



## Report to the Children and Families Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 14th October 2019

**Report of:** John Macilwraith, Executive Director, People Services

**Subject:** Fostering Service Annual Report

**Author of Report:** Anne-Marie Banks, Fostering Service Manager

**Summary:**

This is a cover sheet for the Fostering Service Annual Report 2018/19. The annual report provides information about the activity and performance of Sheffield City Council's Fostering Service in 2018/19. Strong performance in the Fostering Service is important for the people of Sheffield because it means children who need foster care placements will have access to high quality and local foster care and Sheffield's foster carers will receive high quality support.

**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	<b>Annual Report</b>

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

Consider and comment on the content of the annual report

**Background Papers:** None

**Category of Report:** Open



## **SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

People Services

Children & Families

Fostering Service

### **Annual Report**

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## 1 Purpose of Report

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- 1.1 This report is an annual report which sets out the business and activity within Sheffield City Council's Fostering Service in 2018/19.
- 1.2 The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Fostering Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in the year and those planned for 2019/20.

## 2 Introduction

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- 2.1 Sheffield City Council Fostering Service operates within the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the "2011 Regulations"), and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, which form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.
- 2.2 It is a legislative requirement that the Fostering Service reports on its activity and performance to Elected Members.
- 2.3 Prior to September 2013, local authority fostering services were inspected separately by Ofsted. Since then, inspection of local authority fostering services work has been incorporated firstly into the Single Inspection Framework and now currently in the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework, which takes into account the role of fostering in the wider children's services department.
- 2.4 Sheffield City Council Fostering Service's remit is to provide family based placements for Sheffield's children in care population. The Service recruits and approves prospective foster carers, matches and places children with

approved foster carers, and provides support and supervision to approved foster carers.

- 2.5 At end of reporting year 2018/19, Sheffield City Councils' Fostering Service is made up of three 'Fostering Supervision Teams' who support and supervise our foster carers; a Recruitment and Assessment Team', whose focus is on the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers; and a dedicated Connected Persons Team. The Connected Persons Team undertakes Regulation 24, (temporary approval of a foster carer) assessments through to full Connected Persons Foster Carer approval. Childcare legislation requires that these connected person foster carers, who are most often grandparents or other close relatives to the looked after child, be assessed and approved, where suitable, as local authority foster carers. The Connected Persons Team also undertakes Private Fostering assessment and support, and provides support to families subject to Special Guardianship arrangements.
- 2.6 In this report we are able to demonstrate a net gain of foster carers in the reporting year, and an increased number of Sheffield's looked after children cared for by the service. Our foster carers do a remarkable job for Sheffield's children in care and in transforming the lives of so many of children.

### 3 Our Vision and Aims

- 3.1 Our City's 'Big Ambition' is that every child, young person and family achieves their full potential. Sheffield's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018/20 sets out how we are going to meet this ambition for our looked after children and care leavers. We are determined to ensure our children and young people in care, adopted children and care leavers succeed.
- 3.2 Our vision is that 'children and young people are safe and supported to achieve their full potential'. We set out four principles to how we will work to achieve this, as follows:
- Children are at the centre of our practice
  - We intervene at the earliest opportunity

- Our workforce is skilled and supported to do the work that they need to
  - Children and families benefit from high performing and high quality services
- 3.3 The Fostering Service supports the department’s policy to enable children and young people to stay with their birth families wherever this is safe and suitable and where they cannot, to place them without delay with alternative carers.
- 3.4 The aim of Sheffield’s Fostering Service is to provide high quality foster care as part of a full range of accommodation provision for looked after children and provide the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children who cannot live with their own families. In doing so the service strives to:
- Provide a service that is welcoming, accessible and inclusive
  - Provide a choice of high quality foster placements to meet the individual needs of children and young people
  - Ensure foster carers provide a good level of parenting to all children in foster care and assist children and young people to engage in their care and placement planning
  - Work together with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people, to enhance and develop health, education & well-being
  - Work with foster carers to support ‘staying put’ placements for children remaining post 18
  - Provide support and assessments for family and friends of foster carers

## 4 Looked After Children Placement Data

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- 4.1 Sheffield City Council Fostering Service keeps children at the heart of what it does. At the end of 2018/19 we were caring for 19 more children and young people in mainstream in-house fostering provision than we were at the same time last year. This closely correlates with the reduction in numbers of children that have been placed in Independent Fostering Agency placements. This means that more of our children have the opportunity to live in family-

based care within the local community that they know and identify with, where they can continue to have meaningful relationships with the people and places important to them with quick access to local provision. All of this will have a positive impact on our children's self-esteem, identity and wellbeing, and support them to achieve better outcomes through their childhood and into adult life.

- 4.2 Sheffield's overall looked after children population on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 totalled 638 children and young people compared to the 628 children who were looked after on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. This figure not only includes children in fostering provision, but also those in residential care, adoptive placements, and semi-independent living for older young people.
- 4.3 As of March 2019 there were a total of 451 looked after children placed in fostering households. Of those, 268 children were placed with Sheffield's in-house mainstream foster carers, 45 children placed in connected persons foster care, and 138 in independent fostering agencies placements. There were 19 more children being cared for by our Sheffield City Council foster carers and 19 fewer children placed in Independent Fostering Arrangement (IFA) placements.
- 4.4 Despite this improving picture, Sheffield does not yet have a sufficient number and range of in-house foster carers to meet the needs of all our looked after children without commissioning placements from the independent sector. This means that we have to place children in independent fostering agency placements. These are always more expensive and often out of city. In some cases, where we cannot identify an in-house foster carer or an independent fostering agency placement, a young person may have to be placed in a children's home. This may be in contrast to the child's needs for a family and again will be very expensive and may be out of city.
- 4.5 We aim to place as many of our looked after children in our in-house fostering placements as possible. As such it is essential that we have access to a sufficient number and range of high quality, local foster carers which can only

be achieved by increasing the numbers of carers approved while at the same time reducing the numbers of those carers leaving the agency.

## 5 Voice of the child in care

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- 5.1 In this reporting year, Sheffield City Council commissioned the 'Bright Spots' Survey to consult with our looked after children about their experiences in order to better understand the voice of the child in care, (University of Bristol and Coram BAAF). The survey findings identified 8 'Bright Spots' of good practice, (areas of practice where children's responses were more positive about their experience and wellbeing than children in other local authorities who have undertaken the Bright Spots survey and for children in the general population who have been asked similar questions). The vast majority of our children, 88% had moderate to high well-being. High numbers reported having a trusting relationship with a carer and that their carers were interested in their education. *"I really like that I have been able to stay in the same school with my friends," (Child aged 4-7yrs).*
- 5.2 Children and young people in Sheffield felt safer in comparison with children being brought up by their parents: 95% reported feeling safe in care compared with 75% of peers living at home. *"Everything is ok. I'm very happy where I live," (Child aged 8-11yrs).* Most children and young people (63%) in Sheffield were in placements where there was a pet and where they were given opportunities to explore the outdoors. A greater proportion of young people (85%) liked school in comparison with their peers (80%) in the general population. Compared with the responses (78%) from looked after children (8-11yrs) in 17 LAs, in Sheffield a larger proportion (90%) felt that they were given opportunities in school to be trusted. All (100%) the children (8-11yrs) felt included by their social workers in decision-making compared with 84% of the same age group in 17 LAs. We are really pleased with the findings from this survey, but there are areas for development and an action plan will be devised in 19/20 to promote even better outcomes for our children in care.

## 6 Placement stability

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- 6.1 Placement stability in Sheffield is good. On short term stability, 9.6% of our looked after children has 3 or more placements moves in a year compared to 10% nationally. On long term stability, 71.2% of our children in care for at least 2.5 years had been in the same placement for the last two years, compared to 70% nationally and 66.1% amongst statistical neighbours.
- 6.2 In 2018/19 there were 6 placement disruptions of children in our foster care; 4 of the young people moved onto other fostering families within the service. Research suggests that disruptions are much less likely in younger children. In comparison, 'teenage' placements have a 50% chance of breaking down through disruption. This appears to be the case in the disruptions which occurred in within our Fostering Service in 2018/19 with all of the children being aged from 11 years of age up to 16+ years. Whilst the number of disruptions may be relatively low, we realize that for that young person, the loss of this relationship and connection can have a detriment impact of them. Wherever possible, foster carers are encouraged to maintain links and relationships with our young people who move on, and many of our foster carers continue to be a vital source of emotional and physical support to that young person as they move into adulthood.

## 7 Recruitment and Retention Activity and Outcomes in 18/19

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- 7.1 Recruitment and retention of foster carers is probably the most important factor for any fostering service in delivering an effective fostering service for looked after children. In seeking to improve recruitment and retention, Sheffield City Council has recently invested £1.1 million into the fostering service, to improve financial incentives and wrap around support to carers with an ambition to recruit more carers and lose fewer.
- 7.2 In 2018/19 the Service approved 24 new foster carers, and 'lost' 20 foster carers through retirement and deregistration giving an overall net gain of 4 fostering families in that reporting year. This reversed the trend from the previous year where we had a net loss of 10 carers.



7.3 At the time of writing, (June 2019) we have approved five fostering families in 2019/20. We have a further 21 families in assessment and booked on to Foster Panel before September 2019 and 15 applicants booked on to preparation training. Our target is to approve 40 new foster carers in 19/20 and to achieve a net gain of at least 20 new carers.

7.4 Whilst it is clearly important that we maintain a grip on our recruitment activity, it is equally important that we understand the reasons why foster carers leave the agency to maximise our sufficiency potential. All fostering services lose carers during any one year to retirement, deciding fostering is no longer for them, or that their family circumstances have changed, so there is a need to continually recruit just to maintain capacity. The Fostering Stocktake (Narey & Owers February 2018) estimate that the average carer loss per fostering agency is approximately 10% of each agency's carer pool annually. In reviewing the reasons why carers left the agency in 2018/19 the following was noted:

No: of households	Reason for leaving
4	Deregistered due to safeguarding concerns
2	Carer resigned as the agency was working with them surround practice concerns
2	Secured Special Guardianship Order fro the fostered child
12	Change in circumstances, including moved out of area, returning to paid employment, own children requiring more support, becoming grandparents, and care needs of elderly family members

7.8 Whilst there is an investment and strategy around the recruitment of foster carers, a key task in 19/20 is to build on our retention strategy, which this year has included the recent investment, engagement of our carers, annual celebrations events, fostering forums, placement support and psychological intervention to ensure that foster carers are provided with a high quality support offer.

- 7.9 On reviewing carers letters of resignation, it has been pleasing that retired foster carers have generally been pleased by the fostering experience, with other carers indicating that they would like to return to fostering at a later stage in their lives. As one retiring foster carer described, *“it is with a heavy heart.... I have decided to retire after nine years .... I have enjoyed every moment .... we have taken every child and their families into ours.. but for now the right thing to do is take a break from fostering. Thank you to everyone in fostering... it’s been great. Who knows in the future we might be back to do it all again”*.

## 8 Recruitment Plans for 2018/19:

- 8.1 A full and detailed Recruitment and Retention Strategy for 19/20 has being produced based in partnership with the Councils’ Communications and Marketing Team. Recruitment events have been timetabled throughout the year, focussing on three specific campaigns. These are in May which concentrates on harnessing the national promotion of fostering in the national Foster Care Fortnight campaign. Secondly in October to re-launch a refreshed campaign focussing on images of our foster carers and to target the ‘empty nesters’ within the population who may have recently had birth children leaving home to start university. Finally, in January 2020 when we will be focussing on promoting the impact of stories written by our foster carers giving their experiences and reflections of being a foster carer for the Council. This approach looks to stimulate good quality enquiries by telling stories and communicating key messages relating directly to those people who could foster.
- 8.2 In addition we have ensured that we remain visible across the city, having banners up in all local parks, advertising on the back of public transport and also attendance at key events across the city including park runs, Owls in the Park, Pride, Out of this World and the Christmas lights switch on.
- 8.3 The service ensures we have high visibility on Facebook/Twitter updating our posts 2-3 times per week and we hold regular (6 weekly) information evenings in the city centre.

- 8.4 The increased financial package and support offer to foster carers means that the recruitment campaign can now be more explicit with regard to finances carers will receive and promote the benefits of fostering for the Local Authority.
- 8.5 We also continue to revisit all enquiries, even those that have been rejected for reasons such as 'no spare room' or 'not financially viable at present'. By re-contacting enquires within an agreed timescale to ascertain if their circumstances have changed, they know that they can come back to us. It is more financially viable to focus on converting existing leads than generating new enquiries.

## 9 Support and supervision for carers:

- 9.1 All carers are allocated a fostering social worker who undertakes their assessment; where possible for consistency they will maintain some involvement until the point of first placement is made. Another fostering social worker will be identified and allocated post approval, who will continue to support and supervise the foster carer post approval in their journey as foster carer.
- 9.2 All carers are offered a mentor for the first 12 months post approval to offer additional support and guidance. Consideration is given to the mentor carer's approval category and location of carer so support can be more practical if necessary.
- 9.3 All carers are visited a minimum of every 6 weeks. Many will be visited far more frequently, depending on their circumstances.
- 9.4 During office hours we have a duty service available to carers and outside working hours we have a foster carer's telephone helpline.
- 9.5 Sheffield City Council has invested in a Clinical Psychologist within the fostering service. This enables a better understanding for foster carers on the

impact of trauma and abuse on children and the significance of building healthy attachment relationships. The psychologist provides consultation to carers and workers and attends team around the placement meetings to give a therapeutic perspective on the needs of children and carers, and how best to support everyone. In helping carers, there has been additional investment in training and development and the fostering service have recently recruited an additional training and development officer and we are looking forward to her starting in post and being in a position to develop this role.

- 9.6 The Service has a contact and liaison officer, whose key role is liaise and engage with foster carers to ensure that they are heard and promote any upcoming events to encourage attendance and collaboration.
- 9.7 The Service holds quarterly Foster Carer Forums, and has a closed secure webpage, Foster Forum, where carers can book onto training and access any policies and procedures and be updated on any service developments.
- 9.8 There are 7 foster carer support groups across the city that takes place on a monthly basis. The support groups are well attended by foster carers, which demonstrate how our foster carers identify with the service. The groups include induction year group, BME, LGBT and men's support group. The service also offers events for sons and daughters of foster carers through the year. In partnership with foster carers the service facilitate a range of events and activities, including fostering families picnics/ parties in the park events, 'bag a book event,' a 'fostering family fun day,' and involvement and contribution toward the annual 'Star Awards,' celebration event.
- 9.9 For the coming year 2019/20, the Service have introduced three cultural celebrations; an Eid Celebration, a children's Christmas party and a Christmas themed evening celebration event for foster carers.

## 10 Fostering Panel:

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10.1 In 18/19 a total of 24 panels meetings were held with 83 items of business being considered as outlined below:

New approvals	25
1sr Review	12
Resignations	16
Re-approvals after allegations	9
Re-approvals after practice concerns	3
Reg 24 connected carer	18

10.2 In general, two panels are held a month, and where necessary additional panels can be arranged. The Service has two different panels with different membership. Each panel has an independent chair with significant knowledge and experience of fostering issues and all panels meetings have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members.

10.3 There continues to be a system of each panel having a dedicated professional Panel Advisor. This is well established and continues to work well and provide consistency within and across panels. The Panel Advisor has been recruited on a permanent basis in the service to facilitate this role in addition to contributing towards development plans, liaising with the ADM, escalating concerns and areas of good practice, conducting exit interviews and contribute to the six-month and annual fostering panel report. Both panels have the same Chair and Vice-Chair, enabling the panel to remain consistent in its leadership and in the recommendations they make. The Vice-Chair assumes the chairing role four times per year in order to develop and maintain their chairing skills.

10.4 Regarding the quality assurance role of panel, all panel members have an individual responsibility to raise 'practice issues' as a contribution to quality assuring the work undertaken by the Fostering Service. This ranges from typing and factual errors to practice/performance issues of individual workers or feedback to the Service at a more senior level in relation to how procedures and policies are being implemented. These issues are reported back to the service predominately via the Panel Adviser, but also

directly from the Panel Chair and Vice Chair to the Agency Decision Maker via business meetings. Challenging the performance and practice of the Fostering Service is seen as an essential role of panel.

- 10.5 Business Meetings are held twice per year and these are an effective means of communication between the Fostering Panel and the Service.
- 10.6 All panel members are reviewed annually in relation to their performance as panel members. Reviews take place throughout the year to coincide with members appointments. The panel member reviews are instrumental in establishing the training needs for panel members.
- 10.7 Panel training in 18/19 included Sign of Safety, Regulation 24 and Connected Carers assessment, approval and legislation.
- 10.8 All new panel members have an induction which consists of a welcome pack, the opportunity to observe panel, and a mentor who is an experienced panel member
- 10.9 The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is a nominated person within the Local Authority who has the legal responsibility to make an approval decision. The ADM's role is to consider the fostering panel's recommendation and to make the final decision. In most circumstances the ADM accepts the fostering panel's recommendation; the Panel Advisor offers advice and support to enable this process. The ADM for Sheffield City Fostering Service is Paul Dempsey, the Assistant Director, Provider Services.

## 11 Permanency Planning

- 11.1 The Service has also recently recruited a family finder for identifying permanence fostering placements for children who need them and has revised the process for formally placing and matching children within permanent family-based care. The worker who came to post in May 2019 has

quickly begun work on improving practice in this area, revising children and family profiles and introduced guidance on best practice in this area. Whilst outside this reporting year, a new role of fostering panel will be to consider permanence fostering matches for children and their carers, and make recommendations to the ADM. This is in line with best practice. Again it is acknowledgement that this will increase Panel business.

## 12 Temporary Approved and Connected Carers

- 12.1 Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 relates to the immediate placements of children with relatives and friends not previously approved as a foster carer. Where the local authority is satisfied that an immediate placement with a connected person is the most appropriate placement for the child even though they are not approved as foster carers, the carers can have temporary approval for a period of up to 16 weeks allowing time for an assessment of their suitability to take place. In exceptional circumstances an extension can be allowed of 8 weeks. Any placements outside of this timeframe are deemed to be unregulated.
- 12.2 In 2018, the Connected Carers team was established, whose key task was to undertake Regulation 24, (temporary approval of foster carers) through to approval. Since this time there has been a greater management oversight on performance and timeliness. The Service work closely with colleagues in field work, and have provided training to workers across the Council to promote the process for these carers securing Special Guardianship Orders for the children they care for.
- 12.3 In 2018/19 18 families were fully approved as connected persons foster carers; many went on to secure an SGO arrangement providing permanency for these children outside care.

## **13 Developments in 2018/19**

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13.1 In summary developments in the year include:

- Increased fostering management capacity by one new post to increase capacity in managing fostering social workers who support foster carers. In 2019 we saw one Fostering Team Manager retire, and two new Team Managers join the service.
- Increased the fostering reviewing officer resource by 0.5 posts
- Introduced a fostering permanence family finder role to secure timely permanence in foster carer for those children that require this. In doing this, we have refreshed our fostering to permanency matching process in-line with best practice
- Increased social worker resource by one full time post in the recruitment team to prevent drift in progressing assessments
- Recruited a second fostering training lead to promote the understanding of the needs of our children in care.
- Restructured the service, creating a dedicated recruitment and assessment team and a team dedicated to connected persons foster carers, private fostering and special guardianship support.
- Worked in collaboration with residential providers in introducing Project Aspire. Recruited one foster carer household into the Aspire hub. ( Project Aspire is a new initiative that seeks to link foster carers to residential homes in order to move children from residential to foster placements.)
- Provided bespoke fostering specific team training around best practice to promote the quality of service offered to carers with an overall aim of improving the carer experience and therefore retention of foster carers



## 14 Developments and Improvements for 19/20

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### 14.1 The Service has the following development aims for 2019/20

- Increase our investment into fostering by £1.1 million to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers
- To recruit 40 new foster carers by end of reporting year and to achieve a net gain of at least 20 carers
- Improve retention of existing foster carers through continued improvement of the service and our overall support and supervision offer
- Maintain placement stability outcomes for looked after children. The Service have recently introduced a team around the placement process and revised the placement disruption process and these need embedding within the Service
- Improve emotional wellbeing of looked after children in foster care through the additional therapeutic resource and training offer
- Further embed the fostering permanence protocol in order to formally place children in foster care in permanence placements, where it is their plan, as swiftly as possible.
- Embed the new fostering review process and ensure timeliness of reviews in general, including first reviews being presented to fostering panel
- Improve educational engagement and progress

- Increase the number and percentage of young people placed in foster care (as opposed to residential care) and in in city placements and in-house (as opposed to out of city) in line with best practice and children's best interests.

## **15 Summary**

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- 15.1 In this reporting year, we have seen an increase of the number of new foster carers recruited to the service compared to the previous year and turned a net loss of 10 carers in 2017/18 into a net gain of plus 4 in the reporting year. The service was caring for 19 more children at the end of the year than the end of the previous year and we reduced our reliance on commissioned IFA provision, using 19 fewer of these placements. This means more of our children remain in Sheffield, the community they call home and identify with.
- 15.2 Children placed with our in-house foster carers tell us that they feel safe, are listened to and are given opportunities to enjoy and achieve. Sheffield City Council placements are stable and there is a low disruption rate ensuring that our children are given opportunities to develop lasting and meaningful relationships.
- 15.3 We realise there is still a lot to do. We need to further increase the numbers of foster carers approved by the service, and reduce reliance on commissioned IFA provision. We need to refresh our retention policy building on all that Sheffield has to offer including carer engagement, an attractive financial offer, and wrap around support and activities.
- 15.4 This year we will continue to focus on permanence and quality to ensure that the service to our foster carers and most importantly to our children is of a high standard. We will continue to embed best practice ways of working and collaborate with foster carers to ensure that their opinions are sought and listened to.
- 15.5 We will develop stronger links with field social workers teams and more importantly our looked after children's teams to ensure we are working

closely, for example through permanency matching and team around the placement meetings to ensure we are working together in the best interests of our children.

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Anne-Marie Banks, Service Manager, Fostering

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