



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

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>08 September 2022</b>
Subject:	<b>Fostering Quarterly Performance Report Q1</b>

**Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of activity within the fostering service over Quarter 1.

**Actions Required:**

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are invited to review and comment on the contents of the Quarterly Performance Report for Fostering (Q1) and to note this report 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.

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# Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Quarterly Report  
April - June 2022

## **Quarter One Fostering Report–2022/2023**

The Annual Report for 2021/2022 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2021. The statement of Purpose was revised and was ratified on the same day. This is the first quarterly report for 2022/2023.

### **Introduction**

In 2022/2023, the Fostering Service has an annual budget of £9,102,467. Most 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 aspect of the fostering retention strategy given the foster care marketplace is challenging with competition at a peak level with several independent agencies actively recruiting in the Lincolnshire region.

To retain our competitiveness, allowances are a significant factor alongside the continued annual retention payments within a framework of high quality supervision and support. The budget 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

The continued emphasis on recruitment and retention has been impacted upon by the Covid 19 pandemic where the service has seen an increase in numbers of children in care (CIC) and diminishing foster carer availability owing to retirement, health and social factors.

During the last financial year 2021-2022 the continuing Covid 19 recovery required the service to continue to be flexible in its response to foster carers and the children in their care. Most, if not all visits, are now being completed face to face.

The development of the virtual foster care community during the pandemic, via service and Caring2learn, created a model platform to increase interaction and engagement within and across the fostering community which continues with significant momentum.

The impact of the pandemic remains and there has been a decline in placement stability figures which stands at 66% 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 because of placement breakdown. Likewise, the increased demand on placements has made the choice of the right placement upon admission into care more difficult both in house and across the external market.

The activity within fostering recruitment has started well this quarter with a steady level of interest which is indicative of pre-pandemic levels. This will continue to be monitored in accordance with the recruitment campaigns that are scheduled to occur for the remainder of this year.

At the end of the last year, the number of children in care had continued to rise to 735. Those placed with Independent Fostering agencies were 44, 5 of whom were unaccompanied migrant children. The percentage of children in foster placements has declined to 68% which reflects a decline on the previous year's figure.

During this quarter, the number of children coming into care has increased by 84 with 48 of these being placed within foster care

Given the continued increase in the children in care numbers, the rise in the number of children placed in Independent Non-Maintained provision (Independent Fostering 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 continues to be engaged in various aspects and strands of this work with a strong focus on the core offers to foster carers and the development and practice of the Valuing Care Toolkit being an integral part of the foster carer's annual reviews and Form F assessments. As the service move forward the emphasis is to ensure that the Valuing Care Toolkit forms part of all Kinship and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments.

### **Recruitment and Retention:**

Fostering recruitment continues to work through the challenges presented by the recovery of the pandemic and the rising cost of living and recruitment activity is returning to a more stable place that matches previous activity trends. Recruitment has developed into an area that is seen as everyone's responsibility with a wider pool of Supervising Social Workers completing half of all initial visits.

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. This has included online recruitment events and the fostering preparation course.

The Preparation to Foster course offers both face to face and virtual events this year with the expectation that both types of events will be well attended. Plans have been made for three face to face courses and three virtual courses within this financial year. This way of working will be evaluated to ensure it is a most appropriate use of time and resource.

Each course is facilitated by a Supervising Social Worker, Caring2Learn representative and at least one Foster Carer Champion.

Fostering Information events take place on bi-monthly basis and over the last year have been held virtually. Those making formal or informal enquiries to foster are encouraged to attend these events. Virtual events have seen a substantial rise in people attending, recent changes to encourage participation has also made these sessions much more interactive and relational. This is supported in the feedback and improvement of conversion to people going on to stage 1 of the recruitment process.

A recruitment Council audit and review has been completed in this quarter to look at each of the different stages to establish what is working well, what we are worried about and what needs to happen to maximise production and improve the conversion rate of initial enquiry to approval.

The work continuing will closely monitor quality with a strong emphasis on good customer service and community. Initial results from the impact of changes in practice and processes can be seen through key performance indicators. Conversion rates to making a formal application following initial visits has already seen a rise of 11%. Previously the service did find that almost half of those in stage 1 would change their mind about fostering and choose to withdraw although the service has seen a 34% increase in retaining those in stage 1 due to applicant decision. An indication of the strong support offer and customer service that has developed.

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 been further embedded within the fostering service from project to business as usual model. Applying these principles within Foster Carer recruitment has already started to impact on performance in this area.

The links with the virtual school continue to support the fidelity of this global approach in shaping the work to support '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. The support forums continue to act as a way for Foster Carers to access support from other Foster Carers and children's service's teams. This is providing a more integrated approach to support. In a recent survey fostering households identified peer and community support and hub platforms as one of the strongest parts of their support offer.

Feedback from the Foster Carers strongly indicates that virtual platforms have helped carers overcome challenges in attending events, such as childcare. Online support plays a huge part in helping people to connect and support each other away from geographical and office hours challenges

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 newly approved carers have previously been allocated a 'Hub Link' within the first month of their fostering journey, however, the service have now moved to allocating these during the assessment stage to support applicants being able to establish a network within the community.

Therefore, it is more likely they will access general support and guidance from more experienced carers through established relationships rather than relying on new connections. It is hoped that soon the service will be able to allocate applicants a Supervising Social Worker earlier in the assessment process.

A tiered support offer has been set out, which includes a stage 1 support package, stage 2 support package and then a support offer to all approved carers. This allows for a smoother transition to fostering for all applicants. Supporting them to be better informed and equipped for the journey, whilst feeling and experiencing a level of support from the service. The intention is to support and boost their level of confidence in Lincolnshire as a fostering provider.

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. Assessed need is monitored to ensure that the right kind of support is identified and delivered. Carers have welcomed the return of face to face support and feedback from carers is very positive with regards to their feeling really supported.

A recent survey along with the audit information has formed a picture that general advice and support for Foster Carers is going well; however, carers feel more support and improvement is required during challenging times often relating to the trauma experienced and behaviour exhibited by the children they care for.

A challenging time has shown to be the most likely reason Foster Carers consider leaving the service or spend time offline. This is a key area for attention, planning, action, and ongoing review for 2022/2023. Other key themes for retention include support to carers that are offline, new Foster Carers and staff retention.

### **Marketing:**

During this quarter 65 Initial Enquiries of Interest (IEI) were received from the public enquiring about becoming a Foster Carer.

There have been 4 newly approved households in this first quarter of the financial year.

On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022 there were 42 open applications in stages 1 or 2, 29 of these have a panel date booked this financial year.

### **Foster Care Fortnight:**

Lincolnshire Fostering Service took part in the Fostering Network's annual Foster Care Fortnight campaign which was held between 9<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2022 with a theme of a day in the life of a foster carer.

In Lincolnshire, we continually review our marketing strategy and develop our approach as being a local option for carers wanting to care for Lincolnshire children.

During this quarter and year our objective is to draw upon the strengths of carers joining an Ofsted rated Outstanding authority who work collaboratively to find local placements within a local community for local children.

Our continued energy in advertising is to ensure that the objective is understood that Lincolnshire is further establishing itself as a local option.

To achieve this our priorities are:

- Ongoing strategy to build a sense of community responsibility in the role.
- Information events more often and online.
- Ongoing strategy to engage with local businesses and communities.
- Strong online presence.
- Establishing a local feel, with real images, real stories. Resulting in an increased number of followers, higher visibility, higher engagement, higher page reach).
- Advertisement budget used towards online strategies, such as social media adds
- Advertisement through social media (demographic target: women +25) and other online sources.
- Advertisement at public venues, schools, children's centres and LCC buildings.
- Engagement with other communities and businesses within Lincolnshire.
- Developing and marketing fostering friendly employers to support recruitment of working households

## **Advertising**

### **April 2022**

- Foster Carers' Viewpoint focusing on tackling the myths
- 20,000 audience targeted ads across Stamford, Grantham, Spalding, Bourne and Newark websites belonging to the Iliffe Media Group
- Social Media advertising
- Promoted refer a friend with current households



## **May 2022**

- Information Event
- Fostering campaign running on Lincs FM, 'a day in the life a foster carer'
- Half page advert in Lincolnshire Life magazine
- Targeted paid-for Facebook advert
- Article on Int Comms advertising information event
- Promoted refer a friend with current households
- Shared with staff, teams, and foster carers ways they could support fostering recruitment.

## **June 2022**

- 2 days promoting fostering at Lincolnshire Show
- Full page spread in Lincolnshire Life
- Fostering campaign running on Lincs FM, choose local
- Targeted paid-for Facebook advert
- Article on Int Comms advertising information event
- Promoted refer a friend with current households

### **Permanence Campaign:**

Attracting long term foster carers remains a priority for the service. Fostering have developed 4 areas of activity in attracting new and existing carers to this type of fostering. This includes attracting new carers to permanent fostering, supporting those currently in the assessment period to consider permanent fostering and explore possible matches prior to approval, holding a quarterly family finders' event and supporting and encouraging existing households to consider new permanent links or a change in approval.

Profiles are created for children seeking permanent foster homes, this includes anonymised profiles. These anonymised profiles are shared on the Council's social media platforms as part of our marketing campaigns to attract new carers, this includes the Caring2Learn closed Facebook page which invites staff, social care and health staff and existing carers. The

profiles are also readily available in the foster carers google drive and are shared with fostering applicants during the assessment stage.

Our campaign page on the Lincs Fm radio site features information about permanent fostering along with the Council's webpage which has a page dedicated to this campaign.

### **Family Finding:**

During the first quarter of this year Family Finders has continued to meet monthly to consider all children with a care plan for long-term fostering who do not already have a placement identified. These meetings have all taken place in person.

Over this first quarter four additional children have been referred to Family Finders. There are now seventeen children currently seeking long term placements, seven of these are singleton placements and there are five sets of two siblings.

Unfortunately, and despite concerted effort in this quarter, we have not been able to find any long-term placements for the children on Family Finders. However, one couple has shown interest in one of the sibling groups and it is hoped once their own shorter term placement moves on that the matching process and information sharing can progress further.

Family Finders continues to use profiles for the children alongside their Valuing Care profile to try and identify any permanent placements. The children's anonymised profiles have also been shared on the Foster Carers "G drive" where they can access the information and have further discussions with their Supervising Social Worker. These profiles are also circulated to all Supervising Social Workers to consider any appropriate carers.

The Permanence Campaign is on-going and includes a variety of advertising on social media, radio, and local publications. The fostering service has a dedicated Instagram page which the service is utilising as part of the recruitment drive. The Council were also represented at the Lincolnshire Show in June. The County Council fostering web page continues to provide information on long-term fostering and the support available to Foster Carers.

Family Finding review meetings, chaired by senior managers, are also taking place to consider children where no suitable match has been identified after a three-month period to ensure there is no delay for children. During this quarter ten children were referred to this process (six singletons and two sibling groups).

A further permanence event is scheduled for July 2022 where children's information will be presented to foster carers by their social workers with a hope that potential placements will be found. It is also hoped that for some of the children currently in residential placements it may be possible to find them a monthly respite opportunity to give the young person the opportunity to experience family life and build up connections and relationships.

It has also been agreed that potential foster carers in stage 2 of their fostering application would also be invited to the event for them to understand the need of the children and

begin considering permanence. Fostering currently have one set of carers being assessed for permanence with a panel date of August 2022.

**Training:**

A virtual and Face to face offer is now in place and has been welcomed by carers, providing flexibility and options that cater to different circumstances and learning styles.

The fostering training offer remains under review, ensuring that the service continue to meet the needs of the fostering community in providing quality and informed care to children with a diverse range of needs and interests.

Following a review, this year courses have been developed to support preparing birth children for fostering, in response to a retention theme around carers worries about the impact of fostering on their children. This includes a twice-yearly preparation course for birth children aged 5-16 years.

Whilst considering how we better prepare people for fostering included in the hub is access for applicants to training and development throughout their assessment period.

Other courses have been planned in response to data and information concerning placement breakdowns and unplanned moves, these include therapeutic crisis intervention and mental health first aid.

It is important in training and development to also ensure our more experienced foster carers and those that have attended many of the courses on offer continue to have access to further learning and development. The service has specifically identified the 6-day social pedagogy and 2-day Restorative Practice to address this objective.

27 courses were delivered during this quarter with 250 attendees taking part from fostering households.

**Training:**

In this quarter the training schedule has continued to be delivered to assist the training and development of Foster Carers. This is an important factor in improving outcomes of Children in Care and young people. Access to this develops knowledge and skills in areas of interest as well as provides the mandatory courses. It facilitates carers also sharing ideas and experiences where they can share experiences and learn from one another.

**Various courses have been available including:**

- First Aid/ paediatric training
- Restorative Practice
- Kid Skills
- Mental Health First Aid
- Safeguarding

- Safe Care
- Fostering Preparation Course
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention

### **Practice Workshops:**

- Introducing Social Pedagogy
- Introduction to Restorative Practice
- Introduction to mindfulness, Creating Calm
- Introduction to Trauma Awareness
- Supporting sleep, nightmares, and night terrors.
- Time2talk
- Supporting grief, loss, and positive endings
- Relational repair
- Fostering Weekly therapeutic parenting Programme (Caring2gether, 6 weeks)

### **E-Learning:**

LSCP courses are still being accessed and Foster Carers have 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, Support and Development Standards (TSDs) has been well received. The service is 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.

Currently there are eighty foster homes and five 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 twelve months of approval; the service are seeing the number of awarded homes to continue to rise significantly.

### **Celebration Event:**

The Foster Carer Celebration took place over Zoom last year. 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.

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 which is in the planning stages.

### **Kinship :**

Kinship options are always considered when a child enters care for the first time and throughout their care experience. Joint work has been completed and is ongoing between the Fostering Service and other teams to ensure consistency with viability assessments and the referral process.

Practice Supervisors and Social Workers from within the service work collaboratively with other social care staff to ensure that all family and their networks are engaged in the care planning process where it is deemed to be safe and in the child/ren's best interests. Practice Supervisors maintain good working relationships between Fostering and the other teams; this continues to be effective as conversations are held early on and consultations are taking place prior to viabilities being concluded and placements being made.

The Government's manifesto committed to review the children's social care system which was launched in March 2021. As part of this review the value and significance of Kinship placements was highlighted by Josh MacAlister in May 2022 who cited the following:

*"For some children, care will always be the best option and Chapters Five and Six of this report set out how we can transform the care system. However, many children should and could safely– with the right help – remain within their family network rather than enter care.*

*Growing up within a family network means retaining a strong sense of identity, culture and place, which young people have told the review is often lost or significantly diluted through care. A child living with their grandparents, aunt or uncle is unlikely to have to rely on social workers to recount their life story, nor grow up with carers who have very different family or cultural values.*

*While foster and residential care will come with an end date, with young people often having to set out in the world alone, staying within a family network, usually known as kinship care, is significantly more likely to mean children grow up with love, and retain those loving relationships throughout their whole life.*

*Kinship is deemed appropriate for children and young people to be supported by the Local Authority with every effort made to identify and assess the family networks to ensure that children and young people can be safely cared for by people who they have an existing relationship with and are known to them."*

In Lincolnshire, the children’s teams continue to work proactively in identifying the family networks by completing thorough viability assessments and having early conversations to support the next steps on assessments.

There are sound working relationships established between Fostering and the children’s teams, regular discussions and joint supervisions take place and are standard practice. These proactive measures support and improve care planning for children and young people and supports the reduction in placement moves by identifying key supports for both the children and their prospective carers, by identifying the right carer at the right time.

Between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022 the following data reflects the work undertaken during this period:

Number of Referrals	SGO	Reg.24 / SGO	Reg. 24 / Connected Person	Private Fostering	Statutory Checks/CAO/38(6)	Private Law SGO
51	13	16	7	4	10	1

The service has seen an increase in the number of referrals this was highlighted in the last quarterly report. These figures demonstrate the Local Authority’s efforts to secure kinship placements for children and reflect the ongoing improvement in practice in exploring and assessing children and young people’s network. Both the children’s teams and in the court, arena continue to ensure all family networks are explored, and alternative placements are seen as the last resort.

Within the Kinship arena there has been a rise in the overall work including the children’s placements under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and subsequent amendments, which progressed to Special Guardianship Orders. The number of SGO assessments has also seen a rise which suggests that all options have been considered within the Court arena. This reflects a practice of planning for permanence for this cohort of children.

For statutory checks, these are undertaken when the children’s social work teams are completing assessments of family members for private law orders such as Child Arrangement Orders or Special Guardianship Orders. The circumstances in which the assessments are being completed outside of public law proceedings, or when the children are not children in care. The number of these has also increased from what was a stable area of work since the last quarter.

With regards to Private fostering assessments, they have risen from 3 referrals in the last quarter, to 7 this quarter.

**Further expansion of Private Fostering Regulations in relation to Ukraine children and Young People only**

In anticipation of the Government's response following the invasion of Ukraine the Homes for Ukraine Scheme will commence in July 2022. This will involve processing applications from eligible children under the age of 18 who have already applied through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to come to the UK without a parent or guardian in carefully defined circumstances.

- Within 24 hours of a child's arrival the council should carry out an initial welfare visit.
- The council will give the child information in Ukrainian and Russian about how to raise any concerns, and how they have a duty to help them if they believe they are at risk.

### **Staying Put:**

During this first quarter, the number of young people in Staying Put currently stands at 44.

Of the 44 young people on Staying Put 7 are attending university, 30 are in full time further education, 1 is in employment, 2 are on Apprenticeships and 2 are on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme. The remaining 2 are currently NEET with both looking for employment. Several of the young people in full time further education also have part-time jobs.

During the first quarter four young people left the Staying Put scheme. Of these 1 moved into a Shared Lives arrangement with their provider, 1 turned 21 and went to live with birth family, 1 moved into a residential hospital placement and 1 gained a further employment opportunity. There were no placement breakdowns in this quarter.

Staying Put remains an active element of the fostering service provision and continues to receive a steady flow of referrals from the Children in Care Social Workers. There are currently 18 young people waiting to join the scheme when they turn 18. Staying Put arrangement continues to be an option discussed at the first CIC review following the young person's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. The decision regarding Staying Put is recorded within the young person's Pathway Plan and is reviewed at each subsequent review.

Carers with children as young as thirteen contact the Staying Put Co-ordinator to find out more and discuss the provision as a future option for the child/children they have in placement.

In summary:

- Staying Put arrangements are put in place in a planned and informed way with fostering and the Staying Put Co-Ordinator working closely alongside Children's teams and to ensure this happens.

- Positive working relationships and ongoing communication flows between the Leaving Care Service and Staying Put. Information is passed between services in a timely manner with joint working taking place to identify and address issues arising within Staying Put.
  - Virtually all young people (except for two) on Staying Put are either in work or education
- and
- There have been no placement breakdowns this quarter.

### **Conclusion:**

It is reassuring that the start of this year has seen the recovery following the Covid pandemic with services returning to follow a pre pandemic trend. There has been a promising start with fostering enquiries and more carers have returned to fully resume their fostering role.

The pressure has remained on the service which has faced unprecedented staffing changes and vacancies which reportedly reflect the national challenges in social care recruitment.

Despite this the services have pulled together to ensure that all fostering households have continued to receive quality services within the regulatory context. Maintaining high quality supervision and support is central to this in the context of maximising and mobilising our placement capacity. Many fostering households continue to make the difference and have despite the enormous challenges in recent years, have demonstrated their commitment to the Lincolnshire children in their care.

The number of Children in Care remains significantly higher during the same period last year and the increase in this figure and reduced bed capacity results in pressures on the placements available and the matches achieved. Placement stability in this quarter has also been marginally impacted with a variety of factors impacting upon this. The focus on the fostering service and wider colleagues is to continue to monitor and intervene early to prevent a placement breakdown and re-establish stability in the best interests of the child.

The service continues to be heartened by the interest from the public 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 increased alongside the use of external placements where necessary. Using external resources has a considerable impact on the resources of the Local Authority.

The continued transformation programme will continue to support the service in maintaining and developing the core offer for fostering households. This in tandem with the key decision to embed the Caring2 Learn Practice Supervisor into the service has continued to pay 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 during this year

Deborah Crawford  
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