



## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

**THURSDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2021 at 10.00 AM**  
**in COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY OFFICES, NEWLAND, LINCOLN LN1 1YL**

### **MEMBERSHIP**

**Lincolnshire County Council:**

Councillors S P Roe (Chairman), Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman), K H Cooke, A G Hagues, Mrs J E Killey, C Matthews and M A Whittington

**Added Members (non-voting):**

Polly Coombes, Ann Wright, Amy-Louise Butler, Amy Lavery and Elizabeth Bunney

### **AGENDA**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Pages</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Apologies for absence/Replacement Members</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Declarations of Members' Interests</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Minutes of the meeting held on the 22 July 2021</b>	3 - 10
<b>4</b>	<b>Announcements by the Chairman, Executive Councillor and Lead Officers</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Quarter 1 Performance Report for Children in Care</b> <i>(To receive a report by Janice Spencer, Assistant Director – Children's Safeguarding, which sets out the performance of the Children in Care services)</i>	11 - 32
<b>6</b>	<b>Adoption Annual Report and Statement of Purpose</b> <i>(To receive a report by Anne Johnson, Adoption Team Manager, with an annual update on the Adoption Service for 2020-21 since the previous report considered by the Panel)</i>	33 - 94

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|-----------|---|-----------|
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Fostering Annual Report and Statement of Purpose</b><br><i>(To receive a report by Nicola Brangam, Fostering Team Manager, with an annual update on the Fostering Service for 2020-21 since the previous report considered by the Panel)</i> | 95 - 140  |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Fostering and Adoption Marketing Report</b><br><i>(To receive a report from Rebecca Dolman, Fostering Team Manager, which presents the Panel with an overview of the Fostering and Adoption Services Marketing and Recruitment Strategy)</i> | 141 - 152 |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Fostering Quarterly Performance Report Q1</b><br><i>(To receive a report by Rebecca Dolman, Fostering Team Manager, which sets out the performance of the Fostering Services for Q1 2021-22)</i>   | 153 - 168 |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme</b><br><i>(To receive a report from Kiara Chatziioannou, Scrutiny Officer, which enables the Panel to consider and comment on the content of its work programme)</i>                                | 169 - 172 |

Distributed on Wednesday, 1 September 2021

Please note: This meeting will be broadcast live on the internet and access can be sought by accessing [Agenda for Corporate Parenting Panel on Thursday, 9th September, 2021, 10.00 am \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

Should you have any queries on the arrangements for this meeting, please contact Emily Wilcox via telephone 07557 486687 or alternatively via email at [emily.wilcox@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:emily.wilcox@lincolnshire.gov.uk)



## CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL 22 JULY 2021

### **PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)**

**Lincolnshire County Council:** Councillors K H Cooke, A G Hagues, Mrs J E Killey, C Matthews and M A Whittington

**Added Members:** Ann Wright (Foster Carer), Amy-Louise Butler [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)], Amy Lavery (Children in Care Council) and Elizabeth Bunney (Lincolnshire Community Health Services)

Officers in attendance: -

Lisa Adams (Service Manager, Barnardos), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Carolyn Knight (Quality and Standards Manager), Ben Lilley (Team Manager, Quality and Standards), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager), Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director of Children's Safeguarding), Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Cragg (Lawyer, Legal Services), Jodie Ogden (Senior Lawyer, Legal Services) and Deborah Crawford (Head of Service, Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care)

### 1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor S P Roe be elected Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the year 2021/22.

COUNCILLOR S P ROE IN THE CHAIR

### 2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor C L Perraton-Williams be elected Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for 2021/22

### 3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C L Perraton-Williams (who attended the meeting remotely, as an observer) and Polly Coombes (Foster Carer).

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22 JULY 2021**

It was noted that the Chief Executive, having received notice under Regulation 13 of the Local Government (Committee and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, had appointed Councillor Mrs J E Killey to the vacancy until further notice.

4 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor M A Whittington wished it be noted that his son was in receipt of leaving care services.

5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 MARCH 2021

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held on 11 March 2021 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

6 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICERS

No announcements were received.

7 CORPORATE PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chairman invited Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director-Children's Safeguarding to provide the Panel with an insight into the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of Lincolnshire County Council.

The Panel received a presentation, which made reference to: the Legal definition of a Corporate Parent; Corporate Parenting Principles; Members responsibilities; Sufficiency of Placements; Safeguarding; Safeguarding issues/child sexual exploitation/child exploitation; and Key Statutory Duties of Local Authorities.

During consideration of the presentation, the Panel made reference to the following comments:

- The time period for a child going missing and whether this was dependent on age. The Panel was advised that the time period would vary and would be child specific and would be dependent on the vulnerabilities of the child;
- The age for providing support for a care leaver up to the age of 25 was to help the young people transition into being an adult; and
- A suggestion was made for all members to receive a development session concerning their role as a corporate parent, to ensure that all members were aware of their responsibilities. The Panel noted that a Corporate Parenting workshop had been held for members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and officers were happy to arrange further dates for all other members of the Council.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel extended thanks to the Assistant Director-Children's Safeguarding for the presentation.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Responsibilities presentation be noted.

8 FINAL REVIEW OF THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to a report from Andrew Morris, Corporate Parenting Manager, which invited the Panel to consider and comment on the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan.

It was reported that the Strategy was designed to support young people to become independent and proactive adults. The strategy highlighted the Council's aspirations: "*We want all Looked After Children and Care Leavers to feel safe, loved, be heard and to realise their potential, through nurturing, resilient parenting and support*". Details of how this would be achieved by working with partner agencies and communities were set out in the Strategy.

A copy of the Lincolnshire Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2018-2021 was appended at Appendix A to the report; and Appendix B provided a copy of the Action Plan for the Panel consideration.

The Panel received a joint presentation from Lisa Adams, Barnardo's, Service Manager for Lincolnshire's Leaving Care Service and Andrew Morris, Corporate Parenting Manager concerning Lincolnshire Leaving Care.

The presentation made reference to: the leaving care offer available to young people; specialist support available to young people with regarding to housing and mental health; access to education, training and employment opportunities; the Apprenticeship Scheme; the Supported Lodgings Scheme; and the independent living projects.

During consideration of this item, the Panel raised the following comments:

- The success of independent living projects and whether there were any plans to extend the project across the county. The Panel was advised that currently there were no aspirations to extend the project any further, as there was not the need at the moment;
- Whether any Lincolnshire Children in Care were being looked after by other care systems inside and outside of Lincolnshire. The Panel noted that there were some children were being looked after out of county but could still be within Lincolnshire. The Panel noted further that the council was currently looking at expanding its residential estate;

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- Transition into adults. It was reported that there were strong links between children's and adults' teams and the transition pathway was working well; and
- Whether notification was received from agencies the Council worked with regard to possible apprenticeships. Officers confirmed that information was being received.

RESOLVED

That the report and presentation on the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy and the Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service be noted.

9 CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE MEASURES - QUARTER 4 (JANUARY - MARCH 2021)

Consideration was given to a report from Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding, which provided key performance information for Quarter Four 2020/21, relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Appendix A to the report provided details of the Children in Care Measures for the Panel to consider.

It was reported that there were 16 measures in total which related to Children in Care, and that of these measures seven were outside of the target set by the services, details of which were shown on pages 79 to 81 of the report pack.

The Panel were invited to consider and comment on the performance information, and during discussion the following comments were noted: -

- Whether fostering placements met the needs of the young person. Reassurance was given that everything was done to meet the needs of a young person; and that wherever possible a young person would be placed in a family environment. The Committee noted even with the competitive market, a child would be placed within independent sector, if that placement best met the needs of the child. The Panel was advised that the independent sector was governed by the same regulations as the council and were Ofsted inspected; and that any child in an outside placement would receive visits to meet their needs;
- When it was anticipated there would be some improvement on the slippage that had occurred during the pandemic. It was reported that at the moment it was difficult to predict when things would return to normal. However, reassurance was given that performance was continually monitored, some monitoring was done daily, some weekly, some monthly; and where performance had seen a decrease, investigations would be undertaken, and appropriate resources would be targeted accordingly;
- Challenges faced in recruiting and retaining foster carers. The Panel noted that the transformation programme was currently re-thinking how to make the foster care service more attractive; looking at service provision; the support provided to foster carers; and the retention of foster carers. It was highlighted that the marketplace

was currently very competitive. The service had however seen a rise in interest from perspective foster carers from March 2020; and it was hoped that the interest generated would see an increase in the number of foster carers into the service. Appreciation was extended to the foster carers in Lincolnshire and to supporting staff for all their hard work in maintaining the service; and

- The opportunity for the Panel to receive further information concerning the marketing side of the foster caring.

#### RESOLVED

That the Children in Care Performance Measures for Quarter 4 2020/21 (January to March 2021) be received and noted.

#### 10 LINCOLNSHIRE LEAVING CARE - ANNUAL REPORT

This was covered as part of agenda item 8 (Minute number 8).

#### 11 LEGAL SERVICES LINCOLNSHIRE END OF YEAR REPORT - APRIL 2020 TO MARCH 2021

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a report and detailed presentation which provided details of the Legal Services Lincolnshire End of Year Report – April 2020 to March 2021.

The Panel was provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and presentation, and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- It was queried whether Legal Services Lincolnshire would be involved with any young people who may be sectioned. It was confirmed that they did sometimes have involvement with young people with mental health issues.
- In response to a question, it was noted that the Myle Cross Centre was not currently used as a court hub.
- It was queried whether the mixture of online and in-person meetings and hearings would take away some of the worry for the young people attending.
- It was commented that there had been a backlog of cases for the courts at the beginning of the pandemic and it was queried when it was expected that caseloads would return to normal levels. Members were advised that it was the aim to have conclusions for the children as soon as possible, however one of the challenges currently being faced was judicial availability.
- It was confirmed that members of the public were not permitted to sit in on family court hearings.

#### RESOLVED

That the report and presentation be noted.

**12 VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) UPDATE REPORT**

Consideration was given to a report which provided a summary and overview of activities with regard to V4C between February 2021 – June 2021; future V4C planning and progress, including consulting with children and young people within residential settings; and soundLINCS V4C music sessions for children and young people.

It was reported that V4C was Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council with the aim being to share experiences of being looked after in Lincolnshire and to inform teams who support Children in Care what does and does not work for them. V4C meetings were held within Children's Services locality quadrants and were delivered by Senior Youth and Community Development Workers and supported by Children's Services Participation Officers.

It was reported that a Big Conversation event had taken place, and a provisional booking had been made for the next one in October which would be taking place at the Lincolnshire Showroom and it was hoped that invites would be sent out to members and officers shortly.

The report evidenced some good examples of engagement and there had been some successful moves to reintroduce face to face meetings. Positive feedback on the soundLINCS programme had also been received. It was confirmed that there would continue to be opportunities for hybrid meetings to take place.

**RESOLVED**

That the Corporate Parenting Panel noted the report and activities undertaken and was supportive of the future plans for V4C meetings and activities.

**13 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER YEARLY REPORT**

(NOTE: Councillor M A Whittington left the meeting at 11.52am and did not return)

Consideration was given to the yearly report on the Independent Chair's Service. It updated members of the Corporate Parenting Panel on the work undertaken between April 2020 and March 2021. The report also included an update on priorities identified for 2020-21 and new priorities for 2021-22. The Panel also received a presentation.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and presentation and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- In relation to IRO's having access to legal advice, it was noted that the authority was not permitted to use its own legal services teams. It was noted that there was an agreement with Chambers in Nottingham, but this was rarely used, and so there was a need to revisit the contract and check that it was still in place.

- For a young person to enter secure care, there would be a need to go to court to obtain a secure care order. It was noted that there was an excellent secure unit in Sleaford.
- In relation to the negative feedback highlighted in the report, it was commented that there was an issue with young people not knowing who their IRO was, but sometimes young people had so many people in their life they may not know who they were based on their role.

RESOLVED

That the yearly report on the Independent Chair's Service be noted.

14 REGULATION 44 INDEPENDENT VISITORS REPORT

Consideration was given to the Regulation 44 Independent Visiting Service yearly report which updated members on the work undertaken between March 2020 and April 2021. The report also updated the Panel on the work of the Independent Visitor.

RESOLVED

That the yearly report on the Regulation 44 Independent Visiting Service be noted.

15 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report which enabled the Panel to comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focused where it could be of most benefit.

It was noted that no changes to the work programme had been received since it was published. During discussion of the work programme the following was noted:

- A report on adoption recruitment and marketing to be added to a future agenda;
- Quarter 1 performance for fostering to move from 11 November 2021 meeting to the 9 September 2021 meeting;
- The Private Fostering Annual Report to move from 11 November 2021 meeting to the 9 September 2021 meeting.

It was also suggested that training around corporate parenting should be suggested to the Councillor Development Group.

RESOLVED

That the work programme and changes highlighted above be noted.

The meeting closed at 12.22 pm

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**Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy Director of Children's Services**

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>9th September 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Quarter 1 Performance Report for Children in Care</b>

**Summary:**

The accompanying appendices to this report provide key performance information for Quarter 1 2021/22 that is relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Panel is invited to consider and comment on the performance information contained in the appendices of this report and recommend any actions or changes to the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement.

## **1. Background**

Appendix A provides a full and detailed report that covers the measures that are relevant to Children in Care used by Children's Services. This is available for questions.

There are 15 measures in total that relate to Children in Care that are reported on in Quarter 1. Of these measures 10 are outside of the target set by the services.

These are:

**Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family-** Despite the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, Lincolnshire continues to perform well in this measure and the numbers are significantly better than figures from recent history for comparator areas (both Statistical Neighbours and Nationally). Our high performance in this area is achieved through being aware of the journey of each child and ensuring that the adoption team is able to engage in twin tracking at the earliest opportunity within service and via the regional adoption

approach. There has been some delay in getting cases through the courts during Covid, and this may continue to have some impact on the statistics and data for

this year despite the gradual easing. Several of the children are in protracted proceedings.

**Average time between the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family-** The performance this quarter continues to exceed target, despite the Covid 19 pandemic, and is better than National and Statistical Neighbour comparator figures. Recruiting the right families for children reduces the needs to identify independent adoptive placements which in turn minimises potential delays and ensures we continue to do well in respect of this indicator. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect this PI. Until we were able to develop our systems and use Covid risk assessments fewer children were placed in quarter 1 last year. These systems are now effective, and we were able to place a higher number of children in quarter 4, some of whom had been difficult to place.

**Fostering/adoption of Children in Care aged 10 to <16 years old-** This performance remains under target. The vast majority of children in care within this age group are placed in foster care settings but this has been impacted by the pandemic as placement options have been reduced as a result of foster carers being offline to take new placements during the Covid 19 restrictions and the gradual easing. However, there has been an increase in the numbers of younger children in residential placements in the past year. These are often children who have experienced a number of foster placement moves who struggle to adhere to the expectations of living in a family environment. Residential care has provided a nurturing environment for this group and has enabled them to settle. There has also been a concentrated focus on reunifying children with their birth families this year and some of this group are awaiting revocation of their Care Orders or granting of private law orders.

**Stability of placements of Children in Care: Number of moves-** This is a cumulative indicator identifying those children who experience 3 placement moves. The target is challenging and slipped under target last year although our performance is generally better than other East Midland authorities where an average of 10% of children in care experienced 3 placement moves in a year. At this stage performance remains good, but this is a cumulative indicator and may change at year end. The year has been challenging for all children, but foster carers have proven to be very resourceful and committed to the children they care for.

However, placement availability has been negatively impacted as some foster carers have chosen to concentrate on the children already in their care and have declined to take additional placements.

**Stability of placements of Children in Care: length of placement-** Performance remains just below target. For all placements, the service continues to ensure that foster carers are well supported and that potential problems are identified early.

This has been reinforced by the success of the caring2learn project which has encouraged foster carers to share and find solutions to problems and developed a whole range of tailored training. Nevertheless, we have continued to see that some stable placements disrupt unexpectedly and this can have a significant impact upon this indicator. We have also seen an increase in the number of children with care plans for long-term fostering and this will present challenges in achieving placement stability for some children due to the local and national shortage of foster carers who want to care on a long-term basis.

**Percentage of Children in Care with an up-to-date dental check-** Whilst at 59.2% this measure is still below the target of 95%, it has improved markedly (by almost 10%) from 49.5% in the previous quarter of Q4 2020/21. However, the number of Children in Care with an up-to-date dental check continues to be significantly impacted by the Covid Pandemic. Prior to Covid, we were seeing increased difficulties in children being able to register with a National Health Service Dentist. Many of these appear to have made the decision to only provide private dentistry thereby impacting on the number of NHS practices available.

During periods of lockdown, National Health Dentists were only dealing with emergencies and outside of lockdown many have continued to restrict the number of patients they will see in any one day due to the increased levels of hygiene/protection that needs to be in place. Many were and are continuing to refuse new registrations and the availability of dentists across the county continues to impact on our ability to ensure that all children in care have regular dental checks.

**Percentage of Children in Care with an up-to-date routine immunisation-** The number of routine immunisations being completed continues to be impacted by the Covid Pandemic, with the measure staying broadly static at 78.6% in Q1 2021/22 compared to 80% in Q4 2020/21. The majority of overdue immunisations continue to be the teenage boosters which are undertaken in school. These were clearly delayed due to schools being closed for extended periods of time.

The health immunisation team have now resumed their programme of immunisations. However, it is projected that it will take approximately 18 months for the programme to be fully back on schedule. The team have to catch up on those that have been missed/delayed during the pandemic and also the increase in their workload due to all males now being offered the HPV and all school population being offered the flu immunisation.

**Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation-** The good performance in relation to accommodation is down to good working relationships with District Councils and their willingness to view care leavers as a priority group. The continued flexibility and resilience of our housing provider, Nacro, during the pandemic ensured safe accommodation is on offer should also be noted. The above combined with persistent and creative work of leaving care staff has ensured that nearly every care leaver is suitably accommodated. A further 2 young people have gone to custody, and this is deemed as unsuitable accommodation, this will impact on our figures, but LCC is unable to change a care leaver being in custody.

**Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training (EET)**- Whilst this measure remains below target, performance is on an upward trajectory and at 53% there has been a notable improvement from the previous quarter's performance of 49.8%. The Leaving Care Service continues to monitor every single young person who is not in EET. The Service continues to report on a monthly basis the efforts of the service to re-engage individuals back into EET and the Corporate Parenting Manager tracks this performance. Covid-19 and the legacy of it continues to have an impact on the services sector and this does directly affect care leavers. Most young people start their working lives with jobs in bars, restaurants, shops and front-line customer services where the largest job losses are being witnessed and it continues to impact on the ability of these employers to open. It is anticipated that

Covid-19 will continue to impact on EET and the percentage remains in the low to mid 50% range.

Funding has been secured from the Covid recovery fund in order to recruit 2 specialist Leaving Care posts for a period of 1 year. The purpose of these 2 posts is to build capacity within the service and to focus specifically on EET. The focus will be on finding employment opportunities, work experience and unpicking and making best use of a range of initiatives and funding that will become available from central government to aid with the recovery from the pandemic.

**Children in Care Living Within a Family Environment**- Performance remains above target and has improved slightly on last quarter (78.5% in Q1 2021/22 compared to 77.8% in Q4 2020/21). It confirms that, for the vast majority of children in care, a family placement is the most effective means of offering care.

### 3. Conclusion

This report summarises the Quarter 1 performance for Children in Care and Young People, and the Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to raise any questions on the content of the report.

### 4. Consultation

#### a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

### 5. Appendices

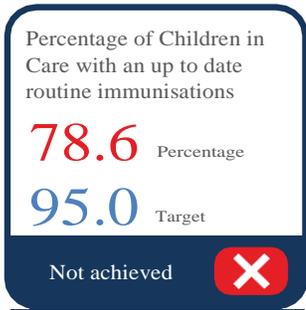
These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Children in Care Measures

## **6. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Simon Hardcastle, Performance Support Officer, who can be contacted via e-mail at [simon.hardcastle@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:simon.hardcastle@lincolnshire.gov.uk).

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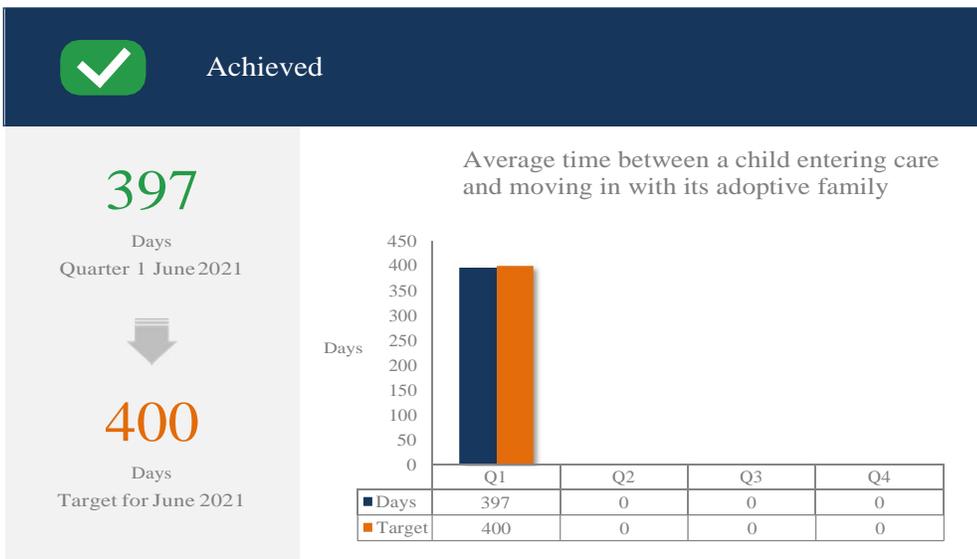


## Healthy and Safe

### Children are Healthy and Safe

#### Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family

Average number of days between the child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. A lower number of days taken to move a child from care into an adoptive family indicates a better performance.



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 415, Q2: 416, Q3: 368, Q4: 386

Despite the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, Lincolnshire continues to perform well in this measure and the numbers are significantly better than figures from recent history for comparator areas (both Statistical Neighbours and Nationally). Our high performance in this area is achieved through being aware of the journey of each child and ensuring that the adoption team is able to engage in twin tracking at the earliest opportunity within service and via the regional adoption approach. There has been some delay in getting cases through the courts during Covid, and this may continue to have some impact on the statistics and data for this year despite the gradual easing. Several of the children are in protracted proceedings.

#### About the target

Target set significantly better than national average.

#### About the target range

A lower value of 490 has been set as this would mean performance is worse than the most recent national figures

#### About benchmarking

Benchmarking information is available for 2018, however, 2019 figures have not yet been released.



## Healthy and Safe

### Children are Healthy and Safe

#### Average time between the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family

Average number of days between the local authority receiving the court order to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family.  
A lower number of days taken to match a child to an adoptive family indicates a better performance.



Achieved

156

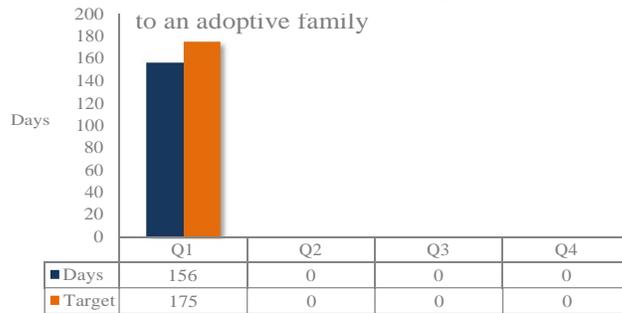
Days  
Quarter 1 June 2021



175

Days  
Target for June 2021

Average time between the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 129, Q2: 131, Q3: 122, Q4: 153

The performance this quarter continues to exceed target, despite the Covid 19 pandemic, and is better than National and Statistical Neighbour comparator figures. Recruiting the right families for children reduces the needs to identify independent adoptive placements which in turn minimises potential delays and ensures we continue to do well in respect of this indicator. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect this PI. Until we were able to develop our systems and use Covid risk assessments fewer children were placed in quarter 1 last year. These systems are now effective and we were able to place a higher number of children in quarter 4, some of whom had been difficult to place.

#### About the target

Target has reduced to 175 to take into account recent trends of a higher number of adoptions, which is expected to impact figures. However, the revised target remains significantly better than the most recent published National figures.

#### About the target range

Both upper and lower tolerances have been set at 10 days (average).

#### About benchmarking

Benchmarking information is available for 2019

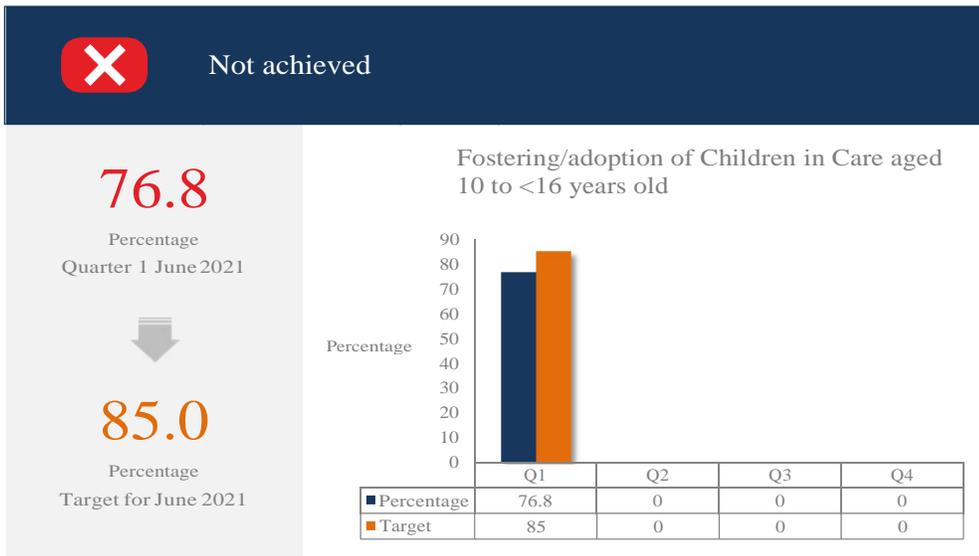


## Healthy and Safe

Children are Healthy and Safe

Fostering/adoption of Children in Care aged 10 to <16 years old

Percentage of Children in Care aged 10 to under 16 who have been fostered or placed for adoption



### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 79.8%, Q2: 78.1%, Q3: 76.8%, Q4: 78.9%

This performance remains under target. The vast majority of children in care within this age group are placed in foster care settings but this has been impacted by the pandemic as placement options have been reduced as a result of foster carers being off line to take new placements during the Covid 19 restrictions and the gradual easing.. However, there has been an increase in the numbers of younger children in residential placements in the past year. These are often children who have experienced a number of foster placement moves who struggle to adhere to the expectations of living in a family environment. Residential care has provided a nurturing environment for this group and has enabled them to settle. There has also been a concentrated focus on reunifying children with their birth families this year and some of this group are awaiting revocation of their Care Orders or granting of private law orders.

### About the target

Target reduced to 85% as performance has remained under target at 82% over the past year. This is indicative of a reduction in the number of foster carers, challenges in foster carer recruitment and children with complex needs.

### About the target range

A 2% variance is set for the upper value and 3% for the lower value.

Meeting the upper tolerance level would achieve a performance level not reached recently and show a change in the overall trend.

### About benchmarking

Benchmarking data no longer available



## Healthy and Safe

### Children are Healthy and Safe

#### Number of Children in Care per 10,000 under 18s

Children in Care per 10,000 population aged under 18. There are a number of reasons why a child may be 'looked after' by the local authority. Most often it is because the child's parents or the people who have parental responsibilities and rights to look after the child are unable to care for the child, have been neglecting the child or the child has committed an offence. The local authority has specific responsibilities and duties towards a child who is being looked after or who has been looked after. This measure is reported taking a snapshot in time. So for example Q2 is performance as at 30th September.

A lower rate of children looked after by the Local Authority indicates a better performance.



Achieved

47.2

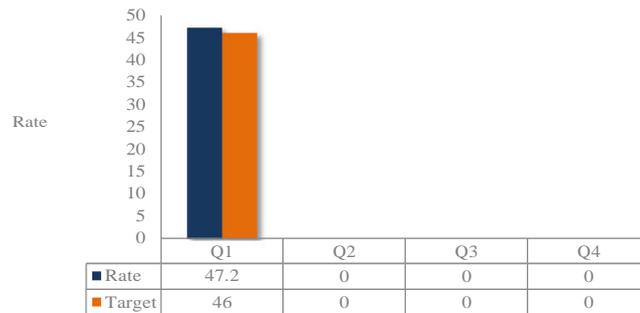
Rate  
Quarter 1 June 2021



46.0

Rate  
Target for June 2021

Number of Children in Care per 10,000 under 18s



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 44.4, Q2: 45.2, Q3: 47.1, Q4: 46.8

This measure has achieved target, however, it is currently showing a slight adverse trend. Whilst the number of Children in Care leavers has stayed reasonably static compared to 31st March 2021 (Quarter 4 2020/21), the number of Children in Care starters over Quarter 1 2021/22 has been around 20% higher than in Quarter 4 2020/21. This appears to have pushed the Children in Care per 10,000 figure slightly further up over the past quarter. However, despite the increase, the Lincolnshire number of Children in Care per 10,000 remains significantly below the most recent published figures both nationally and by our statistical neighbours (67 per 10,000 and 62.67 per 10,000 respectively as at 31st March 2020).

#### About the target

Target Remains Same as Previous Year

#### About the target range

The Upper and lower Target allows for the number of LAC to vary between approximately 626- 699. This is about +/- 35 children from target.

Anything above or below this number would be flagged as worse than target, i.e. indicating a significant variance from the current position.

#### About benchmarking

Comparator information is available and is showing an increasing trend

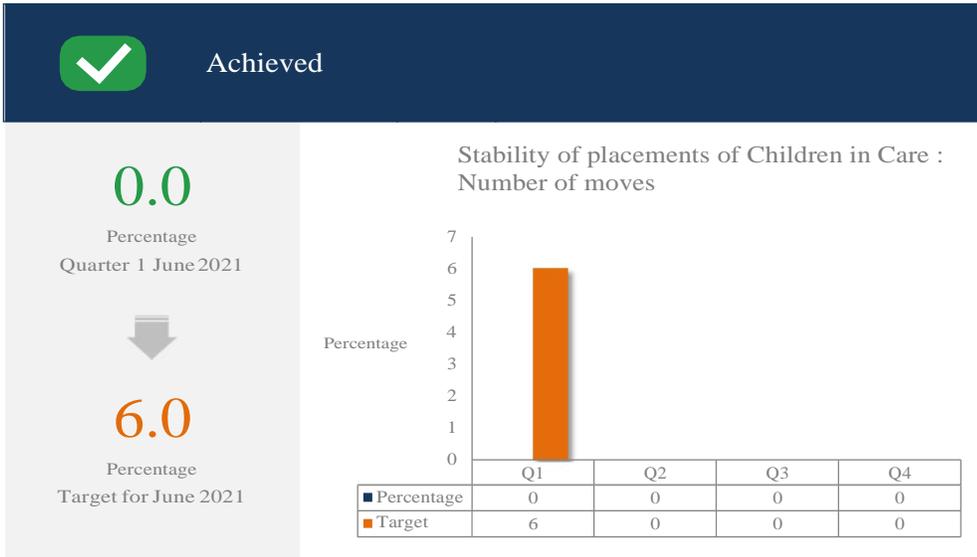


## Healthy and Safe

### Children are Healthy and Safe

#### Stability of placements of Children in Care : Number of moves

Percentage of Children in Care with three or more placements



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 1%, Q2: 1%, Q3: 2%, Q4: 8%

This is a cumulative indicator identifying those children who experience 3 placement moves. The target is challenging and slipped under target last year although our performance is generally better than other East Midland authorities where an average of 10% of children in care experienced 3 placement moves in a year. At this stage performance remains good, but this is a cumulative indicator and may change at year end. The year has been challenging for all children but foster carers have proven to be very resourceful and committed to the children they care for. However placement availability has been negatively impacted as some foster carers have chosen to concentrate on the children already in their care and have declined to take additional placements.

#### About the target

Target remains same as 2020/21. Performance remains good in comparison with the 11% stated national figure. However we have seen a derioration this year which reflects the reduced choice of placement options and complexities of young people placed.

#### About the target range

Achieving the upper tolerance level should maintain LCC's position within the top quartile nationally and still maintain LCC as one of the best performing of our statistical neighbours. Comparative performance within our statistical neighbours is 9.6%. Anything below the lower level should be shown as a significant improvement over last year.

#### About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis

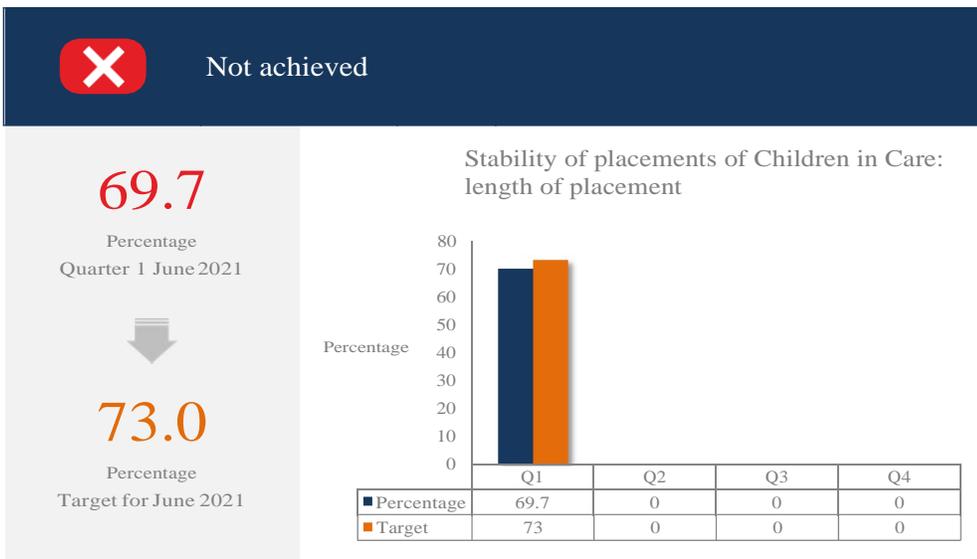


## Healthy and Safe

Children are Healthy and Safe

Stability of placements of Children in Care: length of placement

Percentage of Children in Care in the same placement for at least two years



### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 72.8%, Q2: 69.2%, Q3: 70.9%, Q4: 72.2%

Performance remains just below target. For all placements, the service continues to ensure that foster carers are well supported and that potential problems are identified early. This has been reinforced by the success of the caring2learn project which has encouraged foster carers to share and find solutions to problems and developed a whole range of tailored training. Nevertheless we have continued to see that some stable placements disrupt unexpectedly and this can have a significant impact upon this indicator. We have also seen an increase in the number of children with care plans for long term fostering and this will present challenges in achieving placement stability for some children due to the local and national shortage of foster carers who want to care on a long term basis.

### About the target

Target remains the same as previous years and above the present performance of statistical neighbours. Tolerances for this measure take into account the current performance.

### About the target range

Tolerances for this measure take into account the current performance.

### About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis



## Healthy and Safe

Children are Healthy and Safe

Children in Care cases which were reviewed within required timescales

Percentage of Children in Care cases that have been reviewed within timescales



### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 99.2%, Q2: 98.6%, Q3: 98.4%, Q4: 98.7%

Current performance has met the targets set

### About the target

Target remains at 97% to take into account current performance.

### About the target range

As the target is 97%, an upper value of 3% has been set.

A lower value of 95% has been set to highlight any performance lower than 95%

### About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis

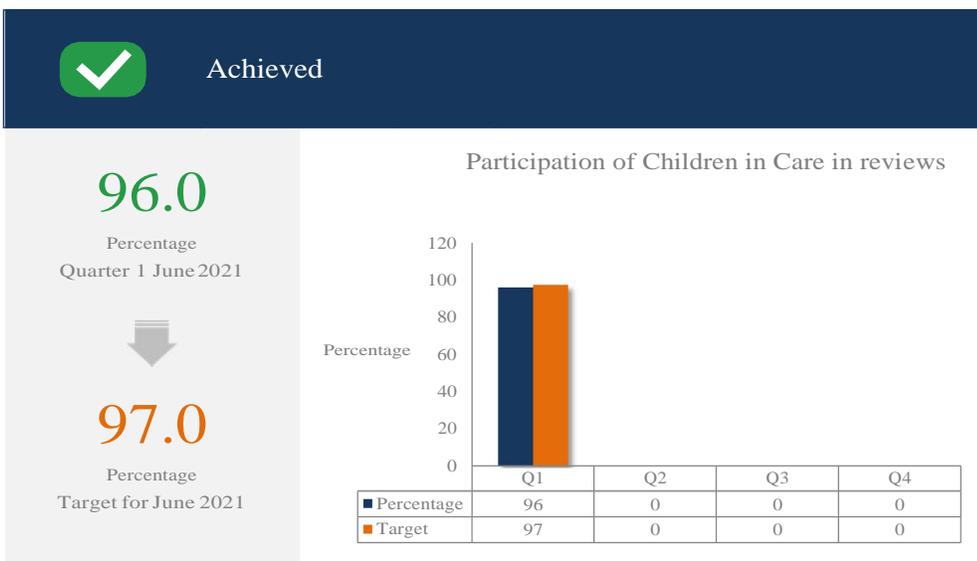


## Healthy and Safe

Children are Healthy and Safe

### Participation of Children in Care in reviews

Percentage of Children in Care who participated in their reviews



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 99.7%, Q2: 99.8%, Q3: 99.2%, Q4: 97.6%

Current performance has met the targets set

#### About the target

Target remains at 97% to take into account current performance.

#### About the target range

As the target is 97%, an upper value of 3% has been set.

A lower value of 95% has been set to highlight any performance lower than 95%

#### About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis

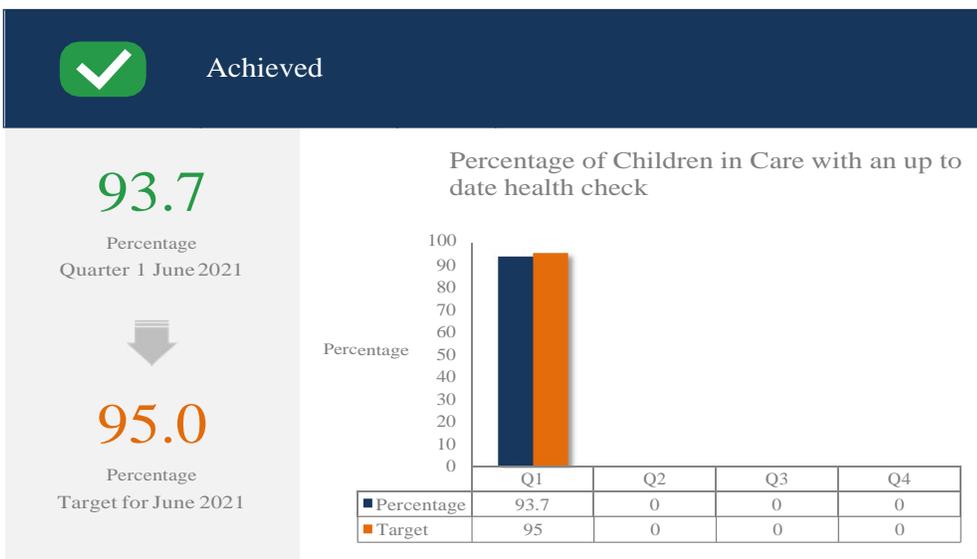


## Healthy and Safe

Children are Healthy and Safe

Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date health check

Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date health check record



About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 93.4%, Q2: 96%, Q3: 94.1%, Q4: 91.2%

Current performance has met the targets set

About the target

Remain as previous year, tolerance allows performance to be in line with this year's performance.

About the target range

An upper tolerance of 4.5% has been set. This would mean that if all checks were done within timescale we would have achieved an excellent outcome, which would be shown as better than target.

A lower tolerance of 2% has been set to allow for under performance. Data from the last two years shows achieving 93% is very achievable and performance has not often fallen below this marker.

About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis

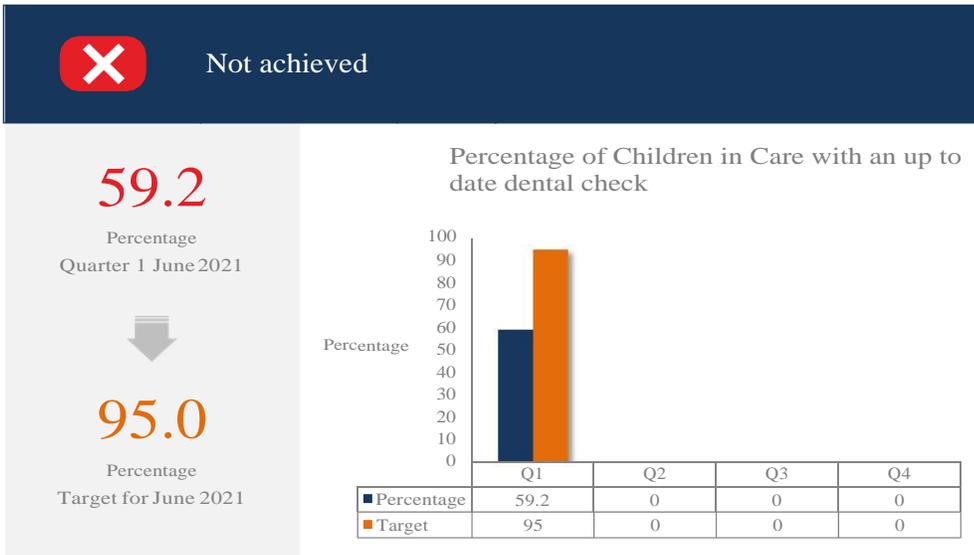


## Healthy and Safe

### Children are Healthy and Safe

#### Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date dental check

Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date dental check



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 89%, Q2: 76.5%, Q3: 69.9%, Q4: 49.5%

Whilst at 59.2% this measure is still below the target of 95%, it has improved markedly (by almost 10%) from 49.5% in the previous quarter of Q4 2020/21. However, the number of Children in Care with an up to date dental check continues to be significantly impacted by the Covid Pandemic. Prior to Covid, we were seeing increased difficulties in children being able to register with a National Health Service Dentist. Many of these appear to have made the decision to only provide private dentistry thereby impacting on the number of NHS practices available.

During periods of lockdown, National Health Dentists were only dealing with emergencies and outside of lockdown many have continued to restrict the number of patients they will see in any one day due to the increased levels of hygiene/protection that needs to be in place. Many were, and are continuing to refuse new registrations and the availability of dentists across the county continues to impact on our ability to ensure that all children in care have regular dental checks.

#### About the target

Remain as previous year, tolerance allows performance to be in line with this year's performance.

#### About the target range

An upper tolerance of 4.5% has been set. This would mean that if all checks were done within timescale we would have achieved an excellent outcome, which would be shown as better than target.

A lower tolerance of 2% has been set to allow for under performance. Data from the last two years shows achieving 93% is very achievable and performance has not often fallen below this marker.

#### About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis

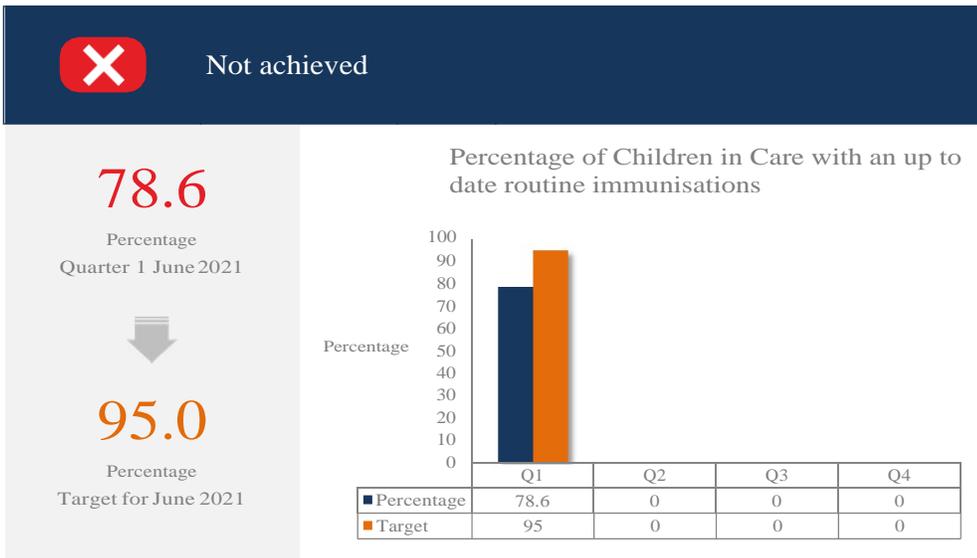


## Healthy and Safe

### Children are Healthy and Safe

#### Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date routine immunisations

Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date routine immunisations recorded



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 85.8%, Q2: 79.8%, Q3: 76.5%, Q4: 80%

The number of routine immunisations being completed continues to be impacted by the Covid Pandemic, with the measure staying broadly static at 78.6% in Q1 2021/22 compared to 80% in Q4 2020/21. The majority of overdue immunisations continue to be the teenage boosters which are undertaken in school. These were clearly delayed due to schools being closed for extended periods of time.

The health immunisation team have now resumed their programme of immunisations. However, it is projected that it will take approximately 18 months for the programme to be fully back on schedule. The team have to catch up on those that have been missed/delayed during the pandemic and also the increase in their workload due to all males now being offered the HPV and all school population being offered the flu immunisation.

#### About the target

Remain as previous year, tolerance allows performance to be in line with this year's performance.

#### About the target range

An upper tolerance of 4.5% has been set. Achievement of this would indicate that all LAC received all their health checks within timescale – achievement of 100%.

A lower tolerance of 1% has been set to allow for under performance. Data from the last two years shows achieving 94% is very achievable and performance has not often fallen below this marker.

#### About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis

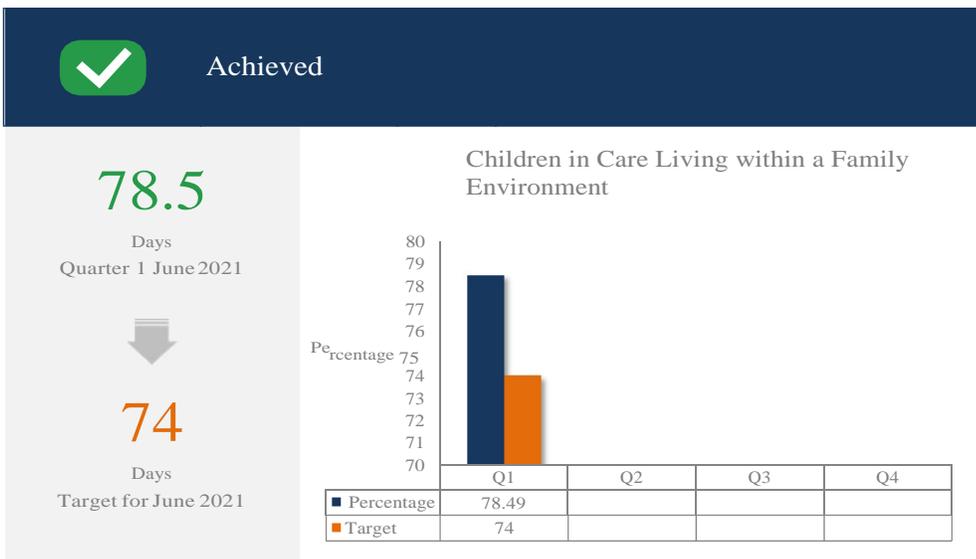


## Healthy and Safe

Children are Healthy and Safe

### Children in Care Living within a Family Environment

Percentage of Children in Care Living within a Family Environment



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 79.6%, Q2: 78.6%, Q3: 78.6%, Q4: 77.8%

Performance remains above target and has improved slightly on last quarter (78.5% in Q1 2021/22 compared to 77.8% in Q4 2020/21). It confirms that, for the vast majority of children in care, a family placement is the most effective means of offering care.

#### About the target

The target has been set to 74%. This is a new Performance Indicator which includes children in care living with parents as well as in foster and adoption placements.

#### About the target range

We would like to see performance between 70% and 77%, so we have set the lower range to -4% and the upper range to +3%.

#### About benchmarking

We are unable to benchmark against other local authorities as this measure includes children residing with their parents.



## Ready for Adult Life

### Ready for Adult Life

#### 16-17 year old Children in Care who are participating in Learning

This measures young people recorded as being Children in Care participating in learning at the end of the reporting period and will not take into consideration the length of time that they have been in local authority care.

Numerator: Number of Children in Care participating in learning at the end of the reporting period.

Denominator: Number of Children in Care at the end of the reporting period.

The percentage is calculated as follows: Numerator divided by the denominator multiplied by 100. The parameters of this measure were previously defined as recording 16-18 year old Children in Care participating in learning. As of Q1 2017/18 onwards, the Department for Education no longer require monitoring of children aged 18, and so the measure has been amended accordingly, restricting data provision to 16-17 year old Children in Care only. A higher percentage of Children in Care participating in learning indicates a better performance.



Achieved

86.3

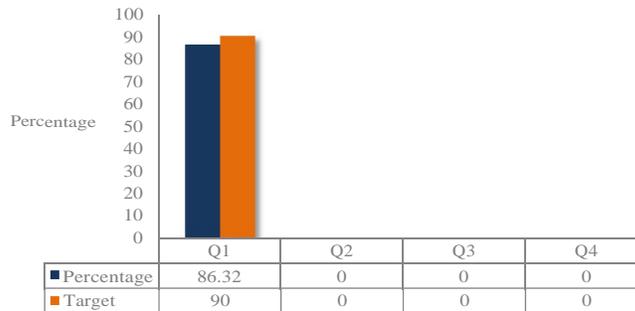
Percentage  
Quarter 1 June 2021



90.0

Percentage  
Target for June 2021

16-17 year old Children in Care who are participating in Learning



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 87.5%, Q2: 58.8%, Q3: 85.96%, Q4: 89.47%

Current performance has met the targets set

#### About the target

Target remains the same as the previous year. Q2 & Q3 targets lower to allow for the expected dip at this time of year due to September being the start of the tracking process

#### About the target range

The target range is set at a level to allow for 2 percentage points above the target and 5 percentage points below the target.

#### About benchmarking

Benchmarking information is not available for this cohort



## Ready for Adult Life

### Ready for Adult Life

#### Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation

A care leaver is a young person who reaches the age of 18 who had been in local authority care.

Numerator: Number of care leavers turning 19 years of age in the year who are living in accommodation deemed as "suitable".

Denominator: Number of care leavers turning 19 years of age in the year.

The percentage is calculated as follows: Numerator divided by the denominator multiplied by 100. A higher percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation indicates a better performance.



Achieved

95.5

Percentage  
Quarter 1 June 2021



92.0

Percentage  
Target for June 2021

Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation



#### About the latest performance

Performance in 2020/21 - Q1: 92.8%, Q2: 96%, Q3: 93.7%, Q4: 94%

The good performance in relation to accommodation is down to good working relationships with District Councils and their willingness to view care leavers as a priority group. The continued flexibility and resilience of our housing provider, Nacro, during the pandemic ensured safe accommodation is on offer should also be noted. The above combined with persistent and creative work of leaving care staff has ensured that nearly every care leaver is suitably accommodated. A further 2 young people have gone to custody and this is deemed as unsuitable accommodation, this will impact on our figures, but LCC is unable to change a care leaver being in custody.

#### About the target

Target to remain the same as previous year, we are above both national and similar authority average

#### About the target range

The lower target has been set at the 25% quartile. Meaning if we fall below this we will not be in the top 25% of authorities. The upper target has been set 5% above this



## Ready for Adult Life

### Ready for Adult Life

#### Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

The number of care leavers turning 19 years of age in the year who are in either Education, Employment or Training



Not achieved

53.0

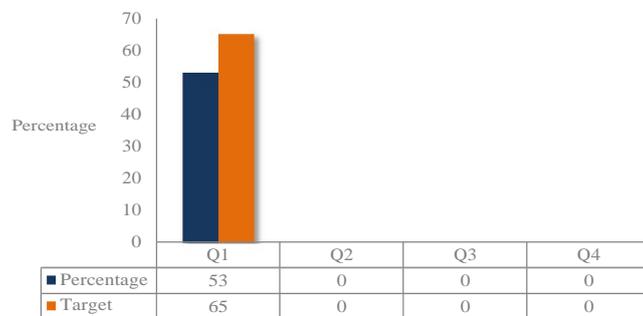
Percentage  
Quarter 1 June 2021



65.0

Percentage  
Target for June 2021

Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training



#### About the latest performance

Whilst this measure remains below target, performance is on an upward trajectory and at 53% there has been a notable improvement from the previous quarter's performance of 49.8%. The Leaving Care Service continues to monitor every single young person who is not in EET. The Service continues to report on a monthly basis the efforts of the service to re-engage individuals back into EET and the Corporate Parenting Manager tracks this performance. Covid-19 and the legacy of it continues to have an impact on the services sector and this does directly affect care leavers. Most young people start their working lives with jobs in bars, restaurants, shops and front line customer services where the largest job losses are being witnessed and it continues to impact on the ability of these employers to open. It is anticipated that Covid-19 will continue to impact on EET and the percentage remains in the low to mid 50% range.

Funding has been secured from the Covid recovery fund in order to recruit 2 specialist Leaving Care posts for a period of 1 year. The purpose of these 2 posts is to build capacity within the service and to focus specifically on EET. The focus will be on finding employment opportunities, work experience and unpicking and making best use of a range of initiatives and funding that will become available from central government to aid with the recovery from the pandemic.

#### About the target

Target reduced to 65% this is based on both recent performance and in comparison with other local authorities nationally.

#### About the target range

#### About benchmarking

We can compare ourselves both nationally and with similar authorities on an annual basis.



**Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director for Safeguarding**

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>9th September 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Adoption Annual Report and Statement of Purpose</b>

**Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Corporate Parenting Panel about the work of the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards National Minimum Standards 2003, 2011, 2014, and the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The National Minimum Standards, together with the Adoption Regulations, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

Under the requirements of the National Standards, Members, in their role as Corporate Parents, should be informed on a regular basis about the activity of the Adoption Service.

The National Minimum Standards for the Adoption Service are broken down into 31 standards. Standard 17 deals with the "monitoring and controlling" and requires the Executive Councillor to satisfy itself that the Adoption Agency is effective and achieves good outcomes for children (Section 17.3). Standard 18 deals with the Statement of Purpose and requires the Executive Councillor to satisfy itself that the Adoption Agency and Adoption Support Agency meet the aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose.

The Annual Report at Appendix A and the Statement of Purpose at Appendix B set out the relevant performance information and identifies the key developments with the service of the last twelve months.

**Recommendation(s):**

That the Corporate Parenting Panel recommends the approval of the Adoption Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose.

**1. Background**

In recognition of the highly specialised nature of adoption, Lincolnshire Children's Services operates a discreet Adoption Service, on a countywide basis from three localities. The

Annual Report and Statement of Purpose thus present the performance of the service over the previous year 2020-2021 to the Executive Councillor responsible for Children's Services and Elected Members.

## **2. Conclusion**

The Annual Report attached at Appendix A contains a range of information about the Adoption Agency in relation to performance indicators and measuring good outcomes; the work of the Adoption Panel; and various regulations relating to the Act and Adoption Support.

The Statement of Purpose is attached at Appendix B and its purpose is to ensure children, staff and service users are clear about the aims and objectives of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Support Agency, and what services and facilities it provides. Members of the Adoption Panel and staff working in the Adoption Service have been consulted.

The Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003.

## **3. Consultation**

### **a) Risks and Impact Analysis**

N/A

## **4. Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Adoption Annual Report
Appendix B	Adoption Statement of Purpose

## **5. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Deborah Crawford, Head of Service - Fostering and Adoption, who can be contacted via e-mail at [Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk).



# Annual Adoption Report 2020/2021

## **Introduction**

This report provides information about the Adoption Service and outcomes for children in care with Lincolnshire County Council, from the period April 2020 – March 2021 inclusive. The purpose of the Annual Report is to inform the public, elected members, partners and staff of the progress and developments of the Adoption Service during this period.

The County Council's Business Plan outlines the organisational values that reflect the Council's Vision and Purpose, providing a set of consistent, simple values that will guide our attitudes and behaviours. These values define how we do things, and are the principles by which we work together and with our customers and partners, and are underpinned by the following statement:

### **Our vision**

Is working for a better future by:

- Building on our strengths
- Protecting your lifestyle, and
- Being ambitious for the future

### **Our purpose**

- Investing in infrastructure and the provision of services
- Commissioning for outcomes based on our communities' needs
- Promoting community wellbeing and resilience
- Influencing, coordinating and supporting other organisations that contribute to the life of Lincolnshire, and
- Making the best use of all of our resources.

Our purpose within Regulated Services is to ensure that every child in every part of the county achieves their potential, responding appropriately to the assessed needs of all looked after children and young people, to ensure that their life chances are maximised by their experience of the service. The vision is 'Putting Children First'.

## **National Adoption Agenda**

The Government continues to maintain a clear focus on minimising delay for children with a plan for adoption and maximising the potential pool of adopters.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014, the Children and Families Bill received royal assent and became the Children and Families Act 2014 on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2014. To reflect the changes; regulations, National Minimum Standards and the statutory guidance for adoption were amended and came into force in July 2014. The changes inherent in the Act have continued to be implemented in Lincolnshire, with the establishment of Foster-to-Adopt placements, a two-

stage approval process for adopters, and the development and expansion of support services to adoptive families.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was rolled out to all local authorities. The fund offered a fast, simple service for local authorities to apply to, meaning that adoptive families can access the support they need, as and when they need it. To access the fund, adoptive families need to have an assessment of adoption support needs completed by the local authority. Where the assessment identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial to a family, the local authority can apply to the ASF on the family's behalf, who will then release the funding to the local authority.

In June 2015, the government published its proposal for the regionalisation of adoption services. The rationale behind this proposal was outlined as:

*"By the end of this Parliament, we want to see all local authorities being part of regional agencies. We want to accelerate the pace of change to ensure those children for whom adoption is the right path, are given the best chance of finding a loving, forever family as quickly as possible. "This year, we want to provide up to £4.5M of start-up funding to support early adopters to take forward their proposals."*

The government invited local authorities and voluntary organisations to combine their resources and submit an expression of interest to become early adopters of regionalisation.

In response to the proposal, The East Midlands Adoption Consortium submitted, and was successful, in its bid for government granted development funding to progress plans for an adoption agency, which would bring together five local authorities, three unitary authorities, and three voluntary agencies into a new regional adoption agency (RAA) across the East Midlands area. Lincolnshire was a member of the consortium supporting the development of the project. Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland launched as Regional Adoption Agency in October 2020 under the name Family Adoption Links. They continue to work co-operatively together to develop the RAA partnership, with an RAA management team, established regional family finding group, and plans in place to co-ordinate the work processes across the region.

Developing the workforce to ensure all social workers have the skills and knowledge to make swift and robust decisions about the best placements for children to meet their short and long term needs was seen as a priority, and in Lincolnshire the adoption staff have all been involved in the Signs of Safety framework in order to support their work. In addition all of the supervising social workers have completed their 'adult attachment interview' training in order to improve the quality of the adopter assessments, and to assist in the process of matching children to adopters.

In April 2019 Lincolnshire was commissioned by Rutland to deliver adoption services on their behalf, so a contract was developed with them, and over the course of the year Lincolnshire conducted a marketing campaign in Rutland and the first adoption information evening in Oakham, where several couples expressed an interest in becoming adopters. There have been regular meetings with Rutland staff to ensure that the work is completed in a timely way and to track cases. Lincolnshire was actively involved in Rutland's OFSTED inspection in

February 2020, by holding a training event with Rutland staff, providing children and adopters' files for evidence, and meeting with the inspector. The comments on adoption services in the Rutland OFSTED inspection report 2020 were positive.

At the end of March 2019 the statutory adoption register run by Coram BAAF ceased to operate, so Lincolnshire joined the Linkmaker system, which enabled social work staff and adopters to access information on children nationally and to have Lincolnshire children on the national system. This has been effective as the regional colleagues also use this system so there is a regional area where the family finding for the region is held, but also the option to have children on the system nationally so that approved adopters seeking a child can do so through this system.

In April 2019 Lincolnshire was inspected under the new ILACS system by OFSTED and was rated 'Outstanding'. This was the third consecutive 'Outstanding' for Lincolnshire Adoption Service.

In January 2020, Lincolnshire became involved in a pilot project for Coram/BAAF which focussed on the 'Together or Apart' assessment model which had been constructed and developed by Shelagh Beckett to assist social workers with the task of making lifelong decisions regarding the placing of sibling groups. Unfortunately due to Coronavirus it was not possible to develop the work on this as was planned. The project has been extended and will be modified to a 'virtual' model of delivery. The pilot has now been completed and the new Together or Apart assessment model is available and in use.

There remains a clear alignment of the local, regional and national agenda which is encapsulated in Lincolnshire County Council's vision "*that every child in every part of the county should achieve their potential*". To achieve this, the work of the Adoption Service is delivered according to the principles that the council adheres to, specifically:

- Early Intervention and prevention
- Safeguarding
- Aspiration and well-being
- Learning and achievement
- Best use of resources.

In addition to the above principles, four strategic outcomes for children have been agreed by Children's Services.

- Children and young people are healthy and safe
- Develop to their full potential in their early years and are ready for school
- Learn and Achieve
- Children and young people are ready for adult life.

The report details how the activity of the Adoption Service fits within the framework of the above principles.

## **Progress on Development Goals identified in 2019/2020 Annual Report**

### **Early Intervention and Prevention**

The use of the Signs of Safety model has continued to be embedded into practice, with all of the staff having completed training. The supervising social workers are using 'mapping' as an effective tool in the initial assessment of prospective adopters. The children's workers have developed their skills in using 'words and pictures' to enhance children's understanding of their situation and the plan for adoption and 'group's supervision' and 'problem solving circles' have become part of the day to day work.

There was continued high performance on the adoption scorecard performance against key threshold measures. We continue to perform well in this area, which means that wherever possible Lincolnshire children are placed with their adoptive family as quickly as possible, many within the government timescales.

There has been a consistent increase in the number of families who we have been able to help through the Adoption Support Fund, and there has been a notable increase in demand for support throughout the period of Covid. The government provided additional funds through the Adoption Support Fund, which we have accessed to provide an on-line therapeutic parenting service for adopters and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers, and an advice line for SGO carers. Both of these services have been well used by adopters and SGO carers.

### **Adoption Scorecard**

The most relevant indicators refer to the years ending 31st March 2017, 31st March 2018 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.

There are 3 main indicators pertinent to adoption performance:

- (A1) Average time between entering care and being placed for adoption is 421 days. The all England average and statistical neighbour average remain higher. Lower is better.
- (A2) Average time between gaining authority to place and achieving a match is 131 days, significantly lower than the all England average of 201 and the statistical neighbour average of 203. Lower is better.
- (A3) The percentage of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 75% in Lincolnshire, slightly down on last year but still well above the all England average.
- Adoptions as a percentage of children leaving care remain strong at 12%.

These remain to be strong figures compared to both statistical neighbours and the national average, and the challenge going forward will be to remain 'on target'. The increase in the A1 is indicative of the length of care proceedings becoming longer, due to court delays during 'lockdown', but the A2 remains the same, and indicates that Lincolnshire children are being placed in a timely way wherever possible. There continues to be a small cohort of

children whose timescales will fall out of the target and this is due to them being difficult to place or applications from parents for leave of the court to appeal Placement Orders which has been a cause for delay. This year has seen an increased number of children with a plan of adoption, from 43 to 49. The trend for high numbers of children placed on Special Guardianship Orders has reduced. The number of children coming into care following a marked increase last year, has levelled. The number of adoption orders granted this year has gone down significantly from 53 for 2019, to 29 for 2020. This reduction reflects an average over the 2 year period of approximately 40 a year which is on target.

### **Regionalisation Agenda**

Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland have formed an RAA, continuing to work as a partnership, planning and work on the various different 'work streams' continue, as we develop the work of the region as a whole.

A governance structure has been established with representatives from across the region forming the Project Governance Board.

### **Safeguarding**

Over the course of the year 'Signs of Safety' has continued to be incorporated into the adoption process wherever possible as a model for assessing matches, adoptive placements and for risk assessments, and in direct work with children whilst preparing them for placement. Staff members in the team have been actively involved in developing the use of 'words and pictures' in direct work with children assisting them in understanding the reasons they are in care, and were not safe in their birth families.

The supervising social workers in the team have all now completed their adult attachment style training and are using this alongside 'mapping' as a way of analysing their initial assessments of adopters, in order to ensure that we are assessing and approving adopters who will be able to manage the needs of the children who require adoptive placements .

### **Aspiration and Well-being**

Maximise the benefits to adoptive families in Lincolnshire arising from the Adoption Support Fund. There has been an increase in the number of families who have been provided with therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund to assist families in utilising therapeutic parenting techniques in their family life.

Over the course of 2020/21 there have been 262 applications to the Adoption Support Fund in order to provide therapeutic input for adopted children and families. The amount of funding granted from the fund to cover these was £620,023. The number of referrals and the amount of money granted this year was almost double that of the previous year so this has placed significant pressure on the team with most of their focus being on adoption

support assessments and arranging the therapeutic packages. This total also included the on line support packages provided through the ASF Covid fund.

There were cases where individual therapy was delivered by therapeutically trained staff who are external providers. In many of the cases there were individual sessions delivered remotely due to Covid, using Theraplay, therapeutic life story work, Dyadic Developmental PsychoTherapy (DDP) or Sensory Integration Therapy (SIT). There was also a number of cases where there was a detailed assessment of therapeutic needs, followed by an intensive period of therapeutic input and attachment focussed therapy, again delivered remotely by external providers. All of the families in receipt of these services have reported them to be positive in helping them to meet the challenge of parenting their adopted children.

### **Learning and achievement**

Maintain strong links with the virtual school and ensure adopted children in schools receive the full benefit from initiatives including the Pupil Premium. Through the period of the Covid pandemic there has continued to be liaison with the virtual school, and we have been able to make sure that where it was important there have been school places provided for children in order to reduce the stress in the adoptive or foster home.

During 2020/21 the majority of adoption staff have continued to use Theraplay theory and methods, albeit 'on line', so that they can support adoptive families with children newly in placement to use therapeutic parenting models in order to enhance the building of positive attachments in the early stages of placement. Unfortunately it has not been possible to deliver this face to face through Covid owing to the constraints relating to close contact. There are three clinicians within the Adoption Support Team who are trained in DDP Therapy, Filial Therapy and Family Therapy; thus creating a flexible and sustainable adoption service.

Staff have learned new skills and have been extremely creative in planning and managing introductions using virtual contact as much as possible, particularly where there were foster carers who were 'shielding'. They have also developed the use of comprehensive 'Covid risk assessments' to ensure that transitions have been well and safely managed in all cases; to enable children to move to their adoptive families in a timely manner.

The Team was able to continue to provide some post-adoption activities for children during school holidays, but these had to be for a reduced number of children and be risk assessed in accordance with social distancing and Covid rules. There were forest schools for the younger children to promote awareness of nature and give them new skills and two photography workshops which provided new skills and creativity. All of these activities enabled adopted children to meet one another and provided an environment in which the children could talk about being adopted as well as increasing self-esteem.

## **Best use of Resources**

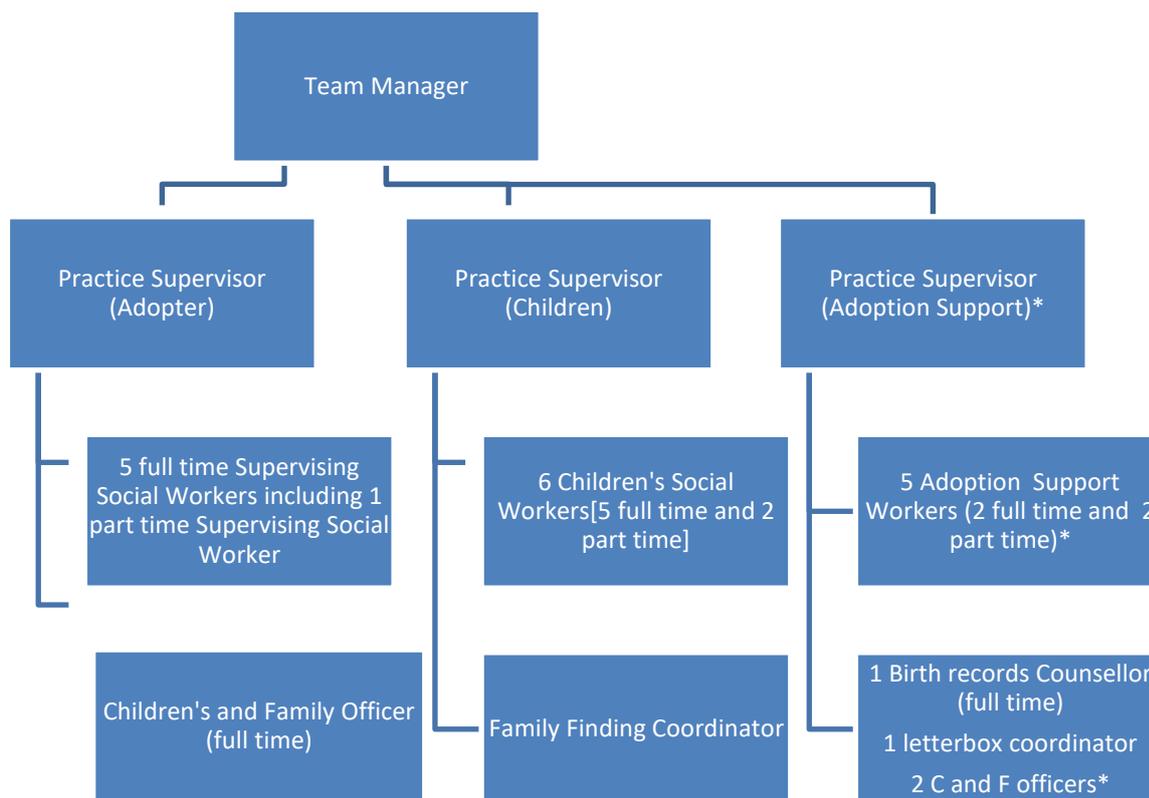
Staff in the post adoption team have been involved in rebuilding the Mosaic system so that it is now a useful and effective recording system which is being used by all team members. The final part of the build was to ensure that the adoption support workflows are correct and effective. This has now been completed so that the system can be used effectively throughout the service.

The post adoption team have begun to develop a range of services for SGO support, to enable them to have access to training, support groups, and advice and guidance. Support proposed will be two-tiered, with the FAST Teams completing the formal reassessment of SGO support plans. The Adoption Support Team has developed an information leaflet and helpline for Special Guardians. Guardians will be granted access to the e-Learning currently available for foster carers and a quarterly newsletter is being developed. Applications to the ASF will be managed through the adoption service.

## **Service Role and Structure**

The core duties of the Adoption Service remain broadly unchanged. The Adoption Service continues to provide services to children, adopters and birth family members as required by the National Adoption Minimum Standards 2014 as issued by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the [Care Standards Act 2000](#), Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, the Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005) and the Adoption Statutory Guidance July 2014, the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and the Children and Families Act 2014.

The Adoption Team remains a stand-alone countywide service with office bases at Lincoln, Sleaford and Louth. This year all staff have been working from home, with access to the office when this is necessary. All staff continue to be employed by Lincolnshire, but the adopter's team and the adoption support teams are now part of the Regional Adoption Agency.



The Adoption Service is staffed by a Team Manager, three Practice Supervisors, six Children's Adoption Social Workers and six Supervising Social Workers. The Adoption Support Team has one Birth Records Social Worker, two full-time and two-part-time Adoption Support Social Workers, a Children and Families Officer who manages the 'letterbox' and an adoption support worker who supports adoptive families in the community. At the end of the year a new Early Help Worker was appointed to focus on the needs of SGO carers and provide them with support and assessments.

The Children's Adoption Social Workers progress children's plans for adoption. The Supervising Social Workers recruit and assess prospective adopters, as well as completing step-parent adoption assessments. Supervising Social Workers also deliver preparation training courses for adopters. A qualified Social Worker in the Adoption Support Team carries out the agency's statutory duties of birth record counselling for adopted adults.

Lincolnshire does not provide intermediary services but does provide limited assistance in tracing where it is able. The Adoption Support Social Workers complete work directly with families who have adopted and who are struggling to manage issues specifically linked to their adoption. In addition they organise groups and activities to support adopters and adopted children. The Children and Family Officer co-ordinates the indirect contact arrangements for adopted children and birth relatives together with the completion of life story work for the preparation of children placed for adoption.

**Adoption Performance**

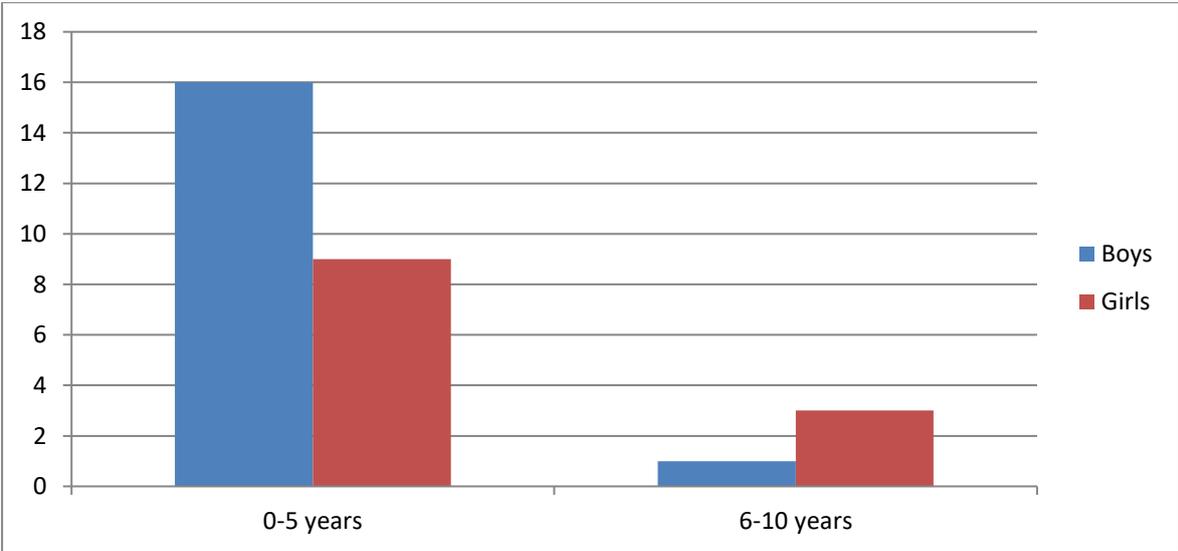
Adoption Orders granted April 2020– March 2021

- In the year to March 2021, 29 adoption orders were granted
- In addition 41 Special Guardianship Orders were granted.

This year has seen a decrease in the number of adoptions in Lincolnshire with 29 adoptions this year. This balances with the increased numbers [53] in the preceding year. Through the Covid period there have been delays in the court process, particularly for 'contested' adoption cases as these have had to be hybrid hearings to allow for birth parents to attend court in person. The number of children being placed on SGOs has increased again to 41 as compared to only 33 in 2019/20. Performance against the Adoption Scorecard has already been discussed in detail above with performance against all three threshold measure continuing to show good performance which is consistently better than the statistical neighbours, and the England average.

**Adoption Activity for 2020/2021**

**Profile of children adopted 2020/2021:**



Lincolnshire County Council achieved twenty nine adoption orders during 2020/2021, a decrease of 24 from the previous year and taking the figure well below the average number for Lincolnshire. The demographics were proportionally similar with more boys [17] than girls [12]. The previous year had seen a number of cases, which had been delayed in the courts for many months due to contested hearings, being granted. Contested adoption cases have become a common theme, as more adoptions are being contested by birth parents, and the court is giving birth families every opportunity before making the final decision .

This year there has been delay in the courts owing to the Covid situation. This has been due in part to the need to have 'hybrid' hearings for contested adoptions, so that the birth parents were able to attend court and be heard, and also due to the increased pressure on the courts owing to an unprecedented increase in care proceedings during this time.

Despite all of this Lincolnshire has continued to achieve high performance levels for the timely placement of children. There are fewer children waiting and many of the children are pre-matched prior to the court granting the Placement Order. In addition to this, 41 Special Guardianship Orders were granted and these are counted by the DFE as part of the adoption performance measure.

In addition to the 20 singleton placements there were only 4 sibling groups this year. There were three sibling groups of two and one sibling group of three. In terms of a profile of ethnicity, there were five children of Eastern European heritage. All other children were recorded as White British.

### **Profile of children with a best interest plan of adoption 2020/21**

During April 2020 to March 2021 49 children had an agency decision of adoption, of which 38 went onto being subject to a Placement Order. This was slightly more than the previous year's figures.

Of the 49 children there were the following groups of siblings:

- 0 groups of 3 children
- 6 groups of 2 children
- 37 single children.

This is a decrease in the numbers of sibling groups as compared to last year, with no sibling groups of three. There continued to be use of kinship placements and Special Guardianship Orders throughout the 2020/21 performance year, and the numbers increased to 41.

### **Age ranges of children with a best interest plan of adoption 2020/21**

- 0 - 5 years = 40 [38]
- 6 -10 years = 2 [5 ]
- 10 plus = 0 [0]

Previous year's performance in brackets.

The predominant ethnicity of the children with a best interest plan remains White British although there was one child of dual heritage.

Children under 5 years remain the largest age group placed for adoption. These children sometimes come as part of a sibling group with older children and therefore the target of

the service's recruitment strategy continues to be targeting adopters willing to consider sibling groups and older children.

### **Profile of children placed for adoption**

With regard to placements made this year 29 children were placed; the same number as the previous year. Of these, 22 were singleton placements, 4 children were placed in 2 sibling groups of 2, and one group of three was placed. Of these sibling groups, one of the groups had two children over five. All of the other children placed were under five with 22 of them being placed before they were 2 years. There were 19 boys placed and 10 girls, so a similar proportion to last year.

Overall, with some variation in the numbers of sibling groups, this is similar to the previous year as approximately 25 under 5s a year seems to be fairly constant. There has been a significant increase in the number of cases which are delayed in court awaiting placement orders and were not placed within NMS 17.7 as they waited several months to be made subject to a placement order.

### **Children Awaiting Placement at the close of 2020/21.**

At the end of March 2021, there were 21 children whose plans were not agreed by the court and who did not yet have a Placement Order. This is twice as many cases as in the previous year, so indicative of court delays due to Covid, and the increasing number of contested cases. There were a further 4 children whose plans were changed by the courts and who either returned home or were placed with relatives on an SGO.

There were 3 young children who have special needs or complex health/development issues, and had therefore waited a long time to get a placement. There was one older child who will be difficult to place and whose legal position is complex. In addition, there were 6 children who were provisionally linked but not yet formally matched.

### **Adopters approved as suitable to adopt during 2020/21**

A total of 25 adoptive parents were approved to adopt during 2020/2021, with no adopters approved for inter-country adoption. 8 of these were also approved for Foster to Adopt. This is a decrease with 3 less adopters than last year's figures and this was mainly down to the impact of Covid 19 upon the assessment and training of prospective adoptive parents.

We ended the year with adopters awaiting placements so were able to meet the needs of children with adoption plans coming through the system. The focus of the work during this year was to match the children waiting and place them into adoptive families at the earliest opportunity whilst ensuring that we remained Covid secure.

The trend continues to be that there are more adoptive parents than children waiting for a placement within the county. As there have been significant delays in children's court proceedings, we have always had approved adopters waiting to ensure choice when making matches. At 31/03/2020 there were 14 [10] adopters approved and waiting; two of which

were being considered for possible links. In addition there were three adopters fostering children with a view to adoption.

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Total Adopters approved	25	28	43	22	32	24
Of which Foster-to-Adopt	8	7	15	14	12	0
Foster-to-Adopt New Applications	8	6	10	5	12	6
Foster-to-Adopt Subsequent Applications	0	1	4	9	5	0

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Approved for one child	19	18	37	13	20	14
Approved for two children	6	10	6	9	11	9
Approved for three children	0	0	0	0	1	1

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16
White British	22	25	40	21	29
Asian/Asian British – Indian	1	0	1	1	2
Other white background	2	1	1	0	1
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	0	0	1		

In order to reflect the government's aspiration to encourage foster carers who then go on to adopt we supported four foster families with children in placement to apply directly to the courts for an Adoption Order. There have been a much higher number of these applications than last year reflecting the amount of time that children are remaining in a task centred foster placement.

It is noted that there has been a reduction in the numbers of adoptive families wanting to provide families for sibling groups, and this may be due to the uncertainties which are Covid related. We will continue to maximise our capacity to recruit for larger sibling groups,

through a mixture of targeted recruitment and the flexible use of support packages for families seeking to adopt three or more children.

**Recruitment**

During this period, the recruitment of adopters was assisted by the recruitment staff.

Their role was to take calls from prospective adopters and make the initial response to enquiries via the website, giving information about adopting, coordinating the provision of further information, completing initial enquiries, and passing the information onto the adoption team.

The Adoption Service continued to undertake its own initial visits to determine the suitability of prospective adopters up to the approval stage.

**Recruitment Statistics**

From 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021:

- 208 Initial Expression of Interest forms (IEIs) were received
- 23 households were newly approved (17 for Adoption and 6 for Foster to Adopt).

Despite the unprecedented Covid-19 epidemic changing the way people across the UK live and work throughout 2020-21, enquiries were higher than they had been in previous years as demonstrated below:

Financial Year	Number of IEIs received
2020 / 2021	208
2019 / 2020	186
2018 / 2019	198

There is evidence that with so many people living in lockdown during this period and being unable to physically go to work, that more people considered if they can adopt, which could be a contributing factor to the increased number of enquiries received this year.

**Advertising**

There was not a great need to spend money on advertising during this financial year due to the high number of enquiries already coming through and the number of approved adopters already waiting for a match in Lincolnshire.

Therefore the only advertising campaign for Lincolnshire during 2020/2021 was during National Adoption Week in October as follows:

- Advert and editorial in Lincs and Wolds Scene magazines

- Paid-for targeted Facebook campaign
- Adverts running on Lincs FM
- Advert and editorial in Lincolnshire Today
- Advert and editorial in Lincolnshire Life
- Advert & editorial in Primary Times
- Event advertised in the prospective adopter newsletter
- Press release to local media
- Virtual information evening on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> October, 6:30pm – 8:00pm.

One of the drawbacks to the virtual event is that it is not possible to engage with attendees as much as it is at face-to-face events to ensure those who are suitable and keen to progress are actually filling out an IEI (at face-to-face events you can have one-to-one conversations with applicants and physically fill out the IEI with them there and then). This is not possible virtually and so is arguably not as effective.

### **YouCanAdopt Campaign**

The national YouCanAdopt campaign ran from 16<sup>th</sup> September – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and Lincolnshire Adoption Service took part in this digital campaign the week prior to and during National Adoption Week through engaging posts supplied by the national project via Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

### **Adoption Panel Activity for 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021**

The Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 17.2 provides a requirement for:

“Adoption Panels to provide a quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to the Panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement.”

### **Children’s Plans for Adoption**

As part of the Quality Assurance Process for children to be considered for Adoption, these reports have been scrutinized in advance by the Panel Advisor along with Team Managers from Fostering, Adoption, FAST, Children in Care and the Independent Reviewing Service.

The Quality Assurance meeting is available each week and cases are booked in consultation with Legal Services and the Adoption Team in advance to ensure the timescales in relation to Care Proceedings are met. This process allows for a rigorous cross-agency check to ensure that the work is of a high enough standard and that the child’s wishes and views are recorded.

When compiling these reports the current foster carers provide a profile for the child, which is circulated. The views of parents and birth family are detailed within these reports. If there are no views then the Advisor will request that the facts and reasons why there are no views from the parents are recorded.

Written Legal Advice is provided independent of the case holder and ensures that any matters concerning Re B-S (Children) 2013 are well evidenced for the Agency Decision Maker and that the plans are robust and there are no legal issues which may prevent the plans from being considered.

The Quality Assurance meeting will collectively scrutinise each report to ensure that in their opinion the Welfare Check list has been addressed and that, if any expert reports have been requested in Care Proceedings, these are available. This is particularly important in order to ensure there is a balanced approach and that key points raised have been considered fully within the Childs Permanence Report.

A summary of the assessments is included in the Child Permanence Report and copies of those expert reports are available to the Agency Decision Maker in good time to be read.

The Panel Advisor liaises with the agency to provide any actions and feedback from this forum; this may be addressed with the Adoption Service, FAST Teams, Independent Reviewing Service and Legal Services.

The Agency Decision Maker considers the Welfare Check List in particular

“the relationship which the child has with relatives and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including (i) the likelihood of any such relationship continuing and the value to the child of its doing so, (ii) the ability and willingness of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, to provide the child with a secure environment in which the child can develop, and otherwise to meet the child's need and (iii) the wishes and feelings of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, regarding the child, to ensure that any recommendations made have taken account of these relationships.”

## **Analysis**

Child Permanence Reports detail the child’s history well. They are written in a style which is easy to read and consideration is made to how the views of children who are nonverbal can still be included in the reports.

The wishes and views of birth parents can be difficult for the workers to report on due to the family disengaging with the workers. It would be beneficial to see further evidence of how workers have utilised restorative/relationship based practice tools to engage with the birth family and how this can be evidenced more fully at the point of a link panel. This may have a bearing on a number of outcomes for both the parents and how many contested cases are addressed.

The reports addressing a child's plan of adoption are written to a high standard and they utilise the Signs of Safety tools in their analysis. The reports detail the child’s history well and are easily read and understood. The report details the challenges that a child may have

faced in their early life including matters which detail the harm which was attributed to the care given to them by their birth family.

The reports consider fully the lifelong impact of adoption and are mindful in addressing matters around contact post adoption both with birth parents but all those who are important to the child including siblings whose plans may not be that of adoption.

The reports also provide significant insight into the functioning and experiences of the birth family and extended family members; this allows for a fuller understanding of who was considered and an explanation as to why they could not offer care to a particular child.

This is key important information for prospective adopters and in due course the child themselves who may come to view these reports at a later stage.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, the following children have had a decision to support a plan for Adoption made by the Agency Decision Maker compared to the previous year.

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Boys approved for adoption	24	29	24	35	17	12
Girls approved for adoption	26	15	27	20	6	8
<b>Total children approved for adoption</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>
Single children approved	37	31	38	41	15	16
Children in sibling groups of two	6 [12]	5 [10]	5 [10]	4 [8]	2 [4]	2 [4]
Children in sibling groups of three	0	1 [3]	1 [3]	2 [6]	0	0
Children in sibling groups of four	0	0	0	0	1 [4]	0
White British children	48	42	45	52	22	19
Other white background (European)	0	1	2	1	1	1
Other	1	2	4	2	0	0
Age Range 0 - 2	40	36	39	32	15	11
Age Range 3 - 5	8	8	8	15	6	8
Age Range 6 - 8	1	0	3	6	2	1
Age Range 9 -11	0	0	0	2	0	0
Age Range 11+	0	0	1			
<b>% meeting the National Minimum Standard 17.6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Between April 2020 and March 2021, the following children have been placed for Adoption.

#### **National Minimum Standard 17.7**

The Adoption Panel makes a considered recommendation on the proposed placement of a child with particular adopters within 6 months of the Adoption Agency Decision Maker deciding the child be placed for adoption.

	2020/2021	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/14
Total Children	49	44	51	55	23
Linked with adopters in timescale NMS 17.7	11	18	19	23	17
Linked with adopters outside timescale NMS 17.7	0	10	11	3	1
Awaiting link	38	6	21	29	1
Awaiting link – no placement order		6			
Returned to family	0	1	0	0	4
Change of care plan	0	2			
Adopted via Direct Application		1			
<b>% meeting the National Minimum Standard 17.7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>78.5%</b>	<b>94.5%</b>	<b>95%</b>

### Suitability of Prospective Adopters

There have been twenty five Adoption/Permanence Panels in this period. In that time the following applicants have been approved;

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Total Adopters approved	25	28	43	22	32	24
Of which Foster-to-Adopt	8	7	15	14	12	0
Foster-to-Adopt New Applications	8	6	10	5	12	6
Foster-to-Adopt Subsequent Applications	0	1	4	9	5	0

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Approved for one child	19	18	37	13	20	14
Approved for two children	6	10	6	9	11	9
Approved for three children	0	0	0	0	1	1

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16
White British	22	25	40	21	29
Asian/Asian British – Indian	1	0	1	1	2
Other white background	2	1	1	0	1
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	0	0	1		

### **% reports meeting the National Minimum Standard 10.6 timescale 88%**

Again these reports have all been prepared by social workers who meet the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005.

Panel Administration requests the papers are available fourteen days ahead of the Panel date to allow the quality assurance process to take place. Reports are passed to the Advisor who checks that the applicant's statutory checks have been completed and that health checks as well as health and safety checklists have been completed. Alongside this the Advisor will ensure that the assessment is completed and that it adequately covers aspects of the couple's or individual's strengths as adopters and their ability to provide safe care to a child.

The report must ensure that the couple's or individual's child care experience, background history and life story, including education, is detailed as well as their support network and what attitude they have regarding contact arrangements for the future. The couple's or individual's financial details should be contained in the report.

The quality of Prospective Adopters Reports is very good and Adult Style Attachment interviews are being used as well as evidence from referees to appropriately explore skills and strengths.

On occasion the Advisor and Chair have required additional work to be completed prior to formal consideration by Panel however this is rare.

If there is any third party information or clarification of issues sought by Panel the workers will be asked to join Panel ahead of the applicants.

A further quality assurance check has been agreed when Lincolnshire are considering a link with out of county adopters. These PARs will be checked by both the PS in Lincolnshire and the Panel Advisor to ensure they comply with the standards in Lincolnshire.

## **Analysis**

There is evidence within the minutes of Panel that detail the Panel's key consideration of applicants. The current central list provides us with panel members who have the experience and understanding of the adoption process in order to be able to consider the assessment.

There has been further development in using the referees as a positive source of evidence for the assessment with workers using the referee interview to confirm the views of the workers or in some cases to appropriately challenge the prospective adopter's views.

The Prospective Adopter Reports continue to be of a high standard with only single numbers where further information has been needed to achieve the standard.

These reports have all been prepared or been supervised by social workers who meet the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005.

Panel Administration requests the papers are available fourteen days ahead of the Panel date to allow the quality assurance process to take place. Reports are passed to the Advisor who checks that the applicant's statutory checks are up-to-date and that health checks as well as health and safety checklists have been completed and that a comprehensive and detailed contact plan is included within the reports.

The Panel Advisor will request any update of reports, medicals and support plans be prepared ahead of Panel to be circulated to Panel Members ahead of the deadline

The Advisor quality assures all the reports to ensure that a full assessment is provided with a clear analysis as to why this particular family has been suggested as the best match for the child and how they will best meet the child’s needs.

Further work continues to be supported by staff on developing a more thorough narrative by adopters on why they wish to adopt a particular child. This further identifies any potential support needs between the child and the potential adopters. The Panel Members will also consider the relative strengths of each match and also any areas where they may require further clarity.

The quality of these reports has been good with positive matches for sibling groups and single children. Reports have detailed the needs of children and how the prospective adopters will meet these needs.

Panel minutes show the various matches of children to couples and single carers and confirm that questioning has been relevant and focussed upon the specific task i.e. the match with the adopters to ensure that the needs of a child can be met in the suggested placement.

**Adoption Support**

The period covered by this report has seen further improvements to the range of adoption support services which are provided within the framework set out within the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005. The majority of the support is now provided through the Adoption Support Fund, but the therapists within the team still provide packages and there is a limited commissioned service through independent providers. The service is provided on a tiered basis dependent on assessed need.

<b>Tier 1</b>	Wide universal support to adopters includes: Contact co-ordination, helpline advice, information via the Lincolnshire adoption website, birth records counselling for adults. Also included in this tier is counselling for birth relatives whose children have been adopted and some general training for adopters and SGO carers.
<b>Tier 2</b>	All of tier 1 and in addition adoption support groups/activities for adopters and for children affected by adoption. These include a programme of activities which bring adoptive children together to share experiences of adoption as part of leisure activities. This tier also includes additional training for adopters/SGO carers.
<b>Tier 3</b>	Previous tier support plus specific adoption support include assessment of need, individual adoption support packages, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Theraplay, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprogramming , Non Violent Resistance, and Extended Life Story Work. This tier also includes access to primary mental health services and CAMHS. Since the spring of 2015 with the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund, government funding has been made available to provide for therapeutic input to adoptive children and their families in recognition of their lifelong needs.

## **Tier 1**

The Lincolnshire Adoption website remains the first point of support for adopters and adopted children and during the period covered by the report all written and web materials are in the process of being revised in line with the Family Adoption Links RAA. The site advertises adoption activities and groups and enables the Adoption Service to consult users about planned future services. Links to services from Children's Centres and a range of education services are also available from this site. In addition to the website service users can contact the Adoption Helpline for advice and guidance. Adopters and SGO carers can also access a range of e-learning modules.

Adopters/SGO carers can sign up to receiving a regular electronic newsletter which provides information on forth-coming activities, useful short articles offering advice, and encourages contributions from both adoptive parents and children.

In 2020/21 the service received 46 referrals for birth records counselling, which is slightly less than last year. Callers enquiring about tracing relatives were signposted to other agencies as Lincolnshire does not provide intermediary services. Twenty five people were provided with counselling services and regular sessions and there were 21 requests from out of county where the file information was summarised and provided to the other authority.

The birth families service is still provided by PAC UK who took the contract from After Adoption and provides counselling to birth relatives who have lost their children to adoption. The contract is at capacity and provided counselling to 40 birth parents /relatives during this year, although with the reduction in numbers of birth parents in care proceedings the nature of the referrals has changed with more of the work now being focussed on birth relatives at a later stage in the process who may have been self-referrals or referrals through the 'letterbox'.

## **Contact**

Indirect Letterbox contact activity

April 2020 – March 2021

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 there were 660 children on the letterbox.

For the twelve month period there were 31 new children added and 35 children removed as they turned 18.

Access to birth records counselling – 25 referrals for counselling.

Plus 21 requests from other agencies for summaries and documents from files we hold.

Birth relative enquiries – not recorded as we only signpost people to intermediary agencies.

There are 13 letterbox arrangements for families who hold Special Guardianship Orders and 2 where children are not adopted but letterbox was felt appropriate.

## **Direct Contact**

- 15 children have direct contact with one or both birth parents
- 12 have direct contact with siblings in foster care or not adopted
- 5 have direct contact with grandparents.

## **Tier 2**

At the core of provision in this Tier is the offer of adoption support groups across the county co-ordinated by adopters supported by the service. Attendance by adopters at these groups continues to vary but those who attend report they are appreciated. In addition there have been courses delivered on line this year through a membership to a therapeutic parenting organisation using ASF monies, as it was not possible to provide therapeutic training remotely, due to increased pressures on the service this year. Adopters and children have continued to meet and network, when it has been possible to do so, within the government guidance, and have also made use of remote contact using Zoom. We have provided funding to these Localised Adoption Support Groups.

Again, due to Covid, and the need for social distancing and risk assessments, the number of children's activities were reduced this year but we were able to offer the following;-

Woodland Adventure Days for primary age children – 3 days in July 2020 – 9 children attended (4 groups of siblings so they could be socially distanced)

Woodland Adventure Day for primary age children – 1 day event in October 2020 – 9 children attended

Music Tech Workshops for secondary age children – series of one-day events with the same group of children – only two events were able to go ahead in August 2020 and October 2020 with 5 children

Photography workshop – also run by Soundlinks for secondary age children – 4 children attended this one day event in August 2020.

## **Tier 3**

This Tier provides specialised therapeutic support to those families who require direct adoption support with tailored plans of support intervention. All adoption support referrals are now completed by the Adoption Support Team. Safeguarding Referrals continue to be assessed by the Family Support and Assessment Teams. Over a hundred adoption/SGO support assessments have been completed and the majority indicated some form of therapeutic intervention was required. Cases can be allocated to Post Adoption Support workers who are trained to provide specialist therapeutic input across a range of therapeutic models including Dyadic Therapy, Theraplay, Psychotherapy, Eye movement desensitization

reprogramming and Non Violent Resistance, but the vast majority are commissioned using the adoption support fund grants .

In addition to the above services, we provided direct financial support through allowances for over 100 adoptive families through the period 2019-2020. This totals £750,000 over the year, and the demand for adoption/SGO support has increased significantly throughout the pandemic.

During 2020/21 the support service received 262 new referrals that became support cases under Tier 3. This was an increase in referrals of almost 100% as compared with the previous year. The requests for support covered the following areas, but there was a general increase in requests for adoption/SGO support in relation to the Covid situation with carers struggling to manage children, particularly those who were unable to attend school:

- Attachment difficulties
- Behaviour management /special needs
- Life Story work
- Contact issues
- Requests for funding for support
- Requests for respite care.
- Request for therapeutic or Theraplay input
- Mediation for adoptive families to maintain the adoptive placement.
- Child on parent violence.

It is clear that the service is trying to manage some extremely complex cases with children who have significant difficulties. There has been delay in the system during Covid, with many of the therapeutic providers being at capacity, and having waiting lists for intervention. The significant support from the Adoption Support Fund has made a positive difference to the range of services which can be offered to adopters/SGO carers, but has not always been able to provide this in a timely way owing to the high demand. 262 applications were made to the fund and all were successful. A total of £620,023 was claimed from the fund in 2020/21.

The Local Authority continues to invest in the on-going training of Adoption Support staff ensuring that Clinical supervision is available to therapists within the Team and that staff participate in on-going therapeutic training to ensure that the needs of families can be met.

### **National Changes for 2021/22**

Family Adoption Links launched in October 2020. This is a 'partnership' with Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and North Lincolnshire who joined us in January 2020.

It is essential that going forward the agency has a clear focus on how best to deliver services in a way that maximises the impact of limited resources and that will include looking at efficiencies which can be delivered through the regionalisation agenda.

### **Service planning**

Our development goals for the coming 12 month period continue to be aligned to the five County Council principles set out at the beginning of the report and the objectives for children which are set out below.

We will aim to learn from changes in practice and plan to move forward using more virtual meetings, and continuing to be creative in developing new ways of working where appropriate.

### **Children and young people are healthy and safe.**

To continue to develop the 'Signs of Safety' model, and restorative practice in the adoption process, and as the framework for preparing children for placement. Plans are in place for the children's social worker to undertake 'restorative' work wherever possible in their work with birth parents.

Maintain and consolidate progress on improving adoption scorecard performance against key threshold measures to minimise delay for children requiring adoption placements.

Ensure that placements are timely either through placing children as soon as they are subject to a Placement Order or through an early placement scheme, in order to promote positive attachment and making best use of in-house, regional and national family finding.

To maintain focus on children's health checks.

To extend the range of training available to adopters; to provide them with therapeutic parenting skills.

To plan and implement training for 'family and friends' of adopters, and enable them to support families in their role as adopters.

### **Children develop full potential in early years and are ready for school**

- Extending the Adoption Support Service to include intensive support at the early stage in placements for sibling groups, in order to promote therapeutic parenting, and attachment work early in the placement, so that children are 'ready for school '.
- Making use of the Caring 2 Learn approach with adopters.
- Support and develop 'play and stay' adoptive family groups to promote social learning
- Making good use of nursery provision for adopted children.

### **Learn and achieve.**

- Maximise the benefits to adoptive and SGO families in Lincolnshire arising from the Adoption Support Fund
- Continue to make best use of the pupil premium to support adopted children in school
- To be creative and innovative in terms of developing children's activities to include a 'Talk about Adoption' workshop.
- Continue the 'Transitions' training course for adopters and foster carers together.

### **Children and young people are ready for adult life.**

- Increase the link with the 'leaving care service' to ensure smooth transitions for adopted/SGO young people into independent living
- To continue to provide activities for adopted children which build their skills, recognise their achievements, and build their confidence.
- Support adopted young people who are in full time further education.

### **Best use of Resources**

- Explore options to broaden Adoption Support Model to other permanence options starting with Special Guardianship Orders.
- Through the regional lead, to continue to participate and support the emerging regionalisation agenda, positioning Lincolnshire at the forefront of any development.
- To work towards further development of adoption support/SGO support services

### **Summary**

The challenge for 2020/21 was to adjust services in line with the Covid epidemic in order to ensure that children were still placed in adoptive placements in a timely way and at the earliest possible opportunity, whilst minimising risk and maintaining high levels of performance against government targets. There have been issues relating to the court process, again due to Covid, which has created delay for some children, and made the government timescales more challenging to achieve. Also, as more birth parents are contesting adoption orders, this increases the period of time that the cases remain open. In general the service has been very successful in attaining these goals and continues to show good levels of performance and excellent outcomes for children.

The caseloads for the adoption social workers have increased, as there have been unprecedented numbers of prospective adopters coming forward alongside high numbers of foster carers who wish to adopt children in their care, so all have worked hard to manage this. Throughout the year there have been approved adopters waiting for placement, so there has been placement choice for many children, although there has also been a residual group of children who are 'difficult to place' due to their age, special needs, or the fact that they are part of a sibling group.

There has been significant increased demand and activity in post adoption/SGO services, and it has been difficult for the team to manage the increased workload. The team has made significant progress in the management of the Adoption Support Fund to enable Lincolnshire families to benefit from a range of therapeutic services, but the need to complete assessments for the ASF has had an impact on the ability to deliver some of the other services which are needed.

Performance in 2019/20 against the key threshold measures in the adoption scorecard has remained high both for the single year and for the three year rolling average. The number of adoptions completed this year was less than the average but the timescales have consistently improved. The number of children waiting at the year-end has decreased due to the team continuing to be proactive in family finding.

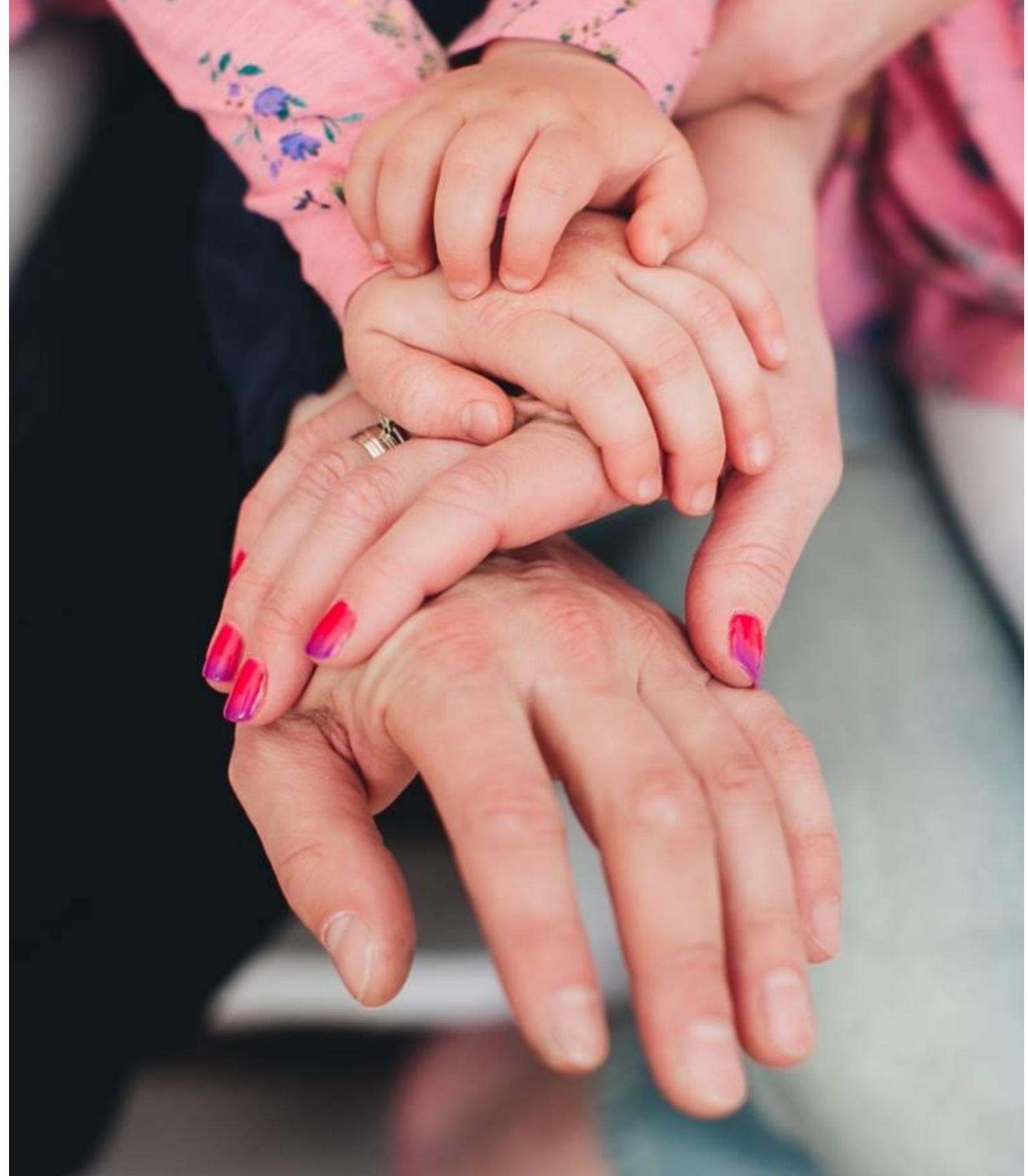
The Adoption Service was subject to scrutiny by Ofsted along with the rest of Children's Services in April 2019. The inspection was undertaken using the new ILACS Framework with a clear focus on outcomes for children. To again achieve a judgement of 'Outstanding' was a strong endorsement of the professionalism and expertise within the team and the confidence shown to it by senior managers and the council as a whole.

Going forward the Service will look to respond positively to the challenges presented through austerity and the regionalisation agenda and, in so doing, maintain its strong focus on delivering excellent outcomes for the children of Lincolnshire who have a plan for adoption.



**Deborah Crawford**  
**Head of Service, Fostering, Adoption**  
**and Leaving Care**

**Anne Johnson**  
**Adoption Team Manager**



Adoption Service  
Statement of Purpose 2021

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR THE LINCOLNSHIRE ADOPTION SERVICE

**This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2002, amended (2005,) (2011) and (2013) and the Children and Families Act 2014.**

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Leadership Structure

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Appendix 3 - Staffing: Number, Relevant Qualifications and Experience.

## AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

### **Regional Adoption Agency**

Lincolnshire County Council is part of the Family Adoption Links (FAL), a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) by 2020.

This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (which provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and North Lincolnshire Council. It has been agreed that Lincolnshire County Council will act as host for the arrangement.

The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and describes how FAL manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we will benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

The vision of the RAA is that:

- Children have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them
- Matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children
- Adopters receive a consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process
- The same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region
- Family Adoption Links, Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters.

### **Governance and Management**

The RAA will be accountable to the Family Adoption Links (FAL) Management Board which is aligned to the agreed vision and will enable partners to have a continuing demonstrable focus on achieving permanence through adoption for children in care. The FAL Management Board is accountable for delivery of services within scope and will continue to provide strategic leadership as the service develops. The Board includes

representatives of each partner and takes decision by consensus. The Board is chaired by a Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the respective Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors responsible for permanency. The FAL Management Board will ensure there are clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. The board has appointed a Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency who oversees the work of the adoption service in each local authority. The Head of Service reports to the board and is responsible for the delivery of adoption services within each Local Authority. Each partner Local Authority retains its own adoption service manager who is the Registered Manager.

The FAL Management Board will keep members fully informed regarding the progress and performance of the RAA.

#### **THE MAIN AIMS OF THE LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE ARE TO:**

Provide a range of quality services which can promote best outcomes for children who need a permanent placement.

Meet and comply with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.

Ensure that all staff are appropriately recruited, supervised and developed to fulfil their agency functions.

To identify children for whom the plan is adoption and to work with them and their carers to ensure children enjoy outstanding developmental outcomes, with quick progress to successful placements with their adoptive parents.

Adhere to best practice for permanency planning timescales as set out in adoption legislation and the Public Law Outline, in order to maximise each child's opportunity to experience a stable and secure family life.

Provide appropriate choice of adoption placements for children within Lincolnshire County Council and beyond where appropriate; making full and prompt use of the regional resources, voluntary adoption agencies and the Linkmaker database.

To recruit, prepare, assess and fully support prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children requiring adoptive families, including those who take a Direct/Foster for Adoption placement.

The focus of assessments will be the applicants' ability to meet the assessed needs of children, promote attachment, improve their understanding of the adoption task and their suitability to be an adoptive parent through on-going quality assurance, and sustain a high standard of assessments. Assessments will be completed within the timescales set out within Statutory Adoption Guidance (2014) wherever possible.

Applicants for inter-country adoption are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.

Ensure that children are well prepared both practically and emotionally for a move to a new permanent family.

Provide links for children, for whom adoption is the plan, with families who can meet their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic needs, whilst recognising that no child should wait indefinitely for the "ideal" match.

Provide a comprehensive support package, including financial support where appropriate to achieve stable and successful placements.

Provide effective and efficient adoption panels to enable adoption plans for relinquished children, prospective adopter assessments and links with children to be progressed without delay.

Ensure that children's plans for adoption are agreed by the Agency Decision Maker and Placement Order applications are made to meet court timescales.

Ensure that issues for contact with the birth family are carefully considered and meet the individual needs of the child.

Ensure that where possible and appropriate, siblings will be placed together and that decisions to separate siblings are made in a timely manner, following a sibling assessment.

In conjunction with other agencies provide a comprehensive range of support services, pre and post order, as detailed in the Adoption Passport, to children, birth parents, relatives and adoptive parents and those involved in the process of special guardianship applications. To access funding where appropriate on behalf of adoptive families, via the Adoption Support Fund.

To ensure that accurate and up to date records and management information is kept in relation to individual children, adoptive parents and services and to maintain confidentiality and security.

Ensure that customers are fully involved and consulted on service delivery and service development.

Treat all customers with respect and without prejudice or discrimination.

Lincolnshire County Council delivers its adoption service through a dedicated Adoption Team managed by a Team Manager.

## THE MAIN PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE SERVICE ARE:

Lincolnshire County Council and its adoption agency believe that, wherever possible, it is best for children to be brought up within their birth families. Only where this is not possible, and other appropriate options short of adoption have been considered, then adoption should be considered as a positive alternative for children to enable them to grow and reach maturity within a stable and loving family.

The Statement of Purpose links all sections in the document to the relevant Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 and shares its values with those Standards.

## VALUES

### Children

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- Delays should always be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this; their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- Children, birth parents/guardians, families and adoptive parents will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes

the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

### Adopted adults and birth relatives

- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved including adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life.
- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- Agencies have a duty to provide services that consider the welfare of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.
- Agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making.
- Agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and establish policies that provide non-discriminatory services.
- Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

## STANDARDS OF CARE TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE AGENCY

The Adoption Service aims to provide safe, secure and high quality care in family settings for children whom a plan for adoption has been agreed. This will be achieved to the standards set out in the Adoption Services Regulations 2002, 2011 and The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 (referred to as the "Regulations"), the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010), The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005), The National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services (2014) and The Statutory Guidance amended (2011) and July (2013 and 2014).

Working together with the Adoption Team, the Adoption Panel and the Panel Adviser, we strive to continuously improve standards of care, informed by inspections, quality audits, safeguarding assurance days as well as new legislation and guidance to evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery.

## STATUS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY

Lincolnshire County Council is an approved Adoption Service provider and will be inspected under the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Service is managed by the Head of Service – Regulated through a Team Manager for Adoption. The Team Manager acts as the Adoption Support Services Advisor. (Standard 15)

The Assistant Director for Children Services is the Agency Decision Maker. (Standard 17)

Lincolnshire Adoption Panel is constituted in accordance with regulations. (Standard 17)

During the period of the pandemic the DfE published 'flexibilities' to allow for the exceptional circumstances so adoption panels have been held virtually since April 2020.

The adoption panel only considers whether:

- A child who is in care to Lincolnshire /Rutland County Council should be placed for adoption, where a parent relinquishes their child or consents that adoption is the best outcome for their child.
- Prospective adopters are suitable to adopt, and
- Particular adopters are suitable for a particular child or children.

There are sufficient appointed panel members including an Independent Chair. The Members of the Adoption Panel will be appraised annually against performance objectives. From 1 April 2011, the Regulations regarding the make-up of panel changed

and allowed the adoption agency to draw its members from a list of people known as “the central list”; these members the agency considers to have the “appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the adoption panel for its consideration.” There is no limit to the number of people on the central list and the same people do not have to be appointed to every panel meeting.

The agency can decide how many panel members should sit at each panel meeting, subject to the panel meeting being quorate.

The members of the central list must include (in addition to the Independent Chair): an adoption social worker with at least three years’ relevant post qualifying experience in child care social work, including direct experience in adoption work. The medical adviser to the adoption agency is a panel member; also the agency can appoint other people whom the agency considers suitable. Suitable members could include specialists in education, child and adolescent mental health, race and culture; and those who have personal experience of adoption.

A Legal Adviser who provides advice in writing to the panel on any legal issue with implications for a child whose plan is being considered by panel. The Legal Adviser also gives advice to the Agency Decision Maker – the Assistant Director of Children's Services.

Lincolnshire Adoption Agency has medical adviser(s) who examine all children being considered for adoption and report to panel members on the child's health needs. The adviser will also meet with prospective adopters to consider health requirements of individual children.

For the period of the pandemic the DFE agreed 'flexibilities' to allow for virtual /telephone medicals to be conducted where necessary.

The Agency Medical Advisers also advise panel members on health issues relating to prospective adoptive parents.

There is a Professional Adviser to the Adoption Panel who advises panel members on procedures, policies and professional issues.

Government has issued new guidance and regulation which came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 which impact significantly on the work of the Adoption Panel.

The primary change made by the Regulations is that Adoption Panels must not be involved in deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption when the Court will be involved in the decision, where care proceedings are on-going or where the child has no parents; the case must be referred directly to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision.

Panel will however still consider cases and make recommendations where the child’s parents will consent to the child being placed for adoption.

## THE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The named manager of the Lincolnshire Adoption Service is:

Deborah Crawford– Head of Service, Regulated Services

County Offices  
Newland  
Lincoln  
Lincs  
LN1 1YL

Telephone: 01522 552781

Email: [Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk)

Qualifications:

DipSW  
Diploma in Higher Education  
BA (Hons) Social and Professional Studies  
PQ1 in Social Work  
Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management in Social Work.

*Experience:* 28 years' experience working in the field of social care, specialising in the area of children and families since 1993. Since 2013 has held a Team Manager post with the local authority within the fostering service before progressing to a Head of Service post in early 2021.

The nominated manager to manage the Adoption Service in the absence of the named manager under Regulation 5 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 is Anne Johnson.

The adoption teams are locality based and deliver a comprehensive service. These teams manage the permanency planning and family finding role, the recruitment, assessment, approval, support and placement processes which enable children in care in Lincolnshire County Council to be placed in a range of appropriate adoptive placements.

Dawn Oldroyd is the dedicated Professional Advisor for both the Adoption and Permanence panels.

The organisational structure of the Service is shown in Appendix 1. The list of current staff is set out in appendix 3. This information in its fullest form is only available to Ofsted.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

The Adoption Service works within the overall Quality Assurance Framework for Children and Families, which sets out a range of general and service specific standards and methods by which these standards are monitored. Children for whom adoption is being considered or who have been placed for adoption are reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Lincolnshire Adoption Service continually monitors and evaluates its service at every stage of the adoption process to ensure quality and effectiveness. Lincolnshire welcomes feedback from all involved in the adoption process

The activity and performance of the Adoption Service is scrutinised by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

As part of the regional Adoption Leadership Board and Family Adoption Links, Lincolnshire Adoption Service actively considers and shares good practice and policy development.

The Adoption Service is inspected by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), under the single inspection framework for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children in Care and Care Leavers. All local authorities will be inspected under this framework within a three-year period.

Performance of the service is monitored through the National Adoption Scorecard and a range of performance indicators.

## THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Lincolnshire County Council's vision is

*“Working for a better future by;-  
Building our strengths  
Protecting your lifestyle  
Being ambitious”*

The principles that the Council adheres to are:

- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Safeguarding
- Aspiration and Well being
- Learning and achievement
- Best use of Resources.

In addition to the principles, four strategic outcomes for children have been agreed by Children's Services.

- Children and young people are: Healthy & Safe
- Develop to their potential in their early years and are ready for school
- Learn and Achieve
- Children and young people are; Ready for Adult Life

The Adoption Agency has the expectation all children in its service is encapsulated into these principles, and will work with children to champion the importance of these aspirations.

We will work to develop self-esteem, self-belief and resilience in all children encouraging all children to be the best they can be.

We will use resources to focus on outcomes, life chances and opportunities.

The Adoption Agency strives to match, wherever possible, a child to an appropriate family, including considerations of ethnic origin and religion. However no child will wait indefinitely for the ideal placement. (Standard 13) The Children and Families Act 2014 supports the adoption reforms set out in "An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay" by ensuring that a search for a perfect or partial ethnic match does not become a barrier to finding a child an adoptive family.

Unless there are clear and specific reasons why this should not happen our aim is to place siblings together. (Standard 13)

All children approved for adoption will receive a guide, which will give age appropriate information about adoption. (Standard 18)

The Adoption Agency will provide support from an individual social worker and, when required, other professionals to enhance a child's understanding of and preparedness for placement. (Standard 15)

Life storybooks and other information which will help children understand their family and background will be provided by the Adoption Agency within the prescribed timescales. (Standard 3, 5, 12)

The Adoption Agency will undertake assessment of needs and placement considerations, which inform matching process to focus on outcomes, life chances and opportunities. (Standard 1 &10)

Where we anticipate local resources cannot meet their needs the opportunity to be matched with an adoptive family from the RAA, VAA and the Linkmaker Database (Standard 13) shall be actively pursued.

Therapeutic support is provided directly, commissioned or met by referral to other agencies if required as an outcome of assessment. (Standard 15)

For those seeking information, counselling and advice in adulthood on tracing birth family members and reunion is available, and provide individuals with counselling about the circumstances of their adoption. (Standard 16)

The Agency will offer supervision and support throughout the adoption process. (Standard 15)

To operate an adult to adult information exchange via the Lincolnshire letterbox system. (Standard 16)

To give an opportunity to talk with other young people who may be separated from members of their birth family. (Standard 16)

The Agency will offer information about how to contact the advocacy service provided by Voiceability Lincolnshire. (Standard 16)

Through collaborative working with other agencies we will deliver and co-ordinate support for children, especially those with attachment difficulties, to facilitate the transition to new adoptive families). (Standard 1, 3, 10)

## **ASPIRATION AND WELL-BEING**

All prospective adoptive carers are, as part of their assessment and training, required to inform the Agency of the plans that they will make to safeguard and maintain the child's welfare when they are adopted. The Agency will undertake to support carers to locate such services as GP, dentist and education services if required.

Before making the placement the Agency must give the notifications required by regulation 35.6. These are important in ensuring as smooth a transition as possible in the child's health care and education, and in the safeguarding and support arrangements for the child.

Working collaboratively with adopters, local agencies and the Statutory Authorities; a plan will be presented to panel outlining the resources that the child needs and how the adopters will be assisted in meeting these needs.

All adoptive families in Lincolnshire are offered therapeutic parenting training to empower them to make a positive and sustained change to their family relationships. Lincolnshire County Council Adoption Agency also offers its adopters therapeutic parenting advice including "Theraplay" which is presented through the initial training course and is designed to assist adopters in identifying areas that may present challenges to them, and where identified as a need, further support is available.

Prior to consideration of the child's plan, a health assessment under regulation 7.1 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 is carried out and a report of this assessment in accordance with those regulations is prepared. Once the agency is considering adoption for the child, it immediately consults its medical adviser to ascertain whether the health information already obtained is sufficient, and sufficiently up to date. This report is needed to fulfil the requirements of the regulations and the need for full information for the child, the adoption panel and the prospective adopter.

This report is presented to Panel and the needs of the child are fully discussed to ensure that any future placement has both the information about the child and a plan as to how these needs are to be met.

## **SAFEGUARDING**

Lincolnshire's Children's Service including its Adoption Service is part of Lincolnshire's Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

The assessment of adopters includes the taking of full employment and accommodation histories. Checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and local authority checks are completed on everyone aged over 18 years of age living in the household. A range of referees are contacted and visited.

All adopters have a safer caring assessment prior to approval which highlights key aspects of the safer caring process. Safe caring is an important part of the training offered.

This training is mandatory and covers specific areas such as safer caring, the implications of looking after children who may have been harmed and the implications of how a child's attachment may have been affected in their early years.

Allegations that are made against adopters prior to an order being made are investigated using an established procedure whereby all are considered by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). An independent person chairs the initial strategy meeting and oversees the process to ensure its timeliness. Where allegations are made following the granting of an adoption order these are managed using standard Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership procedures.

## **ASPIRATION, LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT**

Lincolnshire County Council is committed to maximising a child's potential in both academic attainment and personal achievement and will work collaboratively with prospective adopters, local agencies and any party it considers as necessary to plan and maintain the child's education.

From 2013, adopted children were given priority school access and in 2014 all adopted children aged 2 years became entitled to free early education. Furthermore, the Pupil Premium was increased and now includes all adopted school children from reception class through to year 11, and includes children who were in care prior to becoming subject to a Special Guardianship Order.

A record of the child's achievements prior to being placed will be available to the prospective carer and information sharing will consider the short medium and long term needs of the child in education. Research has shown that in the vast majority of cases adoption works. Education and health outcomes are as good as for children growing up with their birth parents. To assist, it is essential that information about their birth families is available to adopters and that there is an Information Sharing Meeting before an application is made to the Adoption Panel to match a child with applicants. (Standard 1, 3, 10)

At the Information sharing meeting a well presented contact plan for children with birth relatives and siblings will be available. However Lincolnshire County Council considers that unless there are clear and specific reasons why this should not happen, it is our aim to place siblings together. (Standard 13)

Lincolnshire County Council will provide support from an individual social worker and, if required, other workers to enhance a child's understanding of and preparedness for placement (Standard 15). This is alongside life storybooks and other information which will help children understand their family and background. (Standard 3, 5, 12)

## **SUPPORTING THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

All of the work of the Service is delivered through the following relationships and support functions which are described below.

## 1. Prospective Adopter's Social Worker

The role of the prospective adopter's social worker is to give support to the adopter throughout the assessment process, through placement to order. They also assist and advise with practical difficulties and the provision of equipment. They are a crucial link between the adopter and the child's social worker and the two workers need to work closely to prepare the adopters and share with them information that they need to assist in planning for the placement of a child.

Through the period of the pandemic there were 'flexibilities ' which allowed for visits to be conducted virtually, by video call, but all newly approved adopters have been seen directly on at least three occasions through the assessment period [ using PPE and social distancing.]

## 2. Child's Social Worker

The child's social worker is responsible for the overall management of the child's care plan. They have a statutory duty to visit the child in line with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations (2010), the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services (2014); however in some circumstances the visiting pattern will be more frequent particularly in the early stages of a placement or when there are particular difficulties, up to the time when the adoption order is made.

Through the period of the pandemic there were 'flexibilities ' which allowed for visits to be conducted virtually, by video call. Children newly placed in adoptive families were visited in person [using PPE and social distancing] to ensure that they were supported adequately at the early stage of placement.

## 3. Adoption Support Social Worker

The role of the adoption support social worker is to provide specialised therapeutic support to those families which require direct adoption support to the family with tailored plans of support. Support is underpinned by an assessment of need which is made in line with the Adoption Support Regulations 2005. The Adoption Support Services Adviser is the Team Manager for Adoption who will deal with any enquiries regarding the eligibility for support services and the services provided.

The service is provided on a tiered basis dependent on assessed need

<b>Tier 1</b>	Support to adopters includes: Contact co-ordination, helpline advice, information via the Lincolnshire adoption website. Birth records counselling for adults. Also included in this tier is counselling for birth relatives whose children have been adopted as well as seminars for grandparents of adopters.
<b>Tier 2</b>	All of tier 1 and in addition adoption support groups/activities for adopters and for children affected by adoption. These include a programme of activities which bring adoptive children together to share experiences of adoption as part of leisure activities.

<b>Tier 3</b>	Previous tier support plus specific adoption support include assessment of need, individual adoption support packages, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Theraplay clinic sessions to promote attachment. This tier also includes access to primary mental health services and CAMHS. Since the launch of the Adoption Support Fund, therapeutic interventions can be claimed from the central fund to ensure that adoptive families have access to therapeutic support.
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#### 4. Adoption Support Groups

There are locally held support groups for adopters to attend; their social worker will assist them to join a local support group and discuss with the adopters issues such as information sharing within the group. The Adoption Service will provide adopters with access to our website which provides links to useful information relating to all aspects of adoption and signposting to services and resources. In addition, in 2014 we introduced a quarterly newsletter for adopters, which is sent to all current and past adopters with children under 18.

#### TRAINING

The Adoption Service ensures that adopters are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care to meet the needs of a child placed in their care.

Training is not an option but a clear expectation of all adopters and is evaluated prior to approval.

The training is delivered by qualified and experienced social workers in partnership with people who have experienced adoption. There is an adoptive carer and an adult who was placed for adoption in the past, and these people's experiences have been positively recognised by those attending the training.

During the pandemic the preparation courses have been provided remotely using 'teams' and the groups have been smaller and held once a month to try to ensure that all attendees are able to participate as much as possible.

Each preparation course is run over a two day period and covers:

##### Day One

- Introduction
- Short Icebreaker
- Exploration of the changes that becoming an adoptive parent will bring
- Awareness of separation and loss
- Life story work
- Resilience.

## Day Two

- Attachment cycle
- Therapeutic Parenting
- Adopted person talking about tracing
- Adopted parent discussing experiences of contact
- Managing behaviour
- Managing contact.

In addition to the two day experiential learning all prospective adopters are provided with a workbook during stage 1. Each subject in the workbook has an exercise for prospective adopters to complete. During the learning days, the course facilitators refer to the subjects in the workbook and later in the assessment stage the completed exercises are discussed with the assessing supervising social worker.

Each workbook covers:

- The adoption process
- Why children come into care: Background factors
- Child Care Law
- Abuse of children and the possible effects
- Effects of early trauma
- Effects of separation and loss in childhood
- Lifestory work and family books
- Child development
- Discrimination
- Resilience
- Contact
- Telling children about their adoption
- Task description of an adoptive parent
- Social networking/e.g. safety
- Reading list.

Pre-approval training is complemented by post approval learning and development opportunities, delivered through e-Learning and more traditional training seminars.

## THE PROCESS OF RECRUITING AND APPROVING ADOPTERS

The recruitment of adopters is currently managed and effected jointly between the RAA Family Adoption Links and the local Fostering and Adoption recruitment activity. The referrals to the Family Adoption Links website are forwarded to the local offices depending upon geographical location. The Recruitment Co-ordinators aim to make contact with all enquirers within 24 hours of them registering their interest online.

The Recruitment Co-ordinator's role is to ensure that enquirers have all the information they need and following an initial discussion an initial expression of interest can be completed over the phone and/or a detailed information booklet is made available to all interested applicants about the adoption process which is sent within 5 working days. We are focusing on enhancing the overall customer experience and the Recruitment Co-ordinators represent the Local Authority in a professional manner, being respectful to all enquirers and acknowledging their individual journey to embark on this process.

Within 5 working days of applicants completing their initial expression of interest, the enquirers will receive a telephone call from the agency to arrange an individual interview. Initial enquiry forms can also be filled in on our interactive website. Following this visit, applicants will then submit their formal registration of interest to the agency. Adopters are recruited and assessed in line with Lincolnshire guidance based on the National Minimum Standards and Adoption Regulations.

Recruitment involves:

- Utilising social media to reach wide audiences. This is now being led by the regional marketing officer and all RAA marketing information has been rebranded.
- Holding Information events. Information events have been held on line through the pandemic, and are all being advertised on the Family Adoption Links website, so that they are available to all.
- Newspaper advertisements, using the local press across the region.
- Newspaper articles
- Distribution of posters
- Information distributed through displays and presentations
- Word of mouth through existing carers
- Lincolnshire County Council LCC Connects website/Family Adoption Links website
- Targeted activity within specific communities in county

The Regional Adoption Agency continues to focus on four specific areas for recruitment: recruiting adopters for sibling groups, children aged over 4, children with complex health needs and recruiting Foster to Adopt carers.

Foster to Adopt carers will be approved as both foster carers and adopters, but with the purpose of early placement stability for those children where rehabilitation home is unlikely and adoption is a very likely outcome. This would mean that the children in these placements would not have to move from a fostering placement into an adoption placement, thus minimising disruption for the child at a crucial stage in development.

The recruitment strategy has both a community focused approach , to reflect the specific needs of the communities within the region , coupled with digital marketing as it is recognised that we need to maximise our reach to prospective adopters and cannot rely on a single method to achieve this.

We have continued to advertise through local media channels and parish magazines but also utilised social media and the Lincolnshire County Council/FAL website to advertise events throughout the region.

The recruitment activities arranged continue to facilitate informal information sessions where individuals have the opportunity to hear all about the adoption process . These events have continued virtually through the pandemic.

Staff are involved at the events who are able to outline the process to them and what this entails. Prospective adopters also have the opportunity to hear from an experienced adopter in these sessions , and the chance to ask questions .

The prospective adopters can be provided with information booklets about Adoption and Foster to Adopt following events or they can complete a form on line that will trigger contact from a Recruitment Co-ordinator who can begin to obtain details with the hope of progressing to an initial home visit.

The process for the assessment and approval of adopters was reformed on the 1st July 2013 and a new two stage approval process was introduced, so that prospective adopters can be approved to adopt a child more quickly. Under the new two part process, adoption agencies must assess and approve adopters within 6 months. The new process comprises a two month initial training and preparation stage (Stage One). Stage One commences when applicants have formally registered their interest and will end with the agency's decision on whether the prospective adopter can proceed to Stage Two. In Stage One, all required checks and references will be completed. This process is now fully embedded.

Stage Two consists of an in depth assessment and will end with presentation of the prospective adopter report to the adoption panel and the agency decision maker's decision about the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child.

The prospective adopter report is completed by a social worker who is compliant with the restriction on the preparation of adoption reports regulations 2005.

A person is within a prescribed description for the purposes of section 94(1) of the 2005

Act if:—

(a) She/he is a social worker who is employed by a local authority or registered adoption society and who satisfies at least one of the conditions set out in paragraph (2)(a) or (b);

(b) She/he is a person who:—

- is participating in a course approved by a Council under section 63 of the 2000 Act for persons wishing to become social workers
  - is employed by, or placed with, a local authority or registered adoption society as part of that course; and
  - satisfies the condition set out in paragraph (2)(b); or
- (c) She/he is acting on behalf of a local authority or a registered adoption society and is a social worker who satisfies the conditions in paragraph (2) (a) and (b).

The conditions referred to in paragraph (1) are that the person:-

- (a) has at least three years' post-qualifying experience in child care social work, including direct experience of adoption work;
- (b) is supervised by a social worker who:-
- is employed by the local authority or registered adoption society in question; and
  - has at least three years' post-qualifying experience in child care social work, including direct experience of adoption work.

The report is presented to the Adoption panel for consideration and a recommendation of their suitability is made. The organisation and composition of this panel is in accordance with Adoption Service Regulations 2011.

The Adoption Panel makes recommendations on the suitability of prospective adopters; this recommendation is passed, along with the prospective adopter report, panel's final minutes and any other supporting documentation, to the Agency Decision Maker . National Minimum Standards 23.17 sets out the qualifications, knowledge and experience the decision-maker must have. The Agency Decision Maker does not have direct line management responsibility for the adoption panel but has the authority to make decisions on its behalf as to whether the prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child. (AAR 27)

Prospective Adopters are invited to attend panel and participate in the panel discussions. All panels have been conducted remotely throughout the pandemic, but all applicants have still been invited, and have attended.

Feedback is received from those applicants who have commented on the process and have for the most part been satisfied with the experience of being at panel.

## NUMBER OF ADOPTIVE CARERS

A total of 25 adoptive parents were approved to adopt during 2020/2021, with no adopters approved for inter-country adoption. 8 of these were also approved for Foster to Adopt. This is a decrease with 3 less adopters than last year's figures and this was mainly down to the impact of Covid 19 upon the assessment and training of prospective adoptive parents.

We ended the year with adopters awaiting placements so were able to meet the needs of children with adoption plans coming through the system. The focus of the work during this year was to match the children waiting and place them into adoptive families at the earliest opportunity whilst ensuring that we remained Covid secure.

The trend continues to be that there are more adoptive parents than children waiting for a placement within the County. As there have been significant delays in children's court proceedings, we have always had approved adopters waiting to ensure choice when making matches. At 31/03/2021 there were 14 [10] adopters approved and waiting; two of which were being considered for possible links. In addition there were three adopters fostering children with a view to adoption.

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Total Adopters approved	25	28	43	22	32	24
Of which Foster-to-Adopt	8	7	15	14	12	0
Foster-to-Adopt New Applications	8	6	10	5	12	6
Foster-to-Adopt Subsequent Applications	0	1	4	9	5	0

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Approved for one child	19	18	37	13	20	14
Approved for two children	6	10	6	9	11	9
Approved for three children	0	0	0	0	1	1

## NUMBER OF CHILDREN PLACED

With regard to placements made this year 29 children were placed; the same number as the previous year. Of these, 22 were singleton placements, 4 children were placed in 2 sibling groups of 2, and one group of three was placed. Of these sibling groups, one of the groups had two children over five. All of the other children placed were under five with 22 of them being placed before they were 2 years. There were 19 boys placed and 10 girls, so a similar proportion to last year.

Overall, with some variation in the numbers of sibling groups, this is similar to the previous year as approximately 25 under 5s a year seems to be fairly constant. There has been a significant increase in the number of cases which are delayed in court awaiting placement orders and were not placed within NMS 17.7 as they waited several months to be made subject to a placement order.

## FINANCE

Adopters can be assessed for a means tested allowance based on the needs of the children placed. This allowance is discretionary and is reviewed annually in respect of the needs of each placement and the child. Additional support through a one off settling in grant may also be made.

## COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS

### Summary of the Complaints Procedure

The Directorate has a statutory complaints service, the detail of which is contained in the guide for staff 'Handling Comments and Complaints'. It is a three stage process:

- Stage 1 – Informal or problem solving
- Stage 2 – Formal stage at which an independent investigating officer is appointed
- Stage 3 – A formal review by a panel of elected members, chaired by an independent individual.

If complainants remain unsatisfied at Stage 3 they can ask for their complaint to be examined by the Local Government Ombudsman.

Staff must ensure that all carers know how and to whom to complain.

Complainants have the right to involve a friend or advocate.

The Customer Relations & Complaints Manager is Shagofta Noreen

- email [customerrelationsteam@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:customerrelationsteam@lincolnshire.gov.uk)

- write to Customer Relations Team, Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln, LN1 1YL
- call 01522 843322

The Named Manager monitors all complaints and liaises with the Customer Relations & Complaints Manager and the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Business Manager. This information is available to authorised persons only. All adopters have access to support and information regarding the complaints procedures.

### **Independent Reviewing Mechanism**

Prospective adopters are given written information about the role of the independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) as part of their preparation process. They are also provided with leaflets about the IRM when information is being prepared for presentation to panel.

### **NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AND THEIR OUTCOMES**

Three complaints were made to the Adoption Service during 20/21.

Of these complaints, the outcomes were – [2] were Unsubstantiated, and [1] was partially unsubstantiated.

All of the issues raised in complaints were used in order to make changes to the service where this was appropriate.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) was established, for prospective adopters who wish to challenge decisions made by panel in respect of their approval status. There have been no representations made to the IRM in 2020/21.

### **ALLEGATIONS**

Adopters can sometimes be the subject of allegations in respect of the care of the children or young people they are looking after. If this occurs the allegation will be investigated in line with Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership safeguarding procedures with all allegations managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer. In addition to the role of the supervising social worker, adopters can have access to an independent social worker who can offer practical and emotional support.

All allegations and other matters listed in the Regulations are monitored by the manager who ensures that the appropriate notifications to Ofsted and other agencies are carried out.

In 2020/21 there were no allegations in respect of adoptive carers.

## ADVOCACY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Lincolnshire County Council commissions its advocacy for children through Voiceability Lincolnshire

Referral and Information Line: 44[0]300 303 1660

Website: [www.helpline@voiceability.org](http://www.helpline@voiceability.org)

### When might you want an advocate?

You can ask to speak with advocate if you:

- Have serious concerns about the care you are getting
- Want to be more involved in decisions being made about you and your future
- Want to fight decisions being made about you
- Want to make a complaint.



### Children's Commissioner for England

#### Advice guidance and assistance

If you are child or young person who lives away from home or who receives social care, who needs advice or assistance, you can call us on the free phone number **0800 528 0731** or email to [advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)

If your enquiry involves an urgent concern about a child protection issue, you should contact your local police or social services. Adults can also call the **NSPCC child protection helpline on 0808 800 5000**. Children can call **Childline on 0800 1111**.\*

\*Above information sourced from:

<http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/info/advice>

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Lincolnshire Adoption Service works to the Lincolnshire County Council's Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the council's intranet site.

The Adoption Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout their approval process. The adoption agency embraces the Customer Care and Service Standards, endorsed by the DfE, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Adoption UK, and the Consortium for Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the adoption service considers they can safely meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence. The minimum age for applying to adopt is 21 years old.

Every attempt will be made to find a placement which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability. However Lincolnshire's Adoption Service recognises that it is unacceptable for a child to be denied adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and prospective adopter do not share the same racial or cultural background. If the prospective adopter can meet the majority of the child's needs, the service must not delay placing a child because they do not share the child's racial or cultural background.

The Lincolnshire Adoption Service recognises that no child or young person should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

All policies and procedures concerning the adoption service are subject to Equality Impact Assessment.

## OFSTED

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

### **Questions or complaints**

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is the Ofsted National Business Unit.

The telephone number is 08456 40 40 40. The National Business Unit manages all calls and will redirect them as necessary; they can also be contacted at [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or write to:

Ofsted National Business Unit  
Piccadilly Gate,  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

## FURTHER INFORMATION

The Adoption Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

If you require this document in a different language or an alternative format such as large print, audio tape or Braille, please contact the Equality and Diversity Team on 01522 552246 or email [diversity@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:diversity@lincolnshire.gov.uk)

The Statement of Purpose, Children's Guides and other information are also available on the Lincolnshire County Council website: [www.lincolnshire.gov.uk](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk)

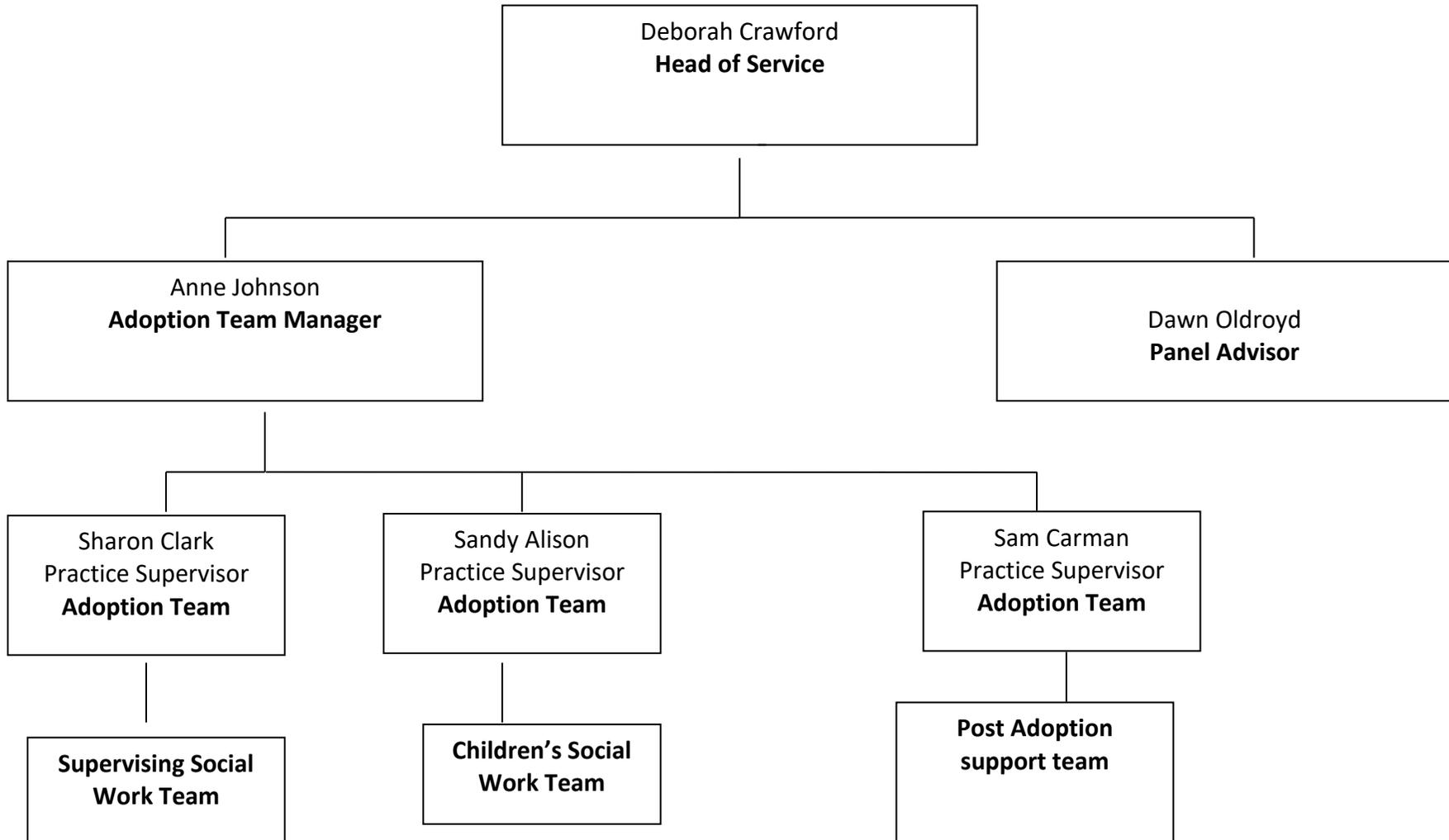
A copy can also be obtained from the registered manager:

Deborah Crawford – Head of Service, Regulated Services  
County Offices  
Newland  
Lincoln  
Lincs  
LN1 1YL

Telephone: 01522 552781

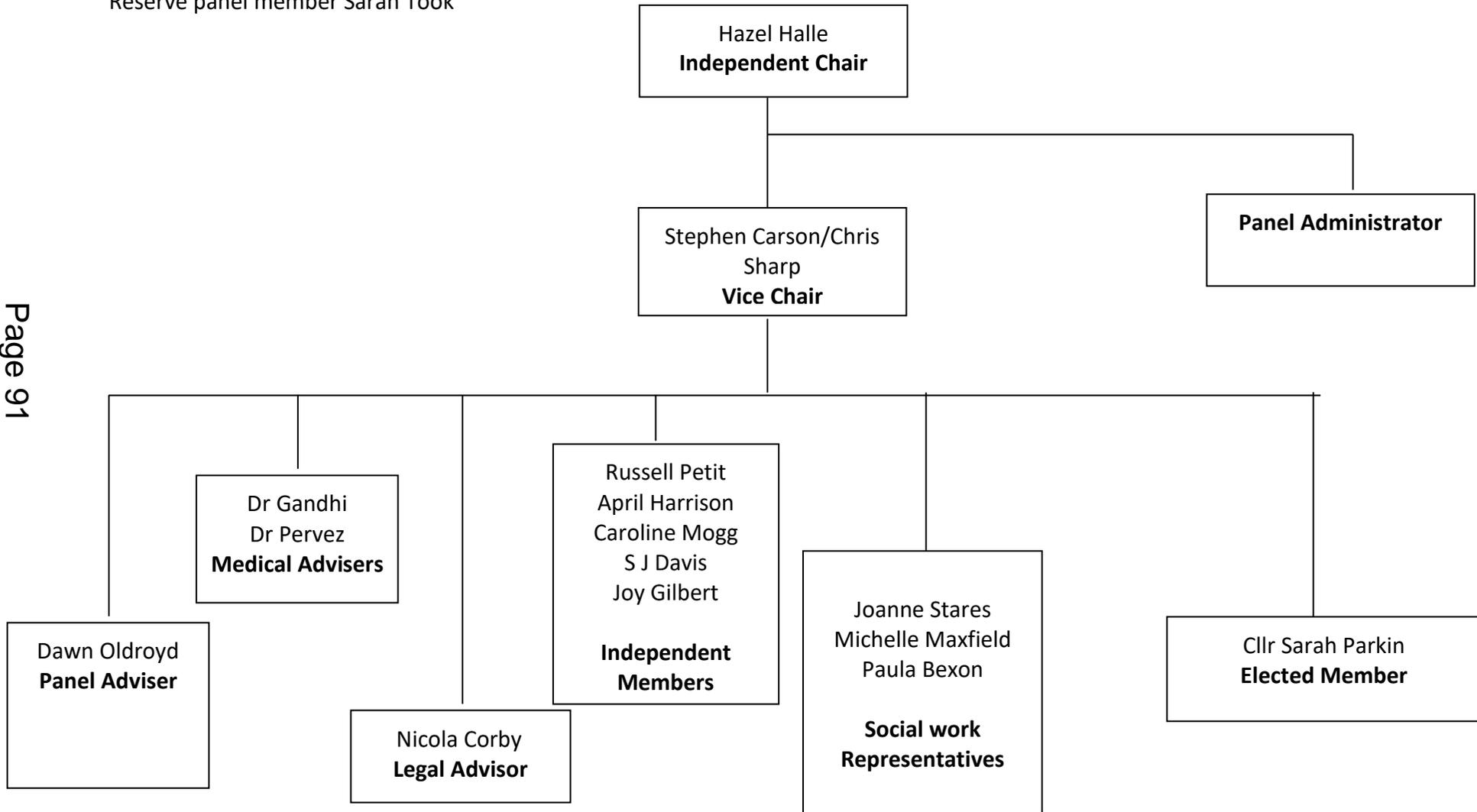
Email: [deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk)

Appendix 1  
Leadership structure



Appendix 2  
Adoption and Permanence Panel  
Reserve panel member Sarah Took

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**Appendix 3**  
**Adoption Service - Staffing**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Length of time in LCC Adoption Services</b>
<b>Head of Service Regulated Services (Deborah Crawford)</b>	DipSW Diploma in Higher Education BA (Hons) Social and Professional Studies PQ1 in Social Work Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management in Social Work	<b>28 years including 9 years in Regulated Services</b>
<b>Team Manager Adoption Services (Anne Johnson)</b>	Certificate in Qualified Social work Certificate of Education Diploma in management PQ6[ Practice Teaching award]	<b>42 years (25 years in Regulated Services)</b>
<b>Practice Supervisor Adoption Services (Sharon Clark)</b>	BTEC ND Social Care BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies DipSW	<b>16 Years</b>
<b>Acting Practice Supervisor (Sandy Allison)</b>	BSc (Hons) Social Work and Social Work Policy DipSW	<b>19 years</b>
<b>Practice Supervisor Sam Carman</b>	CQSW	<b>7 years [3 years in regulated services]</b>
<b>Juliet Collingwood</b>	BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies	<b>3 Years</b>
<b>Supervising Social Worker (Julia Mann)</b>	CQSW BA Combined Studies MA Health Services Studies Post graduate diploma in Social Studies PQ1	<b>17 Years</b>
<b>Supervision SW Lorraine Wallace</b>	BA[Hons] Social work	
<b>Supervising Social Worker (Debra Green)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work	<b>10 years</b>
<b>Supervising Social Worker (Hannah Fawn)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work	<b>6 years</b>
<b>Social Worker (Wendy Jennings)</b>	BA (Hons) Social & Behavioural Studies MA, DIPSW Social Work CACDP Level 1 CACDP Level 2	<b>12 years</b>
<b>Social Worker (Mark Abdul)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work	<b>7 years</b>

<b>Position</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Length of time in LCC Adoption Services</b>
<b>Social Worker (Kristin Daniilidis)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work	<b>9 Years</b>
<b>Social Worker (Claire Liddan)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work	<b>6 years</b>
<b>Supervising Social Worker (Kelly Shaw)</b>	BSc (Hons) Social Work	<b>6 year</b>
<b>Social Worker (Laura Tyrrell)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work	<b>5 years</b>
<b>Social Worker Vittoria Pola</b>		<b>4 years[1 year in regulated]</b>
<b>Adoption Support Worker (Dawn Button)</b>	HNC Business and Finance	<b>22 Years</b>
<b>Adoption Support Social Worker (Jeanette Philbin)</b>	DipSW	<b>9 Years</b>
<b>Post Adoption Support Social Worker (Pat Mills)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work Higher diploma in therapeutic play MA Integrative psychotherapy/ child psychotherapy Level 1 /2 and advanced EMDR Theraplay 1 and 2 DDP 1 and 2	<b>9 Years</b>
<b>Post Adoption Support Social Worker (Jane Thornton)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Work	<b>7 years</b>
<b>Adoption Support Social Worker (Jo Poole)</b>	BA (Hons) Social Science CQSW Certificate in Counselling Advanced Certificate in Counselling	<b>16 Years</b>

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**Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director for Safeguarding**

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>9th September 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Fostering Annual Report and Statement of Purpose</b>

**Summary:**

The purpose of the report is to inform the Corporate Parenting Panel of the work of the Fostering Service for the year 2020/2021 in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services 2011 and Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011. The report provides a written summary of the Service, including relevant performance data, achievements and areas for development.

**Recommendation(s):**

That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service for 2020/2021.

## **1. Background**

To present the Annual Report and Statement of Purpose of the Fostering Service to members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Lincolnshire County Council Fostering Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Children Act 1989, Fostering Service Regulations 2011, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 & 2013 and the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering Services 2011. Fostering services are inspected by Ofsted.

NMS 25 requires the service to provide 3 monthly reports on the service operations to the Local Authority executive. A requirement under NMS 16 is that a Statement of Purpose is provided.

## **3. Conclusion**

The Annual Report attached at Appendix A contains a range of information about the Fostering Service in relation to performance indicators and measuring good outcomes; the

work of the Fostering Panel including responsibilities relating to the regulations within the legal context.

The Statement of Purpose is attached at Appendix B and its purpose is to ensure children, staff and service users are clear about the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and what services and facilities it provides. It details members of the Fostering Panel and staff working within the service.

The Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 16 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011.

Following consideration of the attached Annual Report and Statement of Purpose, the Panel is requested to consider and comment on the contents of these and the work of the Fostering Service.

**4. Consultation**

**a) Risks and Impact Analysis**

N/A

**5. Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Fostering Annual Report
Appendix B	Fostering Statement of Purpose

**6. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Deborah Crawford, Head of Service - Fostering and Adoption, who can be contacted via e-mail at [Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk).



# Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Annual Report April 2020 – March 2021

## 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. 2020/21 has been a particularly challenging one with the pandemic impacting upon all areas of Children's Services and requiring creative solutions to ensure that families and foster carers have been actively supported. It is perhaps no surprise that at the end of the year, the number of children in care had increased by 8% to 680. Of the 680, 491 were placed in either foster care or pre-adoptive placements; this comprises 73% of the population and is a reduction on the previous figure. Nevertheless, at a time of national lockdown it is a huge testimony to foster carers who have continued to both maintain and offer placements to children. Of these, 29 children were placed in externally commissioned foster placements. 5 were unaccompanied migrant children aged between 15 and 18. The figures reflect a continually high number of children placed within their own kinship networks, accounting for 24% of all foster placements.

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. The lead areas are permanence, duty desk, foster carer recruitment and retention, training, development and support and kinship. In addition, the Caring2Learn service has continued to engage effectively with foster carers. The pandemic has seen the development of a foster carer community with a strong on-line presence, higher engagement in training and development and foster carer champions influencing all areas of fostering practice.

### Numbers of Foster Carers:

As at the end of March 2021, there were 295 foster carer households currently registered, including 55 Regulation 24/25 carers and 6 Foster to Adopt carers.

Type	No. of households
Task Centred including Respite	144
Parent and Child/Task Centred	10
CWD Short Break Carers	2
Placement Plus	9
Permanence only	15

Permanence/Task Centred	50
Emergency	2
Remand	2
Family/Friend (Regulation 24/25)	55
Foster to Adopt	6

During the period 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021, 89 new fostering households were approved, including 56 Approved Kinship and 7 Foster to Adopt. The 26 new mainstream households provided up to 45 new placements as follows:

Approved places	No. of households
1 child	11
2 children	11
3 children	4

During the period 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021, 24 mainstream households ceased fostering, owing to the following reasons:

Reason	No. of households
Change in employment	4
Family circumstances changed	5
Health reasons	5
Moved to an IFA	1
Retired	4
Child reached 18	1
Dissatisfaction with service	1
Carer died	3

In addition, 44 approved Kinship households were de-registered; 27 of these converted to Special Guardianship Orders and 6 were related to the child moving to independence. A further 6 Foster to Adopt households were also de-registered

The recruitment of foster carers is both a local and a national challenge, with the Fostering Network State of the Nation report continuing to identify a significant shortfall in available families at a time when the number of children in care continues to rise. Pleasingly, against the backdrop of the pandemic, in Lincolnshire, we have seen a significant increase in interest in fostering with a commensurate increase in approvals. This has largely been achieved within the virtual world and reflects that some of the practice changes necessitated by the pandemic have created a new dynamic which will provide opportunities into the future. Carer availability during the past year has been

restricted due to self-isolation and covid constraints, but carer retention remains good and there are signs that more foster carers are making themselves available to take placements following vaccination. Crucial to carer retention has been the further development of Caring2Learn which places foster carers at the heart of all we do.

The loss of existing carers continues to be of concern and reflects the demographics of the foster carer population. However despite the presence of independent agencies within the County, only 1 carer has left the Authority this year and that was clearly a decision that was financially motivated. There is evidence from foster carer feedback that the Caring2Learn approach, support from the fostering teams and the retention "offer" are key factors in their remaining as foster carers for Lincolnshire children.

### **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.

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. During the pandemic and reflective of the carer demographic, only limited numbers of parent and child placements have been available and there has been some growth in the numbers placed in Out of County placements as a result.

The profile of children in care remains similar to that identified last year. The percentage of those under the age of 5 has remained consistent at 25%. At the other end of the age profile, the percentage of young people, aged 16/17, continues to constitute 22% of Children in Care. Only 37% of this group are in foster placements; the majority being placed in residential or independent accommodation.

In 2020/21 the increase in the number of children who have entered care and the reduction in the number of foster placements available have resulted in a significant increase in the number of children being placed in Out of County residential placements. As a result, transformation work has been undertaken in order to identify how this trend can be altered by both growing in house residential provision and further enhance the support offer to in house foster carers.

## Activity and Performance 2020/21



### Foster Carer Recruitment

The service has a dedicated Recruitment and Retention approach which ensures that the recruitment and retention of foster carers for and within Lincolnshire County Council remains a key priority. In light of covid, all recruitment and marketing activities were delivered remotely for much of the year.

### Recruitment Activity

From 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021:

- 340 Initial Expression of Interest forms (IEIs) were received for fostering
- 214 home visits/initial calls were undertaken
- 55 Registration of Interest forms (ROIs) were received
- 26 households were newly approved to foster (whilst there were 27 approvals, 1 of these is the partner of an existing foster carer and so does not make a new household). These 26 approvals equates to 32 placements (44 if taking siblings)

Despite the unprecedented Covid-19 epidemic changing the way people across the UK live and work throughout 2020-21, the recruitment figures were significantly higher than they had been in previous years as demonstrated below:

Financial Year	Number of fostering IEIs received				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2020 / 2021	80	103	74	83	340
2019 / 2020	46	66	55	72	239
2018 / 2019	52	52	53	76	233

There is evidence that with so many people living in lockdown during this period and being unable to physically go to work, that more people considered whether fostering could become part of their lives.

### Virtual Information Events

Information events took place in a virtual format this year. Attendance was not as high as those that were conducted face-to-face prior to the covid outbreak. It was not possible to engage with attendees

so directly and felt less effective as a result. However it enabled additional flexibility and could be delivered more frequently as indicated below;

- Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July at 2pm
- Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> August at 2pm
- Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September at 6:30pm (as more people began slowly returning to work the timings of the events changed to an evening to accommodate for this).
- Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October at 6:30pm
- Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November at 6:30pm
- Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January at 6:30pm
- Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March at 6:30pm

One of the benefits of moving to online events is the money saved from hiring venues, refreshments etc. which has instead been used on more targeted advertising.

## Advertising

The focus for recruiting new foster carers changed to a more digital model as more people were at home and available online. Many local news companies reported seeing a surge in traffic to their websites during this period. Advertising was targeted towards getting people to attend the information events as well as advertising the type of foster carers we need to recruit i.e. respite, permanence, carers for siblings, teenager and children with additional needs. Examples of digital adverts used can be seen below:



Could you care for a sibling group and help to keep them together in Lincolnshire?

Click to register for our virtual fostering information event, or call 01522 554114 for more info.

Lincolnshire  
COUNTY COUNCIL  
*Working for a better future*



**Virtual Fostering Info Event!**  
Wednesday 9 September, 6:30pm

Register your place!

Lincolnshire  
COUNTY COUNCIL  
*Working for a better future*



Could you be a respite foster carer?

Click to apply!

Lincolnshire  
COUNTY COUNCIL  
*Working for a better future*

## Permanence Campaign

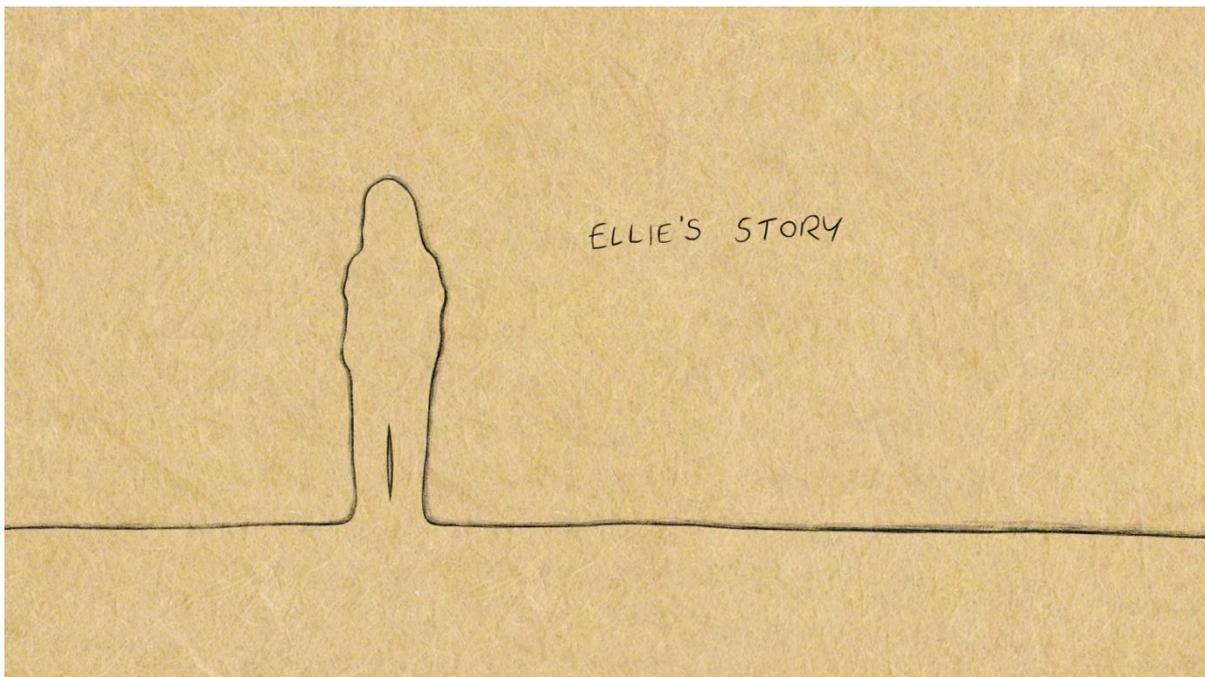
There continues to be an increase in the number of children with care plans for long term fostering and the emphasis on permanence continued this year and included advertising in the form of radio adverts, Facebook posts, and adverts in various forms of local media including online, newspapers and magazines.

Internally, anonymised profiles of children were posted onto the Caring2Learn closed Facebook page as well as the main Fostering Recruitment Facebook page. A regular section was added to the e-newsletter which is sent to approved foster carers. This has become a standing item which is updated on a monthly basis. An article also appeared in the spring edition of County News Magazine about permanence from the perspective of 2 children who are living in long-term foster care.

Also during this period a dedicated permanence campaign landing page was set up on the website which includes information about what long-term fostering is; the Ellie's Story animation (please see below for more information), the benefits of long-term fostering and what support package is in place.

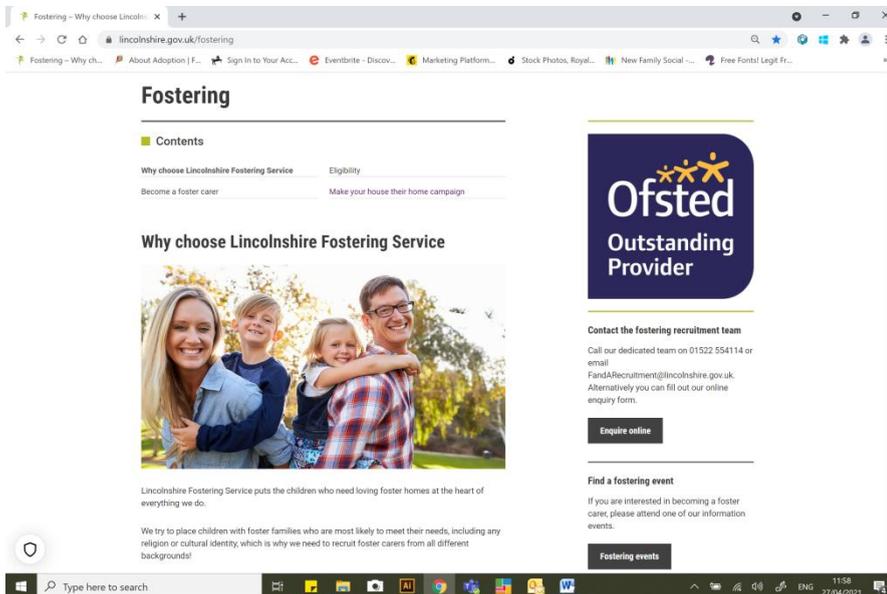
## Ellie's Story

At the beginning of March 2020 an interview was carried out by the Marketing Officer with a care leaver about her experience of being in care with the aim of using this as the narrative for an animated film which highlights the voice of the child in long-term foster care. Electric Egg (which produced the previous animation about the process to become a foster carer) was commissioned once again to do the animation. Work on editing the audio began late-March with the animation process taking place in April and early May. The completed film was launched at the end of Foster Care Fortnight on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. It was also shared by many of our media partners and was viewed over 500 times during the launch weekend. It is also shown on the fostering information evenings and on the preparation course and is always met with very positively (Press Ctrl+Click on image below to watch video).



## Website

Work was carried out on the fostering website to rewrite the content on the 'Why Choose Lincolnshire Fostering Service' page to include Lincolnshire's Unique Selling Points (USPs) and to compete with Independent Fostering Agencies operating locally. There are also some videos on the site of our foster carers talking about these different aspects. A screenshots of the webpage is below:



## Foster Carer Retention

As important, at a time when recruitment, support and connection 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. The innovation of Caring2Learn has developed a new community based hub model, encouraging foster carers to actively invest, share, problem solve and support each other as a community. Over 90% of fostering households actively participate as a member of the hub. The hub model recognizes and acknowledges their skills and knowledge and how these can be used to help support and improve other foster carers' experiences and outcomes for children. The hub offers both formal and organic learning and development opportunities where connections can be built and maintained.

Facilitating and supporting the Hub model are 24 Foster Carer champions; these individuals offer new carers support in their first year by helping to integrate them into the community and make links that will support them and their development in their fostering role. Building upon the champions' existing skills and providing a high level of development opportunities has equipped this group to be able to complete direct work with foster carers as well as supporting and facilitating practice workshops and the induction and preparation course. Foster Carer champions are actively involved within the recruitment of new carers, making initial calls to potential carers that are considering Lincolnshire as their provider. Foster Carer Champions on average are completing 30-45 pieces of allocated work per month. The Caring2Learn Practice Supervisor has overall oversight of this work and allocation.

The role of the Placement Support Workers has been further enhanced and is integral to the hub model. All placement support workers are now trained in Theraplay and therapeutic parenting, enabling the service to offer therapeutic support to foster carers both directly and via training. With the introduction of the 1<sup>st</sup> national lockdown, the design of the hub meant it could continue to operate and thrive with platforms easily accessible online. Placement support workers have worked closely with the Caring2Learn hub and have also been creative in the platforms used to engage children and young people, offering a variety of groups virtually including baking sessions and quizzes.

The Whatsapp listening group which has 82 active members remains a constant hive of activity, with foster carers connecting, reaching out to their community for support or to share their challenges and successes. The Facebook page also continues to offer dynamic and creative support and solutions to foster carers and has over 650 participants.

Caring2Learn has been integrated into 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.

### **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 8% at year end. This figure suggests that Children in Care 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 placements and reduced placement options has 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. During the pandemic, this enhanced level of integrated support has been effective in sustaining placements. Together they have supported a continued improvement in the NI063 placement stability figure with a year-end figure reported as 72.2%; this continues to be good performance.

### **Family Lincs Care**

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

break from their caring responsibilities.

The scheme is now serviced by one fostering household which offers regular breaks to one young person as the other fostering household is not in the position to offer placements due to a change in personal circumstances.

The efforts to recruit to the scheme have not been successful to date. Family Lincs carers offer 100 units of care per annum with the option to offer additional units dependent on demand and the carers availability, each unit equates to 8 hours of care. The current demand for this service is being met with the current carer having two task centred placements alongside the short term break commitment.

## **Permanence**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 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. Owing to the covid pandemic these meetings have been undertaken virtually over Microsoft Teams.

Over the year 22 children have been considered, of these 6 children were newly referred from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 onwards. This is a significant decrease on last year's figures of 39 children.

Out of the 22 children considered, long term foster care in house foster placements was identified for five children, all single children, with three of these children moving to newly identified placements and two children remaining in their current placements. Of the remaining 17 children, 7 moved to IFA foster carers, made up of three sibling groups of two and one single child and it was agreed that one further child would remain in her current IFA placement. Three children moved to residential children's homes, a sibling group of two and a single child; and one child was removed from Family Finders due to a change in his care plan.

Six children have been linked for Permanence at Fostering Panel over the year, however all of these were with the existing task centred foster carers and the children had not been referred to Family Finders. Currently five children remain on Family Finders, made up of a sibling group of three and two single children. In respect of the sibling group of three agreement has been given for an IFA search however this is currently on hold pending the outcome of a re-assessment of a family member.

For years recruitment of permanent foster carers has been difficult with most permanent matches being made with existing task centred foster carers. In 2020 only one new fostering family was approved for permanence.

Although this year there has continued to be a high level of support in place for both prospective and current permanent foster carers; we have clearly had to be more creative in how we deliver this with, until very recently, limited face to face contact. A virtual permanence preparation course and Family Finders event took place in November with 10 children on Family Finders featured and a further event is planned for June 2021.

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. Over the course of the past year a total of 11 children were referred to the Family Finders Review meeting. For those children who have waited too long, this meeting considers referrals to independent fostering providers.

### **Staying Put**

The 'Staying Put' initiative in Lincolnshire is in its twelfth year. It has, since its inception, enabled a total of 168 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. During the last 12 months additional support has been provided to those carers who have continued to support young people in the home if they have been unable to return to university and have remained at home to complete their studies. This has provided stability for those young people in a difficult year with them being able to remain with their families and continue to study.

Lincolnshire's Staying Put Service has continued to support young people and their carers with 44 young people living in a Staying Put arrangement at the end of March 2021. Of these, 24 were in full time further education with 5 attending university. The others were in employment, on Work Experience Placements or Apprenticeships; with 5 of these on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme. There has been a dip in the number of Staying Put arrangements which has been owing to the cohort of young people being of a slightly younger age and therefore have not transitioned to Staying Put.

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 the past 12 months connections with carers have remained in place; with Supervising Social Workers keeping in contact with carers by telephone and virtually. Microsoft Teams has been used to complete virtual meetings ensuring young people and carers fully understand Staying Put and to complete the relevant paperwork relating to the arrangement. Microsoft Teams has enabled greater participation in meetings with the support network for the young person being able to meet up in a virtual environment. Looking forward to the next 12 months Staying Put, there are currently 20 referrals and the scheme will be reviewing documentation and processes following on from the support of the Legal Department and Commissioning in reviewing the License Agreement

### **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. This 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 the Practice Supervisors retired in November 2019 and the other relocated. Following interim management arrangements the service has recently recruited a new Practice Supervisor who has joined the service, and alongside other colleagues will have direct oversight of this area of work.

The number of referrals into the Kinship Team has increased this year. This is most noticeable in the increase in the volume of referrals for Regulation 24 assessments moving to Special Guardianship Order Assessments, Private Fostering and Special Guardianship Assessments including the statutory checks, when compared to the last year. The number of cases presented at Fostering Panel has increased considerably when compared to the previous year. Most of the assessments have been presented to the fostering panel within 16 weeks of allocation; however owing to the pandemic some assessments have been scheduled to be completed within the extended 24 week period.

The numbers 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 2020 -31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Number of Referrals	SGO	Reg.24 to SGO	Reg.24	Private Fostering
186	71	53	38	24

Of the above figures:

- SGO – 26 applicants withdrew/ did not progress due to placement ending
- SGO – 37 are still in process
- SGO – 2 were negative assessments and the children were not placed
- SGO – 4 cases, Court granted a Child Arrangement Order
- SGO – 20 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 – 6 SGO granted

- SGO/Reg.24 – 36 are still in process
- SGO/Reg.24 – 11 where child was moved or other Order granted
- Reg.24 – 23 Carers approved at panel
- Reg.24 – 21 children were moved
- Reg.24 – 10 Not yet attended panel
- Reg.24 – 2 carer granted Child Arrangement Order
- Reg.24 – 5 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 five having taken place in 2020/2021. This course has been delivered virtually due to the covid 19 pandemic and the method of delivery will remain subject to review in accordance with government guidance. 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 and continues to be reviewed and updated to enable carers to receive the latest training and guidance to support them in their role.

### **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 Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Amendments 2015 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:

- 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
- Maggie Nisbet, Independent Member
- Paula Bexon, Social Work Representative
- Michelle Maxfield, Social Work Representative
- Joanne Stares, Social Work Representative
- Panel Advisor and Administrator in attendance at each panel

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.

In response to the emergence of covid 19 in March 2020, the panels have been held remotely via Microsoft Teams. All panel members were trained and supported to engage in a new way of working. There have been challenges but this has allowed for greater flexibility and connection with applicants who may have had to travel significant distances to attend the panels. Whilst the panels have been effectively run, the consensus from panel members is they would prefer to provide this function face to face when appropriate to enhance the engagement with applicants.

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 Fostering Panel has met on 25 occasions this year, 5 more than the previous year.

This is due to the workload of panel and ability to hold meetings via teams.

Panel recommended for approval the following households:

APPROVAL	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Task Centred/Respite	27	19	27	13	20
Reg 24/25 Kinship Care	56	43	33	39	39
Permanent Foster Carers	0	0	2	1	10
Change of Approval	2	6	7	0	5
Permanence Link	4	6	10	10	11
Reviews	32	23	22	17	35
Total	121	97	101	80	120

#### Review Breakdowns:

REVIEW	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Task Centred/ Respite	15	15	12	9	19
Remand	0	0	0	0	1
Reg 24/25 Kinship Care	11	6	9	3	12
Permanent Fostering	0	0	0	4	12
Allegation	6	1	1	1	1

#### Feedback and Quality Assurance

Panel seeks feedback from all participants including social workers attending panel. Whilst it is not the same experience being on Teams this has allowed for much more focused discussions which address key matters. The Panel has fully embraced restorative practice and continues to develop the key areas for conversation in relation to fostering and the needs of young people and children in care.

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. There continues to be an active support from the Panel Advisor with the agency on more challenging cases, this allows for clear discussions and opportunities to review how the agency has developed practice. One such development is around the post allegation report template which provides a consistent framework which is embedded in evidence based practice.

The Chairs to the Foster Panel have continued to work closely with the Panel Advisor and the Fostering Team Managers. 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 continues to be of a good standard with Social Workers producing sound, evidence based assessments. There is clear evidence of use of the Signs of Safety Model and this works well with how the Panel is structured.

Restorative practice is in evidence and an understanding of how this approach is particularly important is in the work with some of the Kinship carers where there is a clear need for the authority to support carers to meet fostering standards. This has been particularly highlighted during the pandemic and has resulted in some excellent work following a negative recommendation and appeal by the family.

The Child's Voice at Panel is actively encouraged, in particular children attending Panel, particularly in permanent link cases. There has been evidence of direct work both with the birth children of foster carers who are an integral part of the fostering household but also children in Kinship arrangements.

The Panel is also mindful of the Training Standards and Development of foster carers, and is actively monitoring the activity around training and ensures that any matters raised are referred back to the training. There has been an impact on the full completion of the workbooks for some carers and this appears to be related to the impact of covid, an additional 3 months has been given and these are required to be reported to panel.

## **Complaints**

In the last year the Fostering Service has received three complaints. One of the complaints was upheld, two not upheld and none were escalated to stage 2. The complaint upheld was raised by a carer in relation to poor communication from the service. Upon investigation this complaint reinforced the importance of communication with fostering households and this continues to be an area for review and development in an effort to continue to provide a high quality service to all children in care and their carers.

The second complaint from a parent related to the matching of a foster placement for a child in care. The matching process was explained and a resolution reached based on explanation and further understanding of how and where placements are identified. The complaint was not upheld.

The final complaint was raised by a foster carer applicant who expressed concern about the conduct of the staff member with responsibility for their assessment. This complaint was not upheld given the pertinent issues that arose and that required additional exploration. This complaint alongside the others was reviewed and lessons learnt to inform our current practice.

The low level representations and concerns were promptly dealt with in the service and satisfactorily resolved. In 2020/2021 there were no matters referred to the Independent Review Mechanism.

## **Foster Carer Continuous Development**

The Fostering Service in partnership develops an annual learning and development offer to include practical and e-learning opportunities, providing foster carers with a schedule of face to face training events and e-learning options which are accessed through the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Childrens

Partnership (LSCP) website and Caring2Learn. A common theme has developed with a preference to access the Caring2Learn events. Feedback indicates this is due to quality, accessibility and personal booking options.

The offer is reviewed annually to ensure it continues to meet the personal and professional development needs for carers, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge to be able to care for children and work towards positive outcomes according to best practice guidelines set out within the local authority. This year brought the unexpected event of social distancing and restrictions due to covid 19, meaning the training offer was no longer fit for purpose and the way training and development would go ahead had to evolve to ensure progress and development for foster carers continued.

The existing Caring2Learn hub made it possible to take courses online to be delivered virtually within just 2 weeks of the first national lockdown. The online sessions and multi-agency offer have created a dynamic learning community where all carers are provided with theory, principles and practice examples that embed and combine Signs of Safety, Social Pedagogy, Restorative Practice and Trauma Informed Care.

Singletons have continued throughout the last year to facilitate the Emergency First Aid, Safeguarding and Safe Care course.

The current training offer supports the Learning Home Toolkit, for new carers this also includes the TSD criteria. The feedback received has been positive and ensures that newly approved foster carers meet the standards whilst evidencing their continued development and understanding of our guiding principles and what this means in practice.

Another Learning Home toolkit is currently in development, this will be given to all carers that have completed the original toolkit and have a Learning Homes Award, the aim is to ensure ongoing that foster carers have a portfolio that supports continued development of knowledge, skills and overall practice. This allows the service to ensure its carers remain up to date with research and guiding principles and theories set by the Local Authority. Foster carers will reapply every 3 years for a Learning Homes Award by submitting their portfolio.

Carers have been able to access mandatory training through the learning and development team virtually. Carers have also had access to the E learning modules offered via the LSCP training platform.

The table below reports the number of carers who have undertaken any form of training this year. Despite the challenges with the pandemic throughout this year, foster carers have continued to access workshops, training events and completed and worked towards Learning Homes Awards. Participation in training and workshops has increased this year by 93% when compared to last year.

<b>Type of event</b>	<b>Number of carers participating</b>
Virtual Training/workshops	474
Face to face	42

The annual Foster Carers' Celebration/Conference took place virtually in Dec 2020; the event was a success with carers being presented with a lapel badge, certificate and gift voucher to recognize their long service. Feedback was very positive from the community regarding the event and a write up on each of the carers that received an award or joined the service was featured in the 'Our World' community magazine.

### **Forward Plan 2020/2021**

Given the extraordinary and unsettling circumstances that the nation faced in the latter part of the financial year there remains some uncertainty about what the impact of the Covid pandemic will have on everyday life going forward. Such an unprecedented and challenging time has undoubtedly impacted on those caring for and supporting children in foster care.

From the outset of the pandemic the service proudly supported those fostering households in the hope that all efforts would serve to promote stability to children and young people in foster care during this crisis, the ever changing situation and the recovery anticipated.

The service has been and will continue to be engaged in the transformation work in working with other teams to improve outcomes for our children in care by providing care locally within Lincolnshire, rather than care at a distance to keep children and young people within their own communities, where they can be close to their networks.

The implementation of the Valuing Care toolkit is an approach which helps us explain, record and track children's needs and outcomes over time. The tool enables us to look at the needs of children across 13 different areas to build up a holistic picture of their needs and strengths. This combined with the fostering toolkit supports the matching activity and strengthens the process of identifying the skillset of the carers alongside the holistic needs of children.

The work of the transformation programme identified a number of key workstreams including the revision of the core offer to foster carers which would support the service reviewing the offer of services and practical support available. The work would highlight the County Council's unique selling point as a fostering provider and consider what attracts members of our communities to become and remain as foster carers for Lincolnshire County Council.

Embedding Caring2Learn within the fostering service will be further considered to better integrate the support offer for foster carers thus maximising the Council's ability to improve outcomes for children, minimise placement instability and provide an enhanced support and training offer to existing foster carers and strengthen the recruitment strategy.

All of the above serve as a focus to improve the provision of locally sourced foster placements that meet the needs of children in care within an increasing challenging and competitive environment.



# Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2021

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR THE LINCOLNSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE**

**This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. To be presented for approval by Lincolnshire County Council Executive in September each year.**

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Leadership Structure

Appendix 2 Fostering Panel Structure

## **AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE:**

### **The main aims of the Lincolnshire County Council Fostering Service are to:**

Provide high quality and safe care within a family setting for children and young people who have been assessed as requiring a foster placement.

Provide a range of Foster Carers able to meet the emotional, physical, cultural, religious and ethnic needs of all the children in care with Lincolnshire County Council.

Lincolnshire County Council delivers its Fostering Service through dedicated Fostering Teams managed by Team Managers covering the north and south of the county.

### **The main service objectives are to:**

Place children and young people in local foster placements where relationships with family, friends and community are maintained and continuity of education, health and cultural links and activities is ensured. In instances where it is not possible to achieve this within the Council's Foster Placements an appropriate placement outside of the resources of the County Council will be sought.

Maintain a sufficient number of foster care placements in relation to the location, numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the looked after population and review this annually through the recruitment strategy.

Recruit Foster Carers who are trained and supported in providing safe care to children who live with them. The service will determine the number and types of foster placements required and produce an annual recruitment plan.

Carry out an assessment of need on every child prior to accommodation. Where possible a safe family member or friend will be the preferred placement choice.

Provide a safe and nurturing foster placement with every effort made to achieve good outcomes for children in care, within set timescales and to agreed standards. The service aims to ensure that wherever possible, children can meet with their prospective foster carers prior to placement and if this is not possible, receive a foster family profile.

Provide for sibling groups to be placed together when this is in their best interests.

Respect and promote the child's heritage, culture and identity.

Promote family time between the child and their family where this is consistent with the care plan.

Achieve permanence for all children who are unable to return safely to their families and promote Staying Put for those young people who are secure within their foster placement

Ensure openness and partnership working between all those involved and concerned with the child's welfare.

Involve young people and foster carers in developing services and building their feedback into service development.

To continually promote Caring 2 Learn to encourage caring schools and learning homes. To support and develop foster care champions across the County to ensure that the model is extended as widely as possible.

The Fostering Service has set targets to achieve best practice for the following Children's Performance Assessment Framework and National Indicators:

NI062 – stability of placements of children in care: number of placement moves.

PAF B79 – the percentage of children in foster placements or placed for adoption.

NI063 – stability of placements of children in care: length of placement.

**The main principles underpinning the service are:**

Foster Carers will be treated with respect and recognition will be given to the valuable role they play in the care of children in care.

Recruitment of new Foster Carers and staff who work within the service, complies with regulations, national standards and good practice.

Foster Carers are vetted, prepared and assessed in line with national regulations and requirements.

The Lincolnshire Fostering Panel considers all carer applications and reviews of approval.

All approved Foster Carers are required to sign the Foster Care Agreement and the Foster Carer Charter which outlines expectations of the Fostering Service and commits to caring appropriately for children in care.

Wherever possible all placements are matched to ensure a positive match between the needs of the child and the skills and experience of the foster carer(s).

Every child placed will be subject to the children in care - care planning process.

All Foster Carers are provided with the required documentation and information to support the placement of the child in their care.

Children have their placement and plan reviewed within four weeks of initial placement.

All Foster Carers have a named Supervising Social Worker and children in foster care have a named allocated Social Worker.

#### **STANDARDS OF CARE TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE AGENCY:**

The Fostering Service aims to provide safe, secure and high quality care in family settings for children who need to be cared for away from home. This will be achieved in accordance with the standards set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (referred to as the Regulations), the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations (2010) and (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) along with the policies and procedures of Lincolnshire County Council. These standards will apply equally to family and friends placements. The service complies with the requirements of the Training, Support and Development Standards.

There is a countywide management group whose function is to continuously improve standards of care informed by inspections, audits, new legislation and guidance and evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery.

#### **STATUS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY:**

Lincolnshire County Council is an approved fostering service provider and will be inspected by OFSTED in accordance with the current inspection framework.

Decision making and arrangements for the management of the service including the appointment of the Fostering Service Manager (Regulation 6) and approval of Foster Carer registrations (Regulation 27) are delegated to the Assistant Director, Children's Services.

A Fostering Panel has been established in accordance with Regulation 23. The Panel is chaired by an independent person with considerable experience of working within Social Care.

Where Lincolnshire County Council needs to use another fostering agency for the provision of placements; the commissioning section of the Council must be contacted to ensure that the process is managed according to the Council's rules on commissioning.

## THE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE:

The Fostering Service is managed by the Head of Service for Regulated Services; through two Team Managers who manage dedicated fostering teams from bases in Lincoln, Louth and Sleaford. The service employs five practice supervisors who have lead responsibility for specific areas of delivery.

The registered manager appointed to manage the Fostering Service under Regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulations is:

Deborah Crawford, Head of Service – Regulated Services  
County Offices  
Newland  
Lincoln  
LN1 1YL

Telephone: 01522 552781

Email: [deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk)

*Qualifications:* Diploma in Social Work, BA (Hons) Social and Professional Studies and Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management in Social Work.

*Experience:* more than twenty years of experience of working in social care, specialising in the area of children and families and latterly fostering. The registered manager comes with various child care experience and has held previous leadership posts within Children's Services.

The nominated manager to lead the Fostering Service in the absence of the registered manager is Rachel Freeman – Head of Service for Children in Care and Residential Estates.

The Fostering Teams are locality based and deliver a comprehensive fostering service. These teams manage the recruitment, assessment, approval, support and placement processes which enable children in care in Lincolnshire County Council to be placed in a range of fostering settings.

Dawn Oldroyd is the dedicated Professional Agency Advisor for both the Fostering and Permanence Panels.

The organisational structure of the Fostering Service is shown in Appendix 1. The list of Fostering Panel members is set out in Appendix 2. This information in its fullest form is only available to Ofsted.

The Teams are managed by two Team Managers responsible for the service on a geographic basis. Rebecca Dolman is the Team Manager North and has over 10 years' experience in Children's Services. The South Team is managed by Nicola Brangam. She has 20 years' experience of social work and has worked in a range of services across children and families including regulated services.

The teams comprise Practice Supervisors who are responsible for the supervision and development of staff; including Supervising Social Workers who are all qualified and experienced in a range of child care social work and a number of unqualified staff who work within recruitment, placement support and placement duty. In addition, the service employs a dedicated marketing officer who is responsible for the delivery of the annual recruitment strategy.

#### **THE WORK OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE:**

*Putting Children First* is at the heart of our work in Lincolnshire; *Working Together with Families to Enhance Children's Present and Future Lives*.

The strategic outcomes that the Council commits to are:

- Young People are healthy and safe
- Children and Young People develop to their potential in their early years and are ready for school
- Children and Young People learn and achieve
- Children and Young People are ready for adult life.

The expectations for all Children in Care are enshrined within these outcomes.

- We will champion the importance of aspiration
- We will promote self-esteem, self-belief and resilience in all children
- We will encourage all children to be the best they can be

- We will use resources to focus on outcomes, life chances and opportunities
- We will work jointly with foster carers to help promote these objectives.

Lincolnshire aims to provide sufficient local placements to enable placement choice and enable children to remain, where appropriate, close to their communities.

Lincolnshire delivers Staying Put opportunities to enable young people to remain in their foster placements post 18.

The training, induction and development of new Foster Carers is in line with the requirements of Standard 20 (NMS) and carers are expected to meet the Training, Support and Development standards (TSDs) within 12 months of approval.

The TSDs are incorporated and combined with the Caring to Learn Home Toolkit which encourages all carers to complete their training and develop skills, develop their knowledge and gain support into their fostering journey.

This combined approach supports foster carers to assess how they work with children and young people to enable them to feel safe, belong in their home and school in order to provide them with a solid foundation to have the confidence to go on to learn, be aspirational and achieve their full potential.

## SERVICE AMBITIONS:

### Young People are Healthy and Safe

All children are registered with GPs and dentists and this is kept under review by the team managers. There are designated GPs and a named Doctor and small team of nurses responsible for this group of children. Children and young people placed in foster care have an initial health assessment carried out by a designated GP and are encouraged to have an annual review by the same GP or designated nurse. During the Covid 19 pandemic contingencies were made to ensure that all initial health assessments were completed and were undertaken by nurses within the designated children in care team and this worked well with the quality, onward referrals and advice to children, young people and carers being evidenced. Moving forward it is anticipated that this work will revert to being GP led.

Medical forms recommended by British Association for Fostering and Adoption (BAAF) are used to record both the initial and annual review and maintain a health profile for each child in care. Lincolnshire has a strategy to tackle teenage pregnancy. All carers are given a copy of the guidance on sex and relationship education within their handbooks. Carers and young people are able to access further information from the young person's pages on the Council's website.

A multi agency commissioning group is in place to understand and improve the health needs of children in care. Health needs of children and young people are regularly monitored through the children in care review process. The Local Authority has a contract with CAMHS and services for children in care are prioritised. CAMHS work to a target of seeing all referred children for an initial assessment within 28 days. A forensic psychology assessment service is available to children in care who have emotional, behavioural, interaction or mental health issues that are manifesting themselves in the form of offending behaviour.

Foster Carers complete a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQs) for children between the ages of four and sixteen years of age. This is to ensure that services for children who require additional support are accessed swiftly in order to improve emotional well being. The results of all the SDQs are monitored by a multi-agency group comprising Social Care, CAMHS and Psychology which identify intervention strategies for those whose scores are of concern. Foster carers have access to the CAMHS professional advice line to support in the management of concerning behaviours.

Part of the training programme for Foster Carers focuses on promoting a healthy lifestyle, good diet and exercise. All mainstream Foster Carers have to undertake first aid training as part of their mandatory post approval training. Foster Carers have training sessions on promoting the health of children in care. This core programme is

supplemented through special interest seminars including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism and teenage pregnancy.

Foster Carers can access specialist services for those with substance and alcohol misuse problems through the young 'We are with you' service. (Previously Addaction)

As part of the assessment process of prospective Foster Carers, a health assessment is undertaken by the carers' GP which the Agency Medical Advisor for the Fostering Panel considers. If there are on-going medical issues, a full medical assessment is undertaken. Full medicals are also completed for all carers seeking approval for permanence. All carers are required to update their health assessment every 3 years. Foster Carers who offer respite care to disabled children are offered specialist training to meet the needs of individual children. Foster Carers are trained in the administration of specific medication.

The assessment of carers includes the taking of full employment and accommodation histories. Checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and local authority checks are completed on everyone aged over 18 years of age living in the household. A range of referees are contacted and visited including previous partners who have parented together and birth children.

All Foster Carers attend mandatory training regarding safer caring and the implications of looking after children who may have been harmed.

Each set of carers have a safer caring assessment prior to approval which highlights key aspects of the safer caring process and this is reviewed in the light of each placement made. Every effort is taken when placing children to ensure that the assessed needs of the child are carefully matched to the skills and capabilities of the carers. All children placed are subject to a safety plan that identifies any risks that carers will be asked to manage.

All Foster Carers receive bi-monthly formal supervision, in addition to regular visits, to review their practice. During the pandemic carers and their families have been seen in person and virtually in an effort to maintain strong support to such families. An unannounced visit to the foster home is made at least once each year. Workers in the team are also aware of the particular vulnerability of disabled children.

Allegations against Foster Carers are investigated using an established procedure whereby all are considered by the Local Authority Designated Officer. An independent person chairs the initial strategy meeting and oversees the process. Independent support is offered to carers during the allegations procedure by Foster Talk. In addition the Fostering Service funds each fostering household's membership of the Fostering Network which brings the benefit of legal protection insurance and access to support and advice from their staff, including free legal advice and counselling service.

Children's plans are regularly reviewed through the Children in Care's statutory Review process, and procedures are in place for reporting significant incidents through the OFSTED notification requirements. All children are given information about how to report abuse and carers are prepared in how to manage disclosure and prevent allegations arising in the placement. In addition children and young people have access to an independent advocacy service. All children are provided with a coming into care kit.

All children and young people are expected to agree with their carer when they go out, where they are going and a time to return. If a young person fails to return at the agreed time, attempts are made to locate them by telephoning friends, family and relatives. Carers can obtain advice about the operation of the Missing from Care protocol from the Emergency Duty Team and are issued with a copy of it within the Foster Carer Handbook.

The process for conducting risk assessments on missing young people and making reports to the police is detailed in the Foster Carer Handbook.

Lincolnshire's Fostering Service Policy is that there is sufficient space within the foster carer's home for a child to have their own room. In certain circumstances, a child/young person may share a bedroom. Full risk assessments for each child/young person sharing must be undertaken before these arrangements are agreed. A matching policy is in place to ensure that effective matching of children to placements is undertaken to improve placement stability and good outcomes for children and young people.

## **READINESS FOR SCHOOL**

All pre-school children who come into care will be placed in a foster placement equipped to meet their individual needs.

All Foster Carers are encouraged to register with their local Children's' Centre and take up the services available as part of the county's Early Help offer available to all children.

All children in care are able to access the 15 hours early entitlement at the age of 2 and have access to suitable nursery school provision to support their learning outcomes. Children aged 3 and 4 can access their 15 hours entitlement from the term after their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, and those in foster care can access an additional 15 hours (to provide a 30 hours offer) if the foster carers are in employment outside of their foster carer responsibilities.

Foster Carers are required and supported to engage children in their care in specific activities in order to develop their self-esteem and socialisation skills.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN AND ACHIEVE

Lincolnshire County Council is committed to maximising a child's potential in both academic attainment and personal achievement. All young people are expected to attend school and efforts are made to maintain children in their existing schools. Foster Carers who transport children to out of catchment schools have their transport expenses reimbursed.

Foster Carers are aware that it is unacceptable to take children and young people out of school for family holidays. A protocol has been agreed on this matter and has been issued to all carers.

The Fostering Service promotes the educational attainment of children placed with foster carers. Each child in foster care has a Personal Education Plan and, where appropriate, a Leaving Care Pathway Plan. Foster Carers are expected to involve themselves in assisting children in placement to achieve satisfactory attendance, assist with homework and participate in parent/teacher events.

All children in care have an entitlement to the Pupil Premium. This is further enhanced by the Council and the utilisation of the provision is monitored within the PEP process.

There is a designated teacher in every Lincolnshire school with responsibilities for liaison, educational monitoring and pastoral care for children in care. There are Education Officers whose role is to ensure effective liaison with schools and to promote educational attainment and attendance of children in care. This includes children who live with Foster Carers outside of Lincolnshire.

The Children in Care Education Service is managed by a Virtual Head Teacher. The Lincolnshire Virtual School Team is fully engaged with the fostering service and carers in order to promote the improvement of educational outcomes for children and young people in care. The team is well resourced and provides training and support to social care teams, foster carers and schools. Personal Education Plan meetings are held three times per year or more if required with high levels of engagement from children, social workers, schools and carers.

The Council has an embedded Caring 2 Learn approach which promotes joint working between schools and foster carers to maximise the potential of children in care. The programme is supported by foster carer champions in all areas and introduced an accredited award.

There is an Educational Psychology service which provides input to vulnerable children including children in care. The service broadens the support and intervention

knowledge and skills of carers and schools and actively identifies children in need of psychological involvement within the SDQ process.

The opportunity for children and young people to succeed in hobbies or sports is seen as an important element of the fostering task and is supported through fostering allowance payments. Annual Foster Carer Reviews consider the level of social opportunities young people in placement are supported in attending. Children and young people are encouraged to participate in a range of activities and interests. Their achievements are recognised each year in an annual award ceremony held under the banner of FAB! which sadly has not taken place for the last two years due to the pandemic.

The Children in Care Council has continued to develop and in addition to a steering group, groups in the four quadrants of the county have been established to ensure that the voice of children in care is heard. These groups operate under the banner of V4C (Voices for Choices) and are held in 4 quadrants of the County on a quarterly basis. V4C is currently working on a refresh of the Coming Into care Kit. In addition the Big Conversation is held three times per year and gives young children in care the opportunity to work jointly with Council officers and Members on key areas for development.

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE READY FOR ADULT LIFE**

Lincolnshire County Council's Foster Carers are recruited and supported to meet the needs of children placed with them and provide the stability that they require to achieve and ready themselves for adult lives. The authority therefore makes sure that there are no barriers, financial or otherwise, to prevent Foster Carers becoming permanent carers be they adopters, Child Arrangement Order holders or special guardians; where an assessment determines that this is the best outcome for the child. The Council has fully committed to the Staying Put requirement with 41 young people remaining in their present foster placements. Young people are issued with a Skills for Adult Life booklet which identifies and develops the core skills for independent living which is a focus for the young person, foster carers and all involved agencies.

The training plan for Foster Carers contains special interest seminars, which assist carers in helping children progress to independence. On an individual basis, placement support workers will also have a role in helping young people acquire skills for independence and have developed a range of work preparation and apprenticeship opportunities. Children in Care are encouraged to follow courses of higher education and appropriate support is made available to them. In 2019 the tender for Lincolnshire's Leaving Care service was awarded again to Barnardo's. All young people leaving care have a named worker and a clear plan for support in their transition to adulthood.

## **SUPPORTING THE FOSTERING SERVICE**

The work of the Fostering Service is delivered through a number of key relationships and support functions which are described below.

### **1. Supervising Social Worker**

The role of the Supervising Social Worker is to provide support and supervision to the Foster Carer household. They also assist with practical difficulties and the provision of equipment. They are a crucial link between the carer and the child's Social Worker. There is a supervision policy for Foster Carers. Supervision takes place bi-monthly and includes a focus on personal development.

Although most support visits will be prearranged the Supervising Social Worker has a duty to undertake at least one unannounced visit per year. They are also responsible for undertaking the annual review of approval, which incorporates the carers' views and those of any birth children and fostered children. The review also includes reports from social workers and the Supervising Social Worker who will identify strengths and future learning needs. Following completion of the review the foster carer is issued with a statement of re-approval.

### **2. Child's Social Worker**

The child's Social Worker is responsible for the overall management of the child's care plan. They have a statutory duty to visit the child within one week of placement and thereafter at a minimum of six weekly intervals until a child is confirmed as being in their permanent placement when a three monthly visiting pattern may be appropriate. However in most circumstances the visiting pattern will be more frequent and determined by an individual child's needs.

### **3. Foster Carer Support**

The service delivers quarterly focus groups with foster carers across the County. These provide opportunities for engagement with the service, support and training opportunities including greater networking. The service has developed a group of foster carer mentors who are linked with foster carers at the point of approval and provide an essential support and point of contact to enhance the confidence and skills of newly approved foster carers. The Caring2Learn programme has recruited foster carer champions to provide training and guidance with regard to the development of a learning environment within the foster home.

All Foster Carers receive a handbook which details local policy, information about fostering terms and conditions and guidance about requirements concerning the care and control of children and other procedures. The handbook is frequently updated and

amended versions are distributed to Foster Carers. The service continues to provide an electronic newsletter which remains the preferred generic communication method between the fostering service and foster carers. This allows us to disseminate information, including training events and dates, social events, good news stories and best practice information to the majority of our foster carers. Those without email or who chose not to receive emails are provided with a copy of the newsletter via their Supervising Social Worker.

Fostering households have access to secure sites such as Facebook and Whatsapp to share general information and offer support to one another. Zoom is also used to facilitate foster carer social activities to encourage the community spirit.

All foster carers are provided with individual membership of the Fostering Network.

#### **4. Out of Hours Service - Emergency Duty Team (EDT)**

This service provides a team of social workers who are available outside of office hours to offer emergency support to service users and the public. The EDT can offer telephone advice and has access to placement information and emergency placements with Foster Carers. Early Help Workers and Future4 me staff are available to provide practical assistance out of hours in certain circumstances.

#### **5. Placement Support Workers**

The service employs a dedicated group of Placement Support Workers whose role is to support and assist Foster Carers and children in care. They offer support and assistance to carers to develop, understand and implement a therapeutic style of care. This is undertaken via group work, one to one direct work, and support to the fostering community.

Placement Support Workers work collaboratively with the other professionals and network around the child (ren) and attend the Child in Care Review meetings to plan and review outcomes for children. Placement Support Workers are committed to continuous professional development informed by latest research and trauma informed practice.

### **TRAINING**

The Fostering Service ensures that Foster Carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care to meet the needs of each child placed in their care.

Training of Foster Carers is a significant aspect of the service and is provided both pre and post approval and is included within the Fostering Service's Annual Training Plan.

Training is not an option but a clear expectation of all carers and is evaluated in supervision sessions and annual reviews. Personal and professional development is supported through the Learning Homes Toolkit and regular practice workshops, supporting carers to transfer theory into practice. A three year cycle of training in Safeguarding, Safe Care and First Aid is a requirement for all carers. In addition, mandatory courses on Diversity and Trauma Awareness are held and should be completed on a 3 yearly basis.

Following feedback from carers the TSD (Training, Standards and Development) and Learning Home Toolkit were combined, the feedback from both staff and carers has been overwhelmingly positive. This ensures that all new carers meet the standards but can also progress and develop their practice and homes to ensure children can heal and meet their full potential. The toolkit encourages training and development in line with Lincolnshire Children's Service's priorities and national research. The toolkit encourages the development of relationships between Foster Carers, schools and other professionals and their participation within a community.

Pre-approval training is over three days and is provided in-house with a Supervising Social Worker being the lead facilitator. The course has evolved over the years to reflect changing practice, local experience and the national fostering agenda. All foster carers are provided with online access via Fostering or the LSCP (Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership) suite of training post approval.

An Annual Foster Carer celebration Conference is held and offers both training, information and recognises the work that foster carers undertake via a range of long service awards. This event took place remotely during the pandemic in 2020 and it is hoped in the future this will revert to a face to face event to celebrate the efforts and commitment from so many.

## **PROCESS OF RECRUITING AND APPROVING FOSTER CARERS**

Foster Carers are recruited and assessed in line with Lincolnshire guidance based on the National Minimum Standards 2011, Fostering Regulations 2011 and the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and Amendments 2013.

Dedicated staff are in place to ensure a prompt response to all first time enquirers. The Practice Supervisor is responsible for the implementation of the Recruitment and Retention strategy and managing all aspects of the recruitment process.

Recruitment involves:

- Co-ordinating evening events whereby foster carers and young people in care attend and give their real life experiences
- Utilising social media to reach wide audiences
- Holding drop-in sessions at Community establishments
- Newspaper advertisements
- Newspaper articles
- Distribution of posters
- Information distributed through displays and presentations
- Word of mouth through existing carers
- The recommend a friend scheme
- Lincolnshire County Council website
- Targeted activity within specific communities in county.
- Participation in a range of county wide events.

All initial enquiries relating to fostering are completed online through the Lincolnshire County Council website and are then passed to the Recruitment Co-ordinators or the Recruitment Co-ordinators are telephoned directly.

The Recruitment Co-ordinators aim to make contact with all enquirers within 24 hours of them registering their interest online. Their role is to ensure that enquirers have all the information they need, and following an initial discussion, an initial expression of interest can be completed over the phone and/or a detailed information booklet is made available to all interested applicants about the fostering process which is sent within five working days.

Once an initial expression of interest is received and allocated to a recruitment team worker; they aim to make contact within 24 hours to arrange a mutually agreeable date and time for the initial home visit. The engagement of foster carer champions within this process has been a recent development and gives prospective applicants a helping hand in realising the realities and benefits of becoming a carer for Lincolnshire.

The fostering service is focusing on enhancing the overall customer experience and the Recruitment Co-ordinators represent the Local Authority in a professional manner and being respectful to all enquirers.

As part of the Stage One process statutory checks are undertaken and prospective carers attend a three day preparation group. If all aspects of Stage One are completed then the prospective carers are invited to begin the Stage Two assessment process. The service aims to have all stage 2 applications approved within 6 months. The assessments are completed by qualified social workers and follow the format of the Coram BAAF Form F.

Foster Carer approvals (including family and friends carers) are considered by the Fostering Panel. Applications to become permanent Foster Carers are considered by the Permanence Panel. The composition and organisation of the Panels is in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The service provider decision maker is the Assistant Director, Children's Services.

Every Foster Carer is required to sign a Foster Carer Agreement (Regulation 27 (5) – (5b)) prior to the placement of a child. A Supervising Social Worker is allocated to the family; this is usually the person who has undertaken the home study. Foster Carers are provided with a copy of the Foster Carer Charter.

Foster Carers are supervised and supported by a named locally based Supervising Social Worker and the child has their own named Social Worker. Independent Reviewing Officers undertake all childcare reviews.

The Fostering Panel always considers first reviews; however subsequent reviews are normally completed under locality management arrangements, unless there is a disagreement regarding the terms of approval which necessitates referral back to Panel. During the covid pandemic the panel has been held virtually to ensure all business is maintained in timescales. The service continue to develop IFAB (Independent Fostering Advisory Board) which offers an independent quality assurance system for fostering annual reviews and will appraise reviews on the basis of year 4, year 7 and year 10 following initial approval. This process supports the ethos of a learning organisation by highlighting best practice and subsequent learning from reviews of carers.

Serious complaints or allegations will also be put before Panel to consider whether or not there should be any alterations to the terms of approval. Since April 2009 Foster Carers have the right to challenge decisions through an Independent Mechanism Review or the Councils Corporate complaints section.

## **FINANCE**

Most Foster Carers receive weekly allowances according to the age of the child. Despite the financial difficulties faced by Local Authorities, in 2020 fostering allowances have increased by 2%.

A specialist fostering scheme remains in place targeted on harder to place children. Placement+ Carers are paid higher fees. Carers able to make permanent commitment to children, receive an increased rate of allowance as do those able to take the more

complex adolescents. The service also offers parent and child placements and placements for young people on remand.

## **MONITORING THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICE**

Foster Carers have at least one unannounced visit per year. This is undertaken by a Supervising Social Worker. They also receive regular supervision from an allocated Supervising Social Worker. This is held bi-monthly. Each Foster Carer is subject to an annual review and contributions are sought from IROs, Social Workers and children placed.

The Service Manager monitors a range of matters identified in the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Regulation 35 (1)) to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the service is developing to meet the needs of a range of children. Reports are submitted on a quarterly basis to the executive to monitor service development.

Regular quality audits are completed by staff from the Fostering Service at key stages in a Foster Carer's career. These are to ensure compliance with procedures and policy and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention of the Supervising Social Worker.

## **COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS**

### **Summary of the Complaints Procedure**

The Directorate has a statutory complaints service; the detail of which is contained in the guide for staff 'Handling Comments and Complaints'. It is a three stage process:

- Stage 1 - Local Resolution
- Stage 2 - An independent investigating officer is appointed
- Stage 3 - A formal review by an Independent Panel of independent members plus the Complaints Manager.

Staff must ensure that all carers know how and who to complain to.

Complainants have the right to involve a friend or advocate.

The Named Manager monitors all complaints and liaises with the Complaints Officer and the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Business Manager. This information is available to authorised persons only.

All Foster Carers have access to support and information regarding the complaints procedures and at the point of any investigation, support can also be accessed through membership of Fostering Network; the cost for which will be met by the agency.

Complaints are collated and reported to the Corporate Parenting Sub Group and themes are shared within the service. Details of complaints relating to the service are considered within the annual fostering report.

## ALLEGATIONS

Foster Carers can sometimes be the subject of allegations in respect of the care of the children or young people they are looking after. If this occurs the allegation will be investigated in line with the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership child protection procedures with all allegations managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer. In addition to the role of the Supervising Social Worker, Foster Carers have access to an Independent Social Worker via Foster Talk who can offer practical and emotional support.

All allegations and other matters are monitored by the manager who ensures that these are retained for agencies to view as appropriate.

## ADVOCACY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Lincolnshire County Council commissions its advocacy for children through Voiceability "Total Voice"



Total Voice Lincolnshire

Referral and Information Line: 01529 400 479

Text:

07860 018 887

Email:

[tv@voiceability.org](mailto:tv@voiceability.org)

Website: [www.totalvoicelincolnshire.org](http://www.totalvoicelincolnshire.org)

### When might you want an advocate?

You can ask to speak with advocate if you:

- Have serious concerns about the care you are getting

- Want to be more involved in decisions being made about you and your future
- Want to fight decisions being made about you
- Want to make a complaint.

Office of the Children's Commissioner



### **Children's Commissioner for England**

The Children's Commissioner is Rachel de Souza. She has a legal duty to promote and protect the rights of all children in England with a particular focus on children and young people with difficulties or challenges in their lives, and in particular those living away from home, in or leaving care, or receiving social care services.

The Children's Commissioner can be contacted:-

By writing to her at

The Office of the Children's Commissioner, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.

Phoning her on Freephone 020 7783 8330

Emailing at: [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)

Visiting the website [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

### **NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED**

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 there were 680 children in care to Lincolnshire County Council.

Of this number 476 were placed with Foster Carers (including kinship carers), including 29 placed in independent foster placements, two children placed with other local authority carers and 5 unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

The Lincolnshire Fostering Service works to the Lincolnshire County Council's Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the council's website.

The Lincolnshire Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the fostering approval process. Applicants wishing to be approved as Foster Carers will be considered irrespective of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the Fostering Service considers they can safely meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence.

Every attempt will be made to find a placement which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

The Lincolnshire Fostering Service recognises that no child or young person should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

## **OFSTED**

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

### **Questions or complaints**

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is Ofsted.

The telephone number is 0300 123 1231. This number manages all general enquiries and will redirect them as necessary; they can also be contacted at [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or write to:

Ofsted  
Piccadilly gate  
Store Street

Manchester  
M1 2WD

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The Fostering Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

If you require this document in a different language or an alternative format such as large print, audio tape or Braille, please contact the Equality and Diversity Team on 01522 782060.

The Statement of Purpose, Children's Guides and other information are also available on the Lincolnshire County Council website: [www.lincolnshire.gov.uk](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk)

A copy can also be obtained from the registered manager:

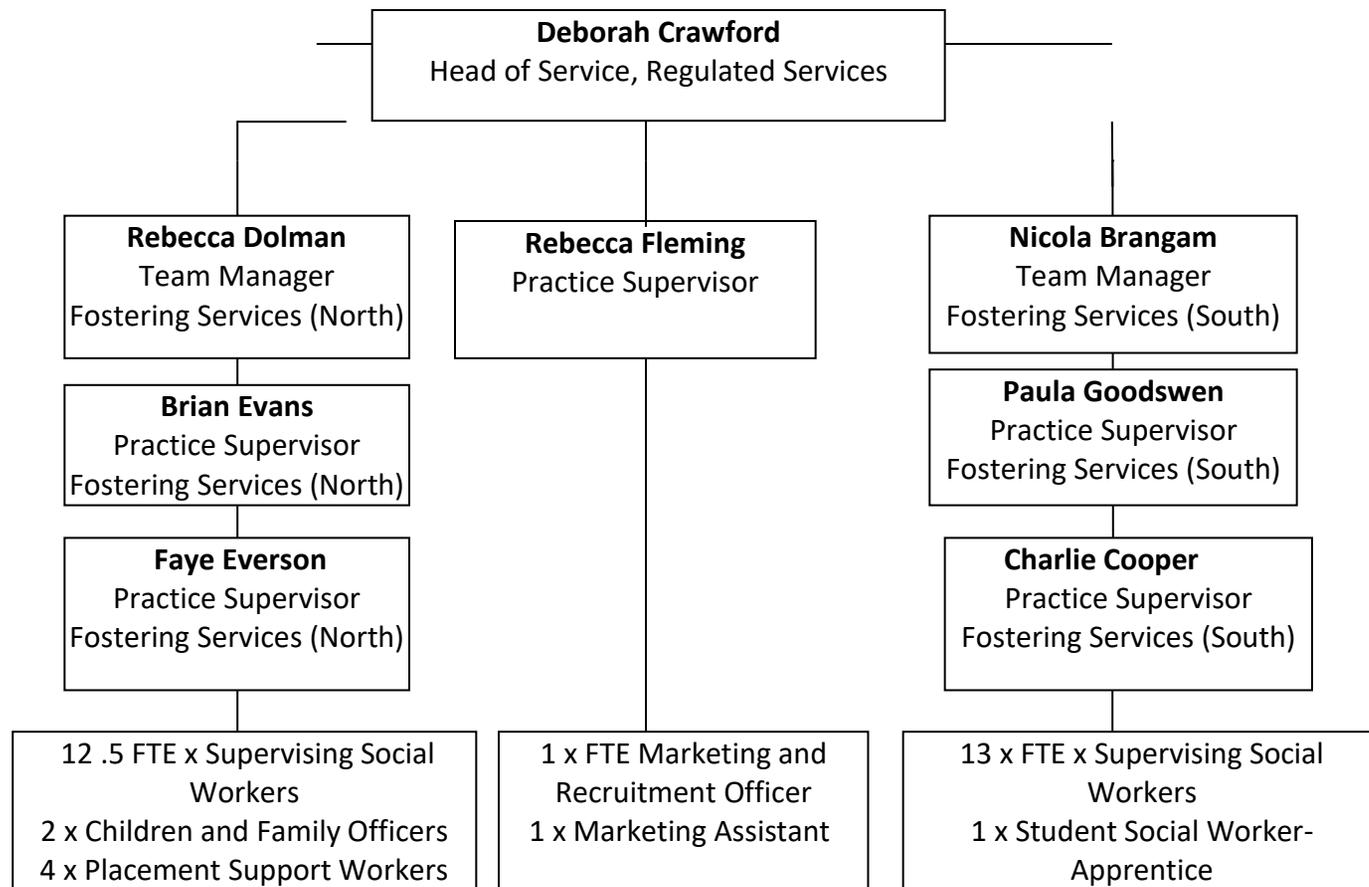
Deborah Crawford Head of Service– Regulated Services  
Lincolnshire County Council  
County Offices  
Newland  
Lincoln  
LN1 1YL  
01522 552781

## APPENDIX 1

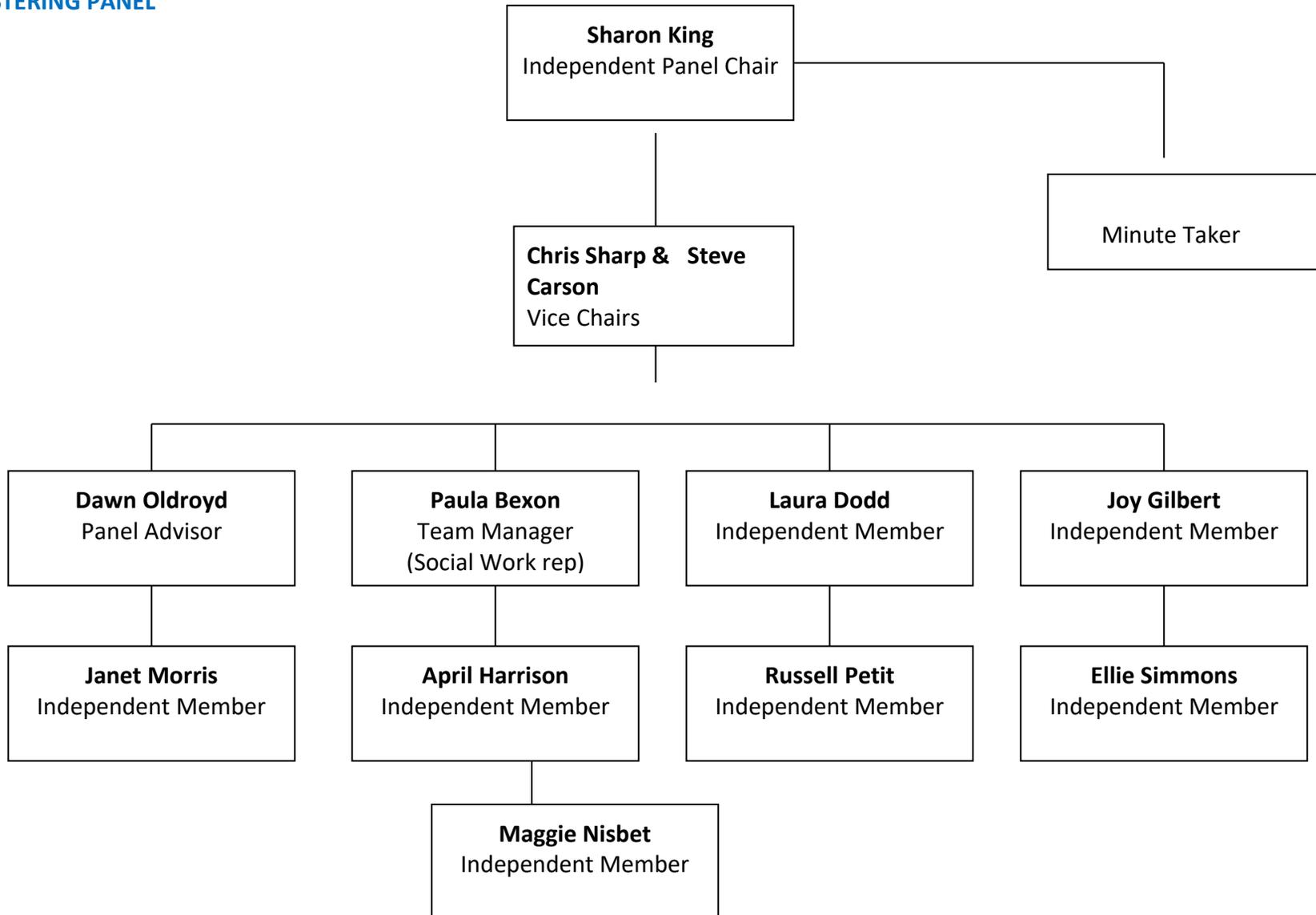
### FOSTERING SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE – SENIOR MANAGEMENT

There are two Team Managers for the Fostering Service who line manage the two teams of Fostering Social Workers and Supervising Social Workers.

### FOSTERING SERVICE – LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE



APPENDIX 2  
FOSTERING PANEL





**Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director for Safeguarding**

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>9th September 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Fostering and Adoption Marketing Report</b>

**Summary:**  
To provide an overview of the marketing strategy in the recruitment of Foster carers and Adopters.

**Recommendation(s):**  
That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering and Adoption Service.

## 1. Background

To present an overview of the Fostering and Adoption marketing strategy to members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

## 2. Conclusion

The progress within the Service to be recognised and the report attached is an accurate reflection of the Service.

## 3. Consultation

### a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

## 4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Fostering and Adoption Marketing Strategy Report

## **5. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Rebecca Fleming and Rebecca Dolman, who can be contacted via [rebecca.fleming@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.fleming@lincolnshire.gov.uk) and [rebecca.dolman@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.dolman@lincolnshire.gov.uk).



# Fostering and Adoption Marketing Report



## **Fostering and Adoption Marketing**

### **Setting the Scene**

From a Local Authority perspective, the ultimate aim of adoption and fostering communication is to increase the amount of adopters and foster carers we have available to support our children in care. In order to achieve this, recruitment marketing activity needs to raise awareness of what this entails amongst key audience groups, challenge misconceptions, and communicate the benefits through the appropriate mix of communications channels.

The long-term marketing strategy (2021-2024) looks at the external environment, competitor analysis and internal environment to understand where our Lincolnshire Fostering Service currently is and how it can develop and move forward. The aim of this strategy is to make Lincolnshire Fostering and Adoption Service the number one choice within Lincolnshire with a reputation for openness and excellence.

With record numbers of children in care and around 13% of the foster carer workforce retiring or leaving nationally every year, recruitment and retention of foster carers and adopters has never been so crucial. In fostering locally we are seeing an annual loss of approximately 10% of foster carer households, less than the national average but still an increasing challenge whilst considering the rise of our children in care population. Reasons for ceasing to foster range from ill health, change in family circumstances such as moving, relationship breakdown, age and agility etc.

Our overall aim is to increase the number of fostering households, replacing those that resign as well as grow our fostering population to give greater capacity and good quality matching and choice for children across Lincolnshire. Although resignations from fostering children are expected, the retention of foster carers remains a key part of community growth.

The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need to recruit at least a further 8,600 foster families in the next 12 months alone. There is a particular need for foster carers to look after teenagers and sibling groups.

In line with what is seen nationally, the number of children in care in Lincolnshire has continued to rise. The shortfall predicted over the next 12 months for the East Midlands is 480 households.

As a result of being unable to place child/ren with suitably assessed family members and Lincolnshire are unable to find a suitable foster home or family member for children in care in Lincolnshire, our efforts shift to seeking this from another foster agency (Independent Fostering Agency) at a significantly higher cost to the Local Authority. This continues to be the case when public spending remains a constant challenge, children can be moved away

from their communities and networks which is further unsettling for them at a time of uncertainty.

Lincolnshire County Council is part of Family Adoption Links, a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DFE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020.

This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and North Lincolnshire Council. It has been agreed that Lincolnshire County Council will act as host for the arrangement.

The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and describes how the Family Adoption Links manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we will benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

Some advertising for the adoption service still takes place locally; this has been largely concentrated during adoption fortnight.

The Family Adoption Links arrangements creates a platform for sharing good practice and better joint working relationships, although fostering remains a competitive market it is important to learn from the experiences and successes of others advertising and marketing strategies to help inform future tasks and objectives. It also helps us to be able to continue to be aware of trends locally and nationally and ensure we can continue to bring an attractive offer through research of what others are providing. Regular market research and the building of relationships with other providers is a current and future priority.

### **The Impact of the Pandemic**

The country has experienced extremely challenging times as the Covid-19 pandemic affected the PEST areas (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) significantly with everyday life for many people being thrown into turmoil and uncertainty. Although the rollout of the vaccination throughout early 2021 has been promising, recovery of the economy etc. is still uncertain/slow/cautious. Therefore, the biggest implications for the service in recruiting more fostering and adopters households are currently hinged on how quickly we as a nation can adapt and bounce back economically and socially from the pandemic.

There currently is no national data available to measure the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on foster carer and adopter recruitment and retention. However, based on anecdotal evidence and conversations with external stakeholders, the fostering network predicts the coronavirus pandemic will have increased the need for more fostering and adopter households.

## A Competitive Market

In terms of competition, independent fostering agencies are operating locally and are recruiting foster carers who are often attracted by the perceived enhanced allowances and support provided compared to Local Authorities.

Within a competitive market Lincolnshire fostering service targets its preferred market segment by promoting its unique selling points and, in particular, emphasises the community feel through its call to action by inviting prospective foster carers to "Join our community!"



**Fostering**  
Putting children first

Lincolnshire  
FOSTERING SERVICE  
*Working for a better future*



### Can I foster?

We consider each application on an individual basis, so you can be a foster carer regardless of whether you are:

- Single, married or unmarried
- Heterosexual or LGBT
- Disabled or able-bodied
- Employed or receiving benefits
- Have your own children, or not
- Are a home owner or renting
- From any ethnic or religious background
- And there is no upper age limit to foster

**What else do I need to know?**

- You must have a spare bedroom for a foster child or young person to use.
- If you have any criminal cautions or convictions for offences against children, or sexual offences against adults, then you will not be able to foster.
- If you are applying to foster as a couple, you need to have lived together for a minimum of 18 months.
- It is important to remember that fostering will have an impact upon your own children. From experience we know how crucial they can be to creating successful placements. For this reason they will be part of the application and assessment process and we will always seek to answer any questions or concerns they may have. We hold a one-day (non-mandatory) course designed specifically to help prepare your children for fostering. We also run a support group for both children within foster families called the Supportive Supervisors who meet throughout the year to take part in fun activities and to talk through anything that may be bothering them.
- If you smoke (including e-cigarettes) you cannot foster a child under the age of 5 years.

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### Lifestyle considerations

Lifestyle choices are considered for all prospective foster carers in order to ensure that children and young people in care have positive role models for a healthy lifestyle as well as being protected from the direct harm passive smoking, alcohol, obesity and lack of exercise can cause.

**Smoking**

There is considerable evidence to show that smoking and passive smoking have long-term effects on health. Passive smoking can damage the health of children and we provide smoke free homes for all children.

Applicants wishing to foster can expect their smoking habits to be considered within the assessment process. Applicants who smoke, including e-cigarettes, are not able to be considered as carers for children under the age of 5 years.

**Alcohol**

There are prescribed healthy limits relating to alcohol consumption. Currently it is no more than 14 units a week for both men and women. Alcohol consumption of applicants will be discussed as part of the fostering assessment process in the context of a healthy lifestyle and factors associated with this.

Applicants should consider the impact their alcohol consumption may have on children and young people they care for, as many will have experienced inconsistent and frightening parenting where alcohol dependency was a factor in their birth family.

**Weight**

There is medical evidence to suggest that obesity, weight and eating difficulties can pose dangers to health. The result can be an increased risk of body damage e.g. cardiac problems, liver damage, diabetes and hypertension.

We will consider whether weight issues have an impact on activity and energy levels during the assessment process. A full medical is not normally required other than for permanent carers, but information from your GP is considered by our medical advisor who may require a full medical to be completed if it is considered to be necessary.

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### Don't foster misconceptions!

Think you can't foster because you're...

- Single
- Diversity / A different ethnicity
- Unemployed / low income
- In a same-sex relationship
- No Limit / Too old
- Rent / Not a home owner
- Disabled / health problem
- Without own children

**Think again!**

Foster carers are needed from all walks of life to meet the diverse needs of the children in their care.  
So, before you rule yourself out, count yourself in!

Lincolnshire Fostering Service | Putting children first

### Ready to join the family?

You can complete the initial Expression of Interest form online now at [www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering)

Alternatively you can speak to one of our friendly staff by calling our dedicated Recruitment Team on 01522 254114.

In any competitive market it is essential that we can provide an efficient and type of service people will not only want to use but talk to others about.

## **Advertising**

### **The Digital Market**

Once a person has started to consider fostering or adoption, they seek out rational information on what the process involves. The research highlights the extent to which potential adopters and foster carers will rely on web based information at this stage.



*(Press Ctrl and click on the image above to watch the animation).*

2020 saw one of the biggest swings towards digitalisation in the work place throughout the world as organisations invested in their infrastructure for employees to be able to work from home. In addition to this, there is evidence to suggest more people were accessing news etc. digitally with many local media companies reporting a surge in traffic to their websites. As we move towards a more digital reliant pool of applicants its important along with the other developments within the local authority that Fostering is not left behind and can continue to compete in this market.

Although some challenges remain in regards to the website we have been able to develop and use other digital means of recruitment and advertising such as social media campaigns, mail chimp marketing campaigns and advertising on other targeted companies' websites.

## **Use of Social Media**

Once people feel they know how to adopt or become a foster carer, they want to know what it is really going to be like. Potential applicants want first-hand testimonies that tell them about the good and the bad, and the effect this might have on their current lifestyle.

Social media is a key channel at this stage and one that Lincolnshire uses to share videos of children's experiences and foster carer's testimonies.

Research has considered the members of society that are most likely to want to adopt or foster a child, according to the research we need to be reaching members of the public between the age of 25-44. Lincolnshire is targeting their social media campaigns to platform such as Facebook where over 47% of its users are within this age bracket.

Some respondents do express an interest in a phone line and there is some evidence that including a phone number on marketing materials prompts telephone enquiries. As Lincolnshire moves to a more digitalised system a phone line and a model of relational practice remains a real priority.

In addition to social media developments, digital marketing in the future will also extend to the use of podcasts, digital events and the review of forms and marketing materials been moved to have online options.

### **Initial Triggers/ Inspiration**

Triggers and motivations vary from individual to individual when considering becoming a foster carer or adopter. Friends advocating their own positive experience of adoption and fostering can play an important role in 'nudging' people to consider it for themselves. Our current marketing strategy includes editorial content about adoption and fostering in newspapers, magazines and radio as an important touch point. We use real life stories and spokespeople to maximise the effectiveness of this type of marketing. The placement of case studies (stories of people who have adopted) have proved to be of particular interest to local and regional media; as have expert spokespeople who can provide information about adoption in the local area, making the content relevant.

The qualitative research found that a common motivation for people who have biological children is the realisation that their children have 'grown up' For those without children or who are unable to have children, when they accept they can't have biological children, is often the key trigger. An important insight from the DFE research is the importance of friends in 'nudging' people towards adoption/fostering – a potential initial trigger can be a friend talking about their positive experiences. In Lincolnshire we offer a "recommend a friend" initiative to existing foster carers with a payment attached.

Lincolnshire County Council has also led by example in the community by adopting its policies and procedures to offer those it employs the flexibility and support to foster its children. Lincolnshire County Council is a **fostering friendly employer** and will be working with other companies and organisations in Lincolnshire to support the recruitment of foster carers by becoming "fostering friendly employers".

From past experience it is felt that tactics which 'cast the net' wide rather than a narrowly focused specific campaign ensure a good turnout at information evenings giving us the opportunity to introduce different types of fostering opportunities.

It will be important in the future to also ensure recruitment strategies that introduce closely the idea of fostering or adoption to those members of society that are most likely to want to adopt or foster now or in the future. Placement advertising such as the use of posters and banners is a priority, as well as mainstream media channels. A two pronged approach rather than a choice between targeted or wide spread advertising will be used.

Research undertaken by the DFE (2014) shows that, for married heterosexual couples, women tend to be the drivers of the adoption and fostering process and often took a role in leading their partner towards a decision. Women tended to be influenced by the personal and emotional side of adoption and foster care; for married, heterosexual men, rational information was typically more important in the decision-making process – they wanted the facts about adoption and a common tipping point for them was an open day or workshop that provided them with this information. Lincolnshire's initial advertising starts from a position of evoking a personal or emotional response in people with information coming later when decision making such as links to further information, testimonies from other carers/adopters and recruitment events. It is important in future advertising to consider where it can be placed to meet high levels of women.

In Lincolnshire we use a variety of advertising methods; these are reviewed and developed according to latest data and recommendations.

Lincolnshire currently use **Lincs FM Radio** to advertise locally, although this is more so for Fostering, the Family Adoption Links uses more wide spread advertising for adoption, fostering very much are still targeting the local area. Radio adverts can have mixed outcomes across the country although we find locally it increases initial enquiries.

Research shows the importance of the back up within the community of advertising using bill board events and local ads, a **call-to-action campaign** is shown to increase interest by up to 147%, advertising in the future will use more call-to-action campaigns to attract Foster Carers.

**Poster Campaigns** are a popular choice with many agencies, as they are relatively cheap to implement, with posters often placed in local libraries, community centres and other areas with a community focus. There is evidence that posters are a successful way to target specific segments although this is not a method routinely used in Lincolnshire. Poster and Banners within the community is an area to be explored and utilised, particularly using a call to action with local businesses and attractions to provide space.



**Press Advertising** works best, in the context of a wider marketing and advertising campaign; a radio and digital advertising campaign also runs alongside this.

Lincolnshire does not currently use **TV Advertising** due to the high cost and a mixed review regarding its effectiveness which makes it high cost without any evidencing of a reward that justifies the spending.

In Lincolnshire we sought to demonstrate the type of children that are available for adoption or require foster care. These are important messages; however we also use advertising to dispel myths and create reassurance regarding some of the challenges and worries carers may have. This means involving current foster carers and adopters within the recruitment processes and using various touch point opportunities.

Lincolnshire fostering and adoption service prides themselves on an Outstanding Ofsted rating; we would also like to confidently pride ourselves on an outstanding customer service rating. Good customer service is a real priority now and in the future with effort and planning informing training, systems, timescales, practice and recording, making Lincolnshire in the future the number one place to foster/adopt.

**Rebecca Dolman**

Team Manager, Fostering

**Rebecca Fleming**

Practice Supervisor

Fostering Recruitment, Retention & Caring2Learn



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**Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director for Safeguarding**

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>9th September 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Fostering Quarterly Performance Report Q1</b>

**Summary:**  
To provide an overview of activity within the fostering service over Quarter 1.

**Recommendation(s):**  
That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service.

## 1. Background

To present an update on the performance of the fostering service in accordance with Standard 25 of the National Minimum Standards 2000.

## 2. Conclusion

The progress within the Service to be recognised and the report attached is an accurate reflection of the Service.

## 3. Consultation

### a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

## 4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Fostering Quarterly Performance Report Q1

## **5. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Deborah Crawford, Head of Service - Fostering and Adoption, who can be contacted via e-mail at [Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk).



# Lincolnshire Fostering Service

QUARTERLY REPORT  
APRIL – JUNE 2021

## **Quarter One Fostering Report–2021/2022**

The Annual Report for 2020/2021 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2020. The statement of Purpose was revised and was ratified on the same day. This is the first quarterly report for 2021/2022.

### **Introduction**

In 2021/22, the Fostering Service has an annual budget of £9,100,233. All Foster Carer allowances have been increased by 2% for this financial year. This has ensured that allowances continue to remain in advance of the government recommended minimum rates. This is important as the foster care market place is more complex with a number of independent agencies actively recruiting in the area, and in order to retain our competitiveness, allowances are a significant factor. This has been compounded by the ongoing effects of the Covid 19 pandemic which has resulted in an increase in numbers of children in care and diminishing foster carer availability owing to health and social factors.

All foster carers were afforded priority for the completion of the Covid 19 vaccine programme and this was well received in terms of the value placed on them by the Council. The take up was encouraging and supported carers in gaining confidence to continue taking placements.

The budget also continues to afford flexibility to provide enhanced allowances to certain categories of carers such as those offering permanence or managing particularly distressed children and those with challenging behaviours. During the last financial year the continuing Covid crisis has required the service to continue to be flexible in its response to foster carers and the children in their care. The development of the virtual foster care community, via Caring2learn, has created a model for the future and additional payments have been made to value the work of foster carers.

The impact of the pandemic remains and there has been a marginal decline in the placement stability figures which stand at 69.7% and the effects upon this indicator are significant. This is largely attributable to some longer term placements ceasing at the carers request given their change in circumstances or as a result of breakdown. Likewise, the increased demand on placements has made the choice of the right placement upon admission into care more difficult.

Despite the constraints of the pandemic, recruitment has started well this quarter with an increased level of interest and this will need to be carefully monitored and reviewed given the gradual easing of government Covid 19 measures.

At the end of the last year, the number of children in care had continued to rise to 680. Those placed with Independent Fostering agencies were 29, 5 of whom were unaccompanied migrant children. The percentage of children in foster placements has remained steady at 72%.

During this quarter the number of children coming into care has increased by 76 with 41 of these being placed within foster care

Owing to the continued increase in the children in care numbers, the rise in the number of children placed in Independent Non-Maintained provision (Independent Fostering/Residential Providers) and the resultant increase in costs in the past few years the Council commissioned transformation work relating to children in care. The fostering service has been engaged in various aspects and strands of this work with a strong focus on the core offers to foster carers and developing the Valuing Care Toolkit as a further measure to match foster carers skillset and children's needs.

### **Recruitment and Retention:**

The Recruitment Service continues to adjust and respond to the effects of Covid 19. Recruitment is developing into an area that is seen as everyone's responsibility with a wider pool of Supervising Social Workers completing initial visits. The team has fully embraced the use of technology to provide a full service of information sharing, initial visits and community and learning engagement. As restrictions have eased the service has adopted a smarter way of working through the use of both face to face and online interactions.

Online activities have brought many benefits and so the fostering service will continue to include online options to increase capacity, accessibility and convenience for Foster Carers in the future.

The Preparation to Foster Courses continues to be delivered virtually at a frequency of 6 per year in order to support the progression of applicants as quickly as possible. The ambition for 2022 sees 50% of courses taking place virtually and the other half is taking place face to face. Each course is facilitated by a Supervising Social Worker, C2L representative and at least one Foster Carer Champion. Fostering Information Events take place on a monthly basis and are held virtually. Those making formal or informal enquiries to foster are encouraged to attend these events.

The service has continued to see an increased number of initial expressions of interest (IEI's) compared to 2019-2020. More work is planned to understand the conversion rates from IEI to approval. A recruitment audit and review is planned to look at each of the different stages to establish current strengths, room for improvement, trends and establish performance indicators to maximise production and improve the conversion rate of IEI to approval. The work continuing will closely monitor quality with a strong emphasis on good customer service.

Retention of foster carers remains the most effective means of recruitment. Providing individual levels of support to our carers and specifically those newly approved remains crucial.

Caring2Learn has proven to be a great strength and resource in its application of key principles and models of support and learning for foster carers and the wider service. This has been acknowledged and so Caring2Learn has been further embedded within the Fostering service to take Caring2Learn from project to business as usual model.

The Caring2Learn Practice Supervisor has been integrated into the team and takes a lead on those elements that fit within the model; these include recruitment, retention, training, development and support.

Reassuringly, the continued links with the Virtual School continue to support the fidelity of this global approach in shaping the work in order to support the Learning Homes and Caring Schools to support and drive forward the good practice for all children in care in Lincolnshire.

Work continues to develop a Community Hub approach across the County. This has included the development of multiple forums and ways for Foster Carers to access support from other Foster Carers, Children's Service's teams and schools. This is providing a more integrated approach to support.

The forums have been developed according to feedback from Foster Carers. All support mechanisms make up a single community hub for all Lincolnshire Foster carers.

The Hub originally consisted of various access points throughout the county to resolve the geographical issues faced by carers and build a strong sense of community with a consistent offer. During the current pandemic it has been possible to explore a virtual offer that ensures carers can access their community more easily. Feedback from the foster carers strongly indicates that virtual platforms have helped carers overcome challenges to attending events, such as childcare.

The Hub largely continues to be supported by the Foster Carer Champions who have roles that cover responsibilities as 'Hub Links'. This replaced the Fostering 'buddy' system and feedback has been positive from both carers and staff.

All new carers continue to be allocated a 'hub link' within the first month of their fostering journey. Hub Links are allocated thoughtfully to promote relationship and connections between carers and their support network. Hub Links have also been allocated to existing carers and Special Guardians where they are experiencing challenges and require additional support. Participation in the different areas of the hub continues to increase; all platforms despite the current restrictions remain in place. Need is monitored to ensure that the right kind of support is identified and delivered. Some carers have welcomed the return of face to face support whilst others have remained happy with virtual, arm's length support.

Feedback from carers is to the most part very positive with regards to their feeling really supported.

The challenges highlighted within the annual survey identified that carers experience challenges which impact on carer retention. It is important for Foster Carer retention to be seen as everyone's business within the wider children services context. The hub approach is creating and recruiting to the role of Caring2Learn Champions, a group made up of Foster Carers, Residential Support Workers, Designated Teachers and Children's Services staff. They will provide peer support and challenge to advocate and support good practice by bringing all services and professionals together to promote how best to support each other and Lincolnshire children.

A retention audit will be completed in quarter 2, this will involve an in depth analysis of the carers circumstances that led to a resignation or long periods off line. It is important that we are able to identify clearly the trends and complicating factors surrounding these over recent years to help inform retention and recruitment planning in the future and set targets and predictions.

### **Marketing:**

The high level of interest in fostering has continued into quarter 1 of this financial year with 74 IELs being received during this period.

There have been 4 newly approved households during quarter 1 providing the following beds:

<b>Fostering Type</b>	<b>Number of beds</b>
Respite / Task Centred / Permanence	1 (2 if siblings)
Respite / Task Centred	1 (2 if siblings)
Respite / Task Centred	1
Task Centred / Permanence	1 (2 if siblings)

As of the end of June there were a further 30 applications in stages 1 or 2, with 13 of these having a panel date booked before mid-December.

### **Foster Care Fortnight:**

Lincolnshire Fostering Service took part in the Fostering Network's annual Foster Care Fortnight campaign which was held between 10<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 with a theme of #WhyWeCare which aimed to highlight and raise the profile of fostering to the general public.

In Lincolnshire, we ran a campaign to reach as many people as possible across the county including:

- Google Adwords campaign running from 1<sup>st</sup> April-30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 alongside remarketing adverts.
- Article in the spring issue of County News about permanence from the point of view of two children in long-term care and why it's important to them.
- Q&A double page spread in the May issue of Lincolnshire Today magazine about how to become a foster carer in Lincolnshire. This is also on their website alongside an online advert.
- Half page advert and half page editorial in the May issue of Lincolnshire Life magazine, as well as a skyscraper advert on their website.
- Paid-for Facebook campaign running from 3<sup>rd</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- Advert in the May issue of Lincs and Wolds Scene magazines.
- Full page advert in Primary Times magazine.
- Advert in Simply Spalding and Simply Boston magazines.
- Advert in the Local Advertising Group.

- Foster Carer Viewpoint for May features one of our foster households explaining why they care and what fostering means to them which went live on the LCC's news section of the website on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- Email marketing campaign to those who have signed up who may have enquired about fostering/visited our website but not yet filled in an IEI with links to May's Foster Carer Viewpoint article, the permanence feature which appeared in County News (and is also online), and promoting the information evening in May sent out on 6<sup>th</sup> May with the aim of progressing them to filling out an IEI or attend the information evening.
- Generic Facebook posts (LCC and Fostering Service pages) relating to the #WhyWeCare theme for Foster Care Fortnight from 10<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021. This includes photos of foster carers holding a placard stating why they care about fostering, as well as one from the Executive Director of Children's Services, Ellie's Story animation, video clips from the Fostering Network, and links to the Foster Carer Viewpoint for May as well as the County News article about permanence.
- Press release to local media on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- Internal communications on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- Fostering advert on Lincs FM from 13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- Online Information Evening via Teams on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021 at 6:30pm.

### **Other advertising:**

Additional advertising promoting the need for more foster carers also took place throughout Q1 as follows:

- Foster Carers' Monthly Viewpoint in April and June whereby a different foster family writes about their experience of fostering and is put on the LCC website as well as on social media channels and in email marketing campaigns to prospective foster carers.
- Digital adverts across Iliffe Media websites (including News and Homepage Takeovers as well as 20,000 views of audience targeted adverts) in June

### **Permanence campaign:**

The permanence campaign continued with a wide range of advertising as follows:

#### **April**

- Digital advert on Lincolnshire Today website
- Half page advert in Lincs and Wolds Scene magazine
- Targeted paid-for Facebook adverts
- Advert in Gainsborough Life magazine

- Email marketing campaign to prospective foster carers
- Piece on Int Comms

### **May**

- Radio advert specifically for permanence running on Lincs FM

### **June**

- Radio advert specifically for permanence running on Lincs FM
- Digital advertising on Lincolnshire Today website
- Half page ad in Lincolnshire Life magazine and skyscraper advert on website
- Targeted paid-for Facebook adverts
- Email marketing campaign to prospective foster carers

The service continues to actively review and develop all marketing strategies in terms of keeping Lincolnshire's edge in the market place. The continued efforts are to increase the cohort of local carers for local children given the obvious benefits for the children and families concerned and the efficiencies within the Council.

### **Family Finding:**

During the first quarter of this year Family Finders has continued to meet on a monthly basis to consider all children with a care plan for long term fostering who do not already have a placement identified. In light of the on-going restrictions in place around Covid 19 these meetings continue to take place virtually.

Over this quarter 7 children have been considered a sibling group of 3, a sibling group of 2 and 2 single placements.

During this period one out of the 7 children has been removed from Family Finders who has been placed with task-centred carers with the view to her remaining with them long term. The sibling group of 3 are currently transitioning to a family member but we are still looking for placements for a sibling group of two and 1 child. We are also aware of another child looking for long term fostering but the referral to family finders has not yet been completed.

The Permanence Campaign is on-going and includes a variety of advertising on social media, radio and local publications.

Profiles for all children on Family Finders continue to be shared monthly with all Supervising Social Workers in the fostering service sharing these with existing and/or newly approved foster carers as appropriate. Anonymised profiles are also shared with prospective Foster Carers on the preparation training and during the assessment process as well as being posted on social media (Facebook).

Information regarding children needing long term placements continues to be shared in the Monthly Foster Carer Newsletter and has been featured in the new foster carers' magazine,

'Our World'. An addition of 'County News' included a feature story on the experiences of two children currently in long term foster placements.

The Lincolnshire County Council Fostering web page continues to provide information on long term fostering and the support available to foster carers.

During this first quarter of the year there has been one set of carers who were approved for permanence as well as task-centred.

On 24<sup>th</sup> February, Lincolnshire County Council held its first Independent Fostering Agency marketing event as part of the Children in Care Transformation work. This pilot and approach was used to test what the independent foster care supplier market could offer and take an opportunity to build relationships with them. Building on this first event, the council want to further work with providers to increase the availability of foster carers in the area and support the vision of Lincolnshire placements for Lincolnshire children.

The Permanent Event and training took place virtually on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021. The session was separated into 2 sessions, the first session focused on social workers sharing information on 3 children who are currently in residential placement but looking to identify long term foster placement for them. The second session was training on permanence and sharing further profiles/information of children who are currently on Family Finders. We had 6 sets of carers attend the first session and 5 sets of carers attend both. There was only one set of carers who had availability to take a long term placement at the time of attending the course, however since then have taken a task-centred placement.

As with the monthly Family Finders meetings Family Finders Review meetings, chaired by senior managers, are also taking place virtually to consider children where no suitable match has been identified after a three months period.

During this first quarter just one child has been referred to Family Finders Review. During this quarter we have had very few children on Family Finders which is unusual. Unfortunately it continues to remain a challenge to identify long term placements which carers approved for permanence with many children remaining with their task-centred carers on a long term basis.

### **Training:**

In this quarter due to the on-going Covid 19 Pandemic all face to face training apart from First Aid has been postponed.

The monthly virtual training schedule has been circulated to all households.

29 courses were delivered this quarter  
312 attendees have taken part from Fostering Households.  
Courses delivered via Zoom or Teams - 26

### **Training:**

- First Aid training

- Restorative Practice
- Kid Skills
- Safeguarding

### **Practice Workshops:**

- Introducing Social Pedagogy
- Introduction to Restorative Practice
- Introduction to mindfulness, Creating Calm
- Kid skills
- Compassion fatigue and Managing Stress
- Introduction to Trauma Awareness
- Supporting sleep, nightmares and night terrors.
- Supporting autism, A carers perspective
- Supporting ADHD and FASD, A carers perspective
- Supporting grief and loss
- Relational repair
- Time2talk
- Fostering Weekly Programme (Caring2gether, 6 weeks)

### **E-Learning:**

LSCP courses are still being accessed and Foster Carers attended;

Safeguarding  
Safeguarding refresher  
Hidden harm  
Covid 19  
Think Safe be safe  
Equality and inclusion  
E-safety

### **Learning Homes:**

The toolkit for new carers which includes the standards from the Training Standards Development (TSDs) has been well received. We are now starting to see these come in for assessment resulting in carers receiving a Learning Homes award with an expectation to resubmit a portfolio every 3 years to ensure on-going personal and professional development.

We currently have 66 foster homes and 4 residential settings that have achieved their Learning Homes Award. Due to the number of toolkits collected over recent months and the expectations that all new carers complete the award within 12 months of approval; we expect the number of awarded homes to continue to rise significantly over the next 12-24 months.

### **Celebration Event:**

The Foster Carer Celebration will take place over Zoom on the 19th October 2021. The event recognises the contribution and achievements of our fostering community. Foster carers will receive their long service awards, a voucher and lapel badge. The voucher and lapel badge are given to carers as a token of gratitude and was positively received at last year's event.

Last year we formally introduced new foster carers to the community and this was our opportunity to thank them for choosing Lincolnshire as their provider. Likewise this will remain a feature at this year's event too.

**Kinship :**

Kinship options are always considered when a child enters care for the first time and throughout their history in care. Joint work has been completed between the Fostering Service and other teams to ensure consistency with viability assessments and the referral process. Practice Supervisors have attended Team Meetings to provide information and support other teams regarding the kinship processes. Practice Supervisors are building really good working relationships between Fostering and the other teams; this has shown to be effective as conversations are being held early on and consultations are taking place prior to viabilities being concluded and placements being made.

At the time of writing this report we are slowly easing from the pandemic however these working relationships and conversations have remained strong and consistent on a virtual platform. We have seen a rise in enquiries regarding kinship placements in this last quarter.

Number of Referrals	SGO	Private Law SGO	Reg.24 to SGO	Reg. 24 / Connected Person	Private Fostering
35	5	9	8	8	5

The first quarter of 2021 year continues to show Kinship is a busy and in demand service. This is particularly in the case of Reg 24 and SGO assessments with changes occurring during the life of the case; for example if an SGO assessment is positive this may then progress to Reg 24 and vice versa.

Early discussions are taking place between the children's teams and Kinship which are enabling better decision making when kinship placements are being considered and ensuring the regulations are met. In addition close joint working is taking place between the teams which has been beneficial in identifying changes in care plan and any issues early on.

This has impacted positively on decisions being made in a timely manner, preventing further delay or drift for children, and ensuring good outcomes and permanence, where possible, is secured for children. Joint supervisions are taking place prior to referrals / allocations being made, at the start of kinship assessments, during the life of the case and nearing the end when conclusions are being drawn. Social workers are undertaking joint visits and a collaborative approach is being more commonly used than in previous years.

**The following is a breakdown of the assessments in the last quarter:**

**Of the 5 x SGO assessments:**

3 x No further action due to applicants' withdrawing  
2 x On-going

**Of the 9 x Private Law SGO:**

1 x Withdrew as children returned home to parents

8 x Applications are on-going with the child's Social Worker completing the Schedule 21 report and the fostering service undertaking the statutory checks.

**Of the 8 x Reg.24 / SGO placements:**

8 x are on-going within public care proceedings; children are placed under Reg 24 / connected persons and SGO assessments are being completed as part of long term decision making re permanent childcare arrangements.

**Of the 8 x Reg 24 assessments:**

8 x children remain within these connected person placements as Children in Care.

**Of the 5 x Private Fostering Arrangements:**

1 x Private foster carer withdrew and child now a child in care  
1 x Assessment has been completed and the Private Fostering arrangement is on-going with Social Care support.  
3 x Assessments are underway and the Private Fostering arrangement is on-going with Social Care support.

Since last year and being in a pandemic, this last quarter has seen the rules and restrictions relaxed and has enabled more face to face working to take place whilst embracing some of the benefits brought about by Smarter Working. The benefits and limitations/challenges within this are outlined below:

**What has worked well?**

Earlier conversations between Kinship and Children's teams are being held virtually over Microsoft Teams. The ease of being able to hold a video conversation has removed the barriers that we previously faced in terms of location and travel. This has resulted in an increase in these conversations taking place and improved decision making as a whole.

As above this has also worked well with joint supervision between Kinship and children's teams. There has been an increase in joint supervision taking place over Teams and this has removed the previous challenge of everyone having to travel in order to have a face to face

conversation. This has also reduced time spent travelling for such meetings and costs such as workers' time and mileage.

Due to the pandemic there have been instances where workers have been told to isolate, or their children have been advised to isolate which has revoked their childcare arrangements. By using the Smarter Working workers have been able to continue working from home in these situations which has prevented disruption to service delivery.

Supervising Social Workers have been able to safely visit foster carer households again; we have seen an increase in face to face visits resuming which is always more beneficial in terms of relationship based practice and safeguarding. SSWs are following the guidance in terms of social distancing, wearing PPE and completing the Covid risk assessments on Mosaic. Where face to face visits are not safe to undertake due to households or workers isolating workers have then used the smarter working strategies and virtual visits and support are being completed.

Team meetings, practice workshops, training and group supervision are continuing to take place virtually. These are scheduled in workers' calendars and although are not the same as face to face; they enable team working and development to continue in a safe way.

The team has continued to work closely with Fostering Panel in terms of ensuring applicants are present and contribute to Panel Meetings.

There are core members of staff being allocated and working kinship cases. This has enabled workers to develop an expertise in skills and knowledge in the kinship side of fostering.

### **What are we worried about?**

Owing to Covid there has been a back log of cases within the court which has caused delay in care proceedings being concluded. Care proceedings and cases are drifting and remaining open longer than necessary. This is resulting in assessments that have been filed and completed going out of date, and workers having to complete addendum and updating reports and assessments thus increasing their work load.

Kinship carers are undertaking training courses, such as the Prep course, virtually and this has reduced engagement. Carers are turning their cameras off and are not getting the same output from training as when it is in person.

A one minute briefing has been shared with Children's teams setting out how referrals are to be made and what information needs to be included to ensure accuracy from the outset. Additionally Practice Supervisors are communicating closely with the area teams to ensure the relevant information comes through and working together to reduce the amount of times this is happening.

### **What needs to happen?**

Enquiries are being made as to how Kinship courses for carers can return to in person in a way that is safe.

Close working is taking place between Kinship, Children's teams and Legal to improve the quality of assessments, to reduce the impact of court availability on case work and children, and to ensure effective and realistic timetabling.

### **Staying Put:**

This quarter has seen a decrease of young people on the Staying Put Scheme from 47 to 42. This is as a direct consequence of Staying Put being one of several options available as a leaving care choice. Within the scheme 2 of the young people are on an apprenticeship, 8 attending university, 20 are in full time further education and 5 are in employment. The remainder are on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme and one is not in employment, education or training but this is expected to be resolved imminently.

In the quarter 8 young people left the Staying Put Scheme; with 1 young person remaining with his former carer under the Adults Shared Lives Scheme. One of the young people returned to live with family and the rest moved to independent living. In the quarter 1 young person remained Staying Put after turning 18 and 5 more will be joining the scheme in quarter 2. Staying Put has remained in contact with providers with meetings and agreements being conducted of Microsoft Teams.

The service continue to liaise with PSS the newly commissioned providers of Shared Lives who will be offering this support for young people with specific needs, for example severe or physical disabilities who will need on-going support post eighteen and twenty one. They have confirmed that any young person needing this level of on-going support will need a referral from an adult social worker prior to them turning 18 in order to commence the process. It is hoped that this service will enable a small group of very complex young people to remain with their carer's post 18.

### **Conclusion:**

During the last year and to date the impact of Covid 19 continues. Despite the vaccination programme and gradual easing the availability of foster placements to the service remains a concern.

The recovery is yet to be fully understood in terms of longer term effects however as a service our best efforts and motivation is to remind all households of their continued value to the authority and the children they care for. Maintaining high quality supervision and support is central to this in the context of maximising and mobilising our capacity. Equally, for many households they have and continue to make the difference and have despite the enormous challenges have demonstrated their commitment to the children in their care.

As a result placement stability in this quarter has marginally impacted. In addition, we should be heartened by the sustained interest in fostering yet despite this there has also been an increased number of referrals to independent fostering agencies. The number of children placed in children's homes has only marginally increased.

The continued efforts of the transformation work will continue to address this by improving our core support for foster carers. This in tandem with the key decision to embed the Caring2

Learn Practice Supervisor into the service is already paying dividends in relation to our hub offer including training and support. The concept of Caring2Learn remains woven throughout the service and this coupled with the continued work of the foster carer champions and colleagues it remains the ambition of the service to build upon our strengths moving forward.

Deborah Crawford  
Children's Head of Regulated Services



**Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director - Resources**

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>9 September 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme</b>

**Summary:**

This item enables the Panel to consider and comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity is focused where it can be of greatest benefit. The work programme will be reviewed at each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure that its contents are still relevant and will add value to the work of the Council and partners.

**Actions Required:**

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to agree the work programme and identify any items for future meetings.

**1. Background**

Overview and Scrutiny should be positive, constructive, independent, fair and open. The scrutiny process should be challenging, as its aim is to identify areas for improvement. Scrutiny activity should be targeted, focused and timely and include issues of corporate and local importance, where scrutiny activity can influence and add value.

Members are encouraged to highlight items that could be included for consideration in the work programme.

## Work Programme

11 NOVEMBER 2021		
	Item	Contributor
1	Independent Reviewing Service – 6 Month Report (April to September 2021)	Carolyn Knight, Quality and Standards Manager
2	Regulation 44 Independent Visiting Service – 6 Month Report (April to September 2021)	Carolyn Knight, Quality and Standards Manager
3	Children in Care Annual Report 2020/21	Rachel Freeman, Head of Service Children in Care and Residential Estates
4	V4C The Looked After Children Council Update	Ben Lilley, Team Manager Quality and Standards
5	Children in Care Performance Measures Quarter 2 2021/22 (July to September 2021)	Janice Spencer, Assistant Director - Children's Safeguarding
6	Fostering Quarterly Performance Report Quarter 2	Deborah Crawford, Head of Service Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care
7	Private Fostering Annual Report and Statement of Purpose	Deborah Crawford, Head of Service Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care

20 JANUARY 2022		
	Item	Contributor
1	Commissioning Excellence: Meeting the Sufficiency Duty 2018-2022 Annual Update	Amy Allcock, Commissioning Manager - Commercial
2	Lincolnshire Virtual School Annual Report 2020-2021	Kieran Barnes, Virtual School Headteacher
3	Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service - Six Monthly Update Report	Lisa Adams, Service Manager, Barnardo's Leaving Care Services
4	Fostering Quarterly Performance Report Quarter 3	Deborah Crawford, Head of Service Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care

10 MARCH 2022		
Item		Contributor
1	Voices for Choices (V4C) Update Report	Ben Lilley, Team Manager (Quality and Standards)
2	Children in Care Performance Measures - Quarter 3 2021/22 (October to December 2021)	Janice Spencer, Assistant Director - Children's Safeguarding
3	Fostering Quarterly Performance Report - Quarter 4	Deborah Crawford, Head of Service Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care

Items to be Scheduled:

- National Approach to Council Tax Relief / Exemption for Care Leavers

## 2. Consultation

### a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Not Applicable

## 3. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Kiara Chatziioannou, Scrutiny Officer, who can be contacted on 07500 571868 or by e-mail at [kiara.chatziioannou@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:kiara.chatziioannou@lincolnshire.gov.uk).

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