



### **Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)**

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**Time and Date**

11.00 am on Tuesday, 12th November, 2013

**Place**

Dame Ellen Terry Suite - Council House

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**Public Business**

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interests**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 6)
  - (a) To agree the minutes of the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2013.
  - (b) Matters Arising
4. **Annual Family Group Conference Service Report** (Pages 7 - 30)

Report of the Executive Director, People
5. **Ofsted Adoption Inspection Report 2013** (Pages 31 - 48)

Report of the Executive Director, People
6. **Fostering Service Report 2012-13** (Pages 49 - 72)

Report of the Executive Director, People
7. **Outstanding Issues Report**

There are no outstanding issues to report.
8. **Any Other Business**

To consider any other items of business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

**Private Business**

Nil

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Chris West, Executive Director, Resources, Council House Coventry

Monday, 4 November 2013

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Usha Patel  
Tel: 024 7683 3198

Membership: Councillor: G Duggins (Cabinet Member) and J Innes (Deputy Cabinet Member)

By invitation Councillor: Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

**Please note: a hearing loop is available in the committee rooms**

**If you require a British Sign Language interpreter for this meeting  
OR if you would like this information in another format or  
language please contact us.**

**Usha Patel**

**Tel: 024 7683 3198**

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# Agenda Item 3

## Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) held at 2.00 pm on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2013

Present:

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Duggins
Deputy Cabinet Member:	Councillor Innes
Shadow Cabinet Member:	Councillor Lepoidevin
Other Member:	Councillor Lucas
Employees (by Directorate):	
Chief Executives:	A. Hook, L. De-Voisey-Williams
People:	A. Pepper, J. Sembi, D. Wilson
Resources:	S. Bennett, V. Castree, J. Newman

### **Public business**

#### **16. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **17. Minutes**

The minutes of the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2013 were agreed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

#### **18. Adoption Service Report 2012/13**

The Cabinet Member considered a joint report of the former Director of Children, Learning and Young People which detailed the work of the Coventry City Council Adoption Service and appended to which was the annual Statement of Purpose (SOP), which was required to be compiled and kept under regular review, at least annually. Updated figures for 2013/14 were provided at the meeting.

The report detailed the new Integrated Family Placements Service which aimed to provide a service for children that was designed around the child's lifeline. A secure outcome of permanency was the priority for the wide range of children for whom this was needed, at the earliest stage, whether via Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders or Long Term Fostering. Located within the Integrated Family Placement Service, the aim of the Adoption Service was to provide a comprehensive Adoption and Post-Adoption Service, including the provision of Adoption Support Services, to all parties affected by the adoption process that was consistent with Best Practice, National Standards, Guidance and Regulatory Requirements.

Officers were congratulated for making the comprehensive document user friendly and were questioned on aspects of the report including:-

- Recording and understanding why people who make initial enquires about becoming adopters decide not to pursue this route.
- Frequency of training and preparation groups, and where they are held
- Approved adopters outside of the City

The Cabinet Member noted that the report had been considered by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) at their meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2013 (their Minute 13/13 refers)

**RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People):**

- 1. Notes consideration of the report by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**
- 2. Accepts the Adoption Service Report 2012/13**
- 3. Approves the updated Statement of Purpose**
- 4. Approves that the Council remains committed to the new model in achieving the greatest number of adoptions compatible with achieving the best outcomes for the children concerned.**

**19. Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2013/13 – Children's Social Care Services**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director, People, which provided details of the comments, compliments and complaints received during 2013/13, the themes that arise from them and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

**RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) endorses and approves the publishing of the Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2012/13 – Children's Social Care Services report on the Council's website.**

**20. Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board Recommendation on the CLYP Social Care and Early Intervention Fundamental Service Review**

The Cabinet Member considered a briefing note which indicated that the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) identified the CLYP Fundamental Service Review (FSR) from the Transformation Programme Progress Board report as an area for scrutiny and had considered this item at their meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2013 (their Minute 14/13 refers).

The Scrutiny Board had raised concerns that the financial targets had not been met and had indicated that they wanted to explore the reasons behind this and whether lessons could be learnt for future reviews. The Scrutiny Board had made

recommendations to the Cabinet Member to address these concerns.

In addition, to making recommendations to the Cabinet Member, the Scrutiny Board had also requested that:-

- 1) That an accurate report is created detailing how many children had been prevented from entering care due to early intervention work and that this report is circulated to members of the Finance and Corporate Scrutiny Board (1) and the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2).
- 2) That a report is brought to SB (1) with an update on progress and action being taken to deliver the financial targets and savings in January, 2014.

**RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member agrees to work with officers and the Chair of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board to review the model on which financial targets are based in order to seek assurance that the model is accurate and targets achievable. This review should take into account relevant contextual information from the original review raised by the project team and external partners, as well as information from the recent Peer Reviews. If the Cabinet Member is not satisfied, then he will consider referring the issue to the Audit Committee.**

21 **Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues to report.

22. **Any Other Public Business**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at: 2.30pm)

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## **Public report** Cabinet Member Report

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board(2) Report  
Cabinet Member Children and Young People Report

7<sup>th</sup> November 2013  
12<sup>th</sup> November 2013

### **Report to**

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board 2  
Cabinet Member for Children & Young People  
Councillor Duggins

### **Director approving the report:**

Executive Director, People

### **Ward(s) affected:**

All

### **Title:**

**Annual Family Group Conference Service Report**

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### **Is this a key decision?**

No

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### **Executive summary**

Coventry Family Group Conference Service facilitates family meetings where strengths and resources within a network of family and friends can be drawn upon to make a family plan which offers support, care and safety for children and young people.

The outcomes for the children and families who have been offered a Family Group Conference have been carefully monitored and evaluated and are documented in the Annual Report attached.

The Family Group Conferencing Service has increasingly demonstrated its value in enhancing and assisting wider family and community networks involvement to make safe decision making for children and families in Coventry where there are child welfare concerns.

### **Recommendations**

Scrutiny Board is asked to:

1. Endorse the report and the continued development of Family Group Conferencing as a process to enhance and assist wider family and community networks involvement in safe decision making for children and families in Coventry where there are child welfare concerns and forward any comments to Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

2. Confirm future reporting requirements for this work, for which annual reporting is not a statutory requirement.

Cabinet Member is asked to:

1. Endorse the report and consider any comments forwarded by Scrutiny Board 2
2. Endorse the continued development of Family Group Conferencing as a process to enhance and assist wider family and community networks involvement in safe decision making for children and families in Coventry where there are child welfare concerns.
3. Confirm future reporting requirements for this work, for which annual reporting is not a statutory requirement.

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix 1      Family Group Conference Annual Report

**Other useful background papers:**

None

**Has it or will it be considered by scrutiny?** **Yes**  
*Booked on Scrutiny Board 2 7/11/13*

**Has it, or will it be considered by any other council committee, advisory panel or other body?** **No**

**Will this report go to Council?** **No**



## **Annual Family Group Conference Report April 2012 to March 2013**

### **1. Background/ Context**

- 1.1 Coventry Family Group Conference facilitates family meetings where strengths and resources within a network of family and friends can be drawn upon to make a family plan which offers support, care and safety for children and young people.
- 1.2 The Family Group Conferencing Service is sited within the Safeguarding Children Service and works on a city wide basis addressing issues of child welfare. The Service is staffed by one full-time manager, three full-time FGC Coordinators and 2 sessional coordinators .

The annual budget for the service in 2012/13 was £165,738.

- 1.3 The outcomes for the children and families who have been offered a Family Group Conference have been carefully monitored and evaluated and are documented in the Annual Report attached. In summary these include:

- All the FGCs undertaken in 2012/13 (91) succeeded in making plans for children, which were acceptable to the referrer.
- Sixty three percent of the children who were Looked After when referred to the Service were successfully returned home to live with parents/family members,
- FGC outcomes have continued to support CLYP priority areas through safely preventing children becoming LAC and improving outcomes for LAC in promoting permanence within the birth family.
- The Service has also continued to successfully support families in identifying informal family based resources to allow children to remain living safely at home, often as an alternative to expensive agency led provision.
- Through the continued flexible use of Sessional FGC Staff, the Service has been able to respond to demand without the need to operate a waiting list, ensuring a timely response to family need.

- 1.4 The Service has also demonstrated value for money in respect of savings achieved through the provision of informal sources of support identified through Family Plans as an alternative to Council resources.

### **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

Not Applicable

### **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

Not Applicable

### **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

Not Applicable

### **5. Comments from Executive Director , Resources**

#### **5.1 Financial implications**

The FGC Service facilitates meetings with networks of family and friends to offer support and care for children and young people. By working successfully with these family networks it has been demonstrated that for 19 young people who had FGC's in 2012/13, it had prevented the need for these young people to be accommodated by the Local Authority and avoided the costs associated with this.

The avoided costs can be considerable, but are difficult to quantify due to the need to assume what services would be required. The following table shows the potential costs avoided through the provision of either accommodation (for the 19) or family based support resources by the family network, where the alternative would have been Local Authority care or services:-

	Estimated Cost Avoided 2012/13
<b>Cashable:-</b>	
Internal/External Fostering Provision	£361k to £763k
Supervised Contact Sessions	£16k
Daycare/Baby Sitting	£2k
Respite Care	£98k
<b>Total Cost Avoided</b>	<b>£477- £879</b>
<b>Non-Cashable (Efficiency):-</b>	
Family Support Worker Time (6,261 hours)	£53,281
<b>Total Efficiency Savings</b>	<b>£53,281</b>

## 5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications

## 6. Other implications

There are no specific implications to be considered

### 6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / LAA (or Coventry SCS)

Sixty nine percent of the children referred to the Service are currently or have previously been subject to Child Protection Plans. Family Plans established at FGC in these circumstances are often addressing specific safety / risk issues or providing a support plan to address longer term sustainability once risk of significant harm has been reduced.

It continues to be an aim to promote the use of FGC pre Child Protection Conference in order to support reduced numbers of children at risk.

The Family Group Conferencing Service has increasingly demonstrated its value in enhancing and assisting wider family and community networks involvement to make safe decision making for children and families in Coventry where there are child welfare concerns.

The Service has also demonstrated value for money in respect of savings achieved through the provision of informal sources of support identified through Family Plans as an alternative to Council resources.

## **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

Not Applicable

## **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

None

## **6.4 Equalities / EIA**

An Equality Impact Assessment was completed in August 2012. No specific actions were identified for this service.

The views of family and friends are obtained following each FGC in respect of the usefulness of the process and success in addressing concerns. One hundred and five family and friends completed evaluations in this reporting period and ninety six percent of those reported that they had found the FGC useful and had addressed the concerns.

Evaluation forms completed by young people at the conclusion of their FGC highlight *that they felt safe and able to contribute, and were listened to by the adults attending their FGC. They felt well supported by their Advocate.*

## **6.5 Implications for (or impact on?) the environment**

Not Applicable

## **6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

Not Applicable

## **Report author(s)**

### **Name and job title:**

Ann Clarkson & Anne Daly  
Family Group Conference Manager

**Directorate:** People

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<b>Contributors:</b>				
Usha Patel	Governance Service Officer	Resources	25/9/13	1/10/13
<b>Names of approvers</b>				
HR:Neelesh Sutaria	HR Manager	Resources	25/09/13	1/10/13
Finance: Rachel Sugars	Finance Manager	Resources	25/09/13	1/10/13
Legal: Julie Newman	Children and Adults Legal Services Manager	Resources	25/09/13	1/10/13
Director:		People	25/09/13	
Member: Cllr Duggins			25/09/13	1/10/13

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[www.coventry.gov.uk/cmis](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/cmis)

**Coventry City Council**  
**Children Learning & Young People**  
**Directorate**  
**Family Group Conference Service**  
**Annual Report**  
**April 2012 to March 2013**

# COVENTRY FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 1/4/2012 – 30/3/2013

## 1) SERVICE PROFILE

Coventry Family Group Conference Service facilitates family meetings where strengths and resources within a network of family and friends can be drawn upon to make a family plan which offers support, care and safety for children and young people. The FGC Service is sited within the Safeguarding Children Service and works on a city wide basis addressing issues of child welfare.

Although the Service works primarily on cases referred by Social Care Children's Teams, multi agency access to the Service through the CAF process continues to be offered.

The FGC Service has been staffed by one full-time manager, two full-time and two sessional FGC coordinators. The FSR process identified funding to extend staffing by 1 full time FGC Coordinator from September 2012. Unfortunately the increased capacity this created, was not realised between July 12 – March 13 due to the absence of a member of staff undertaking social work training via the ELC route.

The annual budget for the service in 2012/13 was £165,738.

The Coventry FGC Service has continued to have a significant profile within the Regional and National network for Family Group Conferencing. The Service works closely with its neighbouring FGC Service in Warwickshire which has helped to reduce costs for example in sharing children's advocacy service and training costs. The service is also currently exploring the option of a shared pool of Sessional Coordinators. This would extend flexibility at times of high demand

## 2) KEY TRENDS 2012/13

- The FGC Service has continued to primarily work with families where critical decisions are being made about their children, in particular those at risk of harm, family breakdown or in need of permanence.
- More than half of families referred to the Service are single parent households and have multiple problems, including domestic abuse, drug and alcohol misuse and mental health needs.
- A significant number of families referred to the service have at least one parent with a disability.
- Early referral identification systems (through relevant Panels and Statutory Meetings) have been further strengthened and are embedded in order to promote take up and avoid delay. There has continued to be regular FGC staff presence in key services (RAS, Neighbourhood and

LAC Social Care Teams) as well as the ongoing FGC Awareness Raising Programme, maintaining a high profile of the service. Increasingly robust follow up of potential referrals has served to increase the referral rate to the service, but has been accompanied by some reduction in those cases progressing to full FGC.

- Despite the high level of need addressed by the service, all the FGCs undertaken in 2012/13 succeeded in making plans for children, which were acceptable to the referrer.
- FGC outcomes have continued to support CLYP priority areas through safely preventing children becoming LAC and improving outcomes for LAC in promoting permanence within the birth family.
- The Service has also continued to successfully support families in identifying informal family based resources to allow children to remain living safely at home, often as an alternative to expensive agency led provision.
- The Service offers extensive flexibility to families, in holding meetings at weekends, evenings and in venues of their own choice.

### 3) SERVICE DELIVERY DATA 2012/13

Referral Rate For FGC	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Children referred to FGC Service	85	120	103	122
No of FGC's held	56	82	88	91
% of FGC's with more than 4 family members	90%	85%	72%	77%

#### 3a) Referral Source

Referrals to the Service continue to be made primarily by **Social Care Children's Teams**. Although FGC was initially anticipated locally to be appropriately employed as preventive tool, the majority of referrals in practice continue to be at the higher level of need.

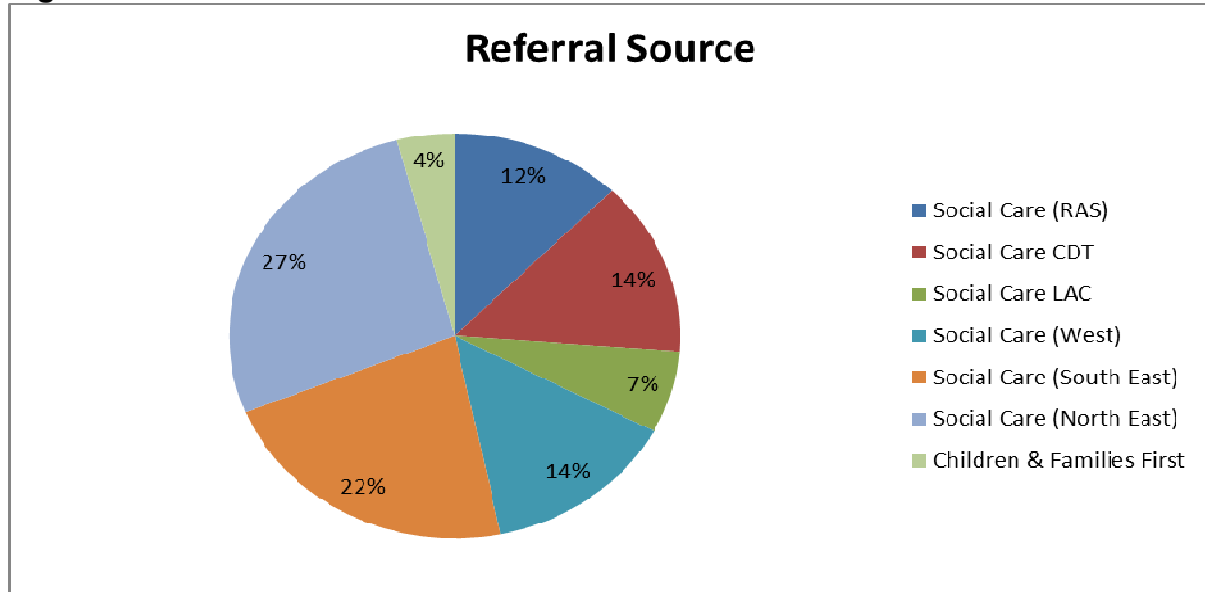
#### 3b) Referrals for FGC within Social Care (Fig 1)

Consistency in uptake of FGC across the city by Neighbourhood Teams has been broadly maintained with all areas more routinely referring to the Service. There has been some degree of delay in FGC referral whilst case transfer from the Referral and Assessment Service to Neighbourhood teams. This has been addressed with relevant managers.

There has been a significant increase in the number of referrals to the service from Children's Disability Team. This is a positive development given the high level of need within this highly vulnerable group

Despite a tracking system being established with the Connected Persons Team, uptake of the FGC service from this service remains low.

**Fig 1 – Referral Source**



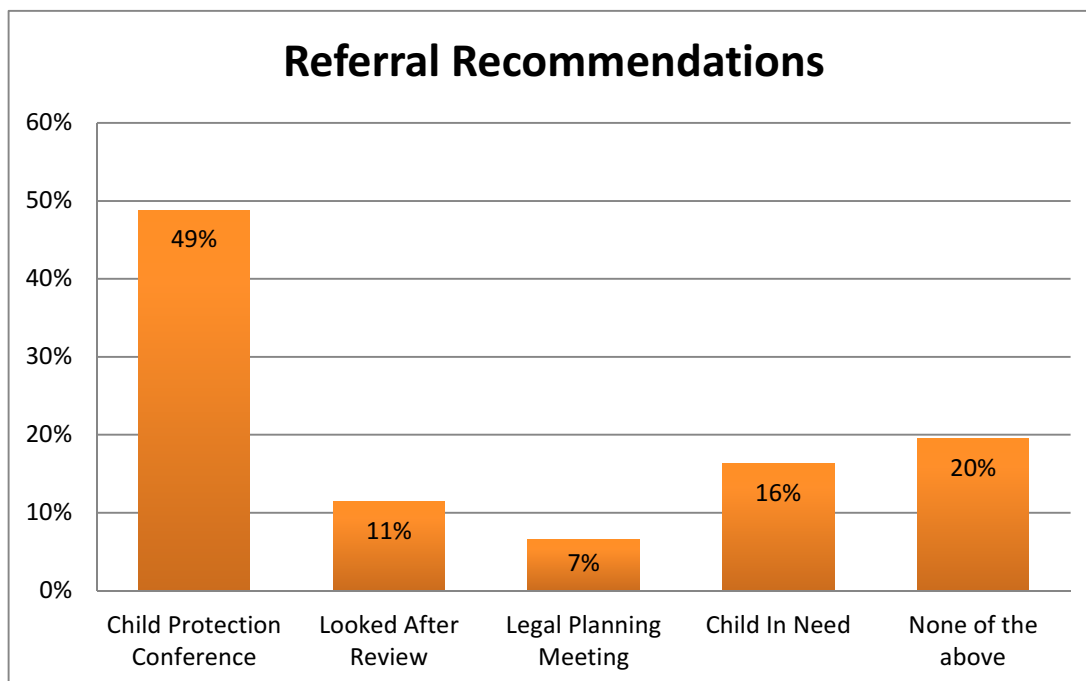
**3c) Source of FGC Recommendation (Fig 2)**

The FGC Service has tight follow up and tracking systems directly from Child Protection Conference, Looked After Children Reviews and Intensive Case and Support Panel.

There has been a significant increase in referrals from CPC recommendations from 40% to 49%. Direct follow up is now made with case holding Social Workers as soon as Safeguarding Service is notified of a child becoming Looked After.

The Service is also currently piloting the allocation of an FGC Coordinator directly from CPC and Legal Panel recommendation in order to progress more timely referrals.

**Fig 2 – Referrals to FGC recommended by:**



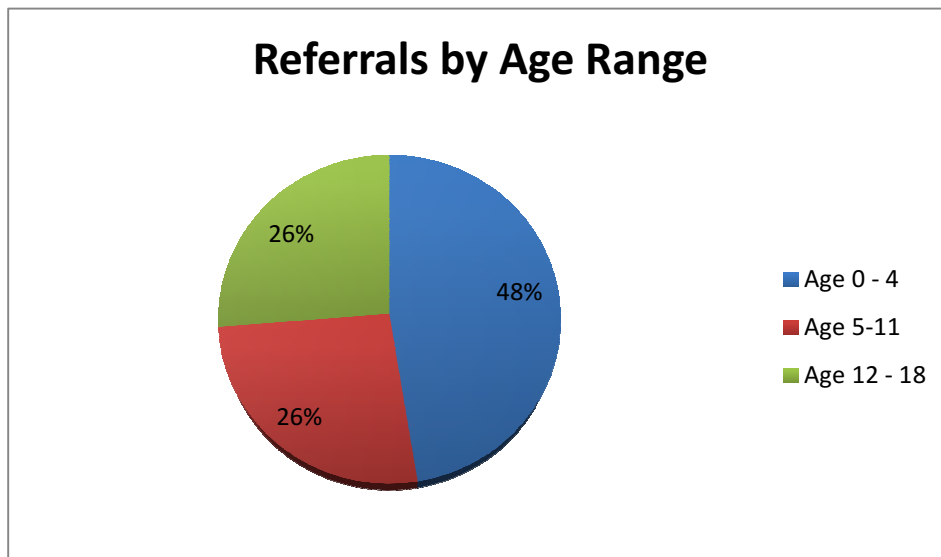


### 3d) Referral Characteristics

#### i. Referrals by Age Range ( Fig 3)

There continues to be an increase in the percentage of children under the age of 4 who are accessing the service. Many of these are within the child protection arena and will include those for whom permanence planning is being progressed with the support of the family network.

Fig 3



#### ii. Child Protection Status of child at Referral (Fig 4)

The Service is working with an increased percentage of children subject to Child Protection Plans (from 43% to 59%) where the extended family are often providing specific safety provision within the Multi Agency Child Protection Plan. It continues to be an aim to promote the use of FGC pre Child Protection Conference in order to support reduced numbers of children subject to CP Plans.

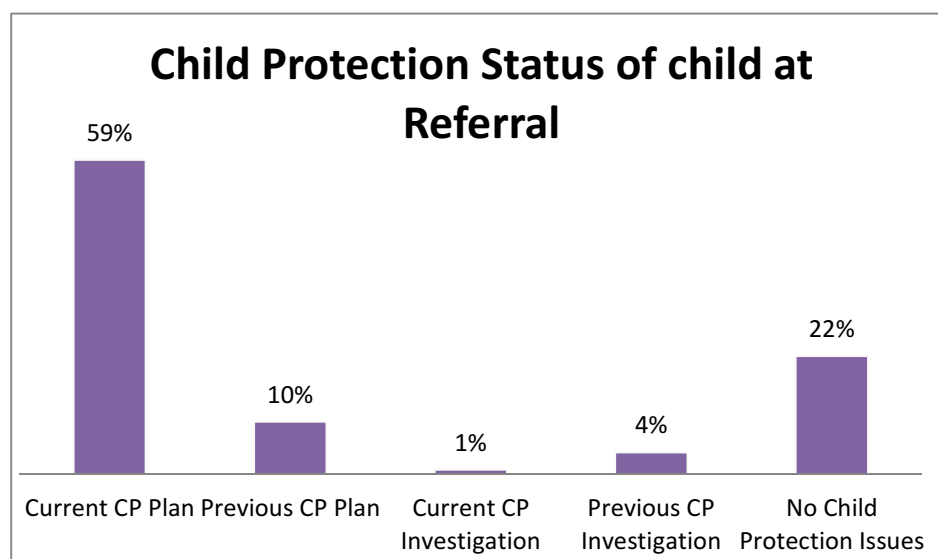
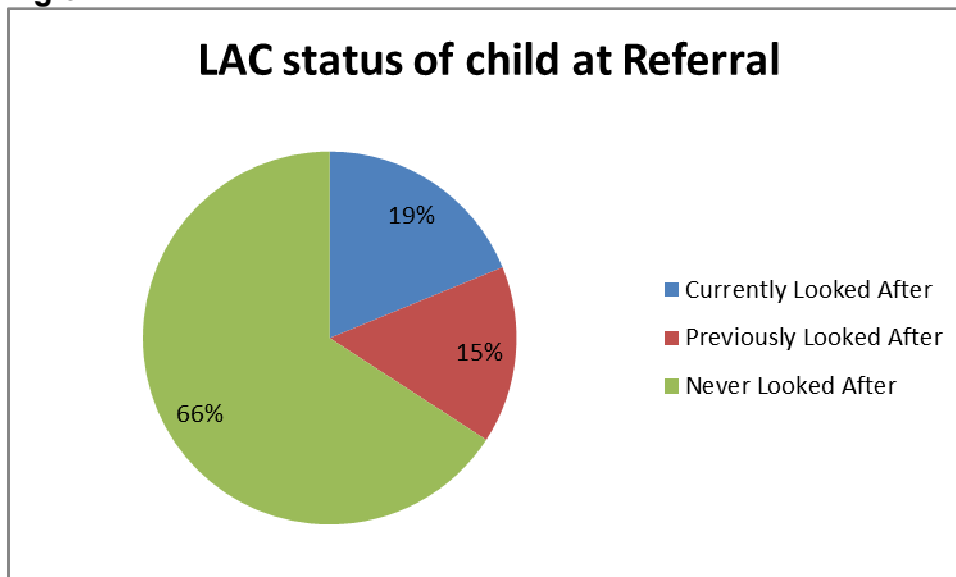


Fig 4

### iii.LAC status of child at Referral (Fig 5)

There has been a reduction of 10% of referrals in respect of children who are LAC and the need is for a family plan to support rehabilitation or to promote permanence planning within the extended family. This continues to be a priority area for the service and will continue to be promoted in the relevant teams.

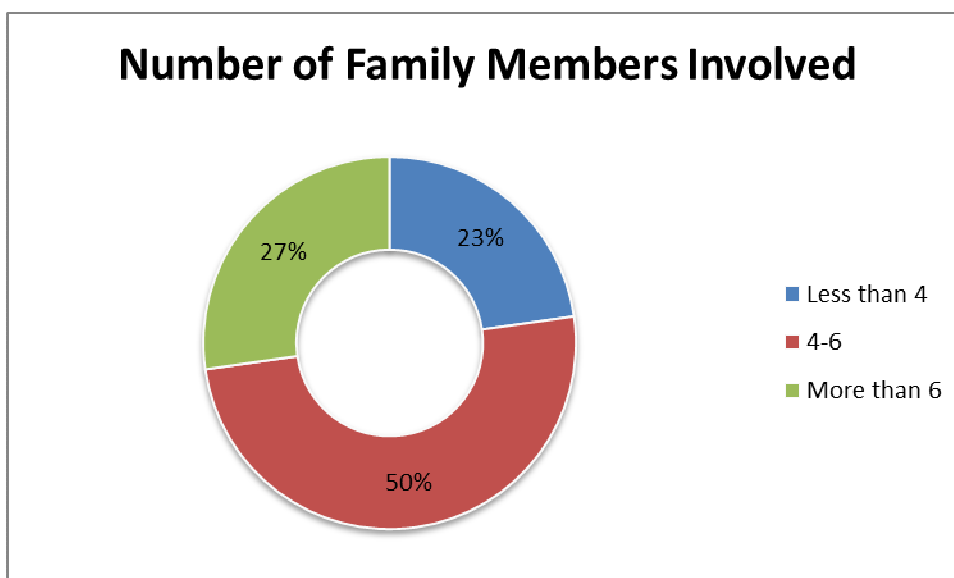
**Fig 5**



### 3e) Participation of family members the FGC process (Fig 6)

The service has continued to be extremely effective in ensuring the involvement of a wide range of extended family members and friends - many often previously uninvolvement in contributing to the family plan. Numbers can range from 3 – 15.

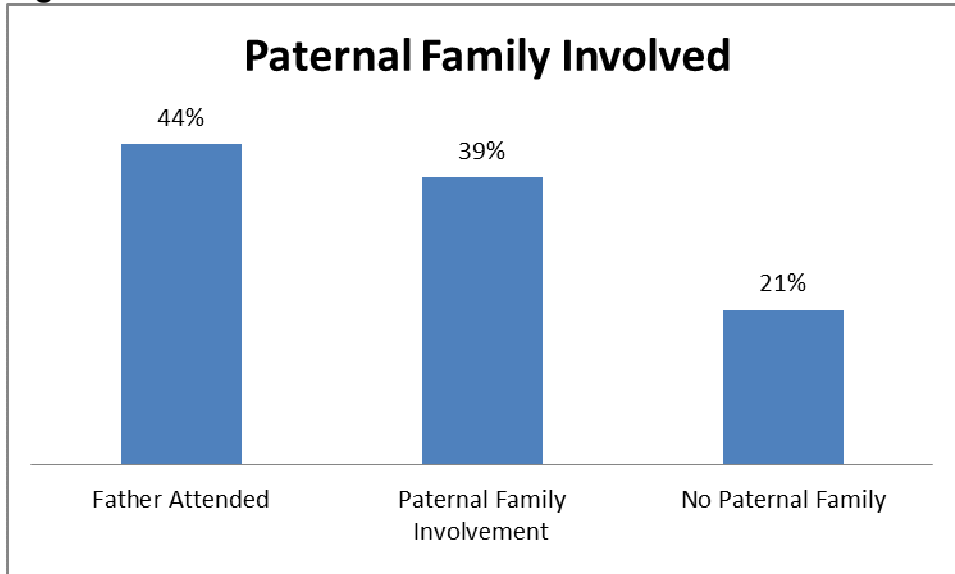
**Fig 6**



**3f) Participation of paternal family members the FGC process ( Fig 7 )**

FGC's have additionally been very effective in involving members of the extended paternal family who often lose contact when parents separate.

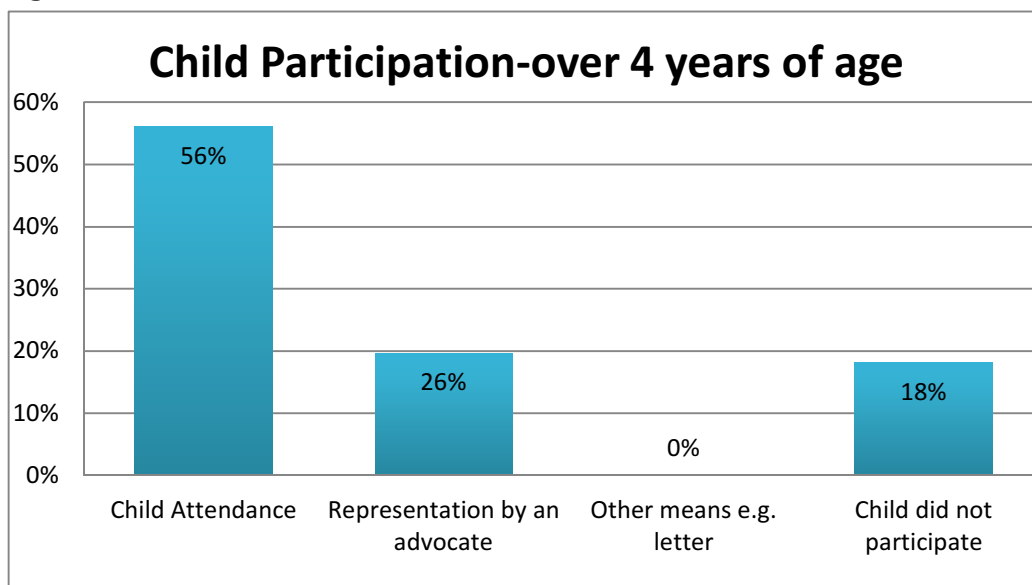
**Fig 7**



**3g) Participation of Children & Young People (Fig 8)**

The participation of children alongside their families in making decisions which affect their lives is a fundamental principle of FGC practice. Every effort is made to promote the involvement of children of all ages through a range of means. The small number who have not had involvement tend to be older young people who have proved difficult to engage.

**Fig 8**



**4) FGC OUTCOMES**

All of the FGCs undertaken in 2012/13 (91) succeeded in making plans for children, which were acceptable to the referrer.

The objective for each FGC is identified by the referrer. at the initial FGC. The outcome at closure is recorded by the FGC Coordinator following evaluation by the referrer.

**4a) Outcomes Achieved**

All of the Family Plans produced by Family Group Conferences in the reporting period with the following aims were reviewed and the children's subsequent status checked on Protocol on 7/05/2013.

<b>To prevent a child becoming Looked After</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
13 children had a FGC with the aim of preventing them becoming LAC	12 children have remained living with family members 1 child became LAC
<b>To support a CIN Plan</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
9 children were subject of CIN Plans	7 were children were closed to Social Care 1 stepped down to C&FF 1 became LAC
<b>To support a CP Plan</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
37 children had an FGC where aim was to support CP Plan	23 children were no longer subject of CP Plan

**4b) Outcomes for Children Looked After at the Point of Referral to FGC**

As there is a current focus upon improving planning and timescales for LAC children, data has been collated about the outcomes following FGC for this group specifically.

**11 children were LAC at the point of FGC.**

**7 (63%) were no longer LAC at the point of closure to FGC.**

**Fig 9**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Children no longer LAC – returned to parents	10	9	7
Children no longer LAC – SGO to family member	4	6	0
Children remain LAC but living with parents or family-plan to seek SGO	4	2	2
Children remain LAC – Plan LT Foster Care /Adoption	5	8	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>11</b>

#### 4c) Estimated Cost Saving Resulting from FGC (Fig 10 and 11)

FGC Plans generally identify supports which can be provided from within the friends and family network. These can range from babysitting to contact supervision and on occasion full time care of a child.

The resultant savings to the Local Authority can be considerable, but are complex to quantify. For example FGC's undertaken at the pre-proceedings stage can contribute to the Local Authority avoiding the need to initiate Legal Proceedings and occurring the resultant costs or contributing to the timely identification of contingency carers for the child and thus preventing costly legal delays.

The figures below (Fig 10) relate to the estimated avoided costs made through accommodation being provided by the family network, where the alternative would have been placement in Local Authority care. The unit cost figures relate to the calculations made for the FSR and represent an average cost for an internal and an external foster placement. The table represents the range of potential savings dependent upon age and placement type. The estimated avoided costs form part of the overall reported position of the financial performance of CLYP.

**Fig 10**

	<b>Average full year accommodation costs (fostering)</b>	<b>No of Children provided with accommodation by the family network via FGC( LAC prevented or returned home)</b>	<b>Total Potential Cost Saving</b>
<b>2010/11</b>	<b>Internal - £20,644</b> <b>External - £42,068</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Internal - £309,660</b> <b>External- £631,020</b>
<b>2011/12</b>	<b>Internal- £17,420</b> <b>External- £42,432</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>Internal- £490,443</b> <b>External- £1,194,631</b>
<b>2012/13</b>	<b>Internal-£19,045</b> <b>External-£40,169</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Internal- £361,855</b> <b>External- £763,211</b>

The Service also collects data in respect of **potential cost avoidance** through the provision of family based support resources as follows:

**Fig 11**

<b>Family Based Resources – estimated avoided cost</b>	2011/12	2012/13
Family Support Worker Time	£49,920	£53,281
Supervised Contact/Transport Contact	£33,160	£16,134
Day care/Babysitting	£8,091	£2,597
Respite	£29,330	£91,698
<b>Total estimated savings</b>	<b>£120,501</b>	<b>£163,710</b>

The above data relates to cases where the family has provided the relevant service required. Costs represent the forecasted cost to the LA if they had provided the service themselves.

(Appendix 2 provides detailed data)

#### 4 d) Views of Family Members re FGC Outcome and Process

The Service routinely obtains the views of family and friends in respect of the usefulness of the FGC process and success in addressing concerns.

**One hundred and five** family and friends completed evaluations in this reporting period which have been collated below. One of the concerns previously raised was whether FGC's were offered to families at the most appropriate time.

<b>Was a FGC offered at the right time for your family</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>Should have been offered earlier</b>
	<b>86%</b>	<b>14%</b>

#### **FGC Service Users have said:**

*'It was a far better process than I would have imagined. We felt listened to and the process was explained well. We were able to reach our own decisions-which was refreshing' Paternal Aunt*  
*'I can now talk more to A (child's mum)without her feeling I am criticising her about things if standards are slipping' Maternal Aunt*

*'It brought both sides of the family together and helped with understanding each other's points of view' Paternal Grandma*

*'It has made my family and friends more aware of the difficulties we are facing' Parent*

*'I feel this, is a very good and aspirational way of working with families that have troubles. The coordinator was compassionate and down to earth' Parent*

#### **4 e) Views of Service Providers**

In addition to the views of family members the service also collates the views of Agency's attending conferences. Agency representatives are asked to consider the effectiveness of the family's plan. **Sixty** percent rated the plan as **excellent** and **forty** percent as **good**. All the Agency representatives considered the plans had significantly contributed to improving the 'five outcomes' for the child.

*'The family took on board the concerning issues between B and hls mum and drew up an impressive plan which they stuck to. At the time of the review all family members had continued to show committment and carried out their part of the plan' Family Support Worker*

#### **5) SERVICE CAPACITY**

FGC Service capacity for 2012/13 was reduced for the reasons identified above, with the service being maintained through the use of Sessional staff funded through the Employee Learning Contract funding. Encouragingly, there has been an increase of 140% in the number of children referred to the FGC service in the first quarter of 2013/14. Although the service is now fully staffed, this may require further use of Sessional staff for which there is no allocated budget.

#### **6) FGC SERVICE PRIORITIES**

The FGC Service has continued to work closely to the CLYP/FSR priorities. Progress/ future action in respect of these priorities are addressed below:

## FGC Service Priorities

CYP Priority	Implications for FGC	Progress	Action planned for 2013/14
<b>Safely reduce LAC numbers</b>	FGC needs to be robustly and consistently considered at key points when LAC is likely/ has taken place without FGC (ie in emergency admissions)	<p>FGC Coordinator link with RAS and each Neighbourhood Social Care Team in place.</p> <p>FGC is mandated for consideration at point of Crisis Intervention Service involvement</p> <p>ICASP – FGC manager membership already.</p>	<p>Robust follow up systems to be continue to be prioritised to ensure early FGC referral.</p> <p>Consideration of formalised reporting/alert system for relevant managers from FGC Service where referrals delayed/ not progressed.</p>
	CPC/Access to Resources Panel/ICASP recommendations for FGC should be acted upon as a priority. Routine notification to FGC Service from relevant Panels would speed up the process.	<p>Notification systems now in place.</p> <p>During 2012/13 there has been increasing focus upon those children subject to legal orders but living at home with parents. FGC has been actively considered through the above Panel mechanism to have the potential as a key part of any discharge plan.</p>	<p>Currently allocating FGC Coordinator at the point of FGC recommendation from CPC to progress referral to reduce the delay by the SW.</p> <p>Progressing proactively cases to FGC without confirmation of family consent/potential may result in a reduction in the cases worked on by the service which progress to full FGC. This 'conversion' from referral to FGC itself needs to be monitored carefully given that all activity which does not result in a Family Plan reduces resources available to work with other families.</p>



CLYP Priority	Implications for FGC	Progress	Action planned for 2013/14
	Through a clear requirement for earlier utilisation of FGC where court proceedings are anticipated, speedier exit of children to appropriate carers within the family network should be facilitated.	System is now in place for all cases coming to Legal Panel where FGC recommended, FGC service notified and Coordinator allocated to progress referral.	Some delay identified in 2012/13 in cases coming through Legal Panel being progressed to FGC.  FGC Manager to meet with Legal Services to strengthen early identification process.
<b>Reduce delays for all children</b>	FGC is a flexible tool. Even if the primary function may be to identify supports to birth parents in caring for their children, an FGC can also establish a contingency plan for alternative care arrangements within the extended family.	Contingency planning should be central to FGC Plans.  System is now in place for all cases recommended at Legal Panel to be directly linked with a coordinator to progress.	Contingency planning to remain a key element of <b>all</b> FGC Family Plans.  The sharp focus within the Family Justice Review timescales (implemented in July 2013) upon timely planning for all children subject to legal proceedings, places great emphasis upon the need to progress FGC quickly. The FGC Manager is involved in the establishment of departmental systems to support adherence to new timescales.  FGC Service to continue to use flexible sessional Staff to ensure no delay in progressing urgent need for FGC.

<b>PaOYP Priority</b>	<b>Implications for FGC</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Action planned for 2013/14</b>
<b>Value for money placements</b>	<p>Within Connected Persons Assessments, FGC needs to be considered at the earliest opportunity. Although procedures refer to consideration of FGC, few referrals have been made.</p>	<p>The tracking system between FGC and the Connected Persons Team needs to be strengthened.</p> <p>All connected persons assessments must demonstrate that FGC has been considered.</p>	<p>The implementation of the Family Justice Review timescale has led to the need for increased focus on ensuring that early referral for FGC is made in respect of Connected Persons with the potential to care for children.</p>
	<p>Reconnecting young people who have been placed in expensive out of city placements with their family network using FGC is a positive use of the service. It may also hold the potential to identify potential carers in what can sometimes be a changed family situation.</p>	<p>Limited progress re increasing referrals from the LAC Service during 2012/13. Changes in the LAC Service from mid 2013 have led to increased robustness of links with FGC.</p>	<p>Build in reporting to LAC Service Managers of the referral rate for FGC by the LAC service.</p> <p>Continue to prioritise for allocation.</p>

## **Appendix1 FGC Case studies**

### **Case Study – B family**

#### **FGC helping a family to make arrangements for the care of their children**

##### **The situation**

Social Care had been working with the parents and children, E and R, for 12 months to support with the girls' learning difficulties. At the point of referral E and R were subject to child protection plans under the category of neglect and were residing with their mother. There was a history of domestic abuse perpetrated by father towards mother and the relationship between them was volatile. Both parents had a history of alcohol misuse and mother had accessed mental health services. Both E and R were experiencing emotional difficulties as they struggled to reconcile their divided loyalties.

##### **Purpose of FGC**

The initial focus of the FGC was to co-ordinate support from family members in order to support the girls to remain in the care of their mother. Over subsequent weeks it became untenable for R to remain in her mother's care and, having been initially unsuccessfully placed with her father, she was accommodated initially into local authority foster care.

By the time of the FGC review the Co-ordinator had been able to engage the girls' half-sister in the process. She had previously not been known to any of the professionals involved with the girls and had limited knowledge of their situation. Through conversations with the FGC Co-ordinator and attendance at the FGC review she expressed her desire to be considered as a carer for the girls, with a view to seeking a legal order to care for both of them until they reach 18.

##### **What difference did the FGC make?**

- It is to be hoped that the FGC was an empowering process for both of the girls as they were able to have their wishes and feelings heard by family members and to be involved in decisions being made about their care. Post-FGC evaluation forms completed by R identified that she had felt listened to a lot at the meetings and felt her views were included in the family plan.
- By attending the FGCs family members demonstrated their commitment towards the girls and their suggestions regarding ongoing contact arrangements contributed to strengthening the girls' familial relationships. This served not only as an additional protective factor for the girls but also promoted the offer of fulltime care within the family network.
- The necessary assessment in respect of the girls' half-sister is looking positive and is likely to recommend that E and/or R be placed in her care. This would not only be in line with the girls wishes both to the girls, by virtue of them remaining in the care of their family, but would result in substantial benefits in terms of cost savings.

## **Case Study - Child C**

### **FGC promoting safety for children**

#### **The situation**

C was a 1 year old child whose father had been arrested at age 15 for assaulting a 9yr old girl and was consequently on the sex offenders register. He was assessed to be at risk of re-offending. Father was deemed to have learning difficulties with poor communication skills.

C's Mum has some learning difficulty and had difficulty recognising concern about Dad's history as it happened several years ago. There was also domestic violence between the couple.

#### **Purpose of FGC**

At the time of the referral C was made subject of a Child Protection Plan. At the time there was some friction between the paternal and maternal extended family members.

Social Care wanted to give the family an opportunity to meet together for them to share the concerns around the father and for the family to look at how they could support the parents looking after C and keeping her safe. There were real concerns about the parents' ability to care for their child long term so the FGC was also an opportunity for the family to identify long term carers if C was unable to remain within her parents' care.

There was also a need for the extended family members to provide advice and support around budgeting, impact of domestic abuse, parenting (day to day care of the child) etc.

#### **What difference did FGC make ?**

The FGC service succeeded in getting both sets of maternal and paternal family attending the meeting which was a major step to the family working together to support and protect C.

The meeting worked really well in the sense that it got the message across from their family to the parents, that they would not minimise the concern and would do everything they needed to ensure their grandchild's safety.

The FGC plan involved the family putting in boundaries and expectations around the adults' contact with her. They devised a support plan around helping parents with budgeting, food dairy, shopping of well balance meals, supervision of contact, emergency support and the monitoring of the child's day to day care and safety.

The family was also able to agree on a contingency plan should the child be unable to remain in her parents' care – with maternal grandparents as main carers.

## Appendix 2 Cost saving data

This table records tasks/supports provided by the informal family network which would/could have otherwise required agency funded resources.

	Family Support total hours in period	Transport total hours in period	Supervision of contact total hours in period	Day care total hours in period	Respite total hours in period
	6261	1218	848	838	6324
Cost Per Hour	8.51	7.81	7.81	3.1	14.5
Total costs	£53,281.11	£9,512.58	£6,622.88	£2,597.80	£91,698

<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£163,712</b>
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**Public report**  
Cabinet Member

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12 November 2013

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) - Councillor Duggins

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director of People

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:**

Ofsted Adoption Inspection Report 2013

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**Is this a key decision?**

*No*

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**Executive Summary:**

Ofsted introduced a new framework for the inspection of adoption agencies which was implemented from April 2012. All adoption agencies must now have at least one inspection in each three-year inspection cycle. There are four potential judgements that Ofsted can make: Outstanding, Good, Adequate, and Inadequate.

Coventry's Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted between 12-16 August 2013. Ofsted judged the service to be adequate. The final report was received in September 2013 and made 13 recommendations. The report was published on the Ofsted website on 1 October 2013.

This report outlines the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection and the action taken to address the recommendations.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that:

The Cabinet Member notes the report and endorses the actions taken to address the recommendations of the Inspection Report.

**List of Appendices included:**

Ofsted Adoption Inspection Report

**Other useful background papers:**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title: Ofsted Adoption Inspection Report 2013**

**1. Context (or background)**



1.1 Ofsted introduced a new framework for the inspection of adoption agencies implemented from April 2012. All adoption agencies must now have at least one inspection in each three-year inspection cycle. The focus of these inspections is on:

- Children that should be placed for adoption are placed without avoidable delay
- Recruitment, timeliness of assessments and approvals of adopters
- The quality of adoption support to adopters and children
- The effectiveness of adoption panel and quality assurance
- Disruption to placements of children with an adoptive family
- Compliance with guidance, legislation and National Minimum Standards

There are four potential judgements that Ofsted can make:

- Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
- Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements
- Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements
- Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

1.2 Coventry’s Adoption Service was last inspected in 2009 when it was judged to be ‘Good with Outstanding’ features particularly in relation to post-adoption support. At that point the service was located at Stoke House.

1.3 The Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted between 12-16 August 2013. Ofsted judged the service to be ‘Adequate’. The final report was received in September 2013 and made 13 recommendations. The report was published on the Ofsted website on 1 October 2013.

1.4 The report makes 13 recommendations and an action plan is in place. Of the 13 recommendations 5 have already been completed – see table below:

Status	Recommendations	Timescales
Completed	4, 5, 6, 7 13 (40%)	October 2013
In progress	1, 3, 8, 12 (30%)	November 2013
In progress	2, 9, 10 11 (30%)	March 2014

1.5 The Family Placement Service was established in 2012, incorporating the Council’s Adoption Services, as part of the Fundamental Service Review in 2011/12. The Adoption Service was integrated with the Fostering Service and Family Finding in July 2012, and was joined by the Permanence Team, previously from the Looked After Children Service in March 2013. All three services are now centrally located in Civic Centre 1. The service is managed by the Head of Service for Looked After Children.

1.6 There were challenges in integrating 3 distinct services, combined with a significant increase in the number of children with a placement order, which increased from 48 in 2011/12 to 71 in 2012/13. Considerable work has been undertaken within the service to address core areas of practice, and given the challenges of managing the changes as well as implementing the Fundamental Service Review, the Ofsted judgement is considered to be an acceptable outcome at this time. However, ‘Adequate’ is not good enough, and the Council aspires to be ‘Good’ and ‘Outstanding’.

- 1.7 There is a programme of systematic review of practice, systems and processes underpinning the changes, to ensure that these are fit for purpose and comply with the regulations.
- 1.8 The service has recruited to vacancies, with the recruitment of first line managers fully achieved in October 2013. Social work vacancies will be appointed to in November 2013. A review of the Service Manager post is underway as it has not been possible to attract suitably experienced applicants.
- 1.9 A key area for development for the service is to review quality of post adoption support. Adoption support services play a vital role in helping to address the specific issues that adoptive families might encounter with an adopted child. Adoption support includes practical support, therapeutic or intensive family support helping children recover from their previous experiences and bond with their adoptive families. The quality of post adoption support is a critical contributor to achieving a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' judgement in any future inspection. This is also a key priority for Government and in September 2013 the Department of Education announced new funding to improve support to adoptive families, which is planned to be released in 2015/16.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) is asked to note the report and endorse the actions being taken to address the recommendations of the inspection report.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

Not applicable

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

All recommendations from the inspection report will have been completed by 31 March 2014.

## **5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources**

### **5.1 Financial implications**

The Family Placement net budget for 2013/14 is £2.3m. This service, covering both fostering and adoption is split into 3 teams, Assessment Team, Permanency Team and Support Team.

On top of this, Coventry received £1.1m Adoption Reform Grant for 2013/14. This has been provided to specifically address the backlog of children awaiting adoption as well as supporting wider improvements in the adoption service. £0.3m is being used to increase the budget for purchasing adoption placements, developing training, increasing team capacity to ensure adopters have an allocated support worker, and enabling wider sub regional working. The remainder is being used to support staffing costs, including strengthening the panel advisor role. This will maintain basic regulatory requirements, and ensure the delivery of the Adoption Action Plan plus recommendations arising from the Ofsted inspection.

### **5.2 Legal implications**

No implications identified.

## **6. Other implications**

*Any other specific implications*

**6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

The work of the Adoption Service supports the key priority outcome in the Council Plan "Coventry, proud to be a city that works" to support and celebrate our young people" in particular in the objective "Children are supported to live safe from harm".

The Adoption Service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging for permanent placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key role that the Local Authority plays as a Corporate Parent, of securing appropriate family placements for Looked After Children, as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

**6.2 How is risk being managed?**

Failure to provide an effective Adoption Service would lead to Coventry's Looked After Children staying in care longer. This risk is being managed through the delivery of the Fundamental Service Review aiming to increase the number of children adopted each year effectively.

**6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

The Adoption Service contributes to Children's Social Care's performance against key indicators that are closely scrutinised both internally and externally on an on-going basis by the Department of Education and Ofsted. An Ofsted Inspection provides a robust critical analysis of the performance of the Adoption Service, and in setting requirements and recommendations for improvement assists the service to focus on continuous improvement.

**6.4 Equalities / EIA**

An Equality Impact Needs Assessment has been undertaken by the service.

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None

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Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
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Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer		22.10.13	22.10.13
Mark Godfrey	Deputy Director	People Directorate	22.10.13	31.10.13
Andy Pepper	Assistant Director		22.10.13	24.10.13
<b>Names of approvers for submission:</b> (officers and members)				
Finance: Rachel Sugars		Resources	22.10.13	29.10.13
Legal: Julie Newman		Resources	22.10.13	22.10.13
Director: Brian Walsh			31.10.13	31.10.13
Members: Councillor Duggins			31.10.13	1.11.13

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[www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

## Appendices

### Ofsted Adoption Inspection Report 2013

# Coventry City Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for local authority adoption agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC055002
<b>Inspection date</b>	16/08/2013
<b>Inspector</b>	Rosemary Dancer / Maire Atherton
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full

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<b>Setting address</b>	Directorate of Children, Learning and Young People, Stoke House, Lloyd Crescent, COVENTRY, CV2 5NY
<b>Telephone number</b>	0247 665 9009
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Coventry City Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	Alison Talheth
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Andrew Pepper
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	25/08/2009

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Coventry City Council provides a comprehensive adoption and post adoption service to people affected by adoption. This includes children for whom adoption is the plan, birth parents and relatives, prospective and approved adoptive parents and adopted adults.

The social workers carrying out adoption work are based in the centre of Coventry and work closely with each other and with the children's teams to progress adoption plans for children.

The service recruits, prepares, assesses, supports and provides welfare supervision to domestic adoptive families. Inter-country adopters are referred to a specialist agency for their preparation and assessment; they then come back to the adoption service for support should they require this. The family-finding social workers work closely with children's social workers to identify potential matches for looked after children. The assessing and support social workers work closely together to identify adopters who may be able to meet a specific child's needs.

The service provides support and counselling for birth parents, including independent support through a service level agreement with a voluntary organisation, and provides a general adoption support service. The agency also works with adopted adults and birth relatives of adopted adults to provide birth records counselling and an intermediary service. This includes a service provided via service level agreements with adoption support agencies.

The agency made arrangements for 40 children to be adopted in the year 2012-2013. As of 31 March 2013, 96 children had a plan for adoption. There were 84 approved adopters.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

This local authority adoption service is providing an adequate service overall. The authority has made improvements in its services to children and adopters in a number of ways over the past year. The implementation of a fundamental service review has led to improvements in the cohesiveness between the children's social workers and adoption social workers and improvements in the identification of children who may require an adoptive placement. This is leading to an improving picture when considering the timescales for children.

The data in a couple of areas, such as the point at which the reviews decide on a plan for adoption, were not always clear. This is an issue that is intended to be addressed through the further development of data reporting, and migrating record keeping into a central system.

Adoptive families are well prepared, assessed and supported to meet the needs of the children placed with them; overall, adopters were complimentary about the social workers. The service is further developing its recruitment strategy to improve the profile of adopters who are currently mainly White.

Direct work with children is carried out so that they understand what is happening to them. Social workers pointed out that, for some, this work has to be carried out very slowly and at the child's pace, and this means a child-centred approach is taken to this work.

The quality of assessment reports in respect of children and adopters are variable, but in the main they provide enough information on which to base recommendations and decisions.

During the period since the last inspection, leaders have recognised that there were emerging issues that were impacting on the work carried out. This, along with intervention by the Department for Education last year, led to an action plan that is being implemented. There was a fundamental service review and this has led to the teams being restructured to provide a team around the child. The leadership team appointed two interim senior managers to oversee the development work planned, and a number of improvements have been made; some developments are yet to be implemented and others need to become embedded over the coming months.

A number of shortfalls have been identified; the majority of these had been identified by the service and plans are in place to address these. They relate to: life story books for children; the system for contact arrangements; the content of the adoption panel minutes; the adoption panel's quality assurance role; the notification system for birth parents; the arrangements for health services; monitoring arrangements in some areas of the work; the content of staff recruitment files; developing a guide for children about support services; developing the adopter recruitment strategy further; and supplying to Ofsted a copy of the most recent Statement of Purpose.

## **Areas for improvement**



## Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure the life story book is given to the child and prospective adopter at the latest by the second statutory review of the child's placement with the prospective adopters; and the completed life story book at the latest within ten working days of the adoption ceremony (NMS 2.7)
- ensure the agency helps individuals comply with the agreed contact arrangements; with specific reference to ensuring an effective and efficient system is developed (NMS 8.4)
- develop a stronger focus, within the recruitment strategy, on the recruitment of adopters, and target people from a wider range of backgrounds than is currently the case (NMS 10.1)
- ensure where these timescales have not been met in relation to cases, the panel records the reasons in the written minutes of the panel meeting (17.9)
- ensure that the adoption panel provides a quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to panel and whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met (NMS 17.2)
- ensure any advice panel gives, for example about the age range of children the prospective adopter should be considered for, is not recorded on the minutes as a recommendation (The Adoption and Children Act Statutory Guidance 2002 Chapter 1, paragraph 1.20)
- ensure the child's birth parents are informed orally of the decision-maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working day (NMS 17.12)
- ensure a guide to adoption support is provided to the child when support is being provided (NMS 18.6)
- ensure a full record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for staff are maintained on staff personnel files; with specific reference to ensuring that the record made during interviews regarding any gaps of employment are transferred to the staff member's file before the record is shredded (NMS 21.3)
- ensure that the arrangements for staff to access specialist advice needed to provide a comprehensive service for children are developed through permanent agreement; this is with specific reference to the arrangements with health services (NMS 24.7)
- ensure that evaluative monitoring of all records kept by the service takes place; with specific reference to: improving the quality of the data for children and adopters' timescales; complaints; reports to panel; the quality and content of children's and other files relating to adoption (NMS 25.2)

- ensure the premises are suitable to enable the agency to meet its Statement of Purpose; with specific reference to ensuring suitable rooms are available for panel attendees to wait in and for social workers to carry out therapeutic work with children (NMS 28)
- ensure Ofsted is notified of any revision of the Statement of Purpose within 28 days. (Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 Regulation (4) (a) and (b))

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

The authority performed poorly on the adoption scorecard published by the Department for Education. However, there is evidence of an improving picture recently in most areas of children's timescales. There are clear tracking systems in relation to looked after children and these include children with a plan for adoption. However, the data are not easily collated in terms of monitoring the child's timescales to adoption order and some data is not available; missing or erroneous data impacts on the performance indicators for adopters' and children's timescales. The measure for the timescales for children in relation to the period between the agency decision and date of placement are improved for 2012/2013, with 70.3% meeting this criteria.

Overall, children are prepared for adoption effectively as is appropriate to their age and level of understanding. Workers showed a high level of commitment to achieve this to ensure that children understand what is happening to them and know what to expect. The preparation and presentation of life story books to children and adopters remain a shortfall and this means that adopters do not have this useful tool to help children understand their situation in a timely way; however, there are on-going plans to ensure that the backlog is addressed. A child spoken to when asked what she would like to say to social workers about placing children for adoption said: 'Make sure children know what it means to be adopted.' She also said that she would tell other children, 'they should have patience as it can take a long time and can be a strain at times.'

Siblings are placed together wherever possible, and assessments about placing siblings together or separately are well considered. Some children have been fully involved in choosing which sibling they would like to live with when it was not possible, or advisable, to place a large sibling group together. The agency's success in placing siblings together has had an impact on their overall performance timescales.

Children's needs are overall met well within their adoptive families. Adopters are provided with information about the child before placement and are helped to think about if they will be able to meet these needs; these include needs relating to attachment issues, culture, race and religion. In terms of children's health needs, work is carried out with adopters to help them consider the implications any health

needs may have on them or the child. However, capacity issues within the arrangements with health have impacted on the timing of this in some cases. There is an interim plan to address these shortfalls; however, a sustainable plan needs to be established as a matter of urgency.

Due to historical delays in taking children into care, some children who the service is currently working with have significant emotional and mental health needs. These have impacted on all areas of these children's lives including their behaviour, social skills and educational and other abilities. The post adoption team is skilled in working with these children and young people and their families. For some families, work has been successful but for others it has not and a small number of placements have sadly disrupted. Children with less complex needs who have been received into care more recently are progressing well in their behaviour and overall development and are healthy and achieving to the best their ability. Adopters are attuned to their children's needs and advocate on their behalf in, for example, ensuring they get the educational support they need.

Children, for whom it is appropriate, enjoy a level of contact with their birth families. This means that they maintain a sense of their heritage. However, the system for letterbox contact is not efficient. This has meant that, on occasion, adopters or birth family members remind the service that contact is due or should have happened; this needs addressing as a matter of urgency.

### **Quality of service**

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

Prospective adopters who have recently gone through the assessment process feel welcomed and valued by the agency. Some commented that the initial response, when compared to other agencies, was favourable which is why they chose Coventry. An adopter said, 'Staff are all approachable, easy to open up to and know what they are taking about; we got a good vibe from them straight away.'

In terms of timescales for adopters, the data have shortfalls in some areas; this needs addressing to allow for effective monitoring. However, although many survey responses referred to frustrations around delays, the recent unpublished data show an improvement in timescales for application to approval for 2012/2013, with 68% having been approved within the eight-month timescale; this timescale was the expectation up until July 2013 when it was shortened to six months.

Prospective adopters are really positive about the assessment and preparation groups. Preparations groups are described as 'amazing', and, 'well delivered, grounded experience in reality'. It is clear that adopters are well prepared. Independent reviewing officers noted that prospective adopters are more proactive now in researching means to support their children in areas such as attachment issues.

The agency's adoption panel meets on a two weekly basis. It has been recognised,

due to an increase in business, that additional adoption panels are needed and these have been timetabled. The previous recommendation in relation to the adoption panel being provided with updates of cases it has heard has been met. However, the adoption panel is not undertaking its quality assurance role in respect of reporting to the agency on the quality of reports and compliance with the restrictions on writing reports. Also the adoption panel is making recommendations outside of its remit, for example, the numbers and ages of children a prospective adopter is approved for. Panel minutes are lengthy and do not record any reasons for delay. There is a new adoption panel chairperson who has very recently been appointed to the panel. She has the relevant qualifications and is very experienced in adoption work and had already identified these issues for development.

Most assessment reports for prospective adopters enable decisions to be made about their suitability to adopt. While most contain an analysis of the information gathered, some are too descriptive. The quality of the child permanence reports is variable; not all are written in an appropriate format for the child to access in the future. Children's views and those of their parents are not always included within the reports. However, the information contained within most of them enables the adoption panel to gain an at least adequate view about the needs of the child. The quality assurance systems of the above reports and associated papers which the adoption panel needs are not effective in ensuring that the adoption panel has sufficient information on which to base its recommendations; this is reflected in some cases being deferred for further information.

Family finding and matching processes have been strengthened by the recent restructure of the adoption team. Family finding is now commencing at the earliest stage possible and this helps to minimise avoidable delays for children. The arrangements for matching children are robust and ensure that children are placed in the most suitable family possible.

Engagement of birth parents in counselling services is low. It is difficult for parents to engage with services and many may not be ready to engage while care proceedings are on-going. However, the agency intends to use the recent increase in capacity of a voluntary adoption agency to try a more proactive approach to engaging birth parents. A birth parent spoken to commented that they have 'done the best they can to help me to come to terms with the situation'. The approach to ensuring that birth parents are informed about decisions made by the agency decision maker are not robust enough; not all parents have been provided with a letter informing them of decisions made about their children. For the majority of them, the reason for this has been because their current addresses are not known; the agency could be more proactive about finding their whereabouts so that they are kept up to date with the situation for their child.

The arrangements for supporting families provide a flexible service that can be tailored to meet needs. Adopters have reported that while the service they have received thus far has been invaluable it has not addressed all their needs. One stated, 'support is good as far as it has gone but it has not gone far enough.' Social workers with expertise in therapeutic work have been retained on the team but

various factors last year impacted on their capacity to carry out this important work.

People coming to receive a service in relation to their adoption are satisfied with the service they have received as it has helped them understand their background and make contact with birth family members.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **adequate** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The arrangements for the recruitment, assessment and preparation of adopters have a strong focus on the needs and safety of the child. Adopters are well prepared, knowledgeable and supported in dealing with the potential and actual impact of abuse and neglect and associated behaviours that their children may display. Adopters know how to help children overcome their past experiences. Training provided has helped to ensure that adopters are confident in supporting their children to develop secure attachments and learn how to use the internet safely.

Children live in adoptive families who keep them safe from harm, and when they are unable to do this, due to emotional or behavioural issues for example, they are confident in asking for help and assistance; adopters spoken to were confident that support would be forthcoming. Children spoken to know who they can talk to if they are worried about something. Social workers visit children placed for adoption to ensure that they are safe, happy and well and these visits are within statutory timescales. At times, more frequent visits are carried out if needs dictate this is required.

The arrangements for the recruitment of staff are satisfactory. However, information on personnel files is incomplete because not all have details of the reasons for any gaps in employment histories; this is because this information is shredded.

Work with adults is underpinned by systems that check people's identity to ensure that they are entitled to receive information.

Any concerns or allegations are dealt with in a timely and consistent way to ensure the safety of young people and Coventry works with other local authorities, for example, in strategy meetings.

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the local authority adoption agency are **adequate**.

Coventry's percentage of children placed for adoption from care, 7% in 2012, was higher than the national average of 4%.

There is a joint recruitment strategy for adoption and fostering. This needs further development to ensure sufficient focus is on adoption, the needs of children coming

through the system and targeting people who can meet children's more diverse needs.

There is a clear Statement of Purpose that outlines the aims and objectives and this is reviewed. The statement has not been provided to HMCI as required by regulations. There has been good investment in producing child-friendly children's guides that support children's understanding about what adoption may mean for them; however, there is not a guide for children to inform them about the support services they can expect to receive.

Monitoring children's timescales in respect of their looked after journey has been insufficiently robust historically; however, recently this is an improving picture. Evaluative monitoring of complaints, reports to panel, and the quality and content children's and other files relating to adoption is not robust enough.

Most recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. This has meant that practice has improved in some areas; however, life story books for children are not being provided to them in a timely way and some shortfalls remain in some staff recruitment files.

The adoption service has been through a disruptive and challenging period. The recent new interim management arrangements have provided staff and the service with a sense of enthusiasm and staff's anxiety levels have significantly decreased. There have been a number of developments at strategic and practice levels and further developments are planned. Although improvements have not had time to become embedded thus far, much has been achieved in a very short timeframe. Staff hold some anxieties about the proposed length of tenure of the interim arrangements but report that there has been a positive change in the culture of the agency which has led to them feeling more valued than they did previously.

Generally there is good engagement now with partner agencies that helps to ensure a more focused approach is taken to developing a team around the child. However, the funding arrangements between health and the local authority recently introduced are interim arrangements; these need to be agreed and finalised to prevent delays for adoptive children.

Staff are very clearly committed and passionate about their roles. Adopters are very positive about the social workers, calling them professional, caring and pleasant. One adopter said, 'Staff are very clearly skilled in their respective roles.' Another said: 'The worker was fantastic; she engaged with the other children in the family and made them feel at ease and happy to see her because they felt part of the process.' Staff receive regular supervision from their respective managers and report that managers are always available.

The premises the service operates from are overall fit for purpose. However, there are issues in relation to the arrangements for the waiting area for panel attendees and the suitability of rooms for social workers to carry out therapeutic work with children.

Children's and adopters' files overall provide a comprehensive picture of the work carried out, and children's files will be useful to them in the future in helping them understand their situation. Files are subject to periodic audit but this system has failed to pick up, for example, when documents are not signed or dated or when documents that are marked as a draft have not been updated.

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of local authority adoption agencies.





## Public report Cabinet Member Report

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Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)

12 November 2013

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) – Councillor Duggins

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director People

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:** Fostering Service Report 2012/13

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**Is this a key decision**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

Coventry City Council's Fostering Service formed part of the Fundamental Service Review in 2011/12. The Fostering Service was integrated with the Adoption Service and Family Finding in July 2012. They were subsequently joined by the Permanence Team, from the 'Looked After Children' (LAC) Service in March 2013 to form the Family Placements Service, all centrally located under the portfolio of services of the Head of Service for Looked After Children.

The rationale for the integrated model was to enable the provision of flexible service for children designed around the child's timeline which aims to secure timely assessments of prospective carers to provide a range of placements. All of which will ultimately support the outcome of permanency for the wide range of children for whom this is needed, at the earliest possible stage, whether this is via Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders or Long Term Fostering or a successful rehabilitation to the birth family.

Located within the Family Placement Service, the aim of the Fostering Service is to provide a range of quality placements to deliver alternative family care to meet the individual needs of those Coventry Children who are unable to live with their own families. The primary objective of the service is to support a range of improved outcomes for those children. The Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment, training, assessment and support of the Council's Foster Carers in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering.

The Fostering Service works alongside the Placements Team, which holds the responsibility for identifying and commissioning suitable placements for the diverse range of children who need them. The Placements Team will match children with the Fostering Service's internal Foster Carers wherever possible and will only commission placements with external providers when children cannot be satisfactorily matched with internal Foster Carers.

The Council is committed to increasing the number of internal Foster Carers to meet the needs of the City's 'Looked After' Children. In the period 2012-13, Coventry's Fostering Service has supported over 158 internal Foster Care households.

During 2012/13, there were 31 applications received from prospective Foster Carer households compared with 16 the previous year. There were 16 new Foster Carers households who were approved during 2012/13 with 15 applications continuing to be assessed beyond 31 March 2013. During this period there were 26 Foster Carer households who left the service. Overall, there was a net decrease in the number of Foster Carer households.

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and the Regulations require that the executive of the local authority receives regular reports on the service provided and that a Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service is compiled and kept under regular review. The National Minimum Standards specify that that the Statement of Purpose should be reviewed at least annually. The updated Statement of Purpose is attached to this report for approval in appendix 1.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) is recommended to:

- 1) Accept the Fostering Service Report 2012/13.
- 2) Approve the updated Statement of Purpose.
- 3) To receive quarterly reports on the Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers throughout 2013/14.

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix 1 – Statement of Purpose

**Other useful background papers:**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body**

No

**Will this report go to Council**

No

**Report title:** Fostering Service Report 2012/13

**1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 This report considers the work completed by the Coventry City Council’s Fostering Service during the year 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.
- 1.2 Located within the Family Placements Service the Council’s Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment, training, assessment and support of foster carers to provide a range of suitable placements for the large variety and number of ‘Looked After’ children and young people in Coventry who need them.
- 1.3 The internal Fostering Service provided an average of 35% of all looked after children's placements in the city for 2012/13. These placements are provided by a diverse range of foster carers.
- 1.4 Typically Foster Carers are either mainstream carers, offering a range of placements to children and young people they do not know, or are ‘Family and Friends’ carers specifically approved for named children or young people with whom they are previously connected. Most Foster Carers offer one or two placements, others are able to look after three or more where there are large sibling groups who may be placed together.
- 1.5 **Performance of the Fostering Service** in relation to the Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers is set out in the following table

<b>Key performance indicators – Recruitment, Assessment and Approval</b>			
<b>APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>
Number of initial enquiries from people interested in Fostering	Not Recorded	241	252
Numbers of applications* received from people who wished to be assessed to become mainstream Foster Carers	26	16	31
Numbers of applications* from people who were approved as mainstream fostering households in the period (as % of applications received) <i>nb. although some of these applications may have been received in the previous year</i>	13 (50%)	11 (68.7%)	16 (51.6%)
Numbers of applications* to foster that remained in progress as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March	Not Recorded	11	15
Conversion Rate of no of approvals from no of initial enquiries (percentage of approvals in relation to enquiries)	Not recorded	1: 22 (4.6%)	1:16 (6.0%)
<b>FAMILY AND FRIENDS APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>
Numbers of applications* received	22	16	12
Numbers of applications* approved in the period	19	13	8

*\*Couples are counted as 1 applicant so this figure represents a potential fostering household as opposed to the total number of people who wish to become a Foster Carer.*

- 1.6 The high number of enquiries in comparison to the number of people who subsequently go on to apply to foster, and to be approved is common to all fostering agencies as many people who enquire about fostering are often not ready to apply at that time or simply may be unsuitable to foster. The Fostering Network (a national association) has recently undertaken a survey in order to benchmark the national conversion rates which is due to be published shortly. One of the most common reasons people do not progress beyond initial enquiries is that they do not have a spare bedroom.
- 1.7 The conversion rate from initial enquiries about fostering to the actual number of approvals has shown an improvement in year 2012/13 compared to the previous year. In 2012/13 there was an improvement in the conversion rate with the ratio improving from **1:22** i.e. only 4.6% of the enquiries received going on to be approved to **a rate of 1:15** i.e. 6% of enquiries went on to be approved and this also shows a significant improvement on the previous year.
- 1.8 Following the Fundamental Service Review in September 2013 the target for completion of assessment timescales for approving prospective Foster Carers were set at 4 months to support the ambitious target set for increasing the number of internal foster carers. Over the last 6 months systems and processes have been developed to support this imperative within the context of extensive change in the service.
- 1.9 Data systems for the Fostering Service have been strengthened as previous years' data was not robust in defining what was meant by numbers of foster care households and whether these included family and friends.
- 1.10 The following table identifies the number of Foster Care households as at 31 March 2013:

<b>FOSTER CARERS</b>	<b>2012-13</b>
Number of Foster Carer <b>Households</b> at the end of the year including family and friends <i>(of those who are family and friends)</i>	158 *(17)
Number of Approved Places (bed spaces) for children <i>*(of which are family and friends placements)</i>	238 *(27)

- 1.11 As at 31 March 2013 there were **158** registered fostering households (comprising of 270 individual carers in total). Of the total households; **140** were approved as mainstream Foster Carers providing a range of different types of placements (as detailed in the table at 1.40), **17** were approved as 'family and friends' fostering households and the remaining **1** household was approved exclusively to provide 'short breaks' placements.
- 1.12 Of these **158** households **70** were approved for 1 child/young person, **48** were approved to take 2 children/young people and **24** were approved to take up to 3 children/young people or larger groups of siblings if required.
- 1.13 The Fostering Service is required to recruit a sufficient number of Foster Carers to reflect the diversity of the children and young people who require placements. The table below shows the diversity of Coventry Foster Carers in comparison to the children and young people in internal fostering placements as at 31 March 2013. There were sufficient Foster Carers from Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British origin in relation to the origin of children, but there remains a significant shortfall of Foster Carers from a mixed race background. This will continue to be addressed as part of the on-going Recruitment and Retention Strategy

<b>Ethnic Origin as at 31 March 2013</b>	<b>Foster Carers</b>	<b>Children in Foster Care</b>
White British and White Other	243 (90%)	119 (70.83%)
Mixed Race	4 (1.48 %)	24 (14.28 %)
Asian and Asian British	12 (4.44%)	10 (5.95%)
Black and Black British	11 (4.07%)	12 (7.14%)
Not stated	0	3 (1.78%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>168</b>

*Note: Ethnic Origins are recorded for each foster carer. More than one Foster Carer can be in the same household.*

- 1.14 **The Recruitment Strategy** was reviewed in 2012 and during the Fundamental Service Review, the project team initiated a dedicated Fostering Recruitment Campaign designed to increase the number of enquiries into the service across the year. In addition, a Recruitment and Retention Steering Group was established which continues to drive the recruitment of carers.
- 1.15 The aims of the strategy are to increase the capacity for in-house Foster Carers and in turn reduce the dependency on external provision. The focus of the updated strategy has been on maximising the opportunities to recruit new Foster Carers by raising the local and national profile of fostering throughout Foster Care Fortnight in May 2012; as well as planning more targeted marketing and recruitment activity for Summer and Autumn 2012.
- 1.16 New ways of working for the fostering team were introduced and include increased speediness of response to enquirers (visiting within 48 hours of enquiry), training and monitoring on the behaviours and relationship building with enquirers to the service. This was further supported by a performance management focus on speedy completion of high quality assessments of potential Foster Carers. This has been particularly well received by applicants.
- 1.17 **Foster Carers leaving the service** - the reasons why Foster Carers leave the service can provide good feedback with regard to the agency's performance.
- 1.18 Some Foster Carers leave for positive reasons, for example as a result of the permanency provided to children via a Special Guardianship Order or Adoption Order, whilst others leave due to personal circumstances. A small percentage of reasons for Foster Carers leaving the service are due to significant concerns about the carers' ability or suitability to continue and there are others which may indicate the level of some Foster Carers' dissatisfaction with the agency. This offers the service valuable feedback in terms of the quality of support offered or challenge the assessment, supervision and review of Foster Carers' ability to meet the standards required.
- 1.19 The following table outlines the reasons for Foster Carer Household's leaving the service over the last three years

<b>Foster Carers Leaving the Service - Reason</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
Adoption/Special Guardianship Orders / Residence Orders were granted	4	8	1
Connected Person's Carers - Children moved to other family members/reached independence	5	5	0
Moved to independent Fostering Agency	5	1	3
Family/practical Issues/retirement (Marriage breakdown, Health of carer, personal difficulties, bedroom space, finance e.g. carer taking up FT work)	4	10	12

Safeguarding concerns Unable to work with department	1	2	1
Resigned prior to de-registration	0	1	6
De-Registration	1	1	2
Other	1	2	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>26</b>

- 1.20 The focus on retaining Foster Carers requires robust monitoring of both the scale and cause of Foster Carer reasons for leaving in order to identify trends and issues that require action by the service, particularly with regard to the quality of support provided to Foster Carers and to inform the strategy for the on-going recruitment of new Foster Carers.
- 1.21 **Support for Foster Carers** – All Foster Carers has an allocated Supervising Social Worker responsible for supervision. Supervision visits are essential in providing direct support to Foster Carers is completed within the required statutory timescales for the frequency of visits to Foster Carers’ dependant on their approval status and type of placement. These are monitored via the Annual Foster Home Review process. There has been a backlog of Annual Foster Home Review’s in this financial year due to the turbulence and turnover of staff in the service as a consequence of the changes in the fostering service. This is being addressed.
- 1.22 Foster Carers’ preparation and training during assessments thoroughly explores the ability of potential applicants to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. Mandatory training is also provided post approval to enable Foster Carers to complete the required standard of the “Skills to Foster” requirements. Further on-going training for carers is focused on promoting positive outcomes for children and young people.
- 1.23 As at 31 March 2013, **124** Foster Carers had successfully completed ‘The Children’s Workforce Development Council Certificate in Training’, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care and there were **10** Foster Carers who completed the equivalent Certificate for Friends and Family Foster Carers.
- 1.24 The recent development of the ‘Keeping foster and kinship carers supported’ (KEEP) programme for Foster Carers is designed to support placements positively. The programme has provided Foster Carers with coping mechanisms and helpful strategies to manage challenging and difficult behaviours. The KEEP programme is an accredited 16 week course programme. The first KEEP training programme started in November 2012 and 8 Foster Carers who successfully completed the programme in March 2013. The second KEEP programme commenced in April 2013 and this has been equally successful with another 7 participants completing in September 2013. KEEP has received excellent feedback from Foster Carers and has been very well received.
- 1.25 Support groups provided jointly by the Fostering Service and the Looked After Children (LAC) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provide carers with the opportunity to develop their ability to support children and young people in placement.
- 1.26 The Local Authority has run a number of support events for Foster Carers throughout the year including a Barbeque and consultation event in summer 2012 and a Christmas Party in December 2012. All events were well attended by Foster Carers.
- 1.27 **Children and Young People in Foster Care** - During 2012/3 there were a total of 299 children and young people who were placed with internal Foster Carers throughout the year, compared to 400 in 2011/12 and 285 in 2010/11. Of those children placed during 2012/13; 155 were of compulsory school age, 39 were disabled and 2 were subject to concurrent planning.

<b>CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE</b>	<b>2010 -11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>
Total number of children who were newly placed with Coventry Foster Carers within the reporting year in the year including those placed only for short periods	285	400	299
Number of children placed with Coventry Foster Carers as at 31 March <i>(*Total number of children who were placed with Coventry Foster Carers at any time during the reporting period, i.e. including those already placed before the 1 April)</i>	211 *(383)	181 *(371)	168 *(421)
Number of children disrupted where placement was for over 3 months <i>(Disruptions are foster placement that end in an unplanned way)</i>	14	15	5

1.28 The range and types of placements available as at 31 March were as follows;

<b>Types of Placement</b>	<b>2012-13</b>
Permanent Long term	54
Short term (including pre adoption and pre permanence)	162
Emergency Foster Care	2
Family and Friends	27
Parent and Child	1
Short Break	2

*Note this table shows the bed spaces in types of placements but some Foster Carers will be registered to provide more than one type of placement*

- 1.29 There were 19 groups of siblings (comprising of 38 children) who were assessed to be placed together and were placed together. There were 2 groups of siblings (comprising of 4 children) who were assessed to be placed together and who were not placed together. There were 9 groups of siblings (comprising of 18 children) who were assessed to be placed separately who were placed separately.
- 1.30 There were 12 young people who turned 18 in the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 and of those there were 11 remained in their placement beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday under an arrangement supported by the Local Authority.
- 1.31 Of the children placed with Foster Carers in 2012/13, a total of 7 children and young people went missing during the year on a total of 10 occasions. In terms of the amount of time that the children and young people were missing all 7 were missing for less than 24 hours. The episode of all missing incidents are reviewed by the Multi-agency Screening Panel and in the children's looked after reviews to ensure that appropriate support and risk assessment plans were put in place.
- 1.32 There were 13 allegations of concern against Foster Carers in this period. There were 4 allegations against Foster Carers that were referred to the relevant Local Authority Designated Officer for managing allegations, and there were 3 child protection investigations involving Foster Carers.
- 1.33 There was 1 incident of restraint recorded by a Foster Carer in this period involving 1 child and 1 Foster Carer.
- 1.34 **Improving outcomes for Foster Children** - All Foster Carers receive training in promoting the health, educational and social needs of children. Foster Carers are involved in the health assessments and the development and review of personal education plans.

Progress is monitored through statutory visits, Looked After Children Reviews and Foster Home Reviews.

- 1.35 The Fostering Service has maintained partnership working with Health and the Looked After Children Education Service (LACES), for example through training and represented on the fostering panel. Children are supported by Education Mentors and LAC nurses in addition to other resources depending on their own individual needs.
- 1.36 Of the children in a fostering placement in 2012/13 only 1 child had to change school as a result of their foster placement. 3 children attended alternative educational provision and 3 had persistent absence from school.
- 1.37 **The Fostering Panel** has responsibility for approving foster carers, reviewing first annual foster home reviews, and variations and exemptions to category of approval e.g. age range and or number of children when required, and offering advice to Social Workers. The Fostering Panel has met approximately every two weeks throughout the year 2012/3 with a total of 17 meetings in all. The activity of the Panel is captured in the following table:

<b>Year ending 31 March</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>
<b>Applications – mainstream foster carers</b>		
Approvals	11	16
Not approved/deferred	4	4
Applicant not considered by Panel due to concerns	1	1
<b>Family and Friends/ Connected Persons applications</b>		
Approved	13	8
Not approved.	3	3
<b>Other</b>		
Foster Home Reviews (FHRs)	19	21
Changes of category – numbers/age	10	21
Causes for concern	2	7
Resignations	26	22
Retirement	4	2
Returned from being on hold	1	0

- 1.38 The Independent Chairperson for both the Fostering and Adoption Panels from December 2010 to May 2013 was Julian Cunningham. A new independent chair was appointed in May 2013, Ms Sarah Borthwick, who comes with considerable experience and a national profile in Fostering and Adoption. The membership of the panel is under review and its membership is to be broadened to ensure a wider representation from children and young people.
- 1.39 The Fostering Panel has a clear remit to drive quality assurance. This will include the consistent use of a quality assurance framework for panel members to focus on each report that comes before the panel and enable accurate feedback to the managers of the service and the Agency Decision Maker.
- 1.40 It is a requirement that individual panel members should be subject to an annual appraisal. This needs to focus on a range of issues including attendance, performance, training and development needs. There are a number of outstanding Appraisals from 2012 and these have been prioritised by the new chair to be completed by the end of December 2013.
- 1.41 Panel training in 2012/13 included Joint Panel Training on 27 September 2012, the role of the supervising Social Worker and lessons from serious case reviews. Members of the Fostering Panel were also able to access individual courses made available to Foster Carers and departmental staff



## 2. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet member accept the Fostering Report 2012/13 together with the update to the Statement of Purpose, therefore ensuring that the National Minimum Standards and registration requirements are met and that the Fostering Service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children.
- 2.2 It is also recommended that quarterly reports on the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers are provided throughout 2013/14.

## 3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 Children and Young People who have experienced foster care are regularly involved in the recruitment and selection of staff in the Fostering Service and in the commissioning of services. This involvement includes face to face contact with interviewees and perspective service providers. Children and Young People have been consulted on and involved in writing the Children and Young Persons Guide to Foster Care.
- 3.2 The following feedback on the service has been received from foster carers and the children and young people in the foster home via the fostering panel (this includes feedback from Foster Home Reviews, resignations, de-registration's and changes of category)

Feedback Received	2011-12	2012-13
Foster Carers' perception of quality of support from Supervising Social Workers		
Positive	17	47
Negative	5	5
Neutral	1	5
Foster Children & Foster Carers' own children's experience of fostering		
Positive (Happy)	9	60
Negative (Sad)	1	1
Neutral (OK)	6	32

- 3.3 Continual review is also undertaken through monitoring of the Council's Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure. There were **2 formal complaints** received during the reporting period April 2012 – March 2013 compared with 8 in the previous year. One complaint was from a child about the way a foster carer spoke to him. This complaint was upheld. The second complaint was from a prospective foster carer regarding communication. This was partially upheld. **13 compliments** were received during the reporting period April 2012 to March 2013, compared with 8 in the previous year.

## 4. Timetable for implementing this decision

Not applicable

## 5. Comments from Executive Director Resources

### 5.1 Financial implications

The table below shows the total budget for Foster Carer fees for the last 3 years and actual expenditure.

	2010-11 £000	2011-12 £000	2012-13 £000
Budget	4,476	4,410	3,623
Actual Spends	3,763	3,355	2,987
Variation (Under) /Overspend	(713)	(1,055)	(636)

The budgets were revised in 2012/13 to reflect the changed position following the implementation of the FSR. The underspend in 2012/13 reflects that foster carer numbers were lower than planned. The average number of internal fostering placements provided throughout 2012-13 was 212 (including Family and Friend placements), in addition the snapshot at the 31/03/13 was also 212. The original FSR target was that by the end of 12/13 there would be 291 placements (including family and friends). This was subsequently revised to 237 when the FSR was reviewed in December 2012.

Foster Carer allowances for 2012/13 remained at 2011/12 levels. Foster Carer allowances were increased in 2013/14.

## 5.2 Legal Implications

National Minimum Standards 2011 stipulate that the Executive side of the Local Authority should receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the Fostering Service every 3 months. In doing so, Members must monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective, is achieving good outcomes for children and is complying with the conditions of registration.

Fostering Regulations also require that each local authority compiles a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide that must be kept under regular review and copies provided to the Chief HMI at Ofsted. Statutory guidance stipulates that the review of the Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide must be at least undertaken annually. A copy of any revisions to these should be forwarded to the Chief HMI at Ofsted and updated on the Council's website.

## 6. Other Implications

**6.1** The Fostering Service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging for a suitable family placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of Corporate Parenting; that of securing appropriate family placements for 'Looked After Children' (LAC), as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

### 6.2 How is risk being managed

Failure to provide an effective and timely Fostering Service may lead to Coventry's Looked After Children staying in care longer, experiencing placement moves and/or potentially being placed further away from the city in costly other agency placements. This risk is being managed through the delivery of the Fundamental Service Review of Fostering and Adoption, which is examining how to increase the number of in house foster placements, reduce delay and increase the number of children adopted each year effectively.

### 6.3 What is the impact on the organisation

The Fostering Service contributes to Children's Social Care Services performance against key Indicators that are closely scrutinised both internally and externally on an on-going basis.

### 6.4 Equalities/EIA

Wherever possible children and young people are placed with foster carers who can successfully meet their social, emotional, psychological and physical needs, and those in relation to their ability, age, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, language, religious belief, or sexual orientation. Children and young people are carefully matched with foster carers and, where the Council is not able to provide a suitable in house placement, an Independent Foster Agency or other provider will be used.

### 6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

### 6.6 Implications for partner organisations

None

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Rachel Sugars	Finance Manager	Resources	23.09.13	21.10.13
Julie Newman	Solicitor	Resources	23.09.13	21.10.13
Councillor Duggins	Cabinet Member	Children and Young People	23.10.13	24.10.13
Councillor Jayne Innes	Deputy Cabinet Member	Children and Young People	23.10.13	24.10.13

This report is published on the council's website:  
[www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

## **APPENDIX 1 - STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF COVENTRY CITY FOSTERING SERVICE (Revised September 2013)**

### **1 Background**

- 1.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require every Fostering Service to produce a statement of purpose. The Statement of Purpose has to cover the following matters;
  - Aims and objectives of the fostering service
  - Services and facilities to be provided by the fostering service
- 1.2 The Statement of Purpose accurately reflects the policies procedures and guidance of the Fostering Service and is available to anyone seeking a copy on Coventry City Council's Website.
- 1.3 Coventry City Council's Fostering Services are part of a group of services operated by the City Council, through its Children's Services; to meet the needs of 'Looked After' children. The Fostering Service is managerially located within the Specialist Services Division as part of the Integrated Family Placements Service comprising of Fostering, Adoption, Family Finding and Permanency Teams.
- 1.4 On a day to day level the Service is managed by the Integrated Service Manager accountable to the Head of Service for 'Looked After' Children (LAC) in the Care of the Local Authority. The Head of Service for LAC reports to the Assistant Director, Specialist Services.
- 1.5 One of the key objectives of the Fostering Service is to bring about improved outcomes for looked after children. The Fostering Service works in partnership with social workers, carers, service users and other professional agencies to provide a range of placements which will offer alternative family care to meet the individual needs of children who are unable to live with their own families.
- 1.6 The service arranges foster placements with approved foster carers for children between the age of 0 and 18, who are looked after by Coventry City Council, and facilitates arrangements for older care leavers to stay on with their former carers via a supportive lodgings arrangement where appropriate.
- 1.7 The Service is jointly responsible with the Referral and Assessment and Neighbourhood Services for the assessment of Private Fostering arrangements in the City and is involved in assessing potential carers for their suitability to be granted Special Guardianship in court proceedings, together with arrangements around support to those granted such orders.

### **2 Principles and Values**

- 2.1 Coventry City Fostering Service subscribes to the following principles and values
- 2.2 The welfare of the Child or Young Person is paramount and the Needs, Rights and Views of the child or young person are at the centre of practice and provision. Individuality, difference and diversity are valued and celebrated and children and young people's health, well-being and educational needs are given high priority to ensure that they reach their full potential.
- 2.3 Children and young people's personal and physical safety is safeguarded, whilst allowing for risk and challenge, as appropriate to the capabilities of the child or young person.

- 2.4 Self-esteem and resilience are recognised as essential to every child or young person's development.
- 2.5 Confidentiality and agreements about confidential information are respected as appropriate unless a child or young person's protection and well-being are at stake.
- 2.6 Professional knowledge, skills and values are shared appropriately in order to enrich the experience of children and young people more widely.
- 2.7 Social inclusion and advancement of children and young people are actively promoted as specified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 2.8 In addition Coventry City Fostering Service aims to;
- Be accessible, approachable, informal, non-threatening and friendly
  - Work in partnership with service users and be focused
  - Respect confidentiality and privacy
  - Remain flexible and open to new ideas and initiatives
  - Be consistent in providing quality services which are flexible, offer choice and are responsive to different needs, cultures and religions.
  - Constantly seek to reflect good practice
  - Be anti-oppressive in practices with foster carers and service users
- 2.9 **Equal Opportunities Statement**
- 2.10 Each child referred for fostering will be valued as an individual with his/her own identifiable needs and will be respected regardless of age, gender, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

### **3 Vision**

- 3.1 Coventry City Council's Fostering Service:
- 3.2 Aspires to enable children in need of accommodation to be valued and to experience a positive family life.
- 3.3 Aims to attract, develop and support quality carers and is committed to learning from experience and seeking continuous improvement through evaluation, assessment and keeping in touch with new developments in research.
- 3.4 Is committed to developing the skills of all team members including foster carers and aspires to provide choice in order to identify suitable placements for children and young people and aims to be open, accountable and consistent.

### **4 Targets**

- 4.1 The Fostering Service has an important part in assisting the directorate to achieve its performance objectives for all 'Looked After' Children. These include: A reduction in the numbers of children experiencing more than 3 moves a year, Placement Stability and Permanence.
- 4.2 The Service is also committed to assisting children to improve their life chances through good health, achieving success in education, and developing social skills necessary for good citizenship.

4.3 These objectives are monitored with an overarching framework of Performance Objectives for all looked after children and reported on monthly through the Quality Improvement Framework within CLYP.

## **5 Fostering Services Provided**

5.1 Services offered directly by the Fostering Service include: Recruitment, Training, Assessment and Approval of prospective Foster Carers; Training and Development opportunities for Approved Foster Carers; Individual and group support for Approved Foster Carers; Targeted support for foster placements under stress; Appropriate equipment and financial assistance for the maintenance and care of children in foster placements; Skills based rewards system that recognises the valuable contribution foster carers make towards the care and development of children looked after by them.

5.2 A range of placements are provided for children looked after including;

- Emergency Placements
- Time-limited placements
- Long-term / permanent placements
- Placements with family and friends
- Respite placements
- Placements preparing children for adoption
- Specialist placements for children with particular difficulties
- Placement of children with significant disabilities
- Cultural link for children trans-racially placed
- Day care on a respite or planned basis for some children whose main carer is prevented from offering 24 hour care for agreed reasons as part of a plan
- Assessment of carers for Special Guardianship Orders
- Support Services to Special Guardianship Carers
- Assessment with Referral and Assessment Service and Neighbourhood Services of Private Fostering arrangements
- On a case by case basis, support with vehicle purchase and house adaptations to support carers in their care of children

5.3 In exercising its functions Coventry Fostering Service strives to match children needing family placements with the best possible available Foster Carer. On occasion there may not be suitable local authority foster carers. In such an event alternative placements with independent agencies are considered and commissioned by the Placement Service. The Fostering Service works closely with the Placement Service who will scrutinise any proposed placement for suitability and matching purposes.

## **6 Working in Partnership**

6.1 The Fostering Service recognises that the provision of effective care for children placed with foster carers require the service to work in partnership with a variety of staff and agencies. The provision of good health care, sound education, and emotional wellbeing all require input from a variety of agencies and people around the child.

6.2 Coventry Fostering Service is therefore committed to developing partnerships with colleagues in Child Health, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Education Service, Connexions, the voluntary sector, and any other organisation that works to secure the best interests of children placed with its carers.

6.3 The 'Looked After' Children Education Service works closely with the Fostering Service; foster carers, supervising social workers, CAMHS staff, children's social workers, and

directly with children to support educational attainment and placement stability.

- 6.4 To meet its obligations under Regulations and as part of Corporate Parenting, the Statement of Purpose of Coventry Fostering Service is reviewed as required and presented to the Cabinet Member for Children Learning and Young People for approval on an annual basis.

## **7 Management Structure and Staff**

- 7.1 The Responsible Manager of the Fostering (and Adoption) service is:

Alison Talheth  
Integrated Service Manager Family Placements  
Coventry Children Learning and Young People Directorate  
Adoption Service  
Civic Centre 1  
Earl Street  
Coventry  
CV1 5Rs  
Tel no: 02476 831873 Fax 02476 294660

- 7.2 Professional Qualifications: BA in Applied Social Sciences and Certificate Qualified Social Worker (CQSW) (Nottingham Trent Polytechnic 1988), Certificate in Management Studies (Open University 1998), Diploma in Public Services Management Studies (Nottingham Trent University 2001)
- 7.3 Experience: Alison Talheth has worked in various local authorities in England in the field of Social Work since 1988. Her posts include those of Social Worker, undertaking the full range of Statutory children and families' work including assessment of foster carers, matching and placing children in fostering and adoption placements and post adoption support, Team Manager Reception and Assessment, Operational Manager Emergency Duty Team and Service Manager Child Care Operation's
- 7.4 Most recent Experience: Responsible Person and Agency Decision Maker, SSAFA Forces Help Adoption Agency and Fostering Service 2009 – 2012, Interim Service Manager Adoption, Sheffield City Council 7.5.12 – 1.10.12.
- 7.5 Responsible Manager from 29.5.13.
- 7.6 The Fostering Service is part of the Integrated Family Placement Service comprised of Assessment, Support, Permanency and Family Finding. The Assessment Team is responsible for recruiting Foster Carers and Prospective Adopters.
- 7.7 This team works with fostering and adoption enquirers to determine initial eligibility, delivers pre application training, and helps those who confirm their interest in fostering to complete their application undertaking pre approval assessment and training and booking Fostering Panel.
- 7.8 The Assessment Team is also responsible for assessing "Friends and Family" carers, Private Foster carers and completing Special Guardianship reports.
- 7.9 The Fostering Service works alongside the Placement Team to identify suitable foster placements for children. They do this using in-house and, where these are not available, commissioning 'out of city' placements in circumstances where suitable in house placements are not available.



- 7.10 The Support Team provides on-going support to mainstream foster carers and adopters, “Friends and Family” carers, and support in connection with Special Guardianship and Private Fostering.
- 7.11 The Permanency Team has dedicated Family Finding Social Workers who receive information on all children with long term fostering plans and adoption plans and oversees the implementation of these plans.
- 7.12 The Family Finders work with the Neighbourhood teams and within the Permanency Team to identify the needs and profiles of the child/ren requiring permanency, whether via adoption or fostering, at an early stage.
- 7.13 Family Finders are able to inform the Assessment Team of the types of placements that are likely to be required and to track possible matches of children with carers as they make their way through the system. They work with the Assessment Team to identify the profiles of current and prospective adopters and foster carers holding a number of active cases of children, including sibling groups, requiring permanent or long term foster placement. Their job is to identify suitable foster carers and/or adopters to meet the needs of the child/ren.
- 7.14 Currently the Assessment and Support Teams are each led by 2 Team Managers responsible to the Responsible Manager of the Integrated Family Placements Service who has overall responsibility for The Assessment, Permanency and Support Teams. Managers are responsible for supervising the work of their team’s social workers, all of whom are qualified bar 2 Child and Family Support Workers.
- 7.15 The majority of social workers are Senior Caseworkers who have a minimum of two years’ experience working in Children's services. The staff involved in the service have a wide range of experience of working in the field of child-care and family placement, including international experience. Staff are representative of the diverse backgrounds in Coventry, including White British and Asian heritage.

## **8 Staffing of the Fostering Service**

- 8.1 The Fostering Service consists of the following staff:
- 8.2 The Head of Service LAC, Jivan Sembi
- 8.3 The Responsible Manager who is the Integrated Service Manager, Family Placements Service.
- 8.4 The Assessment Team  
(Who also cover Adoption) consisting of:
  - 2 Full Time Team Managers
  - 1 Full Time Senior Practitioner
  - 1 Part Time Senior Practitioner
  - 8 Full Time Social Worker posts
  - 4 Part Time Social worker posts
- 8.5 The Support Team  
(Who also cover Adoption) consisting of:
  - 2 Full Time Team Managers
  - 1 Full Time Senior Practitioner
  - 2 Part Time Senior Practitioners

6 Full Time Social Worker posts  
8 Part Time Social Worker post  
2 Child and Family Support Workers  
1 part time Birth Records Social Worker

8.6 The Permanency Team  
(Who also cover Adoption) consisting of:

1 Full Time Team Manager  
2 Part Time Team Managers  
1 Full time senior Practitioner  
8 Full Time Social work Posts  
1 Part Time Social work Post  
3 Full Time Family Finding Social Work Posts  
2 Part Time Family Finding Social Work Posts  
1 Full Time Child and Family Finding Post

8.7 Access to part of Joint Business Support Hub comprising of:

1 x Fostering Panel Administrator/Senior Administrator  
2 part time Team leaders  
5 full time senior administrators  
6 part time senior administrators

8.8 Agency Advisor – Gail Helfet who is responsible for providing Professional Advice and support to the Fostering and Adoption Panels and Agency Adoption Support Services Advice. Gail has over 30 years of experience in the field of Family Placements and Adoption. Gail holds a BA Soc.Sci (social work) and CQSW qualification. Gail has undertaken specialist training in Adoption and Attachment with Family Futures.

## 9 The Number of Foster Carers

9.1 A full list of the number of Foster Carers is maintained on an in-house database.

## 10 The Number of Children Placed

10.1 A full list of children placed is maintained on the department's confidential database.

## 11 Complaints, Compliments and Outcomes

11.1 Children's and Young People's Services operate a system known as the 3 'C's', - Comments Compliments, Complaints. There is a Children's Complaints Officer who oversees the operation of the Complaints system and arranges for them to be investigated. The name and address of the Children's Complaints Officer is:

David Wilson  
Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate,  
Room 250  
Civic Centre 1,  
Little Park Street,  
Coventry  
CV1 5RS  
Telephone: 024 7683 3462  
Fax: 024 7683 2451

## **What happens following a Complaint?**

- 11.2 The complaint is registered and action taken to investigate any concerns. The Children's Complaints Officer will monitor the outcome. In most instances, complaints will be followed up by the manager with direct responsibility for the service. This is because local managers are usually best placed to sort things out quickly, and in most cases a speedy resolution is the most appropriate response.
- 11.3 If the complaint is very complicated, involves a number of service areas or has not been resolved at a local level, a more senior Manager or an independent investigator may investigate it.

## **Further Complaints**

- 11.4 If a complaint was subject to a formal investigation and the complainant is not satisfied with the process, there is an option of writing to the Director of Children, Learning and Young People to request an independent review of the process.
- 11.5 The complaint will be reviewed by a Panel chaired by an independent person. Details of how to do this will be included in the complaint outcome letter.
- 11.6 Ofsted regulates social care services in England, such as children's homes, residential family centres and fostering and adoption services. All Fostering Services must meet national minimum standards and the associated regulations, set by the Government, in order to qualify for registration.
- 11.7 From time to time parents, Carers and others with an interest in children's social care, have concerns about the quality of these care services and may complain to Ofsted.
- 11.8 When considering complaints, Ofsted do not act as a complaint adjudicator. They do not decide if complaints are upheld, partially upheld or are unsubstantiated. Instead they will investigate concerns to make sure that the social care provider continues to meet the national minimum standards and associated regulations and remains suitable for registration.
- 11.9 You can make a complaint to Ofsted by letter (see address below) or email ([enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)) or by telephone (0300 123 1231) or in person.

Ofsted National Business Unit  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

- 11.10 The Office of Children's Rights Director (OCD)
- 11.11 The OCD has responsibility for 'Looked after children' and listening to what children and young people who live away from home have to say about how they are looked after.

- 11.12 The OCRD can advise children in care and children who are adopted on how to voice a complaint about a Local authority. Visit: [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)

Roger Morgan,  
Office of the Children's Rights Director  
Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
Manchester  
WC2B 6SE  
08456 404040 Freephone: 0800 528 0731  
If the complaint is about a registered service, an Inspector from Ofsted may investigate it

*(The Annual Report provides numbers of complaints received by the Fostering Service on an annual basis)*

## **12 Procedure and Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training and Supporting Foster Carers**

### **Recruitment**

- 12.1 The service has an active recruitment strategy and annual plan that is adjusted through the year in response to opportunities and changing circumstances. The marketing strategy involves regular advertising in the local press, seeking opportunities features and community involvement at local events. The strategy is reviewed regularly to ensure it is as effective as possible. Public information meetings take place throughout the financial year.
- 12.2 There is an emphasis on responding quickly to carers, providing them with realistic information about the challenges and rewards of fostering, with an offer of a home visit to discuss their interest prior to inviting them to complete a formal application. The detailed process of responding to enquiries is outlined in the guidance and procedures from Coventry's Procedures manual.

### **Pre-Approval Training**

- 12.3 Applicants for fostering are invited to attend pre approval training, consisting of up to 7 sessions, contributing to the assessment of their suitability as foster carers.
- 12.4 There is a rolling programme of preparation meetings held during the year, however we are currently reviewing this area in order to maximise the opportunities for recruitment of Foster Carers. Meetings provide an opportunity for the Fostering Service to find out more about the applicants and have a clearer idea of their strengths, areas for further work and any concerns that need to be clarified as part of the assessment process.
- 12.5 The meetings are also aimed at self-assessment in that they enable applicants to find out more about fostering and help them discover their own strengths and weaknesses.
- 12.6 Applicants attending the meetings will be asked to complete evaluation forms. A report by the facilitators of the meetings is included in the assessment report presented to the Fostering Panel. Family and friends carers are invited to attend this training.

## **Assessment**

- 12.7 A social worker, located within the Assessment team is allocated to carry out a home study/assessment of the applicant. The time scale taken to complete the assessment after the applicant has completed a formal application should generally be no more than four months unless there are issues with checks or the need for additional work with the prospective foster carers is identified. A Special Guardianship assessment takes twelve weeks to complete and a Friends and Family Assessment is completed within sixteen weeks.
- 12.8 Where the applicant is a relative or friend of the specific child requiring a placement, and the placement of the child with the applicant has already taken place, the requirements relating to the foster carer's attendance at preparation groups are waived. However, the requirement for on-going training after the assessment period may be considered as a condition of any approval.
- 12.9 All assessments of potential foster carers will follow the format of the BAAF Form F Assessment. The Service has adopted the latest version of the Form F which requires an evidence based/competence approach to the fostering task. Connected Persons assessments follow the format of the BAAF Form C assessment.
- 12.10 The suitability of the accommodation must also be assessed and a health and safety checklist completed including an assessment of risk posed by any pets in the household. Any issues that arise from the check should be recorded on the Form F with an agreed plan of action established.
- 12.11 The completed Form F, which should contain the outcome of the assessment and recommendations of the fostering worker carrying out the assessment, is shared with and signed by the applicant. This will be supplemented by the assessment summary of the applicant in the preparation groups. This assessment summary is also shared with the applicant prior to presentation to the Fostering Panel. This gives the applicant the opportunity to make any comments for example by expressing disagreement or support for the recommendations.
- 12.12 A number of references are taken up to verify the applicant's account including a routine employment check instead of solely checking those only employed in childcare.

## **Presentation to the Fostering Panel**

- 12.13 The worker responsible for the assessment or a substitute with adequate knowledge of the applicant and the assessment presents all the relevant information to the Fostering Panel.
- 12.14 The applicants are always invited to attend if they so wish and usually do so. In any event, their views and wishes must be presented fairly and accurately within the documentation before the Panel and verbally. The independent Panel Chair is Sarah Borthwick and she is supported by a Vice Chair and other suitably qualified panel members.
- 12.15 The Panel will consider the written report together with all the supporting documentation and any additional information presented verbally, and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service for Looked After Children) regarding the outcome of the assessment.
- 12.16 The recommendation will be recorded in writing and, where approval is recommended, any limitations of the approval to named children (for example where the foster carer is a

relative or family friend) or conditions as to the age range or number of children to be placed in the foster home will also be specified.

### **Post Approval**

- 12.17 Where an application is approved, the foster carer will be allocated a fostering service supervising social worker. The allocated worker will request the foster carer to sign a Foster Care Agreement between CLYP and the foster carer, which contains the information the foster carer needs to carry out his or her functions as a foster carer effectively.
- 12.18 The foster carer will be given two copies for signature, and will retain one signed copy. The other will be kept on the foster carer's case record, together with the report and supporting documents presented to the Fostering Panel, a copy of the Panel's recommendation and a copy of the approval decision.
- 12.19 The foster carer receives an induction and access to a copy of the induction handbook, either online or a hard copy.

### **Post Approval Training**

- 12.20 The Service offers a training programme each year to foster carers. This includes elements that are mandatory for all new mainstream carers to attend, called "Core Training", additional courses open to all carers, and some specialised training open only to more experienced carers who look after children presenting the greatest challenge. Carers are expected to attend refresher training at regular intervals (no greater than 3 years). All carers are notified of the training courses on offer and a record of the training attended is kept.
- 12.21 In addition the department offers training in a Fostering Diploma, Level 3 in the Children's and Young People's workforce, to selected candidates each year. The training programme is published at regular intervals throughout the year and is amended to reflect assessed needs, requests from carers and availability of trainers.
- 12.22 The Children's Workforce Development Council Induction Standards were implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. Considerable planning and preparation has taken place by the Fostering Service, and Employee Services including information for all foster carers and staff. A number of workshops have taken place to support foster carers and staff to complete the award.

### **Supporting Carers**

12.23 Support offered to carers includes the following:

- Adoption of National UK Standards.
- Financial payments in line with Fostering Network recommended rates.
- Payment for Skills Scheme, allied to a personal portfolio.
- Induction Manual/ Handbook.
- Supervision and support for the whole family
- Targeted support when placements under strain
- Annual Foster Home Reviews.
- Health and Safety Assessment.
- Annual (or more often if required) review of Family Safer Caring Plan.
- Clear procedures covering overnight stays away from the placement.
- Support groups, led by trained foster carers and supported by a designated worker

- 24/7 out of hours telephone support line/on call
- Respite care where required to meet the needs of the child
- Supervising social worker to support and supervise the placement
- Experienced Managers
- Insurance cover.
- Fostering Network membership.
- Fostering Network Mediation and Advice Worker.
- Clear procedures dealing with complaints and allegations, ongoing payments in certain cases pending investigation of an allegation as received by Fostering Network.
- Loan of equipment.
- Core training programme and additional training opportunities
- CWDC Induction Standards  
Diploma Level 3
- Exit questionnaire.
- Support to Coventry Fostering Care Association
- Pathways to Care assistance with home conversions and purchase of people carriers.
- Access to the Council's counselling service

### **13 Review of Quality of Care**

- 13.1 Supervising Social Workers meet regularly with their Foster Carers to offer support and supervision, compliance in relation to each child placed with foster parents, with the foster placement agreement and the Care Plan for the child.
- 13.2 There is a formal agenda for supervision sessions and these are recorded and notes maintained on the foster carers file. Any breach of policies or standards is discussed with managers and appropriate action taken. Foster Carers are expected to maintain records of any medication, medical treatment and first aid administered to any child placed with them and this is checked by the supervising social worker.
- 13.3 Managers review the file regularly and are informed of any issues as they arise. Case file audits are undertaken by managers in the service.
- 13.4 Cause for Concern Meetings are convened if there are concerns that foster carers may have breached the Fostering Standards. Three such meetings in one year would lead to a report being presented to the Fostering Panel and all Cause for Concerns meetings are recorded within a Foster Carers Annual Foster Home Review.
- 13.5 The service collates the views of looked after children, which are attached to annual reviews of foster carers and included within the Annual Report on the Fostering Service. All first year reviews of probationary foster carers and the outcomes of all annual reviews are reported to Fostering Panel and any salient issues identified.
- 13.6 The Integrated Service Manager maintains a register of notifiable events matters listed in Schedule 7 and 8 of the Fostering Regulations including:
- All accidents, injuries and illnesses of children placed with foster parents.
  - Any allegations or suspicions of abuse in respect of children placed with foster parents and the outcome of any investigation.
  - Any incident requiring the police to be called
  - Any unauthorised absence from the foster home of a child accommodated there.

- 13.7 In addition a record of any complaint is kept and any serious complaints about the conduct of a foster carer are reported to the Fostering Panel.
- 13.8 The Integrated Service Manager meets with representatives of the Foster Carers on a regular basis to review services and resolve any issues that arise.
- 13.9 The Integrated Service Manager or a delegated manager and Team Managers meet on a regular basis to review the quality of care offered and these meetings are minuted. Any issues requiring additional consideration are discussed with the Head of Service.
- 13.10 A system of duplicate files is in place to record recruitment records and conduct of required checks of new workers.
- 13.11 Records of fostering panel meetings are carefully recorded and available on the foster carers file and centrally within the service and are available for future reference. Wherever possible a copy of the formal assessment of the carers' suitability to foster is maintained on the most recent file in use. A record of all assessments presented to panel is maintained alongside the foster panel minutes.
- 13.12 Each staff member within the service maintains a daily log of their working hours, including records of time taken in lieu of additional hours, annual or special leave, and sickness.

#### **14 Children's Guide to the Fostering Service**

- 14.1 A children's guide is available which was developed in consultation with the children and young people of the care council made up of children and young people in care and was last updated in June 2013 by Coventry's Children and Young People's Champion, Sheila Bates.

#### **15 Policies, Procedures and Written Guidance**

- 15.1 Coventry's procedures and policies are now accessible to staff on the Intranet.
- 15.2 In addition the Foster Carers handbook contains the procedures and guidance applicable to foster carers revised in 2000, but is currently being revised in line with the introduction of Minimum Standards and regulations, and also to make it more user friendly for the Foster Carers.