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**ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT
APRIL 2015– MARCH 2016**

Author: Shirley Gounder– Interim Senior Social Work Manager (Fostering &Adoption)

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a description of the structure, aims and duties of The City of Wolverhampton Fostering Service and details the performance of the service over the last 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 People Directorate of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Fostering Service recruits trains and supports foster carers to care for and support vulnerable children placed in their care. These placements include relatives and friends (Connected Persons Carers) 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. The Fostering Service comprises of the following:

- **Placement Team**

Although this team sits within the Commissioning arm of the People Directorate, it works in conjunction with the fostering service and is responsible for all placement searches for children and young people needing a foster or residential placement. All short term placements are made via this team, 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 matching the cultural and religious needs of the child.

- **Recruitment, Initial Assessments, Training, and Assessment of Foster Carers**
 The service has responsibility for marketing, recruitment, training and assessing activities. The marketing function is fully supported by colleagues in Marketing and Communication services.
- **Generic or Mainstream Fostering**
 The Fostering Service has a pool of generic foster carers to care for Wolverhampton's vulnerable children needing to be in foster care. In Wolverhampton foster carers are assessed over an eight 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.
- **Connected Persons Carers**
 The service is responsible for the assessment, training, and support of Connected Persons Carers and Special Guardianship carers.
- **Private Fostering**
 This is regulated under the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005, and is inspected by Ofsted. The last Inspection was in 2011. 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, Connected Persons 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, these courses are provided by both internal and external providers and also through on-line courses. This year the team has recruited a full time Social Worker as a Training and Development Social Worker to assist in developing the learning opportunities for foster carers.
- **Independent Reviewing Officers**
 There is one Independent Reviewing Officer who undertakes all reviews of foster carers' households. The Independent Reviewing Officer is managed within the Safeguarding Service.
- **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 staff conferences. All members of staff are subject to yearly individual annual appraisal and reviews. Two members of the fostering service are in the process of completing level one of the Practice Educator's Award through Wolverhampton University and have had the additional responsibility for supervising a third year social work student.

3. 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 environments, so that children's emotional health and development is promoted.
- To work in partnership with foster carers so that they understand the importance of working and co-operating with schools, to ensure access to available opportunities to promote children's attendance and their academic achievements.

4. Recruitment of Foster Carers:

- 4.1 The Recruitment and Assessment Team continue to work hard to increase the capacity of the foster carer population and the quality of care offered. Through a comprehensive Marketing and Recruitment Strategy that works creatively with foster carers and the wider public in 2015/16, the service has enhanced the quality of enquiries with a small number of those coming from Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 4.2 Whilst there have been recent increases in the numbers of approvals of internal Foster Carers, with twenty fostering households approved in 2015/16, there is a continued positive drive to further increase the number of approvals, enabling more LAC children to live with local foster families within the Wolverhampton area. It is anticipated that thirty fostering households will be approved in 2016/17.
- 4.3 As we are aware 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 a number of Foster Carers Champions who work with the Recruitment and Assessment Team to support the new marketing and recruitment campaign. Alongside this, approved foster carers also support Information Sessions and the preparatory 'Skills to Foster' training for new applicants.
- 4.4 Telephone enquiries continue to be routed through a call centre and fostering Duty Workers are available to respond immediately to callers who want more information.

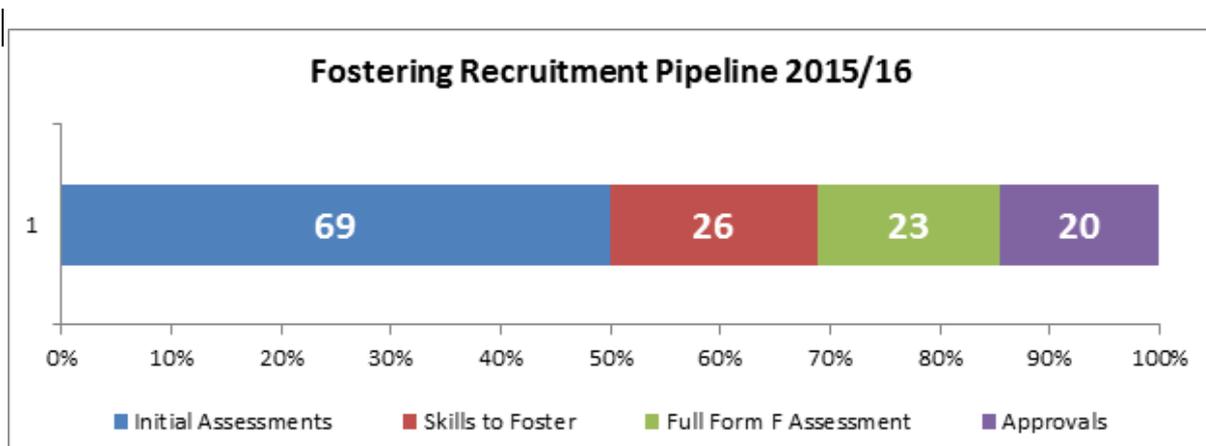
Three training sessions have been undertaken by Social Workers from the Recruitment and Assessment Team with the Duty Workers to increase their awareness and understanding of the fostering task. This training will continue to be offered on a needs led basis of the workers at City Direct.

- 4.5 The Recruitment and Assessment Team continue to work closely with Marketing and Communications and there is an on-going recruitment campaign, with three peaks of activity in January, Foster Care Fortnight in May, where events and road shows were run every day at two locations, and also in September.
- 4.6 Recruitment is sustained by campaign activity throughout the year to achieve the 'drip drip' effect. Monthly 'Fostering Friday' events are on-going, alongside monthly 'Information Evenings' at the Molineux. In January 2016 we launched a new fostering film and to date this has been viewed 262,840 times. During the last year we have continued with the Facebook advertising campaign and radio campaigns on Free Radio and Signal 107 during Foster Care Fortnight and the January event. Editorials and advertisements are placed in local papers and magazines at regular intervals to sustain awareness of the need to increase local fostering provision. As part of looking at possible internal Wolverhampton City Council applicants, recruitment stands at Civic Centre have been held to highlight the Council's Fostering Leave Policy, supported by internal communications. On an on-going basis, Marketing and Communications work with partners including Wolverhampton Homes, Wolverhampton College, Wolverhampton University and West Midlands Police has been undertaken to raise awareness of fostering through their communications channels such as the intranet, website, e-newsletters and social media accounts.
- 4.7 The national rate of conversion from initial enquiry to approval is 11% cent but based on statistics from 2015/16, in Wolverhampton this figure is 8.7%. We have therefore focused on targeting our marketing and key messages to attract quality enquiries from people who meet the essential criteria.
- 4.8 Following Cabinet Approval in October 2015, revised 'Fees and Allowances' were introduced in January 2016. The revised fee structure recognises foster carer skills and experience and it is anticipated this will support the recruitment of new carers, together with assisting in retaining existing foster carers.
- 4.9 During the year we have experienced a dropout of applicants between initial enquiry and initial visit. This 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 whereby the caller is simply gathering appropriate information to consider fostering rather than wishing to pursue an application at that time. Based on this evidence the communications objective is:
Through targeted and sustained communication, generate 345 enquiries pro rata (86.25 per quarter) from residents to become foster carers to achieve the corporate target of 30 (7.5 per quarter) for 16/17
- 4.10 It is critical that children in care are helped to develop strong, trusting relationships with their carers, so applicants now receive more detailed information about fostering, and clarity about the fostering task and the criteria for progression in the application process.
- 4.11 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

4.12 In the last year we have undertaken sixty nine initial assessments, with twenty six households progressing onto the Skills to Foster preparation training course. During the Initial Assessment a very detailed discussion is held between the applicants and Social Workers from the Recruitment and Assessment Team. This covers:

- Applicant’s motivation and parenting capacity
- Appropriateness of accommodation and any health and safety issues
- Any significant medical issues
- Applicant’s occupation and how this may impact on their availability to care for and meet the needs of a foster child
- DBS and any convictions
- Composition of family members
- Support network



4.13 The dropout of applicants 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. Preparation and Assessment Courses

5.1 The preparation and assessment course follows the “Skills to Foster” programme, devised by the Fostering Network. We have recently starting using the updated third edition of the course, of which we played a part in the piloting. 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 largest number of courses at six times a year. We run the Skills to Foster every other month offering applicants the maximum flexibility to enable applicants to attend at a time most convenient to themselves.

- 5.2 In total 26 households attended the preparation courses with 23 progressing onto the full assessments.
- 5.3 During 2015/16 the Sufficiency Strategy required a review of every aspect of the recruitment process to achieve ambitious targets to grow local capacity of available in house foster carers, significantly increasing the numbers over a period of time and reversing the ratio of in house to independent agency carers so that 50-60 per cent of all foster placements will be with Wolverhampton.

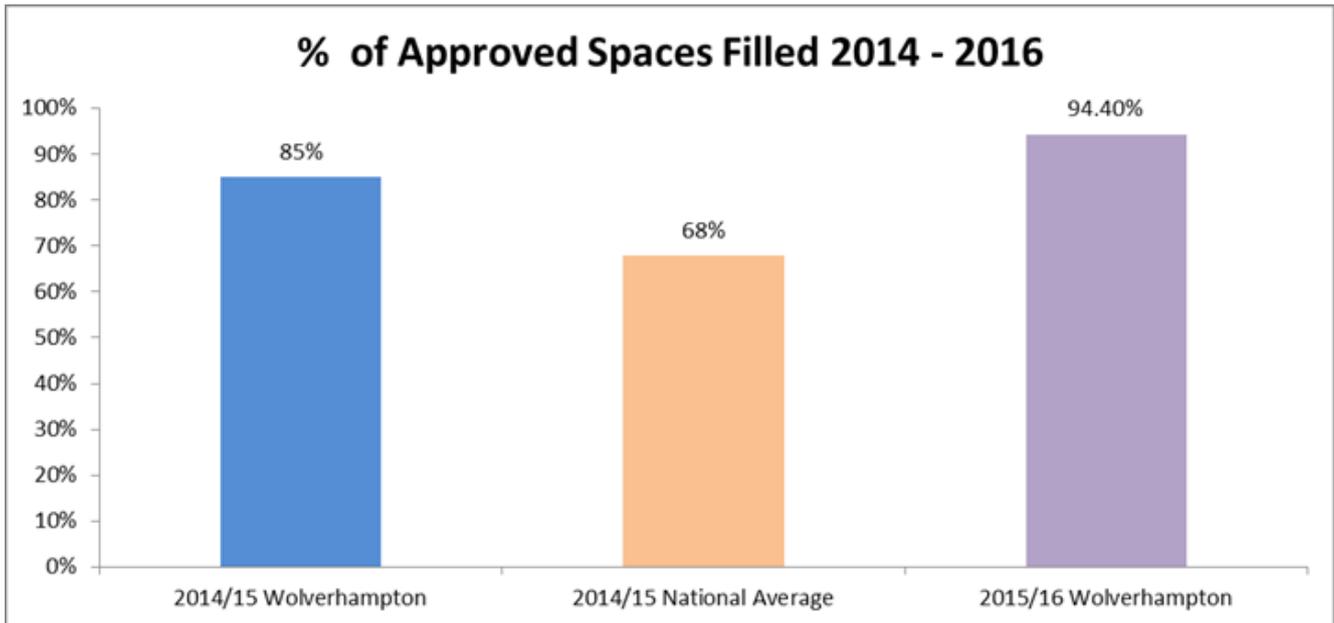
6. Assessments

- 6.1 Assessments are part of the core work of the Fostering 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 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.
- 6.2 References are sought from a variety of relevant organisations, in addition to personal references supplied by the applicants.
- 6.3 The full fostering assessment is commissioned from an Independent Provider, currently this is Core Assets.

6.4

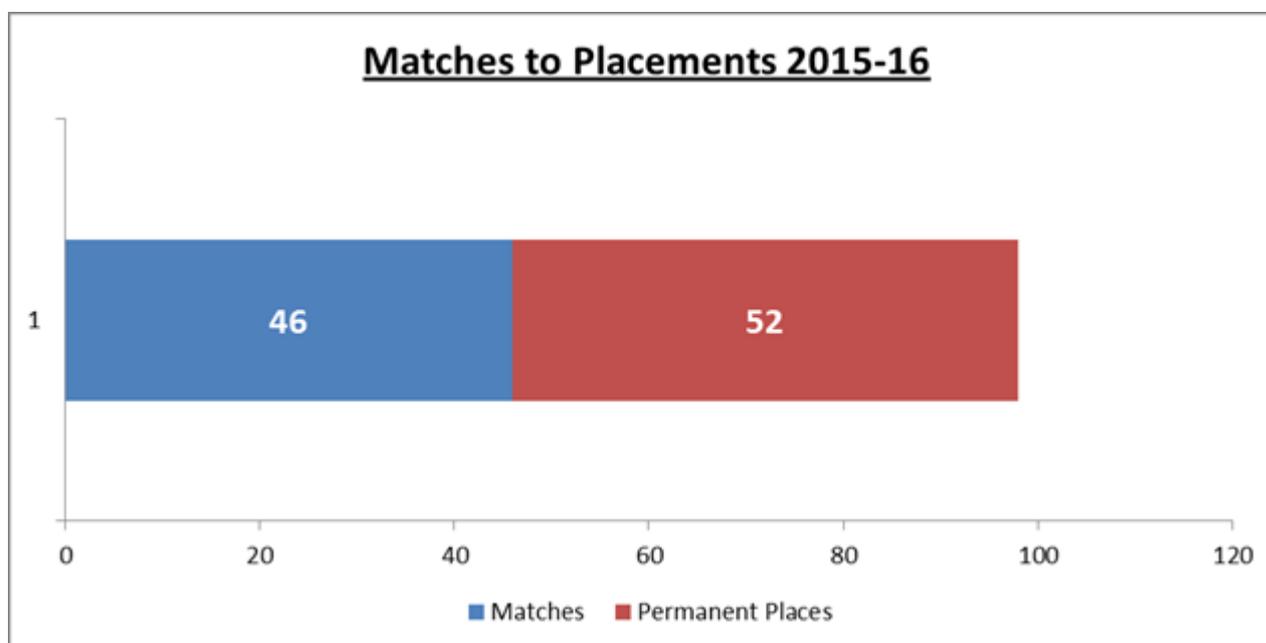
Mainstream or Short term foster carers care for children and young people on a short term basis, until permanent plans are made for them. Therefore children and young people could be in placement for a few days, a few months or longer depending on the circumstances of their individual situations. The recruitment of carers as outlined above is in the main to recruit foster carers to care for this group of children.

- 6.5 Foster carers are now approved under a generic approval category and are expected to take children and young people 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. In line with this the new fees structure will generate a review of all existing mainstream foster carers with an aim to bring their approval in line with the expectation of the newly approved carers, these reviews should be fully completed by January 2017.
- 6.6 As of 31 March 2016 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.



7. Permanency through Long Term Fostering

- 7.1 Wolverhampton Fostering Service seeks to achieve permanency for children and young people when the care plans are 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 secure the permanency plans. 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 in order for young people to remain in the household post 18 years.
- 7.2 The Fostering Service secured 46 matches, a total of 52 permanent placements for children for whom the care plan is permanency. Some of these children or young people were unable to continue into permanency within their current placement arrangements. Other children or young people were in an external provision and wished to remain with their foster placements.



7.3 Currently there are 86 children and young people awaiting permanent placements. Of these 54 have been identified to be linked and matched with their current foster carers, progressing their long term plans to permanency by way of long term fostering. The Family Finder is responsible for ensuring that the linking meetings are scheduled throughout the year for the children's plans to be progressed.

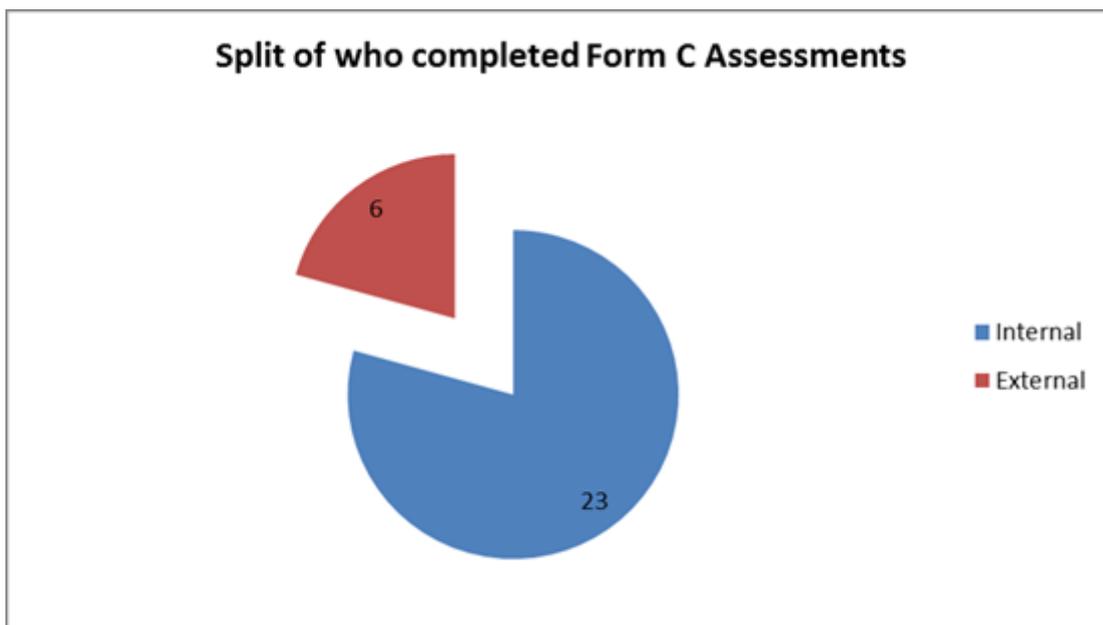
8 Connected Persons Carers

8.1 Local Authorities have a responsibility to consider members of the child's family, or friend (Connected Persons Carers) during Care Proceedings and when a child is facing the possibility of becoming looked after.

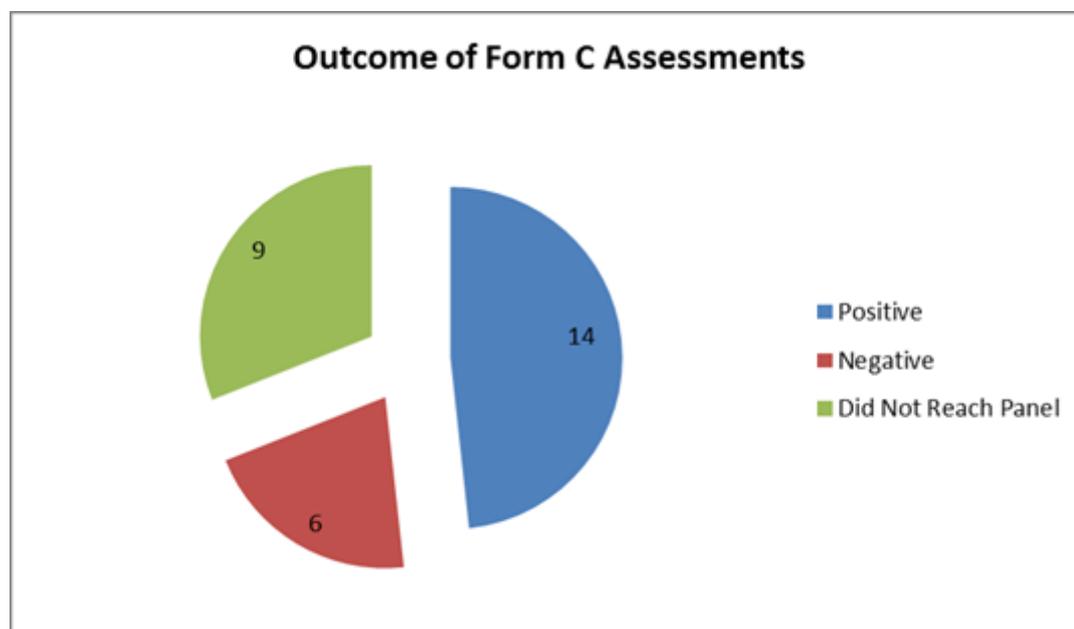
8.2 During this period challenges were posed due to the balance needed in terms of the increase in requests for Connected Persons Carers assessments, and the tight timescales of which were determined by court process. The team assists the childcare teams by jointly (where possible) advising with viability assessments of prospective Connected Persons Carers. The location that some of the relative carers live pose an additional strain on the service due to the time taken by travel. For example, we currently have 10 out of city placements.

8.3 Connected Persons Carers 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. Connected Persons Carers care is governed by The Fostering Regulations 2011. From March 2015 – April 2016, Wolverhampton Local Authority had 36 Connected Person households which provided a total of 52 placements for looked after children.

8.4 During the period of 1 April 2015 till 31 March 2016 there were 23 form C assessments completed within internal resources, six assessments were outsourced and independently undertaken. Of the completed assessments 14 had a positive outcome and six negative, all of these assessments were presented to Fostering Panel for consideration of their approval. A further nine Form C assessments were commenced or completed but did not progress to panel for various reasons i.e. change in Care Plan and applicant's withdrawal. This table shows the numbers of Form C (full Connected Persons Carers assessments) completed;



This table highlights the outcomes of the assessments completed;

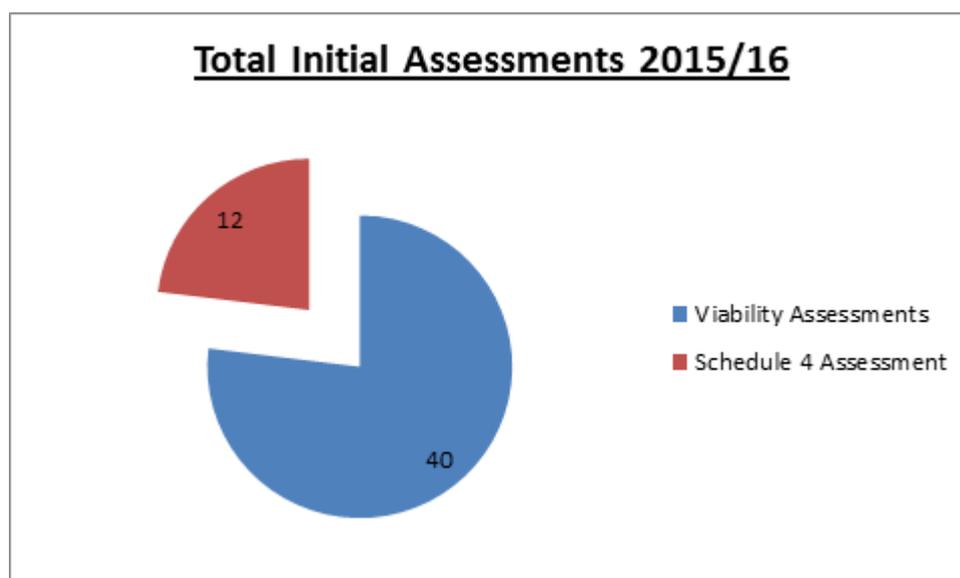


8.5 The Connected Persons Carers Team have received referrals for 40 viability assessments and 12 schedule 4 (temporary approval) assessments from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. Out of these 52 initial assessments, 29 have progressed onto a full Connected Person assessment. Family Group Conferences/family meetings are required as part of the process for Connected Persons Carers, in order to reduce the number of referrals for multiple initial assessments for the same child. This should, subsequently reduce the number of assessments which do not progress onto a full assessment during Care Proceedings. It will also allow for assessments to be

allocated at the earliest opportunity to avoid delay in allocation, completion and restrictions in panel availability.

- 8.6 Schedule 4 assessments whereby Connected Persons Carers are granted temporary approval require allocation of a social worker to supervise and assess the placement suitability within a 16 week timescale. An extension of eight weeks continues to be applied where required and a clear process is now being followed via panel and Head of Service to reduce the number of unregulated placements. These are likely to occur due to a delay in checks and references, rather than assessment completion.

This table shows the numbers of Connected Persons Carers initial assessments completed for this year



- 8.7 In previous years, Connected Persons Carers have been reluctant to attend training and maintain records given the nature of their relationships i.e. the majority are grandparents. However, this year has seen an increase in numbers of carers accessing training courses and completing their Training, Support and Development Standards. Figures will be reported more clearly within the next financial year. However, Skills to Foster continues to be attended as part of the assessment with two courses delivered this year and a total of 22 Connected Carer applicants attending. Nine Connected Persons Carers have also accessed the KEEP programme. The aim is to deliver four Skills to Foster training courses per year and for all Connected Persons Carers to attend KEEP training.

9. Short Breaks (Shared Care) Foster Carers

- 9.1 There is one approved short break foster carer providing shared care placements for disabled children. Short Break foster carers provide care to children or young people with disabilities, who need a temporary placement for a weekend or a week during school holidays. The shared 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. The plans are to enhance this area within the recruitment and communication strategy for 2016/2017

9.2 In January 2016 the new fees and allowances were introduced and they have included payments for shared carers to be made at level three.

10. Special Guardianship

10.1 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, Connected Persons Carers are encouraged to apply for Special Guardianship Orders, thereby replacing a Care Order and Looked After Child status, giving parental responsibility to the carer. There is a social worker dedicated to the role of supporting and advising foster carers and Connected Persons Carers about the details of caring for children under the Special Guardianship Order should they consider this to be a future option. The social worker is also able to discuss on-going support plans to ensure that the needs of the child and carer continue to be met. In the future it is planned for staff to be offered a training workshop available in the area of Special Guardianship Orders and this will provide information of the current policies in place. In addition the team will look to hold permanency clinics on a regular basis so children's social workers can book a time to discuss the available permanency options and a preparation course to be offered to Connected Persons Carers.

10.2 The Connected Persons Carer's social worker, along with the child's social worker completes the Special Guardianship assessment together with the support plan. The Support Plan is reviewed annually within the Connected Persons Carers Team and post-SGO support is high on the agenda for next year. This year, a total of 10 Special Guardianship Orders have been granted and this is expected to significantly increase next year.

11 Post Approval supervision, support and reviewing

11.1 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. Foster carers provide foster placements for children and young people who present challenges and, or have a range of complex needs. All carers are offered support to meet these challenges. There is a behaviour management programme in place such as validated parenting programmes (KEEP) to offer additional training.

11.2 Wolverhampton has a commissioning arrangement with Foster Talk who offer support to all of Wolverhampton's approved foster carers including; legal advice and expenses insurance cover, a 24 hour legal advice helpline, a 24 hour counselling support helpline, an education support line, a social work support helpline and access to discounts and special offers via the use of a MAX Card.

11.3 There is a buddy scheme in place where experienced foster carers will provide support to newly approved foster carers for a period of six months. Buddies will also offer support to foster carers requiring additional assistance, an example of this is providing support during an allegation. Over the coming year the fostering service

would like to increase the number of foster carers who offer the buddy support and will ensure that all buddies received appropriate training for their role.

11.4 All Wolverhampton carers have access to request respite arrangements in line with the Fostering Regulations. 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.

11.5 Foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis (with the exception of newly approved carers who are reviewed six months following their approval) by an Independent Reviewing Officer. This will involve the carer meeting with the Independent Reviewing Officer who will discuss the activity of a foster carer to ensure the carer continues to be suitable and meet the fostering regulations.

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, or any other appropriate person during the review process. Views are usually collected through the use of consultation questionnaires. The review is also an opportunity for the foster carer to review the service and support given to the children who are placed.

11.6 During this review period 156 Annual Foster Home Reviews have been completed. This is an increase of 15 on the previous period.

11.7 Overall, the Reviews have remained positive and the standard of Foster Care delivered to children and young people remains good.

- Due to the change in the way the feedback is provided to the reviewing officer by the supervising social workers there has been a decline in the information received. To improve this for the next review period it has been requested by the Independent Foster Home Reviewing Officer that supervising social workers are now to attend all of the foster home reviews for their foster carers.
- Completed unannounced supervision visits have decreased by eight per cent to 75 per cent. An improvement will be required for the coming year and a target of 100 per cent is expected.
- Foster Carers 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.
- A high number of Foster Carers have completed their training, support and development workbooks.
- Trends emerging from reviews during the year relate to the number of reviews where the recommendation that Delegated Authority documents needs to put in place and reviewed, Life Journey work needing to be complete or updated and for

the home safety check to be completed. There were also a significant number of households that were required to update their Safe Care Statements.

- All matters above have been addressed with forecast improvements in the Fostering Improvement Plan for 2016/17.

11.8 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.

12. Foster Carers Learning and Development

12.1 Wolverhampton provides a comprehensive programme of learning and development to foster carers. This begins before they are approved, whereby prospective foster carers attend the 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.

12.2 Training is a continual process and all approved Wolverhampton foster carers are offered new and refresher training courses to update their skills on a regular basis. Carers are required to complete the evidenced based Training Support and Development National Standards work book within the first year of approval (first eighteen months for Connected Persons Carers). 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 internal, external and on-line facilities.

12.3 Foster carers training needs are identified as part of their Personal Development Plan and reviewed regularly during supervision. Personal Development Plans are intended to assist in identifying gaps in foster carers 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 is voluntary. Failure to attend training that has been identified as appropriate could place the continuing approval of a foster carer at risk.

12.4 With the new revised arrangement for fees 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.

12.5 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 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.

- 12.6 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.
- 12.7 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.
- 12.8 Additionally, at the end of March 2016 90% of mainstream foster carers, shared care foster carers and Connected Persons Carers had successfully completed the Training Support and Development standards (TADS). Newly registered foster carers are being supported to achieve the standards within twelve months of approval. This is facilitated by the TSD workshops.

13.0 Fostering Panel

- 13.1 The work of the panel is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review And Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011. The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015. The panel must advise on:
- On reviews of approvals(Regulation 28),and monitor their effectiveness
 - Oversee the conduct of assessments
 - Give advice and make recommendations on any other matters referred to it
- 13.2 The panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Head of Service, for Looked after Children within 10 working days of the panel meeting. The Head of Children in Need and Child Protection deputises in the absence of The Head of Service Looked After Children.
- 13.3 The panel also have a quality assurance role, offering feedback on the quality and content of reports submitted and the presentation and knowledge of the social workers attending, by way of a Performance Management Form. The quality assurance extends to how the panel members are prepared for their task and each panel member is 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.

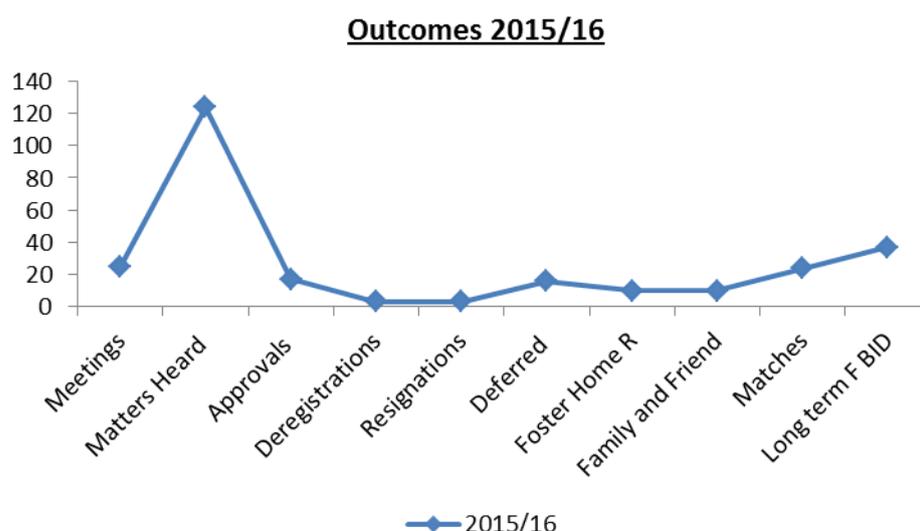
- 13.4 It has been a busy period for the fostering panel, with a steady flow of foster carer approvals and deregistration of 20 foster carers. There has been a steady increase in the number of placements made with Connected Persons Carers. Foster carer first annual reviews have been presented to panel, as have reviews requiring change of approval category, and reviews following concerns or allegations, and an increased number of permanency decisions for children.
- 13.5 A Permanence Panel has been introduced to the panels over the last year. The Wolverhampton City Council Adoption & Permanence Panel considers approvals of prospective adopters, Connected Persons Carers and match /link of adoptive and long term fostering placements and Connected Persons Carers. This is working within the terms of Wolverhampton Permanence Policy. The Adoption & Permanence Panel complies with regulations and guidance relevant to both adoption and fostering: Adoption agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012. The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous amendments) regulations 2013. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (amendments) Regulations 2015; The Fostering Regulations 2011. Panel members from the Central list with both adoption and fostering experience makes up the permanence panel. The composition of Fostering Panels, terms of reference and functions are set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. This constitution and terms of reference provides the framework for the operation of the Adoption & Permanence Panel. It will be reviewed annually.
- 13.6 In line with good practice, and the Fostering Regulation (2011), there is an independent chair and three independent panel members, two with fostering experience, one previous foster carer. One independent member is also the Vice Chair. The panel attendance remains high, demonstrating a high commitment from members who have been panel members with Wolverhampton for some time.
- 13.7 The Central list consists of two previous looked after children, foster carers, adoptees, 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. There have been four members added to the Central list, with enquiries being attended from two young people who were formerly Looked After.
- 13.8 The panel has access to legal and medical advice as required. It is not a statutory requirement for a legal advisor to be present, but legal advice must be accessible where required.
- 13.9 Wolverhampton Fostering panel meets once each month and the Permanence Panel also meets once a month, and over the review period have had 25 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 Connected Persons Carers matters. Matches for long term fostering and children's long term fostering best interest decisions were agreed through the Virtual Panel.
- 13.10 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 Connected Persons Carers 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.

All panels have now fully embraced paperless working; with the panel matters being filtered through a dedicated secure site on the Share Point .It is also accessible to the Agency Decision Maker ratifying the decisions and panel members. Visitors or observers to the site also have temporary access to follow the panel deliberation. All panel matters are now dealt with electronically.

- 13.11 Fostering matters have been heard at both the Fostering Panel and the Adoption and Permanence panel giving a total of twenty five panels throughout the year. There are usually six items to the panel agendas, with the capacity to hear up to four first foster home reviews in addition.

Outcomes	2015/16
Meetings	25
Matters Heard	124
Approvals	20
Deregistration	4
Resignations	27
Deferred	16
Foster Home R	10
Connected Person Carers	20
Matches	24
Long term F BID	37



- 13.12 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. Over the last year there have been increased opportunities for panel members to undertake joint training with the Fostering and Adoption team and also for them to take part in the online training open

to City Council employees. The online training can be accessed via the Panel Pods, where the panel papers are stored. 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 has been strengthened, and will be modified accordingly the panel advisor.

There have also been opportunities to take part in training set up by partner agencies, which several members have utilised. Panel members are also able to access the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board training as required.

- 13.13 Each panel member has a yearly appraisal which is conducted by the panel chair and the professional advisor. The appraisal consists of self- evaluation and a face to face meeting.
- 13.14 Complaints/Compliments: There have not been any major concerns received about the running of the panel. However feedback forms from panel members and some service users always point to a good service with areas for improvement for which we constantly try to improve.
- 13.15 Waiting times for applicant's cases to be heard have improved, although this still needs to be monitored, as there is room for further adjustments.

14 Complaints about the service

- 14.1 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.
- 14.2 These complaints largely resulted from the re-organisation of 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 services, 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. The service reviews complaints, learns from them and makes adjustments and improvements.

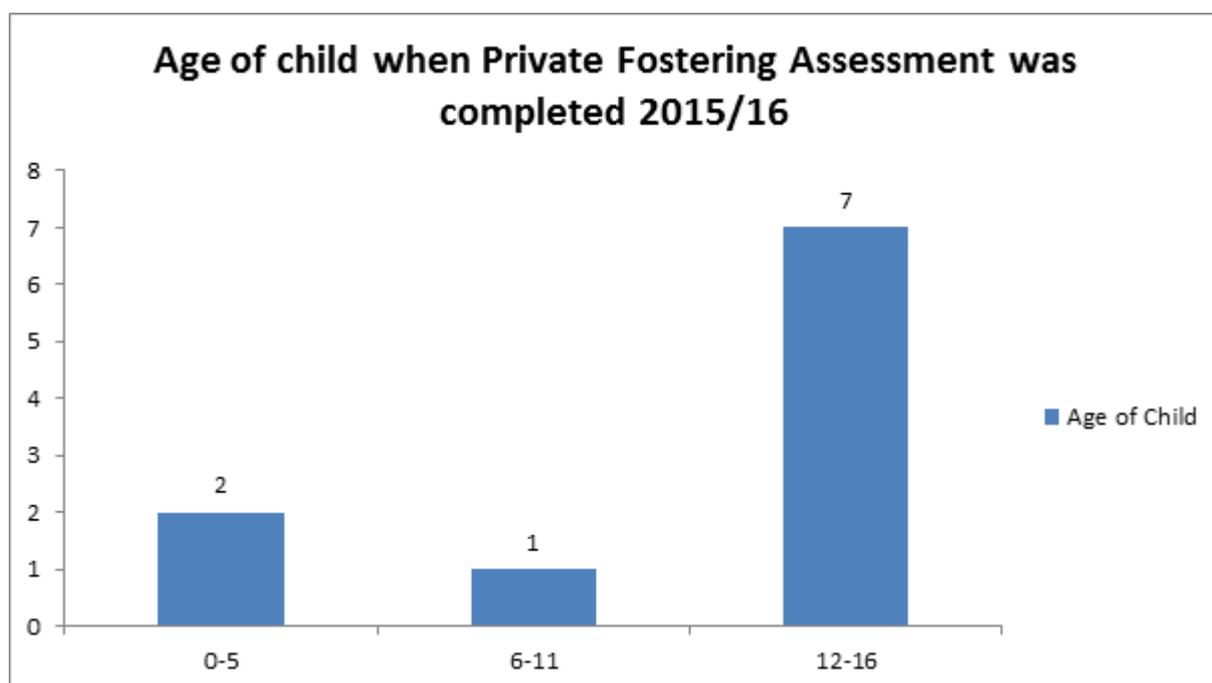
15.0 Private Fostering

- 15.1 The Fostering Service is responsible for the assessment and monitoring of Private Fostering Arrangements in Wolverhampton, as stipulated under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.
- 15.2 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 schools.
- 15.3 The Local Authority is responsible for raising awareness 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.

- 15.4 The number of children and young people in Private Fostering arrangements fluctuates, and this year there have been 10 notifications. Subsequently, 10 private fostering assessments were considered, 1 of which went on to Private Fostering Arrangement and two are currently on-going.

The table below shows the Private Fostering Activity for 2015/16:



- 15.5 Management oversight is provided through supervision. In addition the Private Fostering Assessment is approved by the Designated Fostering Decision Maker, Head of Looked After Children services.

- 15.6 Private foster carers have access to the fostering service training.

16.0 Financial Package for Foster Carers

- 16.1 In January 2016 the new fees and allowances were introduced

- 16.2 Foster carers receive a weekly allowance to cover all living costs associated to the child/ren they care for. Wolverhampton rates follow those recommended by the Department for Education (DfE) and are 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 pocket money and savings. Birthday, holiday and festival allowances are paid in addition to the above. The new Fostering Fees and Allowances scheme has now moved from a scheme that rewards retention of foster carers to one that also supports the skills, experience and expertise of foster carers to meet the needs of our Looked After Children. As part of the scheme foster carers receive a fee based upon their experience and expertise and they are rewarded if they take more than one child. Foster carers are now expected to care for children in a wider age range and are approved to care for children on a temporary, permanent and

emergency basis. The revised reward scheme will provide greater placement choice and reduce Wolverhampton's reliance on external provision.

17.0 Working in Partnership / Feedback from User participation

17.1 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.

17.2 Over the past year steps have been taken to strengthen the relationship with Wolverhampton foster carers. This has ranged from consultations, meetings attended by senior managers and Lead Elected Members. It is expected that meetings will continue with fostering managers to further strengthen the relationship.

18.0 Summary

18.1 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, Child Appreciation Days and introductions of children into adoptive placements.

19.0. 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 Child Arrangement Orders). This will be supported through the re-launch of the Permanence Strategy, including the amended permanence Financial Support Policy.
- Recruit foster carers to Specialist Fostering Scheme.
- 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 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 promote children’s placement stability and the development of resilience for looked after children.
- Continue to implement KEEP Safe training

- 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 recruitment materials and processes
- Update all statutory materials in line with regulatory requirements