

**Warwickshire County Council
Fostering Services Annual Report**

1. Introduction

This is the first annual report of the Fostering Services since the re-configuration of the Services. A structural chart is included at the end of the report.

The re-configuration follows recommendations made by a working group chaired by Brenda Vincent. The re-configuration was agreed by S.L.T. and took effect from 1 October 2011.

The Services was inspected by Ofsted in June 2011 against the revised Foster Care Minimum Standard which became operational on 1st April 2011. These standards had been reissued to place greater weight on outcomes for children, delegation of responsibilities to foster carers and clearer expectations on levels of support Local Authorities and I.F.A.'s are expected to provide to carers. The Service was also involved in Ofsted's Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Inspection in 2011 and underwent a Risk and Assurance Internal Audit in April 2012. The Care Planning Regulations, which were also implemented on the 1st April 2011 also significantly impacted on this Service leading to revisions in the Placement Plan documentation.

The Service provides a range of foster carers offering placements from E.D.T. placements, short term and respite, long term and permanence, Parent and Baby and Staying Put placements for young people over 18.

On the 31st March the number of Foster Carer Households was 352. The Service is successful in being able to meet the placement needs of the majority of Warwickshire's Looked after children and young people.

2. Re-configuration of the Service

Following the work and recommendations of the working group, all staff members were consulted on the proposed changes involved and the new structure. Staff were invited to state their preference re: working tasks and geographical areas. It was important to ensure that Fostering Services had a presence in the North and South of the County and Rugby.

In addition co-location within Children's Teams was sought. This has been partially successful. In addition, Fostering Services attendance at Children's Panels had to be maintained.

The structure now consists of:

- Fostering North Practice
- Fostering South Practice
- Kinship Care Practice (set up on 1 January 2012)
- Central Recruitment and Training Practice

In additions E.D.T. foster carers remain within the Emergency Duty Team Services. The Service also retains the Practice Leader Development post.

The re-organisation of the Services has been within the current establishment staffing levels. At this stage, it is uncertain whether the staffing establishment within the Kinship Care Practice is appropriate and this remains under review.

South Fostering Service

This Service is responsible for assessing, supporting, supervising and reviewing foster carers from Warwick, Stratford and Rugby. The team is currently based in Orion House, but will be moving in late 2012, early 2013.

It would be beneficial for this Practice to be based with Warwick/Leamington Children's Team when the property rationalisation programme in Warwick district takes place. The key benefits of combining the 3 previous Fostering Teams, is this team is now large enough to respond to different service pressures. Staff members, especially those supporting carers in Stratford and Rugby, work flexibly, hot desking from other sites and working from home. Assessments are also allocated faster.

North Fostering Service

Based in Hilary Road, this service manages foster carers in Nuneaton, Bedworth and North Warwickshire and Coventry. The Practice provides the same services as South Fostering. This team currently shares office space with ISIS. Building rationalisation means this team will be in the same office as Nuneaton Children's Team in future.

Fostering Duty Service

With the re-configuration of the service, South Duty and North Duty were amalgamated into one county duty system based in Nuneaton. The benefits from this re-configuration include:

- Consistency of practice
The service is delivered by 6 Social Workers and 1 Manager (2nd Manager available). This reduces the need for 2 Managers to be on duty at the same time. Carers will get to know Duty Social Workers and vice versa.
- Improvement in relationships with Multi Agency Commissioning and Agencies on the Fostering Framework Agreement.
- Lack of repetition of tasks between North/South placements searches. These are now county searches. There are standard expectations.
- Easier to identify trends re: needs of placement location, age etc. An example of this is identifying the volume of requests for respite placements.

Challenges to the County Duty system include

- Amalgamating two different systems has taken time.
- Currently the social workers in the duty system are all based in the North. These workers have had to learn about some carers including approval categories, vacancy rates, strengths and support needs (this will improve with time as carers are used for placements from county duty)
- Communication between North and South Fostering, but also communication with Children's Safeguarding Teams in the South (again, this is improving)

The greatest challenge currently to the Duty Service is the volume of referrals. Between April 2011 and March 2012, the Duty Service received in excess of 480 referrals. Over 200 of these were new referrals including requests for respite care. There were 61 referrals for respite care in this period. (In the 4 months from April 2012 a further 71 referrals for respite have been received).

The number of Looked After Children in April 2010 was 640 and in March 2011 was 679.

Alongside this increase in Looked After numbers there has been:

- Staying Put placements. This provision meets the needs of Looked After Children but the impact is often a reduction in numbers of children placed with the carer (adults cannot share with children)
- Numbers of young people, because of their individual needs, requiring solo placements.
- Increase in respite requests. This in part is due to the delay in children moving onto adoption or returning home. This increase requires further investigation.
- The numbers of Parent and Baby placement requests. There were 38 requests for Parent and Baby placements with a growing number of parents being over 18 years and requests for the baby placements including children up to the age of 4.
- Increase in request for placements for young people aged 17 and over.
- Fostering Framework providers do not have the capacity to meet the 3 Local Authority needs (Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire). This is resulting in more spot purchasing outside of the Framework Agreement.

There were 146 referrals made to the Framework in this period.. From this, 36 placements were made with either Tier 1 or Tier 2. 36 further placements were spot purchased.

The remaining 71 children were either found 'in house' provision (including some changes to carers approval categories), moved into independent accommodation, had STEPS or residential placement or did not come into care.

Kinship Care Practice

This Practice was established in in January 2012 with a newly appointed Practice Leader. This Practice is based in Rugby.

This Practice is currently not fully staffed. There should be 4.5 Social Workers but as of 31st March 2011 there were 2 full time Social Work vacancies.

Benefits of a county Kinship Care Practice include:

- Development of expertise in a variety of kinship assessments.
- Closer working relationship with Legal Services.
- Opportunity to develop be-spoke Kinship Support Services i.e. specific preparation sessions.
- Opportunity to monitor the volume of Kinship assessments and the outcomes.

Current challenges to the Kinship Team include:

- Not fully staffed

- Volume of referrals
- Recognition that each of the Children's Safeguarding Teams approaches this work slightly differently.
- Kinship policy procedures and forms still at a draft stage.
- Delay in receiving information and referrals from Children's Safeguarding Teams.

Central Recruitment and Training Practice

This practice has remained in Warwick, but has reduced staffing. A new Practice Leader has been appointed (in post from May 2012).

This practice's core business is to recruit and train foster carers and to provide the opportunity to gain a professional qualification through the teams QCF centre. Recruitment priorities remain carers for teenagers (young people 10-17 years represent the largest group of looked after children), Permanence and Parent and baby. There is also a growing need for carers to offer placement to sibling groups under 5 years of age.

Family Link Service

This service provides respite placements for children with disabilities. As of the 31st March 2012 there were 28 Family Link carers.

The funding provided by Children's Services for Family Link was one of the services that WCC agreed to reduce funding over 3 years. During this year, the staffing ratio has reduced from 1 Practice Leader and 2 Social Workers to 1 Social Worker. With the introduction of the Care Planning Regulations the majority of placements have been assessed as Section 17 placements. Work is ongoing between I.D.S. and Fostering Services to plan for the future of this service. The Social Worker is jointly supervised by the Fostering Registered Manager and an I.D.S. Practice Leader. Despite the changes, the service remains one of a number of support services for families with children who have disabilities.

Social Care Workers

The re-configuration of the service has resulted in Social Care Workers providing a consistent approach to support to carers across the county. Two Practice Leaders (1 North and 1 South) manage all the Fostering Social Care Workers. This enables the service to prioritise need.

There have been 2 county meetings with Brenda Vincent, Lesley Malley and Social Care Workers. These meetings have enabled Social Care Workers to prioritise tasks, with support being their key task. Two Social care workers have been identified to participate in Triple P training, and during 2012-13 it is hoped that all Social Care Workers will be trained in the Triple P Parenting Programme. A service which will be used to support carers.

Administration Team

With the changes in locations and retirements this service has undergone a high level of change. The service now has a Team Administrator who joined the team in April 2012. As of the 31st March there were 2 full time administrative vacancies (now appointed to)

Administrative Service developments have included the development of specific fostering budgets and on-going work on Care First to ensure appropriate fostering codes and improved screens.

3. Challenges to the Fostering Service

➤ *Demand for Foster Placements capacity issues*

As the Looked After population increases, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide the volume of placements needed.

Matching placements is becoming extremely difficult. Warwickshire is not alone with this problem. There is a national shortage of foster carers.

Within Warwickshire the Fostering Service is recognised as a key component to meeting the needs of children and young people locally. The service has continued to receive funding and Foster Carer Payments for caring for children have remained in line with the Fostering Network Payment Rates. This lack of placement can result in:

- More placement moves for children and young people (due to limited matching opportunities)
- Placements needing increased level of support from both Children's Teams and the Fostering Services.
- Increased disruption rate.
- The need to undertake agency searches This is extremely time consuming as the duty service has to negotiate with both Framework providers and other providers. These searches can be requested 2 and 3 times for the same child.
- The Framework Agreement which is due to run for another 12 months has failed to respond to Local Authorities increasing demands.
 - *Ability to meet the needs of certain categories of young people*
 - Warwickshire does not have any specialist schemes
- Lack of solo placements increases the need to look outside of the WCC Fostering Services. Children and Young People are then placed further afield, with all of the difficulties this creates for the child, their family and the Social Worker. The current skills to foster payment scheme makes solo placements less attractive to experienced carers.
- Parent and baby placements. These are complex placements with different expectations on carers including attending court
- Permanency placements. These placements are often taken up with short term placements making planning difficult.

➤ *Recruitment of Foster Carers*

The current recruitment market is an extremely competitive environment. The Framework Agreement resulted in 13 I.F.A.'s increasing recruitment in Warwickshire. Other Local Authorities, such as Coventry, are also advertising in this area (20 mile radius for Coventry takes their service into Warwickshire).

Warwickshire Recruitment Services is currently reviewing the front end of the service.

The team currently recruit via radio, adverts in a variety of newspapers and magazines, voucher scheme to encourage word of mouth recruitment, bus advertising, and direct marketing. With a new practice leader in post the service is now further streamlining the front end of the service. New campaigns are being developed using websites, Google, Facebook etc.

➤ *Kinship Services*

As a new practice this service, children's teams and legal services need to work together to 'bed in' new procedures, improve communications and work to tighter timescales.

This service is currently not fully staffed and the impact is assessments are still being allocated across the service. The vacant posts have been advertised, but in the short term it is creating additional pressures. Staffing levels will need to continually be reviewed.

The volume of kinship viability referrals continues to rise, often with 2 and 3 family members being put forward. Ideally there would be family meetings or family Group conferences to support families to prioritise the most appropriate member to be assessed. This is not happening at present due to staff shortages and children's teams not having the capacity. There

are still inconsistencies between children's teams and delays in getting referrals and information to the kinship practice.

Support needs for kinship carers are diverse and the service is working on support groups, information packs and specific preparation materials.

4. Service achievements

Appendix 2 is the annual data set for the service. Some key data as of 31 March 2012:

- 580 Foster placements
- 110 new carer applications
- 40 approvals
- 1 application rejected by fostering panel

➤ *Ofsted Inspection June 2011*

Ofsted gave the service an overall rating of 'Good' with some outstanding features

- Helping children to be healthy - good
- Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do - outstanding
- Helping children make a positive contribution - outstanding
- Achieving Economic Wellbeing - outstanding
- Organisation - good
- Promoting Equality and Diversity - outstanding

There were 2 recommendations:

- Ensure that foster carers are trained in health, first aid and administration of medication, they keep a written record of medication, first aid and treatment given to children during placement (NMS6). The service has revamped and increased the level of training offered re: health and first aid. First Aid has become a core training requirement for carers. On-line First Aid training is now provided.
- Ensure foster carers implement a proportionate approach to any risk assessment and Safe Care Practice Act (N.M.S.4).
- Safe Care Plans have been reviewed to ensure they are specific to a child in placement.

➤ *Risk and Assurance Services Audit 2011*

This audit highlighted 100% compliance in several areas:

- CRB
- Health checks
- Approval of carers by Head of Service
- Checks with Local Authorities
- Evidence of carers Skills Levels payments

Areas for Improvement:

- Guidance on ex-partner references
- Evidence of ID checks to be retained
- Payment of carers not up to date on Care First, resulting in over payments - missed payments

All the above areas have been/or are regularly reviewed. The new structure with one manager will improve consistency of practice re, references, ID etc.

Payments to carers is regularly reviewed by S.L.T., Finance and all Children's Teams are working to improve payment to carers.

➤ Training and Development of Carers

- Every year the service run over 50 training events for foster carers, each course has 20 -25 places available for carers, and an addition 2 places are available on every course for social workers/other professionals.
- On approval every fostering households starts to work towards completion of the CWDC training, support and development standards, they have one year in which to complete them. Completion of these standards and attendance at training is linked to the payment for skills scheme at level 1.
- Core Training is run 3 times per year and carers can complete these courses via a distance learning option which is available via hard copy or electronically. Courses in the core suite are Child Protection – Safeguarding, Attachments, Equality and Diversity, Making Placements Work and Basic First Aid. All courses in the core suite have a distance learning option available apart from the basic first aid which has an online option.
- Continual Professional Development training sits alongside the core training provision and offers more specialised training, foster carers select to attend courses that are relevant to the type of fostering provision they offer. Courses include Managing Challenging Behaviours Positively, Caring for Teenagers, Working Positively with Birth Families, Preparing for Permanency, Recording Skills, Allegations training, Self Harm, Internet Security and Safety, Cannabis and Alcohol training, Working with School, Promoting Healthy Lifestyles, Awareness of Domestic Abuse and its impact on children etc.
- Kinship carers are invited to all training and have an additional course specifically for them called Kinship Carers Training.
- A specific course is run for Male carers called Men in Foster Care and we are developing a stage 2 of this course.
- The children in care council are involved in the planning of many of the training courses on offer to carers and we are working to include the children in care council in more of our training, specifically the core training.
- All of our training is linked to the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Every Child Matters Outcomes. We have also linked training to the CWDC training, support and development standards and the QCF diploma for the children and young people's workforce.
- The QCF centre has received positive inspection reports for the last 8 years; the centre is considered a Centre of Excellence by the awarding body City and Guilds.

The Warwickshire Foster Carer Training Programme offers development opportunities to all foster carers. Foster carers have a key role in the life of children and young people and our aim is to provide them with professional training and development opportunities to support them with the children and young people they look after.

The Qualification Credit Framework (QCF) Diploma for the Children and Young Peoples Workforce is aimed at those people already working in the Children and Young People sector which includes Foster Carers. The intention is to make both the system and the qualifications offered far more relevant to the needs of employers and more flexible and accessible for learners. Completion of the QCF Diploma or the Warwickshire Modules is linked to the payment for skills scheme at level 2.

Benefits of the QCF Diploma to foster carers: Professional Qualification with further opportunities, Self Esteem and self confidence are boosted, Skills & Abilities recognised formally, better understanding of Partnership working. An assessor working with the carer for many months aids reflection gives support to learning and encourages participation in continual professional development activities.

Benefits of the QCF Diploma to the department: Clear Career Structure for Foster Carers, Professionally qualified workforce, Confident and happy carers mean happier children & YP,

Carers working towards educational achievements are more likely to assist the children and young people in their care with their education, A qualification is proof that someone has the right skills to do their job well, a key benefit we have noted is that there is evidence of more placement stability. We believe this is due to foster carers receiving regular support from their assessor, giving them opportunity to discuss issues and move forward.

We have 4 intakes a year and currently have 24 QCF learners working towards their diplomas and 1 carer has just completed, we have experienced no drop out from Warwickshire learners. QCF replaced NVQ and we were successful in helping over 150 foster carers to achieve their NVQ, 86 of these are still fostering actively for Warwickshire and 36 carers are from other fostering agencies.

➤ *Working in partnership with foster carers households*

The Registered Manager meets with the Warwickshire Foster Care Group 5 times a year. This enables the Manager to consult with the group re: ongoing developments. The newsletter also enables feedback from carers.

The service consults annually with all foster carers via a questionnaire (which is sent out to carers in September/October) Examples of developments from the responses include extra supervision and support for new foster carers, A planned review of carer finance with under fours.

➤ *New developments in the service include*

- The service has developed a DVD to assist unaccompanied asylum seekers to understand living in a foster family and for foster carers to begin to understand the additional needs of caring for an unaccompanied minor from another country.
- Carers having access to We Learn to enable confidential e mailing
- On Line First Aid training

5. Service Priorities for April 2011 - March 2012

The service has seen a lot of changes over the previous 12 months, via the introduction of new Fostering Minimum Standards and the re-configuration of the structure and the service. All of these changes need to settle in.

Priorities for 2012-13:

- To Increase the number of foster placements available via:
 - Streamlining the front end of the recruitment service. Increase numbers of groups, provide weekend preparation groups, directly book in home visits to potential carers if the initial telephone contact is positive.
 - Review and update recruitment material. Expand recruitment via websites, blogs, Google etc.
 - Increase the number of assessments completed within 6 months to 90% of assessments. Current N.M.S. is 8 months involvement in sub-regional working.
 - The Framework Agreement ends in 2013. The Service with M.A.C. need to review and secure a position within the consortium which provides local placements at a competitive price.
 - Children's Teams need to amend their practice and consider some external placements. There are at least 3 providers in the current Framework that offer a competitive price similar to the in-house costs. If the placement is local, it should be considered as it may be a more appropriate match.
- Review and improve processes to provide more permanent foster placements. Not all children/young people can return home or be adopted. Permanent care that has been well matched with a young person's needs is a positive alternative. It often ensures, a young person can remain in their local area and maintain contact with families.

- Recruit using individual adverts and profiles of young people. Dev carers not being entered into the Duty database.
- Parent and Baby placements
This has remained a difficult service to recruit new carers into. Placement requests are varied, from caring for a young parent and her baby and providing support and guidance. Through a parent or parents to ascertain whether they are able to safeguard their baby and meet his/her needs. The service needs to consider involving other services and professionals to support carers e.g. working with Family Centres, training Social Care Workers re: enhancing parenting skills.
Finance for these placements needs to be reviewed.
- Work to decrease the number of children with 3 or more moves. Warwickshire have not over the last year been able to reduce these moves. Matching placements and lack of carers are only part of this problem. Support to carers from a range of services has to be considered.
- In conjunction with Adoption Services develop a concurrent placement pilot, which could enable carers to be approved as both adopters and foster carers with a view to placing earlier with adopters. A workshop for professionals to be arranged.
- To complete the review of foster carer payments and
 - To include Skills Levels 1 and 2.
 - To consider a payment scheme for solo placements
 - To review Long Term Savings
- To continue to learn from complaints/cause for concerns/carers evaluations.

5 TEAM PLAN

Additional Targets 2012-13 (optional)

Here, add details of any new targets/objectives that were not part of the original 2011-14 plan. Please state what needs to be done, and why the new objective/target has been set.

Objective/Target	Timescales	Action to be taken	Reason for Adding New Objective/Target
Review processes, timescales and preparation group material for potential fostering applicants	6 months	Produce Focus on Fostering Preparation material. Induct fostering staff on the new materials.	WCC is no longer a member of Fostering Network and therefore needed to produce own materials. Increase flexibility into the preparation groups and speed up the process.
Increase the number of Fostering applications by 10%	12 months	Increase advertising opportunities, re internet, Google etc. Redesign adverts for Teenage fostering. Review all current recruitment avenues	Increased need for local foster placements, due to the increase in looked after children figures. Increased use of IFAs
Improve level of support to all Foster Carers	12 months	SCW to be trained in Triple P parenting. Increase level of supervision to newly approved foster carers. SW to visit in first week of a placement.	Number of Placement moves for LA children. In response to feedback from Foster Carers.
Review paperwork and procedures for the kinship practice	12 months	Receive feedback from legal, children's teams, kinship team and carers	New paperwork recently implemented.

Involvement in sub regional work to ensure greater range of local placements	12 months	Work with MAC, fostering and the consortium to review future commissioning opportunities	WCC reviewing all services for quality and value for money. Framework due to end in 2013
Review Foster carer financial systems	12 months	To review feasibility of deducting long term savings at resource. Amend skill level payments.	To incorporate CWDC standards. To reduce the number of complaints re lack of Long term savings. To increase carers attendance at training courses
To review Parent and Baby placements, permanency placements and solo placements	12 months	Working groups to review current arrangements, payment and support. Re commendations to SLT	Increase in number of referrals for all 3 placement categories. To reduce the need for placement moves.
To explore the development of concurrent placements	12 months	Joint workshop with Fostering, Adoption, Panels and Children's Teams	New statutory guidance and regulations.
Confirm funding for Family Link service	12 months	Joint work with IDS to explore options re-funding and support to Family Link carers	Current Funding stream ends in March 2013

Warwickshire Fostering Services

