

Lincolnshire Fostering Service Annual Report

April 2018 - March 2019



Introduction

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000. Fostering has become an increasingly complex service in relation to children and young people who need to be looked after by Lincolnshire County Council (Local Authority). It requires a range of foster carers who are skilled and resourceful. The Service provides quarterly reports to the Directorate Leadership Team and the Executive.

The Local Authority offers a comprehensive range of preventative services delivered under an Early Help offer which enables families to access services as soon as difficulties emerge. In 2018/19, the number of children looked after has fluctuated and after an initial increase, the end of year figure of 614, represents a 7.5% reduction over the previous year. This continued decrease remains at odds with the increasing trend reported nationally. Of the 614, 473 were placed in either in-house foster care or are in pre-adoptive placements; this comprises 77% of the population, this is strong performance and compares favorably with statistical neighbours and all England reporting. An additional 16 children are placed in externally commissioned foster placements. Of these, 5 are unaccompanied migrant children aged between 15 and 18. The figures also reflect a number of children looked after with kinship carers, comprising 15% of the total looked after population, again a strong indicator of supporting children to remain with their birth families.

The Fostering Service is managed by the Head of Regulated Services, through two Team Managers who manage dedicated fostering teams from bases in the north (Lincoln and Louth) and the south (Sleaford). The service has 5 Practice Supervisors who manage day to day practice, and each has lead responsibility for an area of service development. These are currently permanence, duty desk, foster carer recruitment and retention, training, development and support and kinship.

Numbers of Foster Carers:

As at the end of March 2019, there were 290 foster carer households currently registered, including 39 Regulation 24/25 carers and 10 Foster to Adopt carers.

Type	No. of households
Task Centred including Respite	141
Parent and Child/Task Centred	13
CWD Short Break Carers	2
Placement Plus	11
Permanence only	22
Permanence/Task Centred	45
Emergency	5
Remand	2
Family/Friend (Regulation 24/25)	39
Foster to Adopt	10

During the period 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019, there were 75 new fostering households approved, including 17 Foster to Adopt carers and 30 Regulation 24/25 carers. The 28 new mainstream carers provided up to 58 new placements as follows:

Approved places	No. of households
1 child	6
2 children	14
3 children	8

During the period 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019, 33 mainstream households ceased fostering, due to the following reasons:

Reason	No. of households
Change in employment	2
Family circumstances changed	11
Health reasons	4
Moved to an IFA	3
Retired	2
Carers no longer considered suitable	1
Child reached 18	1
Moved out of area	2
Dissatisfaction with service	1
At carers' request	5
SGO for child previously in mainstream placement	1

In addition, 48 Regulation 24/25 carers were deregistered; the majority of which were due to Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) being granted.

The recruitment of foster carers is a national challenge with Fostering Network predicting a shortage of 9000 fostering families to meet the needs of children across the country. Despite this, Lincolnshire remains committed and proactive in recruiting foster carers. The Council has invested in a retention payment in recognition of the dedication of carers in supporting our most vulnerable young people with complex needs. Coupled with investment in Caring2Learn and bespoke support packages.

The loss of existing carers at first glance could appear a worry. However, apart from 3 foster carer households who moved to an independent fostering agency the rest were for personal reasons and the deregistration of 48 Reg 24/25 carers is a cause for celebration, as it means these children have been afforded legal stability and security with a family member.

A further success story is the number of young people who remain with their foster carers post 18 in a Staying Put arrangement, at year end there were 49 young people benefitting from this

support.

In Lincolnshire, there is a very active independent fostering market place and the service is very alive to the issues this may bring. In response to these challenges, we have reviewed our recruitment approach to 'cherish every contact' and promote Lincolnshire as the fostering agency of choice.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the needs of the children and young people who require looking after are more complicated and complex and we are seeing a shift in the number of young people who require a residential resource in the first instance. The development of the LAC Strategy over 2019 will support a range of placement options and assist in providing the right match, at the right time for the young person.

Role of Fostering Service

Lincolnshire County Council's Fostering Service provides a range of short term and permanent placements with foster carers who have a diverse range of skills and experience. Foster carers provide family based services ranging from weekend respite to supporting birth parents and carers, preparing a child for adoption, or providing a longer term placement that will see a child through to independence. There continues to be a high number of family members or friends who come forward for assessment within care proceedings.

These "kinship" carers play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust, if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents. Kinship carers are afforded the same remuneration, training and support as agency foster carers and are critical to achieving positive outcomes for children. In 2018/19 such placements have continued to be the preferred choice for most children entering care, including those who previously would have had a plan for adoption.

The service continues to offer a trained group of foster carers to provide assessment placements to parents and children, usually babies. These placements focus on a parent's capacity to meet the needs and safeguard the infant, and the foster carers are vital in assisting and supporting, often young parents, to develop basic parenting skills. Additionally, the service offers a range of additional specialist placements that provide for those harder to place young people, as well as emergency and remand placements.

The profile of children who are looked after shows that, the percentage of those under the age of 5 has remained consistent at 24%. At the other end of the age profile, there has been a continued increase in the number of young people looked after aged 12+ and, as a result of Government policy regarding vulnerable and homeless young people, those on remand, and an increase in the number of unaccompanied children, the 16/17 age group now constitutes 23% of Looked After Children, of which 52% are in foster placements. This group is increasingly more complex and presents a significant challenge to carers who manage them. At the same time, the growth in the number of looked after children aged 16 and 17, has seen an increase in the numbers who transition into leaving care services each year and have resulted in an increase in those young people remaining in staying put arrangements post 18 which supports and promotes better life chances and outcomes for young people.

In 2018/19 Lincolnshire has referred children to external fostering agencies but only 3

placements have been made available. The year-end figure of 16 was 2.5% of the total looked after population. The Local Authority has developed an effective commissioning relationship with providers within county and beyond, and regularly reviews quality and cost. The balance between the volume of internal and external provision has maintained the Local Authority within the CIPFA benchmarking group as one of the top performing in terms of children placed with internal carers, and one of the most cost effective in respect of the weekly cost of a Looked after Child with Lincolnshire at £780, as opposed to £971 for average authorities(CIPFA Benchmarking report 2017/18).

Activity and Performance 2018-19



Foster Carer Recruitment

The Recruitment Team comprises of 1 Practice Supervisor, 3 Supervising Social Workers, 1 Marketing and Recruitment Officer, 1 Marketing and Recruitment Assistant, and 2 Recruitment Coordinators. In addition, the duty officers undertake the majority of initial visits to prospective foster carers. The Recruitment Coordinators undertake all the business support tasks associated with Stage 1 of the fostering process and process initial enquires regarding adoption, and the base for this activity is in one location. This continues to enable better oversight of the work coming into the team.

Having a dedicated Recruitment and Retention Team ensures that the recruitment and retention of foster carers for and within Lincolnshire County Council remains a key priority. The team is fully integrated within the main fostering service and is able to respond in a timely manner to the changing needs of the service. The Marketing Officer role is to conceive imaginative, thought provoking and evidence based campaigns to recruit more foster carers and adopters. The 3 SSW's undertake the majority of the Form F Assessments across the county and work to a 6 month target for completion of assessments. This ensures that the assessment of potential foster carers is a priority and enables the mainstream SSW's to focus on supporting approved foster carers, contributing to the retention of those carers and ensuring their needs are being met. The recruitment SSW's oversee and co-deliver the 3 day preparation to foster course for potential foster carers and their children.

Recruitment Activity

From 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019, a total of 233 initial expressions of interest (IEI's) forms

were received for fostering, of which, 107 home visits were undertaken. Reasons for not progressing to a home visit include the applicant not having understood the fostering role and recognising that it is not paid employment, the applicant not being suitable to foster, safeguarding concerns or lack of a spare bedroom for fostering and comparing LCC with private agencies. We do know that employment across the UK continues to rise and is at its highest record of 76.1% (ONS, May 2019). Nationally this is having a real impact on recruiting foster carers in the public sector. Private and voluntary fostering agencies had up until recently fared better, however over the past 12 months they too have struggled to recruit and The Fostering Network now state that there is a shortfall of some 9000 foster carers.

Of the 107 initial visits, 40 (37.3) converted to a Registration of Interest (ROI), it is at this stage that Statutory Checks commence. It was at this point, 'Stage 1' that a further 12 applicants ended the process, reasons included safeguarding concerns, significant health issues, changes in personal circumstances including finance, pregnancy, work commitments and landlords refusing to support an application to foster. The remaining 28 were all approved as foster families. Approval rate from Initial Expression of Interest (IEI's) to approval for 2018/19 is 12% compared to our 2017/18 conversion rate of 5.5%, the national rate has consistently hovered around 9% and the East Midlands region around 6 -7%.

The main focus for recruitment this year has been our Information Evening Events. This has been built upon the success of previous year's campaigns. The number of people attending these events has proven to be much more successful than that of country shows and drop-in sessions, with an average of 16 people who are all genuinely interested in fostering attending each event, with a total of 51 IEIs being filled out at these events. The completion of IEI's at Information Events was an initiative started in quarter 1 of 2018 whereby those wishing to take 'the next step' towards fostering could complete an IEI and arrange an initial visit there and then maintaining the 'wanting to foster' momentum. This has continued throughout 2018/19 and has resulted in a significant reduction in time arranging initial visits compared to the process previously whereby details of those wishing to proceed would be given to the Recruitment Coordinator who would then spend time attempting to contact event attendees to arrange a visit.

Our fostering priorities remain permanency, sibling groups, teenagers and children with additional needs. These continue to be the main focus of our campaign by getting people to think about what fostering could bring to their lives. Imagery illustrates the priority needs groups with the tag lines:

"If you could give them love, imagine what they could give you!" (Siblings)

"If you could give him a smile, imagine what he could give you!" (Additional needs)

"If you could give her a future, imagine what she could give you!" (Teenagers)

"If you could give her laughter, imagine what she could give you!" (Permanence)

In October 2018 the service commenced with a separate and dedicated campaign to recruit carers specifically for permanence. To this end a 3 year Permanence Strategy has been developed, this is supported by an annual Permanency Operations Plan. Based on current need and using this to project future requirements the plan is to recruit 24 additional permanent households by 31st October 2022 equating to 8 per year. During 2018/19 a total of 12 permanent links were made involving 16 children/young people.

Innovations for 2018/19

Animation

A 3 minute bespoke animation was commissioned to explain the 2-stage fostering process in a fun, endearing and engaging graphical manner which is easy to understand. The idea being that an animation would keep the audience's attention at events better than a worker talking at them for 15 minutes. The animation has also been posted on the fostering website on 'The Fostering Journey' page and the Facebook page.

Facebook

On the 18th June 2018 the dedicated Fostering & Adoption Facebook page was launched. The page is managed by the fostering service's marketing team and is predominately being used as a marketing aid to recruit more foster carers and convey key messages including who can foster, why people should foster with their local authority, what support the service offers, good news stories, and to advertise information evenings etc.

Foster Carer Involvement and retention

In November 2018, the Fostering Service Annual Survey was launched. 92 surveys were completed and returned. This equates to 31.8% of Lincolnshire's fostering households, an increase from 2017 where just 69 households (23.8%) returned the survey. Analysis of the feedback included. Of the respondees:

- 64.1% of households rate the communication to them from the service as good or excellent. This is an increase from the 2017 survey when 50.7% rated communication as good or excellent. However comments such as " *We feel we have had good communication from our SSW, this is not the case for the children's SWs and I would rate this as a 1*" and "*lack of communication between SSW and child SW*" are common themes across both the 2017/18 surveys.

When asked "*how satisfied are you with your SSW*" 88% responded with good or excellent compared with 77% in 2017. Comments included:- "*The SSW is excellent. She listens to any concerns or problems plus she cares.*", "*I feel very blessed to have a SSW who is so diligent and professional and caring*" and "*We feel we are supported exceptionally well by our SSW. She has stepped in to help on a number of occasions in the last year specifically in negotiating with other SWs.*"

Areas requiring improvement include: "*I would score the SSW as a 4 but seems to be covering 2 people's jobs due to absence hence the service feels like a tick box exercise. Only has time to make 1 or 2 attempts to get a response from the child's SW and if no response we get told there is nothing more that can be done. The periods of full staffing appear to be few and far between. All credit for not caving in under pressure due to lack of staff.*" And "*I have had almost yearly changes of SSW and when first allocated don't seem to acknowledge my previous experience*".

- When asked "*Do you feel that your SSW values your opinion regarding your foster child(ren)*"? an overwhelming 95.6% states "Yes".

Comments included: *"Yes I feel listened to and understood. My SSW is always able to grasp what I'm struggling with and empathises."* And *"One can always tell sincerity. She values my age and experience of birth children, adopted and foster children but she is not afraid to correct me if I'm going wrong."*

- When asked *"How do you feel the service prepared you for having children placed in your home"*? In 2017 30.6% felt that the service could do better in preparing carers for having children placed in their home. In 2018 this dropped to 23.9% it is acknowledged that although better it remains too high. Feedback from carers included: *"Some children placed we don't get enough information and on one occasion I waited weeks."* *"There is still a culture of not sharing all the available information about each case."*

The Service has taken this feedback into consideration and is developing a coordinated response to address the concerns.

Placement Support Workers

There are a total of 8 Placement Support Workers, 4 part-time and 4 full-time working hours to meet individual need across North and South of the county. Their role being to support the Fostering Service in providing a family placement for young people, promote placement stability in an aim to support young people to achieve their maximum potential and support foster carers in areas where there is identified need and be a part of care planning.

Placement Support Workers have a wealth of practice experience, knowledge, skills and are trained in areas such as Social Pedagogy, Theraplay, Therapeutic Parenting Skills, Solihull, Supporting Parents of Teenagers (SPOT) and Triple P Parenting Programmes, Youth work and Attachment. Working closely with Children's Teams, foster carers, children and young people the service continues to target and provide timely support in an aim to promote placement stability and care planning which encompasses children and young people's voices.

Over the last year Placement Support Workers have developed a programme of work to meet identified training needs and equip foster carers with therapeutic skills to support children and young people and placement stability. A Therapeutic Parenting Skills course has been rolled out to small groups of foster carers to gain further understanding of trauma and the impact which this can have on children and providing knowledge and skills around therapeutic skills training. The course is interactive and looks at tools such as PACE, therapeutic games, practical real life strategies when caring for children with attachment difficulties, compassion fatigue and blocked care and the differences which therapeutic parenting can make to the child and their caregiver.

We have Placement Support Workers trained in Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Programme. One of the important distinctive factors of the Non Violent Resistance Programme is the focus on therapeutic support and psycho-educational intervention which involves the carers only, without the necessity to work directly with the child. The aim of this programme is to empower and support carers preventing and responding to the controlling and aggressive behaviour of children and teenagers.

Three more Placement Support Workers have been trained in Theraplay (Level 1) over the last

year. We are now in the planning stages and putting together a programme of work to be able to deliver Group Theraplay to both children, young people (including teenagers) and their carers to develop relationships, support carers to understand and manage complex behaviours and support the children, young people and their stability.

Placement Stability

Placement stability continues to be a critical factor in offering an effective Fostering Service, and is crucial to ensuring that the Local Authority delivers good outcomes for each Looked After Child. Recruitment activity seeks to improve placement choice at the point of admission to care and the engagement of early help and skilling up of placement support workers seek to offer improved levels of support to sustain placements. Stability is measured by 2 national indicators, NI062 relating to children who experience 3 placement moves within 12 months, and NI063 which relates to children looked after for 2½ years who have been in the same placement for 2 years.

The national indicator NI062 reported 7% at year end. This figure suggests that Children Looked After in Lincolnshire, have a high level of placement stability from the point of coming into care. This is significant in achieving long term positive outcomes. However, the complexity of children requiring placement and reduced placement options have had an impact on the indicator, and is likely to remain a challenge. Over recent years there has been considerable focus on supporting foster carers to maintain placements, and perhaps as a consequence, the NI063 placement stability figure has shown only a small deterioration with a year end figure reported as 67.8%, this is good performance compared nationally. We will continue to place an emphasis on supporting foster carers to promote sustained placement stability. However, we have seen an increase in the number of children subject to care orders with plans for long term fostering and we continue to experience the occasional unplanned ending of seemingly stable placements. We know that recruitment of permanent foster carers remains a challenge and will need to carefully track these individual children to ensure that all possible family finding activity is undertaken.

Family Lincs Care

There are currently two foster carer households within the Family Lincs short term breaks scheme. The service is currently accessed by three children and young people who require respite placements to support their home based care. Of these children/young people one has a physical disability.

The majority of the referrals have historically been generated from the south of the county, with all carers being well positioned to accommodate local respite requests. Three children have been referred via the CWD panel this year. The service acknowledges the decline in demand which appears to relate to direct payments, offering more choice of care options closer to home for Lincolnshire families.

Family Lincs carers offer an annual total of 208 units of care with capacity to offer additional units dependent on demand, each unit totals 8 hours of care. This continues to meet the demand for the service, but does allow some flexibility by offering additional units where required. Moreover, where foster carers have spare capacity these units are used to accommodate other children requiring respite. Despite active recruitment in 2018, no additional

carers have made application for the scheme.

In addition to the defined Family Lincs scheme, the service offers a range of other long term and respite placements for children with disabilities.

Parent and Child placements

Parent and child placements continue to be a positive option for Courts, currently there are 13 carers who are approved to offer parent and child placements. In 2018/19 we received 19 requests for placements. Of these 19 requests 12 were met via in house provision, with 8 placements used, 2 are awaiting placement of parent and child, 1 child was placed with family members and 1 request changed to a child only request.

The outcomes of the 8 in-house placements that were completed during the year have varied. 4 have had outcomes where baby and parents returned to the community with the remaining 4 moving to task centred placements, 2 as a result of the parent leaving the placement.

Demand for placements continues to be varied and has proven hard to predict. As a result, across the year, 7 additional placements have been commissioned from independent providers. A clear issue that continues to arise is the expectation of courts and guardians that the placements continue until the final hearing, even though the assessment is planned for 12 weeks; with an expectation at the planning stage that an exit plan is in place for the end of 12 weeks. 4 placements provided have been made for over the 12 weeks with one placement lasting 34 weeks. As placements continue for longer, this continues to have an obvious effect on the availability of carers for new placements.

The service continues to address this trend with legal representatives, with a view to timetabling a case discussion at the end of the assessment

Staying Put

The 'Staying Put' initiative in Lincolnshire is in its tenth year. It has, since its inception, enabled a total of 131 young people to remain with their previous foster carers.

Staying Put arrangements provide the young person with stability at a key stage of their life remaining until their 21st birthday. On-going support and training for carers is provided by the Fostering Service, with the young people having their own designated Personal Advisor from Barnardo's Leaving Care Service.

To further support young people in their transition to adulthood if they are ready to move on before their 21st birthday or for those who join the armed forces, each young person is given a three month window in which they are supported by their carer. For those young people who attend university and live away; carers receive a retainer in recognition of the on-going support they provide, and to enable the young person to return during holidays and continue life within their family setting.

Lincolnshire's Staying Put Service has developed and grown over the past two years with the number of Staying Put arrangements increasing from 44 young people at the end of March 2018 to 49 young people living in a Staying Put arrangement at the end of March 2019. Of these, 36

were in full time further education with 4 attending university. The remainder were in Employment, on Work Experience Placements or Apprenticeships; with 2 of these on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme.

The Staying Put offer in Lincolnshire positively reflects the current guidelines and best practice from Fostering Network. Signs of Safety is embedded in the referral forms, licence agreement and annual review forms which were used across the scheme. By further embedding Signs of Safety and introducing Social Pedagogy into practice the Staying Put Scheme will continue to develop ensuring the best outcomes are achieved for our young people and care leavers.

Permanence

The Family Finding group considers all children with a care plan of permanence/long term foster care and has considered 31 children since April 2018. This number included seven sibling sets of two and one sibling set of three.

Out of the 31 children, permanent foster placements were identified for 18. This included 6 sets of siblings and 8 remaining with existing task centred carers and the remaining 10 moving to newly identified carers.

A further five out of the 31 children moved to a residential placement; 2 moved to an IFA and a further three had a change of care plan.

In addition to this there have been 18 children linked at Permanence Panel with their existing foster families – this includes five sets of siblings.

The new Family Finding procedure was launched in July 2018 and from this date all new referrals are received through Mosaic, with the child's social worker attending the initial Family Finding meeting to provide in depth information about the child and his or her background and needs and to consider any potential matches.

Work has been undertaken to update all of the children's profiles, with more relevant and focused information and a brighter, more engaging appearance. These profiles are shared with all Supervising Social Workers across both North and South Fostering Teams and have been shared with existing foster carers.

The Family Finding lead social workers for North and South Fostering Teams are attending the Foster Carers Support Groups to promote permanence and answer any queries.

In October 2018 a new Permanence campaign was launched, aimed at recruiting eight new permanent fostering families. This has included advertising in local press, radio and social media and has generated significant interest- with some posts on Facebook receiving thousands of views.

Over the year four new fostering families have been approved for permanence and a further five are currently undergoing assessment. Alongside this six existing task centred carers have changed their approval to permanence.

A special Permanence Event was held in March 2019 at The Dower House Hotel in Woodhall Spa – the majority of existing foster carers were invited to this event to hear about the role of a

permanent foster carer and the support that is provided as well as having the opportunity to receive information about children currently on Family Finders and talk with their respective social workers, who were also present.

Support for permanent foster carers has been reviewed and includes a bespoke preparation course (which includes the sharing of suitably anonymised profiles), an enhanced rate for children waiting for a permanent placement longer than six months, specific and/or tailored training, including access to training provided by post adoption support, support from Placement Support Workers trained in Theraplay and Therapeutic parenting and a minimum of 14 nights respite per year.

The Family Finders Review panel continues to meet regularly to consider children where no options have been identified within a three month period. Overall, it has been a successful year for Family Finders with all but two of the 31 children considered during the year having an appropriate placement identified.

Kinship Service

Since 2015 there has been 6 FTE Supervising Social Workers dedicated to undertake Kinship Assessments. In the early part of the year, there was a decrease in the volume of referrals. However, the trend was not sustained and the latter part of the year saw an upturn. At year end, the volume of assessments is at 15%.

The placement of a child within their family and friends network offers a positive alternative for many children enabling them to maintain the links with family and friends and a continued sense of their identity and culture but can also bring with it practice issues in terms of supporting family members to fully understand their role as 'connected person carers' and the expectations of this role.

The picture below for the year records the number of referrals and reflects the ongoing national picture in terms of the area of service increase in terms of assessments.

Overview of the Year 1 –April 2018 to 31-March 2019

Number of Referrals	SGO	Reg.24 to SGO	Reg.24	Private Fostering
152	62	24	41	25

Of the above figures:

- SGO – 8 applicants withdrew/ did not progress due to alternative SGO assessment placement ended for varying reasons
- SGO – 12 are still in process
- SGO – 2 were negative assessments and the children were not placed
- SGO – 1 case, Court granted a Child Arrangement Order

- SGO – 38 were reference and checks completed by Fostering Service as child not LAC
- SGO – 1 positive but remained at home

Where children were placed but with a likely plan to progress to SGO

- SGO/Reg.24 – 8 SGO granted
- SGO/Reg.24 – 7 are still in process
- SGO/Reg.24 – 9 where child was moved or other Order granted
- Reg.24 – 14 Carers Approved at panel
- Reg.24 – 8 children were moved
- Reg.24 – 14 Not yet attended panel
- Reg.24 – 1 carer granted Child Arrangement Order
- Reg.24 – 4 Returned home

The service has continued to offer the specific initial preparation course for both Regulation 24 carers and Special Guardianship applicants, with three having taken place in 2018/19 with consistency in terms of numbers attending. It is a positive initial step to engage families and also connected person carers continue to be invited to the recent county focus groups and foster carers social events.

Fostering Panel

Report from the Independent Chair of Fostering Panel and Agency Panel Advisor

The Fostering Panel is established and acts in accordance with the regulatory framework provided by The Fostering Service Regulations 2011, Family and Friends Care, Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011, and the Standards set out in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. The Foster Panel takes account of the legislation set out in The Children Act 1989, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Guidance, volume 2, 2010.

The Fostering Panel has the responsibility for making recommendations in relation to:

- The approval of foster carers both short/task centred and long term/permanent foster carers;
- The approval of family members or friends as "connected person" carers for children who are looked after by Lincolnshire County Council, and connected to the applicant as a family member or friend;
- The first annual review of all foster carers and connected persons carers;
- Reviews of carers where there have been serious issues such as Child Protection
- Investigations; or
- Reviews of carers where there are concerns regarding their fostering practice and their suitability.

The current membership of the Panel is as follows:

- Sue Tribe, Independent Panel Chair

- Sharon King, Vice Chair
- Ruth Dewick, Vice Chair
- Dennis Clarke, Independent Member
- Georgina Sharma, Independent Member
- Janet Morris, Independent Member
- Russell Petit, Independent Member
- April Harrison, Independent Member
- Laura Dodd, Independent Member
- Paula Bexon, Social Work Representative
- Michelle Maxfield, Social Work Representative
- Malcolm Rebello, Social Work Representative
- Joanne Stares, Social Work Representative
- Michaela Berry, Social Work Representative
- Panel Advisor and Administrator in attendance at each panel

Currently both vice chairs are independent of the Fostering Agency.

The Panel Advisor is responsible for the volume and cost of panel business, in particular the capacity to ensure that connected person cases can be heard within 16 weeks of placement. She ensures that the central list is maintained and updated to allow for all panels to be quorate. There continues to be two Fostering Panels each month.

The Panel in conjunction with the agency identified an opportunity for improvement with the process surrounding Kinship Regulation 24 assessments in 2018 and subsequently reviewed the process in line with the guidance to gain a more integrated approach which would further embed the Signs of Safety model and assist with the trajectory of each case with colleagues in FAST Teams and LAC.

The key area that was reviewed was specifically the Viability Assessments that are completed this encompassed:

- Immediate Placement Screening Requirements before a child is placed,
- Viability Assessments and the Kinship Assessment.

The rationale for this piece of work was to ensure that key regulations and standards required of "Foster Carers" were clearly embedded in the assessment tools and that there was a clearer succinct assessment that could meet the 16 week timescales. These assessments are presented to the Fostering Panel in conjunction with FAST workers as well as the other key material.

The Panel receives medical advice within the Social Workers' reports, and this is considered within the assessments. Legal Services provide advice as required, in order to assist in the Panel's decision making.

Workload of the Panel

The Foster Panel has met on 22 occasions this year.

Panel recommended for approval the following households:

APPROVAL	2018	2017	2016	2015
Task Centred/Respite	27	13	20	29
Reg 24/25	33	39	39	47
Permanent Foster Carers	2	1	10	17
Change of Approval	7	0	5	7
Permanence Link	10	10	11	25
Reviews	22	17	35	45
Total	101	80	120	170

Review Breakdowns:

REVIEW	2018	2017	2016	2015
Task Centred	12	9	19	20
Respite		0	0	3
Remand		0	1	1
Reg 24/25	9	3	12	16
Permanent Fostering		4	2	1
Allegation	1	1	1	3

Feedback and Quality Assurance

Panel actively seeks feedback from all participants via a feedback form. The Panel Advisor has reviewed the feedback information from those attending Panel utilizing a scaling system. This system has been in operation since November 2015 and is rated out of 10, the average feedback on Fostering Panel achieving 9/10.

The reports for Panel are signed as being suitable to present at Panel by the Practice Supervisor, for the worker to ensure suitable quality standards are achieved.

The Chair to the Foster Panel has continued to work closely with the Panel Advisor and the two Team Managers. This has been further strengthened with engagement with members of the Practice Supervisor Group, who are the first line supervisors of staff. These Feedback sessions take place on a six monthly basis and produce an action plan based on the Signs of Safety model. This has enabled both the agency and the Panel to review any areas for development.

The quality of reports presented to Panel continue to be of a good standard, and this has been assisted by the Panel Advisor actively engaging with the Fostering and Looked After Teams, to

reiterate the need for sound, evidence based assessments. There is clear evidence of the Signs of Safety Model, and this works well with how the Panel is structured. The Panel Members have all been trained in the use of Signs of Safety, and utilise this model in their approach to cases.

The child's voice at Panel is actively encouraged, in particular children attending Panel, particularly in permanent link cases. There has been a clear increase in the participation of children at panel and the Social Workers and foster carers have been very creative in how young people are supported to present their wishes and feelings to the Panel. Examples have included art work, Signs of Safety tools, power point presentations of the young person's experiences in foster care. These experiences shared by children and young people continue to be a very powerful reminder for all about the difference that fostering can make for young people in terms of their sense of belonging, their participation, their identity and ultimately providing many young people with a safe place to live and thrive in.

The Panel is also mindful of the training standards and development, and is actively monitoring the activity around training, and wish to have evidence at the first annual review of the TSD portfolio to ensure these are met within the required timescales.

Foster Carer Continuous Development

The Fostering Service produces an annual learning and development programme to include practical and e-learning opportunities and continue to provide foster carers with a calendar of training events, and e-learning opportunities which are accessed through the LSCB website. Lincolnshire continues to review and develop the training opportunities provided to foster carers to ensure that the training they access reflects the changing needs of Looked After Children. Last year all of the face to face training apart from the Foster Carer induction course was outsourced, initial feedback has been positive. This is measured by the feedback sheets and discussions with SSW in Supervision. New courses that were added included PTSD in children, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Autism and ADHD; these courses are being delivered by Able training, Singletons, TACT, Public Health and Breaking the Cycle. The caring2learn programme has significantly enhanced the training offer and course take up in 2018/19.

The following identifies the number of carers who have undertaken any form of training this year.

Number of carers attended face to face	279
Number of carers completed e-learning	152
Number of carers attending Induction course	20 -2 courses held

The Foster Carer induction course was reviewed and is now delivered as a one day event. The first course took place on the 25th September with ten carers attending, the feedback was positive, and by using the SOS format we were able to engage in the discussions and questions.

Caring2learn

The project has become more embedded within the fostering service this year and focuses on 3 key areas;

Developing a locality based support network for foster and residential carers, designated teachers and education professionals and bringing them together sharing good practice and information on how best to support the education of children and young people in care.

Creating and recruiting to the role of 60 Education Champions, made up of foster carers, residential carers and designated teachers. Their role is to provide peer support and challenge as part of the support network to advocate and support good practice in the area of learning both in formal education settings and the home.

- 1. The developments of the Caring2Learn Award for Learning Homes and Caring Schools, which will assess, celebrate and drive good practice for Lincolnshire Looked after children.**

The toolkits for the Caring2Learn award are complete for both schools and Carers. Engagement from Foster Carers continues to grow in regards to participation in the events and accessing the growing hub. The engagement from the Fostering community is currently 47% of homes. 17 homes have already completed their Learning Homes toolkit. Another 20 Learning Homes submissions as a minimum are expected by July 2019. There are currently 20 Foster Carer Education Champions.

The development of the toolkit to incorporate the fostering TSD is well underway; this will support the development of the Preparation course, induction for carers and overall training offer. All new carers will develop their Learning Homes whilst meeting the standards set out nationally; this will also provide a portfolio of personal and professional development as the award will need to be reviewed every 3 years. Initial feedback on the combined toolkit is very positive.

Foster Carer Education Champions continue to be included and integrated into children's Service forums such as the Partners in Practice briefings, operational champions groups, DT Cluster Groups, Champion forums and Early Help team meetings with great success.

Caring2Learn Champions within children's Service areas have started to develop with representatives from Fostering Teams, the Virtual School and Early Help. The plan over the next 6 months is to extend this and involve other teams such as LAC and FAST.

The Caring2Learn project is working with the Fostering team to establish a "hub" approach where Foster Carers can support others, access support and share good practice. Foster Carer Education Champions will help form, maintain and support these groups with a designated SSW.

As the demand for Foster Carers Champions participation in various areas has developed the group of 20 champions have been divided into 3 key groups with clear roles and responsibilities. Champion groups were informed with a detailed skills audit and the wishes and development needs of the champions in place. These groups will be used to formulate and support the future Caring2learn offer.

Supportive superstars

Supportive Superstars began in July 2015 to recognise the key role that birth children play in fostering households and to thank them for their contribution to fostering. One of the aims of this

group was to support with the retention of foster carers and improve the stability of looked after children's placements.

Over the past year there has been an average of 30 children who have attended the activity days. There has been an emphasis to encourage more South children to become part of the Supportive Superstars group. There were 5 new children from the South of Lincolnshire that attended the most recent event in the Easter holidays. Those that attend are birth children, adopted children and those that are subject to a Special Guardianship Order. They come from a variety of fostering households, including task centred, permanent or kinship.

The group meets three times a year, either facilitated together as one large group or separate to the North and South of the county. The group enables the children to socialise with other children who are from fostering households and to discuss their experiences within a safe environment. There are fun activities to support with the children's self-esteem, confidence and social skills. There are also activities related to fostering, which allows them to have their voice heard. The children have been nominated for a FAB award and invited to attend the awards ceremony in June 2019.

Complaints, Appeals and Representations

In the last year the Fostering Service has received five complaints directly to the service. Four of the complaints were partially substantiated and one was not upheld. One of the complaints was raised by carers in relation to the management of the allegation and the learning from this relates to the importance of communication. The importance of communication and sharing detail was cited in a further complaint and serves to reiterate the importance of sharing assessment outcomes in a timely fashion. The remaining two were in relation to service decisions and recommendations where the carers were not in agreement with the service about interventions and the workers approach.

The low level representations and concerns were promptly dealt with in the service and satisfactorily resolved. In 2018/2019 there were no matters referred to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The themes from complaints and representations have been discussed and reflected upon during professional supervision sessions, practice development workshops and team development days, in an effort to constantly review and improve our service to children, families and fostering households. Additionally, the procedures have been revised to reflect the necessary changes, in a continued effort to provide a high quality service and promote improvements where possible. The service have invested heavily in Restorative Practice where the principles, behaviours and approaches aid to strengthen relationships and support carer's in developing their knowledge and skills in their complex and demanding roles. The continued implementation of Signs of Safety has also served to readily identify and evaluate good working practices on what is working well within the service, together with identifying what needs to happen in terms of individual placements; as well as the service as a whole moving forward.

Quality of care

Foster placements are supervised on a bi-monthly basis by Supervising Social Workers. Support visits are also completed bi-monthly which means that foster carers are seen at a minimum,

every other month by their supervising social worker. Their intervention seeks to challenge and develop foster carers and ensure that the quality of care meets each individual child's needs. All foster homes are subject to a minimum of 1 unannounced visit per annum and the foster carer status is reviewed annually. Team Managers and Practice Supervisors each complete a sample of annual reviews to ensure there is an independent overview. As part of the annual review, the views of children placed and their Social Workers are sought to evidence what is working well and what needs to happen to achieve consistent care.

Children and young people are consulted about the suitability of their placements with the **Tell Us** surveys; this also offers the opportunity for children to offer views about their foster carers.

In 2018/19 of the survey of 8 to 11 year olds:

- 88% of those who completed the survey say that they are happy where they live'
- 100% said that they were supported by their foster carers to make good choices,
- 98% feel they are encouraged to learn and do well.

Of 5 to 7 year olds:

- 80% of children who completed the survey like where they live
- 20% feel it is Okay.

Forward Plan 2019/20

Retention Payments

Following agreement to the funding of retention payments for mainstream foster carers, the service will agree the criteria for payments to be made for implementation by end March 2020.

Caring2learn

The service will seek to embed the Caring2Learn approach to incorporate training, group supervision and carer support groups. The role of the foster care champions will be further developed and champions will be trained in training the trainer's techniques.

Foster Care training

The offer to foster carers will be fully reviewed in line with the development of caring 2 learn agenda. Preparatory training will be integrated into a caring 2 learn approach.

The Training, Support and Development standards (TSD) will be mapped against the caring home's workbook to develop a fully integrated model of training and development for the first year of a foster carer's career.

IFAB

The service will introduce a separate panel body FAB, to provide independent evaluation of foster carer reviews for those who have completed 4,7 and 10 years. It is anticipated that this will begin in July 2019.

Develop LAC Strategy

The development of the LAC Strategy over 2019 will support a range of placement options and assist in providing the right match at the right time for the young person.

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