

Report of: the Director of Children & Families

Report to: Executive Board

Date: 27th June 2018

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 2017 and end March 2018.

Recommendations

That the Executive Board receives this report and continues to support the work of the fostering service and promote best outcomes for children and supports the ongoing work to recruit and retain high quality foster carers within the 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 2017 and March 2018. 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. Where it is identified that children cannot remain within their family, 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 has increased this year. The number of children in the age group 0-4 age has increased and the numbers of young people in the age group 11-15+ becoming looked after has also increased from last year. Boys continue to be the larger proportion of those children becoming looked after aged in the age ranges 11-17+.
- 2.3 Number of children looked after

Numbers of looked after children by age group from 2013- 2017					
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
Mar 2017	229	340	440	242	1251
Mar 2018	255	329	458	231	1273

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 some children will always benefit from highly specialist resources and require placements outside of Leeds.

3.1 Fostering Service

- 3.1.1 All mainstream and kinship foster carers are supported and supervised by a qualified social worker (Supervising Social Worker) meeting regulatory visiting and supervision requirements. There are seven staff teams of supervising social workers each team with a Team Manager providing this support: two geographically focussed teams; a Recruitment and Assessment team; a team supporting and supervising foster carers with commitments to Teenagers; two Kinship Care teams and the Children with Disabilities and Complex Needs team. The Teenage team has recently been established to support those foster carers who have commitments to often challenging older children and is developing additional support, including bespoke training and development and co-working with partners including the Youth Service. Support and supervision to Supported Lodgings carers is achieved via Social Work Assistants who also work with providers on the Rent a Room scheme.
- 3.1.2 For financial support, Leeds operates a Payment for Skills (PFS) model for its approved foster carers. All foster carers irrespective of type of approval are supported via weekly child age related allowance payments. The PFS model has four levels linked to a Tasks, Skills and Competencies (TSC) framework and in addition to allowances, weekly fees are paid to carers on Level 2, 3 and 4.
- 3.1.3 The PFS model sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level, so that Level 4 carers have the highest level of skills and competencies and have a more demanding range of tasks that they must undertake. In return they are paid the highest level of fee. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests. Carers are able to progress up through the PFS levels (including Kinship Carers from Level 1) if evidencing required competencies and skills.
- 3.1.4 There has been recent Leadership agreement to increase fees by 2% from April 2018. In addition to weekly allowances and fees, foster carers can receive additional hourly payments for tasks undertaken outside their placement commitments including the delivery of training, providing individual support to families and childcare support to other carers.

3.2 Recruitment of foster carers

- 3.2.1 Registrations of interest have increased this year. The increase has come in the latter half of the financial year and this coincided with the new Foster 4 Leeds website launched in January 2018. There have been 484 registrations of interest in 2017-18 compared to 416 in 2016-17. The service continues to provide a prompt telephone response to all these registrations and achieves an initial visit to enquiries within 7 days when requested.
- 3.2.2 In addition to a high quality online presence, a number of direct recruiting events are held across the city. The extensive range of media and marketing events which take place are detailed in the marketing and communications Action Plan. Facebook currently has 316 followers (up from 226 at the end of March 2017) and

most posts attract between 500-1000 hits. Twitter currently has 549 followers (up from 360 at the end of March 2017).

- 3.2.3 Fostering Ambassadors (experienced foster carers) co-lead the quarterly information evening events held in the city. Fostering Ambassadors also host the 'new carers' support group in partnership with a Social Work Assistant from the Recruitment Team. Fostering pre-approval taster courses continue to be run twice a year at the Carriageworks Theatre. One of these two hour taster courses is run by young adults who belong to 'Voice and Influence' (care experienced young people). Fostering Ambassadors continue to co-lead the pre-approval Skills to Foster training which runs every 6 weeks. Foster carer ambassadors are the 'voice' and 'face' of advertising both on radio and online.
- 3.2.4 Leeds Fostering Service continues to be a lead authority with the regional fostering recruitment campaign 'You Can Foster'. Leeds fostering continues to promote itself as an inclusive fostering agency. The department joined the LGBT parade in summer 2017 and held an LGBT open day during LGBT Fostering and Adoption week in early 2017. The Recruitment team additionally offer LGBT awareness training to foster carers twice a year.
- 3.2.5 Assessments are offered to prospective foster carers through dedicated social workers from the recruitment team and independent assessors. 90% 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.

A key priority for the service continues to be the targeted recruitment of carers for sibling groups, for young people aged 10 – 18 years and children / young people with complex needs. In addition to fostering, the Recruitment Team now approves Supported Lodgings Providers and Rent a Room Providers for young people aged 16 plus. 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.

3.3 Approvals and Deregistration's of Foster Carers (see Appendix 1)

- 3.3.1 The total of all foster carer households registered at the end of March 2018 was 738. The number of mainstream and complex needs foster carer households (excluding holiday carers) recruited in 2017-18 was 30. From January 2018, the number of assessments have increased significantly with a likely increase in approvals for 2018-19 (23 prospective carers were in stage 2 assessment at the end of March).
- 3.3.2 The total number of de-registrations was 99 households. This includes 49 mainstream carers, 40 kinship carers and 10 complex needs/short breaks carers. 23 households were de-registered because they continued to care for a child under a Special Guardianship Order and one child was adopted by their carer. 7 households were de-registered because the child reached 18 and 6 due to the children returning home to birth parents. These 37 de-registrations resulted in positive outcomes for children and young people, ensuring that the service is safely and appropriately reducing the number of young people who are looked

after and improving their outcomes. Other de-registrations were made for reasons as detailed in Appendix 1 for example retirements from fostering, change of circumstances, health issues, carers inactive or unsuitability to foster.

- 3.3.3 5 carers had their registration terminated following an allegation or because they were deemed unsuitable to foster. The fostering service is committed to ensuring that carers provide a high standard of care and these de-registrations demonstrate this requirement. There have been no de-registrations due to carers transferring to Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) or other Local Authorities, indicating that the range of support being provided to carers enables them to feel valued and therefore to remain with the service.

3.4 Placement Service

- 3.4.1 Since the last annual report the Placement Service family finding function is now fully integrated within the Children Looked after Service which includes a structure of 1 team manager, 5 senior social workers, 2 placement officers and 1 housing advice worker.
- 3.4.2 The Placement Service are expanding their support to the wider Looked After Children's service and now offer 'Rethink Formulation' to placements at risk of breakdown. In addition, the service are now supporting a number of children to remain in their current placements at home or in care through additional support to placements, including foster carer peer support, outreach support from experienced foster carers and support from the Youth Service.
- 3.4.3 The pressures on the service at the current time are securing placements for teenagers and children with complex needs. In the last annual report Parent and Child placements were reported as a high pressure area. An evaluation of these placements was undertaken and it became evident that the success rate of these placements (child remaining in the care of their parent) was very low. Since this time the number of referrals has reduced significantly.

3.5 Parent and Child Scheme

- 3.5.1 The Parent and 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 provides safe parental capacity.
- 3.5.2 The total number of Parent & Child carer households is currently 4. 11 Parent and Child assessment placements have commenced (3 are ongoing) with 5 of the children or sibling groups returning home with the assessed parent and 3 going to family members for adoption. The scheme has also provided input to 5 non-residential parenting assessments and 2 non assessment placements for younger parents who need time to complete their education and develop skills to live independently. When the parent and child carers have availability they also undertake respite support for other assessment carers.

3.6 Mockingbird Family Model

- 3.6.1 Leeds has been chosen to develop a 2nd phase of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) with Innovation Funding from the DfE. The model places emphasis on building links with families and the wider community. The Hub foster carer role is central to the establishment of a positive network for up to 10 fostering families.
- 3.6.2 There are 7 Hubs operating at the present time, 3 for support for kinship families, 3 geographical hubs and 1 hub supporting both mainstream foster carers and up to 4 adoptive families where the adoptive arrangement is at the risk of breakdown.
- 3.6.3 An 8th Hub Carer was recruited to support mainstream carers and develop links to Residential Homes aiming to assist young people moving from a residential to a fostering arrangement. Regrettably the hub carer decided to return to a career in residential work so that position is still vacant and the recruitment process is underway. Recruiting experienced foster carers is key to the success of the model and we have 3 prospective carers to consider once they have ceased their present placement commitments.
- 3.6.4 The model is evidencing effective support for satellite carers and assisting with placement stability for children and young people. In total 48 fostering households are being supported with a total of 93 children and young people.
- 3.6.5 MFM staff and carers have hosted practice development sessions on the model for other agencies seeking to adopt the model and the Team manager for MFM and a MFM Supervising Social Worker have been invited to conferences in Gothenburg and Stockholm (Sweden) to present on the Leeds experience.

3.7 Service for teenagers and young adults

- 3.7.1 In July 2017 the Teenage Fostering Team was established developing on from the initial service of two supervising social workers identified to support foster carers for teenagers placed within the recruitment team. The team now consists of a team manager, 6 social workers and 3 social work assistants who cover teenage fostering, Supported Lodgings, Rent a Room and PACE placements (for young people held in police custody).
- 3.7.2 Supervising social workers within the team provide an increased level of visits and more intensive support to foster carers acknowledging the potential for additional challenge that comes with caring for teenagers. There are 2 dedicated Support Groups which meet on a monthly basis (alternative day and evening groups to accommodate carer's employment commitments). The team continues to develop and work together with carers, other teams and agencies to consider how young people can best be supported.
- 3.7.3 The team have been actively involved in the Rethink Formulation practice to support placements seen to be under pressure. They are currently exploring with the therapeutic team how the Non Violent Resistance approach may be helpful in working with young people presenting with aggression or violence and elements of this have already been implemented with carers. Following meetings to consider issues around placement stability and breakdown, the team are currently

involved in planning a multi-agency workshop to look at placement stability and particularly the role that wider agencies can play in supporting placements and avoiding breakdowns.

- 3.7.4 The Supported Lodgings Scheme is steadily expanding and now consists of 23 supported lodgings provider households, 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. The Rent a Room scheme similarly provides a resource to support the transition to independence for looked after young people including UASC and care leavers aged 16 – 25. The Rent a Room scheme currently has 10 providers. The steady growth in demand in relation to teenagers continues and these services offer a flexible range of provision for vulnerable young people needing support within a family environment whilst they prepare for independence.
- 3.7.5 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. The scheme is also accessed by two neighbouring authorities (Bradford and Wakefield) under a service level agreement which ensures adequate use of the provision and value for money.
- 3.7.6 As of March 2018, 70 young people were being supported by former foster carers beyond their 18th birthday under a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This is the highest number of young people supported by former foster carers since the Staying Put Policy was introduced in 2014. The benefit of 'Staying Put' provides young people with more security for them to move to independence at a pace that meets their needs.
- 3.7.7 In conjunction with foster carers, service staff and stakeholders, a Teens Fostering Forum including keynote speaker Des Holmes (Research in Practice), contributions from foster carers and care experienced young people was held in June 2017 at Elland Road Stadium. The forum also provided workshops and an information marketplace featuring over 30 agencies and their work with young people.

3.8 Kinship Care

- 3.8.1 The Kinship care services is composed of 2 social work teams, one for carer assessment and one for carer support. The teams support Kinship foster carers and special guardianship carers. The work within these teams has grown year on year following the growth of the family group conference service and the emphasis to assess family members where the care of the children (other than with birth parents) is required.
- 3.8.2 In order to meet the demands and achieve court timescales, the teams 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. However, reports can be requested by the courts which need completion in much shorter timescales.

- 3.8.3 There have been significant capacity issues in allocating the level of assessments to the team. The team's original capacity was to undertake 72 assessments with a contract for an external provider to undertake 11 assessments (out of Leeds area). 2017 -18 saw a record level of 228 referrals for assessment (compared with 184 referrals in 2016-17). Of these, 66 were KC24 referrals (with the child already in placement), 64 referrals were for prospective carers out of Leeds.
- 3.8.4 The challenges of undertaking 214 assessments from this high number of referrals has also been exacerbated by a high number of supervising social workers across the Kinship team going on maternity leave this year (7 in total).
- 3.8.5 Some temporary social work capacity has been identified from other areas of the looked after service and an advanced practitioner from the assessment team has been acting up as a Team Manager to provide additional management capacity to ensure the robust supervision of assessments undertaken by sessional staff. Given the continuing pressures on the Kinship service it is hoped this temporary arrangement for the acting Team Manager can be made permanent.
- 3.8.6 Of the positive assessments completed, 65 households were approved at panel as Kinship carers and a further 9 households were approved who then went on to gain Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) at the end of the proceedings. This has resulted in a net gain 34 Kinship carer households (181 in total) this year compared to 147 in 2017. The other 140 assessments were either withdrawn due to other plans being made for the child, terminated during the assessment period or were negative assessments which were not approved.
- 3.8.7 65 SGO's were made representing 42 children in care and 23 children not in care. 12 SGO's were made to foster carers, the remainder were to relatives or connected persons. The Kinship support team is continuing to support 181 Kinship approved households which is the highest number the service has experienced. 515 special guardianship arrangements are also supported by the service. Carers with children on SGOs' placed by other authorities but living in Leeds or an SGO made through private proceedings also contact the service for advice or assistance.
- 3.8.8 The Kinship service has now established access to funding via the Adoption Support Fund to help assist children formerly in care now in special guardianship placements with therapeutic support. The Kinship service held an event in April to discuss important research by Professor Elaine Farmer in association with Grandparents Plus. The research details Kinship carer's experiences of caring for children across the UK and the event will discuss and explore developing future practice and improving support for Kinship carers.
- 3.8.9 The Kinship assessment team also incorporates the private fostering responsibilities for the service.

3.9 Complex Needs Team

- 3.9.1 The complex needs service provides fostering placements and short breaks for children with a disability. Carers provide a preventative service through short

breaks to support children and their parents / carers enabling them to remain at home or in family based care.

- 3.9.2 62 children were in full time placements with complex needs foster carers during the last year – 2 placements in the service ended when special guardianship orders were made with the foster carer. Complex needs carers have a good track record of converting placements to SGO's which is a positive outcome for children (although this reduces the overall number of available foster carers).
- 3.9.3 There is a robust transitions policy for disabled children and many foster carers continue to offer placements into adulthood to young people post 18yrs as part of the St Anne's Shared Lives placements service.
- 3.9.4 113 children used the short breaks scheme this year. The trend is that the number of referrals to the scheme is decreasing as families are offered other forms of short breaks services. The Leeds short breaks service is a specialist provision for individual children with many complex health needs or challenging behaviours.
- 3.9.5 The number of carers has reduced this year with a nett loss of 5 short breaks households and 1 full time fostering household. There are 2 households at stage 2 assessment nearing approval offering a short / long term placement.
- 3.9.6 Recruitment is a significant challenge across complex needs especially for full time fostering placements. There are less opportunities to nurture previous short breaks carers to become full time carers and there is often capacity issues between carer's skills and the type of children being referred, particularly those with significantly challenging behaviours, or do not have capacity to have accommodation adapted for wheelchair users.
- 3.9.7 The service intends to set up a focus group including carer stake holders to look at improving opportunities for carers to progress to becoming full time complex needs carers.
- 3.9.8 The service has established close links with the housing service, occupational therapy and nursing services to support children within fostering households. Fleet transport have agreed to finance the replacement of complex needs short breaks services adapted vehicles in 2018.

3.10 Support Care

- 3.10.1 Support Care is a time limited, preventative and supportive service for children and young people living with their families who are experiencing crisis. It aims to support those children on child protection or children in need plans who are deemed as being on the edge of care to prevent the need for children being received into care.
- 3.10.2 Support carers look after children in their own homes for normally short periods (usually overnight) as part of wider packages of edge of care support. Children are aged between 0-16yrs and the provision of these packages can be 6-18 months duration if required. The placement is incorporated and reviewed as part of the child's plan.

- 3.10.3 The child minding scheme is a joint venture between fostering and the family support service. This aspect of the support care scheme aims to support younger children (0-4) to continue to live in their home environment.
- 3.10.4 In the past year 117 children and young people have been supported across both schemes. During this period 5 children (including a sibling group of 3) were received into foster care when their positions became too unsafe for the child to remain at home.
- 3.10.5 The scheme would like to expand in 2018 with a focus on recruiting another full time scheme carer who could provide up to 10 placements for teenagers. Additionally, the scheme would also seek to provide a crisis response (up to 72 hour placements) in an emergency alongside a full planned package of support to help reduce the number of teenagers coming into care who have not been previously known to the children's social work service.

3.11 Training

- 3.11.1 All prospective foster carers undertake the 3 day Skills to Foster preparation course. Prospective foster carers are also encouraged to attend mini courses (2 hours) which include Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding, Attachment and Loss, Behaviour Management and Working with Professionals.
- 3.11.2 A training and development programme is provided for all approved foster carers and is incorporated in the Payment for Skills (PFS) model. From newly approved foster carers through to the most experienced, training courses and development opportunities are provided with attendance requirements dependent upon a carers PFS Level.
- 3.11.3 The Leeds Payment for Skills (PFS) model has been highlighted and endorsed in the National Fostering Stocktake report to Government (January 2017) as a recommended good practice example of a fee paid system for foster carers. The model has a range of training and development requirements for carers at each level of the model. In addition, carers with their supervising social workers achieve an annual Personal Development Plan which identifies learning and development needs.
- 3.11.4 The training programme is developed and updated by the foster carer training steering group. This year the Workforce Development Team ran an Outcome Based Accountability session with foster carer representatives and staff from the fostering service to identify barriers to training and what factors could improve training delivery and participation.
- 3.11.5 A varied programme of training was offered last year, 31 different topics were offered over 174 training sessions. 1,092 training sessions in total were attended by carers (excluding the Nurtured Heart courses).
- 3.11.6 Several new courses have also been piloted, including a course on Further Attachment (3 levels of attachment training are now offered: Introduction, Intermediate and Further Attachment). A course on Trauma Informed Practice is also being piloted. Carers now have access to book their training on the Council

Performance and Learning system (PALS) subject to agreement and sign off by their supervising social worker.

- 3.11.7 The intensive Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCIF) course which runs over 5 days (with refresher days every second year) has been well attended. TCIF is promoted as a key training course, providing carers with a structure to make sense of challenging behaviours and a therapeutic approach to crisis prevention.
- 3.11.8 The Therapeutic Social Work Team also offers training and support groups for foster carers. Four Nurtured Heart and two KEEP programmes ran last year, both these courses offer strategies for carers to manage complex and challenging behaviours and to manage their own stress. Outcomes for the children and the carers who take part in these programmes are very positive.
- 3.11.9 A range of training for staff across the fostering service is provided. A Restorative Practice 'Deep Dive' programme has been undertaken by the South support team. This year teams have been encouraged to learn about and apply a new practice model being used in Leeds called Rethink Formulation and its application in promoting placement support. Additionally, the teenage team has undertaken training with members from the Therapeutic Team on the Non Violent Resistance approach in working with young people presenting with violence or aggression. Both these approaches are compatible with the key principles of Restorative Practice. Supervising social workers attended a development training day about implementing the updated training framework for foster carers.

3.12 Support for foster carers and their children promoting outcomes for children and young people

- 3.12.1 All foster carers have a qualified supervising social worker providing regular support and supervision. In addition to the individual support work undertaken, the service runs a range of support groups across the city. These offer peer support, training and other development opportunities. Some groups offer specialised support (e.g. Asian carers group, Teens carer group). All these groups are facilitated by supervising social workers.
- 3.12.2 Each support group has a representative who alongside the Leeds Foster Carers Association (LFCA) attend the Foster Carer Liaison Group which meets bimonthly. Foster carer representatives play a key stakeholder role and are involved in a range of service developments.
- 3.12.3 The service is committed to supporting the children of foster carers. In the past year 5 sessions of 'We Foster Too' training has been provided for children (aged 7 plus) whose family are going through the fostering process to help prepare them for fostering. This training is delivered on a group basis or 1 to 1 depending on the demand. The 'Kidz Foster Too' group meets every school holiday where a range of activities are offered as well as a training element. A teenagers Foster Too group will be established targeted at older birth children and will be launched in May. This will also include a residential event in October.
- 3.12.4 Foster carers have a key role in promoting a child's education. Specialist education support is available to foster carers. A representative from the Virtual

School attends the foster carers Liaison Group and a number of support groups throughout the year, promoting updates on government guidance as well as advice on Personal Education Plans and Children Looked after Reviews. The Virtual School staff offers termly training sessions to both new and experienced carers covering the national curriculum, issues which may impact on education programmes and how carers may best support their children in placement.

- 3.12.5 Other key partners providing support and individual advice to carers include the Looked after Children's Health Team and dedicated nurses overseeing and advising carers on children's health needs. Additionally, the Youth Service has been promoting both individual and group work support to foster families and children in foster care. A number of children have particularly enjoyed and benefited from a residential event held at Herd Farm this year.
- 3.12.6 The Therapeutic Social Work team provide essential support to foster carers and looked after children including a fostering surgery that assists carers in understanding and managing children's behaviours. There were 128 contacts with the fostering surgery during the past 12 months, discussing 102 children. 36% of referrals were for children aged 2-8 years and 57% for children and young people aged 9 to 16. The placement stability of the children whose carers receive advice is tracked at 93% 3 months post placement and 73% 6 months post placement. 49 life story clinic appointments were also provided during the past year.
- 3.12.7 Foster carers are encouraged to provide health and leisure opportunities for the children they look after as well as themselves and other household members. The Leeds Corporate offer providing free Bodyline Membership and free swimming lessons for looked after children continues to be well received.
- 3.12.8 In conjunction with the corporate offer, the fostering service developed with business and other partners as part of the Child Friendly Leeds initiative a range of events for carers and their families. Enrichment activities and events for foster carers and kinship carers are now co-ordinated by the Enrichment team with links to the fostering service.
- 3.12.9 A separate report from the Enrichment team detailing support to carers and their families is provided at appendix 2.
- 3.12.10 The Leeds Foster Care Association (LFCA) offers a 24 hour 7 day a week advice line for carers provided on a rota basis by experienced foster carers. This has been very effective in offering support to carers especially out of office hours. The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) has given very positive feedback about the service. When appropriate, the LFCA helpline will refer carers to the EDT Team. However, most problems are resolved by the LFCA advice line without needing to refer to the EDT team.
- 3.12.11 All approved foster carers have access to their own resources page on the Foster 4 Leeds website, which provides key information and procedures. They are also provided with a foster carer diary for day to day recording which includes key law summaries and other important guidance. Foster Carers now receive a regular emailed news letter from the service providing news, views and information from service staff, foster carers and the LFCA. Foster carers are offered free individual

membership of the Fostering Network and on approval, are automatically enrolled as members of the LFCA.

3.13 Fostering Panels

- 3.13.1 The number of items heard at fostering panels this period was 389. The service has 5 panels in order to accommodate this level of business, each with an Independent Chair.
- 3.13.2 The quality of assessments considered by panel's remains high with 80% rated as very good or good and 13% rated as satisfactory. 3% of assessments were rated as unsatisfactory. This information was relayed to the relevant team managers to identify how improvements should be made.
- 3.13.3 Feedback from foster carers regarding their experience of attending panel also remains positive with 66% rated as very good, 16% rated as good and 9% rated as satisfactory. 1 attendee rated their experience as poor, the issues this attendee raised were addressed with them directly to see how their experience could have been improved.
- 3.13.4 Panel members attended an annual training day in November. Topics included learning from Serious Case Reviews, safer foster carer recruitment, developments in the Kinship Service and the role of the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- 3.13.5 Panel Chairs, Panel Advisors and the ADM's meet twice a year to discuss any panel issues and agree panel practice improvements. The most recent meeting agreed improvements to the Kinship assessment referral to panel process, including expectations on panels considering incomplete assessments and those with time scaled requirements by the courts.
- 3.13.6 The Panel Manager post (which was jointly shared with the Adoption Service) was removed from the Fostering Service structure in April 2017 following the separation of the Fostering Service from Adoption when One Adoption Yorkshire was established. The senior panel administration post also became vacant for several months (this has now been recruited to). The loss of the dedicated panel manager role has placed additional pressures on two fostering managers who have assumed shared panel management tasks in addition to their existing workloads.
- 3.13.7 The fostering panels consider the suitability of foster carers and can recommend that potential carers are not suitable to foster or an existing carer's registration categories can be amended. 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 change of registration category or the termination of their approval as foster carers. In this period there have been 2 referrals to the IRM. The dates for the IRM hearings are still to be advised.

3.14 Complaints and Allegations

- 3.14.1 There were 15 complaints received of which 6 were considered under the fostering service complaints procedure, 6 under the corporate complaint procedure and 3 under the children act procedure. The outcome of the complaints

are that 2 are ongoing, 3 have been upheld, 2 have not been upheld, 4 have been partially upheld, 2 are inconclusive and 2 have been suspended. There were also 5 representations/enquiries which were dealt with through responses to historical issues.

- 3.14.2 Complaints are dealt with promptly and the learning from complaints is discussed within the fostering managers group. Of the complaints and representations, 7 were by foster carers raising concerns about service support from social work teams as well as from the fostering service. Although the complaints were investigated within the fostering service, liaison and feedback was offered to the relevant social work teams.
- 3.14.3 There were 48 notifications to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where concerns were expressed about possible harm to a child or young person by a foster carer. 38 concerns related to a mainstream carer, 8 related to kinship carers, 1 to a former foster carer and 1 to a de-registered foster carer. It is important to note that a notification in itself does not equate to a substantive allegation against a foster carer.
- 3.14.4 Of the 44 notifications which have been concluded, the majority were unsubstantiated or unfounded. There were 3 kinship and 7 mainstream foster carers where concerns were substantiated. This includes 2 mainstream carers who were reported to EDT by police as being drunk when a missing child was returned to their care. 1 carer who was reported on 2 separate occasions for pushing a child and 2 related mainstream carers who failed to appropriately report concerns relating to sexual activity between 2 children. A further mainstream carer posted inappropriate comments on Facebook about a child who had recently left her care.

Of the 3 kinship carers where concerns were substantiated, 1 inappropriately chastised a child, 1 made inadequate child care arrangements for an adolescent and 1 was found to have weapons in his car when arrested by the police. Immediate actions were taken to safeguard the children whilst investigations were undertaken and appropriate support was identified for the children. Further training and supervision was put in place where it was deemed safe for the children to remain in placement. All carers where an allegation had been substantiated were referred to fostering panel following investigation. 2 households have been de-registered as unsuitable to foster and 1 was de-registered following an allegation.

- 3.14.5 When an allegation is made foster carers can access an independent advice and advocacy service. This service is currently commissioned through FISS (Foster Talk).

3.15 Quality Assurance Information

- 3.15.1 Each fostering panel offers feedback to supervising social workers with regards to the quality of their reports presented to panel. The standards are generally of a high quality. Any identified issues are discussed directly with workers and any thematic issues arising are discussed with managers in the management group.

- 3.15.2 The fostering reviewing team undertake all foster carer reviews and ensures feedback for both the supervising social worker and the foster carer about their work. This year the number of reviews taken place have been delayed due to vacancies in the reviewing team when 2 of the 3 reviewing officers left post. The posts have now been recruited to alongside the reviewing team manager post so it is hoped that all reviews will be completed within timescales during the coming year.
- 3.15.3 As part of the fostering quality assurance and performance framework there have been 32 files audited this year. 29 were rated as good, 2 required improvement and 1 was deemed as inadequate. The issues raised included insufficient evidence of contact/supervision with the carer and inadequate recording. The relevant supervising social workers and their team managers are tasked with evidencing improvements with the carers concerned.

3.16 Strategic Issues and Forward Plan

- 3.16.1 The key priority of the service remains the recruitment and retention of foster carers. A particular challenge is recruiting carers for both teenagers and young people with disabilities or complex health needs. The recruitment team manager and team manager for children with disabilities are working together on targeted recruitment initiatives along-side developments in the wider fostering service and with key partners to develop effective additional support arrangements for carers.
- 3.16.2 The kinship service will be reviewed to address the year on year increase of kinship arrangements and the pressures these present. Additionally there will be a focussed approach to embedding early intervention and support for kinship arrangements within the area social work teams and cluster services, rather than support being primarily developed only via the kinship service.
- 3.16.3 The development of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) will continue with the aim to recruit and train additional Hub carers to support arrangements for children moving from residential care to foster placements and to support teenage foster carers. Leeds MFM continues to attract interest within the UK and internationally. The Leeds Fostering Service has hosted training events for authorities starting out on the MFM journey and will host a study trip to Leeds by professionals from Sweden to learn more about the model in the autumn.
- 3.16.4 The service has a commitment to developing best practice and this will continue through participation in research (Rees Centre, Oxford), the Mockingbird Family Model and the forum on Kinship Support and the research undertaken by Grandparents Plus arranged for April 2018.
- 3.16.5 Following the Fostering Stocktake report to Government in January, there is a growing interest in the Leeds Payment for Skills (PFS) fee model for foster carers which was highlighted as an area of best practice. We will continue to support requests from other local authorities for advice and information regarding this and other areas of service best practice.

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 fostering service works closely with the LFCA to ensure carers are supported in understanding their role. Representatives from the LFCA submitted evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Leeds Fostering Service. This was part of the submissions process for the Government Stock Take on fostering. The LFCA emphasised the established relationship between carers and the service, and the strong position it enjoys compared to other Local Authorities. As a result of this, the Director was invited to submit evidence to the same committee about the Leeds Fostering Service.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The fostering service Equality Impact Assessment previously 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. Attached at appendix 3.

4.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The Children and young people plan identifies children who are looked after as one of the three priority 'Obsessions.'

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 There have been significant challenges to the fostering budget this year for staffing costs covering maternity and sickness leave. The additional costs of resourcing kinship assessments by sessional staff has impacted on staffing costs. Government funding does not cover the costs of maintaining and developing the Leeds Staying Put offer so this has to be factored in to our continuing commitments. The Reviewing Service is now fully staffed but requires review to ensure sufficiency to meet an expanding service.

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. The report is linked to the corporate risk on Safeguarding Children.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The recruitment and retention of foster carers and the development priorities of the fostering service will continue to be addressed in order to achieve a high quality service and best outcomes for children and young people looked after.

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, and supports the ongoing work to recruit and retain high quality carers within the service.

Appendix 1

Annual Stats April 2017 - March 2018	Kinship	Mainstream							Complex Needs						Rent A Room	Grand Total
	Kinship / Level 1	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1/2	Level 1 Supported Lodgings	Support Care Scheme	Holiday	Total Mainstream	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2	Short Breaks	Holiday	Total Complex Needs	Rent A Room	Grand Total
Figures at 1st April 2017	147	173	105	96	18	37	35	464	54	8	-1	28	7	96	7	714
Approvals	74	1	8	12	6	1		28	0	0	0	2		2		104
Deregistrations	40	18	8	15	1	5	2	49	2	3	0	5	0	10		99
Progressions/Non-panel approvals	0	5	2	-8		1	11	11	1	0	-1		3	3	5	19
Nett Gain/Loss	34	-12	2	-11	5	-3	9	-10	-1	-3	-1	-3	3	-5	5	24
Total at end of March 2018	181	161	107	85	23	34	44	454	53	5	-2	25	10	91	12	738
Details of Deregistrations																
	Kinship / Level 1	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2	Level 1 Supported Lodgings	Support Care Scheme	Holiday	Total Mainstream	Level 4	Level 3	Level 1 & 2	Short Breaks	Holiday	Total Complex Needs	Rent A Room	Grand Total
Child Adopted By Carer			1					1						0		1
Child SGO By Carer	22		1					1						0		23
Child RO By Carer								0						0		0
Child Moved To Another Placement	4				1			1						0		5
Child Returned Home	6							0						0		6
Retired - General		11	1	4				16	1					1		17
Retired - Child Reached 18	6			1				1						0		7
Resigned - Change of Circumstance		1	1	5		4		11		1		1		2		13
Resigned - Gone To IFA								0						0		0
Resigned - Gone To Another LA								0						0		0
Resigned - Other	1	3	4	2		1		10	1			3		4		15
Terminated - Unsuitable	1	1		1				2		1				1		4
Terminated - Inactive				1			2	3				1		1		4
Terminated - Carer Ill Health/Died		1		1				2		1				1		3
Terminated - Disruption								0						0		0
Terminated - Allegation		1						1						0		1
Total	40	18	8	15	1	5	2	49	2	3	0	5	0	10	0	99