



Fostering Annual report. 2024-2025



Contents:

1	Introduction	3
2	Purpose of the Annual Report	3
3	The Fostering Service Structure and Service Delivery	4
3.1	Marketing, Recruitment and Mainstream Approvals	4
3.2	Mainstream Fostering Sufficiency	8
3.3	Connected Persons Fostering	12
3.4	Progressing permanence for fostered children	12
3.5	Fostering Panel	12
4	Support and Training to approved carers and guardians	12
4.1	Support to foster carers and guardians	12
4.2	Mentoring scheme	15
4.3	Support from and summary of the work undertaken by the Edge of Care Service	15
4.4	Training and Development of foster carers	17
5	Foster Carer engagement	18
5.1	The Foster Carer Association	20
6	Quality Assurance and Service Development	21
7	Financial impact	21
8	Summary and priorities for the next 12 months	22

1. Introduction:

Foster care is subject to legislative and regulatory guidance through The Children Act 1989, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services: National minimum standards 2011. It is further regulated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations published in 2010 and the Assessment and Approval of Foster carers guidance 2013.

The regulatory framework for fostering sets out the minimum standards expected to ensure that the care provided by foster carers is adequate to ensure that those children placed within fostering homes are well cared for and achieve good outcomes.

The requirement for fostering agencies to produce an annual report is primarily set out by Ofsted and governed by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, specifically Regulation 35, along with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, particularly Standard 25.7.

Who Requires the Annual Report?

- **Ofsted:** As the regulatory body, Ofsted collects annual data from both local authority fostering services and independent fostering agencies. This data collection provides a national overview of fostering services and performance.
-
- **Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:**
 - **Regulation 35** states that fostering agencies must prepare a written report on the management and outcomes of the service and submit it to the executive side of the local authority or agency board.
 -
- **National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services:**
 - **Standard 25.7** reinforces the requirement for agencies to review and report on their performance, ensuring transparency and accountability.

2. Purpose of the Annual Report:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the fostering service.
- To identify areas for improvement and development.
- To ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements.
- To inform stakeholders, about service outcomes and future plans.

This report presents a comprehensive review of the achievements and progress made by Coventry's Fostering Service over the past year. It reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that children across the city are nurtured in safe, loving environments and supported through strong family and community connections.

At Coventry City Council, we believe that children thrive best when cared for by those who know and love them. Our strategic approach prioritises supporting families so that, wherever possible, children can remain safely with their birth parents or within their wider family network. Where this is not achievable, we act with compassion and

purpose to ensure children are welcomed into nurturing family environments that reflect the values of our Coventry Family Valued approach.

A key part of this vision is our dedication for children to remain with Connected Persons carers (Kinship) – individuals who already share meaningful relationships with the child. This relational approach not only promotes stability and belonging but also preserves the child's identity and connections.

The performance of Coventry's Fostering Service is central to delivering this vision. Through targeted recruitment, robust support and retention of high-quality foster carers from within our community, we continue to provide children in care with safe, loving homes that meet their diverse needs and keep them close to the people and places that matter most.

As of 31 March 2025, 76.9% of Coventry's children in foster care arrangements were living in Coventry fostering households, a testament to the strength of our local fostering community and the deep commitment to keeping children connected to their roots.

3. The Fostering Service Structure and Service Delivery

The Fostering Service sits within Children's Services as part of Corporate Parenting & Sufficiency. The Fostering Services comprise of 7 teams and into two specific teams: recruitment, assessment and support to mainstream foster carers and the assessment and support of connected persons carers and special guardians.

Foster care arrangements are referred to as either mainstream or connected persons.

- Connected persons fostering refers to those households who offer to provide care to a child known to them, usually a relative.
- Mainstream refers to a range of households who apply to become foster carers for children not known to them. Mainstream foster carers include those offering out of hours and long-term foster care and those providing short stays. Mainstream carers can be approved to care for between 1 and 3 children at a time and can care for children throughout the age range.

In addition to the social work teams there is a Panel Advisor and a Fostering Service Development Coordinator both of whom report to the Operational Lead.

3.1 Marketing, Recruitment and Mainstream Approvals

During the period of this report, recruitment of foster carers has continued to take place both face to face and virtually. The team have hosted a stall at the Godiva festival alongside smaller drop in and meet the team sessions at local libraries, JobShop, supermarkets, parks over the summer and at coffee shops.

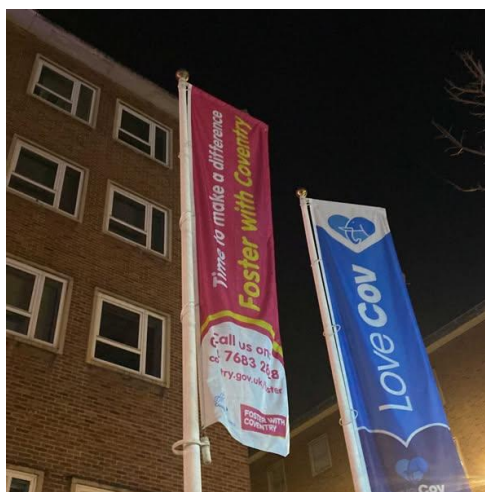


.... Got some lovely feedback from a participant



The Team supported Move4Fun in War Memorial Park as well as an event by a comedian who is a foster carer.

The team have continued to work closely with the communications team to broaden the use of council sites to market for foster carers. This has included regular use of electronic screens in council buildings and bus stops, promotional flags and promoting the fostering recruitment film.



There has been some 'targeted recruitment' during #FCF24 where we were celebrating #FosteringMoments, with an event at the Jobshop and at the Coventry Transport Museum.



The service continues to use digital marketing to support fostering recruitment. However, the effectiveness of this has reduced in recent years as most enquiries have either come from foster carer referrals or from events that have been attended. It is evident that marketing for foster carers in the future will need to continue to be more innovative and wide reaching as the period of digital marketing success appears to be tailing off for both Coventry and other fostering agencies. We are partnering with Coventry Rocks and in the process of having a presence on the Families Portal in Coventry as well as building stronger links with the Chamber of Commerce and Child Friendly Cov stakeholders.

The team continue to participate in both the West Midlands and East Midlands regional fostering recruitment forums and a national fostering recruitment social media network group in order to share ideas and best practice in recruiting foster carers. The service continues to be part of a national benchmarking forum for local authority services to consider where areas of success are and learn from these. However, this data does not provide sufficient clarity on any learning from regional and statistical neighbours.

as it is anonymised data and not directly relating to comparative neighbours or other Local Authorities.

It is hoped that with the creation of a regional recruitment hub, more influential statistics will be shared and consider.

Coventry participated again with the collaborative recruitment film which was launched in October 2024. Over 100 Local Authorities are now using these short films as part of their overall recruitment strategy. The latest fostering film, 'Everything', can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MqKGFrJjlc>

Following recommendations from a Fosterlink visit in March 2024, the Fostering Service has updated its outward facing website to make information more interesting and accessible. Foster carer testimonials and case studies are used throughout marketing to recruit more carers and contents are regularly reviewed.

The marketing strategy for 2025 – 2027 provides more in-depth information.

The following table provides statistics in relation to the recruitment of mainstream foster carers:

Mainstream carers	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of initial enquiries	552	504	709	372	511
Expressions of interest following enquiry (EOI)	156	52	48	42	42
Assessments started at stage 1	83	42	37	27	35
Assessments commencing to stage 2	64	42	35	27	33
Number of households approved	23	20	16	17	20
Conversion rate - enquiry to full assessment	12% (any contact) 41% (expression of interest)	8% (any contact) 81% (expression of interest)	5% (any contact) 73% (expression of interest)	5% (any contact) 64% (expression of interest)	6.5% (any contact) 78.5% (expression of interests)
Conversion rate – stage	36%	48%	43%	63%	60.6%

2 assessment to approval					
Conversion rate enquiry to approval	4.2% (contact) 14.7% (EOI)	4% (contact) 38% (EOI)	2% (contact) 33% (EOI)	5% (contact) 40% (EOI)	4% (contact) 47.6%

The recruitment and retention of foster carers remain a significant challenge, with a noticeable reduction in the number of enquiries. However, despite these hurdles, approvals continue to show a steady growth with 194 households.

Unfortunately, the departure of several long-standing foster carers has led to a decline in numbers, and as of the end of March 2025, Coventry experienced an overall reduction in foster carers within the Service.

In response, we are actively exploring new avenues to enhance recruitment efforts and improve retention strategies. Strengthening collaboration with key stakeholders, both within the Council and externally, remains a priority as we work to broaden awareness and increase the number of foster carers to meet growing demands. In addition, we continue to learn from regional recruitment collaborative and explore options for Coventry with neighbouring authorities.

Nationally there have been a decline in mainstream households and recruitment continues to be a challenge, however, there has been a rise in connected persons growth.

3.2 Mainstream Fostering Sufficiency

3.2.1 Occupancy of Mainstream Placements

Coventry's mainstream foster carers continue to provide an average of 1.4 approved care arrangements per household. The total number of approved mainstream care arrangements on 31/3/25 was 379, provided by 191 fostering households. The occupancy rate of approved placements decreased slightly from 76% on 31/3/24 to 65%.

Analysis of those care arrangements which are unoccupied shows that around 23.7% are unavailable, as carers do not currently want to consider further children or because further children cannot be placed due to matching difficulties. Others are unoccupied for a variety of reasons including those foster carers who are in the process of introducing a new child to their household, carers who provide short stay foster care and those foster carers who are in the process of reducing their approval numbers. Some carers are unable to take further care arrangements whilst they are subject to the allegations process. Around 11.3% of unavailable arrangements were on hold or blocked. However, the service retains close oversight of occupancy and regularly

reviews support on offer to foster carers to enable them to develop and grow the range of care arrangements they can provide.

3.2.2 Retention of Mainstream Foster Carers

In 2024/25, 22 mainstream fostering households ceased to foster, 6 more than the previous year. In addition, 2 foster carers who had been part of a fostering household ceased to foster when they separated from their partners. There has been a considerable rise in the number of foster carers leaving the service, however according to accredited official statistics, there has been a 5% decrease in the number of mainstream Local Authority households for the year 2023/2024 and over the last few years, this number continues to decrease. There is a regular review of the reasons for carers ceasing to foster and all those who choose to move on are offered an exit interview with a manager in the service.

Reason for leaving	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Permanence plan for child (including Staying Put)	0	1	0	3	3
Transfer to another LA fostering service / children's trust (IFA)	1	0	0	0	0
Transfer to an independent fostering agency	1	1	1	1	1
Personal circumstances e.g. separation, bereavement, retirement	4	7	6	8	12
Decided fostering not for them	5	3	3	1	4
Dissatisfied with quality of service	1	0	1	0	0
Safeguarding (termination)	0	0	2	3	0
Resigned prior to quality of care and safeguarding issues	1	2	1	0	2
Other – including death	1	0	0	0	0
Total	14	14	14	16	22

Very few carers choose to transfer to either another local authority or an independent fostering agency. For the household who transferred to an IFA this year, the choice to move to another agency was based upon their hope to be better matched based on their change of circumstances at that time.

Internal fostering continues to be one of the most cost-effective care arrangements for children in care, on a unit cost basis, as well as providing quality outcomes for Coventry children.

3.2.3 Specialist Schemes

a) Next Steps

The Next Steps fostering scheme was launched to provide intensively supported fostering arrangements to children who would benefit from stepping down or avoiding residential care. These fostering arrangements provide a supportive, safe, and nurturing family environment.

Eleven fostering households supported **eleven young people** through the Next Steps scheme at the end of March 2025, offering them the stability of a family home.

- **Seven children** have been successfully long-term matched with their carers, providing them with consistent, nurturing environments.
- **Two fostering households** have guided **three young people** into adulthood, continuing to offer support beyond their transition to independence.

These outcomes highlight the ongoing success of the Next Steps programme in improving the long-term stability, emotional well-being, and future prospects of young people.

- **Two fostering** households concluded their care. One child was not suited to a family environment at the time and required a higher level of care and support. While the other experienced significant trauma linked behaviour and 'dysregulation' as they became older, and concerns for their and their carers' safety were raised.

This has emphasised the importance of carefully matching and assessing both the child and the carer before moving children. Planning should adopt a holistic approach, considering both present circumstances and future outcomes. Additionally, it highlights the need to provide therapeutic support to children transitioning from residential care to a family setting.

Recruitment to the Next Steps scheme remains active. It welcomes both new foster carers and experienced carers transferring from other fostering arrangements.

- **Two families** have already welcomed a **second Next Steps child** into their homes, demonstrating their continued commitment and capacity to provide stable, nurturing care.
- **An additional two households** are currently exploring the possibility of supporting a second child, reflecting their growing confidence.

This ongoing growth highlights the strengths and adaptability of the Next Steps Carers.

All prospective Next Steps carers attend a two-day 'understanding trauma and challenging behaviour' training course, which is also open to mainstream foster carers and staff. They are provided with specialist support and ongoing training that can be tailored to the individual needs of the children they support.

The scheme works closely with the children's social work teams so that carers gain insight into the child they will care for, and positive matching is achieved. This is

followed by a robust transition period to support the child in developing relationships, safety, and security with their new family.

b) Out of Hours emergency carers

The Fostering Service continues to run its successful Out of Hours scheme. These foster carers support children in emergency situations outside of the usual working hours, as they often work full time and offer their home as a safe warm place for children to stay overnight. Children are then collected in the morning.

Between April 2024 and March 2025 Coventry approved 6 new households onto the Out of Hours scheme and lost one carer due to them wanting to change their approval to become short term only. Having these carers, contributed to overall sufficiency and the ability to ensure children are safely placed whilst a suitable longer-term arrangement is found or children return to their families.

Moving forward, we are looking to increase our numbers of Out of Hours foster carers, to be able to continue to provide children and young people a place of safety when needed in the most urgent of times.

c) Parent and Child fostering

The Fostering Service currently operates a dedicated scheme for foster carers who provide parent and child fostering arrangements. At present, two carers are approved to support this provision, receiving tailored support to meet the unique needs of parents and their children. This scheme is undergoing a comprehensive review, with plans to relaunch it in the coming year. As part of this initiative, the service aims to recruit additional carers capable of offering nurturing and community-based fostering households that support both parents and fathers enabling families to remain together.

d) Short stay fostering

Short stay fostering is a type of fostering for a child or children and can either be to support an existing fostering arrangement or to provide a short break to a child who is living at home within the context of section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

In both cases, the intention of this short stay arrangement is to support the child's main living arrangement, supporting the stability of a fostering arrangement or supporting families to maintain care of their child so that do not need to come into care.

By providing some time away from the child's home it is hoped that carers and parents will have time to recharge or attend to needs of other family members. It can also be required where carers are significantly unwell.

Short stays can either be on a one off or regular basis. Each short stay can last for one night up to 2 weeks.

We have recruited a number of foster carers who wish to offer this type of fostering, and as a Service we are in the process of exploring within the wider Service how we can support family led decision making and expand our provision most effectively to support children living with their family in the community.

3.3 Connected Persons Fostering (Kinship)

There has been a continuing growth in the number of connected persons assessments being started prior to children entering care proceedings. This is a positive progression as it enables more timely family led decision making.

Over the past 12 months, the team has received 249 requests for initial assessments, a rise from 238 in 2023/2024. These resulted in 149 positives recommendations however only 138 proceeded to a full assessment. Due to the growing number of referrals, a significant number had to be outsourced and the impact of this is under regular review.

The number of children cared for in a connected persons fostering arrangement was significantly higher than the two previous years, at 132.

Special guardians and connected persons foster carers can access training in an equivalent way to mainstream foster carers. The fostering service also runs a bespoke pre-approval training course titled 'skills to care' and a bespoke training course for special guardians was also launched, which runs 3 times a year.

3.4 Progressing permanence for fostered children

A significant feature of the work of the Fostering Service is promoting permanence for children in care. During the year, 27 children who had been fostered achieved permanence through a special guardianship order and 13 children had their fostering placement confirmed as their long-term home with in-house foster carers.

With the support of a dedicated staff member, we have seen an increase in Adoption & Special Guardianship applications to support more families and avoid SGO disruptions.

3.5 Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel annual report provides a summary of the performance, progress and activity of Coventry's Fostering panel during the past year. Please see report attached.



Annual Foster Panel
report 2024 - 2025 .d

4. Support and Training to approved carers and guardians

4.1 Support to foster carers and guardians

The Service has continued to focus on the quality of support given to foster carers through ensuring consistency of the supervisory relationship, regular visiting patterns and that annual reviews of the foster carers' take place.

The Service produces a monthly newsletter for all foster carers and a bi-monthly newsletter specifically for connected persons carers and special guardians. These

include contributions from a range of sources including colleagues in health and education.

4.1.1 Events

Our annual Carers' Conference which took place in person on the 21st May 2024 at the University of Warwick, centred on "The Impact of Trauma" for children in care. The conference accommodated 150 attendees, including carers, staff and stall holders. Nick Barwick, who has care experience, gave an acclaimed keynote address on trauma, supplemented by fostering service leads and network representatives.

Workshops covered topics such as menopause, self-care, trauma experiences, health, and trauma in higher education, receiving positive feedback. While attendees valued the event's environment, some requested more trauma-related training, extended keynotes, improved workshop scheduling, and greater inclusion of young people's perspectives. The menopause session sparked suggestions for expanded occupational health support for carers.

The Summer Celebration 2024, organized by the Fostering Service and wider Children's Services, took place on the 2nd September at AT7 centre, providing a safe and spacious venue for 171 children and their carers or special guardians. The event featured diverse activities such as pebble decorating, silent disco and a splash park, alongside food options like pizza and ice cream. Attendees praised the event's organization, variety of activities, and staff support, while suggesting improvements like enhanced signage and more activities for older children, with many expressing interests in future similar events.



These events were followed by an appreciation event held on the 10th October 2024 at Coventry Rugby Club during Kinship Care Week. The event was relaxed and peer-focused, featuring food and self-care activities. Entertainment for preschool children included a teddy bears picnic and soft play. The event was attended by 234 people, including carers, senior leaders and the Lady Mayoress. The feedback was positive, highlighting the informal setting and the interaction with staff.



In addition, a 'winter event' was hosted by the Participation Team, in collaboration with the Fostering Service. It was held over 2 sessions at the end of November at the Coventry Rugby Club and attended by nearly 500 people. Activities included seasonal crafts, Santa's Grotto and a carvery lunch provided for everyone.

4.1.2 Other support available

The Service provides an 'out of hours' telephone support for foster carers outside office hours through the fostering service on call rota.

The Service runs a monthly support group for connected persons foster carers and arranged park walks and bi-monthly virtual session with guest speakers. The special guardian peer support is also promoted through a bi-monthly newsletter.

In addition, the Service helps to facilitate two monthly support groups for mainstream foster carers. One for all foster carers and another for carers that foster alone (see below). We also support the development of foster carer led support groups around in and around the city.

The single foster carers' support group (SFCSSG) was created as a gap in the service was identified. From working alongside many single foster carers, it was evident how more challenging and difficult their role was simply by them fostering alone in comparison with carers who are a couple.

This group is held monthly and hosted by members of the Service and a foster carer. Speakers from various agencies have attended to share information, i.e. healthy lifestyles and the advice and mediation worker from The Fostering Network, to share her role, support etc. They have also celebrated different festivals i.e. Easter and Ramadan, with a Muslim carer sharing her own lived experience of the religious celebration.

Another aspect of this support group is for the single carers to expand their support network, to enable them to call upon one another when needed. This has already been seen by carers offering support to each other by caring for their foster children whilst needing to attend training.

Following feedback from foster carers, the Service has worked hard to ensure that information, policies and procedures are more readily available to foster carers. A series of one-minute guides have been produced to bring clarity to areas where foster carers felt that guidance and decision making could be inconsistent. The Service continues to work with foster carers through the foster carer association (FCA) to identify additions or alterations which are needed to ensure the Handbook provides them with clear and comprehensive guidance.

All foster carers approved by Coventry City Council are provided with membership of The Fostering Network and New Family Social, a charity that supports and connects members from the LGBTQ+ community who wish to foster or adopt. The membership with TFN includes access to the Fostering Network's independent Advice and Mediation service.

4.2 Mentoring scheme

The Mainstream Foster Carers Mentoring Scheme was launched in June 2020 with five experienced foster carers supporting two Mentoring Co-ordinators to design the scheme. Since then, there has been ongoing recruitment, and the scheme currently has 20 mentors. All new foster carers are offered the opportunity to have a foster carer mentor. Not all new carers wish to have a mentor, for example, if they already have connections with other foster carers amongst their own family and friends. Some mentors also help more experienced foster carers who require specific support. For example, three to four months support with areas of fostering – including advice around supporting children with disabilities or neurodiversity, the impact of fostering on birth children, supporting transition to adoption, and dealing with an allegation.

During the last twelve months, there have been 16 new mentoring matches arranged, three of which were connected with specific issues for established carers. A mentor is usually offered for the first six months, but this is sometimes extended if needed and the mentoring relationship can become a friendship or source of advice.

Other forms of mentoring exist outside of the main mentoring scheme. The Next Steps Co-Ordinator match their newly approved carers with existing Next Steps carers.

The Foster Service Development Coordinator is working with the current Mentoring Scheme Co-ordinators and members of the Connected Person's team to strengthen the support already provided by the existing mentors and recruit a more diverse range of foster carers to provide mentors to all groups of carers including connected carer and special guardians, plus more bespoke support to any type of carer who is taking on new challenges and experiences.

4.3 Support from and summary of the work undertaken by the Edge of Care Service

Edge of Care (EOC) continues to provide 12-week intensive support when crisis arises to reduce conflict and tension within fostering families. The aim is to strengthen family relationships, build resilience and empower families with skills which enable them to find their solutions in the future through a restorative lens. The aim is to support children's permanence and stability, to prevent children in care experiencing repeated care arrangement breakdowns which may impact their sense of stability.

This intervention is delivered by a Therapeutic Practitioner specialising in Fostering Stability. Their role is to support children and young people (aged 8-17) residing in foster care where the care arrangement is at risk of a breakdown. EOC offer a whole family approach to family's experiencing crisis and when difficulties begin to escalate and relationships becoming stressful and tense. The therapeutic practitioner uses an integrative therapeutic approach which is attachment and trauma informed and delivers both direct work with young people and therapeutic support for foster carers and their family.

Referrals & Outcomes

From April 2024 to March 2025, 23 referrals were received, requesting fostering, SGO and adoption stability. 15 families have been stabilised through intensive therapeutic support.

There has been a decrease in referrals from the previous year, and possible reasons for this will need to be explored further by the Fostering Service and Edge of C.

Key Themes Impacting Carers

A key element of their work with foster carers has been building on their understanding of the impact of traumatic and abusive lived experiences on presenting behaviours and ways of coping for children and young people. The team observed foster carers becoming emotionally triggered by challenging behaviours reflecting how their own history and lived experiences impact their responses and relationships with young people in their care.

They also observed intensified stress among single carers, who reported exhaustion, heightened vulnerability, and greater risk of care arrangement breakdown when managing complex behaviours.

Children and Young People

Over the past year, a shift has been noted from young people presenting with externalised behaviours such as aggression and violence to young people struggling with emotional expression. This has meant that young people may often emotionally withdrawn or become distant leaving foster carers uncertain about how best to help. A focus of this work was using play-based approaches to support emotional expression and trust-building.

Therapeutic Interventions

There has been increased work addressing conflict and tension between children in care and foster carers' children and families. The complexity of risk has required strong collaboration with supervising social workers: joint consultations on CSA, safer caring plans, de-escalation and safety planning. The purpose of this has been to strengthen confidence amongst carers in managing risk at home. This reflective therapeutic parenting work supports carers to notice and manage their emotional triggers, understand patterns of worry, and co-create strategies for emotional containment so

they can care from a grounded, mindfully regulated place. They also introduced more drama and play therapy-informed techniques, and increased family sessions to foster better communication, rebuilding trust between all members of the household.

Practice has consistently balanced authority with empathy, ensuring that children, families, and professionals are fully involved in assessments, planning, reviews, and decisions. Interactions have remained respectful and professionally confident, demonstrating persistence and determination in managing complex family dynamics. The views, wishes, and feelings of children and families have been actively listened to and responded to, including interpreting non-verbal communication and behaviour as a means of understanding. Additionally, children and families have been supported through key transitions—including placement changes, reunifications, and adoptions—ensuring continuity, sensitivity, and a child-centred approach at every stage.

Next Steps

- Strengthen links with the Fostering Service to increase referrals.
- Edge of Care to remain present and visible at Fostering Service's events.
- To identify and support children and young people within the Global Majority to ensure they are offered the same opportunities for stable relationships with their carers.

4.4 Training and Development of foster carers

Foster carer training is coordinated and run jointly between the Service and the Children's Services Development Team. Training is offered in a variety of methods including face to face, virtual and E-learning. Foster carers are also signposted to research and written materials where relevant to the particular children they are caring for. To maximise the training offer to foster carers, wherever possible practitioners from the service facilitate the training for foster carers. The Fostering Service contribute to monthly meetings to plan and coordinate the training offer with the wider children's services training and development offer.

Training can be access via online platforms, JRNI and Flourish. Flourish access has been opened to allow all foster carers access to a range of training in a variety of topics. Removing the barrier of the supervising social worker needing to allocate courses has allowed foster carers more autonomy in their learning albeit it is discussed in supervision visits and of course recommended training and development is suggested through the personal development plan.

Foster carers can access both mandatory courses, ensuring they have the training necessary to undertake their role and more in-depth training for those carers who want to develop particular specialisms or a deeper knowledge of a subject area, for example Foundations for Attachment or Behaviour that challenges you. Both courses run over several weeks to develop a more in depth understanding of how to care for children through trauma informed care.

We have adopted Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), which is a therapeutic model to support children and families affected by developmental trauma and attachment difficulties. This approach equips professionals and caregivers with the knowledge and skills to apply DDP principles effectively.

Refresher training is offered to foster carers who have completed their mandatory training, and it is expected that they undertake this at least every 3 years, in order to keep up to date with current practices.

Preparation training (Skills to Foster) for all prospective mainstream foster carers, continues to be delivered by the fostering team, and include foster carers as well as care experienced adults. These groups are held face to face at regular intervals.

The Service also facilitates a bi-monthly preparation training course for connected persons foster carers entitled “Skills to Care” and a bespoke training course for special guardians and those considering special guardianship.

The Service continues to support newly approved foster carers in completing the mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD). There is an adapted version of these standards for connected persons foster carers and there is an expectation that any connected person’s carer completes this within 18 months of approval.

5. Foster Carer engagement

This section summarises development work from April 2024 to March 2025, driven by consultations with foster carers and stakeholders.

Month	Development heading	Development work
April	Refer a Friend scheme	Consultation to gauge what foster carers appreciate more when they refer a friend to become an approved foster carer.
	Additional Allowances consultation	The aim of this consultation was to make the policy clearer, fairer and consistent across different groups of carers. This consisted of a survey/questions and focus groups to ensure those who wanted to take part were able to contribute.
May	Consultation – Level 3 Progression – form and criteria updated	A working party of social workers from support and connected persons collaborated to look at the current criteria and updated it accordingly. Consultation out to carers for their views from 2 nd May.

	CFCA meeting	<p>This meeting was attended by Katherine Robinson, Operational Lead to discuss matters arising with the FCA members</p> <p>This was at University of Warwick and in person. The theme was The Impact of Trauma and our keynote was Nick Barwick; Nick was able to share his lived and professional experiences which were valued by delegates. The overall rating for the conference was 4.23.</p>
	Annual Conference	
June	Foster Carers Supervision document	<p>We often get feedback around the use of the forms we use. A working group was created to update the document and consult with foster carers. This was completed and the final consultation went out for last comments and suggestions on June 4th 2024. This has now been implemented.</p>
July	Mentoring scheme	<p>We received some feedback from connected persons foster carers and special guardians stating they too would like to access a mentor when things are either new or tricky at home caring for the children. Work began from here off the back of that feedback, due for roll out early February 2025.</p>
September	Summer Celebration 2nd September	<p>This year's Summer Event was held at the AT7 Centre and as we hired the whole venue it meant we could offer a huge variety of activities, including swimming, gyms for the over 12's, dance, soft play plus many different activities in the main hall provided by different parts of Children's Services.</p> <p>The event was a success and rated over all by the attendees at 4.7 out of 5.</p> <p>Catering was provided.</p>
October	CFCA Meeting	<p>Not attended due to staff absence but feedback given through chair</p>
	Thank You event	<p>We had asked our foster carers and special guardians how they would like us to show our appreciation for what they do for the children and young people they care for. The response was, a relaxed, informal opportunity to come together and celebrate with time together, with no big speeches.</p> <p>To meet this, we hired the marquee at Coventry Rugby Club, had a buffet instead of afternoon tea, provided soft play area for preschoolers. We presented some of the carer's who were nominated by social workers and leaders, with flowers and a gift card to extend thanks for going 'the extra mile'.</p> <p>We asked for feedback and overall the event was well received and appreciated. When we run a similar event in the future, foster carers would like the opportunity to get</p>

		involved with the nominations for additional thank you tokens.
November	New course – Court Process and Skills	Carers were asked to share their views on what they believe should be included in a workshop to help them understand more so they can support the children that they care for, better.
December	Training Needs Analysis	This was sent out to all Foster Carers to contribute their views on the current offer and what they believe should be included in the offer for 2025/26. The results were used by the working group that included the Principle Social Worker, Fostering Team manager and fostering Senior Practitioner.
January 25	CFCA meeting	A discussion with foster carers took place and items fed back to the service
February	All About Me – new way of working Mentoring Development	<p>This was a meeting to invite foster carers and connected carers to share their views on the proposed model by Richard Rose, to enable them to be more involved and effective in the Life Story work of the children they care for.</p> <p>The feedback was shared with the working group and built into the training that is now available.</p> <p>The existing service for mainstream foster carers is expanding into the Connected Persons team and for Special Guardians. There needed to be a discussion and consultation with the current mentors to enable this work to develop and go live.</p>
March	Parent and Child fostering	<p>Supervising Social Workers were asked to discuss with carers who are approved and those who may consider, Parent and Child Fostering. The consultation looked at specific questions around this due to the need CCC have to provide this internally. The results showed that many hadn't enough room to accommodate and the summary report is being developed by the Fostering Support Team Managers</p> <p>23 out of 55 carers said they would consider it or would need more space.</p>

In addition, Cllr Seaman and senior managers in the Service have attended the Foster Carers Association and foster carers are also active leads on Corporate Parenting Board.

5.1 The Foster Carer Association

All Coventry approved foster carers are members of the Coventry Foster Carer Association (CFCA), although participation is voluntary. The Foster Carer Association has met monthly throughout the period of this report. The Fostering Operational Lead and Fostering Service

Development Co-ordinator have attended part of the meeting on a regular basis to receive feedback and suggestions from foster carers on issues which are important to them.

In addition to meetings, the Foster Carer Association host support groups as well as social events for foster carers and manage a social media group from which foster carers can seek support directly from their peers.

Members of the Foster Carer Association regularly support events in which they present the perspective of foster carers to children's services staff. Foster carers are regularly involved in staff recruitment.

6. Quality Assurance and Service Development

During the past twelve months, the service has continued to focus on developing and improving practice. This has included regular quality assurance activity including collaborative practice evaluations, quality assurance checklists and observation of fostering practice. The service also undertakes a service performance review on a quarterly basis with learning from this shared during development sessions with the teams. Alongside the consistent supervision of social workers these measures continue to enable the service to improve its work. Learning shared within monthly quality assurance reports, are fed back to the management team to celebrate what we are doing well but also areas that we can develop further. Embedding this learning, contribute to consistent good practice with the aim of ensuring positive outcomes for children in a fostering arrangement.

We continue to actively seek feedback from our carers and consider these as part of our ongoing service improvement.

The fostering service participates in both regional and national forums to promote improvements in our support to fostered children. The Operational Lead chairs the West Midlands Regional Forum for local authority fostering registered managers, members of the Recruitment and Assessment team attends both regional and national fostering recruitment forums and the panel advisor attends a regional forum for fostering panel advisors.

Connected Persons team managers attend a specific regional forum to discuss connected persons' practice and proposed changes.

Collaborative discussions have also taken place in relation to creating a regional recruitment hub as part of the reforms initiated by the DfE.

7. Financial impact

Internal fostering continues to be one of the most cost-effective placements for children in care, on a unit cost basis, as well as providing quality outcomes for

Coventry children. The overall placements strategy reflects this, and the fostering fees budget will increase as appropriate in future years to reflect increased targets. Additional resources will also be made available as necessary to expand the internal fostering team to support the increasing numbers of foster carers.

	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Internal fostering team	3,234	3,403	3,515	3,763	3,732	4,110	3,910	4,174
Internal fostering fees: mainstream	6,420	6,066	6,304	6,078	7,328	6,144	7,237	6,370
Internal fostering fees: specialist	181	225	458	259	340	445	801	598
Connected person fees	1,279	1,685	1,337	1,696	1,655	1,925	1798	2256
Total	11,114	11,379	11,614	11,796	13,055	12,624	13,746	13,398

Fostering fees for 2024/2025 were increased by 3 % and maintenance allowances by 6.3% from 2023/2024 levels in order to recognise the impact of inflation and the rise in the cost of living and to ensure that our rates remain competitive with those of surrounding local authorities. Fees and allowances are above the rates recommended by the Fostering Network and continue to compare favourably to those paid by neighbouring authorities.

8. Summary and priorities for the next 12 months

- Continue to drive the Fostering Excellence Project to enable increased capacity and resilience of internal mainstream fostering households
- Continue to develop recruitment of carers from a range of diverse backgrounds to more closely match the backgrounds of children in care
- Identify reasons for drop out between enquiry, expression of interest and approval, to improve conversion rate
- Finalising and launch Coventry's Kinship strategy and offer
- Continue to develop Kinship fostering in line with the Kinship strategy and our Kinship offer and aim to increase permanence through special guardianship arrangements
- Ongoing growth of the Next steps fostering scheme
- Relaunch parent and child and out of hours schemes

- Launch a short stay provision to support families in need to prevent children coming into care
- Continue to ensure foster carers are consulted about all changes that affect their role
- Widen mentoring offer for connected persons carers and offer to applicants during the assessment process
- Review support available to children of foster carers and newly approved foster carers during their induction period
- Embed DDP principles and continue to upskill all workforce caring for children

Report author:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zelma van Rhyn', written in a cursive style.

**Zelma van Rhyn, Interim Operational Lead Fostering
Children and Education Services**