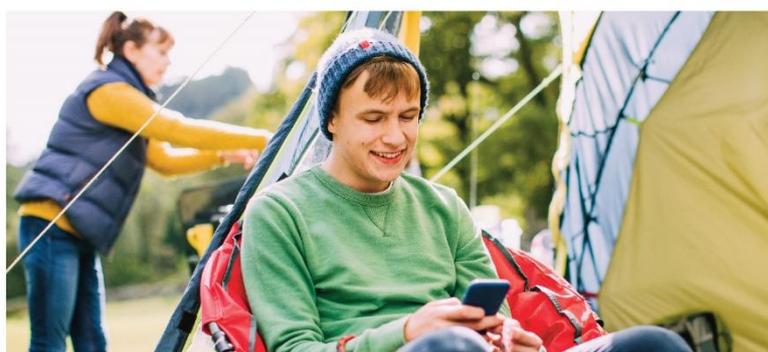


CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

**FOSTER
FAMILIES
UNITED**
BY YOU



ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT

APRIL 2018– MARCH 2019

Author: Lisa Whelan– Service Manager – Children and Young People in Care Service

Contents	Page
1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Functions/roles within the Fostering Service	4
3.0 The Family Values Project	6
4.0 Recruitment of Foster Carers	7
5.0 Skills to Foster	10
6.0 Assessments	10
7.0 Permanency through Long Term Fostering	11
8.0 Family and Friends Carers (Connected Persons Carers)	12
9.0 Short Breaks	13
10.0 Special Guardianship	13
11.0 Performance	14
12.0 Support	17
13.0 Foster Carers Learning and Development	20
14.0 Fostering Panel	21
15.0 Complaints / compliments	25
16.0 Private Fostering	26
17.0 Financial packages for Foster Carers	27
18.0 Working in Partnership/Feedback from User Participation	27
19.0 Summary	28
20.0 Future Service Development/ Challenges for the next year	30

1. Introduction:

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

were the primary cause of the limited in-house Foster Carers growth. The Family Values project was developed and three workstreams were set up – **ENQUIRY GENERATION, ENQUIRY HANDLING and SUPPORT**. Each workstream meeting meets twice monthly, on occasions weekly and under pinned by a plan reviewed at each meeting to chart progress and achievements and to consider future objectives to focus on. A Steering group meets monthly to oversee the progress of the project and tracks completed and outstanding tasks for further focus.



2 FUNCTIONS/ROLES WITHIN THE FOSTERING SERVICE

2.1 Personalised Support Team

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

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

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



Assessment is commissioned to Core Assets for completion. Any Independent Fostering Agency transfers to Wolverhampton are completed in-house by Fostering Social Workers.

2.1 **Generic or Mainstream Fostering**

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

2.2 **Support and Development**

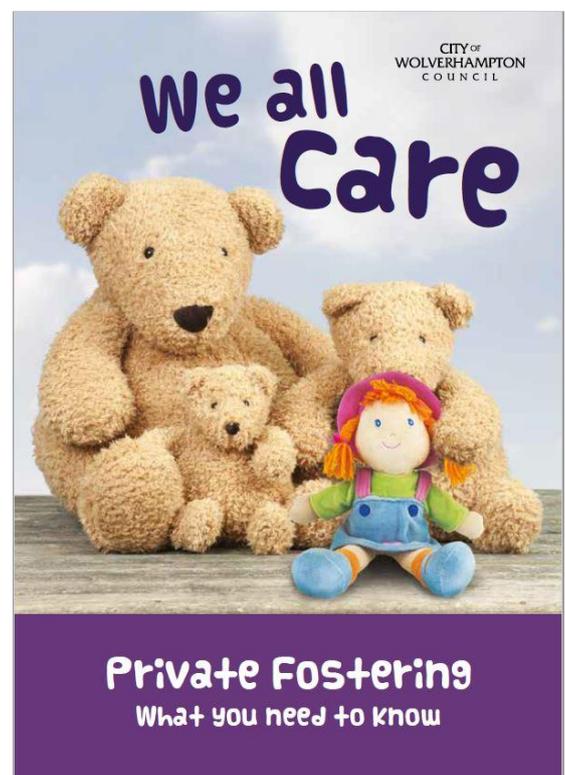
The Service has responsibility for providing supervision, support and post approval training to all mainstream and Family and Friends Foster Carers. The assessments of existing Foster Carers who wish to secure permanent placements for the children in their care are undertaken within the Service. A new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

2.3 **Connected Persons Carers (Friends & Family)**

The Service is responsible for the assessment, training, and support of Connected Persons Carers and Special Guardianship carers. All Connected Persons Assessments are presented to the Fostering Panel who recommend their approval which is subsequently ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

2.4 **Private Fostering**

This is regulated under the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The Service is responsible for raising awareness with the public, professionals, parents and children. The assessments, training, and support of Private Foster Carers is also the responsibility of the Fostering Service. There are 2 Private Fostering Champions within the fostering service who regularly attend team meetings across Children's services, and Private Fostering Champions within the teams of our partner agencies and the voluntary sector and workshops are held to further increase awareness and understanding. The Fostering service supports Private Fostering Week in July each year and refreshes all material/leaflets whilst Private Fostering champions within the service deliver workshops and attend meetings to increase awareness and understanding. Private Fostering Forums are held quarterly where information is shared, and updates noted with regards to referrals and enquiries.



2.5 **Special Guardianship**

The responsibility for the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Orders is that of the Fostering Service. This encourages a more joined up approach between teams with the completion of assessment being a joint activity between the Social Worker in Fostering and the Social Worker for the child. If the Care Plan for the child recommends Long Term Fostering with either mainstream or Family and Friends as a permanency option a Special Guardianship Order should be encouraged where this is



deemed to be in the child's best interests, essentially removing the child from the care system, and transferring parental responsibility to the carer. A tracking tool has been devised and there is monthly oversight of progress to ensure permanency is achieved via SGO in a timely manner.

2.6 **Post Approval Training of Foster Carers**

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

2.7 **Independent Reviewing Officers**

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

2.8 **Social work staffing**

There was a restructure of Children's Social Care in October 2018 and the Fostering Service has a full complement of 17.5 full time qualified Social Work posts, and 1.5 equivalent unqualified posts. The Fostering Service is divided into two teams

- Recruitment and Assessment (Mainstream and Connected)
- Support

Each team is managed by a Team Manager and each team manager is supported by a Senior Social Worker who supervises up to 4 social workers and manages half a caseload of casework.

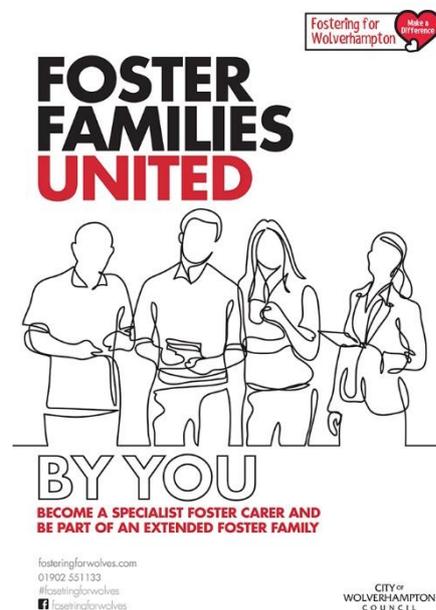
2.9 Staff training

There is a Workforce Development Plan in place which includes a wide range of training and development opportunities for staff throughout the year. This includes staff briefings and Looked After Children staff conferences. All members of staff are subject to yearly individual annual appraisal and reviews. During 2018/19 Two members of staff in the Fostering Service have undertaken stage one of the Practice Educators award whilst two members of staff have completed level Two through Wolverhampton University. All staff are currently attending bi-monthly Reflective Fostering sessions “Supporting Therapeutic Parenting” facilitated by a CAMHS Social Worker, this model will complement the training the same worker is also delivering to all Foster Carers likewise the innovative approach to the Supervision between carers and Supervising Social Workers currently being developed within the Fostering Service. Advanced Practitioners offer city-wide reflective sessions and workshops which can be accessed by Fostering staff.



2.10 Foster Families United

A new scheme “Foster Families United” was introduced following the presentation of a briefing note at Children’s Leadership Meeting” The project is a new approach based on a family model centred around one foster home which acts as a hub carer offering planned and emergency respite, advice, guidance, training and support to up to 5 carers within the hub. The hub empowers families to support each other and overcome potential problems before they escalate and offers children and young people a more positive experience of care. An enhanced support, training and financial package is offered with the same dedicated supervising social worker to all carers within the hub and clinical supervision from a CAMHS practitioner building on the therapeutic training offered.



3 FAMILY VALUES PROJECT

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

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

The Fostering service is also a customer-facing function, providing support and development to Foster Carers. It is by improving the customer-facing function, providing support and development to Foster Carer. It is by improving the customer-facing offer that the council can improve its recruitment and retention, which enables growth and improved outcomes and cost for the council.

The Key growth opportunity areas for the service are –

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

The project concluded its second year – 31st March 2019 and this report charts the progress made and the impact of the project on recruitment and support of foster carers. The project has created energy and has served as a platform for ideas beyond the original objectives set at the outset.

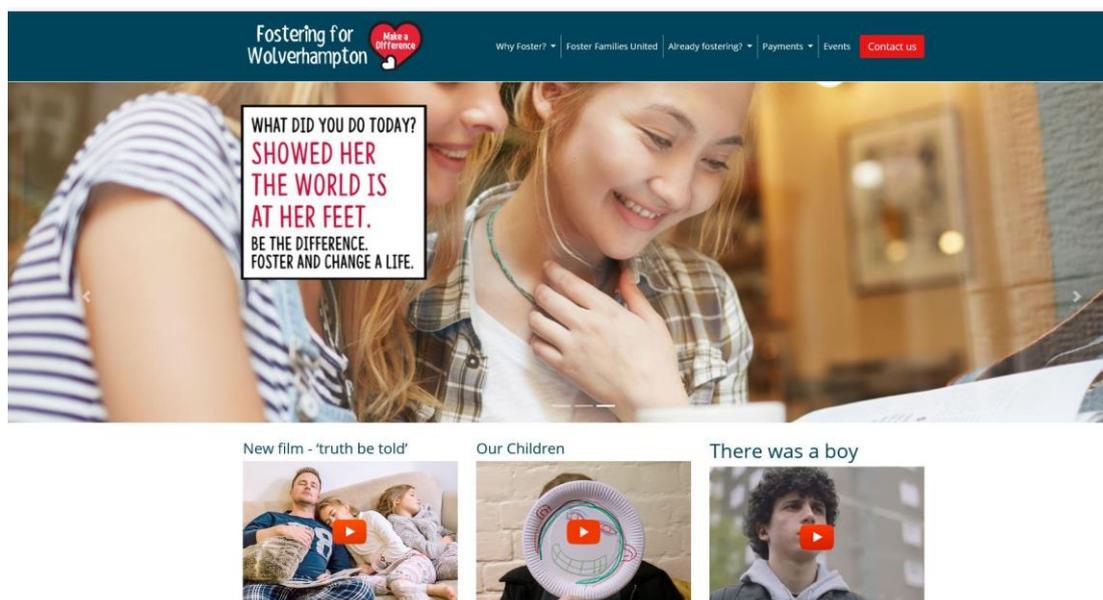
4 RECRUITMENT (ENQUIRY GENERATION)

4.1 The Recruitment and Assessment Team continue to increase the capacity of the foster carer population and the quality of care offered. Through a comprehensive marketing and recruitment strategy that works creatively with foster carers and the wider public in 2018/19, the service has enhanced the quality of enquiries with an increasing number of those coming from Independent Fostering Agencies.

4.2 Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, marketing activity has generated 349 initial leads, these are via events, the fostering website, Facebook, telephone and word of mouth. 152 of these initial enquiries have passed the initial screening and have been progressed by the Assessment team within the Fostering Service. A total of 59 Initial Assessments were completed during the year.

4.3 The Fostering for Wolverhampton online presence continues to support the recruitment of foster carers particularly since the launch of the new website which was introduced earlier in 2018. The programme of digital advertising campaigns is driving people to the website with the average position of the ads being on the 2nd, 3rd or 4th page within google search results. Facebook campaigns continue to drive people to the website to

make an enquiry and this has resulted in 23 leads which have been followed up. Since the launch of the website to date there have been 28,006 visits.



- 4.4 There have been continued traditional targeted campaigns, including New Cross Hospital, University of Wolverhampton, West Midland Police, West Midlands Fire Service, Housing Associations and Nuffield Health. The marketing team continue to be in the early stages of talks with Marston's and Aerospace in Wolverhampton regarding recruitment campaigns for their staff. Wolverhampton are regularly holding events within Costa Coffee shops in the city and there was a stand at the City Jobs Fair. A more formal event was held at the Molineux Football Ground, all were successful in returning quality applicants. Generally, throughout the year campaigns have targeted "Now People" to include professional and aspirational residents.
- 4.5 The May 2018 fostering recruitment fortnight resulted in 17 online enquiries, 4 phone enquiries and 49 face to face enquiries. These enquiries resulted in 12 moving forward to initial assessments.
- 4.6 The September 2018 the Fostering recruitment drive resulted in 12 online enquiries, 5 phone enquiries and 13 face to face enquiries. 21 of these enquiries were progressed by the assessment team, 9 of these were closed following the initial enquiry, 8 had positive Initial Assessments and were allocated to Core assets for the completion of a Form F assessment. All attended the Skills to Foster training in November. To coincide with September's recruitment, drive a Fostering Pop up Shop opened in the Mander centre. The shop opened August-September 2018 and December 2018-January 2019, 4 applications received from the shop have been successful at panel and thus approved as foster carers.
- 4.7 In January 2019 the Fostering recruitment week resulted in 43 people attending the 8 events with 11 making face to face enquiries and 32 people given information at events. There were 30 online enquiries and 5 phone enquiries. 10 Initial Assessments were completed following this recruitment week.
- 4.8 The regional fostering film "There was a boy" was launched in Birmingham earlier in the year and used in the foster care fortnight campaign. In March 2019 a further

regional film was launched “Truth be told” which already has been viewed 20,000 times. Both films were produced regionally with local authorities working collaboratively and the films used successfully for external promotions and training purposes. A Care Leavers video was produced, and foster carer Mo Powell was filmed with Supervising Foster Carer Kulwinder Bhogal, again both were used for training and promotional purposes.

4.9 The foster carer newsletter is published monthly and includes all relevant information to inform foster carers whilst including a section “fostering story of the month” Good news stories from foster carers and social workers are routinely sought and included as appropriate.

4.10 We all know that Foster Carers can portray a realistic and positive view of fostering, we use several Foster Carers Champions who work with the Recruitment and Assessment Team to support the innovative marketing and recruitment campaigns. Alongside this, approved Foster Carers also support Information sessions and preparatory “Skills to Foster” training for new applicants.



4.11 Telephone enquiries continue to be routed through Customer services and Fostering Recruitment Social Workers are available to respond immediately to callers who want more information and will arrange initial visits to further discuss. Training sessions are continuing to be offered by the social workers in the recruitment and assessment team to the customer service officers. The fostering newsletter is shared with customer services staff to keep them updated with the latest news/campaigns to enhance their awareness & understanding, customer services and the fostering service continue to develop their relationship to improve outcomes and timeliness for responding to initial enquiries regarding prospective carers. A Foster Carer listens to recordings of calls to quality assess and suggests any changes to be made to scripts/information shared.

4.12 The Recruitment and Assessment Team includes a dedicated fostering marketing person and there is a Marketing and Communications plan in place for on-going recruitment campaigns.

4.13 Recruitment continues to be sustained by three main periods of campaign activity throughout the year in Foster care fortnight in May and a recruitment week in September and January. These campaigns comprise a week or two weeks of information events at venues throughout the city using the recruitment bus and

information stands. These are promoted through targeted digital advertising through Google AdWords and Facebook and other sites, social media posts and public relations, a chronicle wrap, radio advertising, email marketing and communication through organisations including Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust, West Midlands Police, Wolverhampton Homes, Costa Coffee, University of Wolverhampton, West Midlands Fire Service and Bromford Housing.

- 4.14 Regular information events are held throughout the year which provide opportunities for prospective foster carers to meet the recruitment team to find out more about fostering. These are held on the first Friday of every month when we host a fostering Friday roadshow in Queen Square and other high footfall locations. Also, bi-monthly information evenings are held at the Molineux.
- 4.15 Targeted Facebook advertising is ongoing throughout the year and is refreshed with the new artwork developed for each campaign. The Fostering for Wolves Facebook page is also regularly updated with news, video case studies and events and shares national news and information from the Fostering Network.
- 4.16 We also attend the Regional Fostering Marketing Working Group attended by 13 Local Authorities across the west and east Midlands and share examples of best practice and explore ways of working together across the region.
- 4.17 There are currently 18 Form F (Mainstream assessments) underway and 14 Form C (Connected)



5. SKILLS TO FOSTER (Preparation Training)

- 5.1 The preparation course follows the “Skills to Foster” programme, devised by the Fostering Network. Wolverhampton continues to be part of the Black Country Consortium, along with Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall. The Authorities work in partnership offering two places to any of the other local authorities on every course they run. Each of the local authorities delivers the course a varying number of times, with Wolverhampton running the course six times yearly. Wolverhampton runs the Skills to Foster course every other month offering applicants the maximum flexibility to attend at a time most convenient to themselves.
- 5.2 In total, during 2018/19 33 households attended the preparation courses with 28 progressing onto the full assessments. 6 applicants were not approved or dropped out

of Assessment process, 3 decided not to foster after all, 1 dropped out as her son moved back home 1 was due to finances and the references received cancelled 1 applicant out.

- 5.3 During 2018/19 the Sufficiency Strategy continued to review every aspect of the recruitment process to achieve ambitious targets to grow local capacity of available in-house Foster Carers. The need to increase the proportion of foster care placements with internal Foster Carers remains. There have been significant improvements over the last five years as set out in the table below;

Type of Placement	Number of Looked After Children Placed					
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Family and Friends	45	50	62	71	78	95
Internal Foster Carer placements	158	171	186	193	201	185
IFA placements	382	343	268	247	226	198

6. Assessments:

- 6.1 Assessments are part of the core work of the Recruitment and Assessment Team which enables the building of a comprehensive picture of the applicants. Evidence based, and analytical assessments are completed on all prospective Foster Carers to help understand their motivation and ability to care for children who have experienced loss, separation and trauma. Caring for such children requires Foster Carers with a degree of resilience and patience in understanding the needs and presenting behaviours of children who have experienced childhood trauma including neglect and abuse. In addition, to collating information the assessment explores the applicants own experience of childhood, their parenting skills, understanding of safeguarding children and ability to create a warm and nurturing home for children.
- 6.2 References are sought from a variety of relevant organisations, in addition to personal references supplied by the applicants.
- 6.3 The full fostering Form F Assessment is commissioned from an Independent Provider, currently this is Core Assets who are contracted until 2020. Quarterly meetings are held to review ongoing assessments and any concerns highlighted within the context of the contract.
- 6.4 Mainstream Foster Carers care for children and young people initially on a short term basis until their permanency plan is secured. This plan may include children returning to parents, or being placed long term with Friends, Family or Mainstream Foster Carers.
- 6.5 Foster Carers are approved under a generic approval category for children and young people between the ages of birth and eighteen years. If there is a smoker within the Fostering household, they will be approved for 5 to 18 years. This approval enables

Foster Carers to care for children on a temporary and permanent basis. In addition, consideration, can be given to respite care and emergency placements. To bring all Foster Carers in line with the approval category all Mainstream Foster Carers have received a revised Fostering Agreement.

- 6.6 As of 31st March 2019, there were 177 approved mainstream fostering households, which offered a total of 185 placements. There were 4 Foster Carers on Adoption Leave who have offered adoptive placements or Special Guardianship to a further 4 children. In addition, there are eight fostering households currently dormant due to ill health or home improvements being undertaken, it is unlikely that they will all resume fostering however one has advised they will be ready to foster again in September 2019. There are two further households who have chosen to be dormant due to family issues.

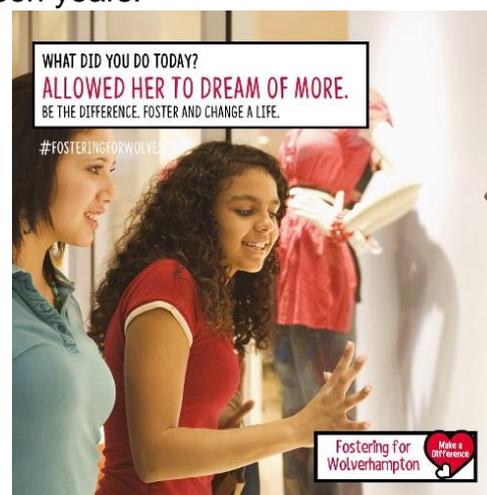
Family and Friends Foster Care is an area of growth and as of the 31st March 2019 there are 36 approved households offering 95 placements.

7. Permanency through Long Term Fostering:

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

- 7.2 This year the Fostering Service has secured 10 Long-Term placements for children via the Linking and Matching process. 1 of the Long-Term Placements were for sibling groups of two children. Most of the Long-Term placements were secured for children with their current Foster Carers which were provided by both internal (5) and external resources (5).

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



8. Family and Friends Foster Carers: (Connected Carers)

- 8.1 Local Authorities have a responsibility to consider members of the child's family, or friends (Connected Persons Carers) during Care Proceedings and when a child is facing the possibility of becoming looked after.
- 8.2 The Family and Friends Team work together with Locality Teams advising and completing joint Viability Assessments of prospective Family and Friends Foster Carers. The location of some relative Foster Carers can place an added pressure on the Service due to the time involved in travel. We currently have 20 out of city placements.
- 8.3 Family and Friends Foster Carers put themselves forward to care for children who are connected to them by association or relationship. They are assessed by the Service as to their suitability to provide appropriate care in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2011. From April 2018 – March 2019 there were 23 Family and Friends Carers approved which provided a total of 95 placements for Children in Care.
- 8.4 During the period of 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 there were 23 positive Form C Assessment approvals. These assessments were completed within internal resources. A further 25 Form C Assessments were commenced or completed. Some were of negative outcome and others did not progress to Panel for assorted reasons i.e. change in Care Plan or applicant's withdrawal during the assessment process. There were 16 ongoing Form C assessments on 31st March 2019 which were all being undertaken by the Social Workers within the Recruitment and Assessment Team.
- 8.5 The Family and Friends Team have undertaken 103 Viability Assessments of which 15 were Schedule 4 (temporary approval) Assessments from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019.

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

- 8.6 Schedule 4 Assessments whereby Family and Friends Foster Carers are granted temporary approval require allocation of a Social Worker to supervise and assess the placement suitability within a sixteen-week timescale. An extension of eight weeks continues to be applied where required and a clear process is now being followed via Panel and Head of Service to reduce the number of unregulated placements. These are likely to occur due to a delay in checks and references, rather than assessment completion. There are currently 9 Schedule 4 assessments within the service, all progressing to completion of a Form C.
- 8.7 In previous years, Family and Friends Foster Carers have been reluctant to attend training and maintain records given the nature of their relationships as the majority are grandparents. However, over the last year there has been a continued increase in numbers of Friends and Family Carers accessing training courses and completing their Training, Support and Development Standards.

Skills to Foster continues to be attended as part of the assessment process for connected carers. There were 10 courses delivered in 2018/19 to both Mainstream and Connected carers. These were attended by 33 prospective Foster Carers. To ensure there is frequent availability of the Skills to Foster Training there are plans for the course

to continue to be held 10 times a year with the training being evenly distributed during the year.

9. Short Breaks (Shared Care) Foster Carers:

- 9.1 There is one approved short break Foster Carer providing shared care placements for disabled children. The Short Break Carers are usually professionals who work full time. They offer regular breaks to parents and carers who have children who have disabilities so that they can have a break from their caring responsibilities. We continue attempts to enhance this area within the recruitment and communication strategy for 2019/20 and will incorporate expertise from within the Disabled Children and Young Peoples service to the marketing campaigns.



10. Special Guardianship:

- 10.1 In June 2014, the responsibility for the assessment and support for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) moved to the Fostering Service. Where the care plan is for the child not to return home, Family and Friends Foster Carers are encouraged to apply for Special Guardianship Orders, thereby replacing a Care Order and Looked After Child status, giving parental responsibility to the carer.
- 10.2 There is a full-time SGO Support Social Worker dedicated to the role of supporting and advising Foster Carers and Family and Friends Carers about the details of caring for children under the Special Guardianship Order should they consider this to be a future option. The SGO Support Social Worker is also able to discuss on-going support plans to ensure that the needs of the child and Special Guardian continue to be met.
- 10.3 There is a step by step flow chart to assist Social Workers in the SGO process to allow for a smooth transition. This also provides guidance on administrative tasks needing to be undertaken post the SGO being granted; this is fundamental in capturing the child's journey through care and informing any future support.
- 10.4 SGO's also feature within the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE's) Programme and Social Work Briefings to improve knowledge regarding family care arrangements, Special Guardianship and current policies in place. In addition to this the SGO Support Social Worker holds monthly Permanency Clinics which allows Children's Social Workers to drop in to discuss the available permanency options. This is further supported by the Fostering and Adoption Advanced Practitioner who delivers city wide workshops to discuss permanency options.
- 10.5 Prospective Family and friends Foster Carer's are expected to attend the Skills to Foster preparation course which has been designed to meet the needs of prospective Foster Carers, this also informs them of the permanence options, processes and assessments involved. The SGO Support Social Worker has now implemented an SGO Training Module specifically for Family and Friends Foster Carer's which runs directly after each preparation course. This has been planned to inform the prospective Foster Carers of their options at the earliest opportunity.

- 10.6 The Supervising Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker jointly complete the Special Guardianship Report. The SGO Support Social Worker completes the Support Plan with the Social Workers involved and shares this with the Foster Carers or Family and Friends Foster Carer's. Special Guardians can now access all training that is currently offered to our internal Foster Carers and Family and Friends Foster Carers.
- 10.7 The Support Plan is reviewed annually by the SGO Support Social Worker who currently sits within the Family and Friends Foster Carers Team and post-SGO support remains high on the agenda for this current fiscal year. A total of 20 Special Guardianship Orders were granted in year 2018/19 with 16 currently in the assessment process to be filed during this year. The target to achieve 30 SGO orders 2019/20 is well on course and it is expected given the current progress that the target will be exceeded.

11 Performance

- 11.1 The 2018/19 target was to achieve a net gain of 26 mainstream foster carers. Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, we achieved the following; -

Approved Foster Carers	24
Number of de-registrations	10
• This resulted in a net Gain of 14 Mainstream Foster Carers.	

- 11.2 With 24 mainstream approvals and 10 de-registrations the overall net gain of foster mainstream foster carers was 14.
- 11.3 The number of children placed with internal carers has increased. There were 82 more children placed in internal foster care provision on 31st March 2019 than in IFA placements. When comparing end of year dates for 2017/18 and 2018/19 a weekly cost saving of £21,837 was made in the foster care placement budget (excluding unit costs for supplying internal foster care)
- 11.4 On 31st March 2018 there were 46 friends and family foster carer households. By 31st March 2019 this has increased to 53. This is an increase of 7 friends and family households taking those connected placements which converted to SGO as 23 connected assessments were approved in the year. This increase in households has resulted in an additional 10 children being placed with friends and family carers between the same dates.

Period	Approvals at panel
April 2015 - March 2016	18 approvals
April 2016 - March 2017	11 approvals
April 2017 - March 2018	19 approvals
April 2018 - March 2019	23 approvals

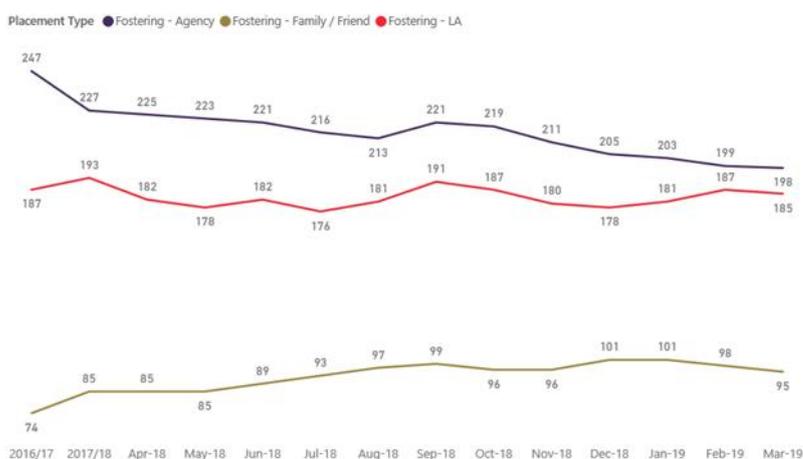
Timescales of Recruitment of new Foster Carers

Year	Number of Mainstream Approvals	Average Days for Approval	% of Cases Approved in Timeframe
2015/16	21	278	56% (8-month target)

2016/17	22	217	72% (8-month target)
2017/18	20	227	50% (8-month target)
2018/19	24	170	67% (6-month target)

- 11.5 In the year there were 24 foster carers approved at an average timescale of 170 days. This is the largest number of approvals in any of the last four years and the lowest average days. The average days decrease is in line with a reduction in target from 242 days (8 months) to 183 days (6 months).
- 11.6 Of the 24 approvals in the year, 16 were approved within timescale (183 days). The shortest time taken to be approved was 131 days, the longest time taken was 274 days. There was a reduction of 73 days in the longest time taken to approve a foster carer between 2017/18 and 2018/19. The longest time taken to approve a foster carer in 2018/19 was shorter than the average time taken to approve a foster carer in 2015/16.
- 11.7 There was a difference between the rate of foster carers being approved in the second half of the year compared to the first. In the first 6 months of the year only 10 approvals were made compared to 14 in the second half. Despite this, cases approved in the second half of the year took slightly longer to approve, 161 days in the first six months and 177 in the final six months.
- 11.8 In the year the local authority lost 10 mainstream foster carers who de-registered. Out of these 10, 2 were due to a Special Guardianship Order for a child who was placed with them long term. Reasons for the other 8 de-registrations was due to either resignation as carers or retirement. All were offered exit interviews but other than one was declined.

11.9 Placement of Children in Care with Internal Foster Carers



- 11.10 The gap between the number of children placed with internal foster carers and those placed with agency foster carers has increased substantially in 2017/18, which is a strong result.

11.11

Date	Children in Mainstream Foster Care	Children in Friends and Family Foster Care	Total Internal Foster Care	Children placed with IFA	Difference
31st March 2016	186	59	245	261	-16
31st March 2017	187	74	261	247	+14
31st March 2018	193	85	278	227	+51
31st March 2019	185	95	280	198	+82

11.12 Despite a net gain of 21 foster carers this has only resulted in a gain of two additional children placed with internal foster carers in the year. The gap has widened due to the reduction in children in IFA placements, which reduced by 29 placements over the period. Since 31st March 2016 there are an additional 30 children placed internally and 63 fewer children placed with IFA's.

11.13 The shortfall in IFA placements can be accounted for during the past 12 months by the increase in the number of children living independently, and an overall decrease in the number of children and young people who are looked after.

Positive Outcomes for Children

11.14 In 2018/19, 13 children left care due to a Special Guardianship Order to their former foster parent.

11.15 Two of these were mainstream carers and 11 were friends and family carers.

11.16 In comparison in 2017/18 only 4 children left care due to a Special Guardianship Order to a foster carer. All were to friends and family carers.

11.17 Further to this in 2018/19 14 children were adopted by their foster carer compared to 5 in 2017/18.

11.18 Overall this equates to 27 children leaving care to live with their foster carer in 2018/19 compared to 9 in 2017/18.

11.19 Although these are extremely positive outcomes for the children it also shows that a net gain has been achieved against a higher-level foster care cessation than in previous years. It also shows that pressure from other projects can have a knock-on effect on Family Values performance.

Finance

Date	Total Weekly Cost of Children in Mainstream Foster Care	Total Weekly Cost of Children in Friends and Family Foster Care	Total Weekly Cost of Internal Foster Care	Total Weekly Cost of Children placed with IFA	Total Weekly Cost of Foster Care	Change Since Previous Year
31st March 2016	£64,728	£20,532	£85,260	£202,797	£288,057	
31st March 2017	£65,076	£25,752	£90,828	191,919	£282,747	-£5,310
31st March 2018	£67,164	£29,580	£96,744	£176,379	£273,123	-£9,624
31st March 2019	£64,380	£33,060	£97,440	£153,846	£251,286	-£21,837

11.20 Taking a snapshot of placements at the 31st March from each year, on 31st March 2019 there was a weekly saving of £21,837 in spend on foster care placements compared to 31st March 2018.

11.21 Taking a snapshot of the end of June 2017, when the family values project started and comparing it to 31st March 2019, there is a weekly cost saving of £31,234. If this saving was replicated over a year it would show a yearly saving of £1,624,168.

11.22 It should be noted that this saving is calculated purely on placement costs and does not incorporate any additional unit cost attributed to placing children internally.

12 Support (Post Approval supervision, support and reviewing)

12.1 The support workstream made good progress throughout the year, a renewed training programme was introduced for the year which included themed training and development days incorporating foster carer forums. This has achieved a higher level of attendance both at training and forums.

12.2 A Therapeutic Parenting Training Programme has been delivered throughout the year which gives foster carers insight in how to provide care to children and young people considering their experiences prior to foster care. This is upskilling carers and supporting resilience and is seeing significant improvement in placement stability.

- 12.3 Restorative Practice Training has been completed by 24 carers and there will be further training events ongoing. The restorative approach is incorporated into every training event with a check-in and check-out and a section during training to discuss restorative practice.
- 12.4 Carer profiles have been completed and filed on both carers' records and on the foster carers register which supports the placement team when identifying placements and advising social workers of the carer's details. A separate stand-alone personal Development Plan has been devised and are currently in the process of being completed in respect of all foster carers.
- 12.5 There have been several special events for foster carers and their families throughout the year including an Easter Egg Hunt, Summer Picnic in the Park, Halloween Party and a Christmas party. These events have all been well attended and there has been exclusively positive feedback from carers and children in care. A Foster carers conference was held in July 2018 where there was a variety of speakers including the poet and broadcaster Lemm Sissay, an Educational Psychologist and young people discussing their "lived experience" of foster care. The "Love of Fostering Awards" were held in December 2019 where carers were recognised for their achievements throughout the year.
- 12.6 There is a "Buddy Scheme" in place and the buddying scheme was revised during the year and training offered to all level 3 carers in providing buddy support to newly approved or less experienced foster carers. 35 foster carers were trained as buddies with 15 to date paired up with newly approved or less experienced foster carers. All newly approved foster carers receive weekly visits for 6 weeks following approval at panel.
- 12.7 A portal for foster carers has been developed by ICT and the support workstream during the year. Technical difficulties have delayed implementation however the portal will be launched in July 2019 at the annual foster carers conference. The portal will allow all carers access to pertinent information regarding training and events and will be interactive, supporting the recording of fostering logs.
- 12.8 The Fostering administrators maintain a database which records complaints, allegations, DBS completions, Health & Safety, Delegated Authority and unannounced visits. The team manager and senior social worker supply updated information to ensure accuracy of the database. There continues to be regular contact between dormant carers and fostering and there are currently 8 dormant carers.
- 12.9 A Foster Carers Level 3/4 panel has been set up quarterly where foster carers present their application alongside their supervising social worker to be considered for escalation from level 2 to level 3 or level 3 to level 4. Two panels have been held so far with 4 carers to progress from level 2 to 3 agreed.
- 12.10 Implementation of a new scheme was agreed following the presentation of a briefing note at Children's Leadership Meeting in February named "Foster Families United" The project is a new approach based on a family model centred around one foster home which acts as a hub carer offering planned and emergency respite, advice, guidance, training and support to up to 5 carers within the hub. The hub empowers families to

support each other and overcome potential problems before they escalate and offers children and young people a more positive experience of care. An enhanced support, training and financial package is offered with the same dedicated supervising social worker to all carers within the hub and clinical supervision from a CAMHS practitioner building on the therapeutic training offered. This scheme will be launched during Fostering Fortnight in May 2019. The scheme will be both incorporated into main fostering events and specifically targeted events throughout the year.

- 12.11 The Key to Inspiration residential unit is due to open soon where children and young people in care will be placed for assessment and will then be “stepped down” or moved into appropriate placements. The Fostering Service will be looking to recruit new carers to take more complex placements and will work closely with Key 2 Inspiration with a view to providing step down placements.
- 12.12 All approved Foster Carers are allocated a qualified Supervising Social Worker. Following approval, the Supervising Social Workers is responsible for supervising and supporting carers, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support, challenge and direction to maintain a quality service, including safe care practices. This includes an agreement that they must work within the agency’s policies, procedures and guidance. One Supervising Social Worker post has been protected within the support team to exclusively support and supervise Family and Friends (Connected Carers)
- 12.13 Our focus is placement stability, reducing placement moves and improving outcomes for children. All our Foster Carers have direct access to local partners in health and education who also provide them with advice and support. Foster Carers provide placements for children and young people who present challenges and have a range of complex needs. All Foster Carers are offered support to meet these challenges. In addition, the Fostering service provides specific training to Foster Carers to help them understand and manage the child’s presenting needs.
- 12.14 Wolverhampton has a commissioning arrangement with Foster talk who offer support to all of Wolverhampton’s approved Foster Carers including; legal advice and expenses, insurance cover, a 24-hour legal advice helpline, a 24-hour counselling support helpline, an education support line, a Social Work support helpline and access to discounts and exclusive offers via the use of a MAX card.
- 12.15 Newly approved Foster Carers are reviewed after six months and then annually thereafter by an Independent Reviewing Officer. This will involve the Foster Carer meeting with the Independent Reviewing Officer who will discuss the activity of a Foster carer to ensure they continue to be suitable. The Independent Reviewing Officer will seek the views of the Foster Carer, the child in placement (subject to age and understanding), the Child’s Social Worker, the child’s Independent Reviewing Officer, the Supervising Social Worker and any other appropriate person during the review process. Views are collected using Consultation Questionnaire’s. The review is also an opportunity for the Foster Carer to review the service and support given to the children placed. An early Foster Home Review maybe requested by the Fostering Service where there are concerns about Foster carers practice or where there have been allegations.

- 12.16 During the period 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019, 175 Foster Home Reviews were undertaken as detailed below. During the same period, last year, 173 Foster Home Reviews were undertaken.
- 12.17 Throughout this review period 35 newly registered Foster Carers have been reviewed, being family and Friends Foster Carers. All newly approved Foster Carers are reviewed within six months of first registration.

Mainstream Foster Carers	172
Connected Persons	37
Shared Care Foster Carers	1

- Overall, the Reviews have remained positive and the standard of Foster Care delivered to children and young people remains good. Last year concerns were raised that supports to newly approved carers were poor however additional support particularly in the first six weeks post approval has seen a decrease in complaints.
- Completed unannounced visits have increased to 87%
- A high percentage of carers have completed their TSDS workbook.
- Regular supervision of Foster Carers is of a good level.
- Overall, the Reviews have remained positive and the standard of Foster Care delivered to children and young people remains good.

13 FOSTER CARER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

○

- 13.1 Training is a continual process and all approved Wolverhampton Foster Carers are offered new and refresher training courses to update their skills on a regular basis. Foster Carers are required to complete the evidenced based Training, Support and Development Standards work book within the first year of approval (first eighteen months for Family and Friends Foster Carers). The Fostering Service provides eight to ten mandatory training courses twice a year for all new Foster Carers and a range of development training opportunities. Over 2018/19 25 Foster carers completed Restorative Practice training whilst during 2019/20 all remaining Foster carers will be offered the opportunity to complete this training. Therapeutic Parenting Training courses are held twice yearly whilst the Nurturing Programme is held 3 times per year.
- 13.2 Foster Carers' training needs are identified as part of their Personal Development Plan (PDP) and reviewed regularly during supervision. The PDP's assist in identifying gaps in Foster Carers skills and knowledge and to ensure that they can meet their obligations in accordance with their Fostering Agreement. Failure to attend identified training would result in the Foster Carer being in non-compliance with the Fostering Agreement and could place their continuing approval at risk. The PDP is now completed as a separate document and stored on the document hub for each Foster carer.
- 13.3 Approved Foster Carers who live a distance from Wolverhampton are offered the opportunity to complete their training on-line or with a local training provider where the funding has been agreed.

- 13.4 To access training Foster Carers can book courses through their Supervising Social Worker or by calling the office by telephone and speaking with their Supervising Social Worker, a Unit Administrator or the Duty Social Worker. There is also availability for Foster Carers to book on-line training via the Safeguarding Hub.
- 13.5 To develop and enhance the training and development of Foster Carers there is a full-time Training Social Worker within the Fostering Team. Her role is to strengthen the importance of continual development and to ensure that Foster Carer's training is targeted to meet the needs of children placed. Completed Training will be recorded on the Foster Carers file and reviewed during Supervision and their PDP.
- 13.6 The Fostering Service holds an Annual Conference for all Foster Carers to attend, this includes professional speakers during the morning, speaking to the whole group about issues such as attachment, cultural considerations and sibling placements and small group training workshops in the afternoon. This event is used to network and demonstrate to Foster Carers that they are valued in their role. A conference for Foster Carers was held July 4th, 2018 where Lemm Sissay gave a presentation reflecting on his experiences in care. Feedback for conferences has been exclusively positive. There is a further conference planned for July 10th, 2019.
- 13.7 In December 2018, there was an award ceremony held to celebrate the successes of fostering and to award Foster Carers for their commitment to fostering by recognising their length of service. The event was supported by Senior Management and Local Authority Members. Entertainment was provided by individual and group singers. Following the event many Foster Carers contacted the Fostering Service to inform that they thoroughly enjoyed their evening.
- 13.8 The Foster Carer Forum and Support Groups have been amalgamated to encourage attendance as this was historically poor. There have been 10 Support and Focus Forums planned during this year, these are taking place during Training development days and in the evenings to try and ensure accessibility to Foster Carers who work. Attendance of the Support and Focus Forum continues to grow.
- 13.9 There is an updated Fostering Handbook of which a hard copy has been sent out to all Foster carers. The handbook contains pertinent information useful to carers and is regularly updated to reflect any changes.
- 13.10 At the end of March 2019 out of the 177 -approved mainstream Foster Carers, all have either completed or are in the process of completing the Training, Support and Development standards (TSDS). The Foster Carers who are in the process of securing Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders are not required to complete the TSDS. Newly registered Foster Carers are being supported to achieve the standards within twelve months of approval. This is facilitated by the TSDS workshops.

14 Fostering Panel:

- 14.1 The work of the Fostering Panel is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011. The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015. The Panel must advise on:
- Reviews of approvals (Regulation 28), and monitor their effectiveness
 - Oversee the conduct of assessments

- Give advice and make recommendations on any other matters referred

- 14.2 The Fostering Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Head of Service, for Looked after Children within ten working days of the panel meeting. The Head of Children in Need and Child Protection deputises in the absence of The Head of Service Looked After Children.
- 14.3 The Fostering Panel also have a quality assurance role, offering feedback on the quality and content of reports submitted and the presentation and knowledge of the social workers attending, by way of a Performance Management Form. The quality assurance extends to how the Panel Members are prepared for their task.
- 14.4 The Adoption and Permanence Panels were introduced to the panels the previous year and offered greater opportunities for the development of Wolverhampton's Permanency Policy however these will cease to become part of the Fostering Service since the introduction of Adoption at Heart on 1st April 2019. The Adoption & Permanence Panel complies with regulations During the year 2018/19, Members were asked to give feedback via one performance form completed by the Panel and fed back to the Management Team. This covers the quality of the paperwork submitted; practice and procedural issues and the overall analysis of reports submitted. All visitors attending the Panel were asked to complete a feedback form to inform on the overall service offered by the Fostering Panel. Despite making the feedback forms available in a variety of ways, e.g. in the invitation letter, not everyone was prepared to complete the form.
- 14.5 It continues to be a busy period for the Fostering Panel, with a steady flow of Foster Carer approvals, resignations and deregistration of Foster Carers. There has been a steady increase in the number of placements made with Family and Friends Foster Carers as in the previous year. Foster Carer's first annual reviews have been presented to panel, as have reviews requiring change of approval category, and reviews following concerns and guidance relevant to both Adoption and Fostering: Adoption agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012. The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous amendments) regulations 2013. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (amendments) Regulations 2015; The Fostering Regulations 2011. Panel Members from the Central List with both adoption and fostering experience makes up the Permanence Panel. The composition of Fostering Panels, terms of reference and functions are set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. This constitution and terms of reference provides the framework for the operation of the Adoption and Permanence Panel. It is reviewed annually.

Adoption at Heart was introduced 1st April 2019 and all matters related to adoption will be addressed through Adoption at Heart therefore the Fostering Service will from 1st April 2019 only be responsible for all Fostering Matters.

Going forward there will be two Fostering panels a month and one Virtual Fostering panel.

- 14.6 In line with good practice, and the Fostering Regulation (2011), there is an independent Chair and five Independent Panel Members, two with fostering experience, one a previous Foster Carer. Two Independent Members are also the Vice Chairs. The Panel attendance remains high, demonstrating a high commitment from Members who have been Panel Members with Wolverhampton for some time. Two Panel Members have

been trained up this year to Vice Chair positions and all three can sit on either Adoption or Fostering Panels as Vice Chairs.

- 14.7 The Central List consists of two previously Looked After Children, Foster Carers, Adoptees, Adopters; a birth relative who managed to trace his adoptive siblings and those that were Looked After and a Councillor. There was at this time last year an over representation of women on the Panel and attempts made to resolve this have been successful with more men appointed with a panel membership now more reflective of the communities in Wolverhampton, and the children for whom we are responsible. The number of Members to the Central List remains constant we are always looking to embrace new enquiries.
- 14.8 The Panel has access to legal and medical advice as required. It is not a statutory requirement for a legal advisor to be present, but legal advice must be accessible where required.
- 14.9 From 1st April 2019, Wolverhampton Fostering Panel will meet twice a month and the Permanence Panel once a month. Over the review period there has been 27 meetings to meet the demands of the service. 24 of these meetings were planned with a further 3 being on call as additional Panels. This exemplifies the versatility and ability of the Panel and its Member to rise to the challenges presented.

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

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

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

- 14.11 Fostering matters have been heard at both the Fostering Panel and the Permanence Panel giving a total of 27 Panels throughout the year. There are usually six items to the Panel agendas, with the capacity to hear up to four first foster home reviews and other notifications in addition. Panel admin are to be commended for enabling this to happen,

especially with the complex and difficult tasks of recording the Panel meetings. The minutes produced for the Panels are of a very high standard.

Outcomes	2018/19
Meetings	27
Matters Heard	142
Approvals	24
Deregistration	6
Resignations	9
Deferred	2 (F&F) 3 Mainstream
Foster Home R	30
Connected Person Carers	22
Matches	10
Long term F BID	28

14.12 Training is offered to Panel Members to ensure that they understand their full responsibilities as Panel Members and that they are also up to date with the requirements and legislation relevant to children in care. Over the last year there have been increased opportunities for Panel Members to undertake joint training with the Fostering and Adoption Team. Panel Members are required to undertake the mandatory training offered by the council. The Learning Hub is accessible to them via the Panel Pods site where they access Panel documents securely. The induction programme for new Panel Members continues to be strengthened and has been modified accordingly by the Panel Advisor. There have also been opportunities to take part in training set up by partner agencies, which several Members have utilised. Panel Members are also able to access the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board training as required. On June 18th, 2018 all Panel Members were trained in Restorative Practice, they fed back that they found this training a useful exercise. Restorative Practice Training will be offered to newly appointed panel members over the coming year. Panel Members attended the Foster Carers Conference in July 2018 and are invited to this year's Foster Carers Conference on July 10th, 2019.

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

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

14.14 Complaints/Compliments: There have not been any major concerns received about the running of the panel. However, feedback forms from Panel Members and some Service

Users always point to a good service with areas for improvement for which we constantly try to improve. Waiting times for applicant's cases to be heard have improved, although this still needs to be monitored, as there is room for further adjustments.

14.15 The Fostering Panel Advisor left the Local Authority in March 2019 and the post is currently vacant despite advertising and interviewing for the position, no one has been successfully appointed. The post has been advertised again and interviews will take place in early July 2019. In the meantime, the post is covered on a temporary basis by an agency worker experienced in Fostering.

14.16 There have been no decisions referred to IRM during this review period.

Future Development:

- For the Fostering Panel to continue to develop the use of Business Meetings between the Management of the Fostering Teams and the Panel Service.
- To ensure joint training is available for Panel Members and Social Workers within the Fostering Team.
- Panel Members Away Days to be further developed and for an increase in the membership of the Central List, especially of male members and birth relatives.
- To ensure that the Restorative Practice Training completed in June 2018 is fully utilised within the Panel processes and for the Panels to remain consistent and effective in producing an appropriate and successful service to the Looked After population of the city.
- For Panel Members to attend the Foster carers conference in July 2019
- For Panel Members to be invited to Fostering Away days to share practice and to improve relationships between the panel and the Fostering Service.
- A Fostering Panel Advisor to be appointed at the earliest opportunity.

15 Complaints and Compliments

15.1 There were 4 formal complaints received about the fostering service during the year 2018 – 2019– This was lower than the previous year, however compares favourably with the national average of 18% of complaints that were from fostered children. There were also 4 informal complaints received which were managed and responded to at a lower level. The Fostering service received 4 compliments.

15.2 The complaints received were around poor communication, quality of service, agreed increased fees not applied and no respite offered. At the same time, there have also been 4 compliments in relation to the Fostering Service recognising Social Workers commitment in their job role to families and young people. The Fostering Service, upon investigating and reviewing complaints received continue to ensure that learning is disseminated to Staff and colleagues in order that adjustments and improvements can be achieved.

16.0 Private Fostering:

- 16.1 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.
- 16.2 There are two Private Fostering champions within the Fostering Service, they are responsible for increasing the awareness of Private Fostering and facilitating training both internally with all City of Wolverhampton employees and externally with partner agencies and the voluntary sector. This year has seen the introduction of Private Fostering Champions in Partner and Voluntary Agencies
- 16.3 As part of the Fostering Improvement Plan Quarterly Multi Agency forums have been set up to discuss the on-going importance of driving and developing processes that will ensure Private Fostering remains integral to our everyday practice. As Private Fostering Arrangements are in place throughout the City there continues to be a need to increase our awareness of these arrangements and report them through the correct channels, so they can be appropriately assessed in terms of safeguarding children. The Private Fostering Policy and Procedure was updated in January 2018
- 16.4 It remains the responsibility of all professionals to continue to raise awareness of what constitutes Private Fostering Arrangements and how to refer them for assessment and support. By taking a multi-agency approach we can together continue to raise the profile of Private Fostering thus increasing the number of referrals and safeguarding our children.
- 16.5 We recognise the complexities involved in understanding Private Fostering and what it entails and therefore wish to create a more collaborative approach and develop relationships across each sector in order that professionals can work together, answer queries and support each other in improving outcomes for children.
- 16.6 To coordinate the multi-agency, approach we facilitate a Quarterly Forum which is attended by representatives from Health, Education, Strengthening Families, Early Intervention, Specialised Support, MASH, Wolverhampton Homes and Marketing and Communications to attend the meetings. This meeting is historically poorly attended, it is hoped with the introduction this year of Private Fostering Champions from Partner Agencies that attendance will improve particularly from a multi-agency stance. Forums have been set up throughout 2019/20 in April, June, September and January.
- 16.7 Over the last year, the Service has continued to publicise Private Fostering through Schools, Health Services and at all fostering recruitment events. There has been a meeting with the Lead Safeguarding Officers to review and renew its publicity of their materials for through various uses.
- 16.8 The number of children and young people in Private Fostering Arrangements fluctuates, and this year there have been three notifications, none of which went on to Private Fostering Arrangements and five are currently on-going. All referrals received have been notified by the Children's Social Work Teams.
- 16.9 Management oversight is provided through supervision. In addition, the Private Fostering Assessment is approved by the Agency Decision Maker, Head of Looked After Children Services.
- 16.10 Private Foster Carers have access to the Fostering Service training.

16.11 An Annual Private Fostering Report is completed each year and presented to the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board in the Autumn.

17.0 Financial Package for Foster Carers:

17.1 In January 2016 the new Fees and Allowances were introduced.

17.2 Foster Carers receive a weekly allowance to cover all living costs associated to the child/ren they care for. Wolverhampton rates follow those recommended by the Department for Education (DfE); and are paid in accordance to the child's age. Foster Carers are expected to open a bank account (preferably and ISA) in which they must save a weekly amount for the child's future. The specified amount of money to be saved for children and the pocket money rates are again age related and are provided annually by the Fostering Service to all Foster Carers. Birthday, holiday and festival allowances are paid in addition to the above.

17.3 The Fostering Fees model is one which rewards Foster Carers in unity with their skills, experiences and expertise in meeting the needs of Looked After Children; in addition to the number of children placed, this is with a view to further encourage Foster Carers to consider sibling placements where they have capacity in their home. All Foster Carers have been provided with a new Fostering Agreement which widens their approval categories from birth to eighteen years. The revised reward model will provide greater placement choice and reduce Wolverhampton's reliance on external provision.

17.4 Foster carers can apply at Level Two to be considered as Level Three carers if they meet the expected required and have the relevant experience and expertise. A panel to consider these applications has been set up and will be held quarterly ongoing. A policy and procedures have been written to reflect this, Foster carers have been consulted and have been informed that the policy is agreed and are advised of panel dates to submit their applications.

18. Working in Partnership / Feedback from User participation:

18.1 The Private Fostering Forums have been set up quarterly, this is to both raise awareness and guarantee that there is multi-agency approach to the professional responsibilities of notifying the Local Authority of Private Fostering Arrangements.

18.2 Senior Management and Lead Elect Members have continued to consult with Foster Carers in their attendance at Forums, events and recruitment. This has been a positive way of Foster Carers feeling they have had opportunity to share their views and experiences. Presence at the fostering events has provided Foster Carers with further recognition for the work they undertake with Looked After Children and, consequently this ensures Foster Carers feel valued by the Local Authority for their continued commitment.

19. Summary

19.1 The Fostering Service was restructured in November 2018 as part of a wider children's service restructure and there are now two teams within the service focussed on Recruitment and Assessment and Support. The Fostering Service continues to benefit from experienced managers and the compliment of social workers remains stable with no agency workers currently employed. Both teams have made significant progress during the year with many development and improvements made across the service as described and outlined above. The latter part of the year saw a new project "Foster Families United" introduced and alongside promotion for this a pilot project based on the model has had a very positive and encouraging start. As always, the fostering service is engaged in continuing to strive for further improvements.

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

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

19.3 Whilst the Family Values project has provided structure and parameters with clear objectives, participation in the workstreams and steering group has provided opportunities within these arenas to explore other ideas for improvement and development, "Foster Families United" and Level 3/4 panels for carer progression are just two examples. The project has certainly elicited energy and excitement and given such positive progress during the year culminating in a net gain of 21 carers the thought continues that there is a real opportunity to continue to increase our cohort of mainstream and connected carers within a Fostering Service that is fully open to challenge and change. It is only by exploring and embracing these opportunities that we will truly as a service achieve our potential with our overall aim to improve the outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

20. Key Achievements 2018/19

- A Net Gain of 21 foster carers has been achieved considering both mainstream and connected carers and that some have transferred to SGO during the year. Success in all areas has impacted on the overall net gain of carers.
- 20 SGO orders have been achieved.
- Continued increased enquiries supported through sophisticated media campaigns and digital advertising.
- A designated Fostering website continues to share pertinent information and is regularly updated.
- Governance for the Family Values project well established, a steering group and work streams meet monthly to monitor progress of the project.
- The "Truth be Told" film promoting Fostering has been released in collaboration with the West Midlands consortium.

- The Foster Carer newsletter is published monthly and includes a section “Fostering story of the month” Good news stories are routinely sought from Foster carers and Social Workers.
- An Easter Egg hunt was held at Bantock Park with Halloween, and Christmas parties held at Burt Williams Centre, all were well attended and enjoyed by Foster Carers and Children & Young People.
- Increased participation by Foster carers in Advertising campaigns and in the Family Values workstreams.
- A policy outlining Escalation to Level 3/4 for Foster carers has been shared and panels set up quarterly to consider applications from carers who apply to be Level 3 or 4 carers.
- The complete Foster Carers register highlighting vacancies and the status of all placements has been shared with the Placement Team, Emergency Team and managers working out of hours in order that ALL can make Internal Placements as appropriate.
- All Foster Carers currently on the “Dormant” list are regularly contacted and whilst unable to offer a full-time placement have facilitated respite to support other Foster Carers requiring a break.
- The Training Programme for Foster Carers 2019/20 has been revised, new courses and developmental days added to the calendar offering an increased variety of subjects and with built in Forums to maximise carers potential to attend both.
- Customer Service Officers trained in aspects of Fostering in order that they handle enquiries effectively and sharing pertinent information to Fostering to support applications. The Fostering newsletter is shared with Customer Service Officers to further enhance their awareness of the service.
- Enquiries are tracked effectively to pin-point origins of referrals to better inform campaigns going forward.
- The use of Twitter has increased to maximise the Fostering Service capacity to reach a wider audience using Social Media.
- Therapeutic Reflective sessions running twice monthly for Fostering Social Workers and facilitated by CAMHS Social Worker to compliment the model of training (18 week- Nurturing Attachments Training Programme) to Foster Carers.
- The Personal Development Plan for Foster Carers to support their development and future training needs filed as a separate document to compliment Supervision.
- Free Swimming lessons for Looked after Children agreed by City of Wolverhampton Council
- Improved interface between the Fostering service and Housing which will improve opportunities for the service to support current carers and prospective carers in applying for House moves/bigger properties.

- Fostering Social Worker trainer trained in Restorative practice will deliver Restorative training to the Fostering Panel Members.
- Therapeutic Parenting Training courses will be offered 3 times yearly to foster carers.
- All newly approved foster carers are allocated a “buddy” and receive weekly visits from their Supervising Social Worker.
- The new model of fostering “Foster Families United” has been developed and a pilot hub of carers reflecting the model with encouraging progress and outcomes thus far.
- Private Fostering Forums have been set up quarterly and attended by Private Fostering Champions from partner agencies.
- A visit to North Yorks Local Authority provided opportunities to observe progress of a Fostering Service within a different demographic
- A pop-up shop has been secured in the Mander Centre with Wolverhampton having access at agreed times throughout the year to promote Fostering and use as part of Fostering Fortnight. The shop has been well utilised and has secured referrals to further progress.
- A Foster Home Review Improvement Plan has been implemented which has secured improvements in the completion of basic requirements in respect of carers i.e. unannounced visits, delegated authority and safer care statements.

KEY OBJECTIVES 2019/20

- To achieve the target of a net gain of 28 Mainstream Foster carers to provide for the diverse range of children’s needs.
-
- To complete connected assessments in timescales as directed and achieve a net gain of connected foster carers whilst acknowledging that successful conversion to SGO’s will impact on overall gains.
- To achieve 30 Special Guardianship Orders.
- To fully launch the Foster Carer Portal to enable access by all carers to the offered training opportunities, Information, Policy & Procedures and developmental information.
- To further develop existing and new carers to provide for children’s needs, promote understanding, resilience of carers and placement stability by reviewing policies to include short breaks/respite, buddy system and additional benefits available to foster carers.
- To continue to review recruitment materials and processes and continue to implement the recommendations from the Family Values Project undertaken by iMPower whilst being open minded to all ideas and development opportunities

that will enhance and improve the Fostering Service which include visiting other authorities particularly those who have recruited high numbers of foster carers and achieved significantly improved outcomes.

- The focus on Private Fostering needs to continue to be strengthened and the profile promoted to increase awareness and understanding of this often-misunderstood area of care. Further training opportunities to be offered across Children's Social Care, with partner agencies and the voluntary sector and to ensure the quarterly is well attended by champions from partner agencies and all relevant materials shared.
- The pilot linked to "Foster Families United" project commenced on May 1st, 2019 and consists of an experienced foster carer acting as a hub carer with three fostering families linked. All carers will be supervised by the same supervising social worker who has recently been appointed to the project whilst a CAMHS practitioner will provide clinical supervision to all within the pilot. The hub carer has planned activities for the carers and is providing additional support in line with the model. Progress regarding this pilot will be shared with senior managers in August 2019. Media campaigns have begun in respect of this project and it will feature in both mainstream and targeted events throughout the year.

