

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to Executive Board

Date: 16th May 2013

Subject: Fostering Service Annual report

Appendix A



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 requirement of the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 that the Executive Board of the council receives a written report on the management and outcomes of the fostering service. This report provides an overview of fostering service activity from April 2012 to March 2013.
2. The fostering service was inspected by OFSTED in June 2010 and was rated as "Good". A further inspection is due in June 2013, although this may not take place due to the new inspection regime being tested during this period.

Recommendations

3. That the Executive Board receive this report and continues to support the work of the fostering service to ensure our fostered children receive the best possible support.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1. The purpose of the report as set out in regulation is to inform the Executive Board about the work undertaken by the fostering service between April 2012 and March 2013. The report provides the Executive Board with information on the work of the service; its compliance with the national minimum standards; the implementation and progression of children's care plans; the service offered to foster carers and outcomes for children. It updates the Board on activity in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers, fostering panel activity and developments within the service.
- 1.2. The report also highlights national developments in fostering practice and provides information on the profile of children in care in Leeds.
- 1.3. Over the past year the fostering service has been working in partnership with foster carers to review the current fee and allowance scheme. The new arrangements are currently being finalised and will be the subject of a report to the Executive Board in July.

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 if at all possible. The Fostering service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the city in line with the priorities outlined in the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan 2010-13, as agreed with partners and with children and young people themselves.
- 2.2. The Fostering service was inspected in June 2010 and was rated as Good, within the current OfSTED inspection framework. However, in Leeds the number of looked after children has stabilised since this time compared with other core cities. The age profile of looked after children in Leeds, however, has undergone considerable change during the last 18 months with very young children entering care. This is consistent with good social work practice in the early identification and clear parenting assessment although the numbers at this younger age are unusually high compared with other authorities. If a child requires care other than by their parents, the best outcomes are achieved by early assessment and a placement plan which assists them to have a permanent alternative family as soon as possible in their life.
- 2.3. It is also planned that we will further reduce the use of external providers through significantly increasing recruitment and improved retention of foster carers.

Table 1: Numbers of looked after children by age group from 2011- present

Age Group	0-4	5-10	11-15	16 -17
Jan 2011	344 (24%)	359 (25%)	459 (32%)	272 (19%)
Nov 2011	429 (30%)	371 (26%)	396 (28%)	211 (18%)
Mar 2012	447 (31%)	385 (26%)	357 (25%)	203 (14%)
Oct 12	458 (32%)	379 (27%)	382 (27%)	200 (14%)
Mar 13	432 (32%)	382 (28%)	361 (26%)	202 (14%)

3. Main issues

- 3.1. Foster carers take children and young people into their homes, often at very short notice and work to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child in care. A key component of the vision for looked after children in Leeds is to ensure all our looked after children are in stable and supportive placements, wherever possible, within their local community and supported by all the resources of the council, working in partnership to support the child. Central to the placements strategy and sufficiency action plan is to rapidly increase the number of “in house” foster care placements. Some children will always benefit from highly specialist resources or require placement other than in Leeds but the vast majority of our children benefit from good quality in house placements with Leeds foster carers.
- 3.2. The national profile of fostering remains very high and the Leeds fostering service has been involved with the Department for Education in considering some of the issues and challenges facing fostering services nationally. The government is currently undertaking a period of consultation on suggested amendments to the assessment process of foster carers, delegated authority and fostering panels. It is likely that in the next three months, the government plans in this area of work may become clearer.

3.3. Fostering service

- 3.3.1. The fostering service in Leeds has grown and in the last few months we have had formal agreement to develop a second kinship care team in order to develop support services for kinship carers and special guardians. The fostering service now consists of six teams: two supervisory teams, two kinship care teams (and developing support for special guardians), a specialist team providing carers for children with a disability and the recruitment and assessment team.
- 3.3.2. The multi-disciplinary placements service moved out of the responsibility of the fostering and adoption service last summer and is now managed within the commissioning service. This service finds foster placements, residential placements and supported accommodation for children and young people and care leavers. The professional responsibility for decision making and supervision regarding the case work remains with the social work service.

3.4. **Recruitment of foster carers**

The service has increased the marketing and advertising budget over the last year and the new 'Foster 4 Leeds' brand and the fostering sub- site has been very effective in channelling expressions of interest. Print advertising has generally ceased, with the team choosing instead to work with newspapers on articles and features about the positive benefits of fostering, which served the purpose of free advertising, particularly during key times such as the national 'Fostering Fortnight' in May 2012. The focus has turned instead to the online presence of the service, funding a period of Google sponsorship to ensure the prominence of the service in online searches, alongside the more traditional methods of advertising through radio and bus campaigns and targeted information and recruitment fairs events.

3.4.2. Video footage of carers and their experience for fostering and adopting is key within the website in attracting carers as well as encouragement and support from the lead member and deputy director to prospective carers and adopters. The social media presence went live in September with facebook and twitter enabling a higher Google listing now that the sponsorship period has ended. The 'Foster a Banner' campaign has been launched during the summer to spread the message to as wide an audience as possible and encourages local organisations, companies and website owners to 'foster' or 'adopt' a banner advertisement, and place it on their own websites.

3.4.3. The need to continue to develop the marketing and advertising is extremely important to ensure that the service remains competitive with Independent Fostering Providers. The recently agreed white rose framework will see further providers who have not traditionally recruited in Leeds begin to increase their marketing in this area which may impact upon in house foster carer recruitment.

3.4.4. **Links with business**

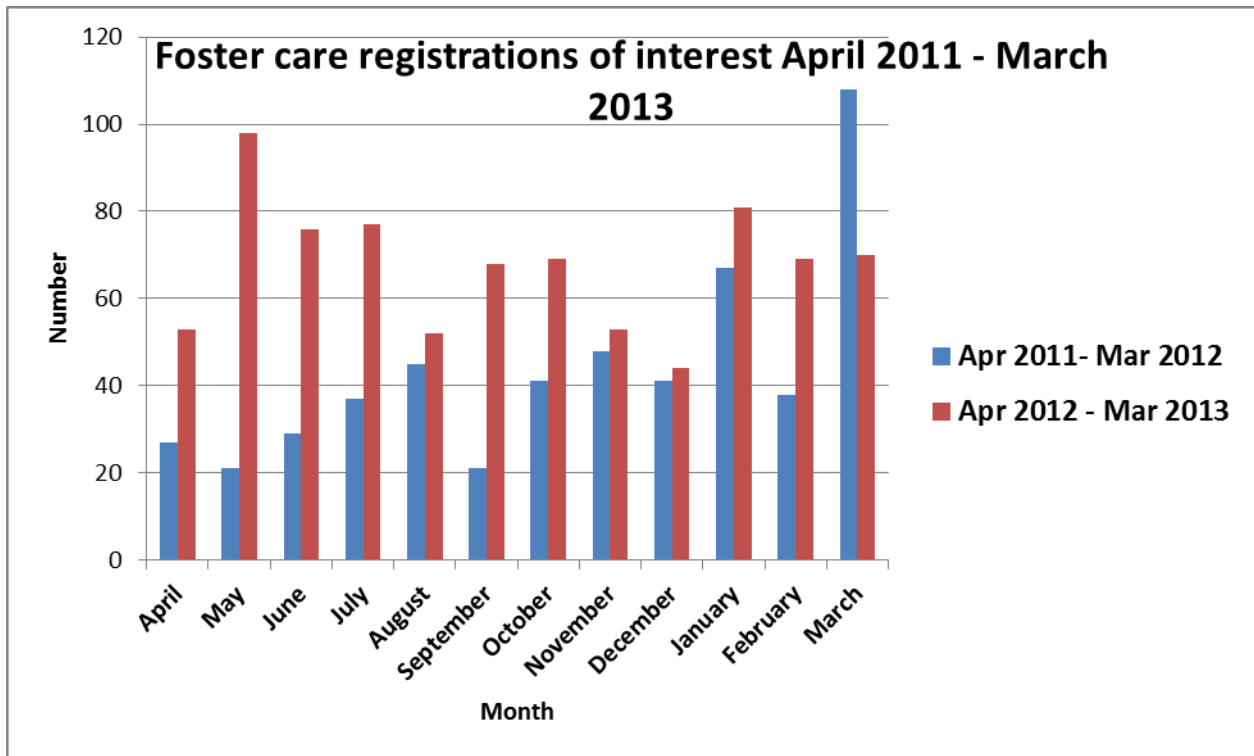
The service has looked to develop relationship with businesses and other council departments in aiming to recruit local foster carers and to provide a core offer in attracting carers to the service. Last month the Executive Board agreed a corporate offer for foster carers and care leavers agreeing a free access to a range of services and facilities across the city. The work on the implementation of this is underway with a planned start date of September 2013.

3.4.5. The links with businesses is developing and the first official partnership with Leeds Rugby was signed by Councillor Blake and CEO Gary Hetherington in May 2012. The links with businesses and other directorates has been difficult to progress within existing resources and a dedicated member of staff is due to come into post on the 1st June to progress the wider links with businesses.

3.4.6. **Expressions of Interest**

Over the last year the service has embedded a clear and consistent response for all expressions of interest in fostering, competing with the independent sector through an immediate positive response and initial visit offered within 7 days. This has had an effect in ensuring a prompt and responsive service for enquires during office hours. This service was extended for a period of four months to cover the

evenings up to 9.30pm on a pilot basis. This has had minimal impact on the expressions of interest and is currently under review.



- 3.4.7. In 2010/11, on average the service received 16 expressions of interest per month from potential foster carers. This increased to an average of 48 per month in 2011/12 and to an average of 67 this last year.
- 3.4.8. Research by the Fostering Network suggests that there is a high dropout rate from initial interest to approval. This reflects the fact that the decision to become a foster carer is a significant one and understanding the full implications leads to a number of people withdrawing their interest. However a percentage of those that show an interest clearly go on to become foster carers and increasing the level of interest is the first step to increasing the number of foster carers in Leeds.
- 3.4.9. **Timely Assessments**
- More timely assessments are being offered to prospective carers, through dedicated social workers to carry out assessments within the recruitment team. Capacity within the team has increased through the use of 12 independent social workers who undertake fostering assessments on a sessional basis. This is both a cost effective and a flexible means of ensuring that we have the ability to respond quickly to all expressions of interest and means that staff costs reflect the actual work undertaken.
- 3.4.10. This has resulted in a three-month target for completing assessments, and four months for a recommendation of approval from the fostering panel; the National Minimum Standards state this process should be completed within eight months. A

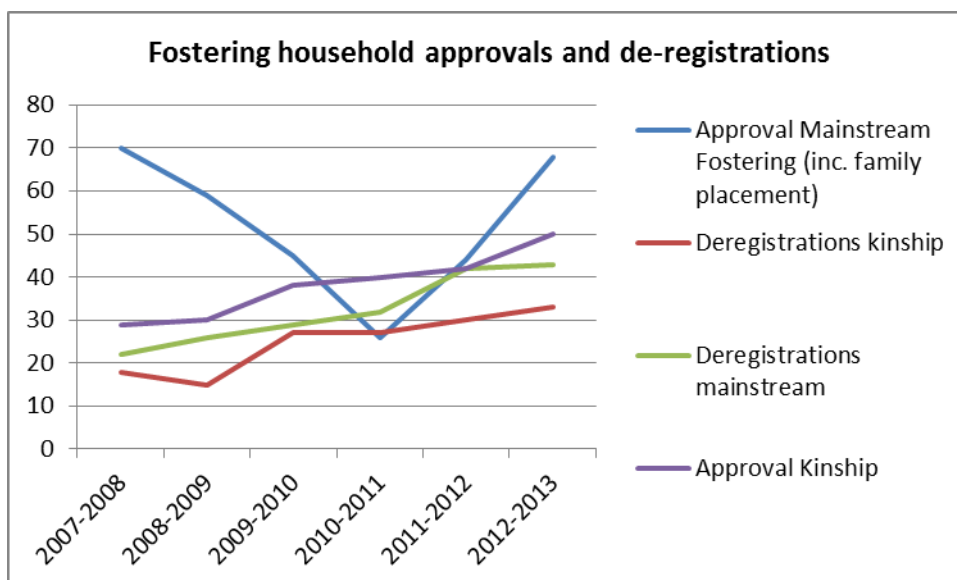
cross section of approvals over the last year shows that on average assessments are being completed to panel within 18 weeks if you exclude 3 assessments that took over 25 weeks due to the issues outside the control of the fostering service, relating to carer circumstances.

3.5. Approval and de-registrations of carers

3.5.1. In the last year 118 foster carers were approved by the service 68 of whom were mainstream foster carers and 50 of whom were kinship carers. This is a significant increase on previous years as shown in the graph below. Retention of foster carers is as important as recruitment and local authorities are required to maintain a register of foster carers which includes a requirement to report any carers leaving the service to a fostering panel. The panel considers the reasons and formally removes the names of carers from the register.

3.5.2. In 2012/13, 76 foster carers ceased fostering. Out of these 11 carers retired; 12 carers resigned due to other circumstances; 1 carer moved to an Independent Fostering Agency and 19 carers continue to care for a child but under a different order. This latter figure is a good outcome for children and enables the service to safely and appropriately reduce the numbers of looked after children.

3.5.3. A large number of foster carers are 50 years old and above and this provides significant benefits to the service including, considerable life and parenting experience and often space and flexibility in the home as their own children have grown up and live independently. However many of these foster carers start to scale down or retire from fostering as they reach 60 years of age and as a result, in recent years the service has suffered from a loss of capacity. There will continue to be a steady retirement of carers over the next few years but there is unlikely to be such a noticeable peak as there was in 2011-12.



3.5.4. Foster care register

There are currently 359 foster carers, caring for children on short term and long term basis, made up of 208 Level 4 carers, 28 Level 3 carers and 123 level 2 carers. 55 of these carers are approved to care for children with a disability or

complex health needs. This is an increase from 335 carers at the same point last year with a net gain of 24 mainstream carers overall. In previous years there has been minimal net gain of mainstream foster carers for a number of years. In 2011 there was 338 mainstream carers and overall the service lost more carers than it approved with a loss of 3 carers overall by April 2012.

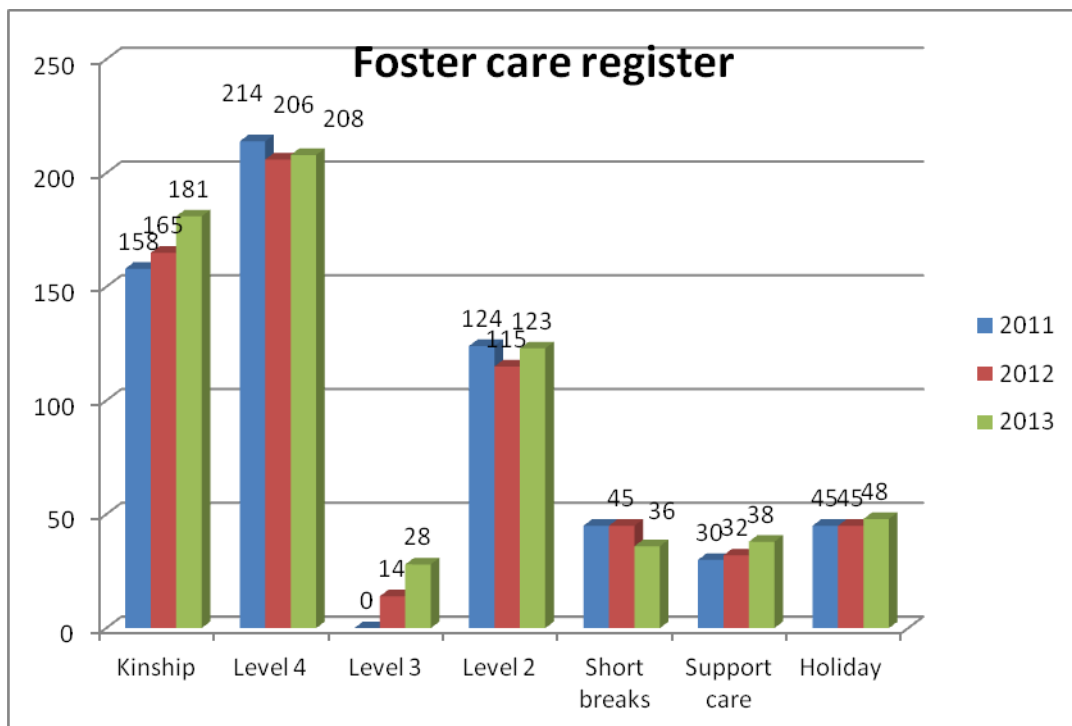
An overall net gain over 20 is a significant improvement. There has been an increase in the numbers of experienced carers coming forward from other agencies which has resulted in the growth of level 3 and 4 carer numbers.

There are currently 181 kinship foster carers, an increase of 20 on last year's figure.

There are two short break schemes providing day care and short breaks for children. These include 36 carers in providing overnight short breaks for disabled children and 36 carers who provide support care to prevent children from entering care as part of a package of targeted support.

In addition there are 48 carers linked to specific foster carers to provide holiday care for those children only. This enables children to remain within their extended family network and community whilst carers take a break from the caring role.

This graph indicates the highest growth in level 3 carers as a number of established level 2 carers have progressed to Level 3.



3.6. Family placement service

3.6.1. The family placement service is a specialist team within the fostering service providing three areas of provision: short and long term foster care; overnight and short breaks service, plus a home based service for disabled children. The

service promotes the social model of disability and the inclusion of disabled children in all aspects of family and community life.

- 3.6.2. The service has always given the opportunity for carers to develop their skills in working with disabled children through the home based and short breaks services, some of whom progress to become full time foster carers for disabled children. As more carers take Special Guardianship Orders and Adoption Orders with their foster children, and do not have space and resources to offer a full time placements to another disabled child, a number of these continue to offer a service through a match with the short breaks service. This development of carers throughout the scheme has meant that carers coming into the long term fostering service are more equipped to deal with more complex and challenging children, having developed their skills over time.
- 3.6.3. The short breaks service for children has been established for over 30 years and is one of the largest in the country. The service offers short breaks ranging from day care to regular weekends, to longer periods as needed, offering new experiences and activities for children whilst giving their parents/carers a much needed break. This is presently a specialist service and families are referred by a social worker via the Disabled Children's Allocation panel. Allocation is usually 36 days per year although additional days can be allocated via Disabled Children's Allocation panel in accordance with assessed need. This service is preventative and by providing short breaks to families the aim is to keep children in their own families with support.
- 3.6.4. There has been a rise in numbers of children requiring ground floor or adapted premises and there is a shortage of carers in the service who are able to offer ground floor accommodation for wheelchair using children. It is very unusual for a foster carer to come to the fostering service with a ground floor bedroom which is suitable for a child with restricted mobility. The service is working closely with housing ALMOs to identify suitable properties which can be adapted for children waiting for placement and the service is proactively asking all carers in assessment if they would consider having their properties adapted to facilitate the placement of a child with restricted mobility.
- 3.6.5. The manager of this team is working across three different areas of provision with 12 social workers. The home based part of the service requires registration as a domiciliary care service, given the personal care that carers provide for the children. The service is aware of the need for registration and is undertaking a review of the service in the coming months.

3.7. Kinship fostering team

- 3.7.1. During the last year the Kinship care team received 120 requests for service and 102 cases were allocated for assessment. 50 families were approved by the fostering panel during the period 2012-2013. This is 10 more families than were approved in the previous year and the numbers of approved kinship carers continues to increase year on year. Of the 102 pieces of work allocated in the kinship care team during this period, 37 cases were not presented at the fostering panel, either because there was a negative assessment (12 cases); one person had a positive assessment but chose not to proceed; 5 Special Guardianship

Orders were made in the court prior to the assessments coming to the fostering panel; 19 assessments were withdrawn prior to completion, because the carer was unsuitable or they chose to withdraw; 3 cases were presented to panel but were not approved. These figures demonstrate that a lot of work is completed in the team that does not materialise into a placement. Further consideration, therefore, needs to be given to the quality of decision making at the point where families are coming forward to be considered as kinship foster carers with more rigour being applied at the viability stage.

- 3.7.2. In 2012/13 33 kinship carers were deregistered. However, 14 carers took out alternative legal orders on the children in their care. The majority of these were special guardianship orders. These carers may continue to need ongoing support and the service has had an agreement to extend the kinship care team to support special guardians over the next year.
- 3.7.3. The use of kinship care is entirely consistent with the aim of keeping children placed within their family and community network wherever possible and as such a number of assessments are often undertaken in relation to each child placed. The development of Family Group Conferencing as a model means that family members should be identified and encouraged to help children much earlier, alleviating the need to enter into care proceedings altogether for some children. Where care proceedings are initiated, the early identification of the whole family network and the relative skills and experience within the network will significantly improve the identification and approval of kinship carers. The development of support for informal kinship carers is crucial in ensuring that the service safely and reduces the need for children to become looked after.

3.8. Fostering support services

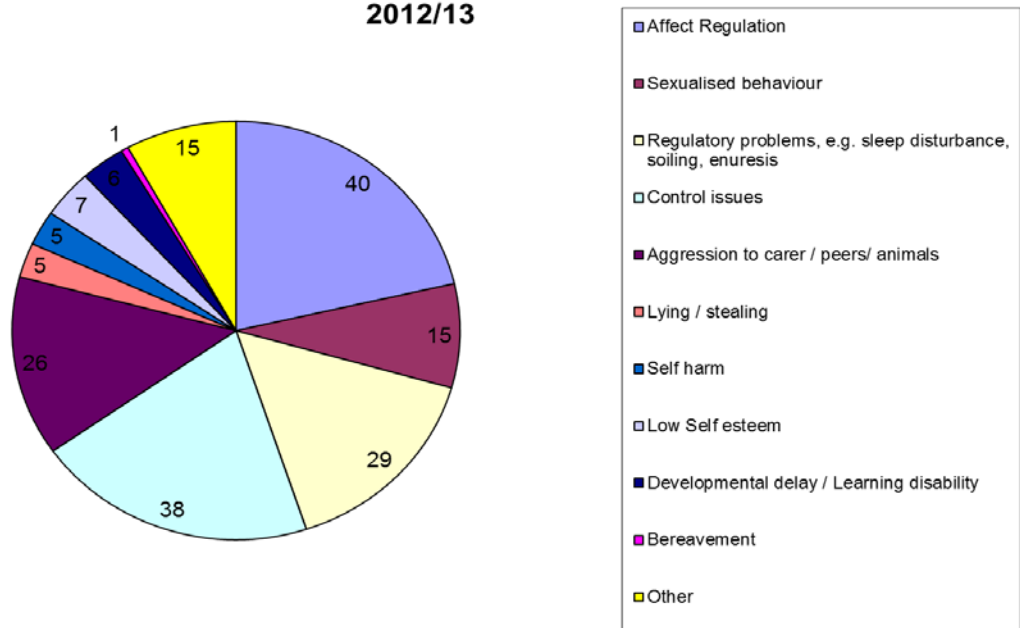
- 3.8.1. The provision of a range of support services from the individual work provided by the supervising fostering officer to training and support groups is a significant factor in the retention of foster carers and enables the service to ensure carers are well supported in caring for often complex and challenging children. It also enables Leeds to compete with the better independent fostering agencies locally.
- 3.8.2. The fostering service has continued to work hard over the year to review and develop the support services provided to carers, the central component of which is the supervisory relationship. The service also runs a number of support groups for carers across the city in geographical areas. It runs regular coffee mornings for kinship carers to more specific support focus groups such as support to carers of young babies from drug using parents and support groups for parent/ child assessment carers.
- 3.8.3. The recent development of two stay and play groups for carers with young children have been very welcome by carers. These groups provide facilities for small children to play whilst carers get can access peer support from other carers experiencing similar challenges and needs.
- 3.8.4. In the last year the development of retention events (family fun days) have been a priority for the service. This has included an Easter event at Kirkstall Abbey; a Halloween and Christmas event and a Christmas party. The recent appointment of a dedicated worker, responsible for retention and support events across the city

with carers, will bring a further range of support and retention activities in conjunction with the Leeds Foster carer association, the youth service and third sector agencies over the next year.

3.9. Therapeutic team

3.9.1. The therapeutic social work team provides support for foster placements via the Fostering Surgery. The surgeries provide consultation and advice to foster carers, enabling foster carers to discuss any issues or difficulties they are facing with a placement and offering strategies to deal with that. Over the last three years there has been a significant increase in the number of referrals to this team as a whole which can be largely attributable to the services provided for foster carers. These increases reflect the expansion of the service and also the provision of a life story clinic, providing support and advice to both foster carers and social workers undertaking life story work with children. During the period 2012/13, 115 appointments were made with foster carers and 90 children discussed. The evaluations from carers would suggest that the service is highly valued and contributes to maintaining placement stability for the most vulnerable children in our city.

**Presenting Problems (up to 3 per child)
2012/13**



3.9.2. For 61% of foster carer attending, the fostering surgery was sufficient, whereas for the remaining 39% on-going work was recommended. After 6 months following attending the surgery over 78% of children remained in placement. This shows that this avenue of support assists with placement stability. The therapeutic team provides a range of training for social workers and carers and the development of the “Keep” programme for carers and the “Nurtured Heart” training is addressed later in the report.

3.10. Independent Support Service

3.10.1. The service provides independent support to foster carers in circumstances where an allegation or serious complaint has been made, through an independent organisation called Foster Talk. 9 carers used the service in the last year. This is a relatively low number of carers accessing this service. The manager of the service has agreed to undertake further publicity with officers and carers to ensure that carers are referred at an early stage for support.

3.11. Training

3.11.1. Staff training is identified via staff appraisals and supervision. In the last year the service has provided specific development days for fostering staff. This year topics have included evidencing the outcomes for children and young people; recording issues; safe care planning and supervisory visits.

3.11.2. Foster carers are expected to attend training as determined through their annual reviews and also as required in the payment for skills structure, determined by the level and type of foster care provided. The payment for skills framework identifies the various courses for each of the carer levels and each carer is expected to undertake a number of hours training each year according to their level. This year the hours were amended to include Continuous Professional Development that allows carers to acknowledge any research, reading or conferences that they had attended. This ensures that training and development is tailored to the individual needs of the carer.

3.11.3. The organisation of foster carer training has been under review. The introduction of a telephone booking system with the Business Support Centre and an improved arrangement for managing waiting lists has received good feedback from the carers themselves. The numbers attending courses so far for 2013/2014 has increased and there is hope that this will continue, making the service more efficient. Additional courses have been provided this year to meet the needs of more experienced carers. The service has received some excellent feedback for the following courses:- the Great Behaviour Breakdown; Foetal Alcohol Syndrome; Communication training and Makaton. The Service is also piloting an e-learning child protection course with 20 carers and if this works well, the service will explore the possibility of expanding e-learning further.

3.11.4. The therapeutic team have run two longer training programmes for carers this last year. Firstly, the Nurtured Heart Programme has been a positive experience for carers who have found that they are able to manage children's behaviour more effectively. The Keep training, (initially funded and supported by the Department of Education), has been trialled this year as a 16 week training course with on-going support groups to help carers looking after children aged 5- 12 years old. This training has been well received by carers and has assisted in reducing carers stress in caring for complex and challenging children. Although two slightly different models, both courses offer carers strategies for managing their own stress and enable carers to think about positive ways of managing often complex and challenging behaviour.

3.12. Educational and leisure support

- 3.12.1. All looked after children of school age are given a MAX card, this allows the young person, another child and two adults free access to various venues throughout the county. Harewood House, The Castle Museum in York and Eureka are all part of the scheme and again carers feedback is incredibly positive. Opportunities will be further extended in September 2013 when the corporate offer to foster carers becomes effective for carers able to access free leisure facilities in Leeds.
- 3.12.2. In the north and west of the city the fostering service is working closely with the youth service to develop more local support and leisure opportunities for looked after children. The fostering service is also linking in with children's centres and clusters in providing more localised and integrated support to looked after children and foster carers and their families.
- 3.12.3. The Stepping Stones initiative continues to support young people with their homework, social skills and raises awareness of University and the students' aspirations. There is a great deal of support in encouraging young people to move onto University with a range of initiatives in place. There are many young people attending higher education this year. Coffee mornings have been trialled to encourage carers to be aware of higher education and support available for care leavers.
- 3.12.4. The sons and daughters of foster carers play a vital role in the fostering task and the service has started to provide them with dedicated preparation whilst their parents are in assessment. Fostering is very much a family activity and research has shown that placements are more successful and less likely to break down when there is a positive framework of support in place that includes the sons and daughters of carers. This is an area the service is developing.

3.13. Looked after health team

- 3.13.1. The looked after children's health team work very closely with the fostering service. They provide training input to foster carers but also offer individual support to carers as required. The nurses for children in care also provide additional individual support and advice to foster carers as required about any health issues related to children in placement. Since 2008 there has been a national requirement to report on the emotional well being of children in care and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire are sent to carers to complete on an annual basis with input from the young person as appropriate.

3.14. Fostering panel

- 3.14.1. Leeds has four fostering panels with three Independent Panel chairs. Panel members come from a variety of backgrounds and provide a positive contribution to the panel process. The fostering panel members have an annual training day and this was recently completed ensuring that panel are kept abreast of any changes and have an opportunity for discussions regarding best practice and providing a consistent approach across the panels.
- 3.14.2. The fostering panels have undergone a period of review and the volume of the work coming to the panels has remained high. The agreement to appoint a panel

manager to work across fostering and adoption panels, with extra administrative support will enable the panels to function more effectively and prevent any delay for approving carers and for agreeing plans for children.

- 3.14.3. Foster carers have the opportunity to attend the independent Review Mechanism (IRM) when they are dissatisfied with a decision made by the department about their registration as foster carers. The IRM is a an independent panel which reconsiders Local Authorities and Fostering Agencies' decision making and then makes further recommendations back to the agency. In this period there have been two cases presented to the IRM. In both cases the IRM agreed with the agency's decision to terminate a carers approval.
- 3.14.4. The statistical report regarding approvals and de-registrations is attached to this report for information at appendix 1. The fostering panel also quality assures the information presented to panel and the report regarding the Quality Assurance completed is also attached to this report at appendix 2.

3.15. **Complaints and allegations**

- 3.15.1. There were 9 complaints this year within the fostering service. Each year the complaints are evaluated to ascertain if there are themes for service improvement. Four complaints remain on-going. Two complaints were partially upheld, one was withdrawn and two were inconclusive in their outcomes.
- 3.15.2. There were 31 allegations made against foster carers resulting in a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Child protection procedures were followed in all instances ensuring that children were safeguarded and appropriate action taken.

3.16. **Service planning 2013/14**

- 3.16.1. The key priority for the service in 2013/14 remains the recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure that children requiring a placement can be well matched with a family in Leeds. The recruitment strategy has shown an increase in interest from prospective carers and this will be strengthened further this year. The service is now organised effectively to respond to the increased demand and assess carers within clear timescales.
- 3.16.2. The support to carers is essential in terms of recruiting and retaining carers. The service is committed to developing a range of improved support through the corporate offer and a review of fees and allowances to carers over the next year.
- 3.16.3. Kinship care remains the first placement of choice for children looked after and the development of a clear support package for all kinship carers is a significant priority this next year. With the implementation of the family group conferencing and the early identification of alternative carers within the family, the service will work closely with social work teams to safely and appropriately reduce the numbers of looked after children.
- 3.16.4. The service is aiming to develop a range of suitable accommodation for care leavers and will look to develop a supported lodgings scheme over the next year.

3.16.5. Additionally, a new initiative is being piloted in the west of the city between the child minding service, fostering and social work service in providing day care to prevent very young children entering care. This pilot will work alongside the “support care” service where 35 carers provide short breaks to families as part of a targeted package of support in order to prevent children from entering care. This pilot will be evaluated later this year to ascertain whether the model should be further developed across the city.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1. Consultation and engagement

4.1.1. Foster carer representatives meet bi-monthly with officers and councillors to discuss areas for development, issues of concern and to ensure there is an open dialogue and communication with foster carers and the service. The involvement of carers in any new developments is an established principle in the fostering service and foster carers have been actively involved in developing the fostering charter for Leeds carers that was agreed earlier last year.

4.1.2. The Leeds Foster Care Association (LFCA) plays an important role in supporting foster carers in Leeds. They provide a regular newsletter to carers and hold social activities to bring carers and their families together. The fostering service works closely with the LFCA and aims to ensure that carers are appreciated and supported in the task they undertake.

4.2. Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1. EIA attached at appendix E.

4.3. Council policies and city priorities

4.3.1. The Children and Young Peoples Plan identifies Looked after Children 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

None identified in this report

4.6. Risk management

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

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. There have been a number of challenges over the past year as the number of children looked after requiring foster placements continues to increase, emphasising the need for an effective and responsive recruitment and sufficiency strategy to meet the diverse needs of the children requiring a fostering placement.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. That the Executive Board receive this report and continues to support the work of the fostering service to ensure our fostered children receive the best possible support.

7. Background documents

- 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.

Fostering panel data 2012/13	Kinship		Mainstream			Family placement							Grand Total	
	Kinship care	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2	Short Breaks	Holiday	Total Mainstream	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2	Short Breaks	Holiday		Total Family Placement
Approvals	50	6	8	30	1	10	55	4	0	8	1	0	13	118
Deregistrations														
Child Adopted By Carer	1	1					1						0	2
Child SGO By Carer	12	2		1		1	4						0	16
Child RO By Carer	1						0						0	1
Child Moved To Another Placement	6						0						0	6
Child Returned Home	5						0						0	5
Retired - General	0	2		3			5				1		1	6
Retired - Child Reached 18	4			1			1						0	5
Resigned - Change of Circumstance	0						0				1		1	1
Resigned - Gone To IFA	0						0	1					1	1
Resigned - Gone To Another LA	1						0				1		1	2
Resigned - Other	0	3	1	4		1	9			2	2		4	13
Terminated - Unsuitable	2			2			2	1					1	5
Terminated - Inactive	1	1	1	4		1	7				1		1	9
Terminated - Carer Ill Health/Died	0			2			2				1		1	3
Terminated - Disruption	0						0						0	0
Terminated - Allegation	0			1			1						0	1
Cont Under New Reg	0						0						0	0
Total deregs	33	9	2	18	0	3	32	2	0	2	7	0	11	76

Fostering Panel Quality Assurance Information on Reports presented to Panel April 2012 – March 2013

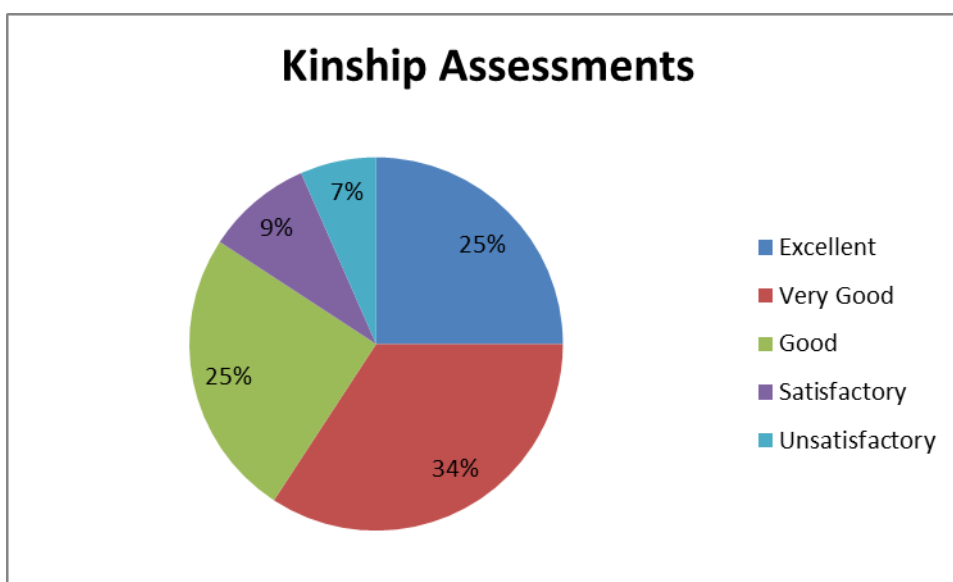
Introduction

Fostering panels offer feedback to supervising fostering social workers and social workers, with regard to the quality of the reports presented to panel and also their performance at panel. The function of the panels is to consider prospective foster carers who are looking to be approved for children unknown to them, and a Form F Assessment and portfolio are completed for these cases. Panel also consider prospective carers who are connected to a particular child, Kinship Foster carer assessments. The template used for the kinship care assessment is different from the Form F and requires information about the child as well as other family linked information. The panel also consider foster carers' reviews and matching reports in respect of long term foster placements for particular children.

April 2012- March 2013

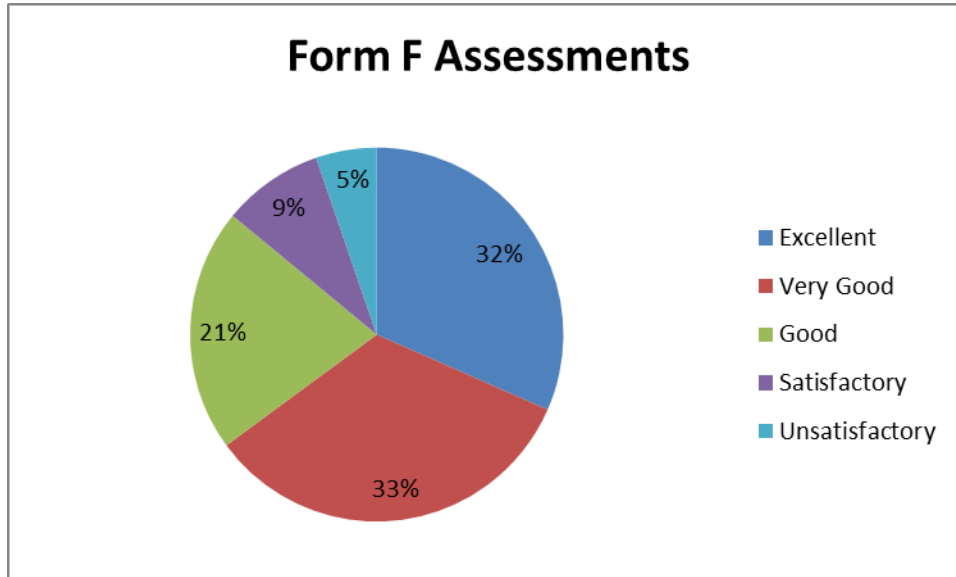
Kinship assessments (feedback forms received)

Excellent 19	Very Good 26	Good 19	Satisfactory 7	Unsatisfactory 5
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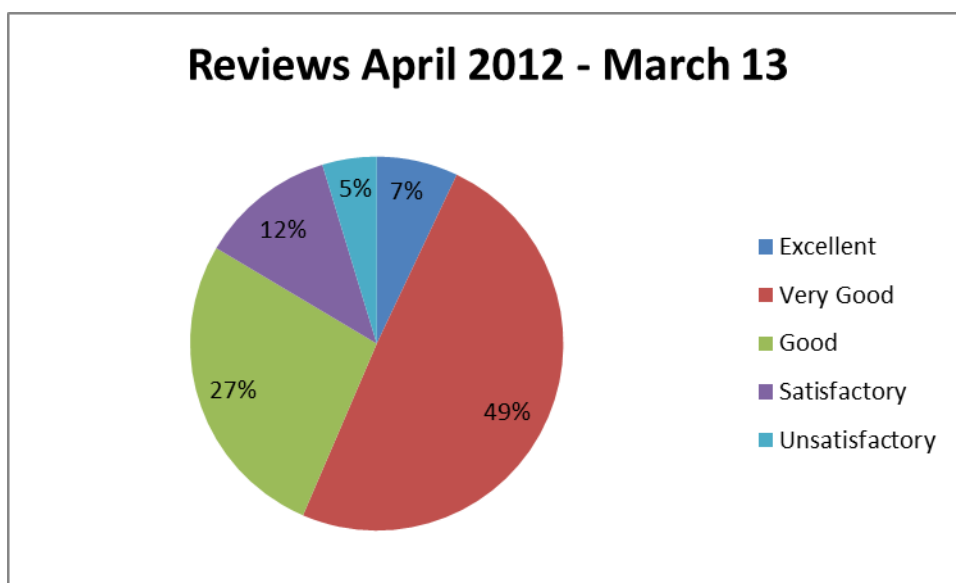
Form F assessments
(Feedback forms received)

Excellent 18	Very Good 19	Good 12	Satisfactory 5	Unsatisfactory 3
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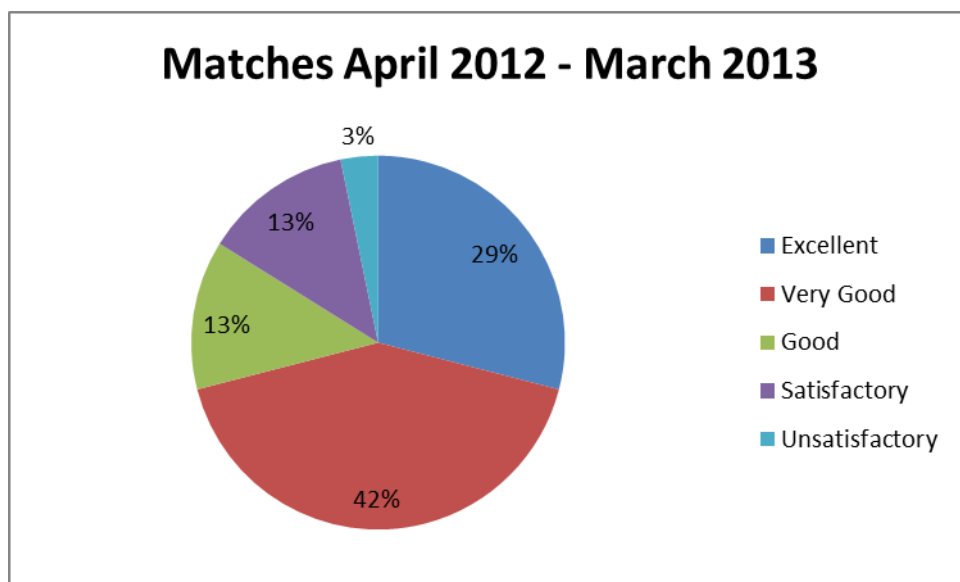
Reviews April 2012 – March 2013
(Feedback forms received)

Excellent 6	Very Good 42	Good 23	Satisfactory 10	Unsatisfactory 4
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Matches April 2012 – March 2013
(Feedback forms received)

Excellent 9	Very Good 13	Good 4	Satisfactory 4	Unsatisfactory 1
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Representative comments made by fostering panel members about the quality of reports received

Where reports were rated good or better, few comments were noted by the panel. Below is a sample of the positive comments:-

- the ability of the applicants and social workers to answer all the questions put to them
- The motivation to foster was very clear and they gave a passionate presentation
- Thoughtful and considered answers
- Excellent presentation by the foster carer and supervising social worker

Not surprisingly, there were more comments recorded where there were concerns. Below is a selection of comments in each category. However it is worth bearing in mind that over 80% of all reports considered by panel were judged to be good, very good or excellent.

Kinship Care Assessments

- There was a lot of information in the report but this could have been more analytical

- The Social Worker appeared vague and her answers were not strong or reassuring.
- The fostering officer presented the case well but no input from child's Social Worker so marked as unsatisfactory
- Information tabled on the day

Form F Assessments

- Lack of analysis in the report. Came across as negative which was countered by the carers' presentation at panel
- Spelling errors
- Would have liked to see the strengths and vulnerabilities summarised in the report
- Appeared not to know the family well

Reviews

- Muddled information
- Report not shared with the carer
- Lack of detail
- Confused, contradictory and out of date

Matches

- Lack of evidence around planning
- Decision making not clear
- Lack of evidence to show why the child should be placed with a particular family

Analysis

The standard of assessment reports presented to panel is of a high quality, with both Kinship care and Form F assessments scoring highly. 59% of Kinship care reports and 65% of Form F assessments were judged to be excellent or very good and if the numbers of assessments scored as good are added, then over 85% of all reports are judged to be good or better.

In some cases kinship care assessments were marked down, because they were not always fully completed by the time the case was submitted to panel and sometimes information had to be tabled on the day of panel. Criminal record checks and medical information are the most common documents that come in at the last minute and have to be brought to the panel on the day. Tight court timescales required for kinship assessments present difficulties for supervising social workers collecting all the information for the assessment in such a short space of time, as reports usually have to be completed in 8 weeks.

The review reports presented to panel were also of a high standard and 86% were judged to be good or better. The recent introduction of independent reviewing for foster carers' reviews should ensure that the standard of reviews and decision making will continue to rise so that all reviews are of a good standard.

Matching reports are generally of a good quality, although sometimes it is hard to see clear evidence of planning and decision making within the reports. Other concerns have been identified in respect of robust planning for children and this has led to a change in the way that permanency plans for children are considered in the future. In March 2013 a permanency panel was set up as a pilot in the East of the city to consider all permanency plans for looked after children other than adoption. The panel considers prospective long term fostering placement matches as well as other options for permanency. The pilot will be evaluated after 6 months and a decision will be taken at this point, whether to provide this function for the whole of the city. If this is the case, the fostering panel will no longer consider long term fostering matches.

Conclusion

The fostering and adoption service has very recently appointed a temporary panel manager to oversee and manage all of the work that is presented to fostering and adoption panels. A senior panel administrator has also been recruited. The quality assurance functions for all panels will be a key area for development, ensuring quality assurance information from the panels is more systematically collected and recorded from now on, so that standards are continually monitored, improvements are identified and corrective actions are implemented.

Val Hales
Deputy Service Manager
29th April 2013