
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

Is this a key decision

No

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

Key performance indicators – Recruitment, Assessment and Approval			
APPLICATIONS	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
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 st 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%)
FAMILY AND FRIENDS APPLICATIONS	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
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:

FOSTER CARERS	2012-13
Number of Foster Carer Households 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

Ethnic Origin as at 31 March 2013	Foster Carers	Children in Foster Care
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%)
Total	270	168

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

Foster Carers Leaving the Service - Reason	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
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
Totals	21	30	26

- 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.

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE	2010 -11	2011-12	2012-13
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;

Types of Placement	2012-13
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 18th 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:

Year ending 31 March	2011-12	2012-13
Applications – mainstream foster carers		
Approvals	11	16
Not approved/deferred	4	4
Applicant not considered by Panel due to concerns	1	1
Family and Friends/ Connected Persons applications		
Approved	13	8
Not approved.	3	3
Other		
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 by to be completed 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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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) 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

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 1st 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.