

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

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

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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.

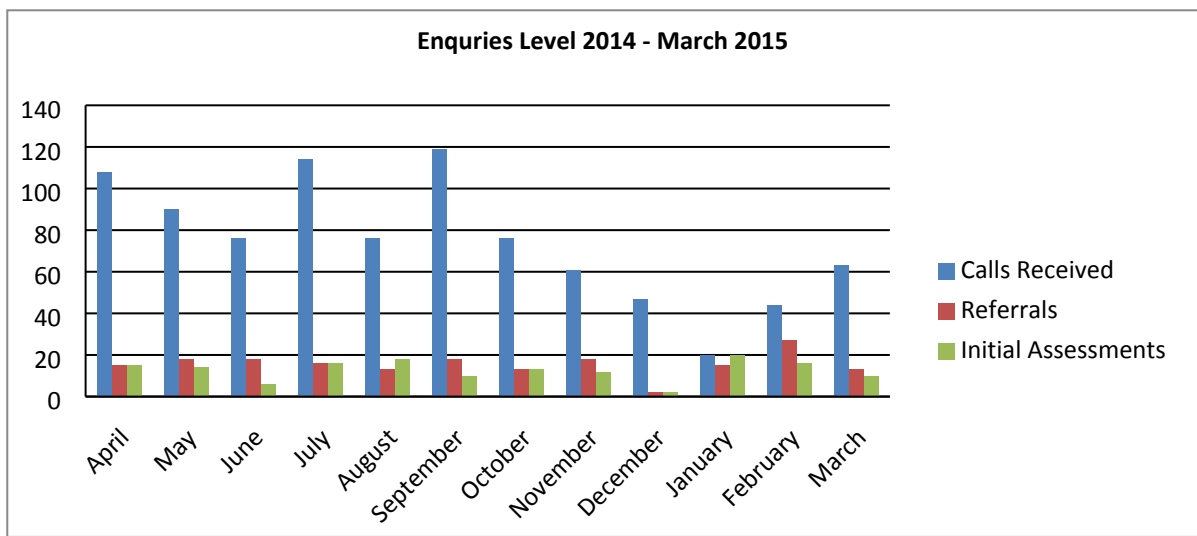
4.7 Telephone enquiries are routed through a dedicated call centre and dedicated fostering duty workers are available to respond immediately to callers who want more information.

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:

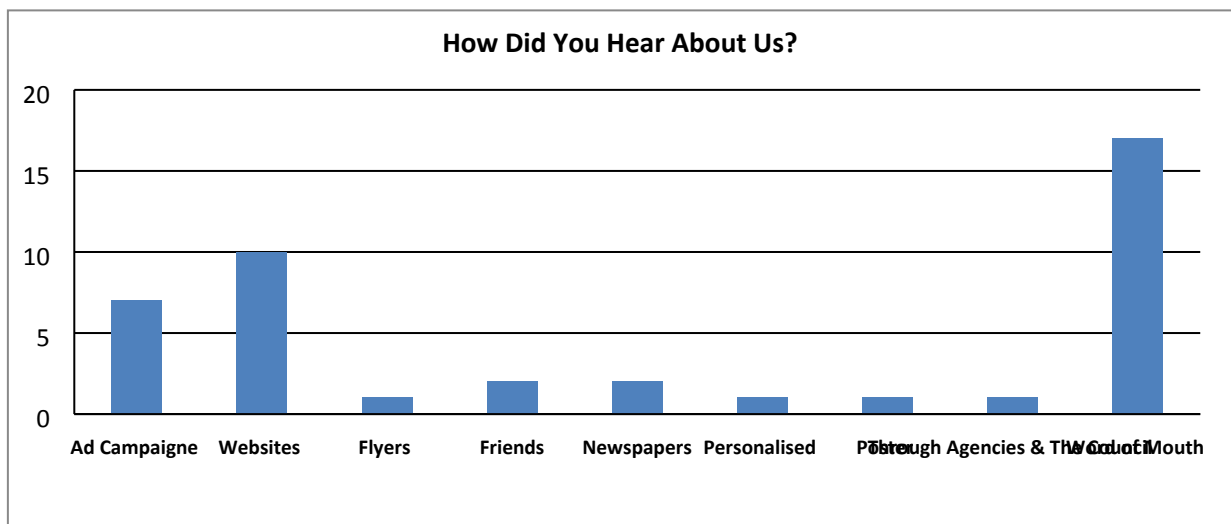
- Utilising the foster carers community as champions for recruitment events
- Consistent online and social media campaign
- Regular outreach events
- Two campaign bursts per year, one to include Foster Care Fortnight (1 to 14 June) using Fostering Network national campaign theme 'Make a connection.
- 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

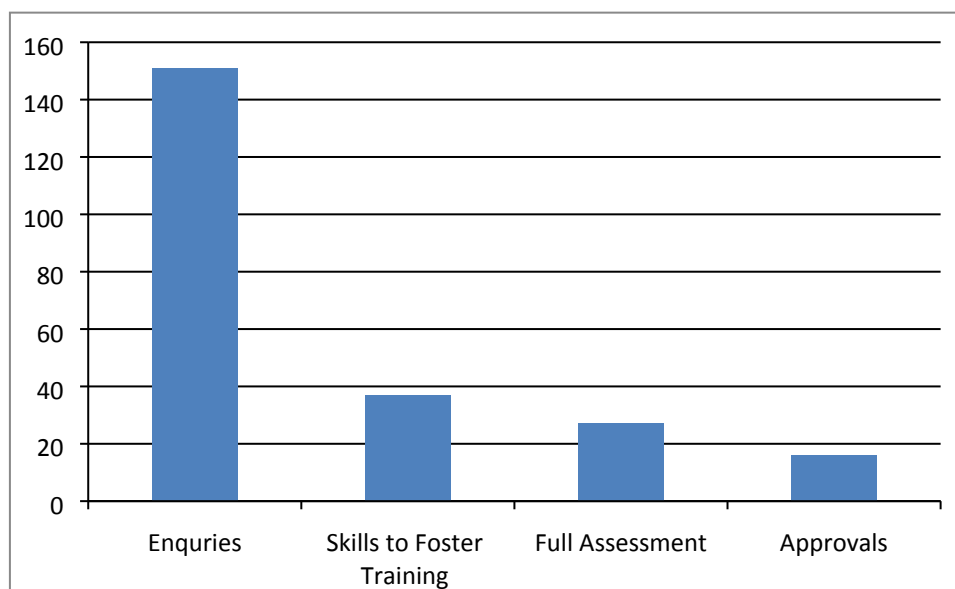
4.15 The dropout rate of 72% at this stage of the process is again due to either applicants recognising that they are unable to pursue fostering, or this is not the right time for them to continue their application or the social workers counselling out applicants due to concerns with any of the above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

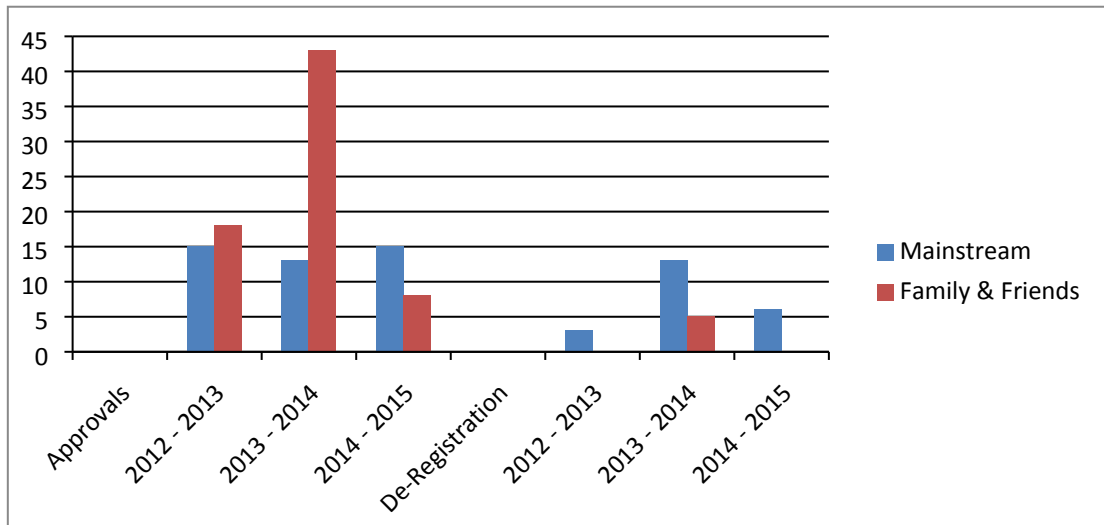
Assessments are part of the core work of the fostering team which enables the building of a comprehensive picture of the applicants. Evidence based and analytical assessments are completed on all prospective foster carers to help understand their motivation and ability to care for children who have experienced 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**

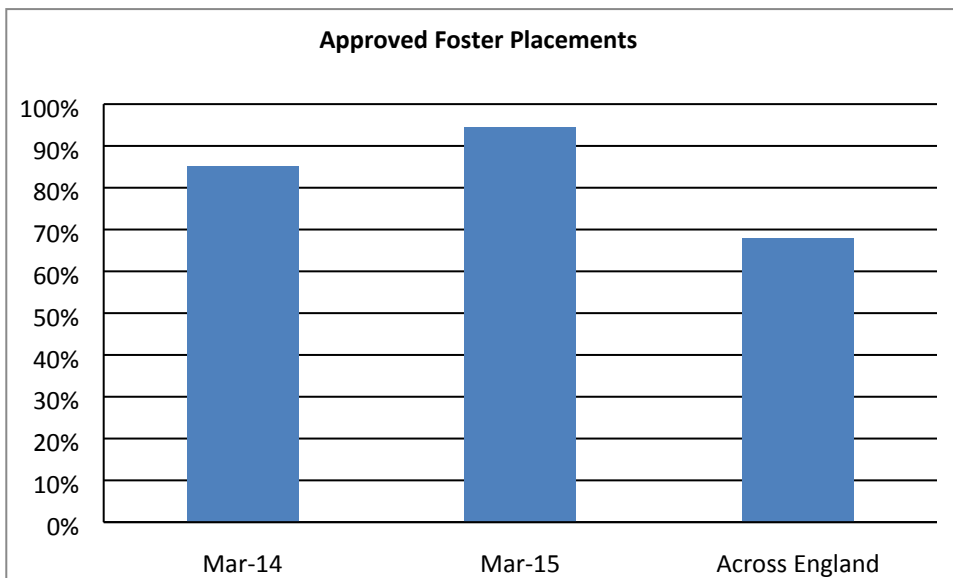
Mainstream or Short term foster carers, care for children and young people on a short term basis, until permanent plans are made for them. Therefore children and young people could be in placement for a few days, a few months or two to three years

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

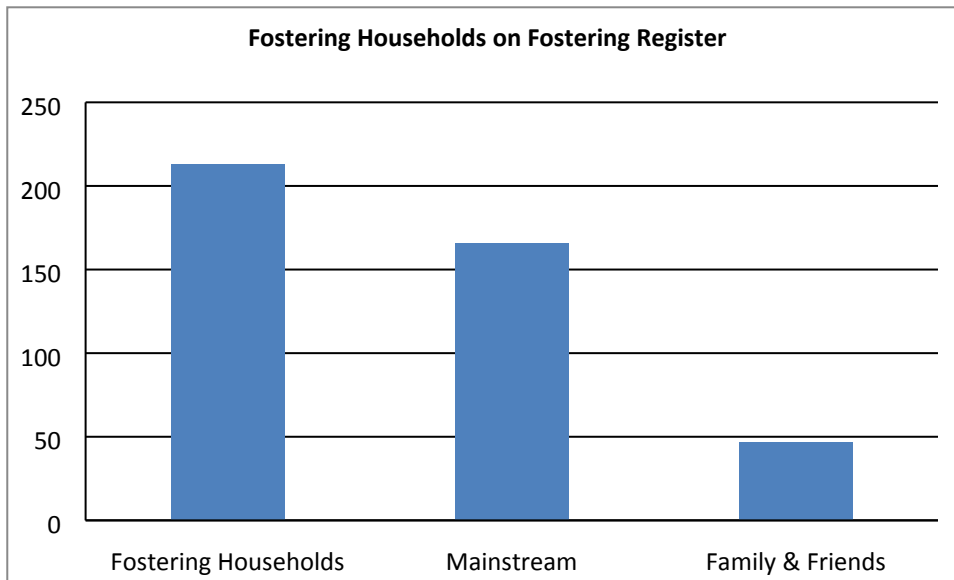
The table below illustrates the number of foster carers Approval for the last three years (2012/2013 2013/2014 2014/2015):



- 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.

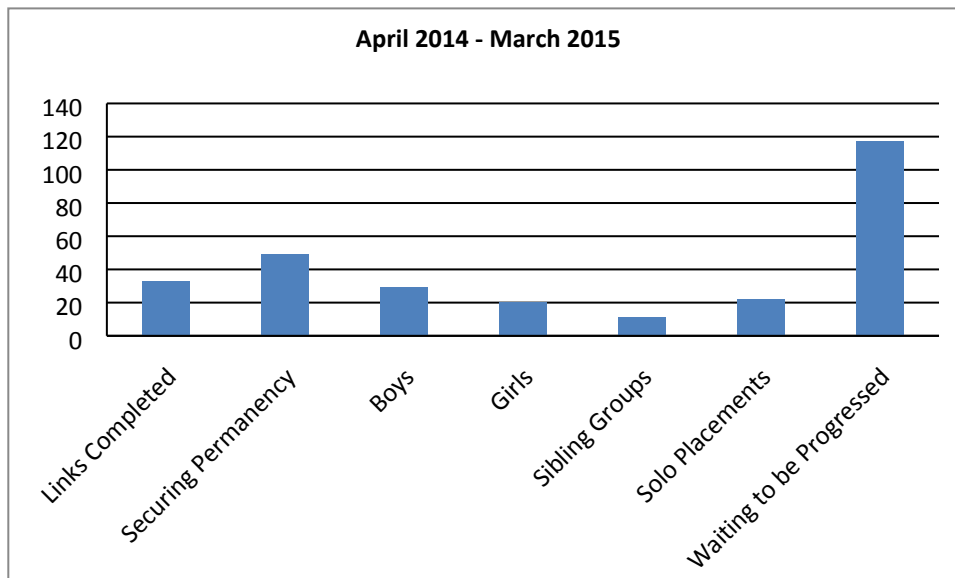


The table below illustrates the number of fostering household in 2014/2015:



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.

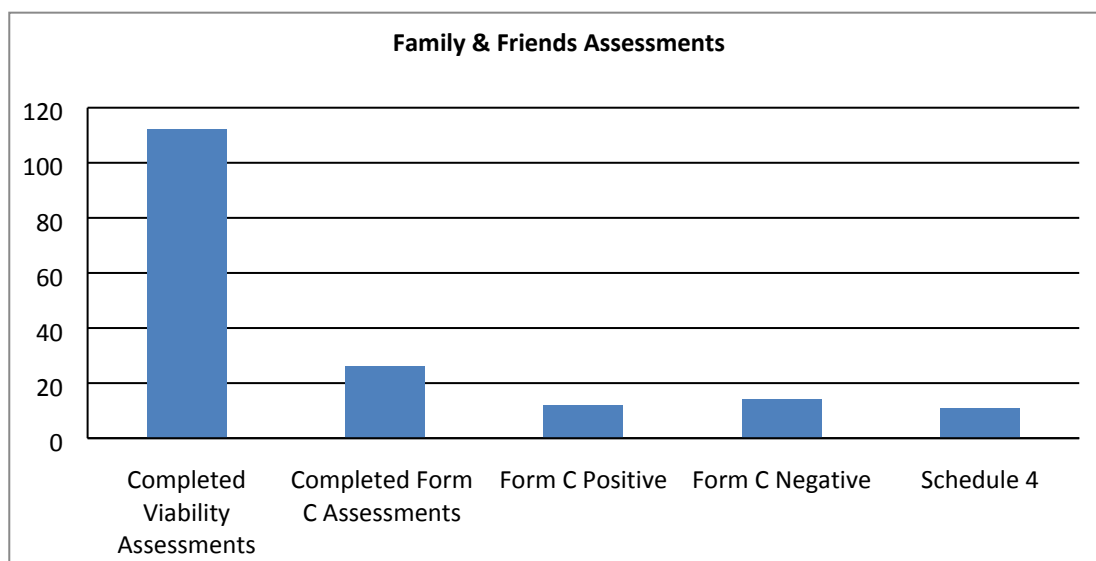


6.2 The fostering service secured 46 matches, a total of 52 permanent placements for children for whom the care plan is permanency, some of whom may not have been able to continue into permanency within their current placement arrangements, or who are in an external provision and wished to remain with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

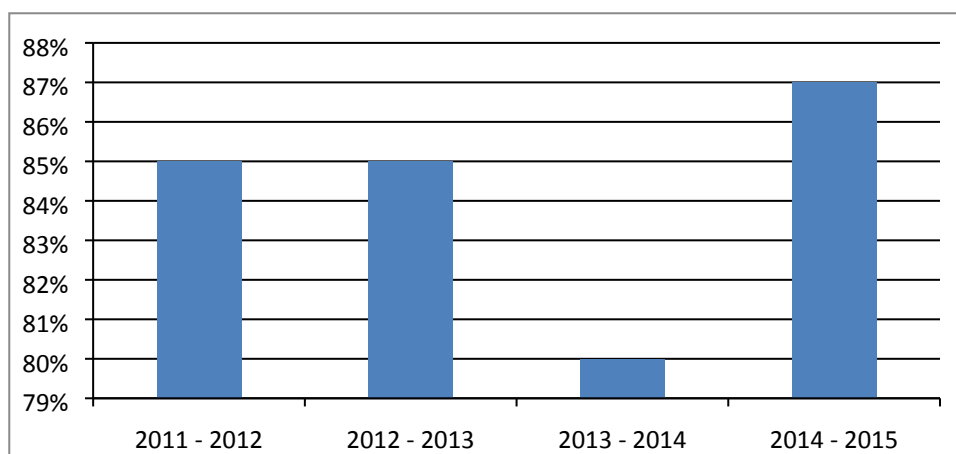
10.1 All approved foster carers have an allocated, suitably qualified supervising social worker. The allocated supervising social worker is responsible for supervising and supporting carers, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support and direction to maintain a quality service, including 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.

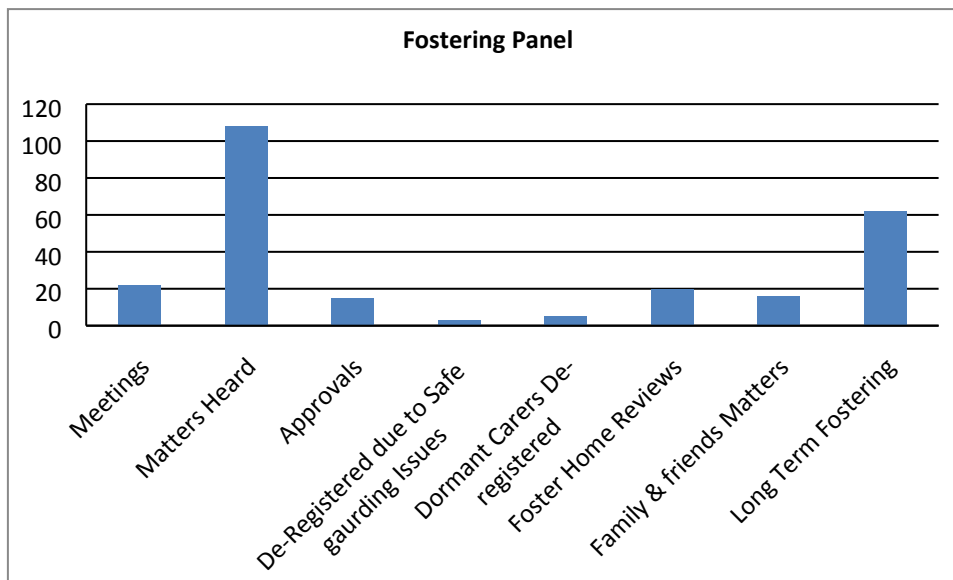
- 11.5 Keep Foster Carers Supported and Trained (KEEP) is a 16 week interactive learning experience for foster carers designed by Oregon .Its aim is to equip carers with a variety of practical skills for caring /parenting. There are two programmes one for children under 12, and the other for carers of 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.

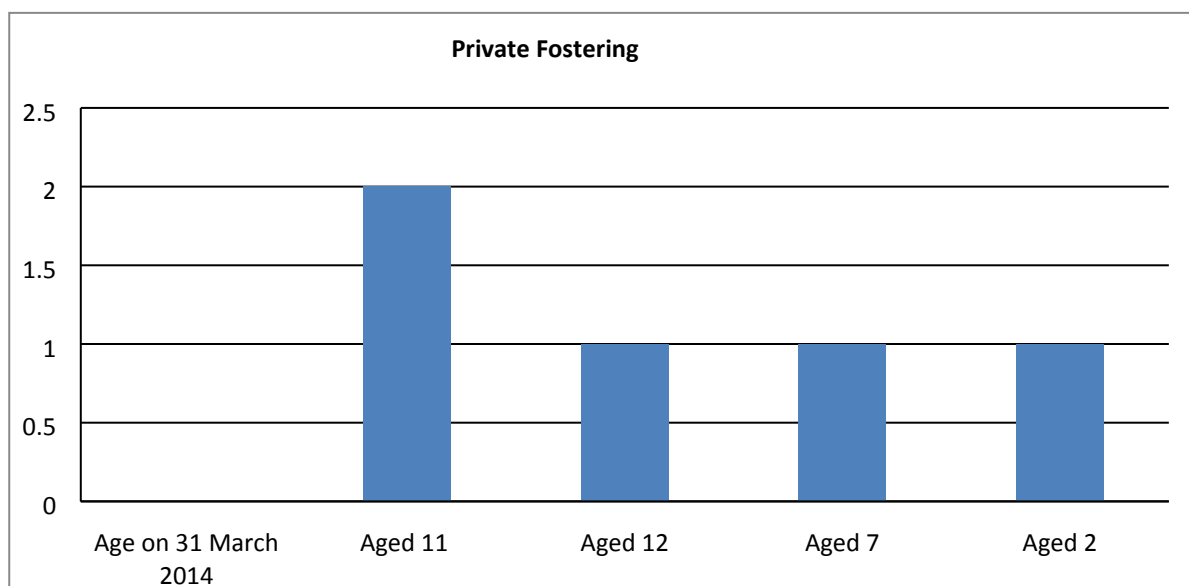
14.2 Research indicates that at least 50% of notifications come from children services, because usually the young person, or children are known to the department, and the young person has made their own arrangements. The other 40% are usually from the carers themselves, or through language schools, as 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