

A close-up photograph of three children smiling. In the center is a young boy with brown hair, wearing a light blue zip-up hoodie and sunglasses perched on his head. To his left is a girl with dark hair, partially visible. To his right is a girl with long brown hair, smiling. The background is a bright, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Lincolnshire Fostering Service Annual Report

April 2019 - March 2020

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 2019/20, the number of children in care has remained steady with an end of year figure of 626, representing a 2.2% increase over that of the previous year. Of the 626, 473 were placed in either foster care or are in pre-adoptive placements; this comprises 75.5% of the population. This continues to be a strong performance and compares favorably with statistical neighbours and all England reporting. Of these, 27 children placed in externally commissioned foster placements. Of these, 4 are unaccompanied migrant children aged between 15 and 18. The figures also reflect a high number of children in care living with kinship carers, comprising 19% of the total looked after population.

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 2020, there were 280 foster carer households currently registered, including 43 Regulation 24/25 carers and 5 Foster to Adopt carers.

Type	No. of households
Task Centred including Respite	136
Parent and Child/Task Centred	12
CWD Short Break Carers	2
Placement Plus	11
Permanence only	19
Permanence/Task Centred	47
Emergency	3
Remand	2
Family/Friend (Regulation 24/25)	43
Foster to Adopt	5

During the period 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020 there were 69 new fostering households approved, including 8 Foster to Adopt carers and 45 Regulation 24/25 carers. The 16 new mainstream carers provided up to 32 new placements as follows:

Approved places	No. of households
1 child	4
2 children	8
3 children	4

During the period 1 April 2019 - 31 March 20, 25 mainstream households ceased fostering, due to the following reasons:

Reason	No. of households
Change in employment	2
Family circumstances changed	10
Health reasons	4
Moved to an IFA	2
Retired	2
Child reached 18	1
Dissatisfaction with service	1
Carer died	3

In addition, 40 Regulation 24/25 carers were deregistered; 17 of these converted to SGO's and 7 were related to the child moving to independence.

The recruitment of foster carers is both a local and a national challenge with Fostering Network predicting a shortage of 8500 fostering families to meet the needs of children across the country. We have sadly seen a decline in approvals this year and that appears to be mirrored across the East Midlands region and reflects the competitive market place and high levels of employment. 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 continues to be of concern and reflects the demographics of the foster carer population. The service continues to identify extended family members as carers and this has enabled children to remain within their family networks and local communities.

In Lincolnshire, there is a very active independent fostering market place and the service is very alive to the issues this may bring. We have seen an increase in the number of requests for references relating to residents of Lincolnshire from these Agencies and know from initial visits, that people are weighing up the offers from different agencies before making their application. The recruitment and retention strategy reflects this dynamic and endeavors to ensure that our "offer" remains attractive.

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.

- a) 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 demand within the court arena for such placements has increased over the year following legal precedent re GR (children) 2019 which stated that Separation will only be granted if the child's safety demands immediate separation.

The profile of children in care shows that, the percentage of those under the age of 5 has remained consistent at 23.5%. At the other end of the age profile, there has been a continued increase in the number of young people looked after aged 16/17 and they now constitute 22% of Children in Care. There is a reducing number of this age group in foster placements. Of these the number which continue to reside in staying put placements continues to increase. At the same time, the growth in the number of children aged 16 and 17, has resulted in an increase in the numbers who transition into leaving care services each year and a proportionate increase in those young people remaining in staying put arrangements post 18. At year end these numbered 55.

In 2019/20 there has been a significant increase in the number of children referred to independent placements. For 2 of these, the service had been unable to identify a long term foster placement and as a means of providing the children with stability, referrals were made to the independent sector. This is in line with the usual strategy that seeks to minimize the risk of children drifting. However, this year we have also had to refer some children as a result of lack of in house placements. This has been specifically in relation to large sibling groups where Courts have requested that they be placed together. In the last year 2 sibling groups of 4 and 1 of 3 have been placed. As a result the year end figure is 10 higher than at the end of 2019 and comprises 4% of the whole children in care population. The Local Authority has developed an effective commissioning relationship with providers within county and beyond, and regularly reviews quality and cost. Despite the increase, 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 £797, as opposed to £997 for average authorities (CIPFA Benchmarking report 2018/19).

Activity and Performance 2019-20



Foster Carer Recruitment

The Service has 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 have developed a revised preparation process with caring2learn for all prospective foster carers.

Recruitment Activity

From 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020:

- 239 Initial Expression of Interest forms (IEIs) were received for fostering
- 143 home visits were undertaken
- 48 Registration of Interest forms (ROIs) were received
- 16 households were newly approved to foster

Information Evenings

11 information evenings were held in total across the county throughout the year. These events resulted in 45 IEIs being completed, 7 of which (to date) have returned ROIs and have panel dates booked for the 2020/2021 financial year.


Facebook

The service has a dedicated Fostering & Adoption Facebook page. 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.

Advertising

The campaign for the 2019/2020 year continued from the previous year with adverts using imagery which depicts the priority needs groups for the service i.e. siblings, additional needs, teenagers, and permanence. The tag lines and images were refreshed for 2019/2020 as follows:

- *"If you could spark their creativity, imagine what they could give you!" (Siblings)*
- *"If you could give her joy, imagine*



give
give

**If you could brighten their day,
imagine what they could give you!**

Permanent fostering gives children, including siblings, a chance to be cared for long-term in a safe, stable, and loving family home for the rest of their childhood.

www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering
01522 554114



what she could give
you!" (Additional
needs)

- *"If you could
him guidance,
imagine what he could
give you!" (Teenagers)*
- *"If you could
brighten their day,
imagine what they
could give you!"
(Permanence)*

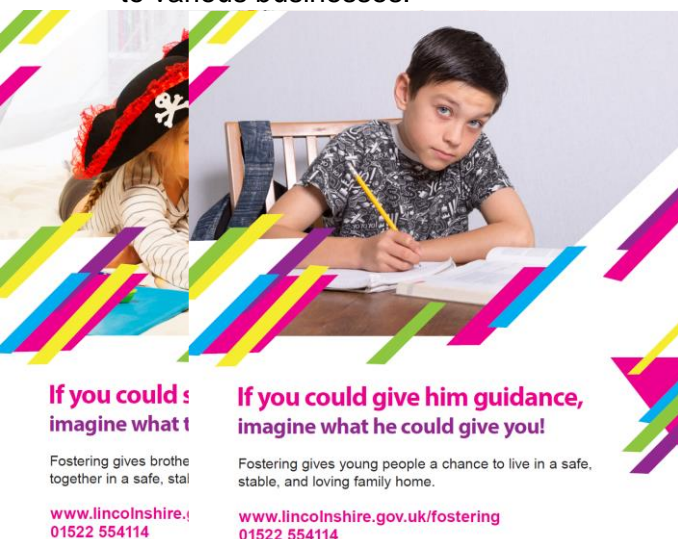
**If you could give her joy,
imagine what she could give you!**

Fostering gives children and young people with additional needs a chance to live in a safe, stable, and loving family home.

www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering
01522 554114



In addition to this, a series of posters advertising the need for respite foster carers, Parent and Child carers and Family Links carers were also produced and poster drops were carried out across the county to various businesses.



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Fostering gives brothe
together in a safe, stal

www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering
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**If you could give him guidance,
imagine what he could give you!**

Fostering gives young people a chance to live in a safe,
stable, and loving family home.

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01522 554114

Permanence Campaign

The Permanence Campaign continued this year as per the 3 year Permanence Strategy and Operation Plan produced in 2018/2019. This included advertising in the form of radio adverts, Facebook posts poster and leaflet drops to companies and organisations across the county, 10,000 leaflets distributed via a media partner attending county shows and adverts in various forms of local media including online, newspapers and magazines.

Foster Walk

On 15 June a team of 9 which comprised of fostering staff as well as foster carers, a former LAC, and a birth child of a foster carer took part in the Fostering Network's Foster Walk in London. The staff and foster families who took part raised

money for the Fostering Network prior to the walk and raised £442.72 in total. The idea behind taking part in this was the excellent publicity opportunity to promote fostering in a positive light as foster families and staff from multiple agencies across the country got together to celebrate and raise the profile of fostering.

Foster Carer Retention

As important, at a time when recruitment is particularly challenging, is the issue of retention. The service has invested heavily over recent years in providing foster carers with additional practical and theoretical support. But the innovation of caring2learn has developed a new approach to foster care support one that seeks to recognise their skills and provide them with a range of platforms which enable training to be delivered and for problem solving together. Underpinning the approach has been the recruitment of 22 sessional Foster Carer champions and the development of "hubs" which offer localized opportunities and enhance partnership working with local schools and childcare settings. In addition the facebook page has offered dynamic and creative support and solutions to foster carers and has over 300 participants. Caring2learn has been integrated into the all aspects of the fostering service and appears to be making a real difference to placement stability and foster carer satisfaction. The development of the champion role

has reinforced the key role of a foster carer and seeks to promote and validate their experience and skills. In many ways it has given foster carers a voice. The emphasis upon retention is a response to feedback from both surveys and exit interviews.

Foster carer feedback was actively sought via Focus groups and The Foster Care Survey.

In 2019, a total 120 surveys were completed; 96 were completed and returned by post and 24 were completed online.

Key themes:

72.7% of households rate the communication to them from the service as good or excellent. This is an increase from the previous two years.

Comments included:

- *Our SSW fantastic, very supportive, without the support would probably not be fostering and of course my own family support, finding respite placements has been a struggle too, especially in our area (Spalding)."*
- *"Communication from the business side is good".*

94.6% of households are satisfied or very satisfied with their SSW. The number of households who are satisfied or very satisfied with their SSW has continued to rise since 2017 when the figure was at 77.0%.

- *She is always available and responds promptly to texts/calls/emails. Dates are always in the diary so I know when we'll meet."*
- *"Always on time, flexible with appointments, very approachable."*
- *"Amy always cooperates and listens to me. Amy also lets me know in advance to any changes to her visits. Amy is a credit to her job with LCC."*

98.2% feel that their SSW does value their opinion regarding their foster children and feel that they are listened to, comments included:

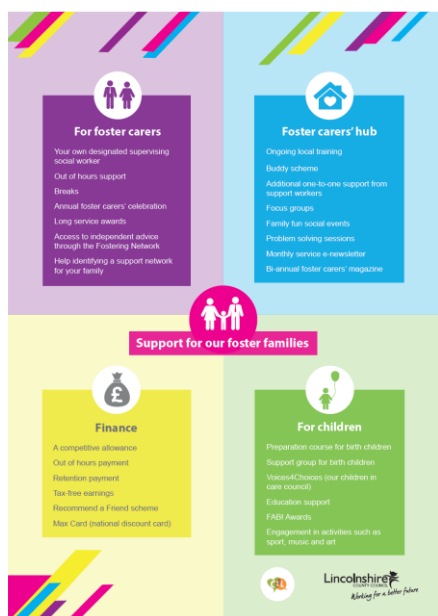
- *"Chloe always values my opinion and support me."*
- *"She listens, we discuss things and she raises any concerns we have with the relevant people."*
- *We always talk things through and come up with good strategies."*

The survey has also identified an inconsistency in the support by Children's Social workers. The service has as a result, shared the findings of the survey with all Social Care teams recognizing that we all have a part to play in supporting and sustaining foster carers.

Infographic

As part of the ongoing work with Caring2Learn considering the importance of foster carer retention, the Marketing Officer devised an infographic highlighting the support offered to our foster families. This is a graphically engaging way of selling our offer in a quick and easy to understand manner to prospective foster carers, as well as newly approved and existing carers.

It is put in the information pack which is sent out to enquirers over the phone / email and also given out at information events. It has also been sent to all existing foster carers as a reminder to the support we offer them.



Placement Support Workers

From foster carer feedback, the importance of the Placement Support Worker should not be underestimated in terms of placement stability and retention. The service has 7 Placement Support Workers, 3 part-time and 4 full-time working hours to meet individual need across North and South of the county.

Over the last two years Placement Support Workers have been working hard developing a programme of work to meet identified training needs and equip foster carers with therapeutic skills to support children, young people and placement stability. A Therapeutic Parenting Skills course has been rolled out to small groups of foster carers and on a 1:1 basis 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.

Four of the Placement Support Workers who are now trained in Theraplay (Level 1) receive clinical supervision on a monthly basis. Theraplay is an approach to child and family therapy that aims to address behavioural, emotional, or developmental issues and improve the carer-child relationship through play and healthy interaction through structured play therapy sessions for children and their foster carers. Its goal is to enhance attachment, self-esteem, trust in others, and joyful engagement. The sessions are designed to be fun, physical, personal, and interactive and replicate the natural, healthy interactions between parents, carers and young children. There remain plans in the future to roll out 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. The workers also deliver Non-Violent Resistance programmes, the aim of which is to empower & support carers preventing & responding to the controlling and aggressive behaviour of children and teenagers.

Over the last year Placement Support Workers have developed and delivered a 'Life Skills Course' to a group of young people with a plan of permanence aged between 13-17. Eight young people attended the group, six of whom had 100% attendance for all ten weekly sessions. Young people determined the issues that they felt would help them in their transition to independence, and a timetable of activities over sessions lasting two hours per session consisted of confidence building work, budgeting, cooking healthy meals, shopping, paying bills, using public transport, taking part in job interviews are just a few of the items on the agenda. The learning from this course has enabled the Placement Support Workers to now work towards planning and developing the next course and working collaboratively with the

sponsor 'Linc Higher' which were really pleased to hear about the successes of the course, to incorporate a 'Higher Education' element. The service will work with the Leaving Care service to develop a programme that can be delivered to a greater number young people across the County.

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 Child in care. The service has been developed and structured to promote stability and support to foster carers. 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 who have been in care 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 an achievement given the reduction in the number of foster carers and the difficulties in recruitment this year. However, the complexity of children requiring placement and reduced placement options have had an impact on the indicator, and this is likely to remain a challenge. Over recent years there has been considerable focus on supporting foster carers to maintain placements. Placement support workers have been trained to offer therapeutic interventions and caring2learn has developed champions and hub supports to all carers. Together they have supported an improvement in the NI063 placement stability figure with a year-end figure reported as 70.7%; this is good performance compared nationally.

Family Lincs Care

The provision of short term breaks in principle offers children and young people with disabilities experiences away from their primary carers to enhance their personal and social development. This serves to offer support whilst enabling parents/carers and families an opportunity to have a valuable break from their caring responsibilities.

The scheme continues to be serviced by two fostering households that provide regular short terms breaks to two young people. There are continued efforts to further recruit to the scheme and the service recognises the value to those that access these breaks. Those young people that access these breaks do so in an effort to support their home based care arrangements. Both of these children/young people have physical disabilities which are well catered for.

Family Lincs carers offer an annual total of 222 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. In the event that foster carers have spare capacity these units are used to accommodate other children requiring respite. Despite active recruitment in 2019, 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

As reported in last year's Fostering Service Annual Report parent and child placements continue to be a positive option for Courts, there are currently 12 carers who are approved to offer parent and child placements. In 2019/2020 we received 20 requests for placements. Of these 20 requests 6 placements

were found with LCC in house provision, 4 placements were identified with LCC in house carers but not used, and 10 requests could not be placed with LCC in house carers and went to IFA/relatives/refuge.

Demand for placements has increased over the year as a response to judicial guidelines re separation of new born babies from their parents however the trend remains difficult to predict. As a result there have been 6 requests made from independent providers. This includes two cases whereby the placement with LCC parent and child placement has ended and the courts have directed a further placement is identified. The placements often exceed the assessment period and can effectively block placements for the duration of the care proceedings. In 2020 the scheme will be subject to review.

Permanence

Between 1st April 2019 and the 31st March 2020, Family Finders has continued to meet on a monthly basis to consider children with a care plan of permanence and in need of a long term foster placement. Over the year 39 children have been considered, of these 29 were newly referred from 1st April 2019 onwards.

This is an increase of eight children from the previous year and included 11 sibling sets of two, and two sibling sets of three - the remainder being single children.

Out of the 39 children considered, long term foster placements were identified for 17, made up of five sibling sets of two, one sibling set of three and two single children. As in previous years, placements identified were a mixture of some children (7) remaining with their existing task-centred carers and the others (10) moving to newly identified carers.

A further 6 out of the 39 children moved to a residential placement and 1 child remained in his existing residential placement. Two children (a sibling group) moved to an independent foster placement and 2 children were removed from Family Finders due to a change in their care plan.

Over the course of the year 6 children have been linked at Permanence Panel, 5 of these children were linked with their existing foster families and 1 child was linked following a match identified from Family Finders.

All children referred to Family Finders continue to have profiles produced by the Marketing Officer in the Fostering Team and these are circulated on a monthly basis with all Supervising Social Workers in both North and South Fostering Teams to share with both existing and newly approved foster carers as appropriate. Anonymised profiles are also shared with prospective Foster Carers during the assessment process.

The Permanence Campaign is on-going and includes a variety of advertising methods such as adverts in local press, on the radio and on social media. This continues to be very well received with Facebook posts generating significant interest. Other fostering recruitment activities have continued throughout the year with the need for permanent foster carers remaining a particular focus at the recruitment evening events.

Since 1st April 2019 three new fostering families have been approved for permanence and a further three are currently undergoing assessment.

There continues to be a high level of support in place for both prospective and current permanent foster carers. This includes a bespoke preparation course, the first of which took place during the year with four sets of foster carers attending. Further to this an enhanced rate is paid to foster carers who offer a home to children who have been waiting for a permanent placement for longer than six months as well as on-going training and support from both Supervising Social Workers and Placement Support Workers and a minimum of 14 nights respite per year.

The Family Finders Review panel continues to meet regularly to consider children where no potential placement matches have been identified within a three month period, enabling senior management to have oversight of actions already taken and discussions around any further options to be considered or explored.

Staying Put

The 'Staying Put' initiative in Lincolnshire is in its eleventh year. It has, since its inception, enabled a total of 153 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 military, 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 continued to develop and grow with the number of Staying Put arrangements increasing from 49 young people at the end of March 2019 to 55 young people living in a Staying Put arrangement at the end of March 2020. Of these, 35 were in full time further education with 6 attending university. The others were in employment, on Work Experience Placements or Apprenticeships; with 6 of these on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme.

The Staying Put offer in Lincolnshire positively reflects the current guidelines and best practice from the Government and Fostering Network. Signs of Safety is used and embedded in all the documents relating to Staying Put with Social Pedagogy being used to support the transition and understanding around moving to adulthood. During 2019 – 2020 a further development has been made in respect of young people transitioning to Adult Services with joint working taking place in respect of Shared Lives. Two LCC foster carers have been approved to be Shared Lives Carers enabling the young people living with them, who are in need of additional support from Adult Services, to remain in their family setting. This development further ensures the best outcomes are achieved for our young people and care leavers.

Kinship Service

The placement of a child within their family and friends network continues to offer 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.

Since 2015 there has been 6 FTE Supervising Social Workers dedicated to undertake Kinship Assessments. There have been changes in terms of workers covering the kinship agenda as one of Practice Supervisors retired in November 2019 and to ensure consistency, one of the Advanced Practitioners from the service is now acting up to Practice Supervisor role and undertaking some of the those responsibilities.

The number of referrals into the Kinship Team has slightly increased this year. This is most noticeable in the increase in the volume of referrals for Regulation 24 assessments and moving to Special Guardianship Order Assessments when compared to last year. The number of cases presented at Fostering Panel has increased considerably when compared to the previous year (14 cases presented to Panel 2018/19). Most assessments are presented to Panel within 16 weeks of allocation.

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 – April 2019-31st March 2020

Number of Referrals	SGO	Reg.24 to SGO	Reg.24	Private Fostering
154	57	34	46	17

Of the above figures:

- SGO – 12 applicants withdrew/ did not progress due to placement ending
- SGO – 15 are still in process
- SGO – 4 were negative assessments and the children were not placed
- SGO – 2 case, Court granted a Child Arrangement Order
- SGO – 17 were Statutory Checks completed by Fostering Service
- SGO – 7 progressed but child either remained at home or moved to an alternative placement.

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

- SGO/Reg.24 – 14 SGO granted
- SGO/Reg.24 – 11 are still in process
- SGO/Reg.24 – 9 where child was moved or other Order granted
- Reg.24 – 33 Carers approved at panel
- Reg.24 – 2 children were moved
- Reg.24 – 9 Not yet attended panel
- Reg.24 – 1 carer granted Child Arrangement Order
- Reg.24 – 1 Returned home

The service has continued to offer the specific one day kinship preparation course for both Regulation 24 carers and Special Guardianship applicants, with three having taken place in 2019/2020. The course has continued to receive excellent feedback, particularly in terms of the Therapeutic Parenting input by Placement Support Workers. The course was adapted in September 2019 to ensure specialist therapeutic guidance was being delivered.

Fostering Panel

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

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:

- Sharon King, Independent Chair
- Chris Sharp, Vice Chair
- Stephen Carson, Independent Vice Chair
- Janet Morris, Independent Member
- Russell Petit, Independent Member
- April Harrison, Independent Member
- Laura Dodd, Independent Member
- Ellie Simmons Independent Member
- Lee Willoughby Independent Member
- Maggie Nisbett Independent Member
- Georgina Sharma, Independent Member
- Paula Bexon, Social Work Representative
- Paula Clayforth, Social Work Representative
- Michelle Maxfield, Social Work Representative
- Joanne Stares, Social Work Representative
- Michaela Berry, Social Work Representative
- Panel Advisor and Administrator in attendance at each panel

The former chair Sue Tribe ceased as Panel Chair in January 2020 and has been successfully succeeded by Sharon King.

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 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 recommendations.

Workload of the Panel

The Foster Panel has met on 20 occasions this year, 2 less than the previous year.

Panel recommended for approval the following households:

APPROVAL	2019	2018	2017	2016
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Task Centred/Respite	19	27	13	20
Reg 24/25	43	33	39	39
Permanent Foster Carers	0	2	1	10
Change of Approval	6	7	0	5
Permanence Link	6	10	10	11
Reviews	23	22	17	35
Total	97	101	80	120

Review Breakdowns:

REVIEW	2019	2018	2017	2016
Task Centred	15	12	9	19
Respite			0	0
Remand			0	1
Reg 24/25	6	9	3	12
Permanent Fostering			4	2
Allegation	1	1	1	1

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. The average feedback on Fostering Panel achieving is 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 Chairs to the Foster Panel have 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.

There is clear evidence of restorative practice and an understanding of how this approach is particularly important in the work with some of the Kinship carers and a real need to appreciate the responsibility of the Local Authority to support carers to be able to meet fostering standards.

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 continued to be 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 ensures that any matters raised are referred back to the training. The recent introduction of IFAB (Independent Fostering Advisory Board) has been established as an Independent Quality Assurance System for Fostering Annual Reviews. The regulations specify that following approval as a foster carer the first Annual Review must be heard at Panel with a recommendation as to the suitability to continue to foster.

Lincolnshire County Council is committed to supporting an Independent Scrutiny of Fostering Reviews to ensure a quality service is being provided longer term. IFAB appraises fostering annual reviews on the basis of year 4, year 7 and year 10 following initial approval and this will be undertaken on a monthly basis to encompass a rolling programme of scrutiny and oversight.

IFAB representation includes the Agency Advisor, an Independent Social Worker and an Independent Panel Member and will be supported by Business Support to administer. Feedback from IFAB is shared with the Supervising Social Worker and Team Managers to ensure that good practices and areas for development for the service are regularly addressed and reviewed.

Complaints

In the last year the Fostering Service has received two complaints. Neither complaint was upheld. One complaint was raised by a carer direct in relation to the support available from the service. This complaint positively highlighted and reinforced the importance of quality recording and the importance of communication with fostering families. Likewise the learning from this representation has been shared across the service in an effort to maintain good practice standards.

The second complaint was from a birth parent expressing concern about the care attributed to her child by the foster family. This was resolved at the early resolution stage and was not upheld. The efforts of joint working between the Social Worker and Supervising Social Worker sought to resolve this given the expectations and communication between parties had become conflicted.

The low level representations and concerns were promptly dealt with in the service and satisfactorily resolved. In 2019/2020 there were no matters referred to the Independent Review Mechanism.

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 face to face training events and e-learning which is accessed through the LSCB website. The Programme is reviewed yearly and the latest edition incorporates Caring 2 Learn and training for staff. The development of the

caring2learn hubs and training offer has further enhanced the training offer to foster carers. The online support and multi-agency meetings have created a dynamic learning community where all carers are provided with learning that integrates social pedagogy, restorative and trauma informed practice.

Alongside the development with the training programme the mandatory TSD completion has been reviewed and is now incorporated into the Learning Home Toolkit, the feedback received has been positive and ensures that newly approved foster carers meet the standards whilst evidencing their continued development. Training continues to be provided by a number of agencies including The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT) Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FASD) which has been welcomed by foster carers. Talking Life; which provide the two day Parent and Child Placement training provides an understanding of the policy, procedures, guidance and practice relating to Parent and Child Placements. Parent and Child Placement training is currently under review to ensure that there is consistency and full understanding of professionals, foster carers and legal as to the purpose of the placement.

Singletons facilitate the Emergency First Aid and the two day paediatric first aid course. Other training resources include the Lincoln ADHD Charity who presents the ADHD course. Autism Union Ltd facilitates autism. The move from in house trainers has received a positive response from foster carers and staff.

The following table identifies the number of carers who have undertaken any form of training this year. Training for Feb and March 2019 was disrupted by the Covid 19 pandemic which has an impact of the figures.

Number of carers attended face to face	418
Number of carers completed e-learning	142

The annual Foster Carers Celebration/ Conference took place at the Petwood Hotel in May 2019; the event was a success with carers being presented with a lapel badge, certificate and gift voucher to recognize their long service award.

Forward Plan 2020/21

Caring2learn

The Hub model will be developed to ensure that the full Caring2learn offer is available to carers across the County.

Foster Care training

The offer to foster carers will be fully reviewed in line with the development of caring 2 learn.

Adult Skills training

Building on the success of the first pilot, further courses to be developed and delivered with Leaving Care Service as part of their 16 + offer.