

Appendix A - Quarter 3 Fostering Report – 2020/21

The Annual Report for 2019/20 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2020. The Statement of Purpose has been revised and was ratified on the same day. This is the third quarterly report for 2020/21.

Introduction

In 2020/21, the Fostering service has an annual budget of £9,118,082. 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. The budget also continues to afford flexibility to provide enhanced allowances to certain categories of carers such as those offering permanence or managing particularly challenging children. During the third quarter, the continuing Covid-19 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 both value the work of foster carers and promote placement stability. This has enabled the stability figures to remain positive but has made the choice of the right placement upon admission into care more difficult. Despite the constraints of the pandemic, recruitment has been positive with a marked increase in the number of people expressing an interest in fostering.

At the end of Quarter 3, the number of children in care had continued to rise to 679. At the same time, those placed with Independent Fostering agencies reduced to 30, three of whom were unaccompanied migrant children. The percentage of children in foster placements has remained steady at 73%.

61 children became looked after for the first time in this quarter, of these 38 were placed in foster care.

Due to the rise in the number of children placed in out of County provision and the resultant increase in costs in the past 12 months, the Council has commissioned transformation work relating to children in care. The fostering service will manage two work streams: the "offer" to Foster Carers and the introduction of a "specialist" fostering scheme.

Recruitment and Retention

The Recruitment Service continues to adjust and respond to the effects of Covid-19. Staffing issues have resulted in assessments being managed across the whole service. The team has fully embraced the use of technology to provide a full service of information sharing, initial visits and Caring2Learn (C2L) engagement.

The Preparation to Foster Courses continue to be delivered virtually via MS Teams and remain at a frequency of once per month in order to support the progression of applicants as quickly as possible. Each course is facilitated by a Supervising Social Worker (SSW), C2L worker and at least one foster care champion. Fostering

Information Events take place on a monthly basis and are held virtually. Those making formal or informal enquiries are encouraged to attend these events.

The service has continued to see an increased number of initial expressions of interest (IEI's) with 74 this quarter compared to 55 for 2019/20. There have been five new mainstream carers approved this quarter. Approvals for the full year are scheduled to be well in excess of the 16 families approved in 2019/20.

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 during this time of uncertainty. Some carers have welcomed the return of face to face support whilst others have remained happy with virtual, arm's length support. The challenge is ensuring each fostering family receives what they require, when they require it whilst ensuring Government and local guidance is adhered to in relation to Covid-19. Feedback from carers is, to the most part, very positive with regards to their feeling supported and understanding the challenges that face us all.

Marketing

Figures

The number of IEI's received this year continues to be higher than that at the same point in previous years as demonstrated below:

Financial Year	Number of fostering IEI's received			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Total
2020 / 2021	80	103	74	257
2019 / 2020	46	66	55	167
2018 / 2019	52	52	53	157

There were five households approved during Quarter 3. Therefore the total number of newly approved households approved to date for this financial year is 18. Those newly approved households in this quarter provide an additional six task centred / respite beds (nine if siblings are taken).

As of mid-January there were a further 38 applications currently in stages 1 or 2 of the process with 10 of these having a Panel date booked before the end of the financial year.

Virtual Information Events

Two virtual information events were held during this quarter as follows:

- Tuesday 20 October at 6:30pm
- Tuesday 17 November at 6:30pm

Advertising to promote the events included:

October

- Paid-for Facebook targeted advert
- Digital advert on Lincolnshire Today website
- Twitter feeds on main Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) corporate account
- Digital adverts across JPI Media websites (including mobile)

- Digital adverts across Media websites (including mobile)
- Advert in Simply Boston and Simply Spalding magazines
- Marketing e-newsletter sent to those who have shown an interest in fostering but may not yet have filled in an IEI but have signed up to receive updates.
- Int Comms piece

November

- Advert in Lincs and Wolds Scene magazines
- Paid-for Facebook targeted advert
- Lincs FM advert
- Digital advert on the Lincolnite and Lincolnshire Reporter websites (including mobile)
- Digital advert on Lincolnshire Today website
- Twitter feeds on main LCC corporate account
- Advert in Lincolnshire Life magazine and website
- Digital adverts across Media websites (including mobile)
- Int Comms piece

Other advertising

Additional advertising promoting the need for more foster carers also took place throughout December as follows:

- Digital advert on Lincolnshire Today website,
- Twitter feeds on main LCC corporate account
- Digital adverts across Media websites (including mobile)
- Advert in South Holland Advertiser

During this quarter, a long-term advert promoting the need for more foster carers also began to go out in the Lincoln City Football Community Trust Folders (distributed for a year), as well as a GP appointment card for Saxilby and Torksey Surgeries (distributed for two years).

Permanence campaign

The permanence campaign continued throughout Quarter 3 with a wide range of advertising.

Also within this quarter, the e-newsletter which is sent to approved foster carers continued to go out on a monthly basis with a sentence about each of the children we are currently Family Finding for and advising anyone interested in finding out more to speak to their SSW.

Family Finding

During the third 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. Over this quarter, 17 children have been considered, made up of three sibling groups of two, one sibling group of three and eight single children. One new child has been referred.

During this period, four out of the 17 children have been removed from Family Finders - one child has moved to a residential children's home, one child is remaining in their IFA placement and two children in their current task centred placement. A further three children are remaining with their current task centred carers and discussions are taking place in terms of this being a longer term option.

Profiles for all children on Family Finders continue to be shared monthly with all Supervising Social Workers for discussions with existing and/or newly approved foster carers as appropriate. Anonymised profiles are also shared with prospective Foster Carers during the assessment process and are 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' with another feature planned for the next edition in March. The next edition of 'County News' will also include a feature story on the experiences of two children currently in long term foster placements.

During this third quarter of the year, there have been no new carers approved for permanence at Fostering Panel. Of the three prospective carers who had expressed an interest in permanence during the last quarter, all have made the decision, due to various reasons, to begin their fostering careers by providing respite and task centred care, with a view to exploring permanence in the future.

There are, however, another four applicants currently being assessed who have expressed an interest in providing long term placements for children.

The next Permanence Event is being planned and will include a mixture of training and information on children seeking long term placements. This is scheduled for the Spring.

The on-going challenges in terms of the impact of the current pandemic remain a significant factor in identifying long term placements for children and it remains the case that a number of children referred to Family Finders are then remaining in existing task centred placements 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 cancelled.

Face to Face First Aid training has taken place using the trainer's venue. Seven carers have completed the training.

The monthly virtual training newsletter is being circulated.

Caring 2 Learn

21 courses were delivered this quarter. 184 attendees have taken part from Fostering Households.

Courses delivered via Zoom or Teams:

- Introducing Social Pedagogy
- Introduction to Restorative Practice
- Introduction to mindfulness, Creating Calm
- Kid skills
- Compassion fatigue and Managing Stress
- Introduction to Trauma Awareness
- Learning Home development workshops
- Supporting sleep, nightmares and night terrors
- Cornerstones In Practice
- Fostering Weekly Programme pilot (6 weeks)

E-Learning

Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (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

Celebration Event

The Foster Carer Celebration took place over Zoom on 16 December 2020. This was a positive event recognising the contribution and long service of Foster Carers across the County. Foster carers receiving long service awards were given a voucher and lapel badge. In addition, this year the decision was made to focus on the newly approved foster carers who were starting their journey with Lincolnshire. The virtual event was well co-ordinated and well received.

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 are also attending Team Meetings to provide information and support other teams regarding the kinship processes.

Quarterly Report: 1 October to December 2020

Number of Referrals	SGO	Private Law SGO	Reg.24 to SGO	Reg. 24 / Connected Person	Private Fostering
61	19	9	20	6	7

The third quarter of 2020 year continues to see an increase in demand over that of the previous year. This is particularly the case in the number of Reg. 24 placements converting to Special Guardianship Orders (SGO); increasing from eight in 2019 to 20 in 2020.

Of the 19 SGO assessments:

- 2 applicants withdrew.
- 17 are on-going.

Private Law SGO:

Nine Private Law SGO applications, with Social Worker completing Schedule 21 Report and statutory checks completed by Fostering service as these are private applications, with nine on-going and remain in Court Proceedings and waiting Final Hearing for decision to be made.

Reg. 24 / SGO placements:

- 1 ended as child moved to alternative family member.
- 19 are on-going Reg. 24 placements with a SGO also directed within proceedings.

Reg. 24 assessments in this quarter:

- 1 ended as child moved to alternative family member.
- 5 are on-going Regulation 24 assessments.

Private Fostering Arrangements as follows:

- 1 child returned home.
- 4 Private Foster Carer Assessment completed and remains Private Fostering Arrangement with on-going Children's Services involvement and support.
- 2 on-going Private Foster Carer Assessment.

Since March 2020, Covid-19 has had an impact on kinship work and the way in which assessments are undertaken. There have been some advantages and some challenges with this:

What has worked well?

- Up until 25 September 2020, workers have been given the opportunity to complete Regulation 24 assessments up to 24 week timescale. This has allowed Supervising Social Workers additional time to plan in virtual assessment sessions and some home visits whilst adhering to social distancing and safety rules. This has now reverted back to 16 week timescale for assessment completion and the number of face to face visits has increased with risk assessment in place for each visit.
- Joint Supervisions by Microsoft Teams rather than face to face have meant all relevant professionals across different service areas have been able to

participate in Joint Supervisions and Care Planning. Prior to Microsoft Teams, there were challenges in terms of travel and distance between teams. This has been a positive change with an increase in the amount of joint supervisions taking place and ease of making such arrangements.

- The team has continued to work closely with Fostering Panel in terms of ensuring applicants are presented and contribute to Panel Meetings.

What are we worried about?

- Workers have expressed one of the challenges has been relationship based practice, particularly when areas of the assessment have been of a sensitive or challenging nature and during the time when the majority of assessments were taking place virtually.
- Given the situation with Covid-19, we have seen a significant delay with Court Proceedings and therefore Social Workers are having to work and support cases for increased periods of time.

Staying Put

Quarter 3 has seen a decrease of young people in the Staying Put Scheme from 58 to 52. Of this number, one is on an apprenticeship, nine attending university, 24 are in full time further education, and five are in employment. The remainder are on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme or Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). There has been a decrease in relation to NEET with there now being two young people who are not accessing education/training and are not employed. Of the six young people who have left the Staying Put Scheme, two were in IFA placements which did not suit them, one went to university with 51 week accommodation, one returned home to their mother's care, and two have moved to supported accommodation.

Staying Put is discussed at the first review following the young person's 16th birthday with the decision being recorded on their pathway plan; which is then followed up at each review. Discussions around expectations and finances are undertaken with the young person and foster carers with a license agreement being completed prior to them turning 18. This ensures the transition to Staying Put is smooth with young people remaining informed about the process, having support and stability to transition into adulthood. The service has continued to work with Shared Lives to ensure that all placements take into account the requirements of the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011.

Caring 2 Learn

The established priorities for the fostering service are:

1. Developing a community based support network for foster and residential carers.

A Community Hub approach has been developed 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 Services 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. Feedback forums have now been introduced to the hub to ensure we have a platform to encourage feedback and communication with carers; this will enable us to ensure the community model and support mechanisms remain purposeful and informed by need.

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. This quarter, the champions have supported 61 fostering households. This is going well but the level of support that can be offered is impacted by carers being unable to actively meet in person.

Children Service's teams are starting to consider where in the model they fit and what the support they offer to the fostering community looks like. 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.

During the period October 2020 - December 2020, we have continued to offer only virtual forums and events. The sharp increase in those accessing virtual platforms including our training events has continued. This difficult time has clearly indicated that the sense of community and strength of a relationship based model is crucial to a developing a successful fostering service.

The Community Hub model opens the gateway to Foster Carers to be included in service forums and developing and connect with staff. Foster Carers' feedback is that this has helped them feel like a valued member of the whole team.

2. Creating and recruiting to the role of Caring2Learn Champion, a group made up of Foster Carers, Residential Support Workers, Designated Teachers and Children's 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 our children.

The Foster Carers Champion role has been divided into three main areas: Training and development; Supporting learning and Education and Learning; and Foster Carer Hub Support. The priority for all the Foster Carer Champions remains Foster Carer community engagement and development which will be important for long term

progress. All Champions have clear performance targets around their lead area and this has certainly increased productivity. Each Foster Carer Education Champion has a clear development plan which they have developed, and with support will review.

There are 20 Foster Carers with a champion role. There are also identified champions within the Fostering, Early Help, Futures4me and Residential Teams who are supporting the project and integration within their own services. There are plans to develop these roles within other Children's Service's areas and recruit four more Foster Carers in the south and east of the county to support the development and demands within the Hub model. The Practice Supervisor is key to the maintenance and development of Foster Carer champions and their roles within the Hub.

The Social Pedagogy Champion group has developed with Caring2Learn to be a workshop around all practice, broadening its focus and inviting representatives from other service areas, schools and Foster Carers. The last workshop welcomed 62 participants. The workshops are themed and consider how theory is transferred to practice. This forum also gives those attending the opportunity to share practice and resources.

3. The development of Learning Homes and Caring Schools, which will assess, celebrate and drive good practice for Lincolnshire Looked after Children.

The toolkit for new carers which includes the standards from the Training Standards Development (TSD) 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 three years to ensure on-going personal and professional development.

We currently have 43 foster homes and three 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 rise significantly over the next 12-24 months. The Learning Homes Award has been achieved by three residential homes that took part in an initial pilot. The completed Residential Toolkit has now been developed and the first home to work through this is expected to submit by Easter 2021. The main development has been around the therapeutic practice to be embedded within the direct care of children within best practice guidelines.

School participation since the conference has risen to 170 providers. 46 Schools have already been awarded Caring School Awards.

Conclusion

Covid-19 has presented challenges to us all. Within the Fostering service, we have seen foster carers take themselves off line due to their own health vulnerabilities whilst at the same time we have seen others who have shown total commitment to the children in their care. As a result, placement stability in this quarter has continued to be strong. In addition, we should be heartened by the increase in interest in fostering and this is reflected in a significant increase in approvals this year. However, it has also resulted in an increase in referrals to Independent Fostering agencies. Sadly, this has not resulted in an increase in placement availability for most children and as a result, the number placed in Children's Homes has significantly increased. The

transformation work will attempt to address this by creating opportunities for improved support for foster carers, nurturing a different relationship with Independent providers and further developing the Foster Care community that Caring2Learn has so effectively initiated.

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