



Fostering Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose 2024 / 2025

CYPE Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 20/01/2026

Lead director/officer: Laurence Jones

Useful information

Ward(s) affected: All

Report author: David Thrussell Head of Service Corporate Parenting

Author contact details: 37 1657

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the activity and performance of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. 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 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 families are supported to deliver the best outcomes for our children and young people.
- 1.3 The Ofsted Inspection of Leicester City Council local authority children's services conducted in September 2024 noted the fostering service has areas of significant strength, and there is a commitment to achieving permanence for children where possible. It also highlighted the support our foster carers access from their social workers.
- 1.4 Most of our children looked after (64%) live in fostering households, with 63% of these living with Leicester City carers on 31 March 2025. Our carers live predominately within City or County boundaries, allowing children to stay close to their wider family, school and community networks.
- 1.5 The fostering service supports 174 fostering households, comprising of 117 mainstream fostering households and 43 kinship households, with the remainder being a mixture of respite or short breaks and fostering for adoption carers.

- 1.6 Our priority continues to be the recruitment of more foster carers to enable more children to live within local family households. We received 57 enquiries from prospective carers in 2024-25, of which 35 households applied to become foster carers. We recruited 12 new mainstream fostering households in 2024-25 who were approved to care for 17 children in total.
- 1.7 We approved 4 Enhanced Carers during the year, offering enhanced care for 6 children with complex needs enabling them to continue to live locally in family households.
- 1.8 Our foster carer population is significantly more diverse than the national average, reflecting the diversity of our city and offering more opportunities to place children in culturally matched homes.
- 1.9 We supported Kinship and mainstream carers for 35 children to become Special Guardians during the year who make a permanent commitment to the children they care for whilst ensuring the children cease to be looked after by the council.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Commission are invited to note and approve the Fostering Service Annual Report for 2024-25 and the Annual Statement of Purpose for 2025/26.

3. Detailed report

- 3.1 Please see below the Fostering Service annual report for 2024-5.



Annual Report 2024/5

Purpose

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the activity and performance of Leicester City Council Fostering Service during 2024-5.

The report should be read in conjunction with the written Statement of Purpose 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 their 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.

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000.

Our service

The Fostering service is a core part of the children's workforce, recruiting and supporting foster carers for looked after children in care and working closely with children's social workers. Support workers, supervising social workers and team managers work alongside foster carers as part of the team around our children. Foster carers are supported to meet the needs of children in care, offering them safe, stable family homes where they can thrive. We have considerable success in achieving permanence through Special Guardianship Orders for our kinship carers as well as some mainstream carers.

Our families

Leicester City fostering service supports 174 fostering households. Our carers live predominately within the City or County boundaries, allowing children to stay close to their wider family, school and community networks.

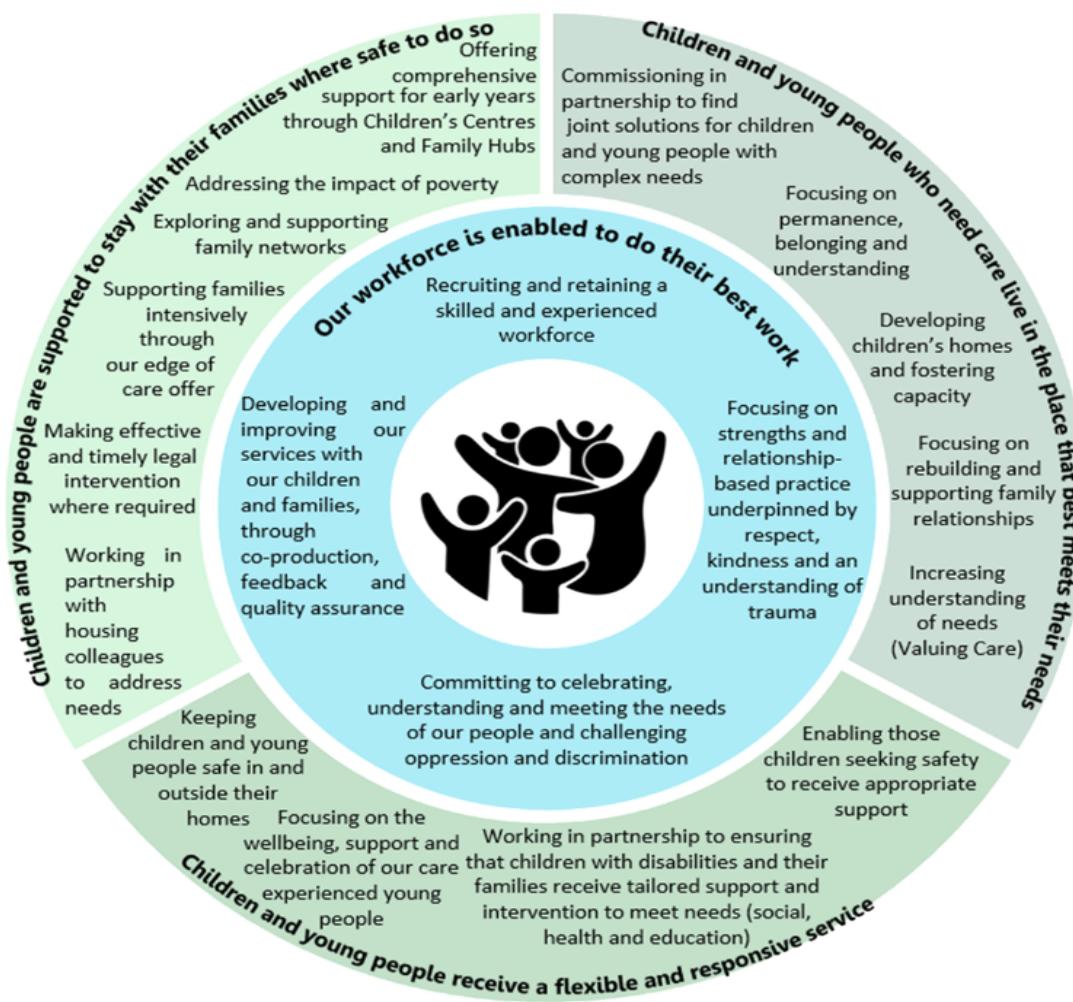
64% of Leicester's looked after children live in fostering households, and around two-thirds of those are living with Leicester City carers.

Our foster carers

- We received 57 enquiries in 2024-25, of which 35 households applied.
- We recruited 12 new mainstream fostering households in 2024-25, a reduction on the previous year.
- Leicester City fostering service supports 174 fostering households: 117 mainstream fostering households and 43 kinship households, the remainder being a mixture of respite/short breaks and fostering for adoption carers.
- On March 31st, 2025, 589 children were in the care of Leicester City. 64% were placed in foster care of which 63% were with council approved foster carers.
- Our foster carer population is significantly more diverse than the national average, reflecting the diversity of our city and offering more opportunities to place children in culturally matched homes.
- Carers for 35 children were supported to become Special Guardians during the year and make a permanent commitment to the children they care for. This is a mix of kinship foster carers and mainstream carers.

Our values

The Fostering Service is part of Leicester City Children's Social Work and Early Help division. Through our shared priorities across the division, we are committed to supporting children, young people, adults, and families to live their best life, so they can be safe, be independent and be ambitious for themselves.



Our service plan reflects these priorities, setting out the following objectives:

- **Support and celebrate** our staff, our foster carers and our good practice
- Improve and **promote our local offer** to foster carers, adopters and special guardians
- Challenge ourselves with robust **quality assurance**

- Develop kinship pathways in line with the new **Kinship Strategy**
- Progress the delivery of the **placement sufficiency** strategy and reduce the numbers of children experiencing placement instability.
- **Support good matching for all children:** Understand and celebrate children's culture and heritage; help our parents and carers nurture children's identities.
- Ensure lessons from Foster Care Home Reviews **inform and improve practice**
- Continue to grow our work with the **Rights and Participation Service** to gain children's views, ask for their involvement, understand their needs.
- Continue our strong **partnership with the Virtual School Team** to help every child reach their potential in education.
- Support our young people **get ready for independence** by collaborating with the Leaving Care service to support practical skills such as cooking and budgeting.
- Promote a **trauma-informed therapeutic parenting** approach for our children and young people.
- Help children to **maintain connections** to people and places who are important in their lives.
- Support children with **Staying Put** arrangements where it is right for them
- Work on a **Corporate Grandparenting** strategy for our young people who become parents.

Key successes and highlights from 2024/25

We are extremely proud of the high standards of care our foster carers offer to children when they welcome them into their families. Foster carers look after children who have experienced significant trauma and have complex needs, helping them to stay close to their families and live in place they can call home. They in turn are proud of the children and their achievements. Long-lasting bonds are formed, and this year several of our carers have been formally matched for permanence with the children they look after or are proceeding with adoptions where this is the plan for the child.

Fostering in Leicester reflects the diversity of our city. We have a diverse group of carers from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and we continue to work on recruiting more carers who share key elements of children's identities. We also know that children can thrive in families where they are not obviously matched and understand how important it is to listen to children's voices about the kind of care they want to receive. We support carers to look after children with different heritage to them and children seeking safety from abroad.

Leicester City has recently published its first Fostering Microsite, embedded within the council website, allowing us to be much more responsive to the changing needs of the service. We are looking forward to developing this further in the coming year. We have also published a new fostering handbook to ensure we always provide up-to-date advice and guidance to carers.

The fostering panel has seen real change this year, returning to panels in-person and recruiting a new chair. We have delivered training to panel members and included them in staff training and begun to revise new standards.

Training for foster carers has been developed based on what they need to complete and on what they tell us they need.

The Ofsted Inspection of Leicester City Council local authority children's services conducted in September 2024 highlighted the support foster carers access from their social workers and noted:

The fostering service has areas of significant strength. There is a commitment to achieving permanence for children where possible. Carers receive very good support, which promotes stability and consistency of care for children.... When care arrangements appear vulnerable to disruption, effective action is taken to strengthen placement support.

Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

Increasing the number of Leicester City foster carers continues to be a priority for the council. We aim to recruit and retain a large and diverse range of foster 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 FTE Assessment Social Workers and 1 Child Care Support worker.

The Communications and Marketing Officer officer's role is to devise effective marketing and communications campaigns to aid in the recruitment of foster carers, and to share general information with foster carers effectively. Working closely with colleagues in the corporate communications team, the communications and marketing officer is responsible for the creation of marketing campaigns, based on areas of need, using various online and more traditional methods, alongside maintaining general communication with our foster carers including a monthly foster carer email newsletter.

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.

Our information and publicity events are supported by the recruitment and assessment team, along with experienced foster carers to ensure those interested in fostering get a broad view of the role from staff and the foster carers themselves. 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 Social Workers in a timely fashion and are comprehensive to ensure that the foster family are ready to become foster carers.

Marketing, Communications and Events

Our online presence remains strong, and our increased financial offer means we are now more competitive against our neighbouring local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies.

As part of our strategy for 2024/25, we:

- Improved our online presence, including the creation of more engaging social media content and the development of a new, dedicated microsite, which launched in March 2025. Early feedback from users has been positive regarding the information available and ease of use.
- Increased our presence in the community, including supermarkets, public spaces and festivals/city events.
- Targeted marketing towards potential carers with the skillset we require for Enhanced and Specialist foster carers.
- Improved our foster carer newsletter to update fostering families on what support is available to them as foster carers.

Events in 2024/25

Dedicated fostering information events held: **22**

No of supermarket awareness stalls: **17**

Awareness stalls at other community venues: **5**

Appearances at other local events: **3**



'Fostering Moments'

Foster Care Fortnight 2024 –

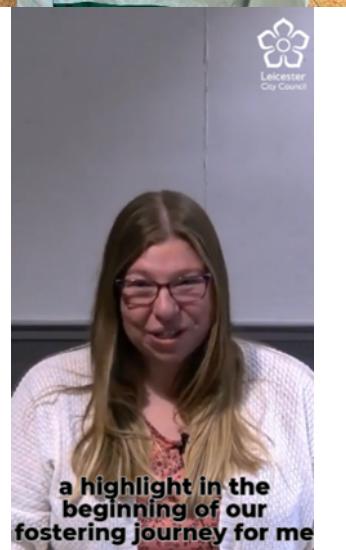
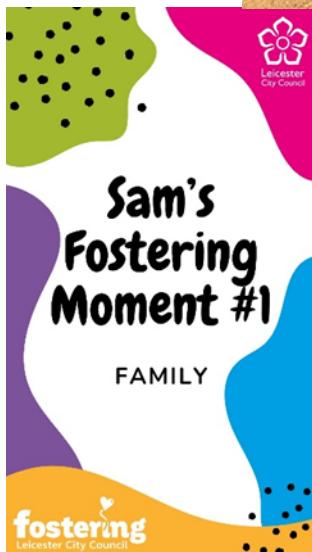


content was

In the lead up to and during foster care fortnight, we celebrated the moments that

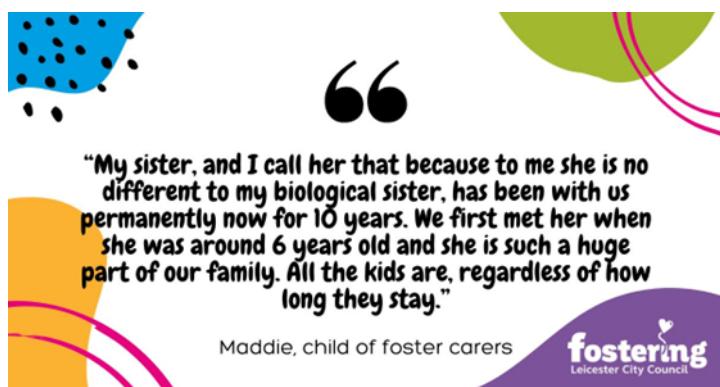


define fostering. Video popular on social media.



The recruitment team also facilitated several recruitment events throughout the fortnight, and we worked with the communications team to produce press coverage.

Children of Foster Carers Month



We are members of the East Midlands Regional Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) foster carer recruitment forum, for children and young people from abroad seeking safety. This is hosted by the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership and aims to support the recruitment of UASC Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Carers. The website and marketing materials will go live in 2025-26.



Change a young life, foster for Leicester



Could you be a child's safe place?

With flexible fostering options to work around you, your family and your career, don't rule yourself out. To find out more about fostering for Leicester City Council, get in touch.

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Foster Carer Recruitment

We assessed 16 fostering households in 2024-25. Eight of our foster carers approved this year were approved to care for sibling groups.

We recruited 12 new mainstream fostering households in 2024-2025, providing an extra 17 placements for the service.

We approved 4 Enhanced Carers during the year, offering Enhanced care for 6 children with complex needs.

We received 57 enquiries in 2024-2025, of which 35 households applied.

Two successful recruitment strategies have been the 'golden hello' - an incentive payment for 'recommending a friend' and the £500 reward payment. Six of the newly approved carers received a 'golden hello' as they were approved for either sibling groups, or teenage placements.

Three current foster carers received a £500 reward for recommending friends who went on to be approved this year. This has been proven to be a positive recruitment aid, as the applicants already have a realistic view of fostering and have friends who can offer support and advice.

Enquiries

Of the 57 enquiries received from 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025, a snapshot of where enquiries are received is shown below:

- 30 via internet
- 3 were previous enquiries
- 4 via Facebook
- 3 were recommended by another carer (£500 reward if approved)
- 12 via a recruitment event
- 2 via word of mouth
- 2 Advertising material
- 1 no source given

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.

Of the 57 enquiries in the last year, 35 applications were received and 29 progressed through to initial visits, as some applicants withdrew before the visit.

Of the 29 who proceeded to an initial visit, 11 were progressed through to assessment and 18 were withdrawn or rejected for the following reasons:

- 8 due to personal reasons
- 2 language barriers
- 2 space/housing
- 1 availability
- 1 not meeting service needs
- 3 known information
- 1 Financial

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 2024 – 25 we approved 16 fostering households. Of these 16 approvals were:

- 7 approvals for sibling groups (6 for 2 sibs, 1 for 3)
- 12 approvals offering matching to children aged 0 - 10

- 5 approvals offering matching to children aged 10 - 18
- 4 households approved as Enhanced Foster Carers
- 9 households approved for Short Term foster care
- 1 household approved for Permanence
- 2 households approved for Mainstream Respite

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

Outcomes

	2021- 2022	2022- 2023	2023- 2024	2024- 2025
Enquiries	157	79	52	57
Applications	57	26	43	35
Assessments	29	25	25	17
Approvals	17	16	19	16
Enquiries to applications	36%	33%	82%	61.4%
Applications to assessments	51%	96%	58%	48.6%
Assessments to approvals	55%	64%	76%	94%

Kinship Team

The Kinship Assessment Team consists of:

- 1 Team Manager
- 2 IVA workers (until 30th April 2025)
- 5.8 Assessing Supervising Social Workers
- 1 FT Assessing Supervising Social Worker vacancy

Remit

Initial Viability Assessments

The Initial Viability Assessment (IVA) is a screening assessment that explores a person's ability and capacity to meet the long-term individual needs of prospective children, when it is unsafe for them to live with their birth parents. This person may be a family member, a friend or a person connected to the child/ren.

IVA's are either completed in an emergency where there are 48 hours to complete the assessment, during pre-proceedings where there are 3 weeks to complete the assessment or as part of care proceedings where the IVA is completed within two weeks.

The IVA assessors have moved away from assessing prospective Kinship Carers just for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and fostering. They now consider the suitability of a Child Arrangement Orders, alongside fostering and SGO as potential positive IVA outcomes. When suitable for either fostering or Looked After SGO, the Kinship assessment team will complete a full kinship assessment as part of the child's care planning process.

Where multiple family members have been identified prior to care proceedings being issued, the IVA assessors attend joint Family Network Meetings in collaboration with the child's Social Worker, family members and their friends. The IVA assessor's role

is to help family and friends consider the realistic nature of being considered as an alternative carer and through the assessment process consider expectations and support, they may need. This meeting helps family and friends decide on who in their network, is the best and most realistic long-term option to care for the child/ren in their network whilst being open and transparent about any concerns.

Every applicant that attends a joint Family Network Meeting is given both verbal and written information to help them consider and make an informed choice about their prospective role in becoming a carer for someone else's child.

Kinship Assessments

The team has experienced some change in the last year related to personal and developmental changes for team members. Despite this the team have remained committed and focused on providing a good quality service to their applicants, carers and children and young people they work with. Feedback from our Kinship Carers shows this:

“I would like to thank the staff who assisted me during the Kinship Fostering assessment with all the guide and kindness I received during this difficult time. “

“The information provided about Kinship fostering is straight forward and easy to understand”

“Yes, some of the aspects (of the assessment) were a bit challenging but with the help of my social worker she tried her best to make things easy and also make me understand what was expected from me”

“The process was fine but just very time consuming which we didn’t realise when we initially agreed to look after our grandson. Not that it would have made any difference if we’d known.”

“I was informed of everything I needed to know step by step in a professional manner”

“The assessing social worker was so helpful, patient a good listener”

“My experience of the assessment was tough especially with all the questions which needed answers and some of them bringing back memories. But nevertheless, with the help of the social worker I managed to pull through”

“Our social worker was great: professional but very friendly and approachable, she was always helpful and supportive.”

The Kinship Assessment Team are preparing for change with the launch of the Kinship Strategy and the opportunity to create our own Kinship Local Offer, alongside the bigger structural changes in how children and families' services reconfigure to align with social care reforms for children's services.

As part of this change, we have commissioned Coram Baaf to deliver Kinship Assessment training in May 2025 to equip staff with relevant training with the new Form K licence. This will provide the team with an opportunity to reflect and consider best practice for future Form K assessments.

Independent Social Worker (ISW)

A childcare support worker in the fostering service supports Independent Social Workers (ISW's) in completing their court ordered Kinship Assessment.

To ensure expectations are clear, we have revised the (ISW) Letter of Instruction to ensure they understand what the court expects from their assessment whilst outlining what support they can receive from the Local Authority.

Whilst the childcare support worker has direct ongoing communication with the ISW, the Kinship Team Manager has oversight of this workstream.

Data

IVAs completed: 209

- *Pre-Proceedings: 73
- *Proceedings: 128
- *x5 IVA's (FCO)- not in proceedings
- *x3 private orders pursued prior to full assessment

43 Full Assessments

- *22 Positive: 5 SGO, 7 FCO (LTF), 3 FCO (PWP/CAO),
- *11 Withdraw
- *9 Negative
- *1 not needed
- *x7 Pending outcome

*Of 209 IVAS

- 64 NEGATIVE
- 66 POSITIVE
- 19 NOT NEEDED
- 13 NOT ENGAGED
- 47 WITHDREW

ISW- 11 assessments (higher

than previous years- average 5-7)

- *3 Positive: 1 then withdrew, x2 SGO
- *x4 negative
- *x4 withdrew

Key successes/achievements

Initial viability assessments (IVA)

Developed our IVA assessment to account for both private and public law recommended outcomes

The IVA assessment has been integrated into our electronic case management system (Liquid Logic) and fostering pathway

Delivered on a high volume of IVA assessments

As of 30th April 2025, the IVAs will be managed by the Child in Need Service

In collaboration with legal services formalised a process and templates for carer withdrawing or not proceeding with IVA assessment

Kinship Assessment

Developed a virtual training programme that is provided following an IVA that explains the legal orders, expectations and process in details to enable our applicant and carers make informed choices about their ability and capacity to proceed with the assessment.

We developed this training programme into a pre-recorded programme to provide greater flexibility for our applicants/ foster carers.

Created a feedback process for Kinship carers to share their views on the kinship process, the quality of their experience and their relationship with their assessing Supervising Social Worker.

Created and developed a reflective tool based on the 'Social GGRRAAACCEESSS' model to use in our team meetings to facilitate reflective thinking around equality, diversity and inclusion.

At the end of our Kinship assessments, we have started writing to the child, in simple language, the rationale for our assessment outcome.

We are utilising the support of Kinship charity for our carers with peer support groups and training.

Where children have experienced complex trauma, we use the trauma tracker to help carers understand the child's lived experiences and the impact this has, to help them best support them as they grow and develop.

The Kinship assessment team has representatives in both the trauma informed practice group and the CORAM Baaf practice group for Kinship.

In collaboration with legal services formalised a process and templates for carer withdrawing or not proceeding with IVA assessment.

Independent social worker assessments

Compliance with ISW letter of instruction in fulfilling our support role for court ordered assessments.

Development work – what's next?

With the IVAs moving into another service area, IVA practice guidance needs to be written to ensure consistent information is shared with applicants as part of the kinship assessment process.

In collaboration with our Business Support Service, we are improving and developing a more efficient process for undertaking statutory checks.

Service Manager is developing links with the Health Authority to explore opportunities for reducing delays with Fostering medicals.

To utilise Form K assessment template, support plan and practice guidance for future assessments.

To create Kinship Policy that aligns with the content of the Kinship Strategy.

Kinship Assessment Team representative to be part of a working group as part of the Children's social care restructuring.

To establish a process to ensure Kinship Carers feedback is feedback into our learning consistently.

Fostering Supervision and Support Team

The fostering supervision and support team is managed by two team managers. It is a dedicated team of 12 qualified level 3 social workers, supporting and supervising foster carers and their households with the children they look after. Four social workers specifically support our kinship carer households but are embedded within the wider team.

Each social worker has a caseload of up to 22 fostering households, supporting a total of 117 mainstream fostering households and 43 kinship households, with 209 children in placement. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, and the team is stable, with many social workers remaining in post for many years. This allows social workers to develop and maintain high-quality relationships with carers. When social workers do move on to different roles, we have been able to recruit staff from other teams and services, increasing our skill set and knowledge base with new perspectives. We are proud to have a diverse workforce who reflect the local population and enhance our capacity to provide culturally sensitive support and challenge to our carers.

The team holds a key role in ensuring placement stability for children in care through our long term, short term, respite and short breaks schemes. Where carers have specialist skills and provide high levels of therapeutic care to children with complex needs, they are supported as Enhanced carers with additional training and skills payments.

Fostering support and supervision workers commission, coordinate and deliver training to foster carers, with a strong training offer combining both online and face-to-face training. During 2024-25 we have consulted with carers on their key training needs and devised a new training programme in collaboration with colleagues and partners including the Virtual School, drug and alcohol services, health services and psychology services.

During the year we have created a pilot Fostering Duty system, ensuring that a named worker is available in the office each day to support carers. The duty worker

maintains and updates the foster carer availability list, manages an e-mail inbox and sits alongside colleagues from other teams to increase connectivity across the service.

The management group has worked hard this year with colleagues from data services to develop a data dashboard, embedding monthly performance meetings to improve oversight.

Retaining foster carers is a key focus for the coming year, ensuring we understand why carers stop fostering and learning from this. Carers who are on hold are reviewed alongside the Fostering Independent Review Officer to provide oversight and clear planning around returning to fostering. A number of our carers have stopped fostering after decades of commitment, so we are confident that their retirement is a success story. We celebrated these carers in a festive event at the Guildhall in December 2024.

Foster carers tell us that they value the support from Leicester City. the monthly newsletter, regular 'Creating a caring culture' meetings and foster carer reviews.

"My social worker and I have a good working relationship, and she has contacted me regularly especially when A was struggling, she listened and cared."

"They have kept the children at the centre, ensuring safety and promoting good fostering standards throughout their involvement."

"You always show genuine interest in the family; going over and above in a number of aspects of your role"

The foster carer described you as "brilliant" and said she couldn't fault you. You are always there for them, have been supportive and the carer has felt able to be open & honest with you about how she has felt without any worries about being judged by you.

"Our social worker changed but the transition was thought out and our new social worker came with knowledge of us and our family unit which was lovely. She has been supportive whilst still getting to know us and we are very happy ... we are super thankful to all that have supported us."

"She goes above and beyond, and her support through this difficult time has been invaluable to us. My supervising social worker is a brilliant support to me

"It is clear that you have offered the foster a very high level of support over the past year, including taking calls at weekends to avoid a crisis. Your preparation for his foster home review was evident and really helped him to reflect during his review on the last year and what has worked well."

"We moved from an agency and our biggest worry was lack of support from LCC in comparison to IFA. However, I'd like to add that we have been very blessed with an amazing SSW who has exceeded our expectations. We have had consistency, full support, regular contact. Our SSW is extremely knowledgeable, and we are super grateful. We would even say the

"Always being responsive with compassion whether it be to an email, a phone call or an urgent request to visit, my supervising social worker has helped and supported me through some very hard situations."

"Our supervising social worker is an amazing social worker and has been with us during our fostering journey for twelve years"

"Proactive, direct & to the point but supportive, very efficient and always doing what you say you will do."

The spoke about having been "really impressed" by you. You have visited them regularly, get back to them quickly when they call/text you & have checked in with them regularly.

The foster carer particularly appreciated your support in helping her set up the new Foster **Carer's** support group.

High quality relationship-based practice, supporting carers to maintain placements with additional support when needed.

Varied and exciting training offer devised based on feedback from carers.

Monthly in-person coffee mornings, virtual groups and a culture of readily available peer support.

Development of fostering duty system and ongoing work to embed the role of the duty worker.

Creation of shared live 'fostering availability' list to provide oversight of internal fostering capacity.

Fostering performance meetings established and dashboard creation.

Next steps

Ensuring we use data to drive performance – automating oversight of compliance measures to allow more focus on quality and analytical practice.

Continuing to develop our exciting fostering events programme, including a Summer Fun Day and 'children who foster' events to celebrate our fantastic fostering families.

Building on our quality assurance practice to provide regular in-depth analysis through fostering-specific audits and dip-samples.

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. This has been re-launched on Tri-x during 2024-25
- 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.
- 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.
- The 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.

Long-term fostering and permanence

For children who are unable to return home to their birth family, permanence and stability are at the forefront of our planning. Placement stability remains strong with Leicester City foster carers, and several of our carers this year have made permanent commitments to children they look after - in a long-term fostering arrangement, under a Special Guardianship Order, or through adoption where this is the child's plan.

This works particularly well for children who have highly complex health and educational needs. Carers and children get to know each other and develop an authentic, loving relationship where children have a secure base within the foster home. Professionals can feel confident that carers are well matched to the children's needs and have the right support in place for the long-term.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) have been granted for 35 children exiting care during 2024-25. The Local Authority has a strong SGO offer for foster carers, enabling them to have confidence in the ongoing support they will receive. Two fostering households are currently in assessment to be approved to adopt the children they care for.

Where children are in short-term placements and need a long-term fostering placement, the Fostering Service provides support to identify the right carers. Children's profiles are developed and shared in a Permanence Newsletter with internal and external foster carers. We have developed our use of Linkmaker and begun to collaborate with the Placements team to work on pro-active family finding strategies for a small cohort of children who have waited longer or are ready to make the move from children's homes to foster care.

The fostering service supports tracking and oversight of children's permanence plans, in collaboration with colleagues from the children's social work teams. This is done through regular Exits from Care and Permanent Fostering Monitoring Group meetings.

Key successes

Development of matching standards and processes for long-term fostering placements.

Greater oversight and collaboration between services to ensure children are matched for permanence without delay.

Greater use of Linkmaker and permanence newsletter to identify the right homes for children.

Addition of a 'Permanence' flag to children's records to better identify those placements that have been formally matched for long-term fostering.

Most importantly, more than 40 children have a clear plan to stay with their carers in a permanence arrangement.

Next steps

Implementation of new matching processes, initially with a small cohort of matches. This includes the introduction of a Matching Certificate for children who would like one, to celebrate their place within their foster family.

Training for foster carers to help grow numbers of carers able to consider long-term matches.

Increased connectivity and creative family-finding work with local independent fostering agencies as well as our own carers, with potential to consider activity days.

Establishment of a long-term fostering Champion within the fostering service to drive best practice and provide a single point of contact.

Renewed focus on supporting and enabling carers to talk to children about their life story.

Fostering panels

Fostering panels in Leicester City Council are held twice a month to give regular and timely opportunities for fostering cases to be heard.

The panel consider applications to foster (kinship and mainstream), first annual reviews, reviews following concerns, de-registrations and attached support applications. The Panel also maintain oversight of Regulation 25 agreements, where temporary fostering approval under Regulation 24 is extended to allow further assessment time.

In 2024-25 considerable development work has been undertaken. A new Independent Chair was recruited, and the central list of panel members has begun to grow. Panels have returned to 'face-to-face' meetings rather than virtual, although carers can attend virtually where needed; this is particularly helpful for kinship carers who may live at a distance. A new booking system has been devised to ensure that all fostering managers have oversight of panel availability and can make family-centred decisions about prioritisation of cases. Work has begun to improve the administrative processes which support panel, including the development of front sheets for panels to be embedded in the coming year to ensure recording is consistent, clear and compliant with the regulatory framework. Over the next year, regular feedback processes will be established and linked back to add to our quality assurance framework, embracing a collaborative learning culture. This will also inform the annual panel review, held jointly with the Agency Decision Maker, and help identify additional training and support to individuals and the system.

Leicester City fostering panel has a diverse and experienced membership. The independent chair is supported by two vice-chairs, social worker representatives and independent members. The panel is supported by a team manager who provides panel advice. Our panel members bring experience of children's social care, education, housing, therapeutic services and lived experience. We are keen to ensure that health colleagues are also represented on the panel. We are proud that our panel members reflect a range of ethnic and religious heritages, genders and abilities, promoting a culture of welcome and inclusion for people attending panel.

Panel members' renumeration was reviewed during this year to take account of the rise in cost-of-living and to acknowledge the value that panel members bring to the service.

Panel training took place in March 2025, with a whole day focussing on Kinship care in fostering. This was well attended and engaging. Panel members all have annual appraisals which are up to date and clearly identify strengths as well as areas for development.

Panel activity

Case type	Number heard	Positive recommendation	Negative recommendation	Deferrals
Mainstream approval	13	13	0	2
Kinship approval	23	21	2	2
First annual review	33	32	1	4
Review following concerns	1	0	1	0
De-registration	3 (1 was conflictual)	2	1	0
Reg 25/AOB	38	38	0	0
TOTALS	111	106	5	8

The ADM followed the recommendation of panel in 98% of cases.

Key successes

Return to face-to-face panels.

Recruitment of a highly experienced independent panel chair, and growth of central list.

111 cases considered across the year.

Development of booking systems and processes to enhance management oversight.

Next steps

Embed quality assurance processes – feedback, compliance measures for paperwork and data.

Development of panel membership to ensure care-experienced people are able to contribute.

Further consider the need for a dedicated panel adviser role (Fostering and Adoption).

Managing Allegations

From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, there were 18 households referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) that considered allegations against Foster Carers. All allegations or concerns are followed up rigorously by the service. 7 contacts to LADO were resolved by giving advice and guidance and they did not meet the LADO threshold. Of the remaining 11 LADO processes were followed and strategy and or LADO meetings progressed. There were 2 unfounded allegations and 6 unsubstantiated allegations. There were 3 substantiated allegations.

The Fostering and LADO service work closely together. Quarterly quality assurance meetings are attended by LADO, FIRO, service managers and heads of service to ensure good communication, identify patterns of concern and highlight good practice.

During 2024 – 2025 three training events were held for foster carers about managing allegations and LADO processes. The events were well attended with those signing up to the training attending these. The foster carers who attended engaged well and these were positive events. The LADO met directly with the fostering team including supervising social worker and team managers in order to keep updated with the service. Views shared by carers about LADO processes have been noted and have prompted recommendations about follow up to carers who have been subject to LADO processes. Further training events are planned for 2025 – 2026.

Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO)

Foster home reviews are undertaken by one full-time dedicated Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO). Reviews take place at a minimum of every twelve months and are also held more frequently if there is a change in circumstances or if there has been a substantiated LADO investigation or standards of care concerns raised.

There is a focus on putting the voices and experiences of children at the heart of the review process including those of carer's own children and other children living in the

home. Flexibility review times are offered to ensure that male carers who are often working full-time are included. The views expressed by all family members, observations of family interactions and the views of professionals involved with children all contribute to an assessment of the child's lived experience within the home. It is lovely finding out about the various ways that our children are embraced by their foster families, and the dedication shown to them by our carers which is often recognised by children's social workers & IRO's.

Monthly meetings are held with Fostering Team Managers & Supervising Social Worker teams on a quarterly basis to discuss any issues arising from reviews & delays in reviews being completed on time. Quarterly feedback is given to the service on review themes.

The reviews also assess foster carers' performance and consideration of training and development needs with recommendations made for the following review period. Clear timescales are set for recommended actions for carers, Supervising Social Worker's and Team Manager's. Foster Carer's first annual reviews are presented to Fostering Panel and carer's have reported this to be a largely positive experience. First reviews are now being booked onto panel six months in advance so are being presented to panel in a timelier way which is working well.

Completion of reviews within timescales remains an issue with just 66% of reviews having been completed within twelve months over the year. This figure varies significantly between quarters – school holidays have a significant impact on the availability of carers as does a higher level of sickness in families in the winter months. The late completion of some Supervising Social Worker reports also impacts on this, particularly when workers are off.

Despite some staff changes and absences over the last year, 95% of carers reported feeling well supported by their Supervising Social Workers. When carers needed additional support, 99% reported having been able to access this and felt that their needs were responded to. Carers also value good communication from children's social workers about care planning timescales and decisions being made about the

children in their care. Positive feedback and commendations about social workers have been shared with them and their managers.

Priorities for 2025/26

- To ensure more reviews are undertaken with timescales
- To continue to ensure reviews capture the voice of the child on every occasion
- To continue to ensure that male partners are included in all reviews
- On-going liaison with Supervising Social Workers & Team Managers regarding carers who are on hold to minimise delays when they are ready to resume fostering
- Ensure that new platforms for the completion of mandatory & recommended training for carers are established, and carers are supported to access these

Staying Put Scheme

Staying Put is an arrangement whereby a young person remains living with their former foster carer after their 18th birthday.

The Staying Put Scheme is designed to promote a gradual transition from care to adulthood and to ensure that young people do not experience a sudden disruption to their living arrangements. Currently we have 25 young people on the scheme.

The figures are broken down as follows: 16 x 18yr olds, 2 x 19yr olds and 7 x 20yr olds living with their carers under the Staying Put Scheme. Policies and guidance are appropriately targeted for young people, professionals and those foster carers who wish to participate.

Looking ahead to 2025/26

As we embark on the year ahead there is continued drive and commitment to provide the best possible service to the children and families of Leicester.

Our priorities will be:

- Improve and promote our local offer to foster carers and special guardians
- Develop kinship pathways in line with the new Kinship Strategy
- Position the service to be able to deliver the Families First agenda
- Progress the delivery of the placement sufficiency strategy
- Reduce the numbers of children experiencing placement instability
- Support good matching for all children
- Understand and celebrate children's culture and heritage
- Ensure lessons from Foster Care Home Reviews inform and improve practice
- Promote Leicester City Council to become a Fostering Friendly employer
- Develop Fostering Champions across the service and wider council
- Support and celebrate our staff, our foster carers and our good practice
- Continue to develop robust quality assurance processes
- Develop our corporate parenting and corporate grandparenting offer to carers
- Continue to grow our work with the Rights and Participation Service and the Virtual School Team

We will continue to support our current foster carers, who are an essential and highly valued part of the professional network. We will seek to build on our good relationships with carers, listening to what support they need to sustain excellent care for our children and young people.

We are looking forward to spending more time with carers this year as more training is taking place in person and events are planned across the year to celebrate fostering, including a family fun day in the summer.



Annual Statement of Purpose 2025/6



Purpose

This report fulfils the requirement for fostering agencies to produce an annual statement of purpose and 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 Statement of Purpose is available to all staff, prospective carers, children and young people, parents, and other professionals in a variety of formats. You can find the most up to date copy on our website www.leicester.gov.uk/fostering.

Summary

The Fostering Service is essential in supporting our delivery of high-quality care and support for our children who are Looked After, allowing them to live and thrive in a family home.

The service allows our children and young people to live in safe, stable, and appropriately matched foster families.

The Statement of Purpose explains the aims, objectives and services provided by Leicester City Council Fostering Service, as well as details about our recruitment processes for foster carers, placement types, support to foster carers, quality assurance processes, access to complaints service, safeguarding arrangements and support for kinship carers.

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Education

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We are committed to supporting our foster families and continue to develop our support offer. More information about the fostering service and the support offered can be found in our Foster Carers Handbook available at www.leicester.gov.uk/fostering.

If you have any questions about the information contained in this Statement of Purpose, please contact the fostering team on 0116 454 4510.

Our Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of the Fostering Service is to ensure that children who require a foster care placement are placed within a caring and supportive family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

Objectives

- To provide a skilled and flexible fostering service that can meet the wide range of assessed needs of children and young people requiring foster care placements.
- To recruit, assess and approve enough foster carers who live in the Leicester area, ensuring as far as possible that children can be placed in the local area.
- To assist and maintain appropriate links for children placed in foster care with family, community, schools, and friends.
- To match children and young people to foster placements that can meet their assessed needs, taking into consideration the views of the child as part of this process.
- To support children placed with friends and family, where the placement outside the Leicester area is in their best interests.
- To place siblings together wherever possible; and where this is not possible due to safeguarding or other reasons, determined efforts will be made to reunite siblings as soon as is possible and where appropriate.
- To consider race, language, culture, religion, gender, gender orientation and ability, when matching carers to the needs of children.
- To support the implementation of the child's Placement Plan, Care Plan, or young person's Pathway Plan in conjunction with other relevant partners.
- To support placement stability, including where appropriate, availability of the placement to the young person after they reach the age of 18 years.

- To provide a designated supervising social worker to each foster carer, and ensure foster carers receive good quality support and training, to assist them to provide the best parenting for children in their care.
- To work in partnership and openness with foster carers and all other partners who are involved in supporting the child or young person's welfare.

Our principles

The Fostering Service believes: -

- Children in foster care are entitled to experience a family life in which they feel loved and secure in the same way as any other child.
- Children should be encouraged to be proud of their heritage and background and to reach their full potential, celebrating their talents and achievements into adulthood.
- Foster families are recognised as often providing the basis for positive change in a child's life, leading them to grow and develop to become successful adults.
- Children should be consulted, involved, and listened to, with consideration given to their views concerning important decisions affecting their lives.
- The specific needs of children with additional needs should be carefully considered when making and supporting foster placements.
- Children and young people should be supported and encouraged to maintain links and contact with their families and communities of origin, and foster carers will be encouraged to support these efforts.
- Children should not be allowed to 'drift' in care and should be prepared for permanency as determined by their care plan, whether this be reunification with their family, adoption, permanent foster care, or independence.
- Children should be safeguarded in care and be protected from harm, including against other actions by children or young people themselves.
- The fostering service and foster carers will operate within the practice and policies agreed by Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The Service

Service Manager: Ellie Boswell

Telephone: 0116 454 1656

In the absence of the Fostering Service Manager, Mike Evans (Service Manager – Placement & Commissioning) deputises as Service Manager, (0116) 454 4500.

The fostering service employs 4 Team Managers, 24 (full or part time) Supervising Social Workers, 2 Child Care Support Workers, a Publicity Officer, and an Enquiry Officer.

Recruitment Team

Team Manager

Supervision and Support Teams

Team Manager Mainstream and Kinship Fostering (one full time, one part time)

Kinship Assessment Team

Team Manager

Children and Families Support Team (CFST)

Team Manager

The CFST provide various direct therapeutic interventions with foster children and foster carers experiencing placement difficulties, including specialist advice and training.

Additional Information

Leicester City Council is an approved Fostering Service provider and is inspected by Ofsted.

The Fostering Service is managed by a Service Manager supported by dedicated Team Managers (Standard 17).

The Head of Service, Child Safeguarding Quality Assurance is the Agency Decision Maker (Standard 14).

Leicester City Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with regulations (Standard 14).

Recruitment

The Fostering Service recruits, assesses, and approves new foster carers. The service supports individuals and families from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds from all parts of the community, who can bring a variety of experiences to the fostering task and help to support our children and young people in care.

Mainstream Foster Carers

The Fostering Service provides an enquiry officer during office hours for anyone interested in fostering. Alternatively, potential applicants can visit our website or email to request information. An information pack including a Registration of Interest Form is sent to enquirers within 24 hours.

Recruitment of carers is planned to maximise interest in foster care. Recruitment campaigns are supported by a dedicated publicity officer. Regular foster carer recruitment events are held throughout the year and target specific campaigns including National Foster Care Fortnight.

Recruitment is focused on the areas of greatest need including permanent placements, sibling groups, teenagers, and short breaks for children who have disabilities. Campaigns have supported recruitment for carers for mixed heritage, Black and Asian children, and geographical areas that are underrepresented with foster carers.

On completion of the Registration of Interest Form, Local Authority checks are carried out, and a phone interview completed. If the application is successful an initial visit is arranged where further discussion will take place to establish, for example, whether the prospective carers are likely to have sufficient space, and time, to foster and more information about the task of fostering is given.

After a Stage 1 agreement form is completed, the service will carry out Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, Probation, The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), health visitor/schools' references (if the prospective carers have children) and character references. Applicants must have full health assessments completed by their GP.

Prospective carers will be invited to commence the assessment process and complete the Stage 2 Assessment Agreement subject to satisfactory checks and references. An assessment will usually take 3-4 months involving approximately 8 visits. A specific form designed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) is used for assessment and is competency based. Applicants will be invited to attend a pre-approval course, called "Skills to Foster" and are required to complete on-line training courses.

Following the assessment, the social worker will write a report, which is read, amended if necessary and signed by the applicant. The report is submitted to a Fostering Panel whose task it is to consider the suitability of the applicants to become foster carers, and their capacity to meet the National Minimum Standards. At the Panel, all members will have read the reports. Prospective carers and the assessing social worker will attend the panel. Foster carers can only be carers for one fostering provider.

Following the Panel, a recommendation is made to the Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service, Child Safeguarding Quality Assurance). Where foster carers are approved, a letter of approval detailing the terms under which the carer is approved, and the matching criteria, will be sent i.e., children's ages; gender; the number of placements, and the type of placement.

If prospective foster carers do not agree with the decision made by the fostering agency, they may make representations to the Agency Decision Maker. Any applicant wanting to challenge the ADM's decision can request for the matter to be considered by the Independent Review Mechanism.

Following approval, the carer will be sent:

- Foster Carer Agreement
- Complaints and Access to Records information
- A copy of the Foster Carers National Minimum Standards
- The Fostering Services Regulations (2011/13)
- Foster Carer's Logbook
- Fostering Network leaflets on record keeping, insurance, contact, regulations
- Information on taxation for carers
- Notification details
- Virtual School Team Information
- Children's guides according to carer's approval
- Application form for Leicester City Council Leisure passes / Library access
- Fostering Training information
- Training Support and Development Standards
- Promotional support and information aimed at foster carers.

Following approval, responsibility for the carer's support and supervision will transfer to the Supervision and Support Team located within the Fostering Service.

Kinship Foster Carers

A family member or Connected Person may be identified as a potential future foster carer for a specific child or children by a social worker and will be referred for assessment by the Kinship Assessment Team.

The Service Manager, acting as the Nominated Officer, may agree to an immediate placement with the Kinship Carer, under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning,

Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, following an Initial Viability Assessment (IVA). The child's social worker will inform the Kinship Assessment Team Manager of an immediate placement, if made. This will trigger a full assessment by the Kinship Assessment Team.

Following a recommendation by the Fostering Panel and approval by the Agency Decision Maker, a letter of approval detailing the terms under which the carer is approved will be sent including the specific children's details, the number of placements, and the type of placement.

Following approval, the Kinship Foster Carer will be sent the same information as that sent to all mainstream foster carers as detailed above.

Following approval, responsibility for the carer's support and supervision will transfer to the Supervision and Support Team located within the Fostering Service.

Our policy on Kinship Foster Care Placements is contained in Appendix 2.

Types of Placements

The service provides:

- Family placements for children and young people from birth up to and including the age of 18 years.
- Placements for babies and young children, including those with a range of complex needs.
- Placements for children with disabilities and those children with medical needs who need adapted accommodation.
- Placement for children and young people who are seeking safety from abroad.
- Transition support to another placement, return home or independent supported living post 16/17 years of age, as part of a planned process.
- Placements for children and young people from varying ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.
- Support from the Child and Families Support Team (CFST) to provide appropriate direct work to maintain placement stability.
- Support for young people who are aged 18 to continue to live with their foster family as part of 'Staying Put' provisions.

Emergency placements

These placements are initially provided for 24 hours, and up to 5 working days, pending work to return the child home to their previous placement or an alternative placement. Some placements may continue to be provided for a short-term period (where the care plan agrees this assessment, and the carer is approved for such placements).

Short-term placements

These placements are intended to meet the care plan for the child to enable them to return home or to an alternative placement within a short timescale. Flexibility of care is a significant feature in ensuring success in moving children on to their next placements, at an appropriate time, in consideration of the child's needs and circumstances.

Permanent placements

These placements are where the child's care plan is permanency, within foster care. Foster Carers return to the Fostering Panel to approve the match and update their approval as permanent foster carers for the child.

Kinship (Family and Friend) Foster Care

This provision is where relatives or friends are approved for specific, named children. The length of the placement will vary, dependent on whether permanency is achieved through kinship care, Special Guardianship, or a return to a parent.

Assessment and Support Plans for Special Guardianship

The service contributes to the assessment for Special Guardianship Orders and support plans, where the foster carer seeks or obtains a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) on a child for whom they are caring.

Short Breaks

This service gives support to families caring for children with disabilities by providing time limited overnight stays and short breaks for children, to help support families and offer new experiences for children.

Support for Foster Carers

- A named, allocated supervising social worker for approved foster carer(s)
- Membership for all fostering households to Foster Talk
- An independent 24-hour support line operated by Foster Talk
- Discounted activities and days out through Foster Talk
- A comprehensive Foster Carer Handbook
- Recreational activities supported through the Leisure Fund
- Free sports pass for use in all city swimming pools and gym facilities
- A rolling training programme linked to carers' accreditation levels
- Briefing sessions on key issues on national and local changes
- Development and peer support group sessions
- Therapeutic support services for children with more complex needs
- Corporate membership of the Fostering Network
- Representation on the Corporate Parenting Forum
- Specialist equipment provided to meet assessed placement needs

Ongoing Professional Development

All carers will discuss their development and training needs with their supervising social worker and new on-line training courses are available to all carers.

An annual training plan is produced by the service, and newsletters are regularly sent to all carers detailing courses available.

There are joint training opportunities for foster carers to attend training with supervising social workers, Fostering Panel members and other professionals.

A carers' annual review will highlight all courses undertaken and those that might be required to maintain the carers' approval, and to develop their knowledge and skills.

Each carer has their own Training, Support and Development Standards information, so they can build up a portfolio of training, specific work, or research study they have undertaken. Foster carers are encouraged to complete this online, and the service will support foster carers to do this successfully.

Support for Young People

Leicester City provides:

- Access to primary mental health workers for young people who require assessment for services about their behavioural or emotional needs.
- Access to a Virtual School Team of professionals whose remit it is to raise the educational attainment of children looked after and secure appropriate educational arrangements for young people either in a mainstream school or specialist provision.
- A dedicated health team of Children Looked After nurses advising and implementing a health care programme to support the general health and well-being of children looked after and living in foster care.
- A dedicated Leaving Care Advisor for young people who are preparing to leave care, to live independently and access education, employment, or training into adulthood.
- A free sports pass for use in all city swimming pools and gym facilities and access to a discretionary Leisure Fund to maximise leisure and well-being opportunities.

- A dedicated Children and Young People's Rights and Participation Team, for children looked after to ensure young people know and understand their rights.
- Access to advice, assistance and advocacy for children and young people in having their views heard, or in making complaints.
- A regular newsletter for all children looked after and opportunities for young people in foster care to meet.
- Opportunities provided through initiatives supported by the work of the Corporate Parenting Board. These can include free cycle riding courses, free access to museum activities, work experience and apprenticeship schemes, job interview practice and recreational activities.
- An Independent Visitor service for children and young people who do not have visits from their parents or extended family (or a significant adult).
- The opportunity to participate in the Children in Care Council and other Care Experienced consultation activities about the council's services.

Children and Young Peoples Guides

All children who are placed in a foster home, receive a booklet which informs them of what the service is for, what it might feel like to live in another family home, the services that children and young people can expect from a foster carer and the service, and what to do if they are unhappy about any aspect of their care.

Children and young people's guides are available for differing age ranges and reading abilities and types of placements, and reviewed regularly with young people, to ensure the details are updated.

A copy of the children's guide is also available to carers of young people, their parents, and social workers on request.

Monitoring the Quality of the Service

The Fostering Service is monitored and inspected by Ofsted.

Foster carers receive at least one unannounced visit a year to their home by the supervising social worker, and regular supervisory visits.

The Service Manager responsible for the day-to-day management of the Foster Care Service monitors a range of matters identified in the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35 [1]), to ensure the standards are adhered to and the service is developing to meet the needs of a range of children.

Inspectors from Ofsted inspect the Local Authority's Foster Care Service as part of the inspection of local authority childcare services according to requirements laid down by the Department for Education and can contact or inspect foster care homes unannounced.

Complaints made about the Service, including carers, are monitored on a routine basis; this also includes any allegations made about staff or carers. A central record is kept of all complaints as part of the agency's quality management process; these records are open to inspection by Ofsted.

All children looked after, and young people have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who chairs their Child Looked after Review meetings to ensure their care plan is being met and they are being provided with quality care by a range of services to meet their needs. The IRO's role is to ensure the 'child's voice' is at the centre of their plan, but to also ensure parent's and foster carer's views are considered alongside other parties in relation to how well a child is progressing.

The Role of the Fostering Panel

The fostering panel considers whether:

- Prospective carers are suitable to provide foster care, and
- Carers are suitable for a particular child or children (matching)
- The Panel has responsibility to take an interest in the general running of the fostering service and to receive reports giving over-view information about the general running of the team.

The Fostering Panel is governed by guidance and regulations. Panel members include:

- An Independent Chair
- Independent Vice Chair
- Social workers with experience of fostering and other relevant specialisms
- Independent Members (not employed by the Fostering Service and who may have personal experience of fostering or other relevant experience).
- Panel Adviser

The fostering panel meets monthly or bi-monthly to ensure the process is not subject to delay. Prospective carers are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel.

Following a recommendation of the Fostering Panel, the reports and minutes of the meeting will be passed to the Agency Decision Maker who has responsibility for decision making on behalf of the Agency. The decisions are made following consultation with the panel adviser and access to the panel minutes. Decisions are made within seven days of the approved minutes of the panel recommendation. The decision will be put in writing to the prospective carer(s).

Complaints Procedure

The Fostering Service has a complaints procedure. Copies of the procedure and complaints forms can be requested from the Fostering Service by telephoning: 0116 454 4510.

All complaints and matters of concern are treated with respect and will be dealt with as promptly as possible, and within specified timescales. The fostering service aims to resolve problems in the first instance informally through discussion with the carer.

Children who are living in foster placements are children in care of the Local Authority and have access to the council's Children's Rights Officer, who will assist any child in making a complaint if they wish and support them throughout the complaints process.

Whilst the investigation is ongoing, the designated Complaints Manager will make sure that carers and young people are informed of progress.

Where it is appropriate, the parents of children (or legal guardians) will be informed of any complaint or allegation made and the outcome, and their views considered.

Parents and family members, friends or advocates can act on behalf of a child to make a complaint about the Fostering Service, or the child or young person can ask the Children's Rights Service to support them.

Contact details for the Complaints Manager are as follows:

Complaints and Access to Records Team
Mezzanine level
Halford House
Charles Street
Leicester
LE1 1HA

Tel: 0116 454 2430

Email: youngpeople-complaints@leicester.gov.uk

If following the local complaints process the carer or young person remains unsatisfied with the outcome, the Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints about Council services. The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman

The Oaks No2

Westwood Way

Westwood Business Park

Coventry, CV4 8JB

Telephone: 024 7682 0000

Safeguarding Arrangements

All carers will receive training on the local child safeguarding arrangements in accordance with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) procedures.

The Fostering Service adheres to the policies and procedures of the LSCP in keeping children safe and responding to concerns when children are thought to be at risk.

The Fostering Service will listen to every concern that is raised with them about the care of children who are placed in its service. If there are concerns about the welfare or treatment of children physically, sexually, emotionally, or about neglectful care, the service will initiate enquiries in accordance with LSCP procedures.

The assessment of foster carers includes the taking of full employment and accommodation histories. Checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and local authority checks are completed on everyone aged over 18 years of age living in the household. A range of referees are contacted and visited prior to foster carer approval.

Where concerns are made about the foster carers or that of their family, there is a procedure within the Fostering Service to inform carers (at an appropriate time) of any allegations made about them and what is likely to happen. This procedure is also laid out in the Foster Carer Handbook and for staff in the staff procedure manual.

Allegations that are made against foster carers are investigated using an established procedure whereby all allegations are considered by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). An independent person chairs the initial strategy meeting and oversees the process.

In the event of complaints or concerns being raised, foster carers will receive support from the Foster Care Service and Foster Talk. Children will be supported by social workers, a Children's Rights Officer, Independent Visitors, and the family as appropriate.

During any safeguarding investigation, the placement of the child (and any other children) will be carefully considered during all stages of the investigation and subsequently when the outcome of the investigation is known.

Children and carers and relevant others will be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

The Fostering Service works closely with the placing social workers for the children, the Safeguarding Unit and relevant others including Police, to co-operate with any investigation and ensure records are kept of all complaints and allegations made and their outcomes.

Each foster care family will have a Safer Caring Policy completed prior to approval and regularly reviewed. The Safer Caring Policy aims to reduce risks to all family members and the Child who is being Looked After. When an investigation has been held, and where there is a substantiated allegation of abuse made about a foster carer.

Appendix 1: Recruitment Pathway for Mainstream Carers

- 1.** Enquiry received. Enquiry Officer inputs on database.
- 2.** Information pack sent out – booklet and Register of Interest Form (ROIF).
- 3.** Completed ROIF returned. Enquiry Officer inputs on database.
LA checks completed.
- 4.** Team Manager allocates ROIF to SSWs.
 - Telephone interview completed
 - Initial visit completed (if appropriate)
 - Application accepted or declined.
 - Letter sent to applicant to advise about the outcome.
- 5.** Stage 1 assessment allocated.
 - Stage One Agreement completed
 - Checks and references completed.
 - DBS completed.
 - Medicals, training and learning identified.
 - Move to Stage 7 if satisfactory. Stage 6 if not
- 6.** Assessment ended due to Stage 1 information.
Letter sent within 10 working days of last information received.
- 7.** Stage 1 completed
Applicants are advised they will move to Stage Two
Stage 2 assessment process commences
- 8.** Stage 2 assessment report completed
All paperwork completed in file – electronic and paper.

9. The assessment report is presented to the fostering panel which makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker – the prospective foster carer is encouraged to attend with the assessing social worker.

10. The Agency Decision Maker considers the Fostering Panel recommendation and any other advice before making the decision as to the suitability of the prospective foster carer to be approved as a foster carer for Leicester City Council.

11. If the prospective foster carer is unhappy with the decision (qualifying determination), then they may make representations or request that the Independent Review Mechanism review the decision.

Appendix 2: Kinship Foster Care Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Kinship Foster Care is where a child or young person who is Looked After lives with family, friends or other people who are 'connected' with them in a placement approved by the Local Authority. This will be under a Care Order (Section 31 Children Act 1989), Interim Care Order, or provision of accommodation by agreement (Section 20 CA 1989). Kinship foster carers are assessed and approved under The Fostering Services Regulations (2011) in line with BAAF Guidance, Fostering National Minimum Standards and the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010).
2. A key principle is that children and young people should be enabled to live within their families where it is consistent with their welfare. If children and young people cannot remain at home, then placement with family, friends or connected people should be explored. Having a secure attachment and placement stability are important in building resilience and promoting children's long-term well-being. Children within kinship care are generally reported to feel secure, happy and feel a sense of belonging within their family. Research also evidences high levels of commitment from Kinship carers, their strong bonds with the children, the pleasure they find in the children themselves and the satisfaction they derive from caring.
 - 2.1. Kinship placements can allow children to maintain positive links with their heritage and their sense of identity and self-esteem can be maximised.
 - 2.2. Many carers are grandparents where issues of age and health may be a significant factor. There may also be complex family relationships, housing overcrowding or financial difficulties. Carers need time and the opportunity to reflect on the impact of their decision. Ultimately, the assessment process with Kinship carers is designed to weigh up these factors with the welfare of the child or young person as the priority.

3. Assessments of prospective kinship carers

- 3.1. In Leicester assessments are undertaken by the Kinship Fostering Assessment Team.
- 3.2. The workers within the team undertake assessments of prospective carers and provide supervision and support to the carers where a child has already been placed with the carers. Once approved, the ongoing supervision and support of kinship foster carers passes to the Kinship Supervision and Support Team. Where children and young people leave kinship care for reunification with birth parents or to permanent arrangements such as Special Guardianship Orders, the Supervision and Support Team in conjunction with the child's social worker continue to provide support until the order is made or the child returns home.
- 3.3. All referrals are welcomed without prejudice. This includes referrals irrespective of the age, gender, sexuality, or ethnic, cultural and religious heritage of the applicant. Where possible, assessments are allocated to Social Workers that reflect the heritage of the applicant. The assessing Social Worker will be provided with access to appropriate support and guidance.

4. The Referral System

- 4.1. It may be the case that there are several family members or friends who come forward to care for children. Social workers undertake a joint Initial Viability Assessment (IVA) along with an experienced worker from the Kinship Team, to identify whether a full assessment is needed.

5. The joint Initial Viability Assessment

- 5.1. When undertaking this viability assessment, the following will be covered.

- Relevant sections of BAAF Form C

Interviewing the prospective carers: This will cover issues such as their motivation, their relationship with the child, birth parents and contact. Issues of safety, parenting capacity, and family history are considered and areas such as

whether the applicants have any major health or child protection concerns. See Schedule 4 of the 2010 Regulations.

- Assessing the accommodation

Assessment is made of the space for a child or children and the safety of sharing a bedroom.

- Safety checks

Social Care client database (Liquid Logic) and police checks are completed on all members of the household, checking with other Local Authorities if the proposed carers are known to them, if they do not live in Leicester City.

- The child's wishes and feelings about the proposed arrangements must be considered.

6. Regulation 24 Placements

- 6.1. There is provision in the legislation for children and young people Looked After to be placed with carers for a time limited period where a full kinship foster care assessment is to be completed. The principle behind this is to not delay placements and minimise placement moves.
- 6.2. Where an immediate placement is made, checks are undertaken, and the Joint IVA completed, before placement. Good practice includes reviewing case files and any records on potential carers, to identify any concerns or risks to the child.
- 6.3. Temporary approval is granted. Information about the child including the Care Plan, is given to the carer, and a Placement Plan is prepared. The Child's Social Worker will visit weekly until the first Review, and then at least monthly. The full assessment is then undertaken.
- 6.4. Where a child has been placed under Regulation 24, although such placements may be positive in the longer term, there is clearly some degree of disruption if the outcome of the assessment is not positive.

- 6.5. A Foster Carer Agreement (Regulation 24) is signed by the carers, and Service Manager. The carers will receive a Fostering Allowance and are eligible for equipment support.
- 6.6. If the full assessment has not been completed after 16 weeks, agreement is sought for an extension to the temporary approval, (Regulation 25). The IRO is informed. The extension is up to a further 8 weeks.

7. The Assessment Process

- 7.1. Kinship foster carers are subject to as comprehensive assessment process as mainstream carers, but the assessment is focussed on meeting the needs of the specific child or children rather than generic issues. The BAAF Form C is used.
- 7.2. The assessment itself comprises the following: -
 - A series of weekly home visits (usually 6 to 10 visits) covering the applicant's history, relationships, support networks, parenting skills, any child protection issues, Anti Discriminatory Practice issues. Currently these visits are virtual and face to face.
 - Applicants have a full medical with their GP.
 - A minimum of 3 referees are interviewed – one family member and two non-related individuals.
 - Statutory checks are undertaken (DBS, Social Care Records, CAFCASS, Housing, Schools, Health Visitor, Employer).
 - The views of the child or children who are looked after are sought as are the views of any children or young people in the household.
 - Birth parents are asked about their knowledge of the parenting provided by the applicants, historical and current.
- 7.3. Workers undertaking the assessment will make a recommendation as to whether prospective carers should be approved as kinship foster carers. This is presented as a report to the Fostering Panel who then make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

7.4. If the outcome of the assessment (at any stage of the process) is negative, this will be discussed with the applicant, the Team Manager and Social Worker and an appropriate course of action decided upon. Legal advice will be sought, particularly in care proceedings, and advice given to the applicant.

8. Support to Kinship Foster Carers

- Kinship foster carers are entitled to receive the full fostering allowance (this includes Regulation 24 and 25 Placements).
- Kinship Foster carers are eligible to take up all the training offered by the Fostering service.
- Kinship foster carers receive specific training related to kinship care. They are expected to complete First Aid and Training, Support and Development Standards training offered by the Fostering Service.
- Kinship foster carers can get practical help with start-up costs and equipment such as beds, bedding etc.
- All Kinship Carers will have an allocated Supervising Social Worker and have access to out of ours support available to all Foster Carers.

9. Post Approval

9.1. All kinship foster carers have their own Supervising Social Worker. Their role is to supervise the placement and carers. Regular supervisory visits are undertaken alongside unannounced Visits and Annual Reviews.

9.2. Where appropriate we will also provide advice to carers on how to secure legal orders for permanency e.g., Special Guardianship Orders and complete the necessary reports in conjunction with the childcare social worker.

10. Partnership working

Communication and partnership working between Social Workers, Kinship Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers in the fostering service is crucial to the success of kinship foster care placements.

Review of the Statement of Purpose

The Fostering Service reviews the Statement of Purpose on an annual basis to ensure its aims, objectives, services, and facilities provided remain appropriate to the care of children and young people. The next review is due in April 2026.

The Fostering Service maintains a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that support the management of the Service, the care of children and advice / guidance / protocols to foster carers which are contained in the Foster Carer Handbook many of which can be found on our website www.leicester.gov.uk/fostering.



4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

4.1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

27 May 2025

4.2 Legal implications

4.2.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report, which is for information purposes only.

Susan Holmes, Head of Law

21.05.2025

4.3 Equalities implications

4.3.1 The Equality Act expects us to show due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations. Our public sector duty expects us to demonstrate how we do this, and included within this is how we undertake decisions, what information we are informed by and what impacts we have taken into consideration to address needs now and in the future.

The aims, objectives and services provided by the Leicester City Council fostering service as detailed in the annual report and activity refer to the support provided to our children looked after across all protected characteristics, the service continues to attract applicants with a range of heritages. This report provides an overview of the activity and performance of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. The Fostering Service's aim is to maintain a sufficiently large and diverse range of foster carers and short-breaks carers to match children and young people's needs.

The service also advances equality of opportunity and fosters good relations by encouraging and publicising fostering services to enable all members of the community to

consider fostering as a positive option and to recruit from a wide variety of backgrounds to meet children's individual needs.

In addition, the service helps to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations by recruiting foster carers who will respect the diverse cultures and lifestyles within society and who will bring up children and young people who will respect these differences. Potentially, children and young people will come from a wide range of backgrounds; all have different family situations, experiences, and will all need different types of care.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

21 May 2025

4.4 Climate Emergency implications

4.4.1 There are no significant climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Duncan Bell, Change Manager (Climate Emergency). Ext. 37 2249.

22nd May 2025

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

4.5.1 None

5. Background information and other papers:

5.1 Fostering Service Annual Statement of Purpose 2024-25.

6. Summary of appendices:

6.1 None