



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

18TH NOVEMBER 2020

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to note the activity of the Leicestershire Fostering Agency for March 2019 – March 2020.

Background

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Agency which undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering.
3. Under the National Minimum Standards (NMS) (25.7), all Fostering agencies are required to provide a report to the Executive¹ regarding the activity and work of the Fostering Agency and Fostering Panel. This report provides information about the Service's work during 2019-20. The full report can be found at Appendix A to this report.

Summary of Report

4. The service recognizes that it operates within a competitive market, with both surrounding local authorities and private providers of placements. As such, ambitious priorities and targets were set in the following areas:
 - Increasing Leicestershire's market share of mainstream foster carers
 - Increase in the numbers of kinship carers
 - Increase the number of Supported Lodgings providers
 - Increase Leicestershire's specialist foster carers
 - Ensuring carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care to children and young people.

¹ The executive in Leicestershire is the Lead Member and Scrutiny Members.

5. A range of work is completed by several teams within the service to ensure priorities and targets are met. The Recruitment Team is enhancing the overall recruitment and experience of prospective foster carers, the Assessment Team assesses prospective foster carers and ensures quality reports are presented to the Fostering Panel and the Team around the Child supports foster carers to provide the best possible care. The Kinship Team assesses prospective foster carers who are known to the child (for example family or friends) and the Dedicated Placement Support Service supports specialist carers, assisting children to move or remain in family-based placements along with the recruitment, assessment and support of independent visitors (and matching to children).

2019-20 Achievements highlights

6. Recruitment of new carers: In 2019/20 the service has received and processed 499 fostering enquiries and undertaken 90 initial visits in applicants' homes with 54 progressing to Stage 1 of assessment. 17 fostering households were approved (creating 23 placements), 1 Pathway Carer was approved, and 5 Supported Lodgings Carer households and 39 Kinship Carers were approved.
7. The capacity of the Dedicated Placements Support Team has been increased to offer more advice to foster carers and children who have complex needs and a positive response from the Foster Carers Survey was received about how the service supports its carers, so leading to better retention rates.
8. The Service has strengthened practice through revised Foster Carer Review paperwork, ensuring each foster family has an up to date chronology and that this informs practice and foster carer development and the completion of joint viabilities assessments with locality fieldwork teams when undertaking a Connected Carers Assessment (which has and will continue to improve early permanence decisions). The Service has also reviewed and revised the Independent Visitors Scheme with a significant increase in Independent Visitor applicants.
9. The service has also strengthened its voice work with both foster and birth children, including Sons and Daughters support events and consultation.
10. Other key activity includes a reduction of applicants leaving the assessment process (20 in 19/20 and 44 in 2018/19). Eight Private Fostering approvals and nine Adoption Orders Granted (non-agency adoption). 35 children are living with 27 Supported Lodgings providers (internal provision) and 90% of young people in Supported Lodgings have placement stability.
11. In the Foster Carers Survey most foster carers stated that they enjoyed the fostering events, training was excellent, relevant and useful, they felt that they meet with their supervising social worker often enough and felt they were listened to by the fostering service.

Overview of targets and priorities for 2020/21:

12. For 2020- 21 the key priorities are to continue to improve and support marketing with specific campaigns around mainstream carers, supported lodgings and specialist carers. This includes targets of recruiting an additional:
- 25 mainstream foster carers
 - 2 specialist carers
 - 5 supported Lodgings carers
 - 20 new independent visitors
13. In addition, the service will strengthen further retention of carers through the development of an Enhanced Carers Pathway, allowing carers the opportunity for professional development and recognising the additional skills some carers demonstrate and require in their fostering role to parent therapeutically.
14. The service will offer a range of new and bespoke training courses including ‘how to manage loss’ and ‘how to manage stress and anxiety’, offering connected parenting and offer of regular therapeutic parenting workshops led by a psychotherapist/ consultant for carers to explore how to therapeutically manage the challenging behaviours of traumatised children, offering bespoke professional input .
15. The service will develop a training module for foster families moving children onto adoption and develop the signs of safety case pod meetings to include a broader range of professionals including attendance of foster carers.
16. Finally, the service will develop Carers Information Evenings by including topical discussions, such as enhancing a child’s understanding of race and ethnicity, inviting speakers with expert knowledge and wisdom on specific areas of interest.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Leicestershire Fostering Agency Annual Report 2019-20:

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