

ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT

APRIL 2021– MARCH 2022

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Section 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 Children and Young People Directorate of the City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC). The Fostering Service recruits, supports, and develops foster carers to care for and support vulnerable children placed in their care.
- 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 an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in March/April 2022 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 children in care 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 in the care of the City of Wolverhampton. Foster carers provide children in care a positive experience of family life within an environment that promotes their physical, emotional and health needs. Working in partnership with Health, Education and other allied professionals enables foster carers to provide a warm, safe, and caring family environment ensuring that the children's emotional health and development is promoted. Foster carers ensure children in care have access to available opportunities to promote children's attendance and their academic achievements, thus maximising all opportunities for children to achieve their full potential.

Section 2: Functions/roles within the Fostering Service

Social work staffing

2.1 The Fostering Service has a full complement of 22 full time equivalent qualified social work posts, and 1.5 equivalent unqualified posts. The Fostering Service is divided into two teams:

- **Recruitment and Assessment (Mainstream and Connected)** – All Recruitment activities are progressed, with support from a marketing executive. The team has responsibility for completing Form F assessments (combination of external and in-house assessors) and Form C assessments (all completed in-house), Private Fostering Assessments and Stepparent Adoption Assessments.
- **Fostering Support** – The team are responsible for the supervision of all foster carers (Mainstream and connected) Training spans across both services, however within supervision, it is expected that all carers personal development plan and training needs are identified. The Special Guardianship function sits within the support team and all Special Guardianship Order (SGO) reports for children and young people in care C&YPiC are completed, whilst all SGO support plans completed across all teams are reviewed before they are filed in court. The financial part of SGO support plans are reviewed annually or when there is a significant change in a SGO carers circumstances.

2.2 Each team is managed by the team manager and each team manager is supported by senior social workers who supervise up to 4 social workers and manage half a caseload of casework. There are currently 2 full-time vacancies within the service no agency social workers at this time.

The tables below reflect the demographics of the children in care and within Wolverhampton as at 31st March 2022 and social care staff within the Children and Young People in Care service.

Ethnic Group	CYPiC Cohort
White: British	58.7%
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	10.1%
Black: Caribbean	5.2%
Other: Any other ethnic group	5.0%
Mixed: Other Mixed	3.7%
Black: African	3.5%
Mixed: White and Asian	2.5%
Asian: Indian	1.9%
White: Other White	1.9%
Mixed: White and Black African	1.9%
Asian: Other Asian	1.6%
Asian: Pakistani	1.6%
Other: Arab	1.2%
Black: Other Black	1.0%
White: Irish	0.2%

Children and Young People in Care Employee Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	CYPIC Cohort
Asian	7.59%
Black	15.86%
Mixed	8.28%
Not Stated or Other	24.83%
White	43.45%

These tables reflect that the cultural needs of children and young people in care can be well met.

2.3 In addition to the two social work teams there are two other teams which work closely to support the work of the Fostering Service. These are the Personalised Support Team (PST) and Independent Reviewing Officers.

2.4 The PST sits within the Commissioning Service. 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 PST hold the register of internal foster carers which details all placements and highlights any vacancies, the register is routinely updated by the PST 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 Eclipse. 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. Each entry on the foster carer register includes a carer profile and a copy of the carer's Form F, which is available for social workers to discuss with children and young people. There is currently an extensive piece of work in progress to update the register and align it with Eclipse.

2.5 There are three part-time Independent Reviewing Officers who undertake all reviews of Foster Carers' households. The Independent Reviewing Officers are managed within the Safeguarding Service. The Independent Reviewing Officer completes a Foster Home Review report annually which is shared with the Fostering Team and the Fostering Panel. The independent Reviewing Officers routinely meet with the Fostering Service throughout the year to discuss and concerns or performance related issues.

Staff training

2.6 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 Children in Care staff conferences. All members of staff are supported with their continual professional development. During 2021/22 one member of staff in the Fostering Service has undertaken stage one of the Practice Educators award through Wolverhampton University. During 2021/22 all staff

continue to attend bi-monthly Reflective Fostering sessions “Supporting Therapeutic Parenting” facilitated by a CAMHS Social Worker, this model complemented the training the same worker also delivered to foster carers. Likewise, the innovative approach to the supervision between carers and supervising social workers is currently being developed within the Fostering Service. Advanced Practitioners offer city-wide reflective sessions and workshops which can be accessed by fostering staff.

Section 3: The Family Values Project

The Family Values project started in May 2017 following a review of the fostering service, which was undertaken by external consultants iMPower. The overall project aimed to transform the service by improving sufficiency and enabling more looked after children to be cared for by ‘in-house’ foster carers.

iMPower provided a range of scenarios that detailed the metric outcome the project could achieve, there was a base, stabilise, good and excellent scenario. The Project Lead decided Wolverhampton would aim for the ‘Excellent’ scenario, at the end of the project in 2021 this would result in: -

- A net gain of 81 foster carers
- 281 overall foster carers
- 63% of Children and Young People in Care placements in in-house fostering placements

The project originally consisted on 3 areas of focus, these included increasing enquiry generation, improved handling of enquiries and improved support and supervision. As the project has developed the enquiry handling workstream was closed after the first year as all actions and improvements had been completed. The Support workstream was also closed in 2020 following completion of activities, and three new workstreams were created – Foster Families United, Placement Matching and Carers for Disabled Children & Young People.

The aim of each workstream is listed below:-

1. Enquiry Generation - undertake ‘Word of Mouth’ campaigns and marketing communications targeting various sectors resulting in increased foster carer referrals and enquiries.
2. Foster Families United - to create an in-house hub of foster carers. The model aims to deliver an extended family approach which provides respite care, peer support, joint planning and training from a multi-agency perspective and social activities.
3. Placement Matching - to improve the quality of placement matching of children and young people placed with internal foster carers.
4. Carers for Disabled Children & Young People - to develop an offer to potential carers of disabled children and young people including short breaks, and to recruit new carers specifically for this workstream.

The project concluded its third year on 31st March 2021 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. It was agreed that the project will continue

meeting monthly and reporting to end July 2021. After July 2021 the project moved into business as usual (BAU).

After July 2021, there were monthly meetings to review progress and targets throughout the year. It is proposed that the following workstreams will remain in scope:

- Foster Families United
- Carers for Disabled Children and Young People
- Placement Matching

Benefits realisation

The key deliverables of the project outlined in the Project Closure report are outlined in the table below with comments to update on current position:

Key Deliverables	Project close July 2021	Update July 2022
Increase the volume and quality of foster carer enquiries	Our volume of foster carers (in house) has increased by 11% (30 YP) since the project began and there has been a reduction of IFA placements by 34% (76 YP).	Since July 2021, the overall number of children in care has reduced from 538 to 505 (6%). Data for the past 12 months shows a reduction of 5 YP (3%) in internal foster placements, however we have seen a more significant reduction in the proportion of IFA placements across the year with 11 YP (9%) less than July 2021. This has resulted in an increase of the gap between the number of internal and IFA placements from 65 to 71 at the end of July 2022.
Strengthen enquiry handling	Improvements have been made to the enquirer's experience, screening and approval process. All enquiries are followed up within 24 hours, with clear guidelines as to next steps. This has led to a more streamlined procedure.	This has been maintained.
Enhance supervision and support	Foster carers receive monthly supervision with their supervising social workers whilst there is further support offered by buddies for newly approved carers and monthly Foster Carers Forum and access to the Foster Carers Portal. In 2019 the Fostering Families United (FFU) model was introduced, and this further enhances support offered within fostering teams headed by a lead carer who offers additional telephone support particularly at times of crisis, and arranges activities for carer and their children to engage in.	Foster carers supervision, buddies for newly approved carers and monthly Foster Carers Forum and access to the Foster Carers Portal have all be continued. FFU has been reviewed and there is no longer a lead carer role with all supervising social workers playing a more active role in extending the buddying scheme to all carers, coordinating support, activities and sleepovers. The aim is all foster carers will be part of a FFU support group.

Wolverhampton fostering service continues to increase the capacity of the foster carer population. However, the recruitment of mainstream foster carers over the past two years is facing an unprecedented challenge. This report provides evidence that despite significant activity, conversion to actual leads and subsequent approvals has decreased, culminating 2021/22 in a net loss of foster carers for the first time since 2017, this is despite maintaining our cohort of carers with de-registrations in the main due to retirement, providing further evidence that our current cohort of carers want to foster for Wolverhampton.



The effect of the pandemic cannot be underestimated with many families rethinking their properties/life plans and more recently the cost-of-living crisis has seen families concentrating on their own household with less focus on expanding commitments and responsibilities.

In consideration of a realistic target 2022-23 and 2023-24, and taking all the above factors into account, fostering for Wolverhampton propose:

- 2022/23 – Net gain target 5
- 2023/24 – Net gain target 20

Overall, 52% of all Children and Young People in Care placements are in-house fostering placements.

Learning from lessons

Lessons learnt were gathered from the Steering Group in July 2021. In total 24 lessons learnt have been identified, these include 7 areas of improvement and 17 areas of success. An update on the areas for improvement is outlined below.

Areas for Improvement	
Situation	Action Taken
The system (shared spreadsheet) used for tracking leads and enquires is very clunky and not streamlined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A CRM system is currently being explored as part of the Black Country Fostering project. Now in testing phase.
Newly approved carers who have not yet cared for a child needs to be further understood E.g. 5 carers were approved between January & March 2021, but no child has been placed with them to date, this is likely to carers wanting to be placed with a child under 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing Social Worker to have a specific conversation around referrals and how the carer would feel about having a particular child placed in their care. This has been achieved. • Work closely with carers around what their preferences for placements are. There is currently a pilot taking place using a behaviours/scenarios/preference toolkit.
Recruiting Lead Carers for the FFU workstream has been a challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FFU has been reviewed and there is no longer a lead carer role.
The need for a dedicated Family & Connected Carers FFU team needs to be revisited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FFU has been reviewed. The aim is all foster carers will be part of a FFU support group.
Additional training to be explored - e.g. further development of the therapeutic parenting course and clinical oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train up Senior Social Workers and Supervising Social Workers to free up the CAMHS social worker to concentrate on other areas e.g. consultation work. A FSW is delivering the next cohort with the CAMHS social worker in September 2022.
The Matching workstream took a long time to progress and understand - a matching policy and process was needed from the outset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matching policy is now in place.
It would have been beneficial for a robust performance system to have been developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance monitoring requirements reviewed at the start of the project. Performance is now monitored BAU.

User Voice

Compliments from foster carers at their Foster Home Review for individual supervising social workers. “The carers stated that the support they received from SSW in caring for child during some very difficult and challenging times was second

to none, they were guided well by SSW and he was always available to support them even outside his normal working hours”.

“I would like to say a Big thank you from children & myself for arranging the Wolves match last night. The boys really enjoyed themselves and they couldn’t stop talking about it on the way home, it probably will be the highlight of the 6-week holiday for them. Thank you again”.

Feedback provided by child’s Independent Reviewing Officer for the recent child in care meeting and feel proud to say that the standard of care being afforded is second to none!

Feedback provided by child’s social worker speaking very highly about the care afforded to child by foster carers. “I would personally like to thank you both for your commitment to child, it is very evident that you have high aspirations for her and with your love and support she is undoubtedly achieving these. In addition, she has been supported to feel part of the family which has boosted her confidence, hence, is thriving in every aspect of her life! Social Worker states, ‘It never feels like a “placement” when I am there and honestly feels like a home from home’.

During direct work one child gave her fostering home – 10 out of 10!

Foster parents are part of workstream meetings such as developing the Portal, Foster Home Review process and the Family Values Steering Group. We have a bank of foster parents who have expressed an interest in reviewing and developing policies. Foster parents are currently reviewing the Independence Packs, they are encouraged to support with delivery of training, events and taking ownership of these. Foster parents offer peer to peer support.

Foster carers are engaged with service events such as support with recruitment events, events for carers and children, compared at the Foster Carer Conferences and online training such as Prevent, Incontinence, TSDS, record keeping and SGO process.

Section 4: Service Delivery

4.1 Recruitment of foster carers

The Service has responsibility for marketing, enquiry generation, recruitment, assessment, and training activities.

Within the team is a dedicated marketing person from the Council’s Corporate Communications Team. An annual marketing activity plan ensures that recruitment campaigns are planned and spread throughout the year. This year our initial enquiries from prospective foster carers have mainly come via the website and Facebook leads. The enquiries are recorded and screened by our specialised customer service officer or our dedicated marketing person. If the initial enquiry is recommending eligibility to foster, then our Recruitment and Assessment Team will book an Initial Assessment. If the Initial Assessment proves positive the Full Form ‘F’ Assessment is completed by an assessor sourced via You Recruit. A proportion of Form F assessments are

completed by Wolverhampton fostering social workers, whilst all Independent Fostering Agency carers seeking to transfer are all completed in-house.

The team carried on throughout the year with new ways of working that were adopted in 2019/20 following government guidelines during the covid pandemic. A calendar of online information events via Microsoft teams was promoted through a digital marketing campaign, advertising on google, social media and partner websites. We also repeated the Sky TV advert and used real footage supplied by foster carers for further promotion on social media platforms. As part of our collaboration work through the West Midlands Regional Fostering Recruitment Forum, we joined together with a total of 34 local authorities to produce a high-quality film 'Out There'. This was a real asset to our recruitment of new foster carers.

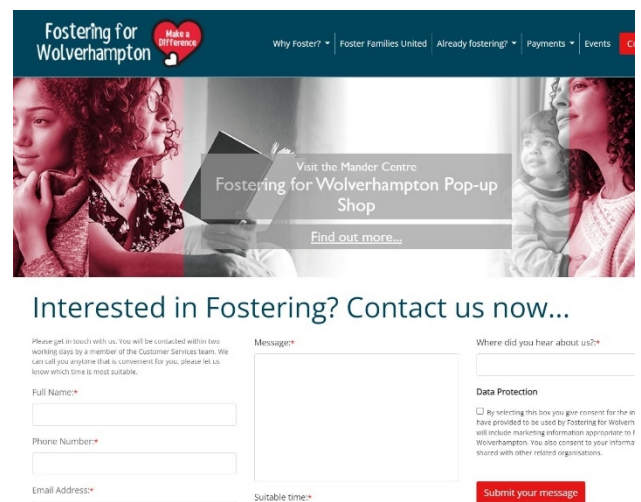
Despite the number of leads reducing throughout the year, activity levels have been high as the Recruitment and Assessment Team have worked hard at remarketing to previous contacts known as 'the warm list'. There have been a number of quality applicants that have not progressed due to personal circumstances and a common theme has been 'strained' or 'poor' financial circumstances.

Despite the challenges the Recruitment and Assessment Team have continued to recruit new foster carers, albeit not at the same levels as the previous few years.

Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022 our enquiries were 232, which is our lowest number for a few years. Of these 167 have been made via our website, accounting for 72% of all first contacts. Google search is the most popular source of enquiry accounting for nearly 50% followed closely with Facebook being the second most popular source at 21%. A total of 38 Initial Assessments were completed during the year.

The Fostering for Wolverhampton online presence continues to be strong and the stand-alone website, which was introduced in 2018, has been invaluable during these difficult times. There were 12,698 visits to the website last year, which equates to an average of 35 daily, which is a reduction on the previous year.

A new Google Ads campaign is being developed to start mid 2022. A decision to refresh the brand, imagery and key messages was made towards the end of the financial year. A new look campaign is being created and developed in time for launch at the beginning of April 2022 and face to face recruitment was planned to start again in June with the re-opening of the fostering pop up shop in the Mander Centre.



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the 'Fostering for Wolverhampton' website. The main banner features a photograph of a woman and a child, with text that reads: 'Visit the Mander Centre Fostering for Wolverhampton Pop-up Shop' and a 'Find out more...' link. Below the banner is a section titled 'Interested in Fostering? Contact us now...' which contains a contact form. The form includes fields for 'Full Name*', 'Phone Number*', and 'Email Address*'. There is also a 'Message*' text area and a 'Submit your message' button. A 'Data Protection' section is visible, stating: 'By selecting this box you give consent for the info you have provided to be used by Fostering for Wolverhampton. You also consent to your info shared with other related organisations.'

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Recruitment continues throughout the year but there are also three main periods of campaign activity throughout the year in Foster Care Fortnight in May, an autumn campaign in September/ October and a new year January campaign. With no option of physical face to face events this year, these have been promoted through targeted



The Fostering Pop-Up Shop in the Mander Centre

digital advertising through Google Ads and Facebook and other sites, social media posts and public relations, a chronicle wrap, a local Sky TV ad, radio advertising, email marketing

We all know that foster carers can portray a realistic and positive view of fostering, we use several foster carer champions who work with the Recruitment and Assessment Team to support the innovative marketing and recruitment campaigns. This year foster carers have supported us with films and personal stories and our recruitment campaign during LGBT Awareness month. Alongside this, approved foster carers also continue to support our online information sessions and preparatory “Skills to Foster” training for new applicants.

Web and telephone enquiries continue to be routed through Customer Services and fostering recruitment team 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. Read only access of the Fostering Portal 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.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team includes a dedicated fostering marketing executive and there is a Marketing and Communications plan in place for on-going



recruitment campaigns. Weekly and monthly meetings take place between Marketing and The Fostering Service, to plan future events and reflect on previous events and share thoughts and ideas.

Our regular information events used to be held throughout the year which provided opportunities for prospective foster carers to meet the Recruitment Team to find out more about fostering, were replaced during the pandemic with regular planned online information events via Microsoft Teams. We hold on average 2 sessions per month and prospective foster carers are asked to book on via our website. Our foster carer champions also attend these online events and can give first-hand advice about becoming a foster carer. Attendance has been patchy throughout the year, but we have had a few quality applicants that have progressed. We are planning to reintroduce face to face events from May/June 2022 with the reopening of the fostering and will continue a mixed approach over the coming months.

Targeted Facebook advertising is ongoing throughout the year and is refreshed regularly 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. Content is also shared on the council's corporate channels including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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.

The Fostering Fees model is one which rewards foster carers in unity with their skills, experiences, and expertise in meeting the needs of children in care; 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.

4.2 Assessments

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 two months from eight months, the assessment is then presented to the Fostering Panel who recommend their approval which is subsequently ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. If an assessment is aborted at stage one a letter is sent to the applicants by the agency decision maker, explaining the rationale for the decision.

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 applicant's

own experience of childhood, their parenting skills, understanding of safeguarding children and ability to create a warm and nurturing home for children.

The full fostering Form F Assessment is commissioned from an Independent Social Worker sourced via You Recruit. Review meetings are held to review ongoing assessments and any concerns highlighted within set timescales, thus ensuring panel dates can be adhered to.

Foster carers are approved under a generic approval category for children and young people between the ages of birth and 18 years. If there is a smoker within the fostering household, they will be approved for five 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.



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 usually runs the Skills to Foster course every other month offering applicants the maximum flexibility to attend at a time most convenient to themselves. This was adapted during 2021/22 to take account of the covid pandemic, with courses extending during the day from 8am-10pm including weekends.

Skills to Foster continues to be attended as part of the assessment process for all foster carers. Thus, 9 courses were delivered in 2021/22 to both mainstream and connected carers attended by 35 households.

There are currently 7 Form F (Mainstream assessments) underway and 12 Form C (Connected).

4.3 Support

The Support Team 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 also undertaken within the service.

As of 31st March 2022, there were 180 approved mainstream fostering households, which offered a total of 254 placements. Of these, there are 15 fostering households currently dormant due to ill health or home improvements being undertaken, it is unlikely that they will all resume fostering, however they will all be contacted monthly for an update on their situation.

Family and Friends Foster Care remains an area of growth and as of the 31st March 2022 there are 61 approved households offering 96 placements.

All approved foster carers are allocated a qualified supervising social worker. Following approval, the supervising social worker is responsible for supervising and supporting carers, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support, challenge, and direction to maintain a quality service, including safe care practices. This includes an agreement that they must work within the agency's policies, procedures, and guidance. Two supervising social worker posts have been protected within the support team to exclusively support and supervise Family and Friends (Connected Carers).

Our focus is placement stability, reducing placement moves and improving outcomes for children. During 2022-22 over 50 placement stability meetings were attended by fostering staff where placement moves were averted by providing additional support to carers to minimise further disruption. 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.

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 (TSDS) workbook within the first year of approval (first eighteen months for family and friends foster carers). During 2020-21, frequent TSDS workshops were run. At the end of March 2022 out of the 180 approved mainstream foster carers, all have either completed or are in the process of completing TSDS. However, figures suggest that there need to be a continued drive to ensure that foster carers complete TSDS workshops in a timely manner. Newly registered foster carers are being supported to achieve the standards within twelve months of approval. This is facilitated by the TSDS workshops.

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 carer's file and reviewed during supervision and their Personal Development Plan (PDP).

The support package offered to all Wolverhampton's foster carers includes:

- Fostering Handbook contains pertinent information useful to carers and is regularly updated to reflect any changes.
- Carer profiles have been completed and filed on both carers' records and on the foster carers' register which supports the PST when identifying placements.
- Foster carers' training needs are identified as part of their 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.

- 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.
- Therapeutic Parenting Training courses are held two/three times yearly (one evening course) whilst the Nurturing Programme is held three times per year.
- A focus on Restorative Practice has been incorporated into all training events.
- Approved foster carers who live a distance from Wolverhampton are offered the opportunity to complete their training on-line, via a local training provider -AC Education.
- “Buddy Scheme” in place and all Level 3 carers provide buddy support to less experienced foster carers. 30 foster carers were trained as buddies with 65 to date paired up with newly approved or less experienced foster carers. All newly approved foster carers receive weekly visits for six weeks following approval at panel.
- Fostering Families United is currently being revised and will by end October 2022 offer support across the entire fostering cohort.
- The Foster Carers Portal allows all carers access to pertinent information regarding training and events and is interactive, supporting the recording of fostering logs and regular updates.
- The Foster Carer Forum meets monthly, all foster carers are invited to attend, these remain predominantly on-line.
- Special events for foster carers and their families including an Easter Egg Hunt, Summer Picnic in the Park, and a Christmas party. These events returned to face to face events following the Covid pandemic.
- Foster Carers’ Conference. (Due to the Covid pandemic this event was spilt into two half days and presented on-line during 2021, however returned to face to face in July 2022.
- The “Love of Fostering Awards” an annual event where carers were recognised for their commitment to fostering throughout the year was held at the Molineux in December 2021.
- Foster Talk offer support to all of Wolverhampton’s approved foster carers including; legal and expenses advice, 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.
- Festivals/Cultural events have been promoted on the carers portal to ensure all faiths recognised, including Ramadan and Holi.



The Annual Foster Carers Conference 2022 held at Molineux Stadium.

Newly approved foster carers are generally reviewed after six months and then annually thereafter by an Independent Reviewing Officer, however following the Ofsted inspection – March/April 2022, a decision has been made that all newly approved foster carers will receive their first annual review after twelve months in line with statutory guidance. This will involve the foster carer meeting with the Independent Reviewing Officer who will discuss the activity of a foster carer to ensure they continue to be suitable. The Independent Reviewing Officer will seek the views of the foster carer, the child in placement (subject to age and understanding), the child's social worker, the child's Independent Reviewing Officer, the supervising social worker and any other appropriate person during the review process. Views are collected using consultation questionnaires. The review is also an opportunity for the foster carer to review the service and support given to the children placed. An early Foster Home Review maybe requested by the Fostering Service where there are concerns about foster carers practice or where there have been allegations.

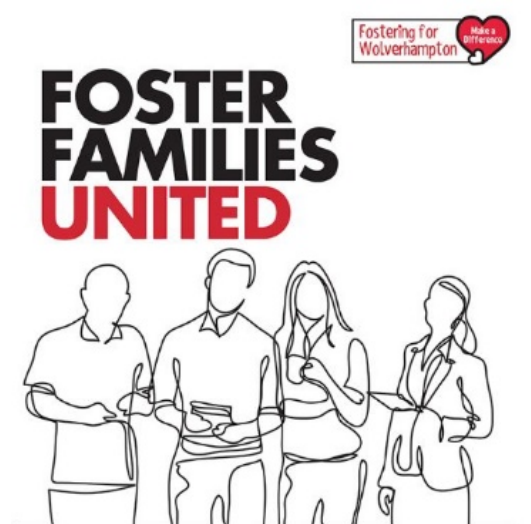
During the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022, 199 Foster Home Reviews were undertaken, as detailed below.

- Mainstream – 154
- Connected – 45
- Shared Care - 0

Overall, the reviews have remained positive, and the standard of foster care delivered to children and young people in care remains good. However, some concerns have been raised about the quality of some information shared in reports to present to foster home reviews by both fostering and children's social workers. Whilst in part, the new Eclipse system has impacted, a piece of work to address this is currently underway with standards of practice to improve over the coming months. There continues to be an extensive piece of work undertaken to further improve the effectiveness and timeliness of foster home reviews.

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. Three panels were held during 2021-22 with seven carers progressing from Level 2 to 3. The panels are facilitated by fostering service and team managers with foster carers and their supervising social workers attending to present their application for consideration. There is appropriate challenge at panels to ensure carers have completed training and are willing to engage in recruitment events and act as buddy's to less experienced carers before a decision can be agreed. During the covid pandemic, some decisions were made outside of panel dates, however 2022 has seen a return to all applications considered at panel.

Foster Families United was introduced in May 2019. The approach is based on a family model centred around one foster home which acts as a team carer offering planned and emergency respite, advice, guidance, training, and support to up to 6 carers within the team. The team 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 team and clinical supervision from a CAMHS practitioner building on the therapeutic training model offered. A pilot project in 2019 evidenced that the model increased placement stability and improved carer wellbeing.



It was agreed in December 2019 that three more Foster Families United Teams would be developed during 2020/21 including a step-down from Residential team, all led by experienced Level 4 carers. As at March 2021, three Foster Families United Teams (FFU) were operating with a fourth planned in June 2021. However, challenges in recruiting lead carers became an obstacle in developing further teams and thus a decision was made to redesign the model. Going forward, the model will not be dependent on lead carers and a vision will be shared over the coming months that involves the whole fostering cohort as part of foster families united.

4.4 Permanency through Long Term Fostering

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 PST. 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. 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 18 years.

This year the Fostering Service has secured nine Long-Term placements for children via the Linking and Matching process. One of the Long-Term Placements were for sibling groups of two children and another for a sibling group of three. Most of the Long-Term placements were secured for children with their current foster carers which were provided by both internal (five) and external resources (four).

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 has recently been agreed and a streamlined process now in place whereby a full report is presented to the Agency Decision Maker for consideration and if a match agreed, panel are advised. Early indications from social workers are that this has significantly improved the process, particularly with regard to timeliness.

4.5 Family and Friends Carers (Connected Persons Carers)

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 coming into care. They are assessed by the service as to their suitability to provide appropriate care in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2011. All Connected Person's Assessments are presented to the Fostering Panel who recommend their approval which is subsequently ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

From April 2021 – March 2022 there were 15 family and friends' carers approved which contributed overall to providing a total of 96 placements in the year for children in care.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team work together with Strengthening Family 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.

The recruitment and Assessment Team have undertaken 98 Viability Assessments of which seven were Schedule 4 (temporary approval) assessments from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

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. This has been effective in reducing the number of assessments with a negative recommendation.

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 the Agency Decision Maker 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 5 Schedule 4 assessments within the service, all progressing to completion of a Form C.

During the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 there were 15 positive Form C Assessment approvals. These assessments were completed within internal resources. There were 11 ongoing Form C assessments on 31st March 2022 which were all being undertaken by social workers within the Recruitment and Assessment Team.

Family and friends' carers have access to all training courses offered by the services and complete their Training, Support and Development Standards and are supported to undertake learning and development to the same as mainstream foster carers.

4.6 Special Guardianship

The responsibility for the assessment and support of Special Guardianships is that of the Fostering Service. This encourages a more joined up approach between teams with the completion of SGO assessments being a joint activity between a social worker in the Fostering Service and a 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.

There are currently 258 established SGO carers in Wolverhampton. There is one full-time Senior Social Worker and two SGO Support Social Workers dedicated to the role of advising foster carers about the details of caring for children under a 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. The SGO team also offer an annual review to the established SGO families and respond to any SGO related queries.

All finances relating to SGO plans are reviewed annually to ensure appropriate funding is in place. A designated business support worker supports the SGO financial review function.

The SGO support social worker delivers an SGO training module specifically for family and Friends Foster carers which runs directly after each preparation course. This has been planned to inform the prospective foster carers of their options at the earliest opportunity.

The Senior social worker in the SGO team offers bespoke face to face consultations with prospective SGO carers and birth parents, offering them the opportunity to ask any questions and provide clarity regarding post SGO support and services. This is alongside any offer of independent legal advice to ensure SGO is the right plan for the young person and their family.

There is a step-by-step flow chart to assist social workers in completing SGO reports and plans and the opportunity to consult with the SGO team throughout.

The supervising social worker and the child's social worker jointly complete the Special Guardianship Report, in partnership with the foster family and young person to ensure a seamless transition from foster care to SGO with the young person's best interest at heart.

A tracking tool has been devised and there is monthly oversight of progress to ensure permanency is achieved via Special Guardianship Order (SGO) in a timely manner.

A total of 18 Special Guardianship Orders were granted across all teams in the year 2020/21 this increased to 21 in the year 2021/2022 despite the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. We have secured 6 SGO's this year (2022-23) and we currently have 51 families on the SGO tracker to be assessed and progressed. The target to increase positive permanency for our young people and their families year on year via SGO Orders is well on course.

Post SGO support

The Support Plan is reviewed annually by the SGO support social worker who currently sits within the Fostering Support Team and post-SGO support remains high on the agenda for this current fiscal year. Special Guardians can access all training that is currently offered to our internal foster carers.

The SGO team are responsible for interagency joint working and ensuring that transfers of SGO support are made in a timely manner, this ensures that SGO families living outside of Wolverhampton can access support within their local area.

The SGO team promote virtual coffee mornings for all SGO carers and invite guest speakers to talk and discuss issues that are relevant to our SGO families. We are hoping to extend the coffee mornings to face to face meetings and are consulting with our SGO families as to when this should commence.

The SGO team have created an online portal which provides updates, information, guidance and advice and links to community-based resources and additional support for our SGO families. We are in the process of compiling a newsletter to share with our SGO families to include the information available on the portal for those who prefer email updates as opposed to online portal access.

The SGO team complete Needs assessments in partnership with our SGO families to make Adoption Support Fund applications for those eligible. We work alongside therapists and families to ensure support is reviewed and any ongoing recommendations are progressed.

The SGO team are part of a regional group where we meet with other Local Authorities and Trusts to share best practice ideas and work together to continually improve and promote our support and offers to our SGO families.

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 three 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, with

workshops 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. The Annual Private Fostering Report is completed each year and is presented to The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together). An action plan is updated quarterly to ensure this area of practice continues to be reviewed.



Short Breaks 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 2021-22 and will incorporate expertise from within the Disabled Children and Young People's Service and Voice 4 Parents who attend a newly developed designated workstream within the family values progress to recruit carers for disabled children and young people and to extend short break opportunities across Children's services.



Fostering for
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Section 5: Quality Assurance within the Fostering Service

5.1 Performance data

The 2020/21 target was to achieve a net gain of 26 mainstream and connected foster carers. Between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, with 31 approvals (mainstream and connected) and eight de-registrations we achieved an overall net gain of 23 foster carers.

Period	Approvals at panel	Number of de-registrations	Net gain
April 2015 – March 2016	18 approvals		
April 2016 – March 2017	11 approvals		
April 2017 – March 2018	19 approvals		
April 2018 -March 2019	23 approvals	0	23
April 2019- March 2020	25 approvals	3	22
April 2020-March 2021	31 approvals	8	23
April 2021-March 2022	22 approvals	31	-9

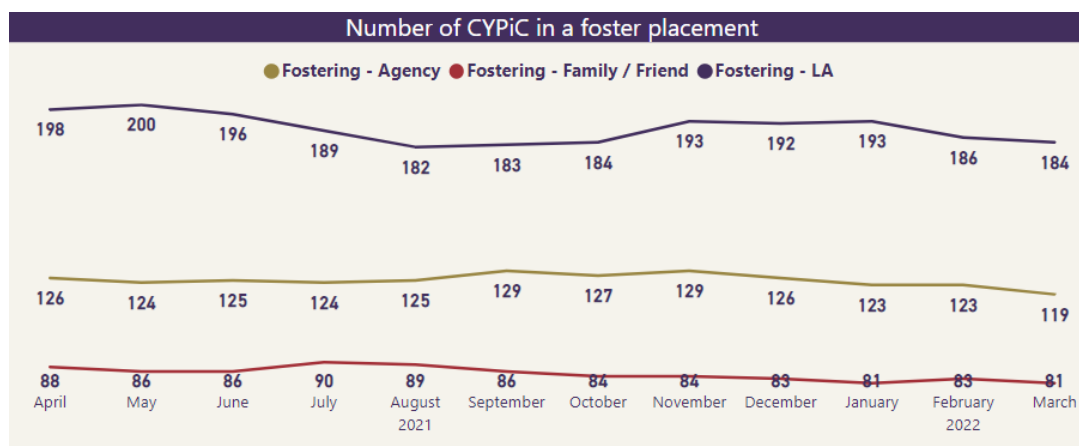
In the year the local authority lost 31 mainstream foster carers who de-registered. Mainly these were due to retirement.

In the year there were 7 mainstream foster carers approved at an average timescale of 236 days with 21 were approved within timescale (183 days). The shortest time taken to be approved was 150 days, the longest time taken was 628 days. The table below shows this is the lowest number of approvals in any of the last four years with the highest average days since 2015/16.

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)
2019/20	25	147	84% (6-month target)
2020/21	14	147	86% (6-month target)
2021/22	7	236	57% (6-month target)

During 2021/22 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 six years as set out in the table below –

Type of Placement	Number of C&YPiC Placed								
	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Family and Friends	45	50	62	71	78	95	84	102	81
Internal Foster Carer placements	158	171	186	193	201	185	195	201	184
IFA placements	382	343	268	247	226	198	154	129	119



At the end of 2021/22, there were 265 young people placed internally, with either mainstream or connected carers, 30 less than the same point in the previous year. The number of young people placed with mainstream carers fell by 19 to 184 and the number placed with connected carers also reduced from 92 to 81. The number of children in IFA placements has reduced by 8 to 119, this means that the gap between internal and external agency placements has narrowed.

Taking a snapshot of placements at the 31st, March from each year, on 31st March 2022 there was a weekly saving of £12,372 in spend on foster care placements. Taking a snapshot of the end of June 2017, when the Family Values project started and comparing it to 31st March 2021, there is a weekly cost saving of £55,584. If this saving was replicated over a year, it would show a yearly saving of £2,890,368.

Date	Total Weekly Cost of Children in	Total Weekly Cost of Children in	Total Weekly Cost of Internal	Total Weekly Cost of Children	Total Weekly Cost of Foster Care	Change Since Previous Year

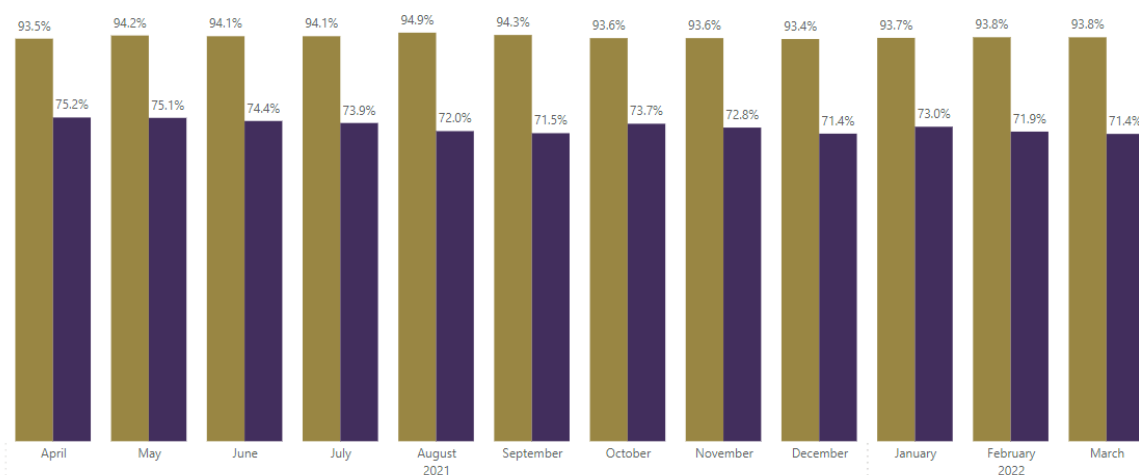
	Mainstream Foster Care	Friends and Family Foster Care	Foster Care	placed with IFA		
31st March 2021	£89,227	£22,211	£67,016	£120,723	£209,950	-£24,351
31st March 2022	£87,876	£19,043	£68,833	£109,702	£199,578	-£12,372

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.

Short Term Placement stability has remained consistent over the year, however Long-Term Placement Stability has seen a reduction of 3.9% in comparison to the end of the previous year. See below the chart for placement stability.

Short Term Placement Stability Pass and Long Term Placement Stability Pass %

● Short Term Placement Stability Pass ● Long Term Placement Stability Pass



Overall, there were 7 children leaving care to live with their foster carer via an SGO or Adoption Order in 2021/22.

Whilst children are being supported to achieve long term permanence through SGO and adoption there has been a decline in children being matched with their foster carer to secure long-term fostering arrangements. An updated Linking and Matching Policy and Procedure has led to a backlog of cases presented at panel and it is expected during 2022-23 that this will be addressed with an increase of recommendations.

Type of permanence	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
SGO by FC	11	20	13	10	5
Adoption by FC	5	14	14	5	2
LT matches	17	10	9	X	3

During 2022-23 we will be developing a more sophisticated data base including a new carers register linked to Eclipse which should support rolling accurate data immediately. Currently 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 however it is reliant on the timeliness of information sharing whilst a database linked to Eclipse will update from all information input across the workforce. This remains an ongoing piece of work.

5.2 Wolverhampton Foster Panel

Overview

Wolverhampton's foster panel has a crucial role to play in the provision and monitoring of foster care for the children and young people of Wolverhampton City. At the end of March 2021 303 of the City's children and young people were living in foster families.

For the last few years, the Government has emphasised that foster care should be a positive option for many children and young people (Fostering Better Outcomes – Department for Education DfE Jul 2018).

In line with this Wolverhampton's Foster Panel is striving towards five overarching ambitions

- 1) To ensure that children and young people are listened to and involved in decisions about their lives
- 2) Foster families receive the support and respect they need to care for children and young people
- 3) That there are enough good quality foster families for children and young people at the right time
- 4) That foster families are commissioned according to the needs of children
- 5) That children and young people experience stability and placements support them to achieve the same outcomes as every other child or young person.

Wolverhampton's Foster Panel therefore strives to ensure that the right foster carers are recruited and can respond to the needs of the local community. Further that individuals wanting to foster have the right skills, resilience, and abilities to understand children and to drive forward their needs, views and wishes.

As a team the foster panel members are committed to ensuring that the voice of children and young people remain central to the decision-making process. Foster Panel members have continued to champion the views of children and in the past twelve months Panel membership has been supported by the recruitment of another care experienced young person.

The virtual panel meeting process hosted by Microsoft Teams is now fully a fully embedded vehicle for meetings and the Foster Panel Teams site hosts the business of Panel as well as managing and tracking the Agency Decision Makers – ADM - long-term fostering and linking and matching arrangements. In addition, the Site is a communication and development hub for Foster Panel members. The 'chat' facility ensures a regular line of communication and as every member is issued with their own equipment to ensure that GDPR is adhered to, and security of highly sensitive information is not compromised. Panel business and functioning has continued to be driven by Marie Humphries. To describe Marie as Business Support is an understatement as Marie has continued lead change and to develop the Panel site and the considerable business processes which are required daily.

Panel Central List / Recruitment

The Panel Central list has continued to evolve. The Independent Chair – Sally Stokes – has continued to be supported by the Vice Chair – Sure Partoon, herself a previous foster carer. Sally and Sue share the chairing responsibilities and support the Panel Advisor in the recruitment, development, and appraisals of the wider Panel.

Panel Meetings

Panel meetings have continued to be held on a fortnightly basis with the addition of several extra panels being convened over the last twelve months.

Panel member commitment to attending meetings remains high and the central list continues to develop and is vibrant and cohesive as a group

Panel Training and development

Panel training and development is inclusive and panel members have accessed the same training development opportunities following their induction as their Council and Children's Services colleagues. Induction continues to be mandatory and all new Panel members must complete Restorative Practice and Unconscious Bias training as well as standard 'new starter' training.

Regional Development

The Theme for development during 2022 has been safeguarding particularly the management of allegations involving foster carers. Panel commenced this process in February with a workshop which focused on the outcome of Child Safeguarding Reviews involving foster carers. As the months have developed this Theme has become incorporated in the development of other foster panels across the Black Country Region and in October the Panel Advisors from the for, the 4 Black Country Fostering Project will host a regional event to expand the MOA involving foster carers. This will be the first event of its kind and commitment to present has been obtained from LADO's, FIRO's and Fostering Managers from across the region.

Panel Achievements

- Panel member retention with a number of expressions of interest in joining Panel
- Annual Appraisals – completed within the twelve-month period
- Feedback from Panel members incorporated into training development
- Development of Regional Black Country Foster Panel network
- Profile of Foster Panel developing across other Black Country Foster Panels
- Foster Panel Coffee and Chat / regional foster panel conference
- Greater communication between senior managers, operational staff and Foster Panel
- Established Quality Assurance and feedback process
- Established practice development forum – bimonthly meeting between Independent chair, vice chair and Head Of Service and operational managers
- Opportunity to influence operational police and procedures
- Continued development of business processes and tracking arrangements
- Electronic feedback for individuals attending panels
- Greater opportunities to incorporate outcomes from quality assurance

Panel Challenges

- Inconsistent working relationship with wider Children and Young People's teams
- Lack of awareness about the role and function of Foster Panel across the wider Children and Young People's teams.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of work presented to Foster Panel by individual social workers.
- On occasions Cases presented at short notice
- Inconsistent IT / connectivity in meetings
- Attendees / presenters at Panel not being properly prepared
- Inconsistencies in terms of understanding of operating procedures and policy changes

All areas of practice deficits are being addressed through a Fostering Improvement plan.

Moving forward Panel Priorities for 2022 - 23

- Review and increase the diversity of the foster panel membership and in line with this increase its reach to the Young People in Care Services. To actively promote and learn from feedback following Panel attendance and to incorporate the views of care experienced children and young people during panel meetings
- Further develop and build working together and partnership arrangements with the wider operational service.
- Engage in further regional development events
- Continue to develop the business process of panel and to increase efficiency in line with the pace of change
- Further embed a restorative approach and to explore associated training for panel members, and provide opportunities to embrace diversity and the impact of difference
- Continue to work in accordance with Children and Young People's Service Plan and Children's Workforce priorities. Organisational operating policy and procedures
- Escalate concerns and utilise practice development meetings to raise concern and to explore areas for development
- Continue to work in accordance with key legislative frameworks and expectations and regulatory requirements
- Continue to be independent and to be effective
- Panel Advisor attendance at regional PA meetings and further development, regional conferences / policy and procedure development
- Maintain and improve Panel effectiveness and Efficiency
- Maintain working relationships locally and across the Region
- Manage feedback and use outcomes to inform Panel and operational practice moving forward

5.3 Complaints / Compliments

There were five formal complaints received about the fostering service during the year 2021 – 2021– This was slightly higher than the previous year, however, compares favourably with the national average of 18% of complaints that were from fostered children. There were also four informal complaints received which were managed and responded to at a lower level. The Fostering service received ten compliments.

The complaints received were around staff conduct, quality of service, special guardianship allowances challenged, and no respite offered. At the same time, there have also been seven 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.

There was one IRM during 2021-22.

Section 6: Summary

Like the rest of the country, 2021-22 continued to be characterised by the Covid pandemic, all staff were based working from home ongoing and during lockdowns, all work including visits and recruitment events were undertaken virtually. However, in the summer 2021, a return to face to face events, visits and meetings was realised. 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 developments made across the service as described and outlined above. The foster carers have coped brilliantly during the year despite the challenges of covid and have continued to support children and young people in care, with examples of innovative ways of delivering home schooling shared on the carers portal and across the city to inspire others. Recruitment events have taken place albeit virtually and whilst there was disappointment at a net loss of carers at end 2022, the service is confident that the “Fostering for Wolverhampton” message is well received and there are people within the communities interested in becoming foster carers. Whilst the effects of the covid pandemic continue to reduce, the cost of living crisis being experienced across the country is having an effect on individual and families capacity to consider adding to their responsibilities. The service is acutely aware of the effect on our existing cohort of carers and extensive support is being considered, alongside our current support offer.

The Family Values Project continued throughout the year with new workstreams developed including placement matching and carers for disabled children and young people workstreams, ensuring that the diverse range of children’s needs could be met, these remain key priorities going forward. The project moved into business as usual in 2021 and a new vision for this aspect of the service will be shared in Autumn 2022. The momentum to further improve and develop the service will continue, with a particular focus on standards of practice and support to foster carers.

Positive progress despite the obvious challenges, continues to elicit energy and excitement and given such positive progress during the year, 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 priority to improve the outcomes of the children and young people in our care.

6.1 Key Achievements

- Permanence, 21 SGO orders have been achieved.
- Placement stability has been steadily maintained, however whilst long term stability has reduced by 3.9%, the year ended with more children in internal foster than within external foster care.
- Despite the Covid pandemic, robust and effective recruitment. Continued increased enquiries supported through sophisticated media campaigns and digital advertising including a TV advert.
- Assessment timeliness has been affected by the Covid pandemic; however, performance remains positive compared to previous years.
- The new model of fostering “Foster Families United” has been further developed and there are currently three teams, each led by an experienced carer, supporting up to five fostering families in each team.
- Wolverhampton worked collaboratively with Black Country Authorities to look at ways of further improving consistency of practice, panel relationships were strengthened, and a shared CRM system was agreed.

6.2 Progress on Key Objectives 2021/22

Objective	Outcome
To achieve the target of a net gain of 25 foster carers to provide for the diverse range of Childrens needs.	2021-22 was a challenging year given the ongoing effects of the Covid pandemic. Despite ongoing recruitment activity, the year ended with a net loss of 9. Post pandemic, targets have been reset.
To develop a fully operational carers register, reflecting the carers status and related compliance record for each carer which provides at a glance compliance information on carers with regard to minimum standards and fostering regs.	Progress has continued, however this remains an outstanding piece of work for completion. Fostering continue to work alongside Business Intelligence and IT colleagues to achieve a fully effective carers register.
Resources redirected within the team into SGO support services, alongside a clearer definition of what services are available to special guardians.	The SGO service within fostering continues to evolve and the support offer to SGO carers has been further strengthened by experienced SGO social workers.
Placement matching is developed within a workstream, ensuring that children and young people are placed at the outset	This workstream has achieved its aim and a revised policy and procedure to

with carers who understand their needs and provide them with a sense of belonging regardless of their diverse needs.	reflect placement matching is to be agreed.
An action plan focussed on Standards of practice is progressed, to include processes at foster home reviews, concerns regarding carers practice and support offers to carers are understood across all of children's services and evidenced within quality information shared to inform decision making and recommendations.	A fostering action plan is in place which encompasses all areas of practice within fostering as identified as requiring improvement. Foster Home Reviews, Therapeutic Training, Carers for Disabled Children and Young People, Management of Allegation and Foster Families United remain in scope.
The Foster Families United model is refreshed and relaunched with a priority to recruit external carers to lead FFU teams to support foster families within their teams.	A revised model has been agreed and will be launched by end October 2022.
Ensure the foster carers portal is regularly updated, including all information to support carers and children and young people in their care, particularly key cultural events of all faiths to reflect the diverse needs of our children and young people in care.	The portal continues to involve and there is currently a focus on ensuring aspects of the portal are aligned to Eclipse e.g foster carer logs.
Ensure that vacant carers are regularly reviewed, and carers are supported in returning to their roles if they have been dormant for a period and remain compliant with fostering regs and minimum standards throughout their vacancy/dormancy	The service is currently managing a cohort of vacant and dormant carers. All carers are being reviewed and their placement criteria challenged where appropriate, to ensure the service can support children and young people – 0-18 who require foster care.

6.3 Key Objectives 2022/23

- Realise a net gain of 5 foster carers 2022-23.
- Carers for Disabled Children and Young People continue to be a focus or recruitment and a support offer is developed and agreed.
- A return to in-person recruitment events blended with virtual opportunities to enable easier access for some.
- Relaunch Foster Families United – September 2022 and ensure the model is encompassed across the cohort of mainstream and connected carers.
- To ensure that the Linking and Matching policy is fully understood, and that practice reflects an increase in arrangements. Celebrate the linking and matching of children and young people with foster carers.
- A fully functioning foster carers register is in place that reflects the approval status of all mainstream foster carers.

- The list of dormant carers reflects a realistic return to fostering or supports carers to make a decision to resign if there is ambivalence regards returning to fostering.
- The Ofsted Inspection March/April 2022 highlighted three areas of service improvement – Supervision of fostering staff, foster home reviews and quality of fostering assessments.
- Ongoing support to foster carers to ensure that all consider a 0-18 age range of children and young people and that carers feel confident they can manage the needs of an 0-18 cohort.



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