



Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director - Children's Safeguarding

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	08 September 2022
Subject:	Fostering Annual Report 2021 - 2022

Summary:

To consider this Annual Report as part of the monitoring of the Fostering Service required under the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Minimum Standards 2011.

Actions Required:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel reviews and approves the Fostering Annual Report.

1. Background

To present the Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-2022 to members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2. Conclusion

Following consideration of the attached Annual Report the Panel is requested to consider and comment on the contents of this and the work of the Fostering 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 Annual Report 2021 - 2022
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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, Adoption and Leaving Care, who can be contacted on 01522 552781 or deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk



Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Annual Report April 2021 - March 2022

Lincolnshire
COUNTY COUNCIL

FosteringLincs
Lincolnshire Fostering Services

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Introduction:

Lincolnshire Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act 2000. Fostering Services continue to be a much needed and increasingly complex service provision in relation to children and young people who need to be cared for by Lincolnshire County Council (Local Authority). It requires a diverse range of foster carers who are skilled and resourceful to provide stability, security, and a positive experience of family life. The service provides quarterly reports to the Directorate Leadership Team and the Executive.

During the last couple of years with the emergence and the gradual easing of the Covid 19 pandemic all areas of Children's Services have necessitated a creative approach to ensure that families and foster carers have been actively supported. This is from the point of Early Help which identifies the need for help for children and families as soon as problems start to emerge or are likely to emerge in the future, a strong multi- agency approach to those in need and in need of protection and for those within the care of Lincolnshire who are unable to live within their families.

At the end of March 2022, the number of children in care had risen from 680 to 735 this being an overall increase of 8% which is hugely significant and reflects the national picture. Of those 499 were placed in either foster care or pre-adoptive placements; this comprises of 68% of the population and is a reduction on the previous figure. Given the events of the last two years this continues to be a huge testimony to the existing fostering families and those who have joined the Lincolnshire fostering community during this period.

Of these 499, 44 children were placed in externally commissioned foster placements which is an increase on previous years, which is attributable owing to the reduced number of carer households and the needs of the children being more difficult to match with existing 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 26% of all foster placements which mirrors a continued commitment and drive to ensure that children who need to be cared for can feel loved and cared for by people with whom they already have a connection.

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, retention, training, support, and development plus kinship. The ongoing engagement of the Caring2Learn initiative and ethos continues to have a positive impact for the service.

The development of the online community during the pandemic has continued and grown from strength to strength with continued high levels of interaction and support, higher levels of engagement in training and development and foster carer champions and others influencing all areas of fostering practice.

Numbers of Foster Carers:

As at the end of March 2022, there were 289 foster carer households currently registered, including 57 Regulation, 24/25 carers and 5 Foster to Adopt carers.

Type	No. of households
Task Centred including Respite	161
Parent and Child/Task Centred	4
CWD Short Break Carers	1
Placement Plus	9
Permanence only	15
Permanence/Task Centred	33
Emergency	2
Remand	2
Family/Friend (Regulation 24/25)	57
Foster to Adopt	5

During the period 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022, 91 new fostering households were approved, including 63 Approved Kinship and 8 Foster to Adopt. The 20 new mainstream households provided up to 40 new placements as follows:

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

During the period 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022, 27 mainstream households ceased fostering, owing to the following reasons:

Reason	No. of households
Family circumstances changed	4
At carer's request (not health reasons)	8
Health reasons	1
Financial reasons	1
Retired	8
Carers moved out of the area	1
Dissatisfaction with service	1
Carers no longer considered suitable / result of investigation	3

In addition, 55 approved Kinship households were de-registered; 33 of these households had Special Guardianship Orders granted for the children in their care. 5 children turned 18 during the year and transferred to the Staying Put scheme. 7 households were deregistered with the

children returning to the care of their parents. A further 9 Foster to Adopt households were also de-registered following successful adoption links.

The recruitment of foster carers continues to be both a local and a national challenge. The Fostering Network, the UK's leading Fostering charity details within the State of the Nation report December 2021 that almost three quarters of the nation's children in care community reside with approximately 45,370 foster families across the country. (House of Commons Debate April 2022).

There continues to be an emphasis to secure more good foster carers that can be the difference in the life of a child/young person. Currently the national shortage stands an estimated 9,365 homes according to available data. (State of Nation Report December 2021).

The local picture during this year reflects the larger scale challenges with the gap widening between the children in care number growth and the number of fostering families becoming approved. Despite Lincolnshire experiencing a growth in interest during 2020/2021 the figures have slowed with interest and conversion rates reverting to following the pre-pandemic trend.

Carer availability during the past year has been restricted in part owing to the extraordinary circumstances and despite the Government's temporary flexibilities of the regulations which ended in October 2021 this did not significantly increase carer capacity. However, with the vaccination and booster offer, gradual easing of restrictions, and regained confidence in day to day living the resumption of some foster placements are all positive signs for moving forward. The continued efforts and enthusiasm within the service including the Caring2Learn initiative serves to reinforce the meaning and value of foster carer households.

The loss of existing carers continues to be of concern and reflects the demographics of the foster carer population. There is further evidence from foster carer feedback that the support from the fostering service and community the retention "offer" and the embedded ethos involving the Caring2Learn approach are key factors in households remaining caring for local children in Lincolnshire.

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 knowledge, skills, and experience. Foster carers provide family-based services ranging from weekend respite to supporting birth parents and carers, preparing a child for a transition to 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. Our recruitment campaign includes strengthening this cohort. 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 had been available however there is recent growth in the number of requests this year with some being placed in external fostering provision when necessary.

The profile of children in care remains like that identified last year. The percentage of those under the age of 5 has risen to 29%. At the other end of the age profile, the percentage of young people, aged 16/17, continues to constitute 22% of the Children in Care population. Only 39% of this group are in foster placements; the majority being placed in residential or independent accommodation.

In 2021/2022 the increase in the number of children who have entered care and the reduction in the number of foster placements available has resulted in a significant increase in the number of children being placed in external foster placements. As a result, transformation work continues 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 2021-2022



Foster Carer Recruitment:

The service has a dedicated Recruitment and Retention strategy which ensures that the recruitment and retention of foster carers for and within Lincolnshire County Council remains a key priority.

From 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022:

244 Initial Expression of Interest forms (IEIs) were received for fostering

177 home visits/initial calls were undertaken

54 Registration of Interest forms (ROIs) were received

20 households were newly approved to foster

In 2020/2021 the service witnessed a sharp rise in IEI numbers, it is thought that this was largely to do with the additional space and time people had for reflection, considering alternative paths and options for their future. As restrictions lifted and the public started to return to a sense of normality, returning to work and social connections becoming re-established hence the service has seen enquiries return to a pre- pandemic level.

Although numbers of IEI's have reduced this year the number of applicants completing a formal application remains the same. Showing a higher conversion rate than the previous years. The conversion rate to initial visit has risen by 11% over the last 12 months.

Financial Year	Number of fostering IEIs received				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2021/2022	56	56	66	66	244
2020 / 2021	80	103	74	83	340
2019 / 2020	46	66	55	72	239
2018 / 2019	52	52	53	76	233

A performance audit in July 2021 and internal audit completed in January – March 2022 highlighted the areas of recruitment that would most benefit from development, the progress made in the conversion rate is linked directly to the developments and improvements in customer service and communication.

Virtual Information Events:

There have been 9 information events taken place virtually this year, face to face events were briefly reintroduced although the number of people that were booking and attending was significantly lower. The service has found that on average online recruitment events have between 20-30 people attending in comparison to 3-6 people for face-to-face events.

At this stage and with regular appearances out in the community the service has determined at present that a virtual event is a much better use of resource, therefore using our resources on a more specific and targeted approach to recruitment. This will remain under review.

The Fostering Service have made some changes to the virtual session recognising that engagement and connection must be achieved differently, then when the events are in person. This has worked well, and applicants have found the events more accessible and convenient. Some of our current foster carers also support in the sessions, co-facilitating and answering queries. This really demonstrates our ethos and culture of welcoming foster carers as part of the wider fostering community.

Advertising:

The focus for recruiting new foster carers during the pandemic moved to a more digital model as more people were at home and available online.

Advertising has been targeted towards getting people to attend the information events as well as advertising the type of foster carers we need to recruit.

Google ads was piloted for 3 months, this time did not see any significant rise in the number of those interested or contact. It was a significant larger cost than Facebook advertising, this type of advertising was not continued.

In July 2021 following the introduction of a new Practice Supervisor an audit of recruitment was completed to understand the inner working and performance data of advertising. The audit highlighted that online media, advertising strategies, and resources were areas that needed development. The social media following and online engagement through social media was low with minimal shares and interactions with the public. Facebook advertising and our organic reach very much depends on our social media presence and public engagement. This is a priority for development for 2022/2023 with a new Marketing Officer starting in April 2022.

Commitments regarding the spending of the advertising budget was set very early in the financial year which limited the amount of change and development that could be undertaken until financial year 22/23. The new Marketing Officer and strategy will see the service developing local visibility, establishing community links, and using advertising that is local and represents Lincolnshire and those that live here.

Foster Carers and staff will become more involved in the activity of developing connections and sharing experiences. Allowing the community to feel like they know the fostering service, this will be achieved through social media using Facebook and Instagram.

In 2019 Lincolnshire started the journey and agreed to the terms of becoming a fostering friendly employer. Since then, notices and information has been shared through Lincolnshire County Council digital comms and teams and there has been an increase in the amount of people coming forward from within the council, the plan going forward is to encourage and work with other employers, schools, and businesses to adopt the fostering friendly policies, offering more support to staff to care for children in care.

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 with 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 and WhatsApp forums. A regular update continues to feature in the e-newsletter which is sent to approved foster carers monthly and profiles can be accessed anytime by fostering households through the foster carer's drive. This is a secure area where foster carers can access information and forms relating to the area of permanence, training, and all administrative matters.

The Rethink Fostering workstream within the Transformation work programme has been fundamental in exploring and creating the core offer and new innovative approaches in fostering, with the creation of the In-House Matching Event, being one of them. This event brings together the opportunity for those that know the children to present a profile of them, which has been developed using the Valuing Care approach.

The family finders' event was first piloted in June 2021, this enabled valuable evaluation and feedback from those foster carers in attendance to help shape up a future one. In January 2022, a further event was held, building on the previous one was well attended and received by foster carers.

This event will now be held on a regular basis and built into business as usual to support all the permanence work with the hope that children are able to secure local carers matched to their holistic needs.

Website:

The fostering website has been updated, to ensure the information is current and up to date, some of the photos have been updated to images that better represent our community and have a local feel. The payment booklet was added as a download on the website, following feedback that those applying wanted to be more informed about the financial support associated with children in care, it was felt that the topic of finances should be more transparent.

Over 80% of our enquires for fostering are still coming via the online platforms. Next year the aim to make the website even more accessible by adding a quick contact option and a QR code to posters and leaflets.

The service has moved towards monitoring Analytics, these will be used to monitor performance and impact during selective marketing strategies and campaigns. Informing our future adds and strategies as we learn which generates the most visits and actions on the page.

Fostering recruitment have also worked jointly to design an online system that intends to support the application and assessment process by monitoring, collecting information and sending alerts/updates to applicants within the two-stage fostering application process. This has gone well and has meant that applicants are more informed and can check progress regularly as well as receiving fortnightly calls from the team to ensure applicants continue to be engaged.


lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering

LCC Bookmarks

Contents

Our offer to foster carers	Choosing a fostering provider
Eligibility	Become a foster carer
Parent and child fostering	Make your house their home campaign

Our offer to foster carers



Ofsted Outstanding Provider

Contact the fostering recruitment team

Telephone: 01522 554114

Email: fostering@lincolnshire.gov.uk

- Like us on Facebook
- Follow us on Instagram

Enquire about fostering

[Enquire online](#)

Foster Carer Retention:

The service has invested heavily over recent years in providing foster carers with additional practical and theoretical support. The innovation of Caring2Learn in conjunction with service developed a new community-based hub model, this hub over the last year has grown and developed to be embedded and come to be known as the 'Fostering Hub'. Over 90% of fostering households actively participate as a member of the hub. The hub model recognizes and acknowledges carer household's skills and knowledge and how these can be used to help support and improve other foster carer's experiences and outcomes for children. The hub offers both formal and informal learning and development opportunities as well as support where connections can be built and maintained.

This year the hub has been introduced to applicants, providing them with a support and development offer through the assessment period, it is hoped that this will improve any applicants withdrawing from the assessment stage but also better prepares applicants/ foster carers and offers a supported transition to becoming a fostering household for them and any children they may have placed already.

In keeping with key themes and feedback from the fostering community it was recognised that some carers continue to recognise and experience the impact of fostering was too much for their own children who are recognised as being a valuable part of this vital role. In response the service strengthened its support to birth children through the Supportive Superstars group, including a children's preparation course, a support offer in times of difficulty and the return of the social and relationship-based events for all birth children.

Facilitating and supporting the Hub model are 22 Foster Carer champions and the service have 2 vacancies for hub development; these individuals offer new carers support from when they

first apply to foster with Lincolnshire 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 work in tandem with foster carers as well as supporting and facilitating practice workshops and the induction and preparation courses. 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 of choice.

Foster Carer Champions on average are completing 20-30 pieces of allocated work per month, this is a decline of around 50% on the previous year although this is due to the changes and easing of Covid restrictions, development of the community and more peer-to-peer support is taking place naturally between carers.

The Caring2learn Practice Supervisor has been integrated and has joined the team as a Fostering Practice Supervisor, with a practice lead on retention, recruitment, support, and development whilst working collaboratively across the service. This post being realigned with fostering has been very positive and has resulted in a joined-up approach across the children's service.

The role of the Placement Support Workers has been further enhanced and is integral to the hub model. The staff group continue to offer a high level of support to carers through therapeutic and trauma informed intervention. Lower-level support and tasks are being supported by the community, allowing the service more capacity for higher levels of need. The core offer for the hub is currently in review with the hope that additional specialist health services will be made available where required for children in foster care.

The WhatsApp listening group which has 95 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. At the request of the carers additional groups have been developed, these include a LGBT, early years, foster carers to be, early years group and men's group. These are active groups which are used daily by carers.

The closed community Facebook page also continues to offer dynamic and creative support and solutions to foster carers and has over 800 participants.

The Fostering Network the UK's leading fostering charity have reported through their analysis of national data advises that fostering services should expect to lose 10% of its mainstream population per year. Lincolnshire last year lost 10% of its carers and this year lost 9%, although this is slightly lower the loss of any carer household impacts and their experience and knowledge is a cumulative loss.

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 9.39% at year-end which is higher than preferred. This figure suggests that the majority of Children in Care in Lincolnshire experience high level of placement stability from the point of coming into care. Albeit, higher than the Council would prefer this reflects some of the challenges and the intricacies of meeting the needs of children and matching them within our existing resources. 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 given 39% of this cohort are aged between 16-18 years old.

Over recent years there has been considerable focus on supporting foster carers to maintain placements. With the launch of the Fostering Hub and an overall improved core offer to foster carers it is the services' continued ambition for foster carers to feel supported in their valuable role. Moving forward the fostering service will have access to support from the complex care team, with clinical supervision being provided to placement support workers to support their offer of Theraplay and a therapeutic support for fostering households.

The NI063 placement stability figure with a year-end figure reported as 66%. The Valuing Care tool has now been embedded within the Fostering service. The tool continues to be used alongside the children in Care Valuing Care tool to support and inform matching with a view to improving placement stability. Identifying carer's strengths in accordance with a child, young person's needs. This enhanced level of integrated support has been effective in creating and sustaining placements. The tool is used in both the foster carer annual review and is also used during foster carer Form F assessment to inform foster carers ongoing learning and development needs. Moving forward the tool is to be used in all Kinship assessments to reflect a whole service approach to embedding this tool in all assessments undertaken.

Family Lincs Care:

The provision of short-term breaks offers children and young people with disabilities experiences away from their primary carer to enhance their personal and social development and provide their families with the vital opportunity to have a valuable break from their caring role.

Short breaks are for any person aged 0 to 18 with a disability, including:

- children and young people with an autistic spectrum disorder
- severe learning disabilities

- complex health needs
- cognitive or sensory impairments
- moving or handling needs
- life-limiting conditions

Providing families with a choice of having the short breaks with a Family Links carer provides children, young people, and their families an alternative option to a residential approach whereby they are offered with a home from-home experience with a specially trained foster carer.

The scheme is now serviced by one fostering household which offers regular breaks to one young person.

The current Family Links Scheme offers 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 carer is meeting the current demand for this service. However, this is under review as it continues to be an essential part of the fostering provision.

Permanence:

Between 1st April 2021 and the 31st March 2022 Family Finders has continued to meet monthly to consider children with a care plan of permanence and in need of a long-term foster placement. Owing to the recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic these meetings have been undertaken using a hybrid model with now more meetings taking place in person.

Over the year, twenty-two children have been considered by Family Finders, of these thirteen children were newly referred from 1st April 2021 onwards. This mirrors the previous year when twenty-two children were considered between April 2020 and March 2021.

Out of the twenty-two children considered, long term foster care in house foster placements were identified for four children, two singles and a sibling group of two children with three of these children remaining in their current placement and one moving to newly identified placement. Of the remaining eighteen children, it was agreed that two would remain with their Independent Fostering Agency carers and a sibling group of three moved to live with a family member under a kinship arrangement.

As of 31st March 2022, there remains thirteen children being considered by Family Finders looking for permanent placements, seven are single children and three are sibling's groups of two.

This year six children have been linked for Permanence at Fostering Panel; however, all of these were with the existing task centred foster carers and the children had not been referred to Family Finders. For several years recruitment of permanent foster carers has been difficult with most permanent matches being made with their carers.

In this year four sets of current carers changed their approval at panel and links were achieved with their existing placements however there were no new carers approved for permanence this year.

On the 27th January 2022 a permanence event took place to consider four of the young people already on Family Finders. The event was virtual and 16 foster carers attended. The event was opened and closed by Assistant Director Janice Spencer, OBE and each social worker had an allotted time to discuss their specific children, sharing photos, profiles including the Valuing Care profile.

A foster carer and the young person she used to foster shared their experiences of permanent fostering and “Ellie’s Story” was shared at the event. This real story exemplifies the importance and benefits to children when they have secured that stable foundation which further allows children to build healthy relationships and attachments resulting in a greater sense of permanency, stability and belonging.

Two sets of carers expressed an interest in offering regular respite for a young people and further information has been shared and this is being progressed. For several years, the recruitment of permanent foster carers has become more difficult with most permanent matches being made with existing task centred foster carers.

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

Staying Put:

The ‘Staying Put’ initiative has, since its inception, enabled a total of 212 young people in Lincolnshire to remain with their foster families when they reach aged 18 years old if both parties agree. 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.

Lincolnshire's Staying Put Service has continued to support young people and their carers with a total of 44 young people living in a Staying Put arrangement at the end of March 2022. Of these, 28 were in full time further education an increase of 4 from 2021. 7 attending university an increase of 2 young people. 3 young people are in employment, 2 young people are on Apprenticeship Schemes one with an engineering firm; and 2 young people are on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme and 2 young people were NEET with one young person deemed medically unfit.

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 what has been extraordinary circumstances.

The Staying Put offer in Lincolnshire positively reflects the current legislation of The Children Act 2014 and best practice from the 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 in relation to 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, virtually or face to face. Microsoft Teams has been used to complete virtual meetings and we have now seen a return to face-to-face meetings where we can build relationships and ensure young people and carers fully understand Staying Put and to timely complete the relevant paperwork relating to the arrangement.

Looking forward to the next 12 months Staying Put, there are currently 23 referrals. There may well be additional young people move into this provision (if this is the preferred option for them and their carers) however this scheme continues to be an option for those leaving the care at the point of attaining adulthood.

Information and promotional materials currently available to carers and young people will be reviewed and updated in supporting Staying Put arrangements as this continues to be a chosen route to further support young adults and their next steps into independent living.

Kinship:

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 Carer's and the expectations of this role.

Since 2015 there have been 6 full time Supervising Social Workers dedicated to undertaking Kinship Assessments. There have been changes in terms of workers covering the kinship agenda and interim arrangements put in situ to ensure the smooth running of the service with creative planning and use of resources throughout.

The number of referrals into the Kinship Team has marginally 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. The number of cases presented at Fostering Panel has slightly increased when compared to the previous year. Most of the Regulation 24 assessments have been presented to the fostering panel within 16 weeks of allocation; however, some assessments have been scheduled to be completed within the extended 24-week period owing to exceptional circumstances.

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.

Year	Referrals	Reg 24	Reg 24/SGO	SGO/ Stat checks	Private Fostering
2020-21	186	38	53	71	24
2021-22	196	24	84	39	19

Of the above figures: 2021-2022

- SGO – 13 applicants withdrew/ did not progress
- SGO – 14 are still in process
- SGO – 7 were negative assessments and the children were not placed
- SGO – 5 progressed but child either remained at home or moved to an alternative placement.

Where children were placed with a plan to progress to SGO

- SGO/Reg 24 – 24 SGO granted
- SGO/Reg 24 – 46 are still in process
- SGO/Reg 24- 3 Not approved at panel / Negative assessment
- SGO/Reg 24 – 5 returned home
- SGO/Reg 24 - 6 withdrew from assessment and child/ren moved to another placement

Where children were placed with a Plan of Reg 24:

- Reg 24 - 14 placements remain on-going
- Reg 24 – 6 Placement breakdowns and children were moved
- Reg 24 – 4 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 8 having taken place in 2021/2022, this is an increase of 3 courses on last year's figures.

This course has been delivered virtually due to the Covid 19 pandemic however with the easing of restrictions this is now returned to face to face. The course has continued to receive excellent feedback, particularly in terms of the Therapeutic Parenting input by the 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 Fostering 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 in care with 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 Enquiries
- 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, Independent Vice Chair
- Stephen Carson, Independent Vice Chair
- Janet Morris, Independent Member
- Russell Petit, Independent Member
- April Harrison, Independent Member
- Laura Dodd, Independent Member
- Sarah Jane Davis, Independent Member
- Joy Tribe, Independent Member
- Caroline Mogg, Independent Member

- Stephen Tyrrell, Independent Member
- Maggie Nisbet, Independent Member
- Paula Bexon, Social Work Representative
- Michelle Maxfield, Social Work Representative
- Paul Fisher, Social Work Representative
- Joanne Hindley, Social Work Representative
- Ruth Roberts, Social Work Representative
- Laura Tyrrell, Social Work Representative
- Dawn Oldroyd, Panel Advisor
- 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. They ensure 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 continued to be held remotely via Microsoft Teams. All panel members were trained and supported to engage in a new way of working albeit this is subject to review to enable panel members to engage face to face with applicants. There have been challenges but most panel members are now participating in a 'paperless' panel process through the Councils secure intranet, SharePoint.

The introduction of remote panels via Microsoft Teams has also enabled applicants to attend panel from different areas of the country and even from abroad when timescales have coincided with planned vacations. This mode of meeting has also enabled children to attend panel from the security of their home address. There have also been creative presentations of children's views that have been shared electronically via video to panel members within the meeting (via screen share) and has included footage of teenagers being 'interviewed' for their views.

There has been the successful recruitment of a new Independent Panel Member who is also a current local authority foster carer and a Caring to Learn Champion. There have also been three new social work representatives sitting on panel which expands the knowledge and experience of panel members.

The Panel receives medical advice within the social workers' reports, and this is considered within the assessments with a medical advisor supporting panel too. Legal Services provide advice as required, to assist in the Panel's recommendations.

IFAB (Independent Fostering Advisory Board) has been up and running since February 2022 on a minimum of a monthly basis. The IFAB is attended by the Panel Advisor, and Independent Foster Panel Member and a Practice Supervisor from either Fostering or the Children in Care Team.

IFAB quality assures all foster carer annual reviews at the 4-, 7- and 10-year stage and has been well received by practitioners in offering oversight and feedback to the carer household, fostering service and wider staff regarding good practice and areas for development.

It has also enabled feedback to be shared with locality teams where foster carers have provided constructive feedback about social workers and the Panel Advisor has been able to challenge any practice issues to ensure continued good communication and compliance with fostering regulations.

Positive feedback has been received from IFAB Panel members about the learning they have had from participating in the panel which they are able to take back to their daily practice.

Workload of the Panel:

The Fostering Panel has met on 26 occasions this year, 1 more than the previous year, due to the workload of panel and ability to hold meetings via teams.

Panel recommended for approval the following households:

APPROVAL	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Task Centred/Respite	20	27	19	27	13	20
Reg 24/25 Kinship Care	63	56	43	33	39	39
Permanent Foster Carers	0	0	0	2	1	10
Change of Approval	4	2	6	7	0	5
Permanence Link	6	4	6	10	10	11
Reviews	33	32	23	22	17	35
Total	126	121	97	101	80	120

Review Breakdowns:

REVIEW	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Task Centred/ Respite	22	15	15	12	9	19
Remand	0	0	0	0	0	1
Reg 24/25 Kinship Care	11	11	6	9	3	12
Permanent Fostering	0	0	0	0	4	12

Allegation	7	6	1	1	1	1
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Feedback and Quality Assurance

Panel continues to seek feedback from all participants including social workers attending panel. As the panel invitation links are sent via Microsoft Teams by the panel member, feedback forms are also attached to these emails and some applicants have sent feedback either on these forms or within an email. The feedback received has been positive and suggests that applicants do not feel negatively impacted by the remote access to panel.

The reports for Panel continue to be subject to a robust quality assurance process to ensure suitable quality standards are achieved. The Panel Advisor routinely has oversight of all reports presented to panel and can highlight potential complexities in cases to ensure all aspects are appropriately addressed within a restorative approach. The Panel Advisor also offers social workers and their supervisors the opportunity to have early discussions about complex cases to ensure that appropriate support and assessments are in place prior to presentation at panel wherever possible.

Complaints:

In the last year the Fostering Service have received only 1 formal complaint, this complaint was not upheld by the Investigating Manager. Despite the service looking to resolve the complaint at a low level the complaint was progressed to stage 2 of the formal complaints process by the complainant as they were not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint's investigation. The complaint was Investigated at this stage by the complaints team and was not upheld at this stage.

In 2021/2022 there was 1 matter referred to the Independent Review Mechanism after a recommendation of deregistration approved by the Agency Decision Maker. The outcome from the Independent Review Mechanism was to uphold the recommendation of the Fostering service.

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 Children's Partnership (LSCP) website and being service led/Caring2 Learn. A common theme has developed with a carer preference to access the service led/Caring2 Learn events. Feedback indicates this is due to quality, accessibility, and personal booking options. From April 2022 all training has moved to this preferable option.

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. In response to the common themes impacting on placement stability several courses will be introduced, these include mental health first aid and therapeutic crisis intervention.

Online sessions and a 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 Training Services and Breaking the Cycle 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 Training, Standards and Development (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.

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 ongoing 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 declined although the number of those attending and completing training remains much higher than previously.

Type of event	Number of carers participating
Virtual Training/workshops	350
Face to face	59
E learning completed	521

The annual Foster Carer's Celebration/Conference took place virtually on 19th October 2021; the event was a success with carers being presented with a lapel badge, certificate, and gift voucher to recognise their long service. Those receiving 15, 20, 25, 30, 35-year awards were also sent flowers from the service as a token of appreciation.

Following the 2020 celebration foster carers had expressed that would like to see the service provide recognition for the outcomes achieved for children in their care and practice, the Virtual School, FAST team, Children in Care Team, Residential and Fostering Service all nominated and presented awards to carers, highlighting within the areas of outcomes for children and good practice. This created a joined-up approach to the way Children Services came together to celebrate and thank foster carers for their contributions and support for its children. The foster carers feedback was very positive.

Forward Plan:

As we emerge from the pandemic our attentions remain focused on the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers. Over the last year the Fostering Service have embedded the use of the Valuing Care toolkit within both the recruitment stage and the annual review of foster carers. Along with the implementation of the Fostering Hub and the expansion of the Core Offer to Foster Carers.

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 service has been and will continue to be engaged in the transformation work and the next stages will be focused upon developing the use of the Valuing Care tool in Connected Person assessment and Special Guardianship reports. Current developments include the Special Guardianship Order Core offer along with a revision of the Special Guardianship Reports and Support Plan which are trauma informed and future focused.

The service will endeavour 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.

Caring to Learn is fully integrated in the fostering service, 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 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 ever increasing challenging and competitive environment.

The Fostering Service have invested in the Placement Support Workers who are integral to providing targeted interventions with Foster Carers and young people to increase placement stability. We will be working in conjunction with the Complex Care Team to provide a holistic therapeutic support package for children and young people which will support them and their carers and ultimately enable more young people to be part of a nurturing family with greater stability afforded to them.