek new fostering resources. The team has also been required to assist the childcare teams by jointly (where possible) carrying out viability assessments of prospective family and friends. There are real difficulties because the majority of these relatives live a far distance away.
- 7.3 This group of foster carers are not recruited as described above; they put themselves forward to care for children from within their family network. They are assessed by the service as to their suitability to provide a placement for a particular child or children in care. Family and Friends care is also governed by The Fostering Regulations 2011. They account for 48 fostering households providing 52 placements. We continue to see a marked increase in referrals for these assessments; the majority of these do not translate into formal assessments.

7.4 The graph below illustrate the work of Family and Friends for 2014-2015:



- 7.5 This group of carers can present challenges for the service in that they do not always willingly comply with the fostering requirements i.e. training or keeping records. They see their role differently to that of our recruited carers, some of our Family and Friends carers are the grand-parents of the children placed. These aspects continue to be a challenge which is being addressed by providing clearer information at the point of placement about expectations and that they sign up to this at an earlier stage of the process.

8.0 Short Breaks (Shared Care) Respite Foster Carers

- 8.1 There are now three approved short break/respice foster carers providing respice placements for disabled children. These are foster carers who due to work commitments or family commitments are unable to provide a full time fostering resource. They will only provide care to children or young people, usually disabled children who need a temporary placement for a week end or a week during school

holidays. The respite carers are teachers, or social workers who work full time. They offer a regular break to parents and carers who have children who may have challenging behaviours or a disability so that they can have a break. The plans are to enhance this area within the recruitment and communication strategy for 2015/2016

8.2 It is intended that once the new arrangement for fees and allowances are introduced in 2016, and under the umbrella of Short breaks will be a service provided by the fee paid foster carers, who will be paid an allowance to offer 90 plus night care per year to a number of different children., These will be carers who are matched with children who have substantial care needs and managed by social workers from the Children Disability teams.

9.0 Special Guardianship

9.1 In June 2014, the responsibility for the assessment and support for Special Guardianship Orders moved to the Fostering Service. Where the care plan is for the child not to return home the Family and Friends carers are encouraged to apply for Special Guardianship Orders, thereby taking the child out of care and giving parental responsibility to the carer. This area of work is developing and can be a growth area. There are other routes leading to a Special Guardianship order other than the looked after children route. The figures for Special Guardianships orders are approximately 150 children. There were six Special Guardianship Order applications granted this year. There is a dedicated worker supporting this area of work.

10.0 Post Approval supervision, support and reviewing

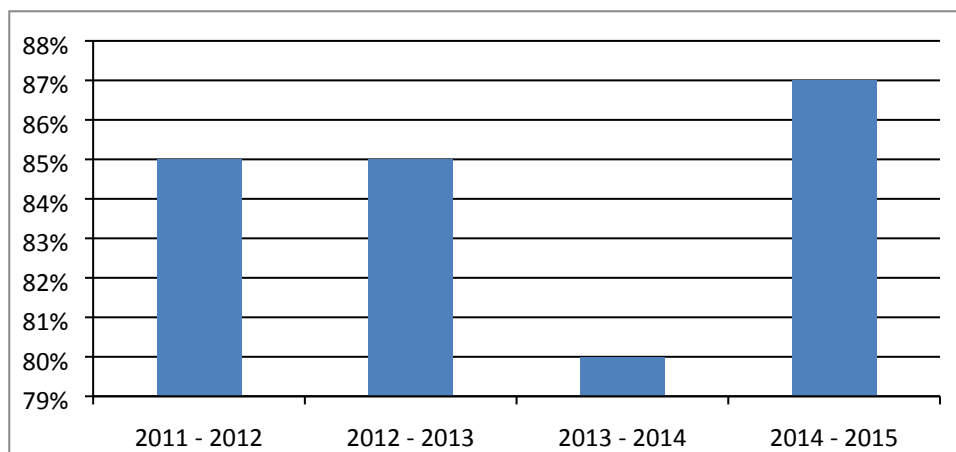
10.1 All approved foster carers have an allocated, suitably qualified supervising social worker. The allocated supervising social worker is responsible for supervising and supporting carers, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support and direction to maintain a quality service, including safe caring practices. This will include an understanding that they must work within the agency's policies, procedures and guidance. However, 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. Because we know that our foster carers provide foster placements for children and young people who present challenges and, or have a range of complex needs, we support our carers to meet these challenges. We have behaviour management programme in place such as validated parenting programme (KEEP)

10.2 Wolverhampton has a commissioning arrangement with Heantun Child Care services to provide a range of support services to our foster carers. These include:

- 24/7-365 days advice and guidance outside of office hours,
- Dedicated buddy to all newly approved foster carers for a period of six months,
- A variety of activities
- A quarterly newsletter
- Assisting in recruitment activity
- Participating with the service in developing and reviewing policies and procedures
- Facilitating carer training
- Running coffee mornings and support groups
- Involvement in regular communication meetings with the service
- A range of support groups and forums.

- 10.3 All Wolverhampton carers have access to seven nights paid respite arrangements each year. As well as the regular fostering arrangements there are also eight approved temporary foster carers who also provide short term foster carers with regular respite placements. In addition respite carers may offer a regular break to carers who may have challenging placements in order that they can have a break.
- 10.4 Foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis (with the exception of newly approved carers who are reviewed six months following their approval) by Independent Reviewing Officers. Social workers and children are given the opportunity to have an input into this process. This will involve the carer meeting with the independent reviewing officer. The reviewing officer will discuss the activity of a foster carer to ensure the carer continues to be suitable to act as a foster carer, and the household is a suitable premise. The reviewing officer will seek the views of the foster carer, the foster child (subject to the child's age and understanding) the child's social worker, the supervising social worker, any other relevant and appropriate person. The review is also an opportunity for the carer to review the service and support given to the children who are placed.
- 10.5 During this review period 141 Annual Foster Home Reviews have been completed
- 10.6 Overall, the Reviews have remained positive and the standard of Foster Care delivered to children and young people remains good.
- It was noted that the quality of written feedback received from supervising social workers remains good during that year
 - Completed unannounced supervision visits have increased by three per cent to eighty three per cent.
 - Foster Carer's generally report the continuing positive working relationships with the Fostering Service, other colleagues and agency partners.
 - Consultation feedback from children and professionals is 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.
 - 90% of Foster Carers have completed their Children's Workforce Development Council workbook (CWDC).
 - Trends emerging from reviews during the year generally related to the lack of attendance at first reviews by supervising social workers and the number of reviews where the recommendation that Life Journey work is completed has been recorded. There were also significant numbers of foster homes where a Safe Care statement needed renewing.
 - These matters are addressed in an action plan to the service which was addressed.
- 10.7 The reviews are considered by the fostering panel (first review or after an allegation, major change in circumstances etc. or change in terms of approval). Over this period, 94% of reviews have been held within the timescales. This rate is an increase from 88% from the previous year. The reviewing officers are timely in chairing the reviews.

- 10.8 Training is a continual process and all Wolverhampton foster carers are offered new training and training to update their skills on a regular basis following approval. Carers are required to complete the evidenced based Training Support and Development standards National Standards work book within the first year of approval. (first 18 months for Family and Friends).The Fostering service provides a core of six to eight induction courses for all new carers and a range of development training courses for foster carers using both internal and external trainers. Additionally there is a Diploma training programme for foster carers, as well as Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), course in the care of traumatised children. Carers can also access additional training “on line”.
- 10.9 Foster carers training needs are identified as part of their Personal Development Plan process and intended to assist in identifying gaps in their skills and knowledge and to ensure that they can meet their obligations under the Foster Carer Service Agreement. Some training will be mandatory and other training voluntary. Failure to attend training that has been identified as appropriate could place continued registration as a foster carer at risk.
- 10.10 The graph below illustrates the completion rate of unannounced visit:



11.0 Foster carers Learning and Development

- 11.1 Maintaining placements stability for children and young people in foster placements is regarded as very high priority, to achieve positive outcomes. The fostering service works very closely with children 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 carer.
- 11.2 Wolverhampton provides a comprehensive programme of learning and development to foster carers .This begins before they are approved, whereby prospective foster carers attend the pre –approval, 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.
- 11.3 With the new revised arrangement for fess and allowances a more individualised learning programme which focuses on further development of foster carers knowledge, skills and experience in areas of their interest and areas specific to the needs of the child or young person in placement will be promoted.
- 11.4 Ideally, Wolverhampton prefer foster carers to attend live face to face training, as this is not only informative but gives carers the opportunity to meet other carers and form local connections, but we recognise that people learn in different ways and have other

commitments that make attendance at a live course problematic, therefore we offer foster carers the opportunity to undertake some courses via a distance learning option and we have introduced a large number of online training courses. We are committed to continuing to develop our courses so we can present foster carers with the best training available. We will continually assess our courses to ensure they meet the changing needs of foster carers. Foster carers complete an evaluation of the training they have attended and this together with the foster carers Annual Review enables us to look at areas that need to be improved or developed.

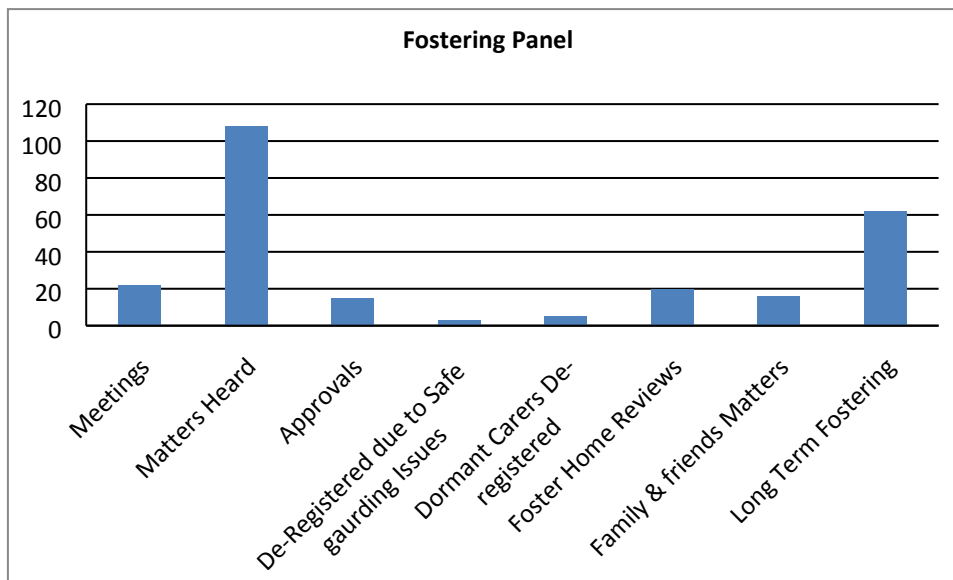
- 11.5 Keep Foster Carers Supported and Trained (KEEP) is a 16 week interactive learning experience for foster carers designed by Oregon .Its aim is to equip carers with a variety of practical skills for caring /parenting. There are two programmes one for children under 12, and the other for carers of young people over 12. The course provides foster carers with a framework for understanding behaviours and developing skills to strengthen the relationship with the children placed with them, and enhance their self- esteem, giving praise, positive attention, and tangible rewards. The programmes make an invaluable contribution to the support and retention of foster carers and also to the stability of placements. Of the courses completed over a period of four years, there has only been three placement disruptions reported.
- 11.6 As outlined above we will continue to enhance the training and development of foster carers as we have successfully employed a full time training officer who will give focus to the training and development of foster carers, and who will introduce more interface between the foster carers and technological developments, whereby foster carers can access online training and development guide to courses ,with booking system on line where times, dates, venues, programmes, etc. can be managed by the foster cares, where they can also apply to attend training courses in a number of ways, either via the webpage, via the post, via emails.
- 11.7 Additionally, at the end of March 2015 90% of mainstream foster carers, shared care foster carers and connected persons (Family & Friends carers) had successfully completed the Training Support and Development standards (TSDS). Newly registered foster carers are being supported to achieve the standards within twelve months of approval. This is facilitated by the

12.0 Fostering Panel

- 12.1 The work of the panel is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The panel must advise on:
- On reviews of approvals(Reg 28),and monitor their effectiveness
 - Oversee the conduct of assessments
 - Give advice and make recommendations on any other matters referred to it
- 12.2 The panel makes recommendations to the agency decision maker who is the Head of Service, for Looked After Children within seven days of receiving the recommendation of the panel, and a final copy of the minutes. The Head of Children in Need and Child Protection deputises in the absence of The Head of Service Looked After Children.
- 12.3 The 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. The quality assurance extends to how the panel members are prepared for their task and each panel members are asked to complete feedback forms on a range of tasks during the panel process. This also extends to all attending the panel with the

appropriate feedback forms are available for attendees to complete should they wish to do so.

- 12.4 It has been a busy period for the fostering panel, with a steady flow of foster carer approvals and the departure of a number of foster carers. There has been a steady increase in the number of placements made with Family and Friend foster carers. Foster carer first annual reviews have been presented to panel, as have reviews requiring change of approval category, and reviews following concerns or allegations, and an increased number of permanency decisions for children.
- 12.4 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.
- 12.5 The central list consists of two previous looked after children, foster carers, adopters 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.
- 12.6 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.
- 12.7 Wolverhampton Fostering panel meets twice each month, and over the review period have had twenty two meetings in order to meet the demands of the service. In the main the work 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 were heard, including changes of approval category, as were Family and Friends matters and children's long term fostering best interest decisions were agreed through the Virtual Panel.
- 12.8 Development over this period has seen the 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 carers, and also those who are placed with Family and Friends (Connected persons) foster placements. 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.
- 12.9 **The diagram is an illustration of the work of the fostering panel for the review period 2013/2014:**



12.10 Training is offered to panel members to ensure that they understand their responsibility as panel members and are also up to date with the legal requirements and legislation relevant to children in care. Panel members are also able to access the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board training as required. They also have access to the Learning hub, where each member can undertake all the mandatory training defined by the department and also any other training of relevant to their task. The induction programme for new panel members needs to be strengthened, and this is an area for further development by the panel advisor.

12.11 Each panel member has a yearly appraisal which is performed by the panel chair and panel advisor. The appraisal consists of self-evaluation and a face to face meeting.

13.0 Complaints/Compliments

13.1 There were three matters referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Two decisions were upheld and one was referred back to the service for further consideration.

13.2 The fostering panel have received complimentary comments on the running of the panel and the welcoming of all attendees to panel. 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. The waiting area is also an area for some considerations as it is described as clinical and unwelcoming.

13.2 Complaints about the service

13.3 There were nine complaints received about the fostering service during the year, none of which were from children. This was lower than the previous year, and compares favourably with the national average of 18% of complaints that were from fostered children.

13.4 These complaints largely resulted from the re-organisation children services which have been embedded. There were also features of poor communication. This has resulted in some work with colleagues across children in need, looked after children, child protection, and foster carers to improve the situation. At the same time, there have also been compliments from foster carers regarding the support they have

received from social workers. However the service reviews complaints learns from them and makes adjustments and improvements.

14.0 Private fostering (PF)

14.1 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.

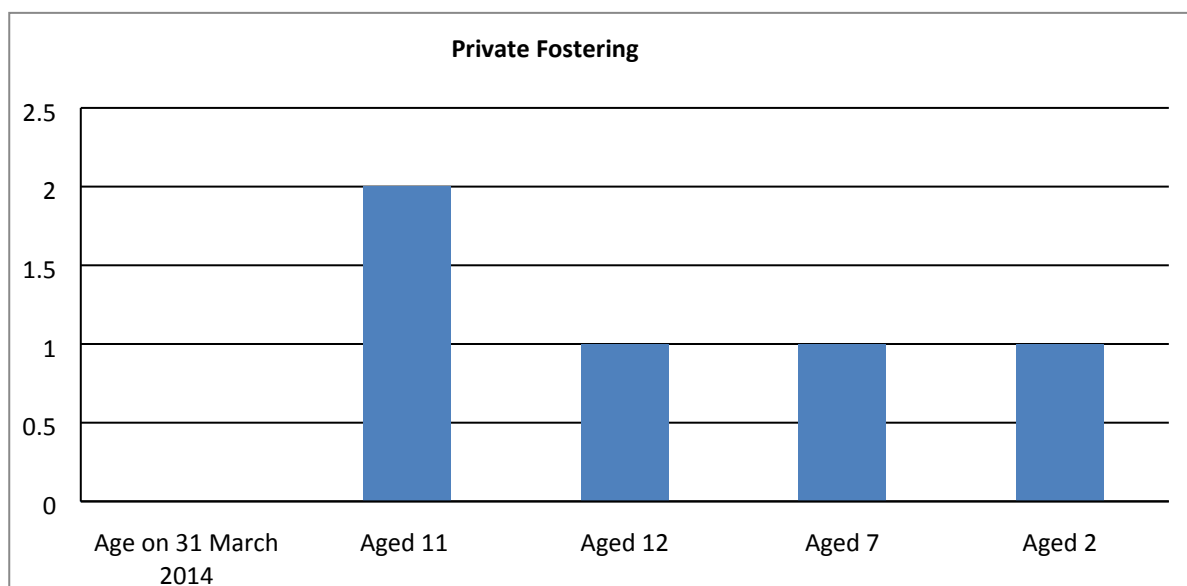
14.2 Research indicates that at least 50% of notifications come from children services, because usually the young person, or children are known to the department, and the young person has made their own arrangements. The other 40% are usually from the carers themselves, or through language schools, as the child/y/p might have come to the United Kingdom from abroad for their education.

14.3 The Local Authority is responsible for awareness raising to ensure that the public is aware of its duty to notify the Local Authority of all Private Fostering arrangements. Over the last year the service has concentrated on publicity through schools, and meeting with the lead safeguarding officers, reviewing and renewing its publicity through materials for various uses

14.4 The number of children and young people in Private Fostering arrangements fluctuates, and this year although there have been some notifications, the number of children and young people in these arrangements has remained consistently low.

- Over the last year, four private fostering assessments have been completed of which three went on to private fostering arrangement, the fourth did not commence.
- All four cases had action under Regulations 4(1) and 7(1) taken and completed within seven working days
- 100% (three / four) had all visits completed at six week intervals or less
- All four children are British (Three are White British and one is Mixed – White / Asian)
- There are two Private Fostering arrangements currently.

The table below shows the Private Fostering Activity for 2014/15:



14.5. Management oversight is provided through supervision and management scrutiny at the assessment stage. In addition the Private Fostering Assessment is approved by the Designated Fostering Decision Maker, Head of Looked After Children services.

14.6 The Children in Need and Child Protection units complete the child in need assessment and the assessment. Private foster carers have access to the fostering service training i.e. Safe Care, First Aid and Behaviour Management etc.

15.0 Financial Package for Foster Carers

15.1 Foster carers receive a weekly allowance to cover all living cost associated to the child they care for. Wolverhampton rates follow those recommended by the Fostering Network and are usually increased annually. The rates vary according to the age of the child. Foster carers are expected to open a bank account to encourage children to save some of their money. Guidance is given regarding the amount to be spent on clothing, pocket money and savings. Birthday and festival allowances are paid in addition to the above.

15.2 Recruitment and Retention

15.3 This is the fee paid to Wolverhampton foster carers. This is paid in recognition of the time as a foster carer for the City of Wolverhampton, and starts from two plus years to nine plus years. In addition foster carers are paid an annual fee of up to £600 per person in recognition of their attendance at training events.

16.0 Working in Partnership / Feedback from User participation

16.1 The Fostering Service encourages feedback from foster carers to promote on- going development and learning for the fostering service. On an annual basis, for their yearly review, foster carers are asked to comment on the quality of support they receive. In addition, foster carers have the opportunity to make comments at foster carers forum, support groups, the Corporate Parenting Board and other meetings which they attend. The fostering service also sends out an annual questionnaire to children and carers to ascertain their views on the service they receive.

16.2 The introduction of the children's services reorganisation brought some challenges for foster carers. Over the past year steps have been taken to strengthen the relationship with Wolverhampton foster carers. This has ranged from consultations, where changes have been made, meetings attended by Senior Managers, and Lead members. It is expected that meetings will continue with fostering managers to further strengthen the relationship.

17.0 Summary

17.1 Overall the work of the Fostering Service has increased significantly and brought with it the challenge of meeting the individual demands of the various timescales in different parts of the service. In addition to recruiting and supporting foster carers, the team works with the Adoption Service when placing children in adoption placements, life appreciation events and introductions of children into adoptive placements.

17.2 The future will bring challenges in terms of changes to the management team as there are two Consultant Social work posts vacant, which will bring challenges in the stability of the team and the performance of the service.

18.0 Future Service Development/Challenges for the next year

- Reduce the numbers of children placed in external foster care placements. This will be achieved by increasing internal capacity by creating additional new placements (for new and existing carers) and “stretching” existing carers in terms of numbers of children placed, age 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 (Special Guardianship and Residence Orders). This will also be supported through the re-launch of the permanence strategy, including the amended permanence financial support policy.
- Recruit to foster carers to Specialist Fostering Scheme (specialist carers).
- To embed the new fees and allowances payments structure that will engage and reward foster carers for the work they do.

Key Improvements

- The focus on Private Fostering needs to continue to be strengthened. This needs to include change to the materials used and more awareness training for partner agencies.
- Recruit key personnel to create stability within the service so that the development of the service can be progressed
- To develop “Specialist Foster Service” to cater for the effects of the emotional impact of trauma for children and young people, to aid children’s placement stability and the development of resilience for looked after children.
- Implement KEEP Safe training
- To source appropriate relevant training for Specialist Foster Carers to enhance foster carer Learning and Development
- To progress developments within the units to enable them to respond efficiently and effectively to the needs of the wider children’s service.
- To continue to review and refocus recruitment materials and processes with a view to streamlining and focusing the core business
- Update all statutory materials in line with regulatory requirements

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Corporate Parenting Board

6 January 2016

Report title	Adoption agency interim report
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Families
Wards affected	All
Accountable director	Linda Sanders, People
Originating service	Children and Family Support
Accountable employee(s)	Tel Louise Haughton 01902 553010 Email louise.haughton@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	The report has not been considered at any other meetings.

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive, observe and provide feedback on the Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service interim report.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report details the work of Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service in the year April 2015 to September 2015.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to provide updated information in relation to adoption locally.

2.0 Background

2.1 Adoption Reform Agenda

- 2.1.1 The adoption reform agenda has been on-going since the latter part of 2011 and as well as the introduction of new legislation three papers have been released.
- 2.1.2 An action plan for adoption: tackling delay, March 2012, further action on adoption: finding more loving homes, January 2013 and regionalising adoption, June 2015.
- 2.1.3 The Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) was launched in April 2014.
- 2.1.4 The ALB is a new national board with a remit to drive significant improvements in the performance of the adoption system in England.
- 2.1.7 Regionalising adoption, June 2015 is the most recent DfE paper and outlines the government's plans to reduce the number of adoption agencies across England. It is argued that fewer adoption agencies would achieve more economies of scale and would allow quicker matching for children. It is anticipated that Local Authorities will have a wider pool of adopters who could potentially meet the needs of a child for whom they were considering adoption.
- 2.1.8 Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell, Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire and Adoption Focus (a voluntary adoption agency) submitted a regionalisation proposal to access funds with the purpose of developing a single sub-regional adoption service. The group have been successful in securing £100,000 from the Department of Education (DfE) to scope the best possible means of delivering a single adoption service in line with the regionalising adoption agenda.
- 2.1.9 All six Local Authorities and adoption focus are committed to creating a single Black Country and Adoption Focus adoption service that can increase sufficiency for all of the children in the region.
- 2.1.10 It is anticipated that any new model will build on the existing ABC (adoption in the Black Country) and Adoption Focus model. Recruitment and assessment, family finding and adoption support are the three main areas that are likely to be delivered through a regional adoption service.

2.2 Panel Business

2.2.1 Below are the number of adopters approved and the number of children matched with prospective adopters between April 2015 and September 2015. The figures in brackets are the same figures for the full year April 2015- March 2015.

Approval of Prospective adopters	Matches of children with prospective adopters
9 (25)	21 (67)

2.3 Adopter approval

- 2.3.1 There have been nine approvals of prospective adopters in the first half of the current financial year. It is expected that a further 14 adopters will be approved by April 2015. This will represent a small decrease in the approval of prospective adopters.
- 2.3.2 ABC (Adoption in the Black Country) has experienced a levelling off of referrals in this financial year. Fewer of these referrals have converted to approved prospective adopters across all four Local Authorities. Over the two preceding years ABC successfully recruited much larger numbers of adopters with enquiries increasing by over 100%. There are a number of factors that could have influenced the recent trend. For example it is known that the number of prospective adopters waiting nationally increased significantly in the last reporting period to over 3,000, with a large number of prospective adopters waiting over 12 months. It is possible that potential adopters are aware of the long waiting periods and are choosing not to begin the process at present.
- 2.3.3 There are currently 14 families waiting to be linked. Of the 14 families six links are being progressed with children from Wolverhampton who have plans of adoption.
- 2.3.4 There are six Asian families currently waiting. In the last two years just two children of Asian or Asian dual heritage background have become subject to a plan of adoption in Wolverhampton. They were placed for adoption with foster carers. This compares to eight in the previous year. As a result, these families have waited longer than anticipated for a link. Two other families have very precise matching criteria and Wolverhampton have not yet been able to identify a match. Family finding has been active on their behalf and they have been advised to attend national exchange days. They have also been featured on Adoption Links which is a national adoption data base, the National Adoption Register and Adopt West Mids.

2.4 Links of children with prospective adopters

- 2.4.1 During the last reporting period April 2013 to March 2014, 67 children were matched with prospective adopters. In the first six months of this reporting year 21 matches were approved by the agency decision maker.
- 2.4.2 Seven of the 21 children matched at panel were part of a sibling group.

- 2.4.3 When considering the ethnicity of the children matched, four of the 21 children were of BME (black and minority ethnic) background. This equates to 19% of children matched. This remains above the England average of 8%.
- 2.4.4 Of the 21 children linked seven were over three, with six of these being boys over the age of five.
- 2.4.5 11 of the 21 children were placed within four months of a placement order which equated to 52%. Six of children who waited more than four months were adopted by their foster carers. In the remaining four cases the children had complex or unknown health needs and in one case the child had received therapeutic support from CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services) for a significant period of time which prevented the case being progressed.
- 2.4.6 The A2 indicator measures the average time between a Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. The current target is four months.
- 2.4.7 100% of children who have become subject to a placement order in this reporting year have been matched within four months.
- 2.4.8 There are however six children who became subject to placement orders in the last reporting year who have not been matched within four months. Two are part of a harder to place sibling group, two are subject to an application by their foster carers to adopt and two children were matched within timescales but the placements did not go ahead.
- 2.4.9 There has been one adoption disruption in this reporting period. This is the first in three years and Wolverhampton remains well below average with regards to adoption disruptions.
- 2.4.10 14 of the children matched were placed with adopters approved by Wolverhampton; the remainder were placed with adopters approved by other Local Authorities or voluntary agencies.

2.5 Children's decisions

- 2.5.1 There has in this reporting period been a significant decrease in the number of "Should be Placed for Adoption" (SBPFA) decisions made, and the number of placement orders made. This is very much in line with the national trend and could be contributed to a number of factors.
- 2.5.6 In the last reporting year 51 children were considered as children who should be placed for adoption. In the first half of this reporting period 21 children have had plans of adoption agreed; of these four have not been granted placement orders.
- 2.5.7 8 placement orders were made in the first half of this reporting period. It is expected that a higher number of placement orders will be made between October 2015 and March

2016. The adoption pipeline suggest that approximately 20 placement orders will be granted by April 2016.

- 2.5.8 As outlined in the previous annual adoption report, in 2014 a judgement was passed by Mr Justice Munby (President of the Family Division of the High Court of England and Wales) that significantly changed the adoption landscape across the country. Re B (June 2013) and B-S (Sept 2013) challenged the robust nature of adoption plans and decision making both in relation to social work reports and court judgments. As a direct result Local Authorities began to see the numbers of placement order being granted decreased and by November 2014 it was reported that nationally placement orders had decreased by 54%.
- 2.5.9 Of the 21 children 11 children were White British. One was Black British Caribbean. Three were dual heritage, White British Black Caribbean. Two were dual heritage, White British Asian. Three were White British Other and one was Black African other.
- 2.5.10 This equates to 48% of children with a plan of adoption being from BME backgrounds. The annual adoption report 2014/2015 found that just 12% of children who became subject to a SBPFA decision were from BME backgrounds. There has been a large variation in the percentage of children becoming subject to a SBPFA decision over recent years. This figure had moved from 14% in 2011 to 32% in 2012 to 59% in 2013.
- 2.5.11 Of the 21 children 10 were female and 11 male.
- 2.5.12 12 children were aged 0-2 and nine children were aged 3-5. This equates to 57% of children who become subject to a SBPFA decision being aged 0-2. This compares with 76% in the previous reporting period.
- 2.5.13 No children aged over six became subject to a SBPFA decision in the first half of this reporting period.
- 2.5.14 It should be noted that much smaller numbers of children are represented in this report compared with previous years and small variances can appear much more substantial when measuring smaller data sets.

3.0 Strategic issues and forward plans

- 3.1.1 Wolverhampton remains committed to adoption as a positive permanence choice for children who cannot be cared for by their birth relatives. The service has welcomed the governments challenge around timeliness for children who have a plan of adoption, it is well accepted that age at placement is one predictor impacting on positive outcomes for children who are placed for adoption. Wolverhampton is therefore committed to continuing to improve timeliness for children.
- 3.1.2 A key feature of the adoption services improvement plan is to increase the recruitment of adopters who can consider offering early permanence options to children either through

concurrent planning or foster to adopt. This has been echoed by the government who have set a soft target of doubling such placements in 2016/1017.

- 3.1.4 The adoption service has demonstrated the ability to embrace new ways of working in order to improve outcomes for children. It is expected that closer working within the region as described above will lend itself to ensuring that children are matched without delay with adopters who are able to meet their long term needs.
- 3.1.5 As the regionalising agenda is progressed it will be important to ensure that the team continues to build on previous success. This will include further improving timeliness, recruiting more adopters who will consider concurrency and foster to adopt and remaining ambitious for harder to place children to ensure they are offered the opportunities they deserve.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The approved budget for 2015/16 for the Adoption Service is £2.8 million. ,
- 4.2 The government has made an allocation available for 2015/16 that will allow the Council to claim back the inter-agency fee when placements are made for harder to place children such as sibling groups, children of BME background and children over the age of five. The allocation is available to all Local Authorities in the Country to claim against on a first come first served basis.
- 4.3 The fund became available in July 2015. No children were who met the criteria were placed between July 2015 and September 2015 but it is anticipated that claims will be made for the remainder of the current financial year.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the Council will be eligible to claim in the region of £350,000 from the allocation set aside by the government should funds still be available at the time when the placement is made.

[NM/15122015/K]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 There have been no legislative changes in this reporting period.

[RC/11122015/O]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 Wolverhampton seeks to recruit and purchase adopters who are able to meet the needs of a diverse range of children. This includes children of different black and minority ethnic groups, both young and older children, male and female children. This is reflected within the recruitment strategy and all new policies have been subject to an equalities analysis.

7.0 Environmental implications

7.1 There are no environmental implications

8.0 Human resources implications

8.1 Regionalisation will have human resources implications but the extent of these is not known at present. Human resources will be considered as part of the scoping exercise.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 There are no background papers attached.

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Elected Member visits to Children's Homes report

Name of establishment	Upper Pendeford Farm
Address	
Name of registered manager	Phillip Johnson

Name of Elected Member	Val Gibson
Date and time of visit	19th Novemebr 2015 4.00pm
Duration of visit	1 ½ hours
Date report sent to Registered Manager	

Name of person in charge at time of visit	Phillip Johnson
Names of other staff on duty	
Number of staff spoken to.	3
Number of young people present at time of visit	2
Number of young people spoken to.	2
Initials of young people spoken to.	

Has the previous report been viewed? Yes No **No**

It is not envisaged that each area for consideration will be reported on at each visit, however if there were specific actions for an area previously it would be useful to revisit this area.

AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION	THOUGHTS, COMMENTS, SUGGESTED ACTIONS	HAVE ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS REPORT BEEN

		MET?
<p style="text-align: center;">Physical condition of the house</p> <p style="text-align: center;">You could consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's the general state of the home? • Have children personalised their rooms? • Is there a welcoming area they can entertain visitors? • Are residents able to (with supervision where appropriate) able to use the kitchen to make snacks, drinks, meals etc? • Does it feel like a home, rather than an institution? 	<p>The house was very welcoming and had a very 'warm' feel. The young people are not allowed to put pictures on the walls but have plenty of space to keep or display personal belongings. There is a large comfortable beautifully furnished dining area where I interviewed staff and young people. There is also a very comfortable sitting room. The independence unit attached seemed to be reasonable and comparable to the kind of accommodation young people might move on to. It could all do with a 'lick' of paint as a minimum to improve the décor.</p> <p>When I arrived one of the young people was being supervised to prepare their evening meal. Residents are able to make drinks and snacks supervised where necessary.</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 50</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Health of the young people</p> <p style="text-align: center;">You could consider:</p> <p>How is exercise promoted with the young people?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are staff being proactive in promoting healthy lifestyles for young people? • Are young people supported to eat healthily? • Are young people given advice and support about relationships and sexual health? • Are young people given advice and support about smoking, alcohol and drugs. • How is young people's emotional health supported? • Do the young people feel enough is being done to keep them healthy? 	<p>Young people are encouraged to maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle. One of the young people is taking horse riding lessons. The member of staff in the kitchen spoke to me about the menus for the evening.</p> <p>There was good evidence of staff support for relationship and sexual health advice. One member of staff told me how she was engaged in positive conversations with a resident about her boyfriend.</p> <p>The young people spoke highly of the staff and felt they could go to them for anything.</p>	
AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION	THOUGHTS, COMMENTS, SUGGESTED ACTIONS	HAVE ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS REPORT BEEN MET?

<p>Education or training of young people</p> <p>You could consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do all young people have a school place? • If a young person isn't attending education for some reason, what is being done to make sure they receive some continuity of education? • What practical arrangements are made for study and homework, are there books available in the home? • How is good performance at school encouraged and rewarded in the school? • Do staff attend open evenings etc where appropriate? • Do staff explore ideas about what young people would like to do when they leave school? • Do staff organise trips out or resources to help with course and school work? • Are the young people encouraged to use the library? 	<p>The manager has created a culture that all young people should be in education. He spoke to me about how staff had accompanied a past resident to school and encouraged him to engage, in a positive way. There was some degree of success in this approach. One of the current young people described how she had removed herself from education but was encouraged to return and now hopes to become a vet.</p> <p>There were plenty of books available and young people are encouraged to use them.</p> <p>Trips are organised which are often educational such as visits to museums.</p>	
<p>Positive activities and involvement</p> <p>You could consider:</p> <p>What sorts of activities are available for the young people to access?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activities do young people currently access? • Do staff take part in activities with the young people? • Are young people supported to engage in life in their local community? • Are the young people supported to get involved in volunteering? • Do the young people take part in participation activities provided by WCC? • Are any of the young people involved with the CiCC • Do all young people attend the young people's meetings? • Do the young people feel they have any barriers to accessing positive activities? 	<p>There are wide ranging activities which are largely determined by the young people. Staff accompany them on trips out to places such as parks, long walks museums, cinema. I am satisfied that a wide variety is provided.</p> <p>There are regular meetings which are attended by most. I am not aware whether any are involved in the Children in Care Council.</p> <p>Young people are allowed out on their own according to their age. One young person said she did not engage with organised activities as she prefers to be out with her friends. This is understandable given her age and she is appreciative of the freedom she has but at the same time enjoys spending time at the home.</p>	

AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION	THOUGHTS, COMMENTS, SUGGESTED ACTIONS	HAVE ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS REPORT BEEN MET?
<p style="text-align: center;">Transitions or leaving care</p> <p style="text-align: center;">You could consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the young people been given support in developing independent living skills? (eg budgeting, cooking, using public transport etc) • Are young people supported to get involved in work experience? • Are young people aware of where to go for help and support after they leave the home? • What support does the home offer the children after they leave? • Are young people supported with preparation for interviews? • How do the young people feel about living independently? • Are the young people feel encouraged and supported to attend further / higher education? <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 52</p>	<p>There is an independence unit and young people have full support for moving on. Of the two young people present the youngest was engaged in cooking and the older was operating to do her washing. They both assured me that they were being well prepared for independence.</p>	

AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION	THOUGHTS, COMMENTS, SUGGESTED ACTIONS	HAVE ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS REPORT BEEN MET?
<p style="text-align: center;">Complaints</p> <p style="text-align: center;">You could consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the young people know how to make a complaint? • Do they know how to access the advocacy service? • Do they feel confident in being able to make a complaint? 	<p>The young people did know that they could make a complaint but it was not clear to me that they understood how. This lead me to believe that they did not feel confident about making complaint but conversely it could be that they were satisfied with how they were being treated and so this was not high on their agenda.</p> <p>They both spoke very highly of the staff and the manger and felt they could ask them for support when they needed it.</p>	

<p>Staff recruitment, training and support.</p> <p>You could consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there regular team meetings timetabled so that all possible staff can attend? • Do staff feel supported by management? • Do staff have positive and appropriate training opportunities? • Do staff confirm that supervision is regular, structured and valued in the home? 	<p>Staff do have regular meetings. I met them individually. They spoke highly of the manager and articulated that they were very happy there.</p> <p>I did not ask them about training and supervision.</p>	
<p>Any specific issues raised by young people?</p>		
<p>Any specific issues raised by staff?</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 5</p>	<p>Staff did voice their concerns about being told the home was going to close and now it is staying open as a respite centre. All questioned whether this was a final and definite decision. I suggest staff are re-assured in this area and informed again of progress and timescales with this.</p>	
<p>Was there anything on this visit that raised particular concern?</p>	<p>I do think it needs a proper redecoration programme rather than a 'patch up' job both in the main house and in the independence unit.</p>	
<p>Was there anything was on this visit that was particularly positive?</p>	<p>The house is very warm and welcoming. I was welcomed by one fo the young people which I thought was particularly nice.</p>	
<p>Any further comments?</p>		

Signed ...*V Gibson*.....

Date.....25th November 2015.....

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