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**Fostering Service**

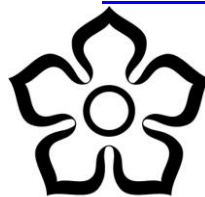
**Annual Report 2022 / 2023**

**LMB: 11 March 2024**

**Lead director: Laurence Jones**

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**SCE** Social  
Care &  
Education [www.leicester.gov.uk](http://www.leicester.gov.uk)



**Leicester  
City Council**

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: David Thrussell, Head of Service Corporate Parenting
- Author contact details: 0116 454 1657
- Report version number: v1

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 Leicester City Council is fully committed to children in the care of the local authority living in loving family homes whenever possible. Our priority continues to be the recruitment of talented foster carers to enable more children to continue to live happy lives within local family households. This report provides an overview of the activity and performance that supported this commitment through the delivery of our own fostering service between 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. The report should be read in conjunction with the annual statement of purpose which sets out the service aims, objectives and configuration.
- 1.2 The majority of our children looked after are living in family households with Leicester City foster carers looking after 65.2% of those in foster care. Most of our children live locally, with 83.1% of our mainstream foster care homes located within Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland.
- 1.3 The Fostering Service currently supports 137 mainstream fostering households, 62 Kinship fostering households and 13 short break fostering households.
- 1.4 We have an experienced cohort of foster carers: 37% of mainstream carers have 0-5 years' experience, 27% 5-10 years, 20% 10-20 years and 16% over 20 years' experience.
- 1.5 We recruited 16 new mainstream fostering households in 2022-23. 44% of our foster carers approved this year were approved to care for sibling groups.

- 1.6 77% of Leicester City Foster Carers are white British compared to 82% nationally. 23% of our carers have diverse heritages, compared to 15% nationally, and our foster carers speak over 20 languages and practice 16 different religions, some with no religion.
- 1.7 We approved 5 Enhanced Carers over the calendar year, with three children being newly placed with them, needing enhanced care.

## **2. Recommended actions/decision**

- 2.1 This report is for information only and the Executive are asked to note and approve the Fostering Service Annual Report for 2022-23.

## **3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement**

- 3.1 The report has been prepared in consultation with the Service Manager for the Fostering Service and shared with relevant stakeholders in the mainstream Fostering and Kinship Teams, and the Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team. The report will proceed to Children & Young Peoples Scrutiny subject to agreement. The report contains some direct quotations from carers who have been supported over the past year.

## **4. Background and options with supporting evidence**

- 4.1 This is a covering report for the attached Fostering Service Annual Report 2022/23.

## **5. Detailed report**

- 5.1 Please refer to the attached main report. If you have any questions about the information contained in this Annual Report or the Statement of Purpose, please contact the Fostering Team on 0116 454 4510.

**6. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications**

**6.1 Financial implications**

6.1.1 Tba

**6.2 Legal implications**

6.2.1 Tba

**6.3 Equalities implications**

6.3.1 Tba

**6.4 Climate Emergency implications**

6.4.1 Tba

**6.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)**

6.5.1 None

**7. Background information and other papers:**

7.1 Fostering Service Annual Statement of Purpose 2019/20.

**8. Summary of appendices:**

8.1 None

**9. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?**

9.1 No

**10. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?**

10.1 No

# fostering

Leicester City Council

Annual Report 2022/3



# Purpose

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the activity and performance of the Fostering Service during 2022 - 2023.

The Fostering Service is essential in supporting our delivery of high-quality care and support for our children looked after, allowing them to live and thrive in a family home. The service ensures that our children and young people live in safe, stable, and appropriately matched foster families, and that our families are supported to deliver the best outcomes for our children and young people.

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**Our aim for children who are cared for is that that they will have a clear understanding of why they are looked after by the local authority, be given an opportunity to make sense of their experiences, knowing who is there to support them to achieve their goals and lead successful lives.**

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The Fostering Service is required to produce a written Statement of Purpose each year which sets out details of our services and how we will meet our commitment to providing high-quality care and support for our children, young people, and foster families.

The Fostering Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose are available to all staff, foster carers, children and young people, parents, and other professionals in a variety of formats.



# Highlights of 2022/3

The fostering service has continued to support our foster carers and the children in their care. Children and carers have been seen in person, with home visits taking place throughout this year.

Support for our foster carers has been provided through online forums, training events and professional practice days, whilst peer support has been encouraged. The Service Manager has continued to provide a weekly bulletin to foster carers providing additional advice and support, and access to online resources.

We have developed more presence at community events with foster carer support, giving us the opportunity to recruit more visibly and we have successfully piloted the Enhanced Foster Carer Scheme.

The Fostering Panel has continued to meet throughout the past year to ensure that potential foster carers can continue to be assessed and approved, and that children can be matched to carers without delay.

Initial viability assessments for potential Kinship carers transferred into the Kinship Team, providing temporary assistance to colleagues from the Children in Need Service. These assessments are of high quality and the most viable family members are being identified for our Children Looked After.

## Key Successes

- Having increased our starting financial offer we have continued to be more competitive, which has led to high quality applications.
- Our capital funding scheme has allowed existing foster carers to expand their homes and offer more homes to children and young people.
- Foster carers continue to tell us that we are supporting them, and we have found ways of offering support such as peer support groups, face to face training events, professional practice days and regular newsletters.

## Local Profile

- 43% of our Looked After Children are placed in foster care; with our Leicester City foster carers looking after 65.2% of those in foster care, which includes 270 children and young people in foster care.
- The Fostering Service currently supports 137 mainstream fostering households, 62 Kinship fostering households and 13 short break fostering households.
- We received 79 enquiries in 2022-23, of which 26 households applied.



- We recruited 16 new mainstream fostering households in 2022-23.
- Long term placement stability continues to be a priority. 37% of children looked after having remained in their foster home for more than 2 ½ years.
- 44% of our foster carers approved this year were approved to care for sibling groups.
- Most of our children are placed locally, with 83.1% of our mainstream foster care homes located within Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland.
- We have an experienced cohort of foster carers: 37% of mainstream carers have 0-5 years' experience, 27% 5-10 years, 20% 10-20 years and 16% over 20 years' experience.
- We are recruiting to match the needs of our children in care: 77% of Leicester City Foster Carers are white British compared to 82% nationally. 23% of our carers have diverse heritages, compared to 15% nationally, and our foster carers speak over 20 languages and practice 16 different religions, some with no religion.
- We approved 5 Enhanced Carers over the calendar year, with three children being newly placed with them, needing enhanced care.

# Recruitment and Retention



Increasing the number of Leicester City foster carers is a significant priority for the Council. We aim to recruit and retain a large and diverse range of foster carers and short-breaks carers to match our children and young people's needs.

Our dedicated recruitment and assessment team consists of 1 Team Manager, 1 Communications and Marketing Officer, 1 Enquiries Officer, 3.3 full time equivalent Assessment Social Workers and a Child Care Support worker. It should be recognised that as corporate parents, all services across the organisation play a role in supporting and delivering better outcomes for our foster families and our children.

The post for our Communications and Marketing Officer remained vacant for most of this year with the team working to cover the post's work. This Officer's role is to work closely with colleagues in the Corporate Communications Team to create appropriate and cost-effective recruitment campaigns, based on areas of need, using various online and more traditional methods such as posters, postcards, and banners as well as recruitment events, radio campaigns and adverts in newspapers. Our new Officer is now in post.

Our Enquiries Officer is available on the phone, e-mail, social media and in person at regular recruitment events to provide a friendly, warm welcome to fostering for Leicester City and to discuss individual circumstances.

Those interested in fostering are provided with information about upcoming information events. Once an application is received, an initial visit is arranged to discuss individual circumstances in more detail. This ensures that we are assessing the right people, at the right time.

Our assessments are completed by assessment Social Workers in a timely fashion but are also comprehensive and ensure that the foster family are ready to become foster carers.

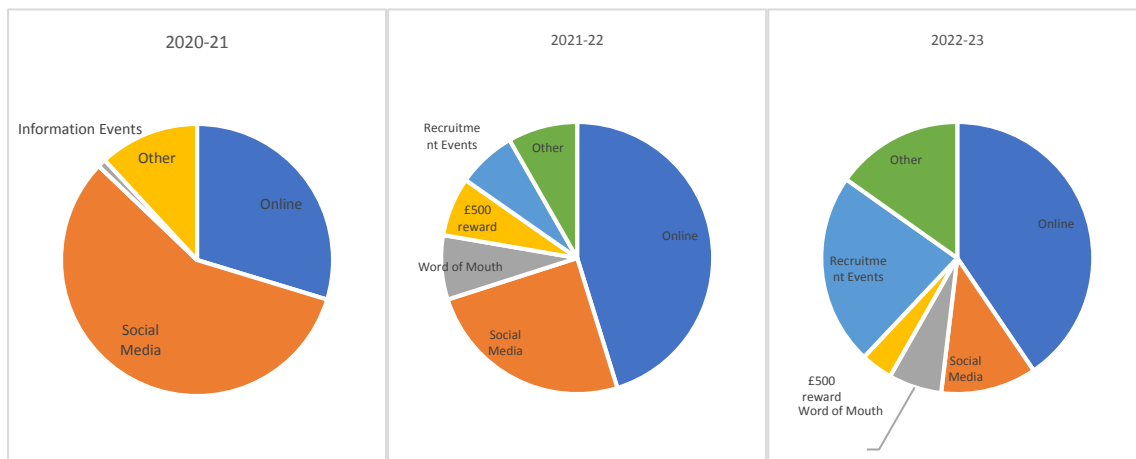
## Outcomes

	2018-1	2019-2	2020-2	2021-2	2022-2
Enquiries	257	197	408	157	79
Applications	52	41	48	57	26
Assessments	47	31	25	29	25
Approvals	27	18	20	17	16
Enquiries to application	20%	21%	13%	36%	33%
Applications to assessment	90%	76%	46%	51%	96%
Assessments to approval	57%	58%	80%	55%	64%

## Initial Enquiries

Our online presence remains strong, and the increased financial offer means we are now more competitive against our neighbouring local authorities and independent fostering agencies. Of the 79 enquiries received, a snapshot of where enquiries are received from is shown below:

- 40% (32) via Internet
- 11% (9) via Facebook
- 6% (5) via Word of Mouth
- 4% (3) via £500 reward
- 23% (18) via Recruitment Events
- 15% (12) other – including google ads, leaflets, Leicester Mercury, transferring from another Agency etc



As part of our new strategy, we have:

- ♥ Developed our Enhanced Foster Carer scheme to be more competitive with private agencies and meet the needs of our children with high levels of need.
- ♥ Refreshed our printed materials for Mainstream Fostering, Short Breaks, Postcards and the Specialist and Enhanced schemes.

Two successful recruitment strategies have been the 'golden hello' and the £500 reward payment. 10 of the 16 approved carers received a 'golden hello' of £1000 as they were approved for either sibling groups, or teenage placements. 3 current foster carers received a £500 reward for recommending friends who went on to be approved this year. This is a positive recruitment aid, as the applicants already have a realistic view of fostering and have friends who can offer support and advice.

We are currently progressing with procuring a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool which will help to respond to enquiries and applications at a time which is best suited to the enquirer, prioritise those who are most interested, automate admin processes, and highlight trends and areas of interest to ensure we are focusing on what will deliver the best outcomes. This is expected to be in place by early of 2024.

## **Applications**

Nationally there is a distinct difference in conversion rates of initial enquiries to applications, due to the different ways of capturing what an initial enquiry is. Our conversion rate is approximately 1 application per 3 enquiries received, which compares well against IFAs with an average conversion of 1 application per 20 enquiries received, while other local authorities report a conversion of 1 application per 9 enquires.

Of the 79 enquiries, applications were received and progressed through to initial visits. Some applicants withdrew before the visit.

Of the 36 who proceeded to an initial visit, 20 were progressed through to assessment and 16 were withdrawn or rejected.

- 7 withdrew due to personal reasons.
- 2 lacked experience.
- 1 proceeded with another Agency.
- 3 space/housing
- 1 availability / not meeting service needs.
- 2 known information.

## **Assessments**

Applicants who are unsuccessful include those who fail to meet basic requirements, for example their working pattern may not be flexible enough; they may lack experience of looking after or working with children; they may demonstrate that it would be unlikely they will meet the minimum standards. Some applicants may express attitudes inconsistent with fostering; they may have health issues that prevent fostering; some will be excluded after negative background checks.

## **Approvals**

In 2022-23 we approved 16 fostering households.

Of these 16 approvals there were:

- 7 approvals for sibling groups (6 for 2 sibs, 1 for 3)
- 11 approvals offering care to children aged up to age 10
- 5 approvals offering care to children aged up to age 18
- 3 households approved as Enhanced Foster Carers
- 12 households approved for Short Term
- 1 household approved for Permanence.

It is not uncommon to see a higher number of not permanent carers during their initial approval – this allows the new carers the opportunity to gain experience and adapt their lifestyle to fostering. Over time, we begin to see not permanent carers expand their approval to permanent fostering at a time which is right for them and the children in their care.

# Kinship (Family and Friends) Carers

There is a legal requirement for local authorities to assess all potential family members as potential kinship carers for looked after children.

Family members who need to be considered for kinship care are subject to an Initial Viability Assessment (IVA) usually carried out by the Children in Need Service arising out of care proceedings. This function transferred to the Kinship Fostering Service to support colleagues. The IVA work demands a speed of response, with most of the IVAs being carried out whilst in proceedings and must be turned around in 1 or 2 days. Work is ongoing to increase the number of Family Network Meetings and to carry out work earlier, in pre-proceedings.

Once completed, the viabilities are then passed through to a specialist Kinship Care Assessment Team in the Fostering Service. The Kinship Team complete the full assessment, the Form C, which is presented to the Fostering Panel, and if applicable, is redacted and filed in court.

Of the kinship assessments completed in 2022-23:

20 were approved.

3 were concluded as negative.

Practice Guidance documents have been written regarding Family Network Meetings, IVAs, and Kinship Fostering Assessments, including Regulation 24 requirements.

## Fostering Panel

The role of the Fostering Panel is to make recommendations to the local authority regarding the suitability of foster carers. The panel also quality assures reports and gives feedback to the Team Managers to promote opportunities and share learning.

The Panel consists of experienced individuals who work to ensure that Looked after Children in Leicester City enjoy a consistently high standard of care with approved foster carers who can meet their needs.

In 2022-23 a total of 25 panel meetings were held – these meetings considered:

- 32 applications across mainstream, kinship and short break households
- 11 changes to approval
- 12 first reviews
- 17 additional requests (such as extensions to regulation 25, attached support and exemptions).

# Permanence

Over the year, 26 children ceased to be Looked After due to their Kinship Carers and foster carers becoming their Special Guardians. 4 children were under 1 year old, 10 were aged 1 to 4; 4 were aged 5 to 9 and 8 children were aged 10 to 15 years of age. 10 were single children and a further 12 children were in sibling groups of 2, and there was a further sibling group of 4 placed together.

## Our Local Support Offer for Foster Carers

### Our Team

The main source of support for our foster carers is access to an experienced and qualified Supervising Social Worker allocated to each fostering household. Foster carers indicate that this relationship is one of the most important elements of the local offer as shown in the comments from a foster carer below.

*"You are amazing! Always there on the end of the phone and never making us feel stupid for asking questions."*

### Our Local Offer

In addition to our Supervising Social Workers day-to-day support, we also offer a range of other support resources to support our foster carers, this includes:

- Our Foster Carers are provided with membership to Foster Talk, an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting Foster Carers. They provide a comprehensive support package including 24 hour legal, counselling, and medical and first aid helplines; accountancy and tax advice, high street discounts, legal expenses insurance, education advisory service, and independent support during allegations.
- A comprehensive Handbook for Foster Carers is published online.
- There are close working relationships with a range of childcare professionals including the child's Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, the Virtual School Team, Health colleagues, and the Children and Families Support Team (CFST) providing therapeutic advice and direct work.

*"... I would like to say how supportive L has been on the cases that we have worked together in particular that of RC and MW. L has gone over and above her remit to support me on the above cases resulting in some positive outcomes for the above children. L is a Fantastic SSW and a delight to work with. Thank you, L, for all your support and making a difference in the lives of the children we work with."* Social Worker

- All carers have an annual review meeting chaired by a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) who sits outside of the service within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team.

♥ *“Just wanted to pass on some really positive feedback from foster carer JC from her annual review today about you H – she spoke about you listening to her – often at length, described you as “so supportive” & said that she doesn’t know what she would have done without you this year..”* FIRO

- ♥ A peer support group is an established and thriving group run by foster carers in the city.
- ♥ An annual professional development Conference went ahead face to face this year, allowing foster carers and workers to learn together.
- ♥ Active Leicester Membership entitles the whole fostering family and those they care for to access free swimming and gym.
- ♥ 30 hours free childcare is provided for foster carers meeting eligibility criteria.
- ♥ Bespoke financial support is provided to foster carers via a Leisure Fund, to enable children and young people to sustain their interests over time, building confidence, skills, and enjoyment.
- ♥ Access to Bullfrog Arts focuses on improving the emotional health, wellbeing, and self-efficacy of looked after children and young people and their foster carers through music and singing culminating in an annual concert.

## **The Children and Families Support Team (CFST)**

The Children and Families Support Team (CFST) provide assessment and intervention to children and their families and carers to enable them to live safely in their family environment and within the community. They are a multi-professional team, including Mental Health Practitioners, Social Workers, Play Therapists, Psychotherapist, Eye Movement and Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapist and Post Adoption and Post- Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support Workers. They have a wide range of knowledge and skills around Theraplay, Play Therapy, EMDR, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), systemic approaches, attachment, and therapeutic parenting.

The team has worked with 42 children who are Looked After (CLA) by the local authority over the past year, working with the child or young person and their caregivers. They have worked with 6 new young people (CLA and non-CLA) who have used Sexually Harmful Behaviour. Additionally, CFST provide training to foster carers and Hub meetings for case discussions and support. Over the past year CFST has helped over 25 foster carers via the CFST Hub; demand has doubled for this service when compared to 2021/22.

## **Training for Foster Carers**

The three main areas of our training offer are Initial preparation training for mainstream carers, an ongoing offer of training for all carers, including one-off training provided by partners, and Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) for all carers.

The Skills to Foster courses have been run on a rolling programme approximately every 10 weeks to meet the needs of applicants. 4 courses were completed during 2023 run by a social worker and a foster carer. Over the past year 29 applicants were trained. These were followed by a session for Sons and Daughters, for ages 7 to 18. The feedback from this is positive, with 7 children appreciating an understanding of confidentiality, safeguarding and what a Supervising Social Worker does.

A virtual course has been developed and run by the Kinship Team, entitled Introduction to Kinship Foster Care. Other new virtual courses have been provided by Inspire Training including Therapeutic Parenting; Calming the angry child; Dealing with lying; Using PACE in real life; Overcoming compassion fatigue; Surviving the holidays; How to deal with arguing.

Foster Carers received a regular weekly email from the Service Manager with attachments and hyperlinks on a range of relevant information and resources throughout the year.

The 2023 Annual Conference '*Supporting Life Story Work for Children; Creative Ideas and Activities*' was day full of creative ideas from a leading expert, Katie Wrench about supporting Life Story Work for children. Katie is an experienced therapeutic social worker, qualified art psychotherapist, trainer and consultant and former foster carer. The aim of the training was to build worker confidence in managing difficult conversations with children and supporting carers explore their children's histories.

Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) are completed by carers through commissioned e-learning from The Grey Matter Group. The six weekly drop-in sessions were moved to a virtual platform during Covid-19 restrictions, so the carers continued to benefit from the support from the Fostering Team and an experienced foster carer. All carers must complete their TSDS; mainstream carers need to complete this within a year of approval and Kinship Carers within 18 months. Newly approved carers are now demonstrating they can complete within this timescale. Further work is being undertaken to support kinship carers. The reviewing of individual foster carers and their training is monitored in supervision and in the Foster Carer Annual Review.

## **Quality Assurance**

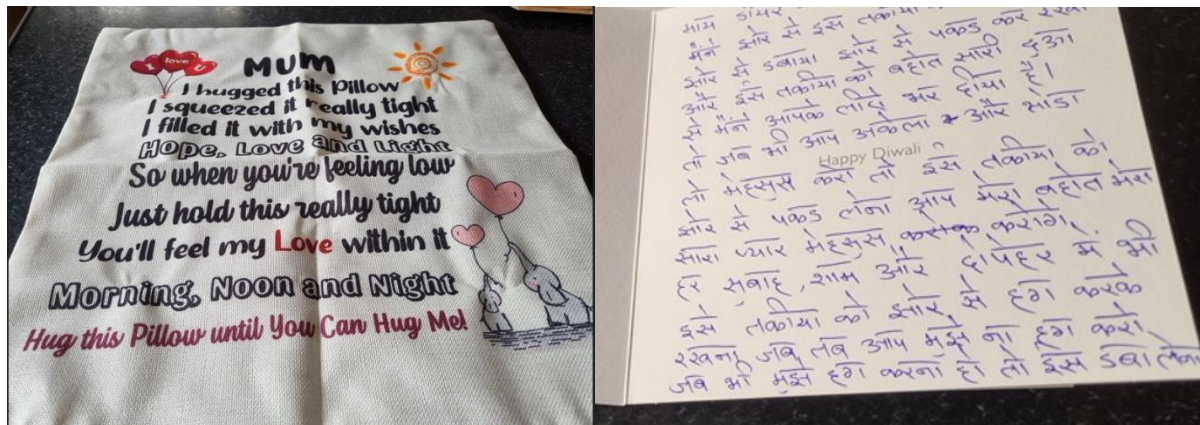
Foster Home Reviews are completed by a dedicated Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO), whilst unannounced visits and supervisory visits completed by Supervising Social Workers, all contribute to an assessment of the child's lived experience in the home.. This means that foster carer's performance, consideration of training and development needs are reviewed regularly. Foster carers are positive about the support that they receive from their Supervising Social Workers and the service.

Commendations over the past year have included the following from a social worker:



" She was truly wonderful when I took three young, vulnerable, and emotionally distressed children to her care. This was an emergency placement and E had been woken in the early hours of the morning asking if she was able to care for these children. When I arrived, she was incredibly warm, friendly, and inviting. She quickly enabled the children to feel at ease in her home. She had tremendous patience with them and showed a true understanding of their needs. She was keen to get all the information about the children and even though this was limited she was able to confidently care for them. She showed awareness of the children's cultural needs and asked relevant questions and was not worried about asking the children directly. She was attentive and engaging. She was able to put enough ground rules in place to ensure the children were safe but without making them feel unwelcome. I have so many positive things to say about her. She is a true credit to Leicester City Council." Social Worker AB 12.04.2023

Below celebrates good practice of one of our foster carers, YS, who bought Diwali candles for the birth mother which were sent to the contact centre, along with a cushion giving hugs and a card giving the translation of the cushion which was written by the LCC translator. The baby was 4 months old and this was sensitive and kind care.



## Managing Allegations

From 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022, there were 18 households involved in incidents of allegations against Foster Carers. All allegations or concerns are followed up rigorously by the service.

Safeguarding Strategy Meetings and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) investigations were held. There were 10 unfounded allegations and 5 unsubstantiated allegations. There were 3 substantiated allegations (one involving neglect, one of physical harm and one involving emotional harm). LADO Reports have been presented to the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker. One fostering household has subsequently been deregistered.

# Placement Stability

Stable and secure relationships are a vital element to ensuring that our Looked After Children are safe and have the best possible opportunities to fulfil their aspirations, whilst consistent and high-quality relationships with carers add to their resilience and security.

Robust actions are taken to prevent placement breakdown and stability meetings are called to identify additional resources to stabilise placements deemed to be vulnerable.

As part of the strategy to improve permanence for our children looked after, a permanent fostering monitoring group (PFMG) has been established to review and track all children to ensure progress and prevent delay. This promotes better outcomes, supports placement stability, and reduces long-term arrangements with more costly IFAs.

Activity to support family finding for permanence includes:

- approaching existing foster carers – through a monthly e-bulletin.
- recruiting more permanent foster carers.
- approaching local Independent Fostering Agencies – through an e-bulletin; this has had a positive start in identifying permanent homes for our children.
- bespoke recruitment for specific children – this will be an innovative recruitment approach as evidenced by conversations with Coram BAAF.

# Staying Put Scheme

Young people who are care leavers have the option of staying with their foster carer after they turn 18. Care Leavers make good use of Staying Put arrangements with their ex-foster carers post-18, with young people using this as a 'springboard' for increased independence, e.g., before they move on to their own accommodation, or higher education opportunities. All care leavers are encouraged to consider this option prior to leaving care, and currently there are 8 x 18yr olds, 6 x 19yr olds and 3 x 20yr olds living with their carers under 'staying put'.

Other young people return to their carers for Sunday lunches and celebratory events, and for ongoing support and interest in their lives. Policies and guidance are appropriately targeted for young people, professionals and those foster carers who wish to participate.

# Looking Ahead to 2024

## Recruitment of Foster Carers

Whilst we have an overall need for more foster carers, there are specific needs for more carers who can support young people over the age of 11 years, larger sibling groups and children and young people with more complex needs due to trauma histories and attachment difficulties.

We will continue to develop our Enhanced Foster Carer scheme and begin the recruitment for a Specialist Foster Carer scheme to care for children and young people with more

complex needs. We intend to start recruitment for Flexible Fostering in an attempt to attract a different cohort of potential foster carers.

We will strengthen our position using a CRM tool which will support our recruitment team to better understand and deliver a timely, effective response to enquiries and applications. This work with corporate communications and digital transformation will open new ways of working, which once implemented will lead to quicker response times, more focused work, and automation of tasks leading to better conversion rates and prioritising of resources.

### **Enhancing our Local Offer**

We will continue to enhance our local support offer using learning from their annual foster home reviews and in consultation with foster carers to shape a local offer which meets the needs of our foster carers.

### **A Corporate Wide Commitment to our Foster Carers**

We will continue to champion and advocate for a corporate wide commitment to our foster carers, recognising each service's role as a corporate parent to support our foster carers.

### **Participation and Engagement**

We will continue to build on our participation and engagement work with our foster carers