Fostering & Alternative Carers Support Team Annual Report

2022 – 2023

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Introductions

The Fostering Service is a countywide service, providing a range of foster placements to Children in Care. These include short term, long term, respite care, connected persons care, and schemes carers. The scheme carers offer a range of specialist support and these include:

- Solo (step down from residential / edge of residential care)
- Breathing Space (Short Term Emergency Placement)
- Parent and Child
- Family Link
- Emergency Duty
- Flexible Fostering

In addition, foster carers may provide a Staying Put placement that will enable the young person to have placement continuity beyond 18 years. Private fostering also sits within the team.

The Service was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and was assessed as 'Good'. The Fostering Service will be inspected as part of the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC)', which is a whole system approach again in 2024, unless OFSTED determines it wishes to inspect at an earlier date.

This annual report looks at National trends with a focus on Fostering Networks Research and recommendations on Recruitment. There is then a focus on Warwickshire's Data to show comparisons and trends, information on how Warwickshire Local Authority manages its fostering agency and we end on our team priorities for 2023-2024.

National Trends - taken from Ofsted National Statistics for Fostering in England 2021-2022

Ofsted estimated that,

At the end of March 2022, there were 43,905 fostering households in total in England. Of these, 36,050 offered mainstream fostering provision and 7,855 were family and friends households. Since 2018, the number of approved mainstream fostering households has decreased by 4% and the number of approved mainstream fostering places has decreased by 5%. Approximately 1 out of every 6 fostering households in England offers family and friends provision, providing care for 1 in 5 fostered children.

Mainstream Fostering Households –

This year, Local Authorities accounted for nearly 3 in 5 approved fostering households (20,845), while IFAs represented just over 2 in 5 (15,205). This figure has decreased steadily over the last 5 years with Local Authorities now offering 58% of all approved households (61% in 2018)

Of the 36,050 fostering households nationally, 4,035 were newly approved during 2021 to 2022 and still active at 31 March 2022. This is an 18% decrease in the number of newly approved households from 2018 to 2022. LAs and IFAs accounted for similar amounts of newly approved households with 51% and 48%, respectively.

As at March 2022, the most common placement types were non-permanent (49%) and permanent (40%). The remaining 11% of households offered other placement types including emergency, parent and child, multi-dimensional treatment, remand, fostering to adopt and short-break places. 'Not permanent' care refers to care that is not currently planned to last until the child ceases to be looked after or until the child reaches the age of 18.

Mainstream Fostering Household sizes
As at 31 March 2022, the majority of fostering households were approved to care for 2 or more children (71%). Compared with LAs, IFAs tend to approve a higher proportion of households to care for 3 or more children and a lower proportion to care for just 1 child.
Within both LA and IFA sectors, newly approved households were more likely to be approved to look after smaller numbers of children. Of newly approved households, 46% were for approved for 1 child, compared with 28% of all approved households.

Deregistration
In 2021 to 2022, more mainstream fostering households deregistered (5,435) than were approved (4,035), leading to a net decrease in fostering capacity since last year.

Enquiries to applications
There were 138,075 initial enquiries from prospective mainstream fostering households in the year ending 31 March 2022. The number of initial enquiries is 18% higher than in 2017 to 2018, and has been slowly rising over that period. The number of enquiries received by IFAs has similarly risen since 2017 to 2018, by 29%. The number of enquiries to LAs has declined in the same period, by 10% (to 31,045), but has gone up and down over the years, rather than steadily declining.

This year, only 6% of those who made initial enquiries about becoming a foster carer went on to apply. Since 2017 to 2018, when 9% of those who enquired went on to apply, there has been a downward trend in the proportion of applications to enquiries. This means that, over the last 5 years, an increasing number of people have been making initial enquiries about becoming a foster carer but a decreasing proportion of them have gone on to make an application.

This year, IFAs reported a ratio of 23 initial enquiries per application
and LAs reported a ratio of 8 initial enquiries per application. In the LA sector, the ratio of enquiries to applications has remained fairly steady since 2017 to 2018, with between 6 and 9 enquiries for each application throughout this period. For IFAs, the ratio of enquiries to applications has increased steadily since 2017 to 2018, when it was 14 to one. Both sectors' ratios suggest a relatively large volume of enquiries are not translating into applications, but this discrepancy is much higher – and increasing – in the IFA sector.

Applications to approvals

This year, 8,280 applications to become a foster carer were received. This is the lowest number of applications in several years, 21% lower than 2017 to 2018. If 2020 to 2021 is excluded as a potential outlier, which seems feasible given the pandemic, there has been a steady decrease over the last 5 years from the 2017 to 2018 total of 10,520.

For both sectors, applications are at their lowest level in several years. LA applications have decreased by 22% since 2018, and IFA applications have dropped by 21% over the same period. In both sectors, 2021 seems to have been an unusual year, with high numbers of enquiries and applications.

Both sectors have seen a decrease in the proportion of approved applications over the years. This year, the most substantial drop has been in the IFA sector, where only 27% of processed applications led to approvals. This is down from 35% in 2017 to 2018. The proportion of approved applications in the LA sector was 29% this year, down from 36% in 2017 to 2018. The proportion of fostering households that were approved in-year is at its lowest level in several years. Households approved in-year make up 11% of fostering households now compared with 13 to 14% in each of the preceding 4 years.

Approved foster carers

As at 31 March 2022, the number of approved foster carers was 61,360. This represents a slight decrease compared with last year. However, if the last 2 years are excluded as potential anomalies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it represents an overall decrease in the number of foster carers over the years, with a 4% decrease from 2017 to 2018 (63,815 carers).

Ethnicity

Of all newly approved foster carers during 2021 to 2022, 77% were White and 20% were from ethnic minority backgrounds. The remaining 3% were reported with their ethnicity marked as 'Not known', in line with previous years.

Age

As at 31 March 2022, the largest group of all approved foster carers were in their 50s (41%). For foster carers newly approved in-year, we see a higher percentage of carers in the younger age brackets. Foster carers in their 20s and 30s accounted for a quarter (26%) of all newly approved foster carers, but only 10% of foster carers overall.

Approved places There were 74,660 fostering places in England as at 31 March 2022. This is a decrease of 5% since 2018 (78,300).

Connected Persons Foster Carers (referred to as Family and Friends)

Family and friends households made up 18% of all active fostering households as at 31 March 2022 (7,855 of 43,905), which is slightly higher than 2017 to 2018 (14%). Just over a quarter of LA households had family and friends care as their primary placement offer (27%). This is higher than 2017 to 2018 when family and friends households made up 21% of active LA households (6,100 of 28,715). The upward trend in the proportion of LA foster care made up by family and friends households.

Family and friends households accounted for 60% of LA households approved in-year that were still active on 31 March 2022, up slightly from 56% in 2017 to 2018. This type of household made up 60% of deregistration's in the LA sector in the 2021 to 2022 period, which is similar to the year before (62%). At the end of March 2022, family and friends households had 12,285 foster carers, which is equivalent to 17% of all approved foster carers, and looked after 11,210 children, which is equivalent to 20% of all fostered children.

The use of family and friends households is in line with the expectation that LAs will place children with family and friends wherever possible. The increase in their number has played a significant part in meeting the demands set by the rising number of children in care and a reducing pool of available mainstream foster placements.

The Fostering network research report 'Foster Carer Retention and Recruitment in England' May 2023

"The challenge in England is that in the last reported fiscal year (ending March 2022), more mainstream foster carers (not family and friends foster carers) stopped fostering than were approved, leading to a net decrease in fostering capacity. At the same time, the number of children in care increased."

"The data show a significant gap between the number of enquiries made to fostering services, and the number of those enquiries that go on to become approved foster carers, in both local authorities and independent fostering agencies."

In the year 2021 to 2022, 31,045 enquiries were made to local authorities and 107,030 to independent fostering agencies. However, as demonstrated by the data below, private agencies demonstrate a much lower conversion rate than LA fostering teams.

2021-2022	LA	Agency
Enquiries	31,045	107,030
Applications	3665	4615
Approvals	675	900

Key recommendations:

• Provide sufficient funding for the support of social workers, foster carers, and the children's social care system, including foster carer pay – allowances and fees - and entitlements

• Provide recruitment campaigns that focus on realistic expectations for fostering

• Examine the recruitment and support strategies and the ways in which these may not be fit for purpose for different demographics of foster carers (e.g., working adults with enough time, energy and skills to foster, adults in their 20s and 30s, males, and a more ethnically diverse demographics)

• Focus on respect for foster carers, which often includes an attitude shift, involving carers in decision-making about the child when appropriate and showing appreciation

• Ensure fostering services are structured to facilitate practice enabling social workers to understand the reality of fostering from the perspectives of foster carers and children. Ensure a single trusted relationship can be built from point of enquiry to matching and ongoing support.

• Ensure that services for foster carers are professional, including clear inductions, professional finance and support systems, as well as clear communications on timelines for assessment and approval, and processes such as matching with children or investigations of allegations

• Provide consistent conversations when foster carers are considering leaving and exit interviews for those who leave fostering, to uncover the reasons behind exit and any supports that can be put in place before leaving

• Undertake more research to ensure that foster carer recruitment and retention is built on more than good intentions, but on what is needed to ensure a foster carer workforce to provide 'stable homes, built on love'

Warwickshire Fostering Data

The below data was derived from our Ofsted return analysis for April 2022- March 2023.

1. **Number of initial enquiries received from new prospective fostering households**

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of enquiries received	301	232	256	217	91

During the 2022/23 there were significantly less enquiries to the service about becoming a foster carer. This is in line with Ofsted data.

WCC Households approved during the financial year

Approval Type	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family and Friends	69	68	91	77*	80
Mainstream	11	21	23	10	12
Shared Care Only	0	0	0	0	1
Short Breaks	0	0	2	0	0
Foster to Adopt	5	6	5	5	2
Number of Households	**85**	**95**	**121**	**92***	**95**

*Includes 4 Family/Friends carers that OFSTED asked us to remove as although approved were yet to have children placed with them as at 31 March 2022

The number of fostering households approved increased during 2022/23. Approvals of mainstream carers saw an increase compared to last year despite a much lower number of enquiries. The majority of approvals in the year continue to be for Family and Friends households.

Of the 12 mainstream foster carers approved in 2022/23, two of these fostering households had previous foster care experience.

Our target is to increase foster carers by 2027 by 10%. We had 159 registered carers at end of March 22 meaning we had 16 more to recruit in 2022/2023. If you only look at new recruitment, we did not achieve this as we only approved 12 carers a deficit of 3. This number increases if you add the resignation of mainstream carers of 20 from the year which meant we needed to recruit 25 this year.

It could be that with the Homes for Ukraine successful campaign people who may have been interested in fostering have instead become a part of this scheme. We know that there were 624 sponsors in Warwickshire from July 22 to July 23. Potentially not all 625 sponsors would have considered fostering, but it is reasonable to consider that some would.

WCC Households De-registered during the financial year

Approval Type	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family and Friends	61	69	70	87	77
Mainstream	34	35*	24	25	20
Shared Care Only	0	2	3	1	0
Foster to Adopt	7	3	5	5	5
Not Known	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Households	**102**	**109**	**102**	**118**	**102**

The number of mainstream carers who left the service saw a slight decrease on the previous year which is positive and shows retention has stabilised. However, the number of mainstream carers leaving the service remained higher than the number of mainstream households approved during 2022/23 resulting in a reduction in mainstream carers at year end (Table 4 - below).

Of the 77 family & friends approvals ended during 2022/23, 22 of these approvals ended due to a special guardianship order being granted to the carers. This compares to 31 SGOs granted out of the 87 family & friends approvals ended in the previous year.

WCC Fostering Households at Year End

Approval Type	31 March 2019	31 March 2020	31 March 2021	31 March 2022	31 March 2023
Family and Friends	75	75	103	96*	101
Mainstream	177	170	169	154	146
Shared Care Only	8	6	3	2	3
Short Breaks Only	2	2	4	3	3
Foster to Adopt	2	5	4	6	3
Number of Households	**264**	**258**	**283**	**261***	**256**

*Includes 5 Family/Friends carers that OFSTED asked us to remove as although approved were yet to have children placed with them as at 31 March 2022

Warwickshire has seen a slight decrease in the number of fostering households during the 2022/23 financial year with five less fostering households available on 31 March 2023 compared to the same point in the previous financial year(The figure in March 22 included 5 family and friends carers without children). The most notable reduction at year end is in the number of mainstream carers, 8 less households were approved on 31 March 2023 compared to the same point last year.

Placement Use as at 31 March

	31 March 2020	31 March 2021	31 March 2022	31 March 2023
Number of Children Placed at 31 March	356 (72.7%)	352 (71.1%)	342 (74.3%)	327 (70.3%)
Number of Vacant Placements	65 (13.3%)	79 (16.0%)	70 (15.2%)	76 (16.3%)
Number of not available placements	69 (14.1%)	64 (12.9%)	48 (10.4%)	62 (13.3%)

Data Caveat: One child placed with a WCC Foster Carer at 31 March 2020 is from another local authority

Warwickshire Fostering Service had less children placed at year end than the previous year end. There has been an increase of not available placements where carers are on hold for a variety of reasons such as resting, pending resignation or health/housing related reasons.

As at 31 March 2023, 42% of Warwickshire's child in care population were placed with a WCC foster carer compared to 41.7% at the end of the previous financial year.

Number of children placed with a WCC Foster Carer during the financial year

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Children placed with a WCC Foster Carer during the year	605	604	570	581	541

NB. The above includes all children placed during the year regardless of duration of their placement. It also includes children where a viability assessment was completed where children were placed under REG 24.

541 children were placed with a WCC foster carer (including Family/Friends) during the 2022/23 financial year which is a decrease of 40 children on the previous financial year, however the number of children in care has fluctuated with numbers decreasing so this will impact on numbers of placement.

Allegations, Complaints, Exemptions and Physical Restraints

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Allegations	5	25	22	16	9
Complaints	8	8	6	9	5
Physical Restraints	5	4	3	3	3
Number of Carers who had an Exemption in place during the year	5	17	10	6	10

LADO workflows have enabled better reporting on number of allegations against foster carers. However, an 'allegation against registered carer' case note has also been added to Mosaic to ensure we are able to collate information about allegations which may not be referred to the LADO or are picked up by another local authorities LADO.

Independent Review Mechanism

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
How many applications were made for a review to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)	1	2	0	1	3
Of the applications made to the IRM, how many resulted in a recommendation being made to your service to review your decision?	0	1	0	0	0

Additional Data: Number of New Foster Care Placements started in the year (Extracted from SSDA903 Looked After Return)

Type	Number of Placements Starts during 2020/21	%	Number of Placements Starts during 2021/22	%	Number of Placements Starts during 2022/23	%
Internal Fostering	427	67.9%	504	76.0%	430	78.5%
Agency Fostering	202	32.1%	159	24.0%	118	21.5%
Total Fostering Placements Started	**629**	**100%**	**663**	**100%**	**548**	**100%**

NB. The above includes all placements which commenced during the financial year regardless of duration of placement.

The volume of new placements made with a WCC Foster Carer placed during 2022/23 saw a decrease compared to the previous financial year whilst those made with an agency foster carer was significantly lower. It is worth noting that there has been a reduction in children in care over the last 12 months and increasing reliance on supported accommodation for 16 & 17 year olds.

During 2022-23 there was an increase in the use of ED carers.

Demographics of Foster Carers

The table below shows the demographics of Warwickshire Foster carers during 2022/23 (excluding Connected Persons & Foster to Adopt Carers)

Number of foster carers in household	19/20 Number of Households	%	20/21 Number of Households	%	21/22 Number of Households	%	22/23 Number of Households	%
1 carer	67	31.3%	60	29.6%	53	28.6%	50	29.1%
2 carers	147	68.6%	143	70.4%	132	71.4%	122	70.9%
Total Number of Households during year	**214**	**100.0%**	**203**	**100.0%**	**185**	**100.0%**	**172**	**100.0%**

Ethnicity of All Carers in Households	18/19		19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23	
	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%
White British/Irish/Other	365	97.6%	345	95.6%	326	94.2%	301	95.0%	278	94.6%
BME	9	2.4%	12	3.3%	15	4.3%	13	4.1%	10	3.4%
Not recorded	0	0.0%	4	1.1%	5	1.4%	3	0.9%	6	2.0%
Total Number of Carers in Households during year (excluding Family/Friends & Foster to Adopt Carers)	374	100.0%	361	100.0%	346	100.0%	317	100.0%	294	100.0%

Age of Main Carer	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23	
	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%
Under 30	1	0.5%	3	1.5%	3	1.6%	2	1.2%
30 to 40	23	10.7%	20	9.9%	20	10.8%	21	12.2%
40 to 45	22	10.3%	18	8.9%	15	8.1%	12	7%
45 to 50	30	14.0%	34	16.7%	32	17.3%	25	14.5%
50 to 55	44	20.6%	39	19.2%	25	13.5%	25	14.5%
55 to 60	44	20.6%	39	19.2%	44	23.8%	39	22.7%
60 to 65	29	13.6%	30	14.8%	27	14.6%	29	16.9%
65+	21	9.8%	20	9.9%	19	10.3%	19	11.0%
Total	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%

Gender of Main Carer	19/20		20/22		21/22		22/23	
	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%	Number of Carers	%
Male	27	12.6%	20	9.9%	19	10.3%	20	11.6%
Female	187	87.4%	183	90.1%	166	89.7%	152	88.4%
Total	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%		100.0%

Location of Household	19/20 Number of Households	%	20/21 Number of Households	%	21/22 Number of Households	%	22/23 Number of Households	%
North Warwickshire	14	6.5%	12	5.9%	11	5.9%	9	5.2%
Nuneaton & Bedworth	61	28.5%	55	27.1%	48	25.9%	46	26.7%
Rugby	35	16.4%	34	16.7%	32	17.3%	27	15.7%
Stratford	21	9.8%	24	11.8%	22	11.9%	24	14%
Warwick	36	16.8%	34	16.7%	29	15.7%	25	14.5%
Coventry	15	7.0%	13	6.4%	13	7.0%	15	8.7%
Leicestershire	11	5.1%	10	4.9%	12	6.5%	9	5.2%
Northamptonshire	4	1.9%	6	3.0%	4	2.2%	4	2.3%
Staffordshire	3	1.4%	3	1.5%	2	1.1%	2	1.2%
Worcestershire	7	3.3%	7	3.4%	7	3.8%	5	2.9%
All Other Out of County	7	3.3%	5	2.5%	5	2.7%	6	3.5%
Total	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%

The majority of our foster carers are two parent families and are White British; the main carers tend to be female 88.4%. The highest number of carers are in the age range 55-60 age bracket at 22.7% this has been a consistent pattern for four years of data. There is a decrease in 40–45-year age range. This may be due to several factors: carers own children being older or leaving home and perhaps being more financially secure. The concern with approving carers in an older cohort is that they may potentially choose to retire at 67. However, we do have foster carers in their late 70's. Our demographics are similar with Ofsted's findings, 41% were in their 50's.

Historically we have had more success approving foster carers in the north of the county and this continues to be the case, currently we have 26.7% in Nuneaton & Bedworth and 5.2% in North Warwickshire. We have had slight increased success in securing foster carers in the South of the county, Stratford of 2% and decrease in areas of Warwick 1.2% in Rugby 1.6%. We continue to approve an increasing number of foster carers outside the county border; this figure is currently 23.8.

As with previous years, Ofsted reports there was a greater proportion of foster carers from non-White ethnic groups in IFAs (23%) than in the LA sector (13%),

Structure of the Team

The Service has 5 Teams.
- **Recruitment, Training and assessment** – based in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Fostering Supervision and Support** (including specialist schemes) - located in Kings House, Bedworth and in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Connected Person assessment team** located in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **SGO & Alternative Carers Support team and private fostering** - located in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Family Support Team –** linked to Connected Persons team, countywide
- **Placement Hub** - located in Kings House, Bedworth,(managed by separate Operations Lead, fostering social workers from fostering establishment have dual roles, split between the Hub and fostering supervision and support)

The Fostering Service is currently managed by a registered manager, one Operations Manager (Placement Hub), 8 Team Leaders, 5 Family Support Workers, WRAP - 2 family support workers and 1 youth worker and 40 Social Workers. During this period we have had agency workers to support workload and at the end of year we had 1 agency SW in supervision and support.

During the year the service provided work placements for two social workers in training. Given a FSW an opportunity as an apprentice social worker.

A hybrid model of working has been adopted of people working at home and being office based.

Functions of the Teams

Recruitment, training, and assessment

From 31/07/22 recruitment has been aligned to Warwickshire's Marketing and Communications Team. We work in partnership on recruitment strategy.

We have a varied and full training programme and are a QCF centre of excellence.

Assessments for Mainstream foster carers are held in this team. The team also manages initial enquiries, initial visits and recruitment events.

Support and supervision

Social workers monitor and support foster carers with supervisions, cause for concerns, LADO referrals, complaints, planning and end of placement meetings, long term matching and complete annual foster carer reviews that are submitted either to fostering panel or the fostering review officer. Social workers also complete SGO reports for court. Caseloads include mainstream and connected persons foster carers. Family support workers are assigned to support carers based on meeting criteria, they complete specific pieces of time-based intervention work and support with some

aspects of childcare. We have a contract with two psychologist and student who offers consultations to foster carers three days a week.

<u>Specialist schemes</u>

We have developed several 52-week paid schemes:
- Solo is for children who are on the edge of residential or stepping down from residential care, including children with disabilities.

- Breathing Space foster carers are for those who need a time limited placement to allow for planning (10 to 20 days).

- Specialist Parent and Child is a 12-week placement to allow for an assessment of parent (s) and child in a family setting. The parent and child foster carer are expected to accept three placements a year.

- Specialist Solo Disability Scheme foster carers meet the high needs to children with disabilities.

- Treehouse – This also sits within Schemes. We have appointed 1 set of Treehouse foster carers from October 2022The treehouse carers support 8 branch carers. The aim of this scheme is for children and young people to have a trusted adult to stay with as would occur in family life and it also offers foster carers who need this support due to the needs of the child or having limited support network themselves 28 days per year for day or overnight care. There is also an element of shared experiences for foster carers and children. Group activities are planned and learning experiences are promoted in this scheme.

Other schemes (not on a guaranteed 52 week payment are)

- Family link foster carers support the needs of families or connected persons where a carer needs a respite facility. The benefit to the young person is that they stay with a foster carer they build a relationship with on a regular basis for short term breaks.

- Staying Put –young people over 18 stay with carers until 21.

- Flexible fostering – This is a new scheme developed in March 2022 to meet the demand for flexible fostering arrangements. 20 nights or 5 periods of accommodation within a review period is required.

Connected Person Assessment Team

This Team is responsible for completing the assessments of prospective connected persons. Reports once completed are presented to either the Fostering Panel or the Court. The assessments may result in recommendations of relatives/connected persons as special guardians or child arrangement orders. This team support approved foster carer for up to three months if an SGO is imminent.

The Team continues to undertake assessments across the country and on occasion abroad. Although most assessments abroad have been outsourced to Social Workers in the country itself due to Brexit.

Additional Connected Person Statistics

	No. Of referrals	No of assessments started	No of withdrawals	No of negative viabilities	No of overseas assessments	No, of approvals
19/20	210	146	29	0	1	69
20/21	262	220	27	13	1	58
21/22	230	182	66	19	0	41
22/23	140	129	69	3	0	52

There has been a decrease in the number of referrals compared to last year which bucks national trends. We have seen a decrease of 3 from last year's withdrawals. It is positive that fostering panel have had more approvals than last year which tells us that initial IVA's are of better quality. This is in line with national trends. The dedicated duty worker continues to be an effective role and the children's team are clear how to seek advice and guidance.

The number of approvals is captured for cases going to fostering panel this does not account for assessments where SGO, CAO or where assessments are completed but not required as the subject child is returned to parents.

Connected Persons Support and Supervision Team

This team works closely with the SGO team and the Permanency social worker when considering permanency for children. They also work alongside the Connected Persons Assessment Team with reg 24 temporarily approved placements.
All of the fostering training is available to Connected persons carers. They can complete core training and evidence their skills through a portfolio and complete the Training and Support standards to progress to skill level payments.

Special Guardianship and Alternative Carers Support Team

We support carers and children who have a Special Guardianship order or where children are on a Child Arrangements Order seeking an SGO when a child has been previously in care . If the child has not been in care but the carers have sought a private law SGO we will sign post them to relevant services and offer the opportunity to join support groups.

The name of the team has been changed to reflect changes in ASF funding eligibility (from April 2022) to further include all children under a Residency Order or Child arrangement order who were previously looked after and all children who were looked after where an Adoption, Special Guardianship, Residency or Child Arrangement Order placement had broken down, irrespective on any reconciliation plans.

A part time Team Leader is responsible for the team and there are 3 workers 2.75fte.

Permanency through SGO is increasing; this year 31 children have been discharged from care with an SGO. This is a significant increase from last year when the figure was 18. A new permanency social worker has been appointed to track progress and we have already seen the positive impact of this following a period of time without one and we have seen an increase of applications made by foster carers.

Adoption support fund
In 22-23 we have made 40 Applications (increase by 12 from previous year), totalling £103,299.31 to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services for SGO holders and children.
SGO carers can access fostering training and have access to monthly support groups across the county, there is a regular newsletter highlighting services and carers are invited to any fostering social event.

Please see Appendix 1 Annual Report

Private Fostering

A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 or under 18, if disabled. This year the criteria for private fostering has been extended to include Unaccompanied Minors Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The young person must be cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt or host.

There has been a decrease by 7 in private fostering arrangements this year.

The Private fostering continues to be aligned to the connected person support team. All team members (5) are trained to complete assessments.

Please see Appendix 2 Private Fostering Annual Report.

Foster for Adoption

Foster for Adoption has been reviewed and since November 2021 there are now 2 dedicated social workers responsible for monitoring and providing support. We continue to work closely with ACE. In 2022-2023 there have been 6 children placed under foster for adopt early permanency.

Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel's role is to make recommendations in respect of Connected Persons Carers and Mainstream foster carers. It's function is to also make recommendations on annual Foster Home Performance Reviews, Terminations and note resignations, exemptions and temporary change of approvals. Five members of panel sit at one time and the panel is made up of level 4 professionals from social work, health and education, foster carers, adults who are care experienced. The Independent Panel Chair is supported by one Deputy Chair and Warwickshire's salaried Panel Advisor. Business Support provide a dedicated panel administrator.

The recommendations of panel are sent to the Fostering Agency Decision Maker who is a senior manager. In 2022-2023 Fostering Panel considered 70 fostering households and 43 business items.

Please see Appendix 3 Annual Warwickshire Fostering Panel Report

Phoenix Psychology

This service is commissioned for 3 days a week and is available to foster carers and to staff for consultation. The provider also offers training for carers and staff. This service has been instrumental in supporting foster carers and maintaining placements where therapeutic support is required.

Please see Appendix 4 Psychology Report June 2022-March 2023

Recruitment of Foster Carers

In June 2022, Warwickshire took the recruitment of foster carers back in house from an external provider who we had commissioned to complete a 2 year contract. Following resuming marketing and recruitment in house, we have rebranded creating a new logo and full marketing campaign in line with existing WCC Child Friendly design.

The Team uses a range of methods of advertising and awareness-raising as follows;

- Digital marketing
- Facebook and Instagram
- In person promotional events
- Online information sharing sessions -Teams and Facebook Live
- Press releases of relevant foster carer achievements / human interest
- Retention activities promotion including conference, well- being day and celebration events.
- TV advertising
- Radio advertising
- Shared Council Advertising Network activities
- Case studies and video content

Recruitment priorities remain;

- Emergency duty carers
- Carers for teenagers (young people 10-18 years)
- Solo placements (including children with disabilities)
- Breathing space carers
- Carers for sibling groups
- Parent and Child specialist placements
- Family Link carers and short break carers

Prospective foster carers can:

- Talk to a fostering social worker and a foster carer at events
- Attend an information session run by foster carers and social workers
- Enquire online, via email or telephone.
- Receive a brochure within 1 working day of enquiry
- Receive a phone call within two working days of enquiry
- Receive a 'Useful Information Document'
- Have a home visit within 5 working days (Subject to the applicant's availability)
- Attend Fostering Preparation Groups 'Journey to Foster'
- Meet support and supervision social worker on or before panel to promote positive transitions.

Recruitment initiatives:
- Flexible fostering launched Autumn 22 – recruitment for respite and planned emergency duty of people who cannot foster full time.
- Fostering Friendly organisation – a commitment to support Warwickshire staff who wish to foster.
- Refer a Friend £300 incentive for foster carers should their recommendation be approved at panel
- Giveaways at live events and craft activities for children.
- Working in partnership with CAN to deliver co-produced nationwide fostering promotion, benchmarking and practice development
- Co-development with Voice, Influence and Change team of child's voice throughout fostering throughout assessment and approval.
- Engagement in nationwide Fostering Network campaigns including fostering fortnight. Activities include foster walk, conference and live events.
- Attendance at live community events such as Leamington Pride, Lions events and cultural celebrations.

Assessment
- The team consists of 4 social workers who complete stage 1 and stage 2 of the mainstream assessment process to prevent delay.
- Access to full training offer during assessment
- National minimum standards weaved throughout the assessment.
- Handover between recruitment officer and then to supporting social worker
- Focus on 5 month assessment timeframe.
- Teaching within assessment including focus on Foundations of Attachment

Training for Foster Carers
The Core courses are as follow.
- Child Protection, safeguarding (all carers expected to complete as soon after approval as practical and must be completed within the first year of fostering)
- A Child's Journey Through Care
- Attachments
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Emergency Paediatric First Aid (all carers are expected to complete in first year of fostering)
- Recording Skills

These courses are also available as distance learning packs/online training. Following approval carers have 2 years to complete the core training to date 245 carers have achieved this.

There is a large number who have almost completed all 6 courses and it is encouraging to see how many carers are refreshing their training in these core areas by reattending, the Fostering services expectation is that carers courses are revisited every 3 years at least.

Following the corona virus pandemic, we continued to offer virtual training, and have offered more live courses during March 2022 and April 2023, paediatric first aid, continued to be live in line with government guidance for life saving skills. We continued to take on board what training our foster carers needed and what we as an authority have as our vision, restorative practice is a mandatory course for all staff including carers and has a rolling programme available for all carers to access.

We have continued to be successful in our virtual offer to carers but less successful in our live training, online training take up has been particularly high, 606 courses were requested and set up for carers.

This year the Service delivered the following new live courses; Getting the Most Out of the Outdoors, Family Literacy, Supporting Care and Connections through Communication, TSD workshops, House Project Webinar, SGO training, Trauma Informed Practice, Adoption Transitions Training,

The following were reintroduced in updated formats, Recording Skills, A Child's Journey Through Care. It is our practice that all courses are regularly reviewed and updated.

New online courses are regularly available and updated lists are distributed to carers via WeLearn and via the email group address called foster carers.   We continue to offer over 60 online training options specifically for young people, on a range of topics including Bullying, Managing Anger, Emotions and Getting Relevant Support, Gangs and Group Offenders, all about Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Leaving Care Expectations and Support, Eating Disorders, Radicalisation, What to Do When I Feel Stressed, Why Carers Get Worried When I Go Missing.

Each live course usually has 20-25 places available for carers and places for social workers/other professionals. This recognises the advantages of joint training opportunities; we have continued to book larger spaces where venues and the service were being cautious of health and safety measures.

Since April 1st, 2022, to present, we had 37 households (25 of these were connected persons households) complete their TSD's. Overall, 195 households have completed their TSD's on our current approved carer list; the list is updated from panel minutes and therefore may be different to the number of current carers as ADM decisions and notifications take a few weeks to filter.   (Historically 544 households have completed their TSD standards whilst being approved carers in Warwickshire).

Foster carer training is monitored and discussed by the fostering social worker and recorded in the foster home annual performance review. All foster carers have a training profile. Each training year we run 3 training terms, carers get full information on what is being offered prior to each term and any amendments are communicated via a dedicated foster carer email system and via the WeLearn platform.

The service ran a conference for carers during this year and hosted our first well-being day. Both were received well be carer and staff who attended.

Some feedback from the wellbeing day.

"All workshops were invaluable to us as foster carers personally as well as reflecting and using with others in our families".

"Have more of these days. The interact between carers and Warwickshire Fostering people is invaluable. To be able to put faces to names, and just say hi builds strong bonds and gives support that online training and TEAMS chats doesn't provide. And keep making it centric to learning and developing our knowledge. I know coffee meetings also exist, but sometimes these can end up just being a whinge-fest".

Some feedback from Conference.

"What a great event the fostering conference was today, seeing faces old and new"

"Can I just say thank you for a really great day it was lovely catching up with people meeting people we've spoken to on the phone but now can put a face too and the workshops were informative helpful but also presented on a relaxed manner which always helps the group chats helped us clarify things, excellent day thank you"

Foster Carer approval and retention

Approval Process – mainstream foster carers

Once the initial visits are completed and the foster carers applies to foster with Warwickshire, the assessment is allocated to a social worker in the recruitment, assessment, and training team. The social worker completes an assessment of the household, involving any children of the applicants. They undertake all statutory checks, including DBS, medical checks, ex-partner references, education checks and visits to referees. The completed assessment report is presented to Warwickshire's Fostering Panel.

Retention of foster carers

Once foster carers have been approved, their induction process begins. Carers need to complete their Training, Development and Support induction standards within 12 months of approval. For Connected Persons, the timescale is 18 months.

All newly approved foster carers receive professional supervision every 3 weeks with their social worker. After their first annual review, supervision is every 6 weeks; Team Leaders review this frequency thereafter.

Support is provided to foster carers via their fostering social workers, the child's social worker, family support workers, and the services of an independent Advice and Mediation Worker.

In line with the Fostering Regulations, all foster carer households have a minimum of one annual, unannounced visit by fostering social worker, however we attempt to do two. Foster carers are only approved for 12 months at a time and foster carer Annual Reviews are presented to either Fostering Panel or the Fostering Reviewing Officer for on-going approval. This scrutiny by an independent Fostering Panel/ Fostering Reviewing Officer and Decision Maker ensures a robust approach to safeguarding children in foster care.

Foster carers are accompanied by their fostering social workers attend a range of meetings concerned with the children in the fostering home including Placement Planning meetings, All About Me Reviews, Placement Stability meetings, End of Placement meetings and additional meetings with education and health professionals.

In addition to support, the Fostering Service provides social opportunities to carers and their own children via Parties and Family Days. This year we were able to have a Christmas party and foster carers were recognised for their achievements at the annual staff conference. In addition, there was a trip to the pantomime for fostering families.

The WFCA administration group is now dissolved.

Children Who Foster

The Fostering Service recognises how difficult fostering can be for the carers' own children and provides some activities for children of foster carers, trips to the cinema or other activity twice a year. The aim is to offer support but also offer opportunities to talk with other children in a similar position.

Foster carers' own children can add their comments to the Foster Home Review.

Role of Family Support Workers

The Fostering Team had 9 Family Support workers, which was reduced to 6 following a restructure. The family support worker's role is to offer foster carers time-limited support for example, behaviour strategies or bespoke targeted training, emotional support, advice, link the carers with another local foster carer, or on a more practical level, to spend time with children who are looked after, or emergency support with school transport or family time to support the stability of placements. Planned work also involves support with carers who have an identified need for support with induction or financial management. Family Support Workers run local foster carers support groups, leading on the Kids Who Foster groups, support with distance learning and ensuring carers can access the WeLearn Platform.

We continue to invest in training for family support workers. Four of our family support workers are Non-Violence Resistance (NVR) trained, including one worker who completed the advanced course.

Working in Partnership with Foster Carers

All foster carer home reviews are signed off by a Fostering Team Leader. The Fostering Review Officer keeps a log of issues as does Fostering Panel and ADM which enables practice issues to be raised.

Exit questionnaires are offered to enable carers to express their views about the service they have received. An electronic version of the exit interview form that may increase uptake. This will also allow us to collate and report on trends. A face-to-face exit interview is offered if carers request this.

In addition, OFSTED invites foster carers to respond to an online questionnaire about the fostering service the uptake is low.

We have worked with foster carers to support with recruitment activities which has been a real focus this year.

Challenges to the Fostering Team

There are several factors influencing this.

- There is a shortage of Foster carers who can meet the needs of our children - this is a national pattern.
- An increase in the number of same day placements.
- We see increasingly complex needs of the children for example mental health issues and CSE.
- Children in teenage years are hard to place within our own resources.
- Inability to place another child/young person in placement because of the needs of the other children who may have complex needs.
- Increased need for foster carers requiring more respite and difficulty resourcing this.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

This remains a national problem, with both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies competing within the market. WCC Fostering Service has a clear market brand. There are 66 Independent Fostering Agencies operating in the area. All these agencies pay carers a fee from day one of a placement. WCC pay skill level one allowance if one carer is at home full time or if they have professional transferable qualifications for example, nursery nursing. Other newly approved carers must evidence their skills via the induction standards and attendance at core training. The Team has a strong reputation and carers continue to promote fostering. The Team continues to look at new advertising opportunities and ways to promote the profile of the Service.

Our foster friendly policy has been rolled out to enable Warwickshire County Council employees to access days off for their foster carer assessment and subsequent training etc once they are approved foster carers. This will be advertised and may encourage staff across the council to apply.

Retirements/Termination of Foster Carers

This year has again seen several retirements of experienced carers. Some foster carers have had allegations, and this has resulted in termination of their approval, or in a reduction of their placement approval range.

Team Priorities for 2023-2024

Action	Responsibility
Increased recruitment of foster carers. New advertising strategies will be implemented. Facebook, Instagram, face book live and podcasts will be used. A combination of traditional methods and new tech will be agreed over a 12 month programme.	Team Leader/Operations Manager/Comms and Marketing Team/Child friendly Warwickshire
Build a Mentoring Scheme for new foster carers – they will be matched and supported by an experienced foster carer	Recruitment and assessment Team
Review of specialist schemes & the new 'flexible' fostering scheme.	Operations Manager/Schemes & Recruitment Team Leader/Placement Hub Operations Manager
Grow the Treehouse scheme to be able to offer this direct support to 8 Warwickshire foster carers in the north or east of the county	Operations Manager/Recruitment Team Leader
Further develop the SGO and Alternative carers support team to offer support to previously looked after children and their carers once they have been granted an SGO. Ensure DDP level 1 training is secured for new SGO support team practitioners.	Operations Manager/Team Leader
Continue benchmarking against other Local authorities, to ensure knowledge is shared and ensure Warwickshire's offer is competitive.	Operations Manager/Service Manager

To review policies and procedures particular focus on transport & Allegations, Complaints and Cause for Concern	Operations Manager/Team Leader/Year 4 advanced practitioners
Offer support to the Children's team's and ensure regular training on Regulation 24 & 25 plus Private Fostering	Year 4 advanced practitioners
Transfer fostering review data onto Power BI so that data is available for transparency and monitoring	Business Intelligence
Scoping exercises between with Business Support and Fostering Alternative Carers Team to bring about best practice	Business Support/Fostering and Alternative Support Carers Operation Lead/Team Managers

Appendices

Appendix 1 – SGO and Alternative Carers support Annual Report

SGO Annual report
2022-2023.pdf

Appendix 2 – Private Fostering Annual Report

Private Fostering
Annual Report 2022-2

Appendix 3 - Warwickshire Fostering Panel Annual Report

WCC ANNUAL
REPORT FOR FOSTER

Appendix 4 – Phoenix Psychology Report

Phoenix Psychology
Feedback Report Apri