

Leeds City Council Fostering Service: Annual Fostering Report, April 2023 to March 2024

Background

This report provides an overview of the work of Leeds City Council Fostering Service during the financial year April 2023 to March 2024. The report provides information on our work as a fostering service, including the kinship service and placement service.

Fostering Service

The Fostering Service operates under the banner of Foster 4 Leeds, this reflects a strong ethos to ensure that Leeds children are placed with carers who live within Leeds and the surrounding areas. Placing children within Leeds enables us to meet our primary aims of enabling children to retain strong relationships with their birth family, allowing children to continue at their school and enabling children to access a broad range of enrichment activities living within our child friendly city.

The values which the service seeks to define within the best practice model for carers draw directly on the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan, with a focus on ensuring that foster carers support children and young people to achieve their potential in all areas and develop the necessary skills for adulthood and beyond.

Children Looked After

At the end of the 2023/24-year Leeds had 1549 looked after children, this represents an increase of 7% or 99 children. This upward trend in Leeds is increasing at a higher rate than the England average which has typically showed a 2% increase in 2022 and 2023. The following table provides a breakdown of the children looked after, by age group, and as a rate per 10,000 over the last 6-year period.



Period	Age range					Total	Rate per 10,000 children
	<1 year	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-15 years	16 and 17 years		
2018/19	67	205	245	510	259	1286	77
2019/20	69	214	256	522	285	1346	79
2020/21	52	201	252	498	275	1278	75.5
2021/22	60	162	257	584	310	1373	80.5
2022/23	55	217	291	563	324	1450	84
2023/24	56	226	302	596	369	1549	89.7

This increase in the overall number of children becoming looked after reflects a trend seen in other core cities. (Rates for 23-24 are not published until November 2024)

Looked After Rate per 10,000 population for Core Cities

Core City	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Leeds	76	77	79	75	80.5	84
Birmingham	67	67	67	67	73	76
Bristol	68	66	66	67	75	80
Liverpool	122	140	148	157	172	156
Manchester	97	106	115	111	109	104
Newcastle Upon Tyne	94	117	113	116	116	108
Sheffield	50	54	53	57	59	57

Statistics released by the Department for Education as of 31 March 2023, stated that there were 83,840 looked after children. This figure represents an increase of 2% on the 2022 numbers and is an all-time high.

We are unfortunately seeing children and young people experiencing an increased number of placement moves which impacts placement stability, especially in newer looked after cases. However, the rate of children and young people who are with the same carers for more than two years is relatively stable.



Placement stability - % in 2 years+ in placement

Core City	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Leeds	72	69	67	68	70	68	69
Birmingham	67	66	68	72	70	71	
Bristol	74	70	72	73	77	71	
Liverpool	72	75	79	77	79	76	
Manchester	69	66	66	69	65	64	
Newcastle Upon Tyne	69	67	63	62	70	68	
Sheffield	76	75	71	72	72	71	

(Rates for 2024 outside of Leeds are not published until November 2024)

Whilst the number of children and young people experiencing more than three placements in one year has risen.

Placement stability - % of 3+ moves

Core City	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Leeds	10	11	12	9	11	14	15
Birmingham	11	12	10	6	8	9	
Bristol	10	9	10	9	7	8	
Liverpool	11	9	8	7	8	8	
Manchester	11	11	10	8	10	10	
Newcastle Upon Tyne	10	10	11	7	5	7	
Sheffield	10	10	14	12	11	14	

(Rates for 2024 outside of Leeds are not published until November 2024)

Foster Carer Recruitment

During the last year the service has successfully recruited 113 new carers to our fostering service. The types of carers recruited and registered were: 15 new foster carers within our mainstream provision, 88 new kinship carers, 9 new foster carers for children with complex needs and 1 supported lodgings carer for our older young people.



These figures represent a decrease in respect of mainstream fostering approvals compared to the previous year which is consistent with the experience of other Local Authorities and assessed as being linked to the long-term impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and cost of living crisis.

Whilst the rate of recruitment and registration of new mainstream foster carers has slowed, we have continued to have some deregistration of carers throughout the year. Over the course of the year there were a total of 110 foster carers deregistered (mainstream and kinship) due to varying reasons which are summarised below.

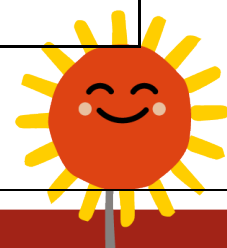
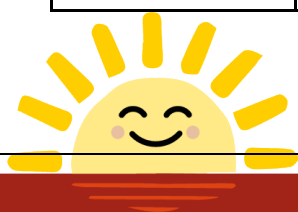
Mainstream Foster Carers:

- 12 resigned
- 7 retired (including due to a change in their circumstances)
- 1 retired after the child / children in their care reached 18
- 7 were de-registered as a result of unsuitability to foster (on the ground of health, inactivity, allegation).

Kinship Carers:

- 22 ending their role upon being granted a Special Guardianship Order
- 5 retiring upon the young person in their care reaching the age of 18
- 11 ending their role after the child or children returned home
- 8 were de-registered after the child or children moved to another placement
- 4 were de-registered following an allegation or after being deemed unsuitable
- 7 resigned due to a change in circumstance

Carer Type	New households registered	Households deregistered	Net change in households	Overall No. of carers in service	Carer Type by %
Kinship	88	61	27	257	36%
Mainstream	15	27	-12	324	46%
Complex needs	9	8	1	84	12%



Rent-a-room	0	8	-8	12	2%
Supported Lodgings	1	6	-5	31	4%
Total	113	110	3	708	100%

The net decrease in mainstream carers along with lower recruitment rates has meant that last years challenges in having in-house placements available for children in Leeds has continued.

Recruitment and Marketing Plans

A significant part of our focus is the recruitment and retention of foster carers. We have to recognise the need to diversify our approach and explore different avenues to the challenges this provides.

The Local Authority is faced with significant financial challenges at present. The overspend within Childrens Social Work Services is a large part of this and the cost of external foster care and residential placements needs to be lowered. Fostering has a key role within this. As part of the CLA Sustainability Plan the department needs to actively recruit more carers, offer more flexibility amongst it's carer community and play a role on reducing the number of children entering care, or staying in care for longer than is required.

Given this we are undertaking a new Fostering Recruitment Strategy. There are 4 main strands on the fostering recruitment strategy, which are:

1. Communications, Marketing and Campaigns
2. Partnerships and Engagement
3. Improving our offer of retention and support to existing foster carers
4. Changing the way we work

These four strands all have their own dedicated working groups established and partners from the transformation team, Workforce Development, Child Friendly Leeds and LFCA are all involved as well as Team Managers, external consultants and



Supervising Social Workers. Plans are being made to also include our foster carers as part of this work to ensure that these issues are tackled from the ground up.

At present there is lots of work taking place by our corporate comms & marketing team, the fostering service and other services to support this key priority to recruit and retain foster carers.

We plan to recruit to two new posts, which will be jointly managed by the fostering service and Child Friendly Leeds. These will be an Engagement and Participation Officer and a Partnership Development Coordinator. These posts will support the activity above and the general recruitment and retention of foster carers.

We are also going to refresh and relaunch the Foster4Leeds website. The fostering team will have day to day responsibility for the website so can update it on a regular basis

with news and events. The website will promote the benefits of becoming a foster carer and share detailed information about different types of fostering. The website will include a new focus on enrichment and retention activity. It will also host a 'blog/news' section where we can share more informal information e.g. interviews with foster carers and highlight specific events and activity such as the launch of new schemes. The new website will include a refreshed Expression of Interest form which simplifies the process for prospective foster carers. The website and the form will both have better data analysis functionality that the current website and form. This means that we can amend the website and the form according to what the data shows.

We will develop a refreshed social media strategy to ensure that free/organic posts can be as effective as possible to increase brand awareness and encourage people to take the first steps to consider becoming a foster carer.

In order to reach a wider audience with the message about the urgent need for new foster carers in Leeds we are working with Child Friendly Leeds colleagues to engage new ambassadors. We have developed a communications toolkit which can be shared with partner agencies for them to feature adverts and communications within their own newsletters, social media posts and throughout their networks.



Outside of this work there will be a renewed focus on who we target and approach to become foster carers. An event has been organised on the 21st October through Child Friendly Leeds that will promote fostering to over 70 companies and organisations that are corporate partners with Leeds. We want to spread the word and dispel some of the myths attached to fostering and these events will be key to that work.

This work will enable us to focus on areas of need. Specifically, a reduction of children placed in external residential places and a reduction in the amount of short term placements for children entering care due to unplanned emergency decisions.

This work is starting to produce good early numbers in terms of expressions of interest and applicants to become carers. We are confident this will continue to grow into 2025 when we aim to target partnerships with the sports sector, the education sector and the health sector to strengthen and develop partnerships in these areas.

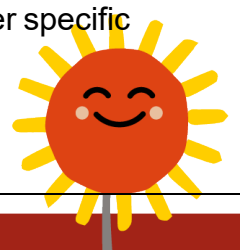
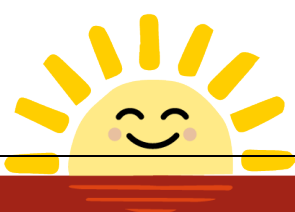
Recruitment of Carers with Diverse Ethnicity

At present the levels of diversity within the foster carer cohort within Leeds is not sufficient. We recognise that children from ethnically diverse communities are overrepresented in foster care, and we need more carers from these same groups of people to meet their needs.

With that in mind we have developed a two pronged approach that will be a clear focus in 2024/25.

We will be working in conjunction with Child Friendly Leeds, elected members and the Fostering Recruitment Team to hold an ambassadors event targeting community groups and partners with good links to a range of diverse communities in order to support us to recruit more foster carers of diverse ethnicities so as to ensure that our foster carer population is reflective of the population of Leeds. We aim to break down the barriers to this and end the assumption that Leeds does not want carers from certain areas of the city.

In addition to this, and in the interim, we are working with support groups of carers with diverse ethnicity to ensure that where we cannot make a cultural match there is support available for carers. This will include a database of information around where to go to meet the needs of children around health, personal care and any other specific



cultural identity needs. We aim to provide a buddy system to support carers and increase their knowledge and capabilities around caring for children with diverse ethnicity or protected characteristics.

Reducing CLA Numbers and Children Placed Externally

Fostering needs to be at the forefront of supporting Leeds CSWS in reducing the number of children entering care, and, where this is not possible, supporting those

placed out of Leeds to return to the city in a planned and supportive way. In order to achieve these two specific fostering projects will be established in late 2024/early 2025.

Making Connections Building Futures

With a current working title of 'Making Connections, Building Futures,' (MCBF) the first scheme focusses on returning young people living in external residential placements outside of Leeds, back to Leeds to live with foster carers. Carers recruited to MCBF will be highly skilled professionals with experience of working with children and young people. They will be given enhanced training and support and will be paid a substantial allowance to reflect the nature of the work they will be undertaking, but also to attract them away from their current careers and make fostering a viable career for someone in an established professional role from a financial perspective.

Wherever it is safe to do so, is better for young people to live near to their communities and families. The scheme will work in partnership with education, therapeutic services, residential colleagues and WFD to support this and allow children to access safe and stable support within their home city.

The scheme represents a significant financial saving for the Local Authority to provide a foster placement rather than costly external residential provision.



Working groups have already been formed with support from the Transformation Team and foster carer consultations and involvement will also be central to the scheme.

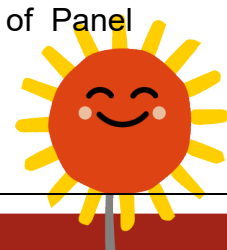
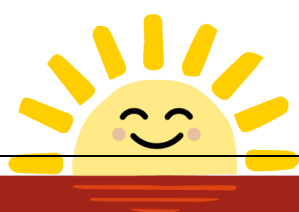
Fostering Panel

Leeds Fostering Panels have continued to operate virtually using the Microsoft Teams platform with four Panel's a month taking place, one being held every week. 48 Fostering Panels were held over the last year with a total of 326 discussions about carers taking place.

The following is a breakdown of the items heard at Fostering Panel over the past year:

Form F Assessment	25
New Partner Assessment	3
Kinship Care Assessment	92
Kinship Care Addendum	1
First Review	32
Early Review	1
Review following Allegations	6
Review Following Change of Circumstances	4
Review – Update following action plan	1
Review to change registration	15
Contested Deregistration	6
Deregistration	92
Long Term Match	8
8 Week Extension	40
TOTAL	326

There are three Independent Panel Chairs who each chair a Fostering Panel and we are currently recruiting for a fourth. Each Fostering Panel continues to have a Vice Chair and Panel Advisor. There have been several changes in terms of Panel



membership but interest in being a Fostering Panel member remains high amongst Social Workers in the city and several new panel members have been appointed over the past 12 months including an increasing number of independent panel members.

The running of our Fostering Panel is supported by one Senior Panel Administrator along with two dedicated Fostering Panel Administrators and a Fostering Panel Manager who oversees the running of the Fostering Panel.

Fostering Panels continue to be busy with both mainstream fostering and kinship business. Social workers continue to undertake high quality assessments of often very complex family situations and their suitability to care for a child or children for whom they are being assessed for. Panel members complete a quality assurance process on all items presented. The quality of assessments presented at Fostering Panel is of an extremely high standard with most being evaluated as good or excellent. Authors of the reports present as knowledgeable and supportive towards the applicants, in attending panel. During the last year 98% of assessments were completed and presented within expected timescales to a Fostering Panel.

Training for panel members takes place annually, the last training took place in December 2023 where the Fostering Panel Manager gave a service update and invited panel to discuss a range of topics including questions asked of applicants, foster carers and social workers (their relevance and purpose in terms of aiding decision making), guidance around managing panel when an interpreter is being used and the role of the Vice Chair.

We are in the process of recruiting a dedicated fostering panel team manager. This role is essential to maintain the current high standards at panel and also to ensure that all panel items are heard as efficiently as possible. The role will allow rigorous oversight of all applications and the coordination of panels and panel advisors as well as constant review of processes and procedures alongside the ADM.

Training



Throughout the year a blended approach to learning and development has continued, with offers of face-to-face sessions and virtual sessions for foster carers. The workforce development foster care training calendar has continued to run throughout the year with a range of learning and development opportunities to support the skills, knowledge, and confidence of carers.

There has been an introduction of new courses for foster carers for example Fundamentals of Autism and ADHD and Suicide Prevention. We are in the final stages of coordinating a roll out EDI training to all support groups. Foster carers continue to have access to learning and development opportunities through the dedicated Research Practice website for foster carers, where they can access more specialist bespoke training opportunities. Workforce Development has launched the Child Leeds learning Centre, a platform for service to access learning and development opportunities.

	Completed	Withdrawn	Not Attended	% attendance
Apr – Jun 2023	185	15	97	62.29%
July-Sept 2023	117	8	111	49.58%
Oct-Dec 2023	231	23	126	60.79%
Jan-March 2024	146	37	113	49.32%
Overall year	679	83	447	56.16%

The uptake and participation levels need to improve. At present the system for booking and management of training is not flexible enough. Carers are facing challenges around short term placements, increasing demand of their expertise and time. They



need a system that allow them to book and change training at short notice to maximise the time they have.

Attending at training is key to developing the skills and knowledge base of our carers. Strategies will be implemented over the coming year to significantly improve these figures and encourage and ensure take up off the broad and comprehensive training offer. These will include the use mobile technology to book and manage training as well as the role out of the DDP and PACE model across the service and wider corporate parenting teams and partners.

Foster carers continue to be able to book a slot at Fostering surgeries, where they can access specialist advice from our Therapeutic Social Work Team.

Enrichment

Throughout the year we put together events and opportunities for fostering families. Our aim is always to deliver 2-3 activities per week during school holidays. These comprise of events solely for the young people, 'family fun days', events for carers themselves and events for the birth or adopted children of foster carers.

We continue to work closely with our partners at three local activity centres located around Leeds who work with us to put on activity days for our young people. We always aim to offer a broad selection of activities to suit all from kayaking, paddle boarding, high ropes, and zip line, too many more to mention.

We offered 4 residential stays in the past year at Herd Farm activity and residential Centre for young people aged 8-17yrs, which continue to be very popular with the young people.

Aside from our events with the activity centres, we continue to make new links with various organisations across the city to develop educational visits for families to attend all free of charge. A few examples are the local fire station which welcomes families for a fun and educational tours of the station, the Leeds Discovery Centre Museum, the recycling centre offer us a tour of the recycling centre, showing families how things are recycled in Leeds. We run these regularly during the school holidays to support education through play.



We work with a local theatre who generously give us free tickets to shows throughout the year. We are very fortunate to be allocated the dress rehearsal show for the annual panto again a great hit with families. We also have links with 2 circuses who both give us 100 free tickets per show.

We continue to receive a regular supply of ticket offers for local sporting matches for Rugby and football to distribute fairly to our families.

We always finish the year of before Christmas break with over 250 coming together for our traditional cinema event curtesy of Hyde Park Cinema.

We have continued to offer stays to our fostering and kinship families at our holiday lodge based at Rudding Park which is open 11 months of the year where over 80 families have benefited from a break. Plans are in place to improve this offer, with two new lodges on the east coast being sourced. This will double our capacity to offer child friendly holidays to fostering households and will help sustain and maintain placements into 2025 and beyond.

Additionally, we have an allocation of holidays kindly donated to us by The Principle Trust Children's Charity to distribute to families, the accommodation offered is disability adapted.

Creating a Fostering Community

Plans are being formed at how we can better engage our foster carers with the department and with our plans to develop the service going forward. At present there is a need to create a community and to communicate and share information and development in a more organic and restorative way.

To that end we plan to work alongside Child Friendly Leeds to create regular events

where foster carers can gather alongside professionals that support them. This will allow for a move away from a system of questionnaires and surveys and allow for healthy challenge and debate around planning and the resolutions of common concerns or issues. This planning will start in 2025 with the aim to hold the first event in the summer.



Support groups for foster carers

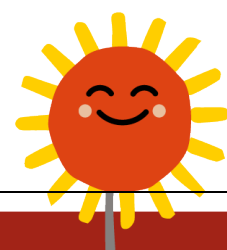
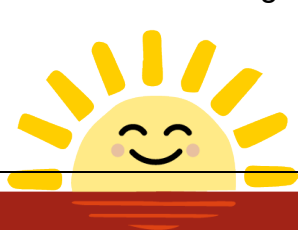
Across the city there are 12 support groups, these run on a monthly basis and include support groups for kinship carers, foster carers who care for teenagers, those who support unaccompanied asylum seeking children, parent and child foster carers, foster carers from diverse ethnicities, foster carers who care for babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome and carers who care for children with disabilities, in addition we run a Moving On Forum three times a year which was developed as a supportive space for those carers who have children moving on from their care.

Each support group has a representative who alongside the Leeds Foster Carers Association (LFCA) attend the Foster Carer Liaison Group which meets bi-monthly and has continued to be chaired by the executive Lead Member for Children's Services. Foster carer representatives play a key stakeholder role and are involved in a range of service developments.

The Leeds Foster Carer Association continues to facilitate 'All Carers' support groups over the course of year, the meetings provide key elements of support but also supplementary training opportunities when keynote speakers from health, education and other areas of children's services are invited to attend.

Kinship/ SGO Update

Leeds currently has 257 approved kinship households caring for 351 children looked after. The number of children cared for by kinship carers has increased since last year. However, the proportion of children looked after by kinship carers is approximately 23% which remains consistent with previous years. 62 children are currently placed with family or friends under Regulation 24 procedures. This is a slight decrease on last year. The sustained proportion of children cared for by kinship carers is clearly positive, meaning that children are able to grow up in homes which have natural connections to their immediate family. This means their identity and cultural needs can be better supported and the problems caused by a continued national shortage of foster carers are to some extent mitigated.



Support is often needed during the Reg 24 temporary approval period to help potentially fragile kinship placements meet children's needs. The Kinship Assessment team continues to deliver the required support which is specifically adapted to kinship carers needs and assists them to better understand and navigate the complexities of the process.

Children living with family and friends under the auspices of a special guardianship order continue to access support from the Kinship service. The Special Guardianship Team provides relevant families with clear plans of support. Therapeutic services support children subject to special guardianship orders and their carers.

The Local Authority has changed the offer for special guardians. This ensures they are not financially impacted for securing a child's permanency under the auspices of a Special Guardianship Order. Special guardians that care for children who were looked after prior to the making of the special guardianship order now receive a weekly allowance until the child reaches 18. This is regardless of their financial situation. This is a significant change. Prior to this change special guardians would receive a weekly allowance for two years after the order was made and then an annual financial assessment to establish if they could continue receiving an allowance.

Children made subject to Special Guardianship Orders are now also eligible for leaving care support regardless of their age when the order is made. The new offer is expected to increase the children being made subject to Special Guardianship Orders. This will mean less children are looked after and have a greater sense of stability and permanency. Special guardians continue to be able to access support from The Mockingbird Hubs and Kinship Carers support groups.

The Mockingbird Family Model

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) 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. The model is evidencing effective support for satellite carers and assisting with placement stability for children and young people. This has been really evident during the Covid pandemic and as lockdown restrictions lifted Mockingbird connections have stayed strong.



In total, 65 fostering households are being supported with a total of 105 children and young people (this is within 10 hubs). Of the 65 Fostering families involved in MFM at the end of June beginning of July 2024 - 29 of those families were reported to be under stress or at risk of breakdown without the support of the MFM Hub Carer.

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 10 hubs available to our foster carers this year; supporting kinship families (including families who have obtained Special Guardianship Orders), Mainstream Fostering Families (including some adoptive families). Our commitment to Mockingbird is strong and our development will be needs led – ensuring as a service that we have the right hub carers, the right liaison workers and full-service support.

In July 2024 one of the MFM Hub Carers resigned, we are in the process of recruiting a MFM Hub Carer with the skills and experience to take over this role. There is a fidelity to the model, which is essential to uphold, however, the model is able to be used creatively to meet the needs of the overall service as these change. Our ambition is for 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. We would also want to involve young people who are placed out of area where the plan is to return them to their Leeds community.

Mockingbird Family Model staff and foster carers have hosted practice development sessions on the model for other agencies seeking to adopt the model. Leeds continues to have an open doors policy to assist other local authorities who come on board nationally to adopt the model.

Mockingbird Family Model 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 the Mockingbird Family Model. This is alongside national engagement activities for children and young people involved in Mockingbird (known as NEST events). This past year events have been held in York and Leeds both of which were well represented with hub carers and supervising social workers.



In addition to this, In February 2024 MFM Project Lead was appointed to take the lead in developing the service and expand the MFM service whilst ensuring it is within the fidelity of the model and to streamline the processes and to liaise closely with The Fostering Network.

Fostering Children with Disabilities Team

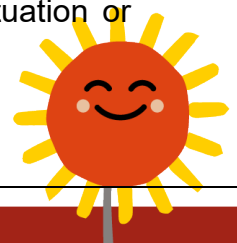
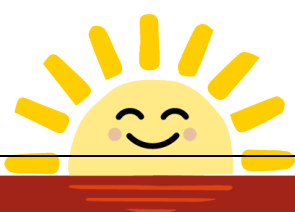
Within the children with disability's fostering service in Leeds, there are 41 carers offering short /long term care and 16 carers offering short breaks. This skilled disability focused foster carers are on hand to offer their expertise, care and support to children with various complex needs. The carers usually have a background in supporting children with disabilities, whether this is experience from their own family or from previous employment. As such, our carers are able to bring their wealth of skills to the role which is continuously developed through high quality support and training.

A range of specialised training opportunities are offered to our carers and those attended are recorded and checked on a yearly basis to signify learning and development. Our general disability carers are also encouraged to attend support groups as part of their development, where specific topics related to fostering are discussed and there is a general opportunity to share any achievements, concerns, or queries. To support our general disability carers, they have an allocated experienced supervising social worker who have regular contact with both the carers and placed foster children to help them navigate the fostering role and provide high quality advice and support.

The children within the disability fostering service have a diverse range of needs, to be eligible for our disability carers they will typically have a physical disability, learning disability, cognitive impairment, complex health needs, autism spectrum disorder or a combination of the above, however, sibling groups will be accommodated if one sibling has a disability.

Support Care & Childminding Service

Support Care is a time limited, early intervention, support service for children and young people living with their families who are experiencing a difficult situation or



family crisis. It aims to support those children on child protection or children in need plans who are deemed as being at risk of being removed from family if significant improvements and changes are not made. The aim of the scheme is to prevent family breakdown and prevent the need for children being received into care. The Scheme is a city-wide service and is part of the wider fostering service.

Support carers look after children in their own homes for short periods (usually up to 72hrs) as part of wider package of support outlined in the CiN or CP plan. Children are aged between 0-16yrs and the provision of support can be 6-18 months in duration if required. The support care placement is incorporated and reviewed as part of the child's plan. The provision offered to families is generally one weekend in 4 or one overnight per fortnight. The support can be increased dependent on need. The placements are generally offered under S17 and in line with short breaks procedures.

Support Carers are assessed, approved, and supported in the same way as mainstream carers. Expectations of Support Carers are in line with mainstream carers.

The childminding scheme is an additional service within the support care scheme. This aspect of the scheme aims to support younger children (0-3) to continue to live in their home environment. Registered childminders with a good or above OFSTED rating, who have applied and been accepted to work as part of the scheme, offer day care to children to enable parents to access support services for themselves ie parenting groups, Forward Leeds, mental health services, counselling services. This service provides support that supports parents to achieve positive outcomes within the CiN or Child Protection Plan. The Scheme currently has Childminders city wide.

The service received 93 referrals within the last year, the vast majority of which were subject to CIN or Child Protection Plans. The service provided placements for 54 children this year (alongside an additional 31 young people who were already in existing placements from 2022). 17 children whose placements have ended within this period have remained at home with family with 2 children entering into LA care. 36 children are currently being supported and continue to live at home with family/family members/kinship or connected persons

The Support Care Scheme also supported children in an emergency situation via placement team, as full-time placements were not available or return home was not



possible. However, Support Care should not be viewed as an emergency or crisis lead service.

Support care works well alongside MST CAN in allowing parents time and breathing space to fully adopt and integrate the work undertaken by MST. This combination has proved very successful in many cases.

The service continues to receive regular requests from Placement Service to offer support in emergency situations where longer-term solutions cannot immediately be found for young people. From our yearly figures it is apparent that our carers have supported on many occasions.

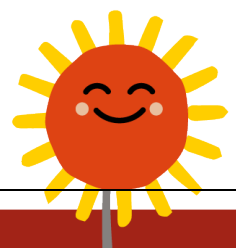
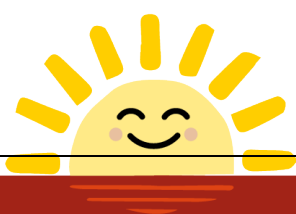
Support Carers are keen to protect their role and work within their remit of approval, which is to provide 'short breaks' to children living in difficult family situations. They are keen to build supportive relationships with children and families, helping parents/primary carers to make changes in their situations, and enable families to achieve positive outcomes keeping families together and children at home. Ultimately preventing children from coming into care.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people (UASC)

Placements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children (UASC) and young people continue to be in demand in Leeds. We use a combination of different placement types for these young people, including foster placements, Supported Lodgings, Rent a Room, Group living, and Semi-independent living. The decision as to which placement is used is informed by a combination of the young person's age, vulnerabilities, needs, independent living skills and placement availability. The majority of the UASC we look after tend to be male, and aged 15+.

The vast majority of UASC who are referred to Leeds, and are then supported by us, are extremely vulnerable children and young people who have experienced significant trauma in their countries of origin and on their journeys to the UK. Our focus is to provide them with a placement which will meet their needs, and which will help them to start to recover from their experiences and build a new life in the UK.

Going forward specific support groups for UASC carers are needed and a quarterly support group is in the process of being set up within the service.



Supported Lodgings

The supported lodgings scheme is a resource for Looked after Young People and Care Leavers aged 16-21. Its aim is to offer a supportive environment that will allow young people to mature and develop the practical and emotional skills they require to make a successful transition to living independently in line with the young person's Pathway Plan. Young people benefit from a level of freedom and responsibility whilst still sharing a home with supportive adults offering guidance and advice.

The young person is a member of the household, not a member of the family as in fostering, but will share in household /family experiences and strong relationships are often established. Young people are expected to be engaged in education training or work. Household expectations are established through a living together agreement. This is regularly reviewed with a plan that the young person is developing skills towards independent living. The carer will also provide emotional support to the young person's journey to adulthood.

Supported lodgings carers are subject to the same assessment and approval at panel as foster carers. Support follows the fostering model in terms of regular supervision visits, support visits and calls, support groups, training and annual reviews.

There are currently 35 supported lodgings households: 22 active with young people placed; 6 with vacancies awaiting appropriate matches and 7 on hold. This represents a total of 30 young people placed, 18 aged 16 – 17 years, and 12 young adults aged 18 – 20 years.

Rent a Room Scheme

Rent a Room was a resource we previously used for Looked after Young People and Care Leavers aged 16-21. To ensure compliance with new legislation for Supported Accommodation the scheme now only offers accommodation for those aged 18+ operating on a similar level to Staying Put. There are currently 2 active rent a room households with 2 young people placed aged 18-20.

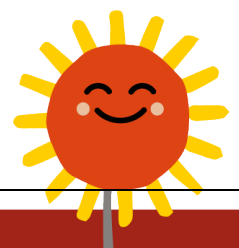
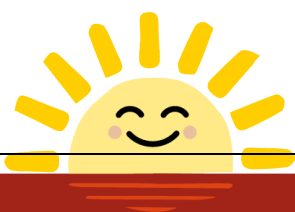


We are no longer actively recruiting to this scheme. A number of Rent a Room providers have been re assessed as Supported Lodgings carers and the focus of recruitment now is on directing those who would previously have considered Rent a Room towards Supported Lodgings.

Complaints

In the last year the Fostering Service has received 15 complaints from foster carers.

Subject of complaint	Outcome
Requesting new social worker	Locally Resolved
Payments not provided	Locally Resolved
Manner of social work support	Partially Upheld (Stage 1)
Breakdown in process	Upheld (Stage 1)
Staff Failure in Duties	Partially Upheld (Stage 1)
Lack of Social Work Support	Upheld (Stage 1)
Delay in finalising EHCP	Upheld (Stage 1)
Change in payments	Upheld (Stage 1)
Payments not provided	Upheld (Stage 1)
Lack of Social Work Support	Upheld (Stage 1)
Delay in assessment	Upheld (Stage 1)
Lack of provision	Upheld (Stage 1)
Challenge Direct Payments Rate	Upheld (Stage 1)
Manner of social work support	Not Upheld (Stage 1)
Lack of Social Work Support	Complaint not accepted (Stage 1)



Allegations against Foster Carers.

During the period 2023-2024, 37 foster carers were the subject of allegations, the majority of these allegations were made by children/young people in their care or their allocated social workers and are detailed as follows:

The number of allegations against foster carers made by fostered children	18
The number of allegations against foster carers made by other sources	19

Information about the categories of alleged abuse	
Physical abuse	16
Sexual abuse	4
Neglect	9
Emotional abuse	8
Information about the actions resulting from allegations against foster carers	
How many referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) did you make?	1
How many referrals to the local authority child protection team were made?	11
How many Section 47 enquiries were made?	0
Information about the outcome of investigations of allegations	
Concern(s) resolved - no further action	8
Continued monitoring for an agreed period	11
Concern remained, referred to fostering panel to review foster carer approval	18
Timescale for investigations	
less than 21 working days	6
22-30 working days (4 - 6 weeks)	2
31-50 working days (6 - 10 weeks)	2
More than 50 working days (> 10 weeks)	27

In circumstances where the service receives allegations against carers these are managed to ensure that any potential risks to children are understood and addressed. This involves liaising with the allocated social workers for the child, the Independent Reviewing Officer and any other relevant agency. We also work alongside the LCFA where they are supporting a carer through this process.

Where necessary children may be moved from foster carers whilst concerns are investigated. In line with relevant procedures and guidance where appropriate concerns are referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer and managed through the Allegation Management process to ensure independent scrutiny and investigation.



Analysis

It continues to be a very challenging period for the Fostering Service. The increase in children becoming looked after and the continued challenges around recruitment have remained. This is reflected in similar cities and authorities across the country and is an established pattern post the Covid 19 pandemic throughout the UK.

This continues to mean there is very little capacity internal foster care resources and that we have not been able to reduce the need to use external provision including Independent Fostering Agencies and external residential. It has also resulted in an increase in placement instability and limited plans to return children to Leeds were possible.

The result of this is a significant financial challenge for the Local Authority. There is a continued need to utilise expensive external provision for children that could be placed internally. As a result of this Fostering needs to continue to play a key role within the CLA Sustainability Plan, with a real focus on recruitment and supporting social work colleagues to actively lower the numbers of children in care.

The social work teams within both Fostering and Placements Services should be commended on the efforts they have made in this very challenging period. They continue to find solutions to placement needs and focus every day on providing the best possible experiences for children looked after in Leeds. They do so with the support of committed and flexible foster carers who time and again go above and beyond to support children.

This context has impacted on some of the aims of the service for the last year, in particular the recruitment of new carers.

However, there are a number of positives. The planned Reunification Service is now fully staffed and already making a difference, with 5 children successfully returned home and several ongoing assessments taking place. The Placement Support Service now has a Team Manager and is recruiting, and this will enable us to improve the stability of placements, a key need.

The assessment and recruitment of Kinship Carers also continues to be a success. These carers provide vital family placements and there needs to be a focus on progressing some of these to SGO and also utilising the skills they have to look at them as potential foster carers in the future.



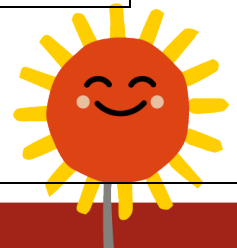
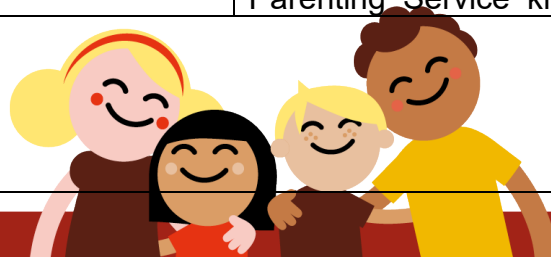
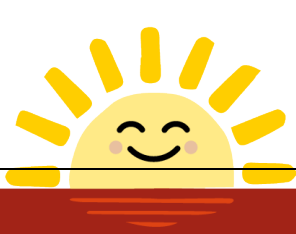
In addition to this it has become clear that we need to review the way we recruit and support our foster carers. As this report highlights this work has begun. A focus will be on a more flexible approach in terms of spreading the word and targeting different individuals and communities through partnership with Child Friendly Leeds, external organisations and companies in partnership with them and Leeds City Council, and internal and external stakeholders that already do much to support.

We need to target all areas of care, with priorities around how the Fostering Service can support the reduction of children entering care, and also help to bring those in external provision back to the city. This work is evolving at a good pace and is a key priority for 2024-25.

Alongside this there will be a focus on working in partnership internally. These challenges need collaboration between all corporate parenting stakeholders and social work teams. The challenges highlighted impact us all and the work highlighted will involve all of these agencies, our social workers and external partners to try and achieve our aims in the coming year.

Update Service Priorities set for 2023/24

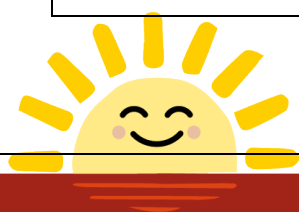
Objective	Progress
To increase the number of foster carers available to the service and to reduce the use of Independent Fostering Agencies.	As highlighted, this has not been achieved. It will remain an objective for 2024-25.
Develop scheme foster carers who can offer placements for young people currently in residential provision.	Project has started and we are working towards an outline of care profile, support offer and service aims that can be ready for consultation in late 2024.
Embed the SGO offer and afford Kinship Carers more targeted support via Early Help.	New SGO offer is available for carers to access. Offer has been shared with professionals via presentation. The offer is being made available to prospective SGO carers to encourage take up. Leaflets are being created to share the offer in a concise manner but have not been completed and shared yet. Despite moving into the Corporate Parenting Service kinships carers are



	still able to access targeted support from Early Help.
Establish Placement Support Team	A Team Manager has been recruited and the aim is to be fully staffed by late 2024/early 2025.
Initiate Reunification Team	As per the report this team is now fully staffed and making an impact in returning children home from care placements. This is a positive outcome and a significant cost saving for Leeds City Council.

Service Priorities 2024/2025

Objective	Actions
To increase the number of foster carers available to the service and to reduce the use of Independent Fostering Agencies.	Progress current recruitment project around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital and Online Communication. - Changing the way we work. - Working better in partnership to recruit. - Focusing on the needs of the CLA service. - Recruiting new carers from a variety of backgrounds who can offer flexibility as well as traditional foster carers. - Explore how this model can support SEND children.
Develop scheme foster carers who can offer placements for young people currently in residential provision.	Develop carer profile, offer, training pathway and children's profiles in time for consultation by late 2024 with a view to implementation in the first 3-6 months of 2025.
Relaunch and expand the existing Care Support Service to ensure Fostering is doing all it can as service to lower the number of children becoming CLA.	Plan a campaign to advertise and expand this service to allow for more flexible carers that can support families on the edge of care.
Establish Placement Support Service.	Continue to liaise and work with all stakeholders to ensure this new service has a significant impact.
Focus on our current enrichment and support offer to carers and how we can approve this.	Work with Child Friendly Leeds to recruit two new workers who can explore the offer, expand it through our corporate partners and work with the LFCA and All



	Carers group to improve and modernise access to training.
Establish DDP and PACE as a way of working across the service.	Roll out this training to all Fostering, Kinship and Placement Social Workers and all Foster Carers.

Recommendation

That the Executive Board accepts the services assessment of its performance during 2023/24 and the services priorities for 2024/25

