



## **CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE**

**31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

Report sponsor: Suanne Lim Director, Director of  
Early Help & Childrens Social Care

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Service, Fostering

# **ITEM 07**

## **Fostering Agency Report**

### **Purpose**

- 1.1** The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the executive side of the local authority:
- a. Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children.
  - b. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months.
  - c. Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration and National Minimum Standards for fostering.

(Standard 25.7)

The Fostering Agency is required to produce a Statement of Purpose updated on an annual basis. The Statement of Purpose was updated in July 2023 and will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2023. It is attached as appendix 1.

This report covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

### **1.2 Summary for Children and Young People**

This is the annual report of work undertaken by the Fostering Service.

- Fostering is a Council priority, and this means all departments support the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Derby. We have recruited and approved 18 new fostering families this year and have had 11 mainstream foster carers resign. We continue to reduce the need to use private sector foster carers, and the number of households is showing year-on-year increases over the past four years. We currently have our highest number of households seen over the past six years, which equates to an 8% increase.

During 2022, we developed a TriX online foster carers handbook, which was implemented in September 2022.

This report explains the role of the Fostering Panel and provides data about the key functions of the fostering team e.g., the number of foster carers approved and the number of carers who have chosen to leave the service. Complaints received about Foster Carers from a range of different people are also included, particularly if this has led to de-registration of a Foster Carers approval.

## **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1** To approve the annual Fostering Agency report and Statement of Purpose.

## **Reason(s)**

- 3.1** To comply with guidance and fostering regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.
- 3.2** To increase recruitment and retention of Derby City Foster Carers.

## **Supporting information**

- 4.1** Fostering Panels have a crucial role to play in the provision and monitoring of Foster Carers and placements for Looked After Children. The membership of Derby City's Fostering Panel complies with Guidance and Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 for Fostering Services. The central list (regulation 23) consists of an independent chair and 2 vice-chairs, all of whom have professional experience of children placed away from their birth family and are competent at chairing complex meetings. Panels meet twice monthly or as required to ensure there is no delay in applications being presented for approval. Applicants and foster carers are encouraged to attend panel and feedback of their experience is positive.
- 4.2** Other members of the panel include a former foster carer from a different local authority, a Derby City Fostering Social Worker representing the service with at least three years post qualifying experience. Two care-experienced young adults have been recruited via the Rees Foundation project, their contribution has been valuable and brings a different perspective to the quality of care children are experiencing. Other independent members have relevant professional experience related to children in care and safeguarding. Derby City's Fostering Panel chairperson was appointed in January 2022. Other new appointments are professionals with a background in children's rights and therapeutic social work. These appointments to the Central list have achieved a more diverse representation and understanding of children's needs.
- 4.3** The panel is currently supported by a professional Panel Advisor and has access to a Specialist Adult Medical Advisor and legal advice as required. The Agency Decision Maker is also Deputy Head of Fostering Service
- 4.4** Panels provide a quality assurance role to the fostering service provider, on the quality of reports and practice and development to ensure good outcomes for Looked After Children. The foster panel chair, vice chairs, professional advisor, Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and Fostering Managers meet twice a year to consider quality assurance and performance issues relating to the service and training needs of the panel members. Panel members receive an annual appraisal undertaken by the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor. Panel function receives administration support in terms of minuting and organising the panel agenda. If requested panel will facilitate observers attending and this is particularly helpful for social work students and new employees.

#### **4.5 Overall experience and ability of panel members and contribution to decision making. The Independent Chair of the Fostering Panel is required to contribute to the annual report and David Keeping has provided the following summary:**

As in previous years, the fostering panel continues to fulfil its regulatory functions of considering the assessments of new applicants alongside the first and subsequent annual reviews of existing, approved foster carers. An evidenced based, independent recommendation is then made for the attention of the Agency Decision Maker to assist decision making about those permitted to care for Derby's vulnerable children. Panel meets twice a month for this purpose.

The two vice chairs and the chairperson meet with the fostering managers twice a year. We discuss the quality of assessments and reports that come to the panel, as well as any areas for development. This forum works two ways; the panel chair persons are able to receive and act on feedback as well as give the same. It is a positive and fruitful mechanism and has led to some time saving measures for panel appointments over the past 6 months.

The central list of suitable people who may sit on each panel has grown these past 12 months including two care-experienced panel members. This means that as the panel considers the suitability of someone to foster we have the benefit of insight from adults who know what it is like to be fostered as a child. One of our long-standing panel members, appointed to the role of vice chair last year, has also commenced her role as the High Sheriff of Derbyshire in April 2023. The fostering panel comprises a wide range of complimentary individuals.

Panel appointments have generally continued to be conducted in person this year. Derby retains use of virtual panels in stances of extreme weather conditions. All panel members reflect on how beneficial meeting in person has been for our development. It can be very difficult to develop as a panel, share best practice and integrate new panel members without the cohesion that comes with being in person together. It would be the preference of all existing panel members to continue with the balance of panel business being conducted in person on the majority of occasions.

#### **4.6 Approach of panel members to ensuring that fostering placements are appropriate and meeting the child's needs**

Panel is aware of its responsibilities in its quality assurance role and safeguarding role and always places the welfare of the child at the forefront of discussions. There is a mechanism within the service for panel's concerns to be addressed at regular meetings with Managers and if specific issues arise during discussion the Panel Adviser will address this with the relevant service. The Foster Panel has an explicit role in obtaining the voice of a child to reassure themselves that the placement continues to meet the child's individual needs. The new appointments of two care experienced adults will reinforce the importance of the child voice. The role of the Panel Advisor supports the panel's recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

#### **4.7 Commitments and awareness to safeguarding and confidentiality**

Safeguarding is considered at all stages of the fostering process and fostering assessments are thorough and robust to ensure looked after children are placed in a safe and caring home environment. (NMS 4).

Safeguarding is very much at the centre of panel discussions and in questions asked of Social Workers and Foster Carers attending.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, eight referrals were made by the fostering service to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Five of these were made to the Derby City Council Lado Service and three to the LADO service from other local authorities where the foster carers concerned lived.

Of the five referrals made to Derby Children's Services LADO, the outcomes of these investigations were that for 3 cases the threshold was not met, one was unsubstantiated, and one was unfounded.

A further three referrals made to Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire LADO service and resulted in outcomes of threshold not met in two cases and unsubstantiated in the third.

All cases where threshold is met are managed under Local Authority Designated Officer procedures. It is a requirement that in these circumstances a report is subsequently made available to the Derby City Council Fostering Foster Panel so consideration can be given to the foster carers on going suitability to be approved, any changes to the terms of approval felt necessary and future support and training needs.

This year, none of the allegations were substantiated, therefore no considerations were required by panel.

#### **4.8 Ability of panel members to address diversity issues**

Panel members consider diversity issues in relation to each assessment report or annual review. The quality of care provided is measured against the requirement to meet the National Minimum Standards (NMS 2) Standard 2 – promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care – ensures that children have a positive self-view, knowledge and understanding of their background. Panel members will confidently challenge where they feel there is a lack of information or detail evidencing how Foster Carers are meeting the child's identity and cultural needs. Panel members are proactive in advocating for Foster Carers where they feel services for Looked after Children are not in place and recognise the importance of partnership working to ensure the holistic needs of Children in Care are met.

#### **4.9 Areas of practice that influence how effectively panel can function**

The central role in hearing the Voice of the Child can be difficult to achieve if this is not provided by the child's Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker for the

Foster Carer will include information in their report regarding the Foster Carers ability to continue to meet National Minimum Standards. These Standards are child focussed and should address the child's progress and suitability of the Foster Carers to facilitate the child's care plan. The Supervising Social Worker's views are not independent of the Fostering Service and therefore child's Social Workers summary of the placement ensures a degree of independent monitoring.

An improvement has been seen in receiving placement feedback (CA22) and social worker feedback (CA21) for annual reviews. We will continue to closely monitor this area of performance and Supervising Social Workers will continue to take a more proactive approach in ensuring that Panel and the Agency Decision Maker have some feedback from the child's Social Worker, even if this is verbal.

- 4.10** Since May 2022, panel have developed a more transparent and open process with applicants and approved carers remaining in the panel meeting with their supervising social worker throughout. This has allowed carers to be fully involved in the discussion and hear the views of panel members regarding their terms of approval and ongoing recommendations for ADM.

To support development, social workers, applicants and foster carers are encouraged to complete feedback forms on their experience of attending panel. All feedback is considered at the Quality Assurance meetings held with the service.

The system of the ADM changing approvals outside of the panel process, as long as carers were in agreement with their new terms of approval, remains in line with regulations, and allows the service to respond more quickly and with more flexibility to emergencies. De-registrations are reported to the quality assurance meeting every six months.

- 4.11** The 'Team Manager Only' panels, developed during Covid due to capacity issues, have continued to meet the high level of demand for annual reviews, and have ensured that timescales are met. The first annual review will always be considered at the main panel, and every third review. In addition, if there have been any safeguarding or concerns around standards of care, or if approval is to be changed, these cases would remain considered at main panel.

### **Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service**

- 4.12** The Head of Service post was replaced by a full time Deputy Head of Service post on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. This post became permanent on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. The service expanded to include the permanence team in June 2022, and became known as the Fostering and Permanence service. Combining and co-locating the services has encouraged and facilitated collaborative working in areas where the work is closely aligned, for example in transitions between foster care and adoption, work across the D2N2 local authorities and Adoption East Midlands, and in the area of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) assessments and support post SGO order. By expanding the service area, the two teams dealing with post SGO support will now be based together and services will be seamless. The management of the service has been fully staffed during the last year by four full time team managers and a professional advisor to the panel, who is part time.

- 4.13** From May 2022, the recruitment team and support team combined their roles to become two teams which both cover recruitment, assessment and support. By doing this, carers have more continuity with the same social workers assessing and then supporting them in their fostering role, and it allows greater flexibility in allocating assessments in a timely manner. It has also meant that caseloads are more equitable across the two teams and gives equal priority to the support and retention of our carers, as well as a wider team to support recruitment and marketing events.
- 4.14** A new marketing strategy was developed for 2022-2023 and will be revised on an annual basis to ensure that the marketing activity reflects the demand for foster placements. (See appendix 2).

Derby City Council need to significantly reduce its current reliance on using Independent Fostering Agencies as this offers greater value for money and would result in more children being placed within a 20-mile radius of Derby City.

The Fostering marketing budget for 2022/2023 is £26,000. Key activity areas in the marketing plan for 2022/2023 are:

- Four targeted events held in May, September and November 2022 and February 2023.
- Continuing to use the “I am, I can” launched early 2021 and used in branding across Derby.
- Working in partnership with the Derbion Shopping Centre for use of their community space once a month, allowing us to promote fostering within a busy central location.
- Providing specialist online events to encourage supported lodgings and respite carers to apply.
- To actively promote and raise the profile of Derby City Council’s Fostering Friendly accreditation
- Advertising on Google Ads and Facebook to raise the profile of the service above external agencies.
- External promotions in Derby City and surrounding areas targeting the major routes in and out of the City.
- Marketing toolkits developed and distributed to all major employers and Corporate Partners in the City.
- Supporting events that celebrate our foster carers to encourage retention.

- 4.15** Our marketing objectives are to:

- Increase enquiries by 25% achieving a total of 225 by March 2023
- Increase our conversion rate from enquiry to a completed initial visit to 25%, by generating high quality marketing qualified leads (event booking/visit bookings)
- Attract 10% of total enquiries specifically for children and young people with complex needs, by targeting healthcare/police professionals
- Attract 20% of total enquiries for children ages 10-15
- To increase awareness of Fostering Friendly Status, encouraging 10 Derby city-based companies to achieve status by April 2023
- Attract more foster carers from a more diverse ethnic community
- Focus for this year around specific fostering types – short breaks, parent and child, supported lodgings

Our marketing activity will focus around four 'peaks' or campaigns to recruit more Foster Carers. These peaks will be centred on recruitment events and other major activities which will require full participation by all Fostering colleagues with support from the Corporate Fostering Board.

The focus will be on the quality-of-service delivery and recruitment and retention of Foster Carers for older children and sibling groups. Derby's marketing strategy aims to reflect the demographics and diversity of the City.

- 4.16** The Payment for Skills scheme continues to be well received and foster carers are committed to learning and training. The generous financial package recognises the skill base and experience that Foster Carers develop and has allowed us to provide a package of remuneration that competes with the private sector. As a result of this we have seen a growing number of enquiries from Independent Fostering Agency Foster Carers, and over the last year, 20% of our enquiries have been from IFA foster carers who are interested in transferring to Derby City Council. Alongside the Payment for Skills scheme we have a growing number of bespoke fostering options, which recognise the complexity of the children placed with the carers, for example, Parent and Child, Fostering Plus and UASC.
- 4.17** Fostering allowances are required to be reviewed annually in line with the rate of inflation. Derby City's allowance payment rates have been the highest in the region in recent years, but as part of the D2N2 collaboration work, other LA's in D2N2 are now looking to level up their fees in line with ours. It is interesting to compare how our allowance rates compare with the National Minimum Allowance.

The basic weekly allowance rates for 2022/23 were increased by 2.4%.

<b>Age of child</b>	<b>Weekly allowance per child 2022/23</b>	<b>National Minimum allowance in 2022/23</b>
0-4	£157.26	£137
5-10	£179.14	£156
11-15	£223.01	£177
16-18	£271.30	£207

**4.18 Recruitment activity between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

<b>Initial Enquiries</b>	<b>Information Packs Sent</b>	<b>Initial Visits</b>	<b>Number of households invited to apply</b>	<b>Returned Applications</b>	<b>Approvals</b>
153	102	54	48	35	11 Mainstream  7 Family & Friends (full approvals)

## Figures for 2021-2022 for comparison

Initial Enquiries	Information Packs Sent	Initial Visits	Number of households invited to apply	Returned Applications	Approvals
199	64	45	34	18	16 Mainstream 10 Family & Friends

Mainstream approvals – these are carried out under The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and allows the Fostering Service provider to assess any person who applies to become a Foster Parent and whom they consider may be suitable and meet the National Minimum Standards for fostering (NMS 13).

Friends & Family – Regulation 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations sets out arrangements for the temporary approval of a connected person as a Foster Carer in exceptional circumstances for up to 16 weeks to allow an immediate placement and sufficient time for a Foster Carer approval process to be undertaken. National Minimum Standards 30 allows for family and friends Foster Carers to receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

- 4.19** Of the 153 fostering enquiries, 20 were from applicants under the age of 30, and 82 were aged between 30 and 49 with the remaining 51 aged over 50. The average age was 42. This is a positive change to our age profile of carers. Of the 153 enquiries received in 2022-23, 120 of these were from people within the Derby City boundary (78%). This is an increase of 6% from 2021-2022, where 72% were from people within the City boundary.
- 4.20** For the year 2022 – 2023, we received 153 enquiries and approved 11 households. This represents a conversion rate of 7.1 % from enquiry to approval. This compares to 8% for 2021-2022, a drop of 1%.

Although our enquiry numbers were lower for 2022-2023 than the previous year (153 compared to 199), we sent out more information packs, completed more initial visits and invited more applicants to apply. We also received almost double the amount of applications back from applicants wanting to start an assessment (35 compared to 18). This could suggest that as a service our marketing material is targeting a more suitable audience, meaning we are receiving less unsuitable enquiries. This could also suggest that as a service we are widening our criteria of what we think is suitable to progress to offering an initial visit and inviting an application. The thinking around this is that more complex issues are then explored during the assessment process. The fact that from 35 applications received we only approved 11 households could further suggest this to be the case. Exploration is needed around this level of drop out during the assessment process, due to the demand this places on resources and more information on this is shared later in this report.

This year we returned to face-to-face recruitment events. These tended to be less popular than they had been pre-pandemic, but the suitability of people attending these events was good. This again suggests our targeted marketing is working well.



This year we also started offering a drop in once a month at the Derbion shopping centre in central Derby, utilising a Community Drop-in room free of charge. The advantage of this is the central location and also large footfall of the shopping centre, meaning we have increased availability and visibility for anyone considering fostering. The Derbion centre is a prime spot for advertising and utilising the community room with our banners on display for free and this provided a valuable opportunity. Although only small number of enquiries resulted from these events (10) they tended to be of good quality and also we were able to reach people from a wider range of ethnic backgrounds (of the 10 enquiries, 3 were from the Global Majority). From 10 enquiries, 4 applicants went on to be assessed. 1 of these households has been approved with 1 more still in assessment stage. If they go on to be approved, this would be a conversion rate of 20% from this specific source of enquiries, higher than our general conversion rate this year of 7%.

There were four face to face main fostering events during 2022/2023, spread equally across the year, with a targeted marketing campaign around each one utilising social media and billboards/digital signage around the city. Analysis of these events provided a total of 52 prospective fostering households attending and taking the first step to find out more information on becoming a foster carer. 12 of these households applied and began a fostering assessment – of those, 5 were approved and 3 are still in the assessment phase. This is a potential conversion rate of 15% if all 8 are approved.

We have tried to plan our recruitment events strategically this year, with an aim of widening our reach in the different communities of Derby, to attract carers from a broader range of backgrounds and identities. The death of the Queen meant that we were unable to attend Derby Pride this year but we intend to attend Pride 2023 this Autumn. We have continued to try to increase the awareness of fostering in the different ethnic communities in Derby this year and our newly formed Black Carers Group has helped with suggestions of avenues we can pursue. The group have also been keen to help with Recruitment Events, so anyone attending these groups see a wider level of representation in the foster carers they can speak to.

We have offered specific recruitment events alongside our mainstream events for Supported Lodgings, Parent and Child Fostering, Fostering Friendly and Short Breaks. These have had mixed success, the Supported Lodgings face to face events were particularly well attended, the other events less so. We will continue to learn from these events for planning events for the next financial year.

Holding celebration and retention events for our existing carers in local community venues, also created a source of enquiries, as local residents were passing by and saw what was happening, prompting them to enquire. As these events were often held in venues in parts of the City with a range of diverse communities, we were able to reach the attention of people who perhaps would not have been aware of us otherwise. We have built on these events by leaving leaflets, flyers and posters at these venues to try and continue to attract the attention of local residents.

Our foster carers continue to be an excellent source of new enquiries through word of mouth and they receive a bonus of £1,000 - £1,500 if anyone they recommend goes on to be approved and foster for us. We have continued to receive enquiries and approvals from Foster Carers wishing to transfer from their existing agencies,

many of whom cite how they have been treated as carers as being the reason they want to transfer.

- 4.21** There were four targeted fostering events during 2021/2022, which were a mixture of in person and virtual. Analysis of these events provided a total of 81 prospective fostering households taking the first step to find out more information on becoming a foster carer. This resulted in ten initial visits taking place and seven of those were supplied with an application pack. The service subsequently received five applications.
- 4.22** From the 153 initial enquiries 102 information packs were sent out either by email or by post. Information packs are not always sent out and this is often due to telephone consultations with the applicant being ruled out early (i.e., call back from Fostering Social Worker reveals circumstances that would prevent them from proceeding

Reasons why enquiries have been closed at initial contact include:

- Safeguarding concerns.
- Lack of space/spare bedroom for older children
- Balance of other responsibilities
- Financial reasons.
- Not the right time.
- No response to follow ups.

Anecdotally, more initial phone calls have involved a discussion around finances, specifically whether a family can afford to foster, which is indicative of issues in the wider society over the last 12-18 months.

- 4.23** 54 initial visits were completed in the year 2022-2023, and 48 households were invited to apply with us (88%). Application forms are left with all potential households that demonstrate the capacity and willingness to commence the assessment and meet statutory regulations. 88% is an increase from last year where 76% of those people receiving an initial visit were invited to apply. This increase suggests we are refining our screening process, so we are more likely to visit suitable applicants.
- 4.24** The Recruitment Officer tracks all enquiries and applications to the point of allocation.

During 2022 – 2023 48 households were invited to apply. Of those, 35 applications were received (72%, compared to 28% 2021 – 2022).

Tracking activity was undertaken on the 13 households who did not return a completed application form. Of those 13:

- We were unable to reach 10 of the households again despite when we attempted to follow up (several attempts made), meaning their enquiries were closed down. This is an area for development over the next 12 months, to try and explore the reasons for this.
- 1 household contacted us back to say they did not want to proceed
- 1 household could not proceed due to financial reasons

- 1 household had a change in circumstances (their daughter's health needs)

We received 35 applications back in 2022 – 2023, meaning we could start the fostering assessment process. Of these, 7 were Independent Fostering Agency carers wishing to transfer to the Local Authority (20% of the applications returned). 2 of these have gone on to be approved, 3 are still in the assessment process and 2 were ruled out of the process due to concerns they would not meet Fostering National Minimum Standards (practice related).

From those 35 applications received, 11 went on to become approved foster carers (across 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 financial year). 9 households are currently in the process of assessment, so likely to be approved in the 2023 -2024 financial year. The remaining 15 households all withdrew from the assessment process, for a range of reasons detailed below:

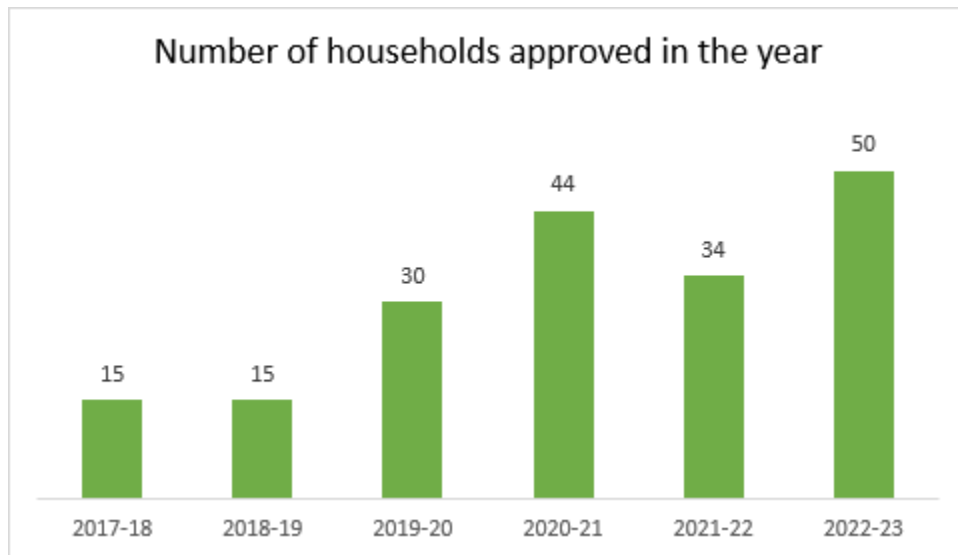
- Change in circumstances/Not the right time.
- Fostering is not what they thought it would be as they have learnt more about it through the assessment and initial training phase.
- Health and Safety Concerns.
- Unable to meet Fostering National Minimum Standards/Concerns regarding practice.
- Physical/Mental health reasons.
- Financial implications

15 households withdrawing out of 35 applications represents 43%. This is significant as this represents a significant level of resources involved to process the application to the point at which they then withdrew.

The reasons for withdrawing above suggest there could be more done around how we discuss the fostering role and impact on a family at the early stages of the enquiry, so they go into the assessment process with expectations that are as realistic as possible. This is a delicate balance as we want to encourage applications from suitable households.

- 4.25** During 2022/2023 a total of 18 households were presented at Fostering Panel for a recommendation of approval. 11 approvals were mainstream Foster Carers and 7 were family and friends carers.

Significantly, by the end of March 2023, we had the highest number of fostering households that we have had for 6 years (139 households, compared to 129 at the end of March 2022). This equicates to 237 fostering places, compared to 215 the previous year.



4.26

#### 4.27 Placements of children:

2022 / 2023 has been a positive year, in terms of growth of the total number of internal fostering placements. Linked to this is the decreasing in reliance on external foster placements made with independent fostering agencies (IFA's). The number of IFA placements has decreased in total and decreased as a percentage of all foster placements.

This has been achieved, during a year where there has been little or no net increase in the number mainstream foster carers. It appears the fostering service is using the foster carers it has more effectively. As well as better use of internal mainstream fostering resources, the increase in the number of friends and family placements has also contributed to this success.

This positive performance has built on the progress made in the previous year (2021 / 2022) and is demonstrated in the data outlined below;

- **Total number of internal foster placements:** Increased from 152 at the start of April 2022 to 161 at the end of February 2023.
- **Percentage of all foster placement that are internal:** Grown from 32.5% at the start of April 2022 to 34.2% at the end of February 2023.
- **The total number of IFA foster placements:** Decreased from 315 at the start of April 2022 to 289 at the end of February 2023.

The ongoing role of the Placements Officer, which started in July 2021, has continued to have a positive impact on the placement of children internally. This relates to the consistency it offers to social workers and foster carers, the improved recording and monitoring systems that have been implemented and increased knowledge and utilisation of the foster carer base.

The effect of the fostering service in producing financial savings has been monitored on a quarterly basis through meetings held with the finance and commissioning teams. These have considered savings created by placements 'stepping down' from IFA or

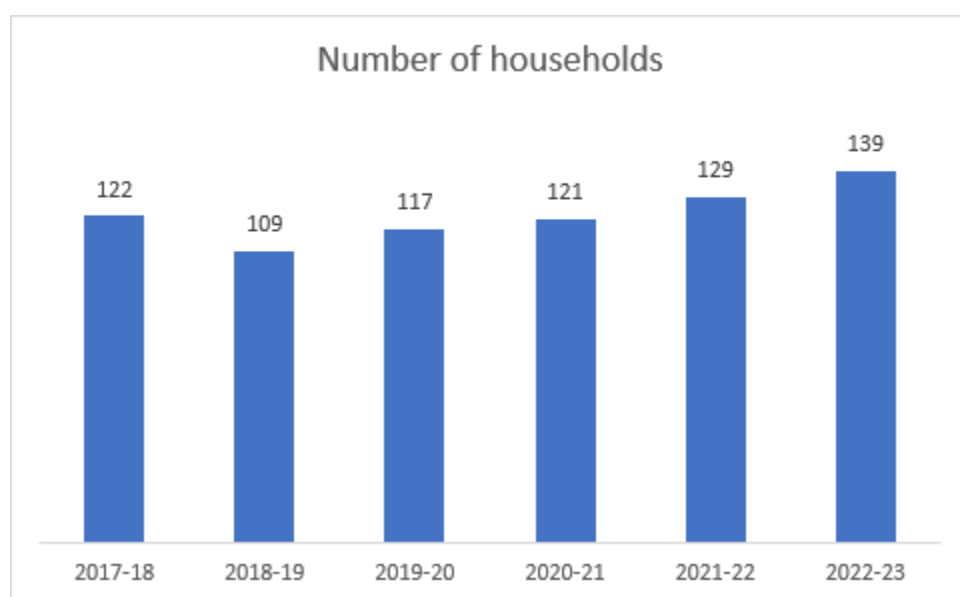
residential placements, or by avoidance of going to an IFA placement, due to our carers being able to accept more complex referrals.

The specialist parent and child placement scheme has continued to be promoted and made some, if modest, progress. Two internal parent and child placements using two fostering households, have occurred during the year. As with all areas of fostering recruitment, finding new carers wanting to offer parent and child placements has continued to be challenging.

A second specialist foster placement scheme has been developed during the year. This is called the fostering plus scheme and is aimed at stepping a cohort of children and young people down from being placed in residential care, to being placed in internal foster placements.

The scheme offers foster carers an intensive package of support to facilitate them in being able to offer and maintain these placements. This includes bespoke therapeutic support, increased respite provision, increased social work support, specialist training and development and increased financial rewards.

Again, whilst recruitment has been challenging, one applicant is currently being assessed who wants to offer a Fostering Plus placement to a specific child. In addition, the first placement under the scheme has been made recently with an existing internal foster carer.



#### **4.28 Approval activity since April 2022 and developments in the Family and Friends team**

In the year from April 2022 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2023, there were 50 approvals; 10 mainstream, 4 Foster to Adopt carers, 36 Family and Friends Carers. The categories for mainstream approvals were as follows:

<b>Approval categories</b>
Permanent: 1
Short -term, not permanent: 9
Emergency: 2
Short breaks: 2
Family and Friends: 5 approved, 31 temp approvals

**4.29** At the end of March 2023 the Family and Friends team were completing 9 regulation 24 assessments, 10 SGO assessments and 1 private fostering assessment. During the year 2022/23 the team introduced the midway review meeting, to enable the fostering team, operational teams and legal services to meet mid assessment to update and discuss progress of the assessment and proceedings, and identify any concerns that may impact on filing dates for court. Another development in the team was the appointment of additional part time social worker hours to complete assessments of need to make applications to the Adoption Support fund in the team. This has also freed up time for the post SGO team to take over the management of the SGO letterbox scheme.

**4.30 De-Registrations of Fostering households:**

There were eleven de-registrations of mainstream foster carers during the year 2022 / 2023. This equates to around 9% of the total carer base at the start of the year. It is slightly higher in terms of numbers than the previous year when ten carers were deregistered, however is less in terms of the overall percentage (9.9% reduced to 9%). It is also well below estimated national average of 16% of carers ceasing fostering each year and indicates on going positive performance in the retention of foster carers.

All the eleven foster carers who were deregistered, resigned. None were deregistered by the Fostering Service due to safeguarding or serious practice concerns. The reason for the carers leaving are summarised below;

- Four fostering households retired, due to age or ill health.
- Four households left due to the fact fostering had not been what they expected.
- Three fostering households left due to a change in their personal circumstances, eg adopting the child they were fostering.

Three exit interviews were carried out by the Deputy Head of Service for Fostering in the year 2023 / 2023. Some of the themes emanating from these around what contributed to foster carers decision to leave included the

- The assessment process and being assessed during covid which meant a lot of the assessment was not carried out face to face.
- The impact of fostering on carers financial situation

- The reality of fostering including the process of moving a child onto adoption, contact issues and the negative impact around being the subject of an allegation.

In relation to foster carer exits, it is noteworthy that six of the foster carers who left during the year, had been approved for less than 18 months. This is a significant concern and could be related to issues in the assessment process or post approval support. Several of these carers were assessed and approved during covid which may have had a negative impact on them. It will be important to monitor, analysis and compare foster care registration in 2022 / 2023 with those in 2023 / 2024.

Overall, no foster carers left to transfer to other fostering, agencies including Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). At the same time several carers from IFA's have transferred across to start fostering for Derby City Council. This is indicative of the strong offer Derby can make to potential and existing foster carer, allowing them to successfully complete with IFA's.

#### **4.31 Engagement and support of foster carers:**

The Derby Foster Carers Association (FCA) under the strong leadership of their chairperson, have had an active voice in developments in the Service over the last year. Since the Covid restrictions have lifted the FCA have gone back to having face to face meetings, coffee mornings and have also arranged social events which have been well received. The chairperson attends our corporate fostering meetings and is an excellent advocate for foster carers.

The Fostering Support Team Manager has been invited to and attends monthly Foster Carers Association committee meetings, where a solution focussed, approach has served to overcome challenges and develop practice.

The Foster Carers Association were involved in the reviewing the Foster Care Charter during the last year.

All new foster carers are now offered support from a mentor/buddy, who is an experienced foster carer on a Skills Band C or D. New carers have appreciated this support, and our experienced foster carers have gained from the experience of sharing their knowledge and wisdom.

Foster Carers have also been involved this year with our Workforce Learning and Development Training Officer, in participating in delivering training. This new training pool consists of ten Carers who have been involved in delivering training. They have also developed new courses (e.g. Through the eyes of the carer course) participating in interviews for Social Worker students and helping at recruitment events by talking to members of the public interested in becoming a Foster Carer for Derby City.

#### **4.32 Support groups:**

The range of support groups available for carers has continued to expand with a new group set up to support applicants in the assessment process. Other groups including the black carers support group, men's group, moving children onto adoption support group, short breaks group for carers or children with disabilities, mainstream foster carer and family and friends support group have developed terms of reference and have gone from strength to strength. The support groups generally

have a training element and a theme, as well as providing an opportunity for carers to offer social and informal support to each other.

The service has also organised a number of activity based sessions for carers and children together, including a summer and easter activity event, Christmas film night, and our very first Fostering Festival is being arranged for May 2023. We work closely alongside other agencies to provide these sessions, including Derby County Community Trust and Plus One theatre group. It is hoped that this increase in support on offer, will continue to have an impact on the number of de-registrations and will positively aid retention.

#### **4.33 Collaboration with D2N2 Local Authorities**

Regular meetings have continued between Heads of Service for Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Derby and Nottingham City (D2N2) and have continued to explore potential areas of collaboration which will encourage more enquiries to local authorities, cost savings, efficiencies, and improved services to our carers.

The Skills to Foster course has continued to be delivered across the four local authorities, with a separate specialised course for Family and Friends carers being offered to both SGO's and Reg 24 kinship carers. The mainstream Skills to Foster Course has also been offered to our Supported lodgings hosts in the approval stage.

3 of the 4 D2N2 local authorities have become Foster Friendly authorities, and it is hoped that joint recruitment drives across local companies can be developed in the coming year.

Derby City successfully gained accreditation as a Foster Friendly Council in March 2022, and since this time we have held 3 recruitment events for Derby City employees to explore fostering alongside their work. We have approved 2 employees through this scheme and have 2 more in the assessment phase. We have also started to make links and support several large, high profile local companies to consider becoming Foster Friendly, for example, Rolls Royce, The NHS ICB, Derby University and Derby County Community Trust.

During the next year as a D2N2 group, we will continue to explore the potential benefits of a combined website for recruitment and enquiries.

- 4.34** We continue to develop ways of improving placement sufficiency through expanding the range of fostering opportunities available. During 2022/23 we developed our Fostering Plus scheme which was approved in October 2022. The aim of the scheme was to step-children down from residential care into an in house fostering placement. From several specialist recruitment and advertising events, we have had one enquiry and an assessment is ongoing and one child is due to be placed with one of our existing foster carers, in July 2023.

#### **Areas for development in the year 2022/2023:**

- 4.35** The Supported lodgings scheme has been a huge area of growth during the last financial year. One of our senior practitioners leads on this scheme, and as well as the 3 hosts recruited last year, we now have another 7 carers in the assessment process. It is hoped that with a significant group of 10 approved hosts, this offer will become a valued part of the supported accommodation offer for young people in



the 16-21 year age group. In addition, there will be a requirement by October 2023 for the scheme to be registered with OFSTED.

- 4.36** A new area of development is to explore the potential benefits of a combined website for recruitment and enquiries. D2N2 will apply for possible funding from the DFE to deliver a recruitment and retention hub in the next financial year.

### **Public/stakeholder engagement**

- 5.1** Derby City Council undertook a Foster Carer Survey in July 2023. An analysis of the results will be coordinated by the Communications and Consultation Team and circulated to fostering households. The feedback used from this survey will form part of a 'you said, we did' action plan.

### **Other options**

- 6.1** Not applicable

### **Financial and value for money issues**

- 7.1** The cost of providing the Fostering Service is contained within fixed cost-centre budgets. A budget increase in 2022-2023 allowed Fostering allowances to be up lifted in line with the Governments recommended national minimum rate.

Any increase in the shortfall of in-house placements has a direct financial effect due to the much higher placement costs in the independent sector. It is therefore essential to keep pace with marketplace developments regarding the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.

In the event of an appeal to the IRM, the cost falls on the Fostering Service provider. The fee is £2500 for each case referred to the IRM. There have been no cases referred to the IRM during 2022/2023.

In addition to placements made to carers through the Fostering Service, our Children in Care are placed in foster placements commissioned through Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) linked to the D2N2 Framework for Children in Care, a partnership between Derby City, Derbyshire County, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Councils. When considering the types of placements needed for our children and young people, in addition to more fostering placements in local to Derby, there is also a need for more Carers who can support children with socially challenging behaviour, emotional/behavioural needs and sibling groups.

### **Legal implications**

- 8.1** The fostering function of the Council is regulated by the 1989 Children Act and the Associated Fostering Regulations, guidance and the minimum standards published in 2011.

### **Other significant implications**

- 9.1** None  
**Personel**

- 10.1 The Service is managed by a full time Deputy Head of Service for Fostering. There are three full time Fostering Team Manager posts and 16 FTE Social Workers who carry out the full range of statutory regulations associated with fostering activity. There is also one full time permanence team manager, who manages 5 adoption permanence social workers, and 2 exit from care workers.

The Deputy Head of Service and Team Managers maintain a close working relationship with the Workforce Learning and Development Training Commissioning Group. This group coordinates the post approval training programme, e-learning and any specialist training from an external provider for approved Foster Carers. The training programme is reviewed annually and has been developed to meet the training requirements to allow Foster Carers to progress within the payment for skills programme. This year the training has expanded to include a separate pathway of training opportunities for Kinship carers and has become a mix of virtual and face to face training since the restrictions have ended from Covid 19.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team are supported by one full time Recruitment Officer to ensure the early stages of recruitment activity receive a prompt response and data tracking is provided for the Team Manager to monitor assessment timescales.

The Fostering Service is also supported by one full time Casework Support Officer.

### **Equalities Impact**

- 11.1 The service continues to give due consideration to race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion and disability in all aspects of service delivery to ensure children's needs are appropriately met. Fostering Panel monitors the quality of care being provided by the Foster Carer and the child focussed standards NMS 1 - 12 underpin the quality of placements being provided.

### **Health and Safety**

- 12.1 This is considered at all stages of the recruitment, assessment, training and supervision of Foster Carers. All the Managers in the Service have completed mandatory Health and Safety training. Fostering Panel have a quality assurance role to ensure all fostering households meet the required National Minimum Standards for Fostering (NMS 6 and 10).

### **Environmental Sustainability**

- 13.1 None arising from this report.

### **Property and Asset Management**

- 14.1 None arising from this report.

### **Risk Management**

**15.1** Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

### **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

**16.1** Corporate and departmental objectives are pursued through Business Plans and individual performance monitoring throughout the Service.

- The Continue to review our fostering marketing strategy to achieve an overall increase in fostering households
- Regularly consult with our Foster Carers to improve the Service offer
- To increase approved households for older children and siblings and to develop a new Parent and Child fostering scheme.

**This report has been approved by the following people:**

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal Finance Service Director(s) Report sponsor	Suanne Lim, Service Director, Early Help and Children's Social Care Peoples Services Directorate 01332 642641 <a href="mailto:suanne.lim@derby.gov.uk">suanne.lim@derby.gov.uk</a>	12.10.2023
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Background papers: List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Appendix 2 – Marketing Strategy 2022/23
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