
16th October 2012

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Children, Learning and Young People) - Councillor J. O'Boyle

Director Approving Submission of the report

Director of Children, Learning and Young People - Colin Green

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

Fostering Service Annual Report including Statement of Purpose and Family and Friends Policy

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report considers the work completed by Coventry Children, Learning & Young People's Directorate in respect of fostering during the year 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

Coventry's Fostering Service has supported 117 internal foster care households providing placements for 213 of Coventry's looked after children (at March 2012) during a period of high demand for foster placements, with a significant number of looked children in the city (580 by March 2012).

Statement of Purpose

Under the Fostering regulations every Fostering Agency has to produce a Statement of Purpose which is considered by the executive of the authority on an annual basis.

- The Statement of Purpose documents the activities of the Service and the way services are delivered.
- The Statement of Purpose together with the National Minimum Standards, are the key documents against which OFSTED inspects the Fostering Service.
- The Statement of Purpose has to accurately reflect the policies, procedures and guidance of the Fostering Agency and is available to anyone seeking a copy.

The Statement of Purpose covers the following matters:

- The aims, values and principles of Coventry Fostering Service.

- The functions of the Fostering Service, including the service users, and activities of the agencies.
- Information about the organisation and staffing of the service.
- Systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of services provided
- Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting foster carers
- Information about the complaints procedure, including the Independent Review Mechanism.
- The address and telephone number of OFSTED.

Family and Friends Policy

Children may be brought up by members of their extended families, friends or other people who are connected with them for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different arrangements.

The Local Authority has a statutory obligation to ensure that family and friends carers are aware of relevant support services, and that these can be readily accessed by those caring for children whether or not these are looked after by the local authority.

The Family and Friends Care Policy sets out the local authority’s approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of such children and covers the assessments which will be carried out to determine the services required and how such services will then be provided.

Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Fostering Annual Report 2011/2012 is accepted
- 2.2 That the Statement of Purpose is approved
- 2.3 That the Family and Friends policy is endorsed

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 - Fostering Annual Report

Appendix 2 - Statement of Purpose

Appendix 3 - Family and Friends Policy

Appendix 4 - Financial summary

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: Fostering Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose

1. Context (or background)

This report considers the work completed by Fostering Service in respect of fostering during the year 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

Coventry Fostering Service has been responsible for the recruitment, training, assessment and support of a full range of carers and the placement of children in in-house foster care provision for more details.

In March 2012, the Coventry Fostering Service provided 47% of looked after children's placements in the city, compared to external placements (excluding friend and family placements). These placements are provided by a wide and diverse range of carers:

- Most carers offer one or two placements, others are able to look after three or (exceptionally) more.
- Some carers offer emergency care for the critical period when a child enters care; others offer short term care for up to 18 – 24 months.
- Some are matched to long term placements of children and provide good permanent families.

The development of Residence Order and Special Guardianship policies, with associated financial support, has assisted the department to offer an alternative to children being placed in long term care through being placed with 'friends and family' carers. This can reduce the length of time such carers continue to be registered as foster carers.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

That the Council is committed to achieving the greatest number of foster placements compatible with achieving the best outcomes for the children concerned.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

Feedback from children in placement

- 3.1** Feedback from children in placement, the foster carers, foster carers own children and the child's social worker are sought at every foster home review. There is a high rate of return from foster carers, a reasonable return from children from the household but a variable rate of the child's social workers' response. These concerns will continue to be raised at the Fostering Panel.
- 3.2** Children in foster care are regularly involved in the recruitment and selection of staff and commissioning of services. This involvement includes face to face contact with interviewees and perspective service providers. The young people feed their views to the Fostering Panel.
- 3.3** Feedback from children in placement was sought by Ofsted Inspectors during their Fostering Inspection in Coventry in November 2011, and acted upon by the Local Authority. Feedback included concerns raised by Inspectors about how their belongings were moved from placements and how their voice was heard during their

annual review with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's). The Local Authority has changed practise as a result of this feedback.

Feedback from foster carers

3.4 Prospective and approved foster carers all receive an invitation to attend Fostering Panel. Feedback from carers was not obtained for 2011/12 due to an administrative oversight. This is unfortunate, as carer feedback is considered very important. This situation has now been rectified and will not be repeated in future.

3.5 *The following feedback has been received from foster carers during 2011-2012*

Feedback from foster carers regarding support from Supervising Social Workers:

Positive	Negative	Neutral
17		5

Feedback from foster carers own children concerning foster children in the home:

Positive	Negative	Neutral
9	1	6

This feedback will be considered by panel members and the Panel Decision Maker to ensure there is a policy of continuous improvement.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

n/a

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Legal Services

5.1 Financial implications

Foster Carers Budget and Expenditure

5.1.1 The budget for internal foster carer fees for the last year was £4.4m with £3.3m spend, due to a diminishing number of foster carers. This was supporting around 193 foster carers (at March 2012).

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
	£000	£000	£000
Budget	4,419	4,476	4,410
Expenditure	4,194	3,763	3,355
Overspend	225	713	1,055

Foster carer allowances

5.1.2 Foster carer allowances for 2011/12 were frozen at 2010/11 levels, due to the financial climate and reductions in government funding. There was a reduction in spend from previous years due to a reduction in the number of foster carers.

- 5.1.3 In summary, the Internal Fostering budget was underspent by £1,055k in 2011/12 (2010/11 underspend was £713k). LAC numbers for Internal Fostering, including Family & Friends reduced from offering 283 placements in 2010/11 to 244 in 2011/12.
- 5.1.4 This performance should be put into context by reviewing the full placements budget variation for 2011/12 – a £5,413k overspend – largely due to a significant increase in more expensive external fostering placements.
- 5.1.5 The placements budget was realigned for 2012/13, acknowledging actual levels of spend in individual areas. However, significant Fundamental Service Review (FSR) financial savings of £8.5m are expected over the next 3 years, largely through reprofiling and reducing the overall placement numbers. For 2012/13, a £1.4m target saving is expected for all placements, and a much increased internal fostering LAC target of 274 has been set as part of this model.
- 5.1.6 The 2012/13 Internal Fostering LAC numbers (at period 5) show that numbers are well below target – actual is 216, while the target for the year is 274, a shortfall of 58. In financial terms, this is significantly contributing to the expected £1.3m overspend in 2012/13 for all placements.
- 5.1.7 Internal Fostering places are not likely to increase significantly this year beyond the current levels, therefore further work is needed to establish a revised and realistic model for 2013/14 and beyond, where savings are achievable.

Family and Friends policy

- 5.1.6 There is a possibility that publication of the Families and Friends policy could result in carers who do not currently receive financial support coming forward to claim such payments. The Local Authority has a statutory obligation to ensure that family and friends carers are aware of relevant support services, and that these can be readily accessed by those caring for children whether or not these are looked after by the local authority.

A full financial summary is included in Appendix 4

5.2 Legal implications

Statement of Purpose

- 5.2.1 It is a regulatory requirement that the Executive receives, reviews and approves the Statement of Purpose on an annual basis.
- 5.2.2 The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 state that the fostering service provider must compile a written statement in relation to the fostering service (“the statement of purpose”) which consists of:
- (a) a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and
 - (b) a statement as to the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service.
- 5.2.3 The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the Chief Inspector, place a copy on their website (if they have one), and make copies available, upon request, to :
- (a) any person working for the purposes of the fostering service,

- (b) any foster parent or prospective foster parent of the fostering service,
- (c) any child placed with a foster parent by the fostering service, and
- (d) the parent of any such child.

5.2.4 Under Statutory Guidance the Fostering Service must compile a Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services, and facilities which are provided (including the provision of any “parent and child arrangements”). The statement must be reviewed and updated as necessary, but at least annually and published on the provider’s website (if they have one), with a copy provided to Ofsted.

Family and Friends Policy

5.2.5 In March 2011 the government published the Family and Friends Care Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. This required every local authority to publish and publicise a policy on its approach to promoting and supporting the needs of children living with families, friends and carers.

6. Other implications

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)?

- 6.1 The work of the Fostering Service supports the key priority outcome in the Council Plan for "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".
- 6.2 It contributes to the wellbeing of children to live 'safe from harm' through arranging for placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of the Local Authority's Corporate Parenting role – that 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?

Panel Risks

- 6.2.1 A continuing area of concern has been the quality and availability of medical assessment reports submitted to the Panel Medical Advisor. There is currently no requirement on new applicants to be the subject of a full and current medical assessment. The assessment is based on reports received from the applicants’ medical practitioner, sometimes based on less than timely historical information.
- 6.2.2 The Panel Medical Advisor then has to make an assessment and recommendation to Panel on this information. Panel believes that an assessment based on a thorough and recent medical examination is required. This is in line with current practice of the Adoption Panel. This will require a change in the current agreements with the NHS Commissioners and this has been formally raised with the Decision-Maker. The Decision-Maker is continuing to try and address this requirement with the NHS Commissioners.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

- 6.3.1 The Fostering Service contributes to Children's Social Care Services performance (within the Directorate of Children, Learning and Young People) against key indicators that are closely scrutinised both internally and externally on an ongoing basis.
- 6.3.2 An OFSTED Inspection provides a robust critical analysis of the performance of the Fostering Service, and in setting requirements and recommendations for improvement assists the Service to focus on continuous improvement.
- 6.3.3 In November 2011, an Ofsted team undertook an Inspection of the Fostering Service, indicating that it was 'Good'. See Appendix 3 for the full report.

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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This report is published on the council's website:
www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings

Appendix 1



Public report

Fostering Service Annual Report 2011-2012

September 2012

Authors:

Nicky Hale, Interim Head of Service, Looked After Children
James Lawrence, Programmes and Projects Manager

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report considers the work completed by Coventry Children, Learning & Young People's Directorate in respect of fostering during the year 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.
- 1.2 The Coventry Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment, training, assessment and support of a full range of carers and the placement of children in in-house foster care provision. Where children could not be satisfactorily matched with city council carers, external foster caring provision is organised for looked after children.
- 1.3 Fostering Panel is responsible for the recommending the approval and termination of foster carers, reviewing the first Foster Home Reviews of carers, and linking children to long term foster carers. Serious complaints and resignations/terminations are also presented to Panel.
- 1.4 Coventry's Fostering Service has supported **117** internal foster care households (**193** foster carers). At the end of March 2012, **217** children were placed in internal foster placements. This is against a backdrop of a period of high demand for foster placements, because of the significant number of looked children in the city (**580** by March 2012).
- 1.5 During 2012/12 **11** mainstream foster households were approved; and **11** friends and family/connected person applications approved. **30** foster carer households left the service during this time.

2. Performance

2.1 Overall performance

The following table sets out the performance of the Fostering Service:

Key performance indicators	2011-2012
MAINSTREAM FOSTER CARER APPLICATIONS	
Initial enquiries from people interested in Fostering	241
Number of people sent an information pack	142
Numbers of applications received and taken through Panel	16
Numbers of applications approved in the period	11
Number of Foster Carers leaving the service during the period	30
FAMILY AND FRIENDS/CONNECTED PERSONS APPLICATIONS	
Numbers of applications received	16
Numbers of applications approved in the period	13
FOSTER CARERS	
Number of Approved Foster carer places for children at 31 March 2012	244
Number of Foster Carer Households at 31 March 2012 (193 foster carers)	117 households
Number of Foster Carer vacancies at March 2012 (approved foster care households without children placed)	1 vacancy
FOSTER CARE CHILDREN	
Number of requests for foster placement from the service (can be for more than 1 child)	354
Total number of children placed in internal foster care placements at 31 March 2012 (including family and friends)	217
Number of children disrupted (i.e. were in a foster placement and it ended prematurely)	15 (19 placements)

*Please note that the figures above are drawn from a variety of sources including FSR figures, the Ofsted return for 2012, Enquiry and Approval Databases and Panel figures. All the recording

systems in the service are under review to improve ease and accuracy of maintaining performance figures.

3. Applications to Foster

- 3.1 241 general fostering enquiries were received by the Recruitment Team, Coventry Fostering Service. 142 prospective foster carers were sent information packs.
- 3.2 32 applications to foster were received during the year. Of these, 16 applications were to become mainstream foster carers with 11 applications approved. 16 applications from family and friends/connected persons were received with 13 approved.

4. The Fostering Panel

Role and Frequency of the Panel

- 4.1 The Fostering Panel has various functions, a responsibility for approving foster carers, linking children to foster carers, reviewing foster home reviews when required, and offering advice to social workers. It also deals with the first annual review of foster carers.
- 4.2 The Fostering Panel has met every two weeks throughout 2011-2012 with 25 meetings in all.
- 4.3 Julian Cunningham has remained as the Independent Chairperson since December 2010. There have been changes to the Panel membership in terms of social worker representatives and temporary maternity leave cover for the Education member.
- 4.4 The Panel have dealt with a range of issues during the year including:
- Form F applications to become mainstream foster carers;
 - Family and Friends/Connected Persons Full approvals;
 - Long-term linking's¹
 - Change of Category; updates;
 - foster home reviews
 - foster carers retired and resignations
 - causes for concern and carer deregistration.

The business of the Panel can be broken down into the following:

Applications – mainstream foster carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 Form F approvals (applications to become mainstream foster carers) • 4 Form F applicants not approved (applications to become mainstream foster carers) • 1 Form F applicant pulled from being considered by the Panel due to concerns about the applicant
Applications – Family and Friends/ Connected Persons applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 Family and Friends/Connected Persons applications approved • 3 Family and Friends/Connected Persons applications not approved.
Linkings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 long-term linking's approved

¹ these became the responsibility of the Permanency Panel from April 2012

Foster home reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 foster home reviews
Changes of category & Causes for concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 Changes of category in respect of numbers of children and age range • 2 causes for concern
Carer issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 resignations from Foster Carer Households • 4 retirements from Foster Carer Households • 1 carer returned from dormancy

Quality Assurance

- 4.5** The Fostering Panel has a clear remit to raise and drive a quality assurance agenda. To this end a clear quality assurance agenda has continued to be maintained by the Panel. These 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 Decision Maker. This includes positive and negative feedback to individual social workers and their managers.

Panel Training

- 4.6** Panel training in 2011-2012 focussed on briefings about the change in regulations and practice developments led by the Decision-Maker. A training session on Connected Persons regulations and assessment was organised and well attended. A training session was also held in regards to Sibling contact and attachment. Training being prepared for 2012-13 includes work on the new regulations, the role of the supervising social worker and lessons from serious case reviews. Members of the Fostering Panel are also able to access individual courses made available to foster carers and departmental staff.

Annual Appraisal

- 4.7** It is a requirement that individual panel members should be subject to annual appraisal. This needs to focus on a range of issues including attendance, performance, training and development needs. The Panel Chair and Decision-Maker have continued to meet with each panel member since January 2012. The purpose of the appraisal meeting is to discuss these areas.

5. Foster carer recruitment

- 5.1** The Service seeks to recruit a pool of foster carers to meet the needs of a wide range of children, and to provide a choice of resources for workers seeking placements. Throughout the country there is a shortage of carers for teenagers, sibling groups and from ethnic minorities.
- 5.2** During the year the Service supported **193** Foster Carers during the year (117 households), with **24** new approvals (**11** friends and family and **13** mainstream carers).
- 5.3** Of the **193** Foster Carers, **179** (93%) were White, **6** Mixed race² (3%), **5** were Asian (2.5%) and **3** were Black (1.5%). This reflects the shortage of carers from ethnic minorities that is experienced nationally.
- 5.4** A range of activity took place during the year as part of recruitment including Foster Carer Fortnight, advertisements on buses, a radio advertisement on Mercia and a regular weekly stall

² Of the Mixed Foster Carers **two** were White and Black Caribbean and **four** White and Black African

at Friday lunchtime in the Lower Precinct.

6. Foster Carers leaving the service

6.1 During the period **26** foster carer households left the service and there were also **4** retirements from the service. The reasons for these resignations are set out in the following table. This compares to **20** foster carer households leaving in the previous year.

Of the 26 households who left the following reasons were given:

8	Because of Special Guardianship orders, Adoption or Residence Orders
3	Connected Person's Carers the children moved to other family members
1	Moved to independent Fostering Agency
6	Family Issues (Marriage breakdown, Health)
1	Matching difficulties
1	Due to cause of concern but was placed over number in first year of fostering
2	Connected Person, Child moved to Mainstream Foster Placement
1	Resigned due to unfounded allegation by child about Foster Carers partner
1	Resigned prior to de-registration
1	Unable to work with department, concern about domestic violence from partner

6.2 The number of foster carer leaving the service is of concern. Some of these are acceptable due to specifically approved placements for identified children coming to an end or the carers no longer having appropriate accommodation to meet the required regulations. However the scale and cause of carers leaving the service needs to continue to be investigated and monitored.

7. Support for Foster Carers

7.1 Initial supervision visits by qualified social workers take place with all carers. These visits are essential in providing direct support to foster carers.

7.2 Foster carers assessments and the 'skills to foster' preparation training thoroughly explores the ability of potential applicants to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. Training for carers is focused on promoting positive outcomes and supporting carers to achieve this.

7.3 Support groups provided jointly by the Fostering and LAC CAMHS service provides carers with the opportunity to develop their ability to support children and young people in placement, and the recent development of the 'KEEP' programme is further designed to support placements positively. The fostering service recognises the importance of placement stability for children in order to promote good outcomes. There is a close working relationship between the fostering service and the Looked After Children's social work service to ensure that good outcomes are achieved for Looked After Children

- 7.4 Coventry has an independent Foster Carers Association. The Association supports Coventry City Council in identifying views of Coventry foster carers, recruitment and selection of staff (i.e. team managers, section heads). The Association is also actively involved in the development of social events for foster carers and their families including visits to the seaside.
- 7.5 The Foster Carer Association have also been involved in the development of policy and practise including improving the travel claim procedure for foster carers.
- 7.6 The Local Authority has run a number of support events for Foster Carers throughout the year including a BBQ and consultation event in summer 2011, the Looked After Children's Conference (October 2011) and a Christmas Party for Looked After Children who are under 12 (December 2011). All events were well attended by Foster Carers.

8. Children

Children placed for internal fostering

- 8.1 At March 2012, **217** children were placed in internal foster carer places. This was around **47%** of total placements in the city (excluding family and friends), compared to external placements. This is considered a low percentage.
- 8.2 There were **19** unplanned placement finishes during the year with **15** children having their foster placement disrupted i.e. were in a foster placement and it ended prematurely).
- 8.3 Of the children placed with foster carers in the year, **5** went missing during the year. In terms of the time that children were missing, **4** went missing for less than 24 hours and **1** child for between 1 and 6 days.
- 8.4 Children and young people felt that during their annual review with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) that professionals attending the meeting were "talking at them" or "to each other" rather than actively engaging them. Subsequently, the authority acknowledged this challenge and organised training for professionals to improve children and young people's involvement within the sessions, and ensure their voice is heard.

9. Financial Issues

See Cabinet Report 16 October 2012 for details

10. Improving outcomes for Foster Children

- 10.1 All foster carers receive training in promoting the health, educational and social needs of children. Foster carers are involved in the health assessments and reviews of Looked After Children, the development and review of personal education plans. Progress of children is monitored through LAC reviews.
- 10.2 The fostering service has excellent partnership with Health and the Looked After Children's Education Service (LACES), and both of these agencies are represented on the fostering panel. Children are supported by Education Mentors and LAC nurses as well as other resources depending on their own individual needs. Progress is monitored through statutory visits, LAC Reviews and Foster Home Reviews.
- 10.3 The inspection of the Fostering Service in November 2011 rated the educational support as 'outstanding' in helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do.

11. Complaints and compliments

11.1 8 complaints were received during the reporting period April 2011 – March 2012, compared to 16 in the previous year. Of the 8 complaints:

- 2 were from foster carers about the standard of service they received - **1 upheld, 1 partially upheld**
- 1 was from the parent of a service user about the attitude of the worker involved - **not upheld.**
- 2 were made on behalf of carers regarding problems with allowances - **both upheld**
- 1 was from a foster carer regarding a decision not to fund a loft conversion - **not upheld**
- 1 was from a parent of a service user regarding poor communication - **not upheld**

11.2 8 compliments were received during the reporting period April 2011 – March 2012, compared to 20 the previous year. 5 were made by professionals, 1 by the grandfather of the service user, 1 by a set of adopters and 1 by a former service user.

11.3 All the 8 compliments received regarding foster carers praised the quality of the care and support they gave to the children they were looking after.

11.4 The 2 compliments about the Fostering Service were both from foster carers praising the support they received from their Supervising Social Workers.

12. Family and Friends Care Policy

12.1 Children may be brought up by members of their extended families, friends or other people who are connected with them for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different arrangements.

12.2 The Family and Friends Care Policy sets out the local authority's approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of such children and covers the assessments which will be carried out to determine the services required and how such services will then be provided.

12.3 In drawing up this policy, the local authority have consulted a diverse range of foster carers, parents, grand-parents and other people who could be looking after a child, whether in an official capacity or not.

12.4 Consultation on the draft policy was led by Sheila Bates, in her capacity as Children's Champion and also as a Director of the Community Empowerment Network.

The policy is hosted on internet by TriX at

http://coventrychildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_fam_friends.html

13. Future direction of the Fostering Service

Family Placement Service

13.1 In July 2012 the Fostering teams amalgamated with the Adoption teams in line with the recommendations made by the full service review completed earlier this year. The Fostering service now forms part of the larger 'Family Placement service'. This service has been divided in to functional groups:

- Recruitment and Assessment
- Family Finding
- Placement Support

These three teams will carry out all the functions of the previously split service.

- 13.2** In bringing the service together it is anticipated that there is greater scope for processing assessments more quickly, 4 months for time limited fostering assessments from enquiry to approval and 6 months for all permanent carers (Adoption/Permanent Fostering).

Permanency Panel

- 13.3** Matching decisions for long term foster placements/special guardianship are now made by the Permanency Panel usually chaired by the Head of Service for Looked After Children.

Parallel Planning & Dual Approval

- 13.4** The service as a whole has revised all its twin track and parallel planning processes following Coventry's apparent low adoption score card in order to ensure that children who need to be placed for adoption can be placed as soon as possible.
- 13.5** All prospective adopters are now being approached to consider dual approval as foster carers and adopters and for very young children, so that in a small number of cases children will be placed before their placement order is made, under foster care regulations, and while their permanence plan remains unresolved.

Recruitment

- 13.6** Following the full service review it has been recognised that Recruitment Activity is needed with much greater scope.
- 13.7** There is now a Recruitment and Retention Steering Group which meets fortnightly to plan and review recruitment activity. This is being further developed to include expert advice of adopters, foster carers and looked after children.
- 13.8** The recruitment activity for 2012-2014 will address a slow drip method which includes a continuous profile of Coventry's family placement service (leaflets, posters, banners, beer mats). Activities will deliver all year round awareness of Fostering in all city buildings and as many public places as possible.
- 13.9** The recruitment strategy also allows for a number of high profile events; two of which will take advantage of national events including Adoption week (5-9 November 2012) and Fostering Fortnight. To support the above activity information materials including an ambitious new website and prospectus are being developed, which will assist in reducing the assessment and approval timescales.
- 13.10** New support practise and development of existing foster carers is hoped to encourage some more able to move through scales to become 'specialist carers' and to retain those who offer and exemplary service for our children. It is anticipated that next year's annual report will reflect the outcome of these significant improvements.

APPENDIX 2

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF COVENTRY CITY FOSTERING SERVICE

(Revised August 2011)

1. Background:

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 requires every Fostering Service to produce a statement of purpose. The Statement of Purpose has to cover the following matters

- a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service; and
- a statement as to the services and facilities to be provided by the fostering service.

The Statement of Purpose accurately reflects the policies procedures and guidance of the Fostering Service and is available to anyone seeking a copy. Staff working in the Service each receives a copy of the Statement of Purpose.

- 1.1 Coventry City Fostering Service is part of a group of services operated by the City Council, through its Directorate of Children, Learning and Young People; to meet the needs of looked after children. The Fostering Service is managerially located within the Specialist Services Division. On a day to day level the Service is managed by a Integrated Service Manager accountable to a Head of Service for Looked After Children. The Head of Service for Looked After Children reports to the Assistant Director, Specialist Services
- 1.2 One of the key objectives of the organisation is to bring about improved outcomes for looked after children through facilitating improved partnership working between social workers and provider services. The Coventry City 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, either temporarily or permanently.
- 1.3 The service arranges foster placements with council carers for children between the age of 0 and 18, who are looked after by Coventry Children Learning and Young People's Directorate, and facilitates arrangements for older care leavers to stay on with their former carers via a supportive lodgings arrangement where appropriate.
- 1.4 The Fostering Service through the joint Recruitment Team located in the Adoption Service also provides information to people interested in fostering; training and assessment to applicants; and support, including training and development, to approved carers. The Fostering Service is now 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. The Service is jointly responsible with the Referral and Assessment and Neighbourhood Services for the assessment of Private Fostering arrangements in the City.

2. Values and Principles

2.01 Coventry City Fostering Service subscribes to the statement of values adopted by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering in November 2002.

2.02 In addition Coventry City Fostering Service aims to be

- Community based, accessible, approachable, informal, non-threatening and friendly.
- Accepting and respectful towards service users and service providers.
- Working in partnership with service users and user focused.
- Respecting of confidentiality and privacy.
- Flexible and open to new ideas and initiatives.
- Consistent in providing quality services which are flexible, offer choice and are responsive to different needs, cultures and religions etc.
- Constantly seeking to reflect good practice.
- Anti-oppressive in practices with foster carers and service users.

2.03 Equal Opportunities Statement

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

- Coventry City Fostering Service aspires to enable children in need of accommodation to be valued and to experience a positive family life.
- The service aims to attract, develop and support quality carers.
- The service is committed to learning from experience and seeking continuous improvement through evaluation, assessment and keeping in touch with new developments in research.
- The service is committed to developing the skills of all team members.
- The service aspires to provide choice in order to identify suitable placements.
- The service aims to be open, accountable and anti-oppressive.

4. Performance Targets

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
- For children looked after in foster care to have stability of placement
- 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. To this end it works with children's social workers, and others, to support its foster carers and ensure children enjoy and maintain good health, achieve educationally to their ability, and develop socially. 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

5.01 Services offered directly by the fostering service:

- Recruitment, training, assessment and approval of foster carers.
- Training and development opportunities for approved carers.
- Individual and group support for approved foster carers.
- Targeted support for foster placements under stress
- Appropriate equipment.
- Financial assistance for the maintenance and care of children in foster placements.
- Skills based rewards system that recognizes the valuable contribution foster carers make towards the care and development of children looked after by them.
- A range of placements for children looked after including:-
 - Emergency Placements
 - Time-limited placements
 - Long-term / permanent placements
 - Some placements with family and friends
 - Some 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 occasion, support with vehicle purchase and house adaptations to support carers in their care of children

5.02 Independent Agency Placements

5.03.1 In exercising its functions Coventry Fostering Service strives to match children needing family placements with the best possible available foster carer. On occasion there are no suitable local authority foster carers. In such an event placements with independent agencies are considered. The Fostering Service works closely with the Placement Service who ensure information is circulated to Fostering Agencies who are part of the Fostering Framework.

5.03.2 Team managers or supervising social workers scrutinize any proposed placement for suitability and matching purposes. Where the placement is suitable advice to this effect is offered to the Placement Team.

6. Working in Partnership

6.01 Coventry City Fostering Service recognizes that the provision of effective care for children placed with its carers requires the service to work in partnership with a variety of staff and agencies. The provision of good health care, sound education, and emotional well being all require input from a variety of agencies and people concerned for the child.

6.02 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 organization that works to secure the best interests of children placed with its carers.

6.03 The Education Service for Looked After Children works closely with the Fostering Service, it's foster carers, supervising social workers, CAMHS staff, children's social workers, and directly with children to support educational attainment and placement stability. The Manager is also a key member of the Fostering Panel.

6.04 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

7.01 The Fostering Service presently consists of 1 Integrated Service Manager, 3 Team Managers, senior practitioners and a range of qualified and unqualified staff, (including admin support staff). All social workers working within the Fostering Service are professionally qualified and most have a minimum of 2 years childcare experience prior to joining the service. Additionally there are three unqualified support workers in post., see point 15 for current posts.

7.02 Each Team Manager is responsible for managing a group of staff within the service and in addition takes lead responsibility for different elements of service delivery and development.

7.03 One of the Team Managers is responsible for an assessment team which locates and matches internal placements for fostering and works closely with the Placements Team.

7.04 The Recruitment Team which acts on behalf of the Fostering and Adoption Services, is managed by the Adoption Service, but will continue to be

responsible for the recruitment of foster carers and adopters. The Team has a complement of a Team Manager, Senior Practitioner (p/t), and 4.66 FTE Senior Caseworkers, as well as an Assistant Communications Officer and admin support. The Fostering Recruitment element of this team transferred to the Fostering Service from June 2011, and was amalgamated within the Assessment Team.

- 7.05 There are two other Fostering Teams, providing supervision and support to foster carers, including the specialist foster carers, mainstream carers, "Friends and Family" carers, and assessment and support in connection with Special Guardianship and Private Fostering. Each team has a complement of Team Manager, with an appropriate allocation of Senior Caseworkers, Senior Practitioners, and Support Staff, along with admin support.
- 7.06 Professional staff are supported by an admin group led by an Admin Manager, who reports to the Integrated Service Manager. The fostering service admin staff comprise of 1 Manager, 1 Assistant Admin Manager and 5 admin staff. This structure has significantly changed since the ABSS review.

8. The number of Foster Carers

As of 31 March 2012 the number of foster carer's households in Coventry City Fostering Service is 117. A full list of the number of foster carers is maintained on an in-house database.

9 The number of children placed

The number of children placed with Coventry City foster carers (internal) at 31 March 2012 was 217.

A full up to date list of children placed is available on the department's database.

10. Complaints, compliments and outcomes

Complaints concerning foster carers, including complaints by carers, by children placed in foster care and by others about carers are collated and overseen by the Children's Complaints Officer, who reports to the Cabinet Member for Children Learning and Young People. Of the complaints received, most were from prospective or existing foster carers and some were from looked after children and their birth families. Compliments were also received, some of these were complimenting members of staff from the Fostering Service; and some were from foster carers about the care and support from Supervising Social Workers. Compliments were received about foster carers too. All were about the standard of service they provided to the children they were looking after. A register of all complaints, compliments and outcomes is maintained and reported on at each Inspection.

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

11. Procedure and processes for recruiting, approving, training and supporting carers.

11.01 Recruitment

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.

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.

11.02 Pre Approval training

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.

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. 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. 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.

11.03 Assessment

A fostering service worker, located within the fostering 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 six months unless there are issues with checks or the need for additional work with the prospective foster carers is identified.

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 ongoing training

after the assessment period may be considered as a condition of any approval.

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. 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.

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. A number of references are taken up to verify the applicants account. In light of the Wakefield report, a number of further checks are proposed for inclusion in the future to enhance the evidence based approach e.g. routine employment check instead of solely checking those only employed in childcare.

11.04 Presentation to the Fostering Panel

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.

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 Panel was until December 2010 chaired by an experienced ex Children and Families Manager as an Independent Chair. In January 2011 a new independent chair was appointed with significant experience

The Panel will consider the written report together with all the supporting documentation and any additional information presented verbally, and makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service for Looked After Children) regarding the outcome of the assessment. 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.

11.05 Post Approval

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. 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. The foster carer receives an induction and access to a copy of the induction handbook, either online or a hard copy.

11.06 Post Approval training

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.

In addition the department offers NVQ training in fostering 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.

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, NVQ Centre 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.

11.07 Supporting carers

- 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
- NVQ Level 3
- Exit questionnaire.
- Regular newsletters
- 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

12. Review of quality of care

- 12.01 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 responsible authority's plan for the care of the child.
- 12.02 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.
- 12.03 Managers review the file regularly and are informed of any issues as they arise. Case file audits are undertaken by managers in the service.
- 12.04 Cause for Concern meetings take place if carers breach 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 review.
- 12.05 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.
- 12.06 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 unauthorized absence from the foster home of a child accommodated there.
- 12.07 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.
- 12.08 The Integrated Service Manager meets with representatives of the Foster Carers on a regular basis to review services and resolve any issues that arise.
- 12.09 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.

- 12.10 A system of duplicate files is in place to record recruitment records and conduct of required checks of new workers.
- 12.11 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.
- 12.12 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.

13. Children's Guide to the Fostering Service

A children's guide is available and was last updated in January 2008. A recent review was completed and we are currently updating this guide with assistance and input from the Children's Champion

14.00 Policies, Procedures and Written Guidance

- 14.01 Coventry's procedures and policies are now accessible to staff on the Intranet.
- 14.02 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.
- 14.03 This Statement of Purpose accurately reflects the policies and procedures of the Coventry Fostering Service, as part of Coventry's Directorate of Children, Learning and Young People as of the date this report was written.

15. Current Posts

List of current posts within the service:

1 x Integrated Service Manager

Recruitment & Assessment Team

- 1 x Team Manager – f/t
- 1 x Senior Practitioner – f/t
- 3 x Social Workers – f/t
- 2 x Social Workers – p/t

All the above are qualified posts

Mainstream

- 1 x Team Manager - f/t
- 8 x Social Workers - f/t
- 2 x Social Workers - p/t

All the above are qualified, to include to Newly Qualified

Connected Persons

- 1 x Team Manager – f/t
- 1 x Senior Practitioner – f/t
- 4 x Social Workers – f/t
- 1 x Social Worker – p/t
- 2 x Children's Support Worker's – f/t
- 1 x Children's Support Worker – f/t

Team Manager, Senior Practitioner, and social Workers all qualified

Administration Team

- 1 x Manager – f/t
- 1 x Assist. Manager - f/t
- 3 x Administrators – f/t
- 3 x Administrators – p/t

The new structure for Administration support will now come under the Business Service Section

APPENDIX 3

Family and Friends Care Policy

Contents

1. **Introduction**
2. **Values and Principles**
3. **Legal Framework**
4. **Different Situations Whereby Children May Be Living with Family and Friends Carers**
5. **Provision of Financial Support - General Principles**
6. **Accommodation**
7. **Supporting Contact with Parents**
8. **Family Group Conferences**
9. **Complaints Procedure**

Appendix A: Caring For Somebody Else's Child - Options

Appendix B: Summary of Consultation Findings

1. Introduction

Children may be brought up by members of their extended families, friends or other people who are connected with them for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different arrangements.

This policy sets out the local authority's approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of such children and covers the assessments which will be carried out to determine the services required and how such services will then be provided.

In drawing up this policy, we have consulted a diverse range of foster carers, parents, grand-parents and other people who could be looking after a child, whether in an official capacity or not. Consultation on the draft policy was led by Sheila Bates, in her capacity as Children's Champion and also as a Director of the Community Empowerment Network. A summary of findings from these consultations is at **Appendix B: Summary of Consultation Findings**.

The manager with overall responsibility for this policy is Shanti Eaves, Head of Looked After Children's Service.

This policy will be regularly reviewed, and made freely and widely available.

2. Values and Principles

Consideration of children's welfare and best interests will always be at the centre of the work we do.

It is an underlying principle that children should be enabled to live within their families unless this is not consistent with their welfare. We will therefore work to maintain children within their own families, and facilitate services to support any such arrangements, wherever this is consistent with the child's safety and well-being. This principle applies to all children in need, including those who are looked after by the local authority. Where a child cannot live within his or her immediate family and the local authority is considering the need to look after the child, we will make strenuous efforts to identify potential carers within the child's network of family or friends who are able and willing to care for the child.

We will provide support for any such arrangements based on the assessed needs of the child, not simply on his or her legal status, and will seek to ensure that family and friends carers are provided with support to ensure that children do not become looked after by the local authority, or do not have to remain looked after longer than is needed.

3. Legal Framework

All local authorities have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children in Need* living within their area and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families. The way in which they fulfil this duty is by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's assessed needs (Section 17, Children Act 1989). This can include financial, practical or other support.

It is important to note that local authorities do not have a general duty to assess all arrangements where children are living with their wider family or friends network rather than their parents but it does have a duty where it appears that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a Child in Need.

*A **Child in Need** is defined in Section 17(10) of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is disabled or who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by the local authority.

To clarify the children who may come within the definition of Children in Need, the local authority has drawn up a '**Children's Social Care Thresholds and Practice Standards**' document, which is available through the Procedures Manual.

Children in Need may live with members of their family or friends in a variety of different legal arrangements, some formal and some informal. Different court orders are available to formalise these arrangements.

Looked after children will always come within the definition of Children in Need, whether they are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (with parental consent) or in care subject to a Court Order whereby the local authority shares parental responsibility for the child. The local authority has a responsibility wherever possible to make arrangements for a looked after child to live with a member of the family (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989).

For a detailed summary of the meaning and implications of different legal situations, the rights of carers and parents, and the nature of decisions which family and friends carers will be able to make in relation to the child, please see **Appendix A: Caring For Somebody Else's Child - Options. Section 4, Different Situations Whereby Children May Be Living with Family and Friends Carers** below sets out the local authority powers and duties in relation to the various options.

In relation to financial support, local authorities may provide carers of children in need with such support on a regular or one-off basis, under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. This may include discretionary funding based upon a financial means test. However, the status of the placement will determine the nature and amount of the financial support and who can authorise its payment. The legal status of the child may have a bearing on the levels of financial support which may be available to carers, however. There are different legislative provisions which apply to financial support for children living with family or friends in looked after/adoption/special guardianship/residence order arrangements. The following sections of this policy set out the financial support that we may provide to family and friends who are caring for children in these different contexts.

4. Different Situations Whereby Children May Be Living with Family and Friends Carers

4.1 Informal Family and Friends Care Arrangements

(Section 4.1 applies to those children living in informal family and family care arrangements which do not meet the criteria for Private Fostering, as in **Section 4.2, Private Fostering Arrangements** below).

Where a child cannot be cared for within his or her immediate family, the family may make their own arrangements to care for the child within the family and friends network.

The local authority does not have a duty to assess any such informal family and friends care arrangements, unless it appears to the authority that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a Child in Need. In such cases, the local authority has a responsibility under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to assess the child's needs and provide services to meet any assessed needs of the child. Following assessment, a Child in Need Plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified. This can comprise a variety of different types of services and support, including financial support.

See **Section 17 Payments Procedure** in Coventry's Manual of Procedures, which provides as follows:

Section 17 can also be used to support extended family members and family friends to assist in the care of children at a time of crisis.

Whenever the need for alternative arrangements to care for children is assessed as being required, social workers are required to assist parents to consider the scope for a child's care needs to be met by extended family members and friends. Such arrangements must always be explored in partnership with parents as an alternative to a child becoming **Looked After**.

In such circumstances the arrangements for placement are made between the parents and the carers and the role of Children's Social Care is limited to assisting the parties to make the arrangements and to advise regarding benefit claims etc.

While most "kinship care" arrangements are established without Children's Social Care involvement, there are occasions when financial assistance is required to support such placements. As children placed through such arrangements are not looked after, any such support is provided under Section 17.

Generally family or friend carers will obtain the finance necessary to support the child from the parents or by claiming welfare benefits and, in these circumstances Section 17 assistance will be limited to occasional payments designed to overcome a cash crisis, which would otherwise have an unacceptable impact on the care of children. Exceptionally occasional payments may also be made to meet a special need on the part of a child, which would not otherwise be met.

Consistent with the wording of section 17, such payments will be "exceptional" and will consist of the minimum amount required to reasonably meet the assessed need.

Consideration of such payments must be at team manager level and the basis of the decision (including any amounts) must be clearly noted on the relevant case file.

Normally section 17 assistance is limited to occasional payments as outlined above.

In very exceptional circumstances however, regular payments may be made as follows:

- Regular payments cannot be made to persons with parental responsibility;
- Regular payments can only be made to family/friends carers whose income is below the specified "needs allowance" for the family and child and who are not entitled to claim welfare benefits to supplement this;
- The maximum amount for a regular payment is that which will increase family income to the specified "needs allowance".

Consideration of the need for regular payments must be at Integrated Services Manager level and any payment arrangement must be reviewed at three monthly intervals. The basis of the decision (including the amounts) must be clearly noted on the relevant case file.

4.2 Private Fostering Arrangements

A privately fostered child is a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled) who is cared for by an adult who is not a parent or close relative, where the child is to be cared for in that home for 28 days or more. Close relative is defined as 'a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent.' It does not include a child who is Looked After by a local authority. In a private fostering arrangement, the parent still holds parental responsibility and agrees the arrangement with the private foster carer.

The local authority has a duty to assess and monitor the welfare of all privately fostered children and the way in which they carry out these duties is set out in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. However, the local authority may also become involved with a child in a private fostering arrangement where the child comes within the definition of a Child in Need. In such cases, the local authority has a responsibility to provide services to meet the assessed needs of the child under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Following assessment, a Child in Need Plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified. As in **Section 4.1, Informal Family and Friends Care Arrangements** above, this can comprise a variety of different types of services and support, including financial support.

4.3 Family and Friends Foster Carers - “Connected Persons”

Where a child is looked after by the local authority, we have a responsibility wherever possible to make arrangements for the child to live with a member of the family who is approved as a foster carer (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989). The child can be placed with the family members prior to such approval, subject to an assessment of the placement, for up to 16 weeks. This temporary approval can only be extended in exceptional circumstances. In this context the carer is referred to as a Connected Person and the process of obtaining approval for the placement is set out in the Placement with Connected Persons Procedure. Where temporary approval is given to such a placement under the procedure, the carers will receive financial support on a regular basis.

In addition the child will have a placement plan which sets out the specific arrangements surrounding the child and the carers including the expectations of the foster carers and the support they can expect to receive to enable to fulfil their responsibilities for the child.

The assessment and approval process for family and friends who apply to be foster carers for a specific Looked After child will be the same as for any other foster carer except that the timescales for the assessment are different where a child is already in the placement as indicated above. In all other respects the process is the same as for any other potential foster carers and is set out in the Assessment and Approval of Foster Carer Procedure. An information pack will be available to potential foster carers about the process and they will be given the name and contact details of the social worker from the Fostering Service allocated to carry out the assessment.

Once approved as foster carers, they will be allocated a supervising social worker from the fostering service to provide them with support and supervision; and they will receive fostering allowances for as long as they care for the child as a foster carer.

While the child remains a looked after child, as a foster carer, they will be expected to cooperate with all the processes that are in place to ensure that the child receives appropriate care and support, for example, contributing to reviews of the child's Care Plan, cooperating with the child's social worker and promoting the child's education and health needs.

4.4 Residence Order

A Residence Order is a Court Order which gives parental responsibility to the person in whose favour it is made, usually lasting until the child is 18. Parental responsibility is shared with the parents.

Relatives may apply for a Residence Order after caring for the child for one year.

Residence Orders may be made in private family proceedings in which the local authority is not a party nor involved in any way in the arrangements. However, a Residence Order in favour of a relative or foster carer (who was a 'Connected Person') with whom a child is placed may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a 'Looked After' child.

The local authority may pay Residence Order Allowances to relatives or friends, unless they are a spouse or civil partner of a parent, with whom a child is living under a Residence Order. This is set out in paragraph 15 of Schedule 1 of the Children Act 1989 however this is discretionary.

4.5 Special Guardianship Order

Special Guardianship offers a further option for children needing permanent care outside their birth family. It can offer greater security without absolute severance from the birth family as in adoption.

Relatives or friends (Connected Persons) who have been approved as foster carers (see [Section 4.3, Family and Friends Foster Carers - “Connected Persons”](#) above) may apply for a Special Guardianship Order after caring for the child for one year. Otherwise, they have to have cared for the child for 3 out of the last 5 years before they can make an application.

As Special Guardians, they will have parental responsibility for the child which, while it is still shared with the parents, can be exercised with greater autonomy on day-to-day matters than where there is a Residence Order.

Special Guardianship Orders may be made in private family proceedings and the local authority may not be a party to any such arrangements. However, a Special Guardianship Order in favour of a relative or foster carer (who was a 'Connected

Person') with whom a child is living may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a 'Looked After' child.

Where the child was Looked After immediately prior to the making of the Special Guardianship Order, the local authority has a responsibility to assess the support needs of the child, parents and Special Guardians, including the need for financial support.

4.6 Adoption Order

Adoption is the process by which all parental rights and responsibilities for a child are permanently transferred to an adoptive parent by a court. As a result the child legally becomes part of the adoptive family.

An Adoption Order in favour of a relative or foster carer (who was a 'Connected Person') with whom a child is living may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a 'Looked After' child.

Local authorities must make arrangements, as part of their adoption service, for the provision of a range of adoption support services. They then have to undertake assessments of the need for adoption support services at the request of the adopted child, adoptive parents and their families, as well as birth relatives. The support required is then set out in an Adoption Support Plan and this may include financial support.

5. Provision of Financial Support - General Principles

There are three categories of payment, which may be considered. One or more of these may be applicable, depending on the particular circumstances of the case:

1. Subsistence Crisis (One-off) Payments

These should be used to overcome a crisis, following the best assessment that can be achieved in the circumstances.

2. Setting-up

These are for such items as clothing, furniture, or bedding. The social worker must be satisfied that the carers' financial position justifies the payment through a financial assessment. Assistance may be given subject to conditions, including repayment in certain situations. However, in most situations, it will be inappropriate for the Department to seek to recover money provided under these circumstances.

3. Weekly Living Contribution

It is possible for the local authority to make regular payments where family members or friends care for a child whether or not the child is not Looked After. Where regular payments are to be made, relative carers should be assisted to maximise their Income/Benefit as regular payments may adversely affect an individual's claim to income support.

In all cases where regular financial support is agreed, a written agreement will be drawn up detailing the level and duration of the financial support that is to be provided, and the mechanism for review. The written agreement should reflect the legal basis on which the placement is made.

The following criteria will be applied to all such payments:

- The purpose of the payments must be to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child;
- As part of the assessment, a view should be taken as to whether the carers need financial support based on their reasonable requirements in taking on the care of the child;
- There are no other legitimate sources of finance;
- Payments will be paid to the carer, not the parents;
- The payment would not place any person in a fraudulent position.

6. Accommodation

The authority works with landlords to ensure that, whenever possible, family and friends carers living in social housing are given appropriate priority to move to more suitable accommodation if this will prevent the need for a child to become looked after.

7. Supporting Contact with Parents

The authority is under a duty to promote contact for all Children in Need, although this differs depending on whether or not the child is Looked After.

Where the child is not Looked After, we are required to promote contact between the child and his/her family 'where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote his or her welfare'. As part of the support arrangements, it may be identified that specific assistance is required to ensure that any such contact can be managed safely. If necessary, information will be made available to family and friends carers about local contact centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services.

Contact for a child who lives with parents who have separated remains a paramount issue in that child's long term welfare.

For children where a social worker is involved, work will be undertaken with the family to identify positive contact opportunities and routines. Much of this can be agreed between parents and connected people in negotiation facilitated between themselves, Children's Social Care or an agency such as Relate. Social Care can seek advice from the in-house contact service for suggestions on venues. There is also the Contact Centre, Queens Road Baptist Church, Grosvenor Road, Coventry, CV1 3EJ. Telephone: 024 76231100

For more complex family situations Family Group Conferences (see [Section 8, Family Group Conferences](#) below) are useful in bringing into focus the needs of the child and utilising family resources to ensure contact arrangements are met.

For many families, private law proceedings are an option to sustaining stable placements and contact arrangements for children. The outcome of these hearings will often include orders and directions for family members to engage with mediation and contact routines.

Within the Coventry area there are a number of private / charity organisations that provide contact venues and varying degrees of contact support / supervision. These can be accessed or sign posted via Relate, Social Care or the court mediation service. A number of agencies have recently identified opportunities to support families with contact arrangements, these services are in the early stage of development and do carry spot purchase cost for families.

Where a child is Looked After, we are required to endeavour to promote contact between the child and his or her family 'unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare'. The overall objective of the contact arrangements will be included in the child's Care Plan and the specific arrangements will be set out in the child's Placement Plan.

8. Family Group Conferences

Family Group Conferences are meetings held between professionals and family members, which aim to achieve the best outcomes for children. They promote the involvement of the wider family to achieve a resolution of difficulties for Children in Need, and may help to identify short-term and/or permanent solutions for children within the family network.

We will offer a Family Group Conference or other form of family meeting at an early stage. If a child becomes Looked After, perhaps following an emergency, without a Family Group Conference having been held, then (where appropriate) we will arrange one as soon as possible.

The process is set out in [Part 2.5, Family Group Conference Service](#) of the Procedures Manual which covers the Family Group Conference Service.

9. Complaints Procedure

Where a family or friends carer is not satisfied with the level of support provided to enable them to care for the child, then they have access to the local authority's complaints process. Our aim would be to resolve any such dissatisfaction without the need for a formal investigation but where an informal resolution is not possible, then a formal investigation will be arranged.

The timescales and process are set out in the [Complaints Procedure](#).

Appendix A: Caring For Somebody Else's Child - Options

[Click here to view Appendix A: Caring For Somebody Else's Child - Options](#)

Appendix B: Summary of Consultation Findings

This policy, whilst in draft form, was shared with a diverse range of foster carers, parents, grand-parents and other people who could be looking after a child, whether in an official capacity or not.

Consultation on the draft policy was led by Sheila Bates, in her capacity as Children's Champion and also as a Director of the Community Empowerment Network.

The Community Empowerment network is an umbrella body for community groups across the city of Coventry that has over 300 members. On 3rd September 2011, the Community Empowerment Network forum was held with over 150 representatives attending representing 70 groups. This event was held at the Community space in the Ricoh Arena and this draft policy was consulted on at this forum. The policy was generally welcomed and some specific feedback points which are noted below. Similar feedback points were also raised when consultation was undertaken with the Coventry Foster Carers Association although the draft policy was generally welcomed.

The specific feedback points raised from the Consultations are summarised as follows:

- Request for the detail around the assessment for subsistence (one-off) payments. There was concern about how much information the local authority would require that wasn't purely financial, who would have access to this information and how this information would be used and stored following payment;
- Issue was raised about how awareness of this provision would be raised and the ease of the process to access payments;
- Request for more family friendly documents that give more detail about entitlements, assessment and the complaints procedure;
- Concern that if a family member was looking after a child relative but relations with the parents were not good, that involvement with the local authority and meeting their criteria may make the problem worse;
- Sometimes the support needed is not financial and there should be a one stop shop approach for such families to access signposting and support.

End

APPENDIX 4

Full Fostering Financial summary

Placement Spend Summary	2009/10			2010/11			2011/12		
	Budget	Actual	Variation (under)/Overspend	Budget	Actual	Variation (under)/Over spend	Budget	Actual	Variation (under)/Overspend
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Internal Fostering	4419	4194	(225)	4476	3763	(713)	4410	3355	(1,055)
Internal Residential	1884	1977	93	1851	1981	130	1843	1823	(20)
External Placements									
-External Fostering	2542	3834	1,292	2542	6184	3,642	2542	6944	4,402
-External Residential (other)	3208	3973	765	3208	4481	1,273	3208	4618	1,410
-Northern Care	3869	4148	279	3870	4783	913	4886	5562	676
Total External Placements	9619	11955	2336	9620	15448	5828	10636	17124	6488
Total Placements	15,922	18,126	2,204	15,947	21,192	5,245	16,889	22,302	5,413

LAC Numbers *	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	
			Target	Forecast
Family and Friends	58	46	46	42
Internal Fostering	225	197	227	174
External Fostering	147	173	128	203
Internal Residential	9	8	7	9
External Residential (Northern Care)	38	42	38	36
External Residential (Other)	41	49	39	47
Placed For Adoption	26	27	25	36
Placed with Parents	35	29	29	26
Other (incl B&B/some aftercare)	17	7	5	10
Total	596	578	544	583

* Based on actual bed nights

Bed nights up to August 2012