
Report of Director of Children's Services
Report To: Executive Board**Date: 22 June 2016****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 2015 and March 2016.

Recommendations

- 2 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 2015 and March 2016. 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 to decrease overall. However, the numbers of young people in the age group 11-17+ becoming looked after has increased to its highest level since March 2013. Boys continue to be the larger proportion of those children becoming looked after aged in the age ranges 11-17+.

2.3 Number of looked after children

Numbers of looked after children by age group from 2013- 2016					
Age Group	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-17	Total
Mar-2013	432	382	361	202	1377
Feb-2014	378	396	384	193	1351
Mar-2015	296	378	394	188	1256
Mar 2016	237	354	417	224	1232

2.4 Children entering care and main reasons children April 2015- March 2016

During the last year there were 373 children who entered care and the primary reason for this was due to neglect and abuse. This is a breakdown of the ages and main reasons children entered care in the last year.

Number of children entering care by age and main reasons 15-16

Age	0-4	5-10	11-15	16+	Total
Abuse / Neglect	130	65	50	5	250
Fairly Dysfunctional	13	3	12	1	29
Assert Parenting	0	0	11	16	27
Family in Acute Distress	6	5	3	0	14
Other reasons	20	3	16	14	53
Total	169	76	92	36	373

During the last year, compared to previous years, there has been an increase in teenagers entering care. As a result of wishing to understand more about the reasons for this, Children's services carried out a research study looking at the family circumstances and experiences of adolescents who became looked after in 2015. The research aimed to explore the reasons young people became looked after, as well as their contact with services prior to care entry, in order to identify any lessons for practice development. The key themes that emerged relate to behaviour, engagement and family solutions. As a result of this research a clear action plan is in place to address the issues emerging. This includes defining the city-wide support pathway for adolescents in need of help and protection, and those on the edge of care; broaden the expertise of the children's services workforce in engaging with adolescents and their families; consider how best to support young people and families during periods of disruption (e.g. when changing schools, or moving between caregivers) and consider re-positioning resource to address emerging needs at the targeted rather than specialist level.

3 Main issues

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. Whilst the placements strategy and sufficiency action plan is to increase the number of 'in house' foster carer placements children will always benefit from highly specialist resources and require placements out of Leeds.

3.1 Fostering service

3.1.1 The fostering service comprises of 6 social work teams; the Recruitment & Assessment team currently incorporating work supporting carers for teenagers, supported lodgings and “staying put” carers. There are 2 geographical supervision and support teams, one of whom has a specialist parent and child assessment scheme; 2 kinship teams, one with lead responsibility for assessments and private fostering, the other supporting ongoing kinship arrangements and special guardianship support; in addition a citywide team supports foster carers looking after children with a disability, including a smaller number of carers who provide overnight short breaks for families caring for disabled children. This team is also responsible for supporting children on the edge of care with the Support care and child-minding scheme.

3.2 Recruitment of foster carers

3.2.1 A key priority for the service continues to be the targeted recruitment of foster carers for young people aged 10 – 18 years and Supported Lodgings providers offering support to teenagers from 16-18 years moving towards independence. Targeted recruitment continues to be kept under regular review to ensure that the service can respond flexibly and swiftly to emerging changes in the population of children who are looked after.

3.2.2 There remains a regional and a national shortage of placements for teenagers in foster care, so in addition to recruiting new carers, the service continues to explore ways to increase the confidence of existing carers to consider fostering teenagers. This includes developing specific training and support to meet the needs of these carers.

3.2.3 Registrations of interest overall have reduced this year as expected given the focus of activity on teenagers and siblings, rather than younger children. There have been 584 registrations this year which is reduction from 615 the previous year. However, the service continues to provide a prompt telephone response to all these Registrations of interest and achieves an initial visit to enquirers within 7 days.

3.2.4 In such a competitive market it is essential that the council maintains a high quality online presence. As a result of feedback and from looking at other websites a decision has been made to update the Foster4Leeds website over the next year. In addition, a number of direct marketing events are held across the city and there is an extensive range of media and marketing events detailed throughout the year in the marketing and communications Action Plan, including radio campaigns, bus back campaigns, twitter and Facebook.

3.2.5 The Recruitment Team organises monthly fostering information evenings (called “hubs”) at the Shine Centre in Harehills, Aireborough Leisure Centre and Morley Leisure Centre. These give potential carers a good opportunity to talk to staff and carers about what fostering involves. The feedback from these information evenings are positive from those attending with most of these going on to make formal applications to foster.

3.2.6 Assessments are offered to prospective foster carers through dedicated social workers from the recruitment team and independent assessors. The majority of assessments continue to be completed within the required timescales. The benefits of independent assessors enable the service to be responsive to the fluctuations in demand.

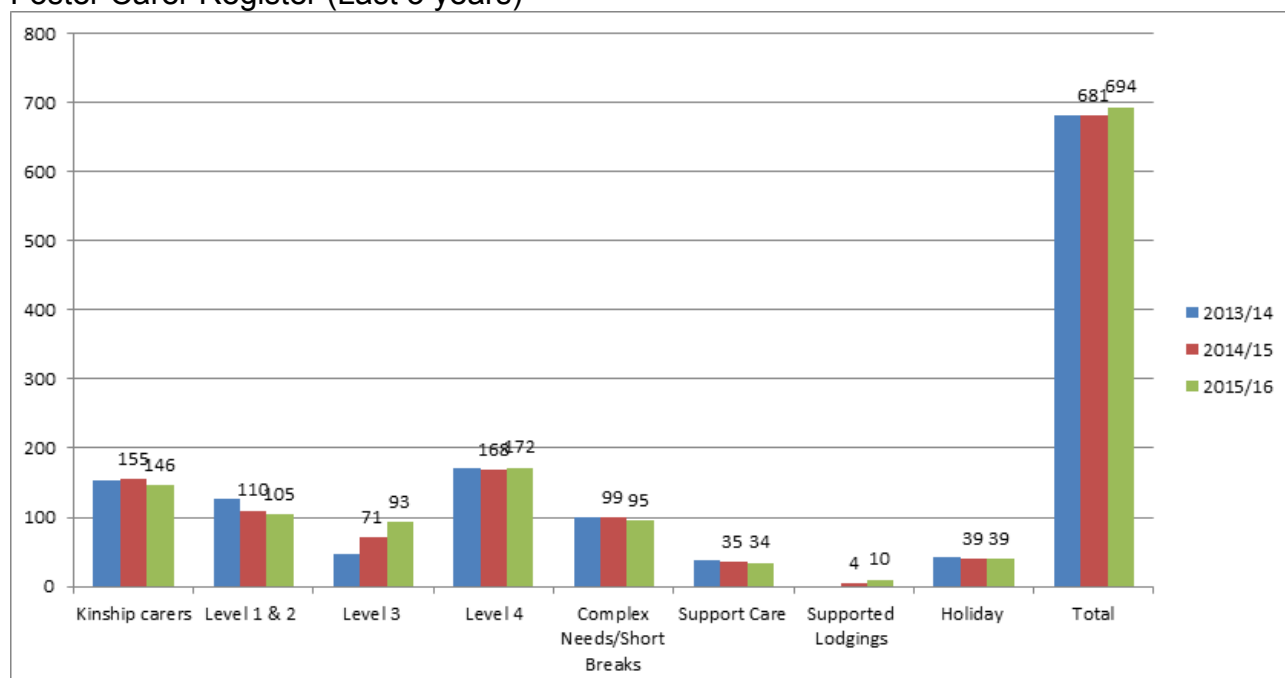
3.3 Approval and Deregistration of foster carers

3.3.1 There have been a total of 96 household approvals in the last year. These incorporate 52 mainstream carers, 2 Complex Needs/Short Breaks and 42 Kinship carers. The total of carers registered at the end of March 2016 was 694 with a net gain of 26 mainstream carers. This included 17 carers transferring from independent fostering agencies. 30 of these new carers had a preference for caring for teenagers and this is real progress in this targeted group but remains a challenge. The conversion rate from registration of interest to approval is just under 10% reflecting the national picture.

3.3.2 The total number of de-registrations includes 26 Mainstream carers, 6 Complex Needs/Short Breaks and 51 Kinship carers. Interestingly, 23 households were deregistered because they continued to care for children under a Special Guardianship Order; 8 because the child turned 18 and 9 due to the child returning home to birth parents. These 40 de-registrations resulted in positive outcomes for children and young people, ensuring that the service is safely and appropriately reducing the numbers of young people who are looked after and improving their outcomes.

3.3.3 There were no foster carers who resigned during this year to move to another fostering agency and this provides evidence that the range of support being provided to carers suggests that carers feel valued and therefore remain with the service.

Foster Carer Register (Last 3 years)



3.4 Placement Service

The Placement Service is managed within the Commissioning Service although these management arrangements are currently under review. Weekly placement meetings are held with the fostering team managers to consider the placement needs of children and to identify potential links with available foster carers.

- 3.4.1 Long term placement matching events continue to be promoted by the fostering and placement services. In the past year, 44 long term placements have been made with 4 long term placements moves pending. A further 34 children and young people have been identified as requiring a long term placement (potential matches have been identified for 7 young people).

3.5 Parent and Child Scheme

- 3.5.1 The Parent & Child scheme provides highly supported assessment placements where birth parents are given the opportunity to demonstrate and improve their ability to care for their child in an environment which promotes safe parental capacity. The scheme is very much in demand and of the 23 fully completed assessments, 11 children returned home with their parent, whereas for twelve children alternative plans have been made (in 3 cases the child was subsequently placed with another family member). This is a scheme we are looking to expand and adapt to ensure that assessments can be completed in a safe environment and that foster carers are clearly aware of the roles and responsibilities. These carers have a very difficult task when undertaking such complex assessments and managing risk safely and appropriately within their own homes needs a careful consideration and support.

3.6 Mockingbird

Leeds has been successful in attracting innovations funding in the last year from the Department of Education (DfE) to work in partnership with the Fostering Network to pilot and develop the “Mockingbird peer support model”(Leeds is one of eight fostering services to develop the model). This model originates from America and is similar to an extended family with a main central carer called a “Hub carer” who works with 8 -10 other foster carers. The Hub carer supports the foster carers and the children to support each other over time and overcome problems before they escalate, offering children a more positive experience of care within an extended network of support. The outcomes for children supported as part of the Mockingbird model are extremely positive with improvements in their wellbeing and outcomes as they develop. Within the period of the year we have established 6 Mockingbird Hubs, 3 for support to kinship carers, 2 geographical Hubs and a Parent and Child Scheme Hub.

3.6.1. An independent evaluation by Loughborough University is being undertaken regarding the model and is due to report back in the next few months. Early indications show that the scheme is increasing a sense of community for carers and children alike, enabling them to feel supported and hopefully will further improve placement stability. This has been particularly beneficial for kinship carers who have responded well to the peer support. The service intends to sustain the scheme beyond the life of the project and expand the Mockingbird Model, once we are clear of the evaluation results and lessons to take forward into the next phase of development.

3.7 “Staying put” arrangements and services for teenagers and

In the past 12 months, 128 children and young people aged between 11-17 years have become looked after. At the same time the service has continued to strengthen its commitment to ‘Staying Put’ arrangements where young people beyond 18 years of age can live with their former foster carer.

3.7.1 At the end of March 2016, 68 young people were being supported by former foster carers beyond their 18th birthday. This is the highest number of arrangements in England and compared with a total of 35 young people in Leeds in similar arrangements in March 2015. The focus on staying put is now benefitting a wider range of young people, including young people in employment and those not in any education, training and employment. This provides more security for young people as they move into independence, at a pace that meets their needs. More than half of the 68 young people are in higher or further education; 21 young people are in Employment /Training and 8 of the young people are not in education, training or employment.

3.7.2. The increased numbers of young people entering care in this age range and the staying put arrangements has placed significant pressures on the ability to provide foster placements across the service. The foster carers who support young people in staying put arrangements are often experienced carers who would have been available to take on other children but are unable to do so due to their staying put commitment. In addition the funding required to support these arrangements has impacted upon the overall children’s budget as the grant the government provided does not cover the cost of the staying put arrangements.

3.7.3 The service also provides 2 placements for young people who are undergoing police questioning in line with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)). This provides an immediate response to prevent the need for young people to be kept in police custody overnight. Negotiations are currently in progress with neighbouring West Yorkshire Authorities to develop a pool of PACE beds aiming to ensure adequate provision and value for money.

3.7.4 The Supported Lodgings Scheme is steadily building a cohort of supportive lodgings providers – some foster carers are dual registered to provide a foster placement for younger teenagers and a supported lodgings arrangement for young people who are preparing for independence. This is a continuing area for steady growth in the service and increases the range of choice of provision for vulnerable young people needing support within a family environment whilst they prepare for independence

3.7.5 There are a range of support groups who meet on a monthly basis. A number of staff in the teams provide more intensive support to new foster carers taking teenagers who are new to care or are in Supported Lodgings arrangements. However, carers have expressed some concern about the range of support provided and the flexibility of support that we can offer. We are therefore looking with the placements team and other services to provide a more tailored individual package of support to meet the needs of foster carers and the young people.

3.8 Kinship Care

3.8.1 The Kinship Care service comprises of 2 social work teams, one for carer assessment and one for carer support. These teams support kinship foster carers and Special Guardians and the work within these teams has grown considerably following the growth of the family group conference service with assessments of family members to care for children being required.

3.8.2 In order to meet the demand and achieve the court timescales, the team use a number of sessional social workers in addition to their own staff to undertake assessments. Generally, an 8 week period is allowed for each assessment, though reports are requested to be completed in much shorter timescales by the courts which presents a challenge for the team. It is critical that assessments are robust and also have enough time to assist carers in preparing for taking on the care of children. During the past 12 months, 183 viability assessments have been undertaken with families, 72 of these resulting in completed assessments. 42 of these resulted in kinship care foster carers being approved but many carers assessed take on Special Guardianship orders at the end of care proceedings and do not become registered as foster carers. An additional two social workers have been moved into this service from the adoption service to ensure that the work continues to be managed effectively.

3.8.3 The Kinship Care Support team is continuing to work with approximately 150 Kinship approved households as well as supporting over 500 Special Guardianship arrangements. Alongside the 3 Mockingbird Hubs, there a number of Support groups that continue to be well attended. A number of Kinship carers have attended Nurtured Heart training, and an increasing number are accessing relevant formal training opening to all foster carers, given the volume of the work that moves through the team.

3.9.4 The Kinship assessment team also incorporates the Private Fostering responsibilities for the service. A separate annual report is provided regarding this work.

3.9.5 The team's remit has widened to look at how informal kinship carers are supported across the city. The growth of the family group conferencing service has meant that many families develop their own plans for the care of children within the extended family network. It is essential that these carers access support as they require it, supporting families in these arrangements. A Project Lead on kinship has recently being appointed who is working closely with the city wide kinship steering group (a sub group of the multi-agency looked after partnership) in developing links with clusters and the voluntary sector to develop awareness of the issues affecting kinship carers and support for these arrangements across the city.

3.10 City Wide Community Support and caring for disabled children

- 3.10.1 This city wide team is composed of 2 parts, the Complex Needs service provides fostering placements and short term breaks for children with a disability. Foster carers support disabled children who are unable live with their birth families and also provide a preventative service to support disabled children and their parents/carers. This enables them to remain at home or in family based care.
- 3.10.2 The service has established close links with the housing service, occupational health and nursing service to support children within fostering households. Full time foster placements have been provided to 66 children in the past year.
- 3.10.3 124 children used the Short Breaks service this last year. However, the trend is that the number of referrals of children through Resource Allocation panel (RADAR) is decreasing as families are offered other forms of Short Breaks. Referrals to Short Breaks are often individual children with very complex health needs or challenging behaviours.

3.11 Support Care

Support care is a time limited preventative and support service for children and young people living in families who are experiencing crisis. It aims to support those children deemed to be on the edge of care by helping their families address problems and keeping their children safe. The service provides short overnight breaks for children and young people as part of a wider package of support for a period of between 6 and 12 months depending on the needs of the child/family.

- 3.11.1 During the past year 81 children were successfully matched with a support carer. Currently 45 children are being supported in these arrangements, preventing the child entering care. During this year, 3 children on Support Care were received into foster carer during this period where their positions at home became too unsafe for the child to remain within the family. This provides evidence that this service works well in keeping children at home within their extended family.
- 3.11.2 The Child Minding Scheme is a joint venture between Fostering and the Family Support and Parenting Service. This aspect of the Support Care Service also aims to support younger children (0-4) to continue to live in their home environment and prevent family breakdown. 38 children have had placements via the scheme (2 of these were received into care). Placements are not time limited; however, when a child is eligible for 2/3 years of funding this can be directly accessed by the child minder. Parents have reported finding the support care and child minder support helpful and appear to be very receptive to accepting and acting on the parenting advice offered from the child minder, providing further evidence that this is a resource that assists in preventing children entering care.

3.12 Training

- 3.12.1 All prospective foster carers undertake a 3 day 'skills to foster' course. 7 courses were run in 2015/16. Prospective foster carers are also encouraged to attend mini bite sized courses which include Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding, Attachment and Loss, Behaviour Management and Working with Professionals.
- 3.12.2 The training programme is regularly reviewed and updated by the foster carer training steering group. A varied program is offered – last year a total of 137 sessions were delivered by the workforce development team consisting of 35 different topics. Over the 12 month period, 2,592 training places were attended by foster carers (excluding the 3 Nurtured Heart courses).
- 3.12.3 The intensive Therapeutic Intervention (TCIF) course which is run over 5 days will also be run in the evening during 2016 to enable carers who work to attend.
- 3.12.4 The therapeutic team also offers training and a support group for foster carers using the Nurtured Heart approach. A total of 37 carers attended the 3 groups this year. Additionally, 18 carers attended the KEEP programme; an evidence based parenting programme. Both these courses offer strategies for carers to manage complex and challenging behaviours and to manage their own stress. The outcomes for the children and the carers who are part of these programmes are extremely positive.
- 3.12.5 In terms of training for staff across the service there is a range provided that all social workers can access. However, in addition there 3 specific service development days with topics around the Mockingbird model training, recruitment and support for Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Transsexual carers (LGBT), Re-unification, Staying Put, foster carer e learning and Private Fostering.
- 3.13 Support for foster carers and their children promoting outcomes for children and young people

All foster carers have a qualified, supervising social worker providing regular support and supervision of foster carers. In addition to the individual work undertaken by the supervising social worker, the service runs a range of support groups across the city. These are very well attended allow carers to access a range of information about specific topics as well as accessing support from other carers. The service remains committed to supporting children of foster carers. The 'Kidz foster 2' support group is now in its 3rd year. Between 15 and 20 children and young people attend these support group sessions which run every half term. Sessions this year have included safer care and welcoming a foster child into your home.

- 3.13.1 Foster carers have a key role in promoting a child's education. Specialist educational support is available to foster carers in the service. There is a qualified teacher (linked to the virtual school) who provides support, advice and training to foster carers regarding a child's educational needs. This year, 60 carers accessed the training offered by the virtual school and it is planned to repeat and expand this training to include a multi-agency aspect in the coming year.

- 3.13.2 The Virtual School works with the Books Trust and the Leeds Library Service looked after learners in years 1, 3, 5 and 7 who receive book bundles and learning activities via libraries to support children's academic progress.
- 3.13.3 Children and their carers continue to benefit from the Max Cards produced by the Virtual School enabling children to widen their experiences and knowledge about the local and regional area and participate in learning and leisure opportunities.
- 3.13.4 The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring healthy outcomes for children. The Looked after Health Team works closely with the fostering service. Dedicated paediatricians and 2 designated nurses in conjunction with other health carer professionals oversee children's health. There is timely access to health care services and the child's annual health assessment ensures a child's physical and emotional health and development is progressed.
- 3.13.5 Foster carers are encouraged to promote health and leisure opportunities for the children they look after, as well as themselves and other household members. The therapeutic social work team provide essential support to foster carers and looked after children. They operate a fostering surgery that assists carers in understanding and managing children's behaviours. There were 123 Fostering service appointments during the past 13 months. The placement stability of the children whose carers received advice and support from this service is tracked with 75% of children remaining in placement following the issues being raised. Of the 25 children who moved placement, 3 were as result of a placement breakdown. The other moves were planned (e.g. on to family, a fostering placement or adoption).
- 3.13.6 The corporate offer of free Bodyline membership and free swimming lessons for looked after children and carer's children (at leisure centres across the city) is well received. There is an extensive range of activity days offered to carers and their families which are fully accessed delivered by a partnership across the council, with voluntary organizations and businesses across Leeds. Attached in Appendix 1 is a sample of these activities with comments from carers and young people.

3.14 Fostering Panel

- 3.14.1 Leeds currently has 4 fostering panels with 3 independent panel chairs. The establishment of an additional panel from May 2016 (to be called East Panel) will help ensure that assessments and other business will continue to be considered in a timely manner. The quality of assessments remains high with 87% of reports rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent' by panels.
- 3.14.2 Feedback from foster carers regarding their experience of attending panel remains positive with 90% rating the experience as 'Very Good', and the other 10% describing it as 'Satisfactory'. No applicants rated the experience as 'Poor.' Any issues raised by carers are picked up to ensure that the service can improve the experience for carers.
- 3.14.3 Panel members attended a training day in November which included a half day on Restorative Practice, and a half day on legal issues which directly or indirectly affect panels. Fostering managers also led discussions on service developments.

3.14.4 The panel considers the suitability of foster carers and can at time recommend that potential carers are not suitable to foster. If contested, foster carers have the opportunity to attend the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) if they are dissatisfied with decisions made by the department about the termination of their approval as a foster carer. In this period, there have been 2 referrals to the IRM. The outcome in both cases was that the IRM did not advise the panel to reconsider the decision.

3.15 Complaints and allegations

3.15.1 There were 9 complaints regarding the Fostering Service (compared to 13 in 2014/15). 2 complaints were from carers about support provided to the carer, these were both upheld. A further complaint by a foster carer relating to support from the child's social workers was partially upheld. There have been 3 complaints made by parents, 1 has been upheld, 1 partially upheld and 1 was responded to and resolved. 1 complaint (partially upheld) has progressed to stage 2. A further complaint has been withdrawn.

3.15.2 Complaints are dealt with promptly and the learning from complaints is discussed within the fostering management group and with the relevant team. In partnership with colleagues from Customer Relations and foster carer representatives, a new Complaints and Complements Procedure for foster carers has been introduced. This aims to produce a more transparent and restorative process, particularly where issues can be resolved informally.

3.15.3 There were 57 notifications to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where concerns were expressed about possible harm to a child or young person. It is important to note that a notification in itself does not equate to a substantive allegation against a foster carer. Of the 33 notifications which had been concluded, the majority were unsubstantiated and unfounded. There were five kinship and 3 mainstream households where concerns were substantiated. Immediate actions were taken to safeguard the children whilst investigations were undertaken and appropriate support was identified for the children. Further training/supervision was put in place where it was deemed safe for the children to remain placed. Carers were referred for early reviews and fostering panel following investigations.

3.15.4 The LADO attends fostering service management meetings on a quarterly basis to discuss issues raised through the allegations process. These discussions inform service development and best practice. When an allegation is made foster carers can access an independent advice an advocacy service. This service is currently commissioned through FISS (Foster Talk).

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.

- 3.16.2 The Fostering Review Team undertake all foster carer reviews and ensure feedback for both the supervising social worker and foster carer about their work. There have been delays in first reviews being presented to panel within timescales this year (attributable to staff sickness and vacancies) which is being addressed. A fostering reviewing officer (FRO) attends the fostering training steering group and the management meetings on a regular basis to develop links between review outcomes and training implementation.
- 3.16.3 As part of the Fostering Quality Assurance and Performance framework, there have been 83 foster carer case file audits undertaken this year. Case file auditing employs Ofsted ratings for file judgements. Of the 83 files audited, 66 (81%) were rated Good and none were inadequate.
- 3.16.4 This is evidencing improvement in audit ratings compared to the previous year (Good 76%). File statutory compliance and practice improvement is being evidenced in key areas, including safe care planning, Carer Training and Development planning and the 'voice of the child' in placement planning and decision making. A 'One to One' audit process between auditors and Supervising Social Workers has been piloted successfully looking at outcome based auditing and this will be fully introduced in August 2016.

3.17 Strategic issues and Forward plan

- 3.17.1 The key priority of the service remains the recruitment and retention of foster carers for teenagers and how we can ensure that carers and young people are supported to maintain stable placements to see young people through to independence. There is a real focus of collaboration across children's services and partners to look at how we can assist in preventing teenagers entering care; the expansion of the support care scheme and developing the range of carers who can provide a stable base to assist with reunification of children back to their family are part of this. Outreach support and work with our residential homes will be developed to look at how we can support carers and birth families where young people are on the edge of care.
- 3.17.2 The development of the Mockingbird Model gives us an opportunity to look at how we support carers across the board moving forward in a different way using a peer support model which will be considered over the next year.
- 3.17.3 In order to reduce the numbers of looked after children safely and appropriately it is essential that kinship carers are supported to safeguard and meet the needs of children who experienced abuse and neglect in their birth family. These carers need similar support that foster carers and adoptive parents receive and the challenge is to ensure that this can be provided in the communities where the

families live and that a range of support is provided from a universal to specialist support with our partners across the city.

- 3.17.4 3 staff service development days have been achieved this period. Topics have included; Mockingbird model training, LGBT fostering (recruitment and support for LGBT carers), Re-unification project, Staying Put, foster carer e-learning and Private Fostering.
- 3.17.5 The service has a continued commitment to developing Best Practice. This period has included establishing the Mockingbird model which is being evaluated by Loughborough University. The service has also participated in Oxford University research regarding unsubstantiated allegations against foster carers and University of East Anglia Research about caring for LGBT young people in foster care.

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 developments 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 that was completed remains relevant and the service ensures that actions to attract carers from a diverse range of communities continues to meet the needs of children requiring care.

4.3 Council Policies and Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The activities in this report contribute to the Best Council Plan outcome for everyone in Leeds to 'be safe and feel safe' with specific priorities for 2016-17 to 'keep people safe from harm' and 'support children to have the best start in life'. In addition, the supporting Children and Young People's Plan identifies Looked after Children as one of the three priority 'obsessions'. The fostering service is integral to these plans to provide stable and secure placements for looked after children.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The increased numbers of young people staying put has placed significant pressures on the ability to provide foster placements across the service. In addition the funding required to support these arrangements has impacted upon the overall children's budget as the grant the government provided does not cover the cost of the staying put arrangements. There were 68 staying put placements at the end of March and this cost £1.4m over the year, with a government grant of £220k in 2015-16. There are 40 foster carers who would, if they did not have a staying put placement, be able to take another child therefore reducing the in house fostering capacity. Trying to find alternative placements for young people who would have been placed with internal foster carers would result in additional external costs of £1,700,000.

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.

Appendix 1

Some examples of Retention and Enrichment Events, Activities & Projects 2015/16

Leisure

'Circus Zyair' - 12th September 2015 3pm and 6pm performances – following on from last year's amazing feedback, Circus Zyair once again gave us 100 family tickets (each admitting 4 people) across the 2 performances. All tickets were allocated.

"Thanks again for the brilliant experience at the circus. The evening was totally thrilling for adults and children alike".

'The Works Indoor Skate Park' - 26th October 2015 – This was an event for teenagers of the fostering household (13 to 17 years). The morning included using the indoor ramps on BMX bikes, scooters and skateboards with an informal lunch for those who came along. Funding for the activities was secured from the Leeds Community Foundation Looked After Fund.

"Many thanks for yesterday. J and M had a fantastic time, they came home buzzing. They were also impressed with the staff that helped them also taught them new things. They can't wait until the next time."

Family Days

'Day out at Ponderosa Farm' - 18th August 2015 – This day was organised exclusively for foster families from the Complex Needs Team at an accessible, inclusive farm in Heckmondwike. 11 families (17 carers and 21 children) came along. We had a guided tour to see all the animals and all the children received free pony rides.

"As you saw, my children really enjoyed Ponderosa. They loved looking at and handling the animals. We thought the tour was good because it kept us all together if that is what we wanted - or we were able to go off just with our children. The party room made having lunch much easier than it would of been without it. Thank you for organising it."

'Blackpool Big Day Out' - 22nd August – 4 coaches of foster and SGO families came along to spend the day at the seaside. The weather wasn't great but we did manage to get on the beach in the afternoon to play some games for those who wanted to join in.

"Just quick note to thank you and the rest of your colleagues for a great day out yesterday. Even the weather turned out ok in the end. The boys had a really good day with the only black spot being Christopher not wanting to leave as he wanted to stay for ever. Thanks again as I am sure you were running around all day trying to make sure all were ok."

Exclusive screening of BBC's 'Billionaire Boy' at Hyde Park Picture House 20th Dec 2015 - over 200 people including our foster families, SGO families, CLA and CFL's partners were invited to an exclusive preview of Billionaire Boy, courtesy of Screen Yorkshire at Hyde Park Picture House. There was a real festive feel with a choir and refreshments provided by British Gas. This was part of our Christmas menu of events.

"We had a fabulous festive afternoon the children really enjoyed the film. The hospitality was amazing. A lot of effort was put in by everyone it was very much appreciated. Thank you."

'Comedy Club 4 Kids' at Harrogate Theatre 17th Feb – coach transport and tickets for foster families were kindly sponsored by the GSAL's. 54 carers and children came along.

“My three young ones, who all have very complex needs, thoroughly enjoyed themselves at the theatre. They laughed and clapped, not always at the right time, but understood that they were watching a very funny thing. I like that there was plenty of time to have lunch. Thanks very much.”

Skelton Grange Environmental Centre

‘Family Fun Day’ - for kinship families 18th Feb 2016 – we had a full house of 8 families (25 people in total) with children of all ages. Everyone got involved in the team games, shelter building and toasting marshmallows over the camp fire.

“Another well organised event girls once again enjoyed themselves, all the children seemed to get on really well (together also the adults),no one seemed to be on the outside well done everyone.”

“They loved Skelton Grange and all they did and learned. They love telling people what they made and saw. Thanks again”.

Sport

‘Scuba Diving Experience for Looked After Young People’ - Weds 22nd July and Weds 26th August 2015– a fantastic opportunity for our young people aged 8 to 17 years to try scuba diving. This was an evening activity run in conjunction with Scuba Leeds Dive Centre. 10 young people participated across the two dates.

“Just to say thank you for arranging the scuba diving event, our young men really enjoyed the experience and had a fantastic time.”

Leeds Rhinos

‘Leeds Rhinos V Hull KR in the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley’ - 29th August 2015– 3 coaches of foster families, young people from residential and care leavers travelled to Wembley to see the Rhinos beat Hull 50-0! It was an amazing, if very long, day.

“A wonderful experience for the whole family, which otherwise would not have been accessible without the contribution from Leeds Rhinos Foundation and Leeds Children's Services. Many, many thanks for a day to remember. Thank you”.

LUFC Foundation

‘LUFC Silver Stars Football Project ‘started 8th October 2015 Wednesdays 4pm to 5pm – This followed on from the success of the Summer sessions. It was offered to LAC young people aged 5 to 12 years, 20 places are available and we had almost at full capacity. The number of sessions were extended from 6 to 9 due to its success.

B has loved football training.

He runs out of school already in his kit and trainers shouting “Are we going?”

“I think football is great because I can develop my skills and meet new people.” – M aged 12 years

Cultural & Seasonal Activities

GSAL Sat 17th October 2015– This session included readings and drawings from Julian Clary’s new children’s book. plus a Q & A session. 20 tickets were offered to our foster families courtesy of GSAL’s.

“I took a 9 year old boy who is interested in books he thoroughly enjoyed it as did I. He loved watching the illustrator as was interested in the question and answer session putting his hand up all the time. He got a copy of the book signed by them both which he is extremely proud of and has shown anybody he can.”

'Polish Cultural Awareness Workshop' for Foster Carers' - 23rd November 2015—The focus being on the traditions and culture of Polish people and how this has been established within Leeds. There were interactive displays and many resources to take away. A traditional Polish Christmas meal was the highlight of the day. 17 people attended the day.

" Outstanding information sharing – is invaluable."

'Festive Morning at Whiterose Centre' - 6th Dec 2015 – 31 children aged up to 8 years old enjoyed the morning. They had breakfast in BHS, played pass the parcel and met Santa and his Elves in his grotto. All received a gift and a photograph. M&S (White Rose) kindly donated advent calendars and goodies for all the children. This event was sponsored by White Rose Centre.

"Peter and I were really touched by the kindness of everyone who took part in making the festive morning a success. Everyone who was there had a smile on their face and nothing was too much for them. The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves and thank you again for making our children feel thought about."

'Christmas Cinema' family event at Vue, Kirkstall' - 12th Dec 2015 children aged up to 8 years – 243 people attended the event where our fostering and SGO families could see the new film 'The Good Dinosaur' complete with popcorn as part of our Christmas celebrations. Sainsbury's in Moortown kindly donated 200 selection boxes for the children.

"What an absolutely fantastic experience, greeted by warm, friendly staff. The building was 'buzzing'! I took two boys aged 9 and 10, they were overjoyed with the popcorn and then to receive a selection box was brilliant. An experience they will never forget."

Emotional Health & Well Being

'Think like a Pony' Empowering Children through Horsemanship Projects

These projects were open to ALL Leeds looked after children and young people aged 11 to 16 years (with no mobility issues) including those in residential and IFA placements. The therapeutic approach promotes self-awareness, effective communication and skills for life using horsemanship and riding skills as a tool. Priority was given to young people with attachment or relational/social difficulties.

Each project for this age range consisted of 3 days. 6 YP attended each group. Dates ran in April, May and August during the school holidays (4 groups in total).

We were able to secure a second round of funding which allowed us to offer projects to children aged 7 to 11 years. 6 children attended each group which consisted of 4 shorter days and an evening session. Dates ran in August, September and October. 3 groups of children were able to benefit from this work.

"She has had a boost in confidence and is more vocal about her worries. She has been able to confide in me a little more and is more willing to communicate."

"This opportunity has been the best way for L to accept subtle support? It has encouraged her to take a look at her actions and be aware that things can/do happen that you are not happy about. Rather than bottling up emotions to the point where you are ready to fight anyone and everyone you can persuade a change in others and yourself. This is a powerful tool."

Theatre, Music & The Arts

'Creative Art workshop for Under 5's and their carers' - 24th April 2015 – a 2 hour workshop where foster carers and children below school age could get involved in sensory/tactile art based activities. The venue was kindly provided by The Tetley, one of our Child Friendly Leeds partners. 30 people attended 15 carers and 15 children.

"We had a great time didn't realise we had a budding artist in our care. The venue was brilliant it was nice to talk to other carers. Look forward to next event"

'Fresh Dance Performance' at West Yorkshire Playhouse 25th April 2015 - Fresh is the regional youth dance platform for Yorkshire. This is a chance to see some of the most talented young dancers from across the region performing various dance styles including contemporary, street, South Asian dance and commercial dance. We were given 10 tickets by Yorkshire Dance.

"It was so good we was on the front and had a great evening x we knew people who was in the show too. The girls were dancing all the way home".

Yorkshire Dance Project 'The Dance Leeds Made' 30th May to 6th June 2015 – a week long project culminating in a pop up dance performance in Leeds on 6th June. 4 young people signed up.

Our partners have been extremely generous with the offers of free or heavily subsidised tickets this year. This has allowed many of our foster families to access musical and drama based performances regularly throughout the year. We were able to create opportunities for a wide range of ages with performances at times to match the identified cohort.

The Carriageworks – Millennium Square

'Travelling by Tuba III The Return' - 8th April 2015 – A fascinating voyage through the weird and wonderful world of the tuba. The show involved music, dance and audience participation. The performance was aimed at young people 4+ years old and their carers. 36 tickets were allocated.

"Kids enjoyed the interactive aspect to the show and making maracas beforehand was a hit too! Thanks again!"

"The show was fab. We had two very excited 6 year olds that really enjoyed it. They've been asking about science mania 2 and telling their school friends all about it. Thanks again!"

'The King of Tiny Things' – 27th October 2015 –a magical story brought to life with life with circus, puppetry and song. Performance was suitable for ages 5+. 36 tickets allocated.

Leeds First Direct Arena – Leeds City Centre

'MOBO Awards' 4th November 2015 – This was the world respected 'music of black origin' awards ceremony. We were given 52 tickets in total by the MOBO organisers and First Direct Arena for our looked after young teenagers and carers to go along.

"The MOBO Awards were fantastic C stated "it's the best event I've been to since living with you it was brilliant."

'Paul Heaton & Jacqui Abbott in Concert' - 19th March 2016 - We were given 14 tickets in a VIP box at short notice our foster families with teenagers.

"I just wanted to thanks everybody for the effort put in by yourselves and First Direct Arena staff in making tickets available for a special night for us at the Paul Heaton & Jacqui Abbott concert last Saturday. The evening was a real boost to morale and made us feel special."