

Report of: the Director of Children & Families

Report to: Executive Board

Date: 26th June 2019

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

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 2018 and March 2019.

Leeds' support for foster carers and kinship carers is seen as a model of good practice. Support for foster care was praised by OfSTED inspectors in 2018 *'Great care is taken in trying to find the right placement for children. Potential matches are carefully considered. Placement plans are comprehensive and detailed. There is good wrap-around support for children and their foster carers, including kinship carers. Most children who are looked after live with families either in Leeds or within 20 miles of their homes. Placement stability is generally good.'*

The *rate per ten thousand* (77) of children looked after in Leeds remains steady despite an increase in the child population in the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city. The proportion of children looked after in Leeds who are in foster care rather than residential care is higher than most local authorities in the Country and this is in line with the strategy to ensure that children are raised in a family environment wherever possible.

The report outlines the types of foster placements provided by the service and the recruitment and retention strategy using social media, advertising and fostering ambassadors to ensure that the authority continues to improve the capacity and quality

of foster care in Leeds. In the last year the service has seen a net increase of 28 foster carers in what is a very competitive market. Leeds has not seen any carers leave to join a private provider in this reporting period.

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 2018 and March 2019. The report updates the Board on activity in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers and developments within the service.

2. Background

- 2.1 A key priority for the Council's ambition to make Leeds a child friendly city is to ensure that wherever possible 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 contrast to national and regional trends, the proportion of children and young people that need to be looked after has been successfully reduced in Leeds over recent years. Current estimates suggest that in March 2019 75 per ten thousand were looked after, compared to a peak of 95 per ten thousand in 2012.
- 2.3 Whilst the proportion of children looked after in the city has been reduced, wider socio-demographic changes continue to create pressures. The child population grew by roughly 10% over the past ten years and is likely to grow by a similar amount over the next decade. Furthermore, this population growth has been centred on the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city – two thirds of population growth were in neighbourhood classified as amongst the 20% most deprived in the country. National and local research has shown that children from these communities are up to ten times more likely to enter their care compared to their peers in affluent neighbourhoods.
- 2.4 As such there continues to be significant demand on the service, and in particular growing need for support for adolescents as a result of recent and ongoing growth in this cohort as the rising birth rate from the 2000s feeds through into the current population.

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.

There is a significant increase in work associated with ensuring that children who cannot remain in the care of their parents have the opportunity to remain within their extended family. As a result there is a need to have a range of resources to

provide appropriate support to these Kinship families based on child and family need rather than type of court order.

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 fostering teams made up of supervising social workers, social work assistants and team managers. Two are geographically focussed teams; one team concentrates on Recruitment and Assessment, two teams specialise in working with Foster Carers with teenage children and children with disabilities and two other teams support Kinship Foster Carers. The work of the seven teams is overseen by two Service Delivery Managers (SDM's), both appointed in the last year following the retirement of the previous Service Delivery Manager. The SDM's are also responsible for the Placement Support team, the Therapeutic Social Work team and the Benefit and Finance team. These three teams are active participants in the Fostering Management group and play a crucial role in supporting the work of Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers. This increasing integrated approach has been a key development in the last twelve months.
- 3.1.2 Increasing the stability of foster placement placements has been an important focus for the Fostering Service. In September 2018 the 'Shaky Ground' day conference was attended by over 120 Foster Carers, Social Workers and Supervising Social Workers, along with a range of other professionals involved in working with Children Looked After. The Conference was a lively event, generating a lot of discussion resulting in a working group taking forward a range of key actions. These included developing a better understanding of foster carers issues through an on line questionnaire, improving the understanding between SW's and SSW's of their respective roles through a series of breakfast events, work with the Police regarding their practice in relation to foster children reported missing, focus on improving support to carers which included developing the therapeutic offer and out of hours service and a changing role for the Placements Team which included renaming it 'The Placement Support Team'.
- 3.1.3 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.
- 3.1.4 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.

3.1.5 There was 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 and retention of foster carers

3.2.1 Registrations of interest in fostering have increased this year. There have been 510 registrations of interest in 2018-19 compared to 484 in 2017-18. The service continues to provide a prompt telephone/email 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 687 followers (up from 316 at the end of March 2018). Twitter currently has 707 followers (up from 549 at the end of March 2018). Foster4leeds launched an Instagram account in 2018.

3.2.3 Fostering Ambassadors (experienced foster carers) co-lead the quarterly information evening events held in the city. 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 from our 'Voice and influence' (care experienced young people) group. 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 The Recruitment Team launched 'Costa Coffee' information drop in's during 2018/19, led by foster carers and Social Work Assistants. Locations currently include Kirkstall Bridge Shopping Centre, Otley Town Centre, Seacroft Shopping Centre and Crown Point Shopping Centre. These locations are all provided free of charge and have resulted in 19 registrations of interest.

3.2.5 The Recruitment Team has hosted 'Park Run takeovers' throughout 2018/19. This involves the team turning up to the events, speaking to runners before they set off (up to 400 people) regarding fostering and then having a table with information packs at the end of the run. These events are free of charge community events and the recruitment team has been very well received. Park runs completed: Bramley, Potternewton, Middleton, Armley, Roundhay and Temple Newsam.

3.2.6 The Recruitment Team continues to attend local fetes, galas and Breeze events throughout the summer school holiday period.

3.2.7 In March 2019 the Recruitment Team ran an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker campaign to recruit more foster carers, Supported Lodgings and Rent a Room providers for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people coming to Leeds. Three open days were held at the Reginald Centre in Chapeltown. Both Harehills and Chapeltown post codes were leafleted shortly before the open days. Approximately 12 families attended. We are also working closely with Migration

Yorkshire to support wider regional efforts to increase the number of carers offering homes to these children.

- 3.2.8 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 2018 and advertised heavily during LGBT Fostering and Adoption week in early 2019, for the first time advertising on the main billboard in the Freedom Quarter (Lower Briggate). The recruitment team additionally offers an LGBT awareness training course to foster carers once/twice a year.
- 3.2.9 Assessments are offered to prospective foster carers through dedicated supervising 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 disabilities. 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.
- 3.2.10 The Recruitment Team continued to be the main fostering team organising foster family events in conjunction with the Child Friendly Leeds Enrichment team.
- 3.2.11 This period, the Fostering Recruitment Team has organised the following: a Summer holiday day trip to Whitby, a Christmas Hyde Park Cinema event, Halloween Party at St Chads Parish Church, a day trip to the local Donkey Sanctuary, several trips to the Leeds Recycling Centre and Leeds Discovery Centre, free tickets to the Carriage Works Theatre, 4 teenager residentials for looked after children in foster care, a family day at Herd Farm, Iron Age experience at Herd Farm, a day trip to Middleton Railway and a trip to the Killingbeck Fire Station. The Recruitment Team organises the 'Kidz Foster Too' group (foster carers birth children support group) who this period organised the following: Easter Bake Off (April 2018), Go Karting (May 2018), Herd Farm activity day (August 2018), Cinema and Pizza day (December 2018) and Jumble Rumble crazy golf (February 2019).
- 3.2.12 The Supervising Social Work assistant within the Recruitment Team continued to organise and host in partnership with the Leeds Foster Carer Association the newly approved foster carers support group at the Old Fire Station in Gipton. The group is open to newly approved carers for up to 18 months.

3.3 Approvals and De-registrations of Foster Carers (see Appendix 1)

- 3.3.1 The total of all foster carer households registered at the end of March 2019 was 768, an increase of 28 from March 2018. Recruitment has increased for both 'Mainstream' and Children with Disabilities carers and Kinship carers. The overall number of fostering households recruited in the last year is **140**.

3.3.2 Deregistrations of mainstream and children with disabilities carers has reduced slightly compared with the previous year however there has been an increase of de-registrations of Kinship Carers. The total number of deregistration's in the last year is **121**. The reasons for deregistrations are varied as shown in appendix 1. In addition to this there has been a net increase of 9 respite carers.

3.3.3 Again we are able to report there have been no deregistration's due to carers transferring to IFA's or other Local Authorities. This suggests Leeds foster carers feel well supported by their supervising social workers and the broad range of services provided enabling them to feel valued in their role.

3.4 Placement Support Team

3.4.1 Since the last annual report the Placement Support Team has been rebranded to reflect the ambition to move to supporting placements and increasing placement stability alongside family finding. The team is integrated within the Children Looked after Service which includes a structure of a Team manager, 5 social workers, 2 placement officers, 1 part time housing advisor, 2 reunification project social workers and 2 part time Unaccompanied asylum seeking children placement development social workers.

3.4.2 The placement team are responsible for family finding and identifying placements for children, young people and care leavers from pre-birth to 25 years of age. Types of placements include: parent and child foster placements, foster placements, respite foster placements, residential care home placements, supported living, supported lodgings and care leaver accommodation. To do this the placement team work closely with Leeds fostering team, children's social work teams, children's commissioning service and independent fostering, residential care and leaving care providers. Family finding and placement finding constitutes a significant part of the day to day work of the placement team as well as increasing placement support activities.

3.4.3 The team benefits from two project reunification social workers whose focus is to move children from residential placements to foster care placements or family care, with a particular focus on children placed in out of area or placed in external residential placements. This involves working closely with the looked after teams, fostering, MST, education and therapeutic services to progress reunification and 'move on' plans. The two project social workers are also responsible for chairing Rethink formulation meetings and support the looked after teams to complete reunification assessments. This project has been successful in its aims, with 25 young people moving home to family or to foster care placements and improved joint working with the looked after teams.

3.4.4 From April 2019, the team has increased to include a new post funded with money obtained from the Home Office Controlling Migration fund. The unaccompanied asylum seeking children placement development social work role is funded for two years with a view to increasing placement opportunities and placement stability for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people in Leeds. The role has been offered on a job share with 2 social workers tasked to lead this project, supporting the placement support team, the fostering team and Children Looked

after Service. The social workers are responsible for developing training and support groups specifically for Leeds carers who care for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and for supporting recruitment and retention of unaccompanied asylum seeking children's carers. They are also responsible for family finding for all unaccompanied asylum seeking children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children care leavers.

- 3.4.5 The Placement Service have expanded their support to the wider Looked after Children's service. Rethink Formulations are offered to support social work teams where foster placements are unstable and to formulate care planning with a placement focus. Two social workers in the team are 'rethink trained' and providing this service, which is well used across the service. In line with the overarching ambition to move towards supporting placements, all of the placement team social workers are in the process of being trained to provide additional support with a view to double the capacity to offer this support. In addition to this, the placement support offer has also been extended since the last annual report to include; increased attendance at placement support meetings, regular placement support team delivered support groups for foster carers and foster carer peer support. Additionally, the Placement Support Team social workers are increasingly acting as support broker and coordinator, arranging and reviewing individual support packages for children, young people and foster carers where needed. Support packages can include outreach support from experienced foster carers, support from the Youth Service and individually commissioned floating support from support agencies.
- 3.4.6 The pressures on the service at the current time are securing placements for adolescents, for children with complex needs, large sibling groups and the limited availability of foster carers able or willing to offer long term foster placements. Adolescents are at a higher risk of experiencing placement breakdowns or temporary placements. This is especially true of adolescents being accommodated for the first time as it is for young people moving placements following a breakdown. Young females at risk of CSE are also particularly challenging to place in foster care.

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 In the year 2018 -19, 6 Carers participated in the provision of Parent and Child Assessment placements. As of March 2019, one of the carers is undertaking a residential parent and child assessment, another is providing a non-residential assessment where the child is living with the carer and the parent is not. One of the carers is caring for a baby alone, another is caring for a sibling group and two are awaiting placements.
- 3.5.3 During the year 4 children have left placement to live with the parent being assessed. 2 children have left to live with a parent other than the one being

assessed. 3 children have left to live with other family members. 2 children have been adopted outside of their birth family. In addition, 2 children have been the subject of non-residential assessments and have moved on to live with the parent being assessed.

- 3.5.4 The Scheme also provides support to 2 Carers who offer non assessment parent and child placements. One of these has seen a parent and child leave together to live in the community and have agreed to accommodate another young father and his child where he has been positively assessed as a parent by CSWS but where support in a placement is needed for a period. The other was caring for a baby while a plan for permanence was formulated and where both young parents have had the opportunity, in succession, to demonstrate they can care for their child.
- 3.5.5 There has been an emphasis this year on training given the difficulty in accessing relevant training for the assessment carer's task. The carers and the SSW between them are formulating bespoke training on understanding neuro-sequential development in young babies, on understanding attachment in a placement context and in assessing parents with learning needs.

3.6 Mockingbird Family Model

- 3.6.1 Leeds is currently engaged in developing a second phase of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM), working in partnership with The Fostering Network and with innovation funding from the DFE. The model places an emphasis on building links between fostering families and the wider community. The emphasis is very much about strengthening families and protecting children and young people.
- 3.6.2 The Hub foster carer role is central to the establishment of a community network for up to 10 fostering families. Recruiting experienced foster carers has been key to the successful implementation of the model in Leeds. We have increased the number of hubs available to our foster carers from 7 to 10 this year; 5 support kinship families (including families who have obtained Special Guardianship Orders) and 5 geographical hubs support mainstream fostering families.
- 3.6.3 One of the mainstream hubs links in with 'One Adoption' (Post Adoption Support service) and looks to provide hub support where the adoptive family is under stress and there is risk of breakdown. The fostering service and One Adoption are connecting this year with Oxfordshire who are the only other authority who work with adoptive families as part of MFM to consider future developments.
- 3.6.4 Our ambition is for mainstream hubs to further develop links to our residential homes aiming to assist young people moving from a residential to a fostering arrangement. Part of this would include providing young people with quality time in a family/community setting until the right long term family can be identified.
- 3.6.5 One of the most recently established hubs will be set within our Teenage Team and will focus on support to mainstream carers of older children and young people.

- 3.6.6 The model is evidencing effective support for satellite carers and assisting with placement stability for children and young people. In total, 61 fostering households are being supported with a total of 101 children and young people (this is within 8 hubs - the two new hubs are just being established).
- 3.6.7 As our hubs have grown and developed so has our experience and skill in their use and we strive to ensure that the hubs we establish meet the varied needs of our children and young people and their families.
- 3.6.8 The Rees Centre (Oxford University) is undertaking a 3 year evaluation of Mockingbird phase 2 which is due to conclude in March 2020. As an agency we submit detailed data that informs this study with the hub carers providing monthly data returns on their hub activities.
- 3.6.9 MFM staff and foster carers have hosted practice development sessions on the model for other agencies seeking to adopt the model. MFM staff have previously been invited to conferences in Gothenburg and Stockholm (Sweden) to present on the Leeds experience. Leeds continues to have an open doors policy to assist other local authorities who have come on board since 2017 to adopt the model.
- 3.6.10 MFM staff continue to benefit from working in partnership with The Fostering Network who facilitate national and regional leadership and operational workshops for staff and carers involved in MFM. This is alongside national engagement activities for children and young people involved in Mockingbird (NEST events).

3.7 Services for Teenagers and Young Adults

- 3.7.1 The Teenage Fostering Team was established in July 2017 with the remit to support young people in foster care through a specialist team supporting carers with a clear attachment and trauma informed approach grounded in knowledge of the teenage developmental stage. Supervising social workers provide a more frequent level of visiting in recognition of the increased challenges that can be faced by carers of teenagers. The team cover Teenage Fostering, Supported Lodgings, Rent a Room and PACE.
- 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). Support groups are currently being reviewed with a plan to increase consistency across the groups.
- 3.7.3 The team continues to develop and work together with carers, other teams and agencies to consider how young people can best be supported. The team were centrally involved in the planning and delivery of the Sept 18 multi agency workshop 'On Shaky Ground' looking at placement stability and the team have continued to be involved in ongoing developments from this including foster carer support questionnaires, social worker / supervising social worker forums to encourage closer joint working and another stability conference planned for September 2019.

- 3.7.4 The team work closely with the therapeutic team both through the fostering surgery and direct referrals. Workers continue to implement aspects of the Non Violent Resistance approach, particularly in terms of de-escalation and increasing parental presence. The team continue to be actively involved in Rethink Formulations using them as a form of placement support meeting. A number of team members have volunteered to form a pool of co-ordinators to facilitate expanding the model further for placement support as well as workers also using the model one to one with carers to explore different ways of understanding young people's needs.
- 3.7.5 The Supported Lodgings Scheme now consists of 27 supported lodgings providers. The Rent a Room scheme similarly provides a resource to support the transition to independence for looked after young people including unaccompanied asylum seeking children and care leavers aged 16 - 25. The Rent a Room scheme currently has 10 providers. These services offers a wider range of provision for vulnerable young people needing support within a family environment whilst they prepare for independence.
- 3.7.6 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.
- 3.7.7 As of March 2018, 67 young people were being supported by former foster carers beyond their 18th birthday under a 'Staying Put' arrangement. The continued priority to support young people via Staying Put is providing them with security to enable them to move to independence at a pace that best meets their needs.

3.8 Kinship Care

- 3.8.1 Leeds has a high profile as a model of good practice in terms of Kinship Care and hosts regular visits from other local authorities across the country. The Kinship care service is composed of 3 social work teams; one leads on carer assessment and private fostering, one on carer support and Mockingbird, with a third smaller, newly developing team taking the lead on Special Guardianship. Each team has its own roles and identities, however, the staff work very much as a unified service.
- 3.8.2 The teams are made up of Supervising Social Workers and Social Work Assistants; 4 SWA's working full time, 11 SSW's working full time, 7 SSW's working on a part time basis.
- 3.8.3 Staff support colleagues in area teams in particular around viability assessments and Emergency Regulation 24 placements. Staff offer advice, guidance and support on a regular basis to Kinship carers enabling them to access appropriate services ranging from training to welfare benefit advice, as well as additional provision in their localities.

- 3.8.4 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. Staffing numbers have not changed during this 12 month period but there has been a further, significant increase in the work required from the Kinship Service. The number of kinship assessments referred into the service increased in 2018 -19 to 247 (up from 228 in 2017-18). The number of approved kinship foster households increased from 181 to 199 and the total number of Special Guardianship arrangements known to the Kinship Service is 530 (households) for 707 children (up from 507 households , 665 children at 31 March 2018). The number of viability assessments the team co-worked was 281 (up from 258).
- 3.8.5 Of the Kinship assessments allocated, 31 % were allocated within the Kinship Care Service (up from 22% in 2017-18), 51% were allocated to internal (Leeds City Council employees) sessional workers (up from 46%), 4 were allocated to external independent assessors (equal to 2017-18), 14% were allocated to Carter Brown assessors (down from 27%) and 1% were allocated for international assessment (up from 0.5%).
- 3.8.6 A significant area of ongoing development for the Kinship service is the roll out of the Mockingbird Family Model provision for kinship carers. In the last 12 months this has been extended to cover Special Guardians and their children. There are currently 5 Mockingbird hubs for Kinship, an increase of 2 in the last 12 months. This has proved an invaluable resource for carers and children alike and is now much sought after.
- 3.8.7 Whilst Kinship families are encouraged to find support within their family networks we also have some Kinship carers who access alternative forms of support (other than Mocking Bird) through the Short Breaks Disability service, mainstream respite and the Support Care scheme.
- 3.8.8 Last year the Kinship service held their first successful overnight stay for around 7 families at Herd Farm Activity centre. There are 2 more weekends away, covering 2 nights each, planned in the next 12 months along with a Kinship Activity day for children and young people in the summer holidays. Kinship staff are present to support both centre staff and families at these events.
- 3.8.9 In March 2019, Leeds successfully facilitated a consultation event on behalf of M.P. Melanie Onn (member of the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care) to capture the voices of Kinship carers across the Yorkshire & Humberside region. Carers gave their views on a number of issues including the key areas that would improve the lives of the children they were caring for, including; what would enable more children who can't live with their parents to be brought up in kinship care; what MP's could do to raise awareness of the advantages, strengths and opportunities that kinship care provides.
- 3.8.10 Kinship care is an area of growth within social care and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. As a Child Friendly City committed to helping children staying within their families and communities wherever possible the service will continue to work to develop and improve work in this vital area. As such Leeds

has recently started work with an independent Social Care consultant to identify opportunities and options for change to ensure that the service is best placed to deliver our aspiration to maximise Kinship and Special Guardianship arrangements where appropriate.

3.9 Special Guardianship

- 3.9.1 The two dedicated Special Guardianship SSW's deal with referrals for a range of support, with a wide range of issues with financial problems and contact being two common sources of pressure on these families.
- 3.9.2 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. This has proved to be a popular opportunity for carers and their children and is a significant piece of work for the staff undertaking each assessment and referral to the fund.
- 3.9.3 The Special Guardianship service has embraced a West Yorkshire Regional Partnership with the national charity Grandparent's Plus who have been funded to offer additional support to Special Guardians across Leeds and West Yorkshire. The team now have a part time worker who is able to extend the offer of support to a number of Special Guardians.
- 3.9.4 Carers with children on SGO's placed by other authorities but living in Leeds or an SGO made through private proceedings also contact the service for advice or assistance.
- 3.9.5 We are currently working together with One Adoption West Yorkshire to lead a review of Special Guardian arrangements across the region to support the sharing of best practice, learning and provide a consistent response and offer to families with seeking Special Guardian arrangements.

3.10 Fostering Children with Disabilities Team

- 3.10.1 The fostering children with disabilities service provides fostering placements and short breaks for children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). 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. They provide support to children in the community and children in foster families.

In doing so they support children on the edge of care and help to prevent family breakdown and support foster carers to maintain placement stability for looked after children with additional needs.

- 3.10.2 During the last year 58 children were in full time placements with 41 disability fostering households. 4 placements in the service ended when special guardianship orders were made with the foster carer. Children with Disability foster 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). 2 new long term/short term foster carers were recruited to

the service last year. 1 carer has retired and 1 is presently inactive. 2 households have returned to fostering after a period of inactivity; one following adoption of 2 siblings and 1 after a break to settle young people on the St Anne's Shared Lives service.

- 3.10.3 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 adult placements service. Last year, 3 young people remained with their previous foster carers who are now with the St Anne's Shared Lives service.
- 3.10.4 109 children used the short breaks scheme this year. We currently have 32 active short breaks carers. The cohort of carers varies and includes 6 carers with ground floor adaptations and adapted vehicles, 4 of whom are contracted to the service to provide short breaks 48 weeks of the year for at least 5 days out of 7. These carers tend to provide short breaks for children who are hardest to place. Other carers may be matched to 1 or 2 families only to which they provide a bespoke service where the families develop close supportive relationships. The trend is that the number of referrals to the scheme is decreasing as families are offered other forms of short breaks services. The service is a specialist provision for individual children many of whom have complex health needs or challenging behaviours. Our short breaks social workers sit on RADAR (resource allocation decision and review panel for disabled children).
- 3.10.5 Recruitment for carers of children with additional needs, especially for full time fostering placements remains a significant challenge. There are less opportunities to nurture previous short breaks carers to become full time carers and there is sometimes capacity issues between carer's skills and the type of children being referred, particularly those with significantly challenging behaviours. We also have a shortage of accommodation adapted for wheelchair users. There has also been a rise in the numbers of children with disabilities in residential placements.
- 3.10.6 In autumn 2018 following consultation with our foster carers, we changed our name from the Complex Needs Service to the Fostering Children with Disabilities Service as part of our recruitment strategy. It was felt that "complex needs fostering" didn't reflect the range of children or fostering opportunities and focused potential carers minds on a small cohort of medically complex children. In November 2018 we invited carers and professionals to a public relaunch of the service with the aim of increasing our profile, recruiting new carers, and supporting short breaks foster carers to progress to becoming full time complex needs carers.
- 3.10.7 The service will make fostering children with disabilities a priority for recruitment and have updated all of our publicity material. The service has launched a 2 year initiative '100 Helping Hands' to recruit more carers for disabled children with a target of having at least 100 disability foster carers by the end of the initiative. Foster carers have been part of a focus group to plan a video publicising Leeds as a positive place for foster carers to reach out their helping hands to children with disabilities. We have also involved foster children, previously fostered children, and families who use the short breaks service in the planning and making of the video. A launch event for the video and the campaign in Fostering Fortnight in

May has been widely publicised. There are plans to keep up the momentum over the next 2 years. 8 fostering households who have fostered for between 25 and 35 years are having tea with the Lord Mayor and the Director of Children's Services on June 5th 2019 and their stories will be released on social media and to the press. In November 2019 the fostering service are holding a conference at Elland Road to celebrate children with disabilities and develop our knowledge around the needs of our vulnerable children. It is anticipated that this will strengthen our opportunity to raise awareness and recruit new carers.

- 3.10.8 The service has established close links with the Housing Service. In the last year, Housing partnered with us and financed the adaptation of the property of a professional full time short breaks carer to increase our offer to children who are wheelchair users. In the coming year there are 2 extensions/ adaptations in progress to meet the housing needs of children placed with foster carers also financed through housing and Disabled Facilities Grant. There is also a further adaptation underway to a council property of a short breaks carer which is financed by housing and which will enable us to provide short breaks to children who have mobility and health needs. We are aware of the need to ensure that we replace carers with adapted homes who are reaching retirement age with new carers coming through. Occupational therapy and nursing services also offer significant support to children within fostering households.
- 3.10.9 The Fleet transport service is in the process of financing and managing the replacement of 6 fostering children with disabilities vehicles used for short breaks where possible with electric sustainable vehicles.
- 3.10.10 We work closely with our colleagues in health to meet the needs of the most medically vulnerable children in Leeds with 3 of our children having a life limiting condition and an end of life plan in place. We are actively working with health to place a child who is on full time ventilation with foster carers.

3.11 Support Care

- 3.11.1 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.
- 3.11.2 Support carers look after children in their own homes for normally short periods (usually overnight) as part of wider package 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.
- 3.11.3 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 (0-3) to continue to live in their home environment, by providing day care to enable parents to access support service for themselves in order to achieve positive outcomes within the Children in Need or Child Protection Plan.

- 3.11.4 In the past year, 87 children and young people have been referred to the scheme. An additional 47 children and young people have been supported across both schemes. During this period of the 134 children supported, 12 children (including a sibling group of 4 a sibling group of 3 and 2 sibling groups of 2) were received into foster care when their positions became too unsafe for the children to remain at home. 2 teenagers were placed in MST FIT (which was a planned intervention) and returned home and 1 young person had a planned move into a residential setting.
- 3.11.5 How the great work of these support carers can continue to be developed will be considered over the coming months as part of a wider review of support for adolescents and families 'on the edge of care'.

3.12 Foster Carer Training & Development

- 3.12.1 All prospective foster carers undertake the 3 day Skills to Foster preparation course. Prospective foster carers are also expected to attend taster courses (2 hours) which include Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding, Attachment and Loss, Behaviour Management and Working with Professionals.
- 3.12.2 A training and development programme is provided for all approved foster carers and is linked to 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.
- 3.12.3 The training framework is reviewed and updated by the foster carer training steering group which meets three times per year. There have been recent amendments to the framework for all foster carers which offers a more streamlined programme of training and development, courses offered and additional development opportunities.
- 3.12.4 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 Leeds foster carers.
- 3.12.5 A new training course, the Secure Base Model (for Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers) is currently being piloted with a view to this being offered in the future to all foster carers either through formal classroom training or delivered via carer support groups.
- 3.12.6 Carers continue to access and book their training on the Council Performance and Learning system (PALS) subject to agreement and sign off by their supervising social worker.
- 3.12.7 The intensive Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCIF) course which runs over 5 days (with refresher days every second year) continues to be 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.

3.12.8 The Therapeutic Social Work Team also offers training and support groups for foster carers. Four Nurtured Heart and two KEEP (Group training) 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. The KEEP programme has just run its final course but the Therapeutic Social Work team are currently developing a similar course that will be looking at being trauma informed, brain development and providing a secure base.

3.12.9 A range of training for staff across the fostering service is provided. 'On Shaky Ground' was an event held last year for foster carers, Social Workers and other professionals that looked at the issue of placement stability. Teams continue to develop and use Rethink Formulation, (Leeds practice Model) in promoting placement support.

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

3.13.1 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.

3.13.2 Each support group has a representative who alongside the Leeds Foster Carers Association (LFCA) attend the Foster Carer Liaison Group which meets bi-monthly. Foster carer representatives play a key stakeholder role and are involved in a range of service developments.

3.13.3 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 is now established targeted at older birth children.

3.13.4 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 offer 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.

- 3.13.5 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.
- 3.13.6 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.
- 3.13.7 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.
- 3.13.8 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.
- 3.13.9 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.
- 3.13.10 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.

3.14 Therapeutic Social Work Team

- 3.14.1 The team provides essential support to foster carers and looked after children including a fostering surgery that assists carers in understanding and managing children's behaviours. During 2018-19 the team offered 127 appointments in which 108 children were discussed - this service is offered to foster and kinship carers

as well as Special Guardians. In terms of contribution to placement stability, after 3 months 98% of those children were still in placement - of those who moved on, all but one of the moves was planned.

- 3.14.2 Feedback from carers about this support is very positive, some of the carer comments the evaluations have included: 'being listened to and being told of new ways to approach things', 'the discussions confirmed that our approach at home was correct and we were unable to support the child any better', 'having space to talk about concerns and being listened to', 'being able to talk openly and getting re-assurance we were doing the right thing', 'just talking made me understand more', 'someone listening and understanding our difficulties as a carer was very helpful'.
- 3.14.3 The team has standardised their assessment of therapeutic need and formulation in a new model introduced in January 2019. This includes the use of clinical measures and places foster carers at the heart of the process, recognising them as the experts on their children and encouraging carers to see themselves as key agents of change.
- 3.14.4 The Therapeutic Social Work Team also offers training and support groups for foster carers. Three SSWs from the fostering service support teams are accredited trainers and co-work delivery of the training.

3.15 Benefits and Finance Team

- 3.15.1 The Benefit and Finance Team was established in March 2019 and expanded from a team of two to four. The team consists of a Team Manager, Senior Welfare Rights Worker, Welfare Rights Worker and Benefit and Finance Assistant.
- 3.15.2 The expansion of the team has enabled them to offer consultancy to staff across the service including to fostering teams (mainstream and kinship) on Welfare Benefits, Leaving Care finance and Staying Put finance. A large part of the teams role is to support young people and their carers to claim welfare benefits. Working across the services has enabled the team to build good links, particularly between the Care Leaver service and the Fostering service.
- 3.15.3 The team also delivers briefing sessions on welfare benefit updates to staff groups across the service and to foster carer support groups.
- 3.15.4 The primary role of the team is to maximise benefit entitlements for carers and young people and to source funding from alternatives avenues where appropriate, including charities. The team monitor consistency of payments, specifically for Staying Put arrangements and will support young people to make their contribution towards their housing costs in Staying Put arrangements. This reduces the overall costs to the Department.
- 3.15.5 The team is in the early stages of becoming established and the number of carers/young people that are supported is high. The team is working with the Mosaic team to look at system monitoring options and has set up interim

arrangements to start gathering statistics relating to the amount of referrals and the benefit gains achieved.

3.16 Fostering Panels

- 3.16.1 The service changed to operating 4 panels (from 5) in January 2019. This was to accommodate assistance for the Panel Administration team to better help prepare for one panel per week rather than two in tandem. This decision also coincided with one panel chair retiring in October 2018. This panel's membership was redistributed across the remaining 4 panels from January 2019. The 4 panels are independently chaired with one chair overseeing 2 panels (3 chairs in total). Two of the Panel chairs were interviewed for inspection purposes by the regulatory inspector as part of the Ofsted inspection in 2018. Each Panel has an experienced manager from the Fostering Service as a Panel Advisor.
- 3.16.2 Panel membership has increased across all Panels this period, including the appointment of additional independent panel members helping to providing a broader range of experience which assists with panel discussion, scrutiny and decision making.
- 3.16.3 Agency Decision making (ADM) responsibilities following Panel recommendations are shared by two senior managers appointed by the Head of Service, Children Looked After. Each oversee two panels and respond to timescales for decision making in a timely manner and have access to Panel Chairs, Panel Advisors and Fostering Service Delivery Managers for any panel item clarification if needed before a decision is made.
- 3.16.4 The number of all items heard at fostering panels was 433, an increase of 44 on the previous year. Each panel completes a quality assurance audit of items heard, including assessments of new foster carers (both Mainstream and Kinship). The quality of assessments considered by panels is high with 80% rated as excellent or good and 14% rated as satisfactory. 2% of assessments were rated as unsatisfactory. Information from panel quality assurance on assessments and other items is discussed with fostering team managers both as part of feedback by panel manager's in the managers meeting or individually with the respective team manager as required.
- 3.16.5 Feedback from foster carers regarding their experience of attending panel also remains very positive with 91% rated as very good and 9% rated as good.
- 3.16.6 Panel members, ADM's and advisors attend an annual training day, normally in November. Topics at the last training day included presentations on the decision making processes of the independent Review Mechanism (IRM), the Leeds Youth Justice Service and the Leeds Therapeutic Social Work Team. The day also included an opportunity to review the panel member's annual appraisal process.
- 3.16.7 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 the change to four panels, new arrangements for the independent chairs

and improvements to the Kinship assessment referral to panel process, including those with time scaled requirements by the courts.

- 3.16.8 The increasing amount of Kinship business needing to be achieved via Panels and within court timescales continues to be challenging. The Service is operating an additional panel when required for Kinship business and utilises an ongoing review by the Kinship managers and the court liaison case manager to coordinate early planning for assessments which require priority panel booking.
- 3.16.9 The Panel Manager post is jointly held by a Kinship Fostering Team Manager and the Lead for Service Development. The senior panel administrator has now been in post for a year and has successfully reconstituted the panel staff team, incorporated new staff and improved efficiencies in all areas of panel work.
- 3.16.10 The fostering panels consider the suitability of foster carers and can recommend that potential carers are not suitable to foster or an existing carers registration categories can be amended. If contested, foster carers have the opportunity to attend the independent Review Mechanism (IRM) if they are dissatisfied with panel recommendations made about a change of registration category or the termination of their approval as foster carers. In this period there have been 2 referrals to the IRM. 1 was withdrawn before hearing, 1 was heard and the Fostering Panel's recommendation was upheld.

3.17 Complaints and Allegations

- 3.17.1 There were 10 complaints received during this period of which 5 were considered under the fostering service complaints procedure, 3 under the corporate complaint procedure and 2 under the children act procedure. The outcome of the complaints were that 3 were upheld (payment delay, assessment & support from child's SW) 1 was not upheld (assessment), 3 were partially upheld (support from child's SW, fostering process & practice issue) 2 were locally resolved (missing paperwork and allowance payment) and 1 was withdrawn.
- 3.17.2 Complaints are dealt with promptly and learning from complaints is discussed within the fostering managers group. The number of complaints has reduced in number from the previous year and the service continues to take a proactive and restorative approach in relation to addressing and resolving complaints. Fostering Team Managers and Service Delivery Managers are aware of the need for early action on their part in relation to exploring complaints from foster carers and the importance of face to face discussion to aid resolution.
- 3.17.3 There were 38 notifications to the two Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOS) as is required where concerns are expressed about potential harm of likely harm to a child or young person by a foster carer. 30 concerns related to 'mainstream' carers, 8 related to kinship carers, including 1 to a prospective kinship carer under assessment. It is important to note that a notification in itself does not equate to a substantive allegation against a foster carer.
- 3.17.4 All 38 notifications have been investigated fully and concluded. Of these 27 were unsubstantiated or unfounded. Of the remaining 11 allegations that were

substantiated; 5 were against mainstream foster carers, 5 were against kinship carers and 1 was against a prospective kinship carer whilst in assessment.

- 3.17.5 Where allegations were substantiated swift action was taken to ensure that the children and young people were safe and supported, and learning from these incidents has been well used to improve training for carers and the Fostering Service's ongoing work.
- 3.17.6 When an allegation is made the service provides support to both children and young people and carers. Children and young people are supported to access support and advocacy from Leeds Childrens Rights Service and our foster carers can access an independent advice and advocacy service currently commissioned through FISS (Foster Talk). Our foster carers may also choose to access support from the Leeds Foster Carers Association.

3.18 Quality Assurance Information

- 3.18.1 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.
- 3.18.2 As part of the fostering quality assurance and performance framework there have been 28 foster carer case files audited this period via the general case file audit process utilising an audit tool which includes Ofsted ratings for overall file outcomes measurement. Files are randomly selected in advance and audited periodically by a group of Fostering Managers to evidence conformity to regulatory requirements (including statutory visiting and supervision of carers) and foster carer practice and areas of their support for children / young people in placement. Of these, 24 were rated as good, 3 required improvement and 1 was deemed as inadequate. The issues raised needing improvement included incomplete Delegated Authority documentation, not achieving the required number of supervisory visits and incomplete foster carer training recording. The relevant supervising social workers and their team managers are tasked with evidencing any required improvements.
- 3.18.3 In addition to the general case file auditing process and introduced this period, Team Managers are now expected to achieve 1:1 'interactive' case file auditing directly with Supervising Social Workers and discuss any improvements required. In this reporting period, 31 interactive audits have been undertaken. 1 was rated outstanding, 28 were rated as good and 2 required improvement. Issues identified as requiring improvement included updating a household 'safe care plan', undertaking a room share risk assessment given plans to change children's bedroom arrangements and updating a foster carers personal development plan.

3.19 Fostering Reviewing Service

- 3.19.1 The fostering reviewing team independently undertake all foster carer reviews and ensure feedback for both the supervising social worker and the foster carer about their work. The service continues to make an important contribution to the goal of

improving outcomes for looked after children. The primary focus of the service is ensuring that all foster carers have a quality annual review to ensure that the fostering service is meeting its legal standards and that carers receive the best possible support to undertake their challenging role and to enable them to care for foster children in a way that provides security, stability and a strong sense of identity.

- 3.19.2 The Fostering Reviewing Service continue to review all foster carers with the exception of short breaks carers. It is hoped that an additional post in the team will enable them to also undertake the short breaks carer reviews. There are currently three full time fostering reviewing officers.
- 3.19.3 Going forward, the service intends to undertake development work around consultations to reviews and work more closely with the team around the child. They are well placed to utilise their unique citywide perspective to identify any emerging themes and consider, with the fostering service, how best to respond to these.
- 3.19.4 It is envisaged that from June 2019 the Fostering Reviewing Service will be managed alongside the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service. The Fostering Reviewing Service continues to be impressed by the commitment and dedication of the foster carers working in partnership with the fostering service.

3.20 Strategic Issues and Forward Planning

- 3.20.1 Approximately 270 (21%) of our children who are looked after are living in placements provided by independent and private providers. Around 200 of these children are living in foster households with Independent Fostering Agencies. As set out in the report our efforts to maximise recruitment and provide Leeds carers for Leeds children remains a primary objective of the service. Whilst we recognise the benefits of working with the independent sector to maximise diversity and opportunity of placements we also believe that extending our own services to ensure that Leeds children and young people can grow up in Leeds with carers support by our services is a core priority for our services.
- 3.20.2 The activities of the Recruitment and Retention team will be crucial in meeting these challenges. To that end it has recently been agreed to change the role of the manager responsible for this team. Other duties have been removed and the manager will now work exclusively on recruitment and retention thus enabling a greater focus on this key area of practice. It is intended to develop a clearer strategic approach working with partners both in and outside of the council to maximise opportunities to significantly increase the number of foster carers we recruit in the year ahead.
- 3.20.3 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.

- 3.20.4 The development of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) will continue with the aim that Hub carers support arrangements for children moving from residential care to foster placements, to support foster carers caring for teenagers and to support Kinship families. We will continue to prioritise placement stability, to proactively prevent placement breakdowns / unplanned moves for our children and young people and to offer a high level of support to foster carers. The model will develop with an approach that will be flexible in order to meet the needs of Leeds fostering service.
- 3.20.5 MFM continues to attract interest within the UK and internationally. The Leeds Fostering Service has hosted several training events for authorities starting out on the MFM journey and will continue to host study trips to Leeds by professionals from other local authorities to learn more about the model.
- 3.20.6 The service has a commitment to developing best practice and this will continue through participation in research e.g. the Rees Centre (Oxford University) and the Fostering Network regarding the Mockingbird Family Model; the Parliamentary Taskforce and Grandparents Plus on Kinship Support; participation in the University of East Anglia long-term foster care research advisory group.
- 3.20.7 Following the Fostering Stocktake report to Government in 2018, there has been 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 Leeds best practice.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The Foster Carer Liaison Group (FCLG), chaired by a Cllr nominated by the lead member for children's services, meets bi-monthly to discuss areas of service development and any issues of concern. Membership currently includes representatives from foster carer support groups, mocking bird hubs and the Leeds Foster Care Association (LFCA) together with managers and staff from the service. In June 2019 the group will undertake a review of the terms of reference for this group to ensure that it maximises its reach and communication across the whole of our foster carers. Stakeholder involvement in new service developments remains a key principle of the service.
- 4.1.2 The Leeds Foster Care Association (LFCA) is an independent organisation, a registered charity with its own constitution. On occasions it rightly provides a challenge to the Fostering Service and can be viewed as a critical friend. However, it also provides advice and support to foster carers in their role working with Children Looked After. Particularly in respect of the out of hours service it provides, it has recently been recognised that the fostering service needs to provide a more formal structured support offer to the members of the LFCA providing guidance to other foster carers. This arrangement is now in place with a Fostering Team Manager providing regular supervision to carers involved in the out of hours support service.

- 4.1.3 The service is updating the Leeds Foster Carer Charter in conjunction with the LFCA. Leeds originally worked with the Fostering Network and other Local Authorities in developing a foster carer charter in 2012. The charter also links to a Working Together Agreement with the LFCA which is currently being finalised. This will establish a written understanding of the cooperation between the fostering service and the LFCA in seeking to promote support for foster carers in Leeds and improve outcomes for fostered children and young people.

4.2 Equality and Diversity/Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The fostering service Equality Impact Assessment previously completed remains relevant. This is currently being updated so the service ensures that actions to attract carers from a diverse range of communities continues to meet the needs of children requiring care. This is attached as appendix 2.

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.'
- 4.3.2 *Climate Emergency.* The continued increase in Leeds own capacity to provide local placements contributes to better outcomes for children and reduced travel for children, young people and their families and professionals who visit children regularly. The service overall is engaged in conversations with stakeholders to develop a strategy to minimise impact on the environment.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

- 4.4.1 As set out in para 3.8.5 the Kinship service has continued to required additional capacity to undertake the increased volume of required assessments. This has been compounded by an in year unusually high level of staff on maternity leave. This has placed the Kinship teams under pressure and inevitably resulted in an increased use of sessional staff with the associated additional cost pressures. The currently review underway in this area of the services will seek to identify smarter ways to manage this ongoing and growing area of work.
- 4.4.2 The Government funding provided to support 'Staying Put' arrangements does not meet the full costs of these arrangements. This is in part due to the success of our arrangements extending to a relatively high number of children, when compared locally, and also due to the extent of our commitment to staying put carers and these households.

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 in achieving the best possible outcomes for children looked after and supports the ongoing work to recruit and retain high quality carers within the service.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

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

Annual Stats April 2018 - March 2019	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 2018	181	161	107	85	23	34	44	454	53	5	0	25	10	93	12	740
Approvals	90	2	7	22	9	6		46	0	1	0	3		4		140
Deregistrations	71	12	10	14	2	3	3	44	3	1	0	2	0	6		121
Progressions/Non-panel approvals	0	3	2	-4	0	-1	10	10	0	1	0	-1	-1	-1	0	9
Nett Gain/Loss	19	-7	-1	4	7	2	7	12	-3	1	0	0	-1	-3	0	28
Total at end of March 2019	200	154	106	89	30	36	51	466	50	6	0	25	9	90	12	768

Details of Deregistrations	
Child Adopted By Carer	
Child SGO By Carer	30
Child RO By Carer	
Child Moved To Another Placement	9
Child Returned Home	17
Retired - General	
Retired - Child Reached 18	7
Resigned - Change of Circumstance	2
Resigned - Gone To IFA	
Resigned - Gone To Another LA	
Resigned - Other	1
Terminated - Unsuitable	3
Terminated - Inactive	
Terminated - Carer Ill Health/Died	1
Terminated - Disruption	1
Terminated - Allegation	
Total	71

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
		1					1						0		1
	1	2					3	1					1		34
							0						0		0
							0						0		9
							0						0		17
	5		2		1		8	1			2		3		11
							0						1		8
	2	4	6	2	1		15	1	1				1		18
							0						0		0
							0		0				0		0
	1	2	2	2	0	1	7		0				0		8
				1			1						0		4
		1	1	2		3	7						0		7
		1		1			2						0		3
							0						0		1
							0						0		0
							0						0		0
							0						0		0
							0						0		0
	71	12	10	14	2	3	3	44	3	1	0	2	0	6	121

Appendix 1