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Report of the Director of Children's Services

Report to: Executive Board

Date: 24th June 2015

Subject: Fostering Service Annual Report



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. It is a National minimum standard requirement that the Executive Board receives reports on the management and outcomes of the fostering service. This report covers the period between April 2014 and March 2015.
2. Between January and February 2015, Ofsted inspected Children's Services using the single inspection framework. The overall judgement is that children's services in Leeds are good. Ofsted judged that the services for children who need help and protection are good, the services for children looked after and achieving permanence (including adoption performance and experience and progress of care leavers) are good and the leadership, management and governance was outstanding.
3. This report will refer to comments within the Ofsted Inspection Report which make specific reference to the fostering service.

Recommendations

1. That the Executive Board receive this report and continue to support the work of the fostering service.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report as set out in regulations is to inform the Executive Board about the work undertaken by the fostering service between April 2014 and March 2015. The report updates the Board on activity in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers, fostering panel activity and developments within the service.

2 Background information

- 2.1 A key priority for the Leeds City Council as a child friendly city is to ensure that children can be brought up safely with their birth parents or within their wider extended family network. The fostering service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people who are looked after.
- 2.2 In Leeds the number of children who are looked after continues on a downward trend. However, the numbers of children in the age group 11 – 15 years has increased to the highest level since November 2011. Boys continue to be the larger proportion of those looked after in this age range.

2.3 Number of looked after children

Numbers of looked after children by age group from 2012- 2014					
Age Group	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-17	Total
Oct-2012	458	379	382	200	1419
Mar-2013	432	382	361	202	1377
Feb-2014	378	396	384	193	1351
Mar-2015	296	378	394	188	1256

3 Main issues

- 3.1 A key issue for children who are looked after in Leeds is to ensure that they are in stable and supportive placements and wherever possible live within the local community. Central to this aim is to increase the number of in house foster carer placements.
- 3.1.1 Whilst the placements strategy and sufficiency action plan is to increase the number of 'in house' foster carer placements (aimed at reducing dependence on expensive external placements) some children will always benefit from highly specialist resources and require placements other than in Leeds.

3.2 Fostering service

- 3.2.2 The fostering service comprises of 6 fostering teams; 1 recruitment & assessment that has recently expanded to incorporate work supporting carers for teenagers, including the supported lodgings and staying put carers; 2 geographical supervision teams, 2 kinship care teams (incorporating one assessment team that also has lead responsibility for private fostering arrangements and one support team leading on support to special guardians across the city); plus a specialist team supporting foster carers who provide care for children with a disability, this team having recently taken on responsibility for the expansion of support care/ child minding scheme across the city, providing support for children on the edge of care.
- 3.2.3 The fostering service works closely with the placement service, a multi-disciplinary team, managed within the commissioning service. The placement service finds foster placements, residential placements and supported accommodation for young people leaving care. The service manager provides professional supervision to the manager of this team.

3.3 Recruitment of foster carers

- 3.3.1 The recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a key priority for the service. Over the last year there has been a change in our recruitment of foster carers, to respond to the changing profile of children in care. The fostering service has undertaken more targeted recruitment for carers able to look after sibling groups of three, teenagers and children with more complex needs. The team is not currently recruiting carers who wish to foster children under the age of 10 years, or with only one bedroom to offer due to a sufficiency of supply of foster carers for younger children. This is kept under regular review to ensure that the service can respond flexibly and swiftly to emerging changes in the population of children looked after.
- 3.3.2 Whilst recruiting carers for teenagers is more challenging the service are continuing to target recruitment for older children. Over the last two years the service has participated in a Department for Education project (DFE) with a consortium of other agencies including Calderdale and two independent fostering agencies looking at innovative ways to recruit carers for teenagers and retain foster carer. There is a regional and national shortage of placements for teenagers in foster care and Leeds is hosting a regional teenage fostering recruitment event during fostering fortnight at the First Direct Arena, in order to raise the profile of teenage fostering amongst the general public.
- 3.3.3 In addition to recruiting new carers, the service has been exploring ways to increase the confidence of our existing carers in looking after teenagers and ensuring that we are able to use our foster carer work force in the most efficient way. This has included the recruitment team manager attending fostering liaison groups to talk to foster carer representatives about the current needs of the service and working with the placements service on profiling events to engage foster carers with vacancies to think about considering older children.

- 3.3.4 A number of Leeds carers attended a teenage awareness event in Calderdale (one of the DFE consortium partners) to develop awareness and confidence in undertaking teenage fostering. This training program will be delivered to Leeds foster carers in the next few months.
- 3.3.5 In order to expand the knowledge base and confidence of foster carers in taking on a diverse range of children the service have undertaken 2 information and training events relating to the needs of young people who are deemed 'trafficked children' or unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. In addition, an awareness course was attended by 9 fostering households to promote awareness of the needs of children from Polish backgrounds and it is anticipated that further awareness raising courses for Roma children and children from West Africa will also be delivered in the coming year. These events promote awareness of the needs of children from these backgrounds who require foster placements and have resulted in the service meeting children's needs locally.
- 3.3.6 The recruitment team has continued to broaden its remit through 2014 and into 2015 regarding foster carer retention. One of the fostering advisors continues to work closely with other council services and the business development officer to develop fostering retention events, offers and discounts for foster carers. These have been very positively received by foster carers. This work is expanding to develop opportunities for all looked after children and is a focus of further work for the coming year.
- 3.4 Expressions of interest
- 3.4.1 The recruitment team advertise current targeted areas of need on the foster4leeds website – we are currently recruiting carers for;
- Sibling groups aged 0 – 10 years (three spare bedrooms are required)
 - 11 – 17 year olds
 - Children with a disability or complex health needs
 - Parent and child assessment scheme
 - Support care/ child minding scheme
 - Supported lodgings providers
- 3.4.2 This targeting recruitment has resulted in a reduction in registrations of interest and applications (given those wanting to foster babies and young children are not applying). However, the number of foster carers approved with the service remains the same.

3.4.3 Expressions of interest

	Apr 2011 - Mar 2012	Apr 2012 - Mar 2013	Apr 2013 - Mar 2014	Apr 2014 - Mar 2015
Apr	27	53	46	72
May	21	98	69	80
June	29	76	63	48
July	37	77	58	47
Aug	45	52	53	35
Sept	21	68	94	56
Oct	41	69	66	57
Nov	48	58	64	31
Dec	41	45	38	27
Jan	67	82	111	73
Feb	38	67	53	54
Mar	108	72	57	35
Total	523	817	772	615

3.4.4 Throughout the summer and autumn of 2014, the number of applicants in assessment dropped which filtered through to the lower number of approvals in 2014 (compared to the previous 2 years). Since the last quarter of 2014, the number of assessments has been steadily increasing (16 in stage 1 and 15 in stage 2 at the end of the March 2015). During these quieter periods the team has undertaken a number of kinship care assessments to relieve the pressure on that part of the service.

3.4.5 The service has embedded a clear and consistent response to all expressions of interest in fostering offering a prompt response and initial visit within 7 days.

3.5 Timely assessments

3.5.1 Assessments are offered to prospective foster carers through dedicated social workers from the recruitment team. The majority of assessments are completed within the required timescales, with the exception being only a small minority of kinship care assessments. This challenge reflects the very tight timescales the kinship care assessment team work towards given the requirements from court.

3.6 Approval and Deregistration of carers

3.6.1 There has been a total of 96 house hold approvals in the last year (see Appendix A). These incorporate 44 mainstream and 51 kinship carer households plus a change of approval for a holiday carer to a mainstream carer. 18 foster carers moved over from Independent Fostering agencies this year.

- 3.6.2 The total number of de- registrations was 50 kinship foster carers and 46 mainstream and family placement carers.
- 3.6.3 The total of carers registered at the end of March 2015 remained static compared to 2014 at 681.
- 3.6.4 The retention of carers is important and the Local Authority is required to report any carers leaving the service to the fostering panel, following consideration of the reasons the panel formally removes the names of carers from the register.
- 3.6.4 96 households were de registered. 35 households were de registered because they continued to care for children under a different legal order (Special Guardianship or Adoption Order); 3 because children returned home and 5 because the child had reached 18 years of age. These 43 de- registrations represent 45% of the total number of carers de registered, resulting in positive outcomes for children (children achieving permanency through other orders). This ensures the service is safely and appropriately reducing the numbers of children who are looked after.
- 3.6.5 In addition, these figures included 10 who had retired from the service and 27 had resigned due to a change of their personal circumstances; 4 registrations were terminated as the carer was deemed unsuitable to foster; 2 were inactive and 2 due to ill health / death. One kinship registration was terminated following a disruption and 6 kinship registrations were ended as the child/ren had moved to other placements.
- 3.6.5 No carers resigned during this year to go to either an Independent Fostering Agency or another Local Authority.
- 3.6.6 There are currently 416 mainstream and family placement carers looking after children on a short term or long term basis. This figure excludes short breaks and kinship carers.
- 3.6.8 The number of support care and short break carers is 66 – which represents a reduction from last year 69 (2 were de registered when they achieved SGO's on children placed). It is anticipated that these services will expand during the coming year, with an additional staff member in the team.
- 3.6.9 There are 44 carers linked to specific foster carers to provide holiday care for their foster children only. This enables children to remain within their extended family network whilst carers take a break from their caring role.

3.7 Placement Service

- 3.7.1 The Placement Service is now managed within the Commissioning Service. However, professional responsibility for decision making and supervision regarding their case work remains with the social work service. The department is committed to using the capacity of its foster carer work force in the most effective way.
- 3.7.2 Weekly placement meetings are held with the fostering team managers and residential managers to consider the placement needs of children and to identify

potential links with available foster carers. The Ofsted inspection report commented on the clear consideration given to the needs of individual children and where possible for siblings needing to live together, noting 'Evidence of innovative methods of family finding to ensure children and young people are matched with carer - and where the children's wishes and feelings are given consideration' (Page 25) .

- 3.7.3 Long term matching events have continued to identify options for children awaiting long term placements. The attendance of placement team members as panel members at permanency panels has been beneficial in terms of early permanency planning and consideration to potential links to foster carers. In the past year there has been a reduction from 47 to 20 young people with a plan for long term/permanency within a fostering setting. Timescales in identifying appropriate long term placements has also fallen significantly within expectations that children and young people will have a placement identified within 12 weeks of the referral.
- 3.7.4 Within children's services it is widely acknowledged that residential care is a temporary measure in order to provide a period of settlement and positive intervention with a view to a move back to a family environment either rehabilitation home, a family member or foster care where appropriate. Given the success in increasing placement stability, the 'practice family model' (whereby a child in residential care is gradually offered increased positive experiences within family life – but without the intensity or expectation that the carers are going to be a 'forever family') has been introduced. 5 young people have benefited from this approach and are now residing in long term foster care and all five have opted to live with their 'practice family' on a full time and permanent basis. The plan is to implement the model on a wider basis and the use of Multi systemic therapy will assist in developing this further.
- 3.7.6 Over the last year 75 children have been placed or have an identified long term placement and are waiting introductions. A further 52 young people have been matched at permanency panel with a foster carer on a long term basis and some of these are likely to progress to special guardianship over time.

3.8 Kinship Care

- 3.8.1 The Kinship Care service continues to grow as the wider use of family group conferences has led to an increase in children who are placed within their extended family through kinship fostering arrangements or through Special Guardianship Orders/ Child arrangement orders. The service is made up of 2 teams; one for carer assessment, one for carer support.
- 3.8.2 The kinship assessment team has gained an additional Advanced Practitioner post to help drive up the quality of kinship assessments across the city and work more closely with social work teams. Another 1.5 social work posts have been moved to this team from other parts of the looked after children's service to meet demand. In addition to the permanent members of staff, sessional workers undertake assessments on an ad-hoc basis as the demand for assessments dictates. The demand for assessments is high – when there is available capacity,

supervising social workers from the recruitment team have also undertaken kinship assessments.

- 3.8.3 During the past year the team has had 263 requests to undertake viability assessments (in conjunction with the child's social worker) and 172 requests for full assessments to be undertaken. This is almost double the previous year and will need to be kept under review to ensure that the team continues to meet tight timescales set by the court.
- 3.8.4 The team has been working on a new assessment framework which will also cover the information required by the court to apply for a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order as well as a Care Order. This assessment framework will reduce timescales and avoid the need for a separate Regulation 21 report to be written as part of the application to court for a relevant order.
- 3.8.5 Private fostering responsibility is also located within the assessment team. This area of work has expanded and there are currently 32 private fostering arrangements which are being monitored. The Ofsted inspection report noted that the 'identification, assessment and approval of children in private fostering situation is being well addressed and that progress is now better than the national average with the specialist workers being pro-active and tenacious in maintaining compliance with regulations.' A separate annual report on private fostering was presented at the Leeds Safeguarding Board in May 2015.
- 3.8.6 The kinship support team supervise kinship foster carers and Special Guardians. This supervision and support extends to kinship carers living outside Leeds boundaries including as far away as Scotland, London and Cornwall.
- 3.8.7 The social work assistants offer practical support to kinship carers and in particular to special guardians. Given the increasing numbers of special guardians (there are around 500 guardianship arrangements within the city) the team has had an additional social work post and a social work assistant post moved into the team to meet demand. Given the growth of this work we will ensure that the resource continues to support kinship carers.
- 3.8.8 During the past year, special guardianship support workers have held a monthly support group working closely with the grandparents association and have introduced an annual review of support plans for special guardianship carers.
- 3.8.9 As part of the DFE consortium project on the recruitment and retention of foster carers Leeds have piloted the "Mockingbird" peer support model in an aim to look at creative ways of supporting kinship foster carers. A 'hub carer' has been identified who has been working with seven kinship carers and their children to reduce isolation, provide family activity days and support and providing respite care for those families who are experiencing some difficulties. This has been very well received and the outcomes of the work to date were presented at a DFE event in London. The DFE has awarded funding for Leeds to expand the "Mockingbird" peer support model to support an additional hub carer to support kinship carers over the coming year and to expand the use of this for foster carers caring for teenagers.

- 3.8.10 An annual kinship newsletter is shared with over 600 kinship carers and a wider kinship reference group has been set up, as a sub group of the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership, in conjunction with the third sector and universal and targeted services. The aim of this group is to raise awareness of kinship arrangements across the city and to ensure that these arrangements are effectively supported.

3.9 City Wide Community Support and caring for disabled children

- 3.9.1 The home base sitting service which had been part of the disabled children's fostering service moved to the complex needs service. The service for children with a disability now comprises of 2 parts; the fostering service where children with a disability are cared for on a long term basis for foster carers and the short breaks service. The children with a disability service has established close links with the housing service, occupational therapy and nursing services to ensure children with a physical disability can be placed and supported within fostering households.
- 3.9.2 The short breaks, community support service, provides commissioned packages of short breaks to children and families who require longer term, intensive support with a focus on building parenting skills and strategies. These packages will be based on an assessment of need, identified outcomes and agreed timeframes and will aim to support transition to targeted or universal Short Breaks support. This process will also be utilised to support transition out of residential care.
- 3.9.4 The fostering service is committed to promoting permanence through Special Guardianship and adoption for disabled children and 3 Special Guardianship Orders were progressed this year.
- 3.9.5 The transitions policy for disabled children in foster care (children on SGO or formally looked after) has been agreed and fits well with the wider Staying Put policy for looked after children.
- 3.9.6 The Community Support Care service (like the short breaks service) is a distinctive yet city wide community based provision. This scheme has been very successful in providing support and preventing family breakdown for a number of children and preventing children entering care.
- 3.9.8 This part of the service has also expanded to include a number of child minders who offer intervention and caring for vulnerable children in the 0 – 4 age range who are most at risk of being received into care. Parents have found this scheme particularly helpful and have benefited from the parenting advice and support provided by their child's child minder. Both the support care and child minding scheme are being expanded across the city to support children to remain within their birth families.

3.10 Services for teenagers and young adults

- 3.10.1 A key priority for the service has been the recruitment of foster carers for teenagers given the number of children requiring placements in the 11 to 15 age

range has risen. 51 young people aged 14 and 15 have become looked after in the past 12 months.

- 3.10.2 The teenage fostering stakeholder group was convened to look at the needs of children entering care as teenagers and a number of services are being developed to meet these needs. 3 supervising social workers have been identified who will provide more intensive support to carers taking teenagers who are new to care. This support will include the development of 2 peer support hubs to offer comprehensive support to these carers. These young people are often identified as presenting with challenging behaviours, including being at risk of child sexual exploitation and going missing.
- 3.10.3 2 foster carers have been recruited to provide PACE beds for young people who have been arrested and are undergoing police questioning. This will provide an immediate response and prevent the need for young people to be kept in police custody.
- 3.10.4 The supportive lodgings came back in house in December 2014 and is being developed to assist young people who have been in the care of the local authority or who have presented as homeless aged 16 – 21. Supported placements are tailored to the needs of the young person to assist them to prepare for independence, whilst living within a safe and caring family environment.
- 3.10.5 2 social work assistants have been recruited to offer practical advice and support to the supportive lodgings providers and also to 'Staying Put only' former foster carers who will not continue to foster beyond their staying put commitment to the young person.
- 3.10.6 The number of Staying Put arrangements (where young people can continue to live with their carers beyond 18) has risen from 8 in March 2013 to 35 in March 2015. The Staying Put policy is now becoming embedded and training has been provided by a specialist welfare benefits worker and the lead for fostering service development to all personal advisors, 13+ teams' social work staff and fostering supervising social workers. Briefing sessions on Staying Put are also being undertaken at the carers support groups across the city.
- 3.10.7 The Ofsted inspection judgement for care leavers was rated as 'good'. This has included ensuring that there is a wide range of accommodation available to meet the needs of care leavers. Ofsted noted that the 'Staying Put' policy is clear and foster carers are positive about the scheme which is having a significant impact in providing improved outcomes for care leavers.
- 3.10.8 A focus on the development of out of office hours support is being progressed for carers which includes peer advice through the fostering advice line offered by the Leeds Foster Care Association; targeted outreach from a residential children's home; the development of 2 hub carers for a number of teenage carers and the development of links with the missing children's and CSE hub. The out of hours Emergency Duty Team will also continue to be available where carers require a social work response if a critical situation arises.

3.11 Support for foster carers and their children

- 3.11.1 Two geographical teams provide support and supervision to foster carers. All foster carers have an allocated qualified supervising social worker.
- 3.11.2 In addition to the individual work undertaken by the supervising social worker, the service runs a range of support groups across the city. These groups allow an opportunity for carers to access a range of information and discussion about specific topics as well as developing peer support from other carers with similar challenges and needs.
- 3.11.3 The Parent and Child scheme benefits from support from the therapeutic social work team and a child psychologist. This year 16 child and family assessments have been undertaken, these are intensive and highly supported placements. Birth parents are given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to care for their child in an environment which promotes safe parental capacity. This service is very much in demand. This year 6 parent and child assessments resulted in the child remaining with their parent. There are plans to undertake a review of the parents and child service over the next three months to ensure that optimal outcomes for children and parents are achieved.
- 3.11.4 Research has shown that placements are more successful when there is a positive framework of support in place for the children of foster carers. 'Kidz Foster2' is a support group for birth children of foster carers who offer regular forums for the birth children of foster carers to undertake activities together and discuss topics related to living with fostered children. Topics have included; house rules, safer care, internet safety and making safe choices. An evaluation of the group has been undertaken (on average 11 young people attend these groups). The evaluation highlighted that the groups were 'fun, interesting and well planned' and the children enjoyed meeting other children in the same situation.
- 3.11.5 The fostering service has a referral route to the Therapeutic social work team and the Leeds Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which provides therapeutic support to children in foster placements and consultation to carers.
- 3.11.7 The weekly fostering surgery which foster carers can access directly has continued to be well utilised. Placement stability is evaluated as high for those carers attending the surgery. 155 carers attended the fostering surgery and there were 216 referrals to the Therapeutic social work team for therapeutic support for young people.
- 3.11.8 The service also offers training and a support group for foster carers using the 'nurtured heart' approach. A total of 40 carers have attended three groups this year. Additionally, 18 carers have attended the KEEP program. Both courses offer carers strategies for managing their own stress as well as offering strategies on managing complex and challenging behaviours.

- 3.11.9 Placement stability is good – and OFSTED reported that children are well looked after in foster care. Carers report that they are positive about the support they receive and feel part of the professional team supporting the child.

3.12 Training

- 3.12.1 All prospective foster carers in assessment undertake the 3 day 'skills to foster' course and pre-approval 'taster' course. Foster carers are deemed by Ofsted to be well assessed and carers generally speak positively about training received.
- 3.12.2 The training budget 2014 – 2015 was significantly reduced due to the need to make budget savings. The work force development team has had regular meetings with the training steering group (which has supervising social workers and foster carer representation) to prioritise training and identify some training which could be delivered in house to reduce training expenses.
- 3.12.3 The workforce development team have undertaken 'training the trainers' with a number of supervising social workers to enable them to develop and deliver relevant training to foster carers, including via the carer support groups.
- 3.12.4 A number of E learning courses have been posted on the Leeds fostering website to enable carers access to the variety of mediums to develop their skills and knowledge.

3.13 Education, health and leisure

- 3.13.1 Foster carers have a key role in promoting children's education and this includes having the confidence and skills to liaise and negotiate with a wide range of people; educational psychologists, school staff, teachers, etc. A training course developed within the DFE consortium for foster carers around education and was attended by a number of Leeds foster carers. The virtual school for looked after children provides advice to carers regarding children's educational needs, this includes access to children's tuition, where required.
- 3.13.2 Leeds Metropolitan (Beckett) University has provided information events for foster carers to raise awareness of the educational support which is available to care leavers and guiding young people to post 16 learning has been delivered to foster carers, supervising social workers and personal advisors.
- 3.13.3 Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision. An extensive range of activity days have been offered to foster carers and their families which has included theatre and sporting events. The corporate offer to foster carers has been implemented and there is free access to a range of sports and leisure activities.
- 3.13.4 The looked after health teams work closely with the fostering service. There is swift access to health care services for all looked after children's services and health needs assessments robustly address children's health needs. These include substance misuse services, sexual health and therapeutic assistance. Named children's nurses or health visitors are available to assist carers in

completing the annual SDQ (strength and difficulties questionnaire) which is used to report on the emotional health and well-being of children in care.

3.14 Fostering Panel

- 3.14.1 Leeds has 4 fostering panels with 3 independent panel chairs. All panels are now held at Kernel House, the new accommodation for the fostering and adoption service in the East of the City. A new booking system for panel items ensures a balance between kinship assessments, mainstream assessments and fostering reviews are spread equally across the 4 panels. This results in more balanced panels and a reduction in all day meetings.
- 3.14.3 Panel has dealt with over 90 de registrations. The majority of these are uncontested, many being where SGOs have been awarded to carers. Foster carers have the opportunity to attend the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) where they are dissatisfied with decisions made by the department about their registration as foster carers. In this period there has been one referral to the IRM. The outcome is still awaited.
- 3.14.4 This year has seen the full introduction of electronic paperwork for panel, with panel papers made available on Sharepoint and all panel members having laptops or Ipad access. Initial teething problems have now been overcome and panels are working smoothly using the system.
- 3.14.5 The overall quality of panel reports remains good or very good with a few exceptions compromised by late responses from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). There are occasions when there is a discrepancy in review paperwork between recommendations of the original panel and what is recorded on the review forms. This is being addressed with the fostering review team.
- 3.14.6 Feedback from foster carers regarding their experience of attending panel and timeliness of receiving their confirmation letter is rated as very good in 67% of responses, good in 27% and satisfactory in 6%. The feedback comments from carers suggest a high level of consistency of a positive experience across the 4 panels.

3.15 Complaints and allegations

- 3.15.1 There were 13 complaints this year within the fostering service. 7 complaints were from foster carers. These relate to the social workers attitude or behaviours and one was about a finance issue. 2 were upheld at stage 1, 2 more locally resolved and 2 were partially upheld at stage 2/3. There have been 6 complaints about foster carers regarding attitude or conduct. 3 were not upheld, 2 were partially upheld and 1 was locally resolved.
- 3.15.2 Learning from complaints is fed back to the service and discussed within the fostering management group or with the relevant management team.
- 3.15.3 There were 61 notifications to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). It is important to note that a notification in itself does not equate to a substantial

allegation. There is a range of possible outcomes the LADO service uses, which includes; substantiated, unsubstantiated, unfounded, malicious and incomplete.

- 3.15.4 Of these notifications, 36 resulted in convening an allegations management meeting to ensure that the children were safeguarded and appropriate action taken. In terms of outcomes, 18 were substantiated which resulted in interventions such as additional training, re assessment and a return to panel. 4 of these foster carers were deregistered with referrals to the fostering disclosure and barring service. Major interventions are occurring at the most serious end of the range of foster carer harm, but this is around 1% of the total.
- 3.15.5 The LADO attends management meetings to the fostering service on a quarterly basis to discuss issues raised through the allegations process. These discussions inform service development and best practice.
- 3.15.6 When an allegation is made, foster carers can access an independent advice and advocacy service.
- 3.16 Quality Assurance Information
 - 3.16.1 The Fostering Panel offers feedback to supervising social workers with regards to the quality of the reports presented to fostering panel. The standards are generally of a high quality and the feedback is welcomed by staff.
 - 3.16.2 The Fostering Review Team is now established and the Fostering Reviewing Officers (FRO's) are managed within the Integrated Safeguarding Unit. The FRO's undertake all foster carer reviews and ensure feedback for both the supervising social worker and foster carer about their work. There has been a vacancy which resulted in slight delays in completing all the annual reviews within timescales this year; this has now been appointed to. There is a commitment to the FRO's attending fostering managers meetings on a regular basis to discuss themes emerging from the reviews. A FRO will also attend the fostering training group in the coming year to develop links between reviewing outcomes and training implementation.
 - 3.16.3 As part of the Quality Assurance and Performance framework, there have been 129 fostering file audits undertaken this year, representing 20% of fostering house-holds. This framework monitors key service requirements to ensure statutory compliance and good practice standards. Future developments will include the direct engagement of supervising social workers in the case file audit process. This will enable discussion with the workers concerned and provide direct feedback on how files are maintained and practice is evidenced.

3.17 Service Planning 2014/ 2015

- 3.17.1 The key priority of the service remains the recruitment and retention of foster carers and further developing the capacity of carers to provide teenage placements.
- 3.17.2 The service will be undertaking a review of the parent and child assessment scheme. There have been increasing requests for these types of placements during the past year.
- 3.17.3 The implications of the Care Planning and Fostering Regulations 2015 which came into force in April 2015 will be reviewed, and the training requirements of foster carers will be addressed to ensure they can meet the requirements of these changes.
- 3.17.4 The DFE has awarded funding for Leeds fostering (one of eight fostering services) to develop the Mockingbird peer support model approach in Leeds. This is an innovative and research informed approach aiming to improve outcomes for fostered children / young people, support for carers and services.
- 3.17.5 The service will be developing training and support structures to embed the 'Reunification' program aiming to return children from fostering and residential placements to family care where appropriate.

4. **Corporate Considerations**

4.1 **Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 Foster carers meet bi monthly with officers and councillors via the Foster Carer Liaison Group (FCLG) to discuss areas of service development and any issues of concern. Foster carer representation and stakeholder involvement in new service development remains a key principle of the service.
- 4.1.2 The Leeds Foster Care Association (LFCA) plays an important part in supporting foster carers in Leeds and the service works closely with the LFCA to ensure carers are supported in understanding their role.

4.2 **Equality and Diversity/Cohesion and Integration**

The fostering services Equality Impact Assessment has been updated and is attached to this report.

4.3 **Council Policies and Best Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 This report links to the Best Council Plan Objective of a Child friendly city and the Children and young people's plan identifies children who are looked after as one of the three priority 'Obsessions.'

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 None identified in this report

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to information and Call In

4.5.1 None identified in this report.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 It is a regulatory requirement of the local authority that this report is prepared and presented to the Executive Board of the Council.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The recruitment, retention of carers and development of the fostering service will continue to be addressed.

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the Executive Board receives this report and continues to support the work of the fostering service and promote best outcomes for children.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

Appendix A

Annual Panel Stats -																			
April 2014 to end of March 2015		Kinship	Mainstream Fostering							Family Placement									
		Kinship / Level 1	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1/2	Supported	Support Care	Holiday	Total Mainstream	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2		Short Breaks	Holiday	Total Family Placement			
Figures at April 1st 2014		154	17	47	12	0	37	43	42	58	3	2		33	5	10			68
Total New Approvals		51	6	15	11	5	0	0	37	2	0	1		4	0	7			95
Total Deregistrations		50	10	4	15	1	2	5	37	1	0	2		6	0	9			96
Progressions/Change of level/ Non-panel approvals		0	0	13	-13	0	0	1	1	0	0	0		0	0	0			1
Nett Gain		1	-4	24	-17	4	-2	-4	1	1	0	-1		-2	0	-2			0
Total at end of March 2015		155	16	71	11	4	35	39	42	59	3	1		31	5	99			68

Appendix A continued

Reason for Deregistration																			
	Kinship / Level 1		Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2	Level 1 Supported	Support Care	Holiday	Total Mainstream		Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2		Short Breaks	Holiday	Total Family Placement		Grand Total
Child Adopted By Carer	1				1				1								0		2
Child SGO By Carer	28				1				1				1		2		3		32
Child RO By Carer	1								0								0		1
Child Moved To Another Placement	6								0						1		1		7
Child Returned Home	3								0								0		3
Retired - General	1		4		4				8						1		1		10
Retired - Child Reached 18	5								0								0		5
Resigned - Change of Circumstance	0		2				2	4	8						1		1		9
Resigned - Gone To IFA	0								0								0		0
Resigned - Gone To Another LA	0								0								0		0
Resigned - Other	2		1	3	7	1		1	13		1		1		1		3		18
Terminated - Unsuitable	1		2		1				3								0		4
Terminated - Inactive	1				1				1								0		2
Terminated - Carer Ill Health/Died	0		1	1					2								0		2
Terminated - Disruption	1								0								0		1
Terminated - Allegation	0								0								0		0
Total	50		10	4	15	1	2	5	37		1	0	2		6	0	9		96