

FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

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1st APRIL 2015- 31st MARCH 2016

Report Owner –Carol Moreton (Registered Person) Fostering Team Manager

Alison Forshaw – Kinship and SGO Team manager

Lin Hitchman (Responsible Person) – Head of Looked After Children

Introduction

This report complies with Standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards which sets out the condition that the Fostering Service Manager will monitor and report to board members and management members about the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months.

Establishment

1 Team manager

9 full time equivalent social workers – including 1 senior practitioner, 1 HIPSS project coordinator and 1 SLP fostering social worker.

1 family support worker; 1 marketing officer; 1 recruitment officer.

Vacancies: One secondment post is vacant (covering senior practitioner moves) but interview set for permanent post.

1.5 social worker posts have been filled but 1.5 posts are vacant – interviews to be held in May 2016.

One p/t maternity cover will be returning to post in May.

The Kinship and SGO hub has developed its remit to include Overnight Short Breaks for children with disability.

Analysis:

Over the year one member of staff has gone on maternity leave, one moved to the adoption team and 3 staff moved to the 16 + team. It is significant that they have not left out of dissatisfaction with the Council but have sought to progress and specialize in another field.

Caseloads per staff member have increased significantly due to staffing shortages in the quarter: average case load has increased from 16 to 20 which places pressure on the team and duty work. Alongside continued recruitment and increased demand for form F assessments we have together with Commissioning and Hoople implemented a flexible system for the timely completion of assessments through the creation of a framework agreement with independent assessors.

Issues relating to the geographic spread will again be compensated by reallocation of cases over the next year 2016/17 into area groupings to reduce time spent by fostering social workers travelling once fully staffed.

Current Picture:

We support, supervise and provide training for 107 general fostering (including 8 HIPSS) households, 18 Supported lodgings providers and 34 kinship foster carers.

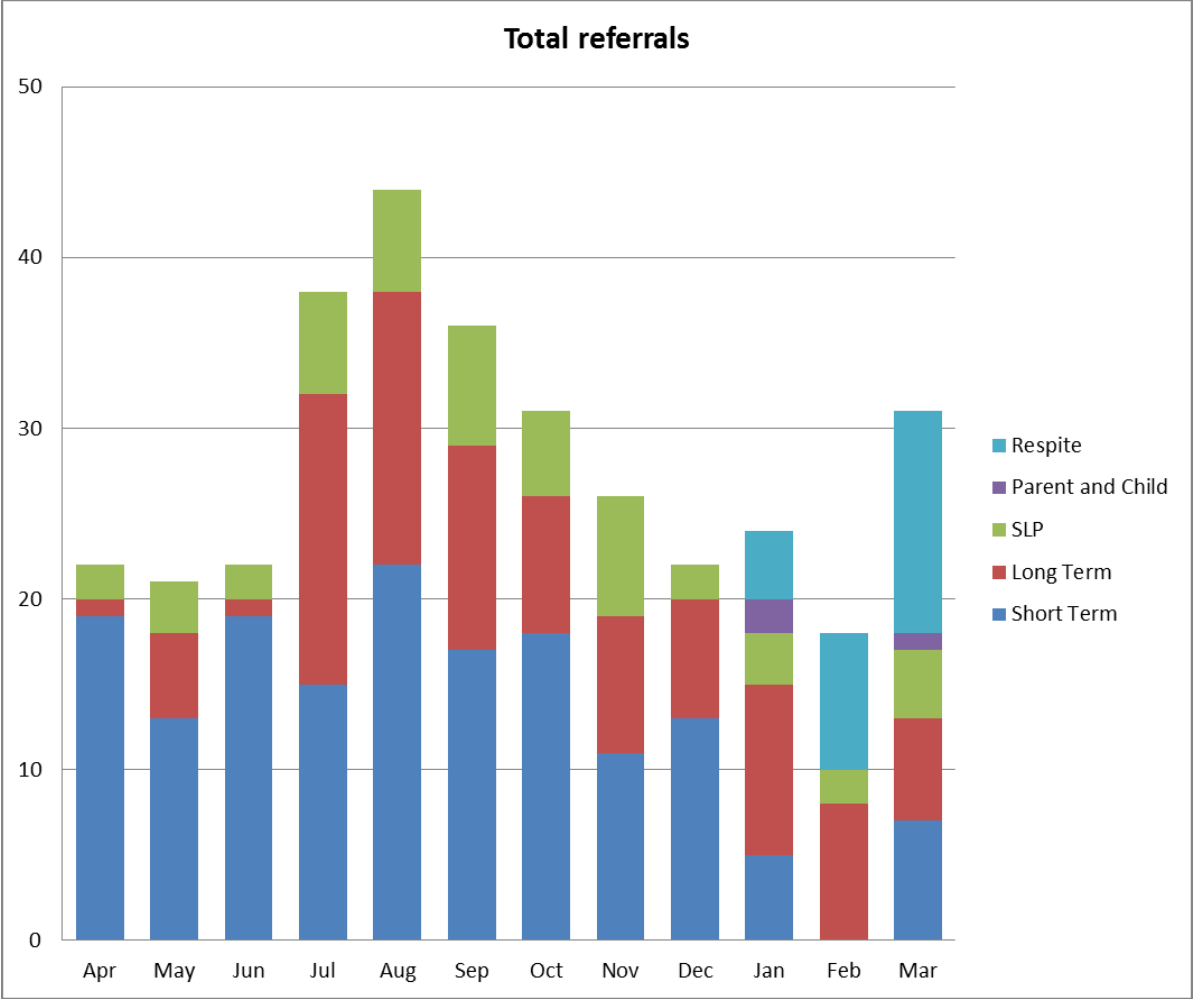
In line with other local authorities there has been an increase in the numbers of children becoming LAC and late summer of 2015 was extremely busy for duty workers and foster carers.

There are currently 119 children in in-house placements, (49 in kinship care/8 in Reg 24, and 97 SGO placements); plus 19 (13 LAC, 6 s17 or post 18) in SLP, a total of 195 placements plus 4 Staying Put arrangements.

PLACEMENT ACTIVITY:

REFERRALS:

There has been a slowdown in the number of placements being requested and therefore made in the quarter. Despite several disruptions of placements requiring crisis responses and support plans the number of IFAs continue to be below previous levels in the quarter:



In line with the Care placement Strategy we have continued to work to prevent the use of IFAs over the last quarter: particularly in preventing IFA or expensive residential mother and baby placements – in January there were 4 such placements. The Ofsted 2014/5 data report has shown a rise of 3% in the use of IFA's across all other Local authorities.

Placement Searches, especially for respite, take considerable team duty time and placement availability continues to be increasingly limited as many carers have reached full capacity. However, we have recruited 3 respite carers in the quarter to meet this need and comments from carers about the lack of respite impacting on morale.

There is continued slowdown in referrals in the quarter which would indicate placement panel and scrutiny of decisions has been effective.

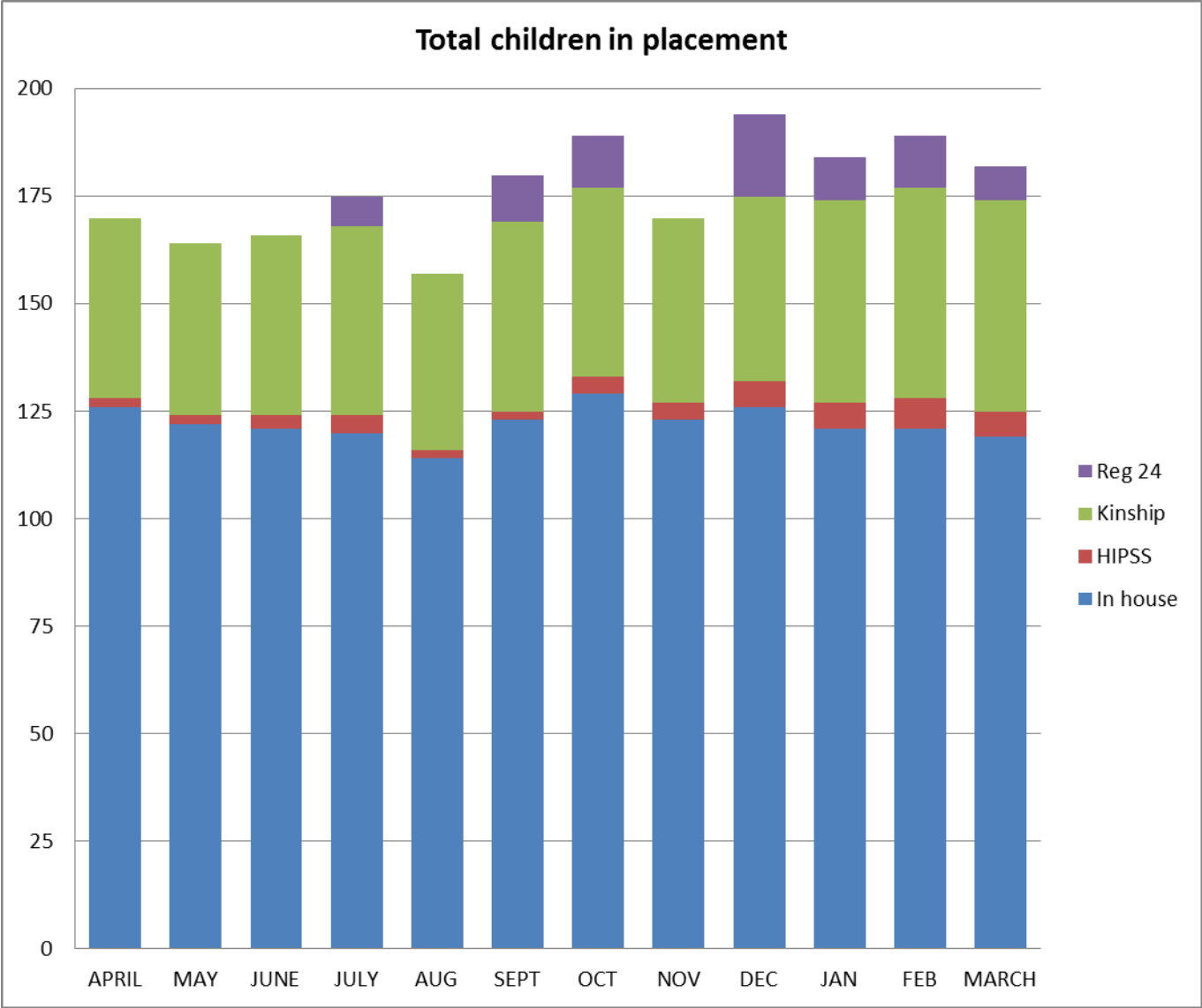
Analysis:

The number of short term or emergency placements peaked in the first quarter and third quarter. We have had a consistently high number of children awaiting ongoing long term placements, some ultimately are not needed as other options are identified i.e. s/t move, reunification or remain in existing placements.

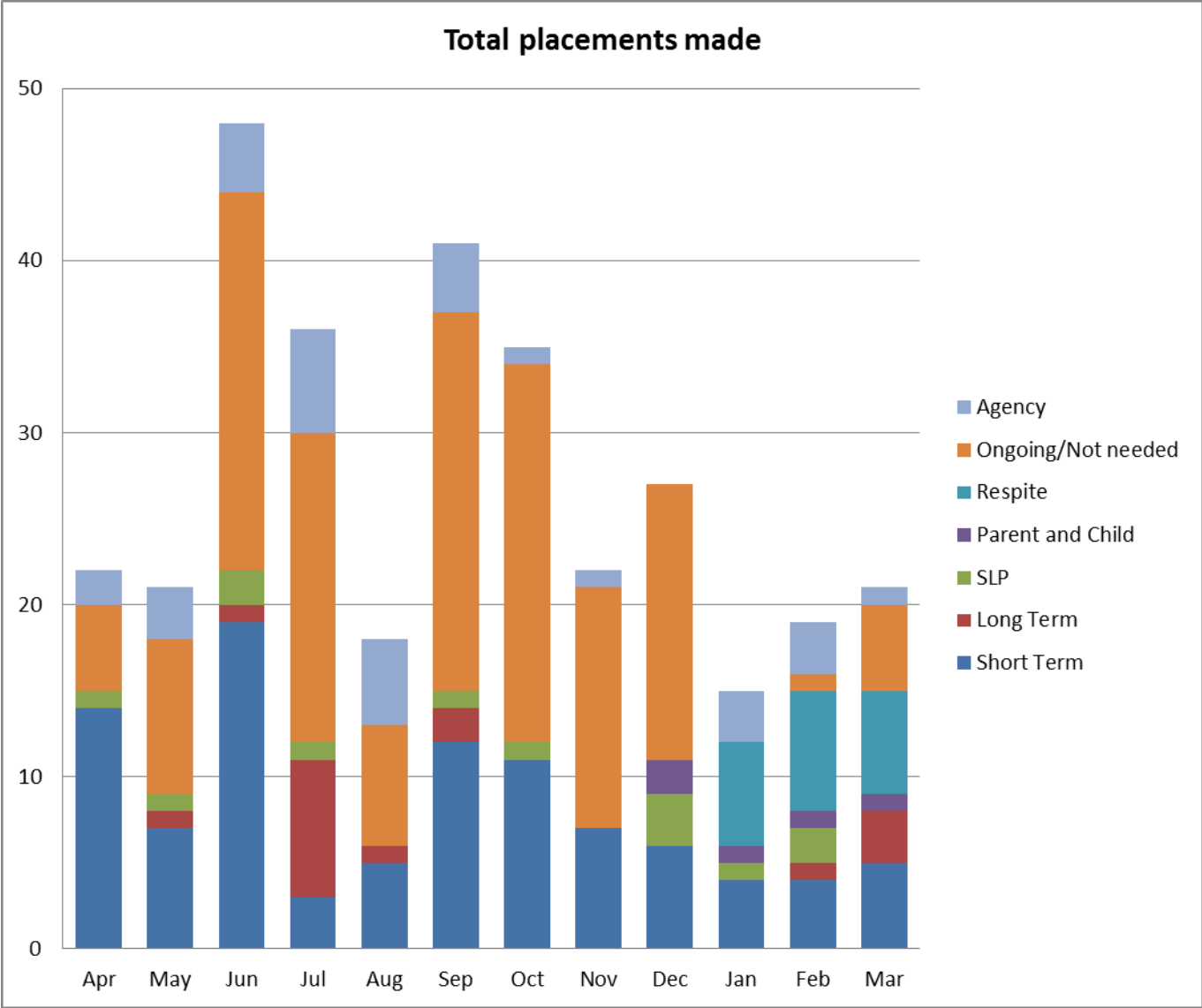
The spread of SLP placements remains fairly consistent but placements are being blocked by lack of moving on to independent housing. This is being addressed at a Strategic level and is being supported through corporate parenting Panel.

Four parent and child placements were made in-house over the year – thus preventing the use of expensive IFA or mother and baby unit expenditure. Meeting this demand has illustrated the need to develop parent and child training, policy and procedures over the next 6 months.

From January 2016 we will collate figures for respite activity as this requires considerable duty time and reflects the level of support needed by some carers to maintain challenging placements. Respite support is part of our strategy to support and retain foster carers. To meet increased need we have recruited an additional 3 respite carers in the last quarter.



In the face of increased LAC numbers the service has worked hard to place children in house without resorting to additional IFA's.



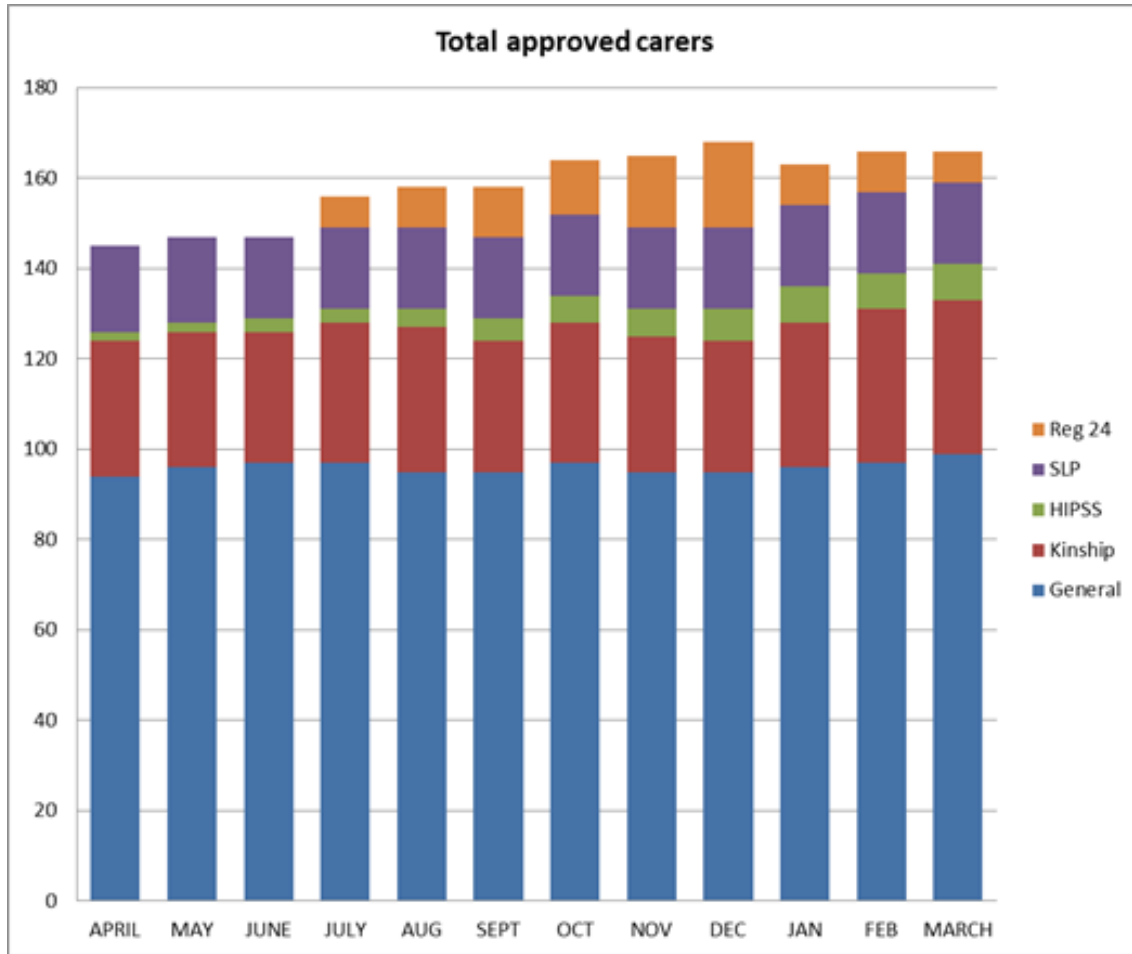
PANEL AND ASSESSMENTS:

There are 2 Panels per month to meet increasing need and an increase in review work. A further two panel members have been added to the Central list from education and Care leaver backgrounds to add to the scrutiny and quality of decision making.

From September 2016 the service moved to completing Stage 1 checks and references to Stage 2 assessments. This allows the fostering social worker to focus on assessment whilst the recruitment officer can focus on checks and references and 'hold' potential applicants interest.

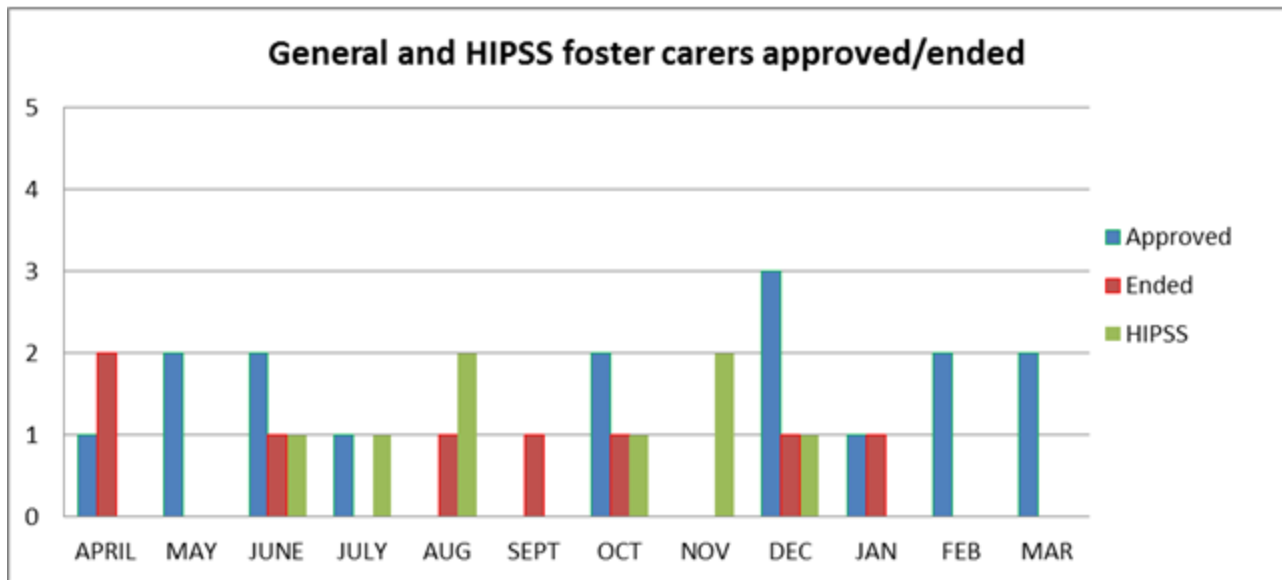
The number of applicants at Stage 1 has increased as Stage 2 becomes a faster process for applicants and increases Panel business. There have been some risks to this – one is staff

vacancies, the other is that three applicants have 'gone on hold' whilst other family or business commitments impinge. One general applicant was withdrawn as unsuitable following a brief report to panel and it was evident that this was an effective way to prevent having to complete the full assessment. Applicants may appeal this decision to IRM if they wish.



Significantly, there have been 7 IFA or experienced Local authority carers that have transferred to work for Herefordshire council. This means they are moving over with pre-existing skills and require less 'induction' to develop skills – a further 3 are currently being assessed and 2 Adult placement providers are converting to Supported lodgings.

No in-house carers have left to move to an Independent agency.



HIPPS:

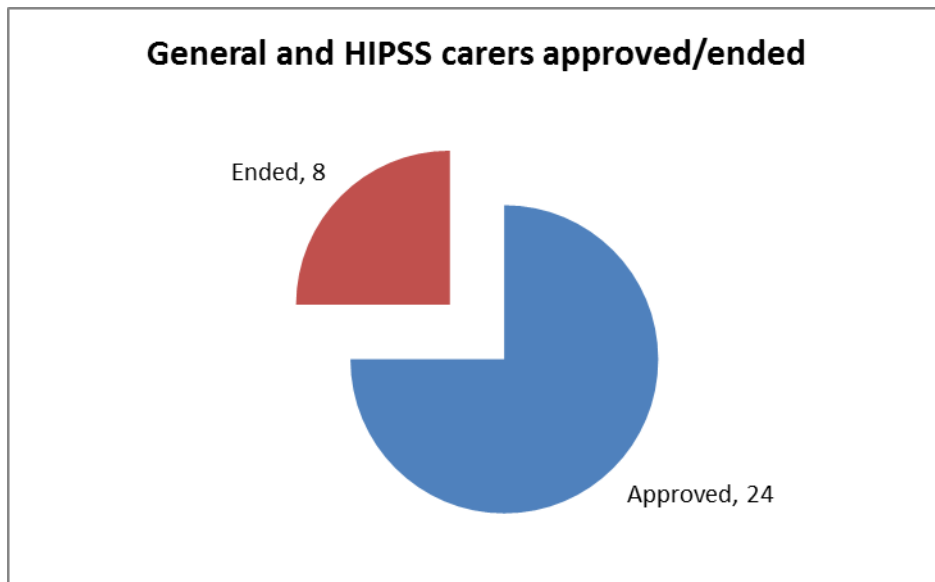
The HIPSS scheme is only slightly below its target of 10 households by April 2016 having recruited 8 HIPSS carers households over the year. These are providing care for 6 placements: one kinship, 3 step downs from Residential and 2 placements have successfully stepped down to in-house placements from IFA; one respite carer has been identified as being needed to consistently support the scheme.

Analysis: whilst an Open Evening held on 8th February failed to generate new interest, a wider marketing plan is in place which targets carers interested in teens and older children with challenging behaviours; specific adverts in Hereford Times jobs pages targets those with pre-existing skills in counselling, therapeutic or Residential work.

Training and 'upskilling' of general foster carers to be available for 'step down ' and prevent escalation is in place with the HIPSS and TISS teams.

Carers approved and resignations:

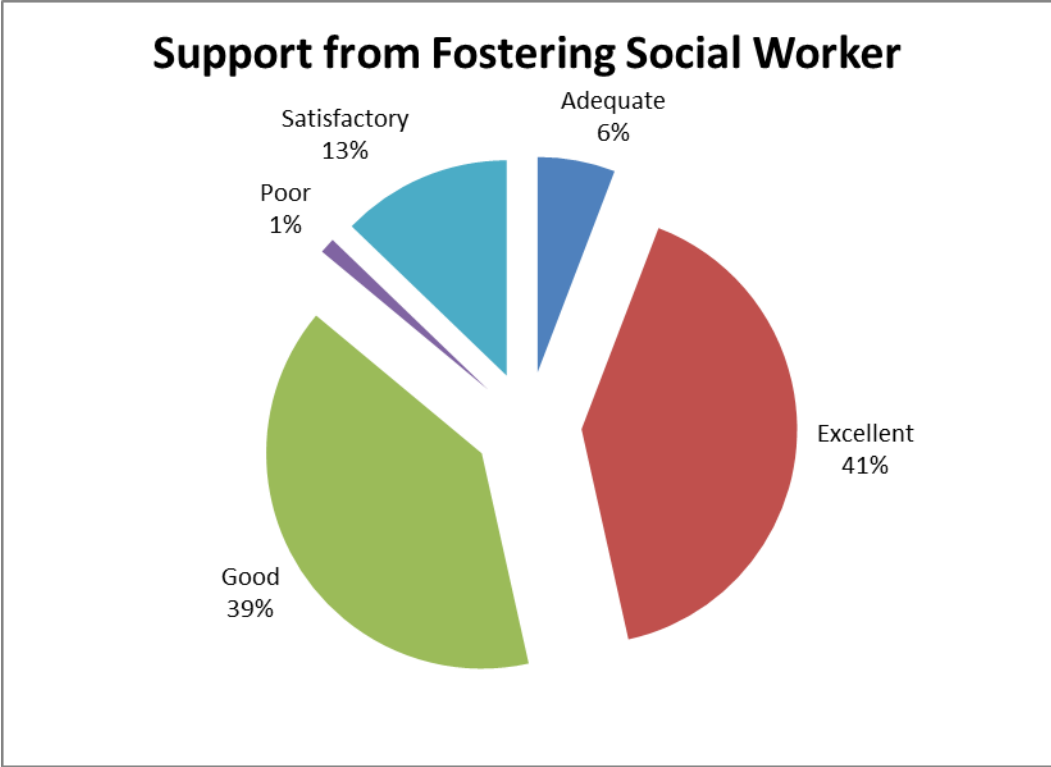
The service has increased the number of general and HIPSS foster carers by 24, retention remains good as the resignation level is low again (8 2013/4, 9 in 2014/5). A further 4 carers came to panel in April 2016 and ADM in May.



Retention and support:

Some (15) carers have opted to go on 'hold' through the year due to family circumstance, adoptive placement break, health need, post placement recovery or exhaustion, this impacts on placement choice/vacancies available. However, by March 31.3.16 this figure had reduced to 10 - these carers need a break but should be back 'on board' with careful matching and support.

To check whether we are getting support levels right in the midst of increased pressures a survey of the past years annual reviews and feedback was collated to identify gaps and training needs:

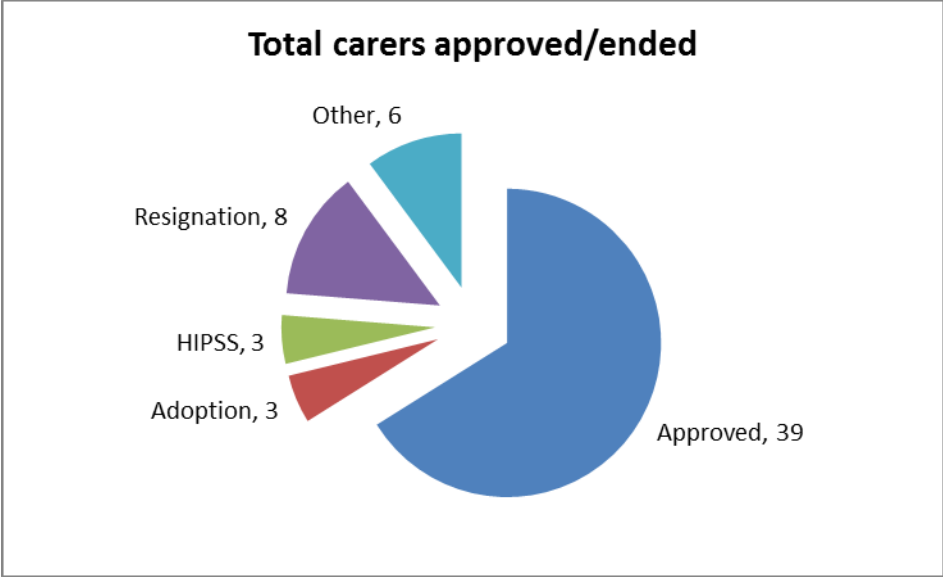


Analysis:

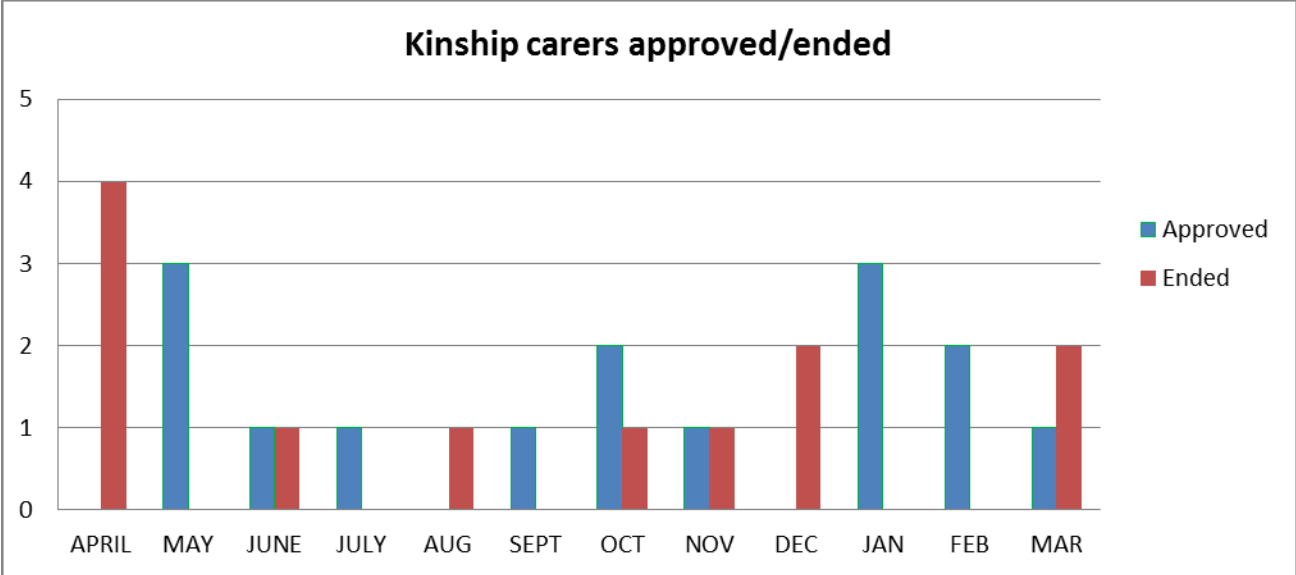
The 2014 – 2015 Ofsted Annual report showed a national decrease in fostering households of one percent (and an increase in family and friends households of 6%). Herefordshire foster carer households have increased by 8.6% (93 carers 31.3.15 to 107 carers 31.3.16). Herefordshire family and friends foster carers have increased by 6.25% (32 to 34 households) which is in line with the national average but does not reflect some of the increased activity around temporary approved carers which peaked at 19 households at one point but is reduced to 7 as at 31.3.16 which reflects a more stable workflow.

Over the year the impact of resignations is mitigated by those carers converting to other permanence or resource options, either adoption or SGO for LAC children needing permanence – this reflects savings to the Department in avoiding expensive out of county adoption or remaining in care. Three in house carers have converted to become HIPSS. None have moved into SLP.

Other represents those whose temporary approval has not continued. Within the 8 resignations 2 households were de-registered following serious concerns relating to practice or care following LADO investigation.



KINSHIP- Team Manager – Alison Forshaw



Over the quarter the kinship team have supported 34 carers; 2 kinship carers were approved in the quarter with a further 12 kinship, reg 24 or SGO assessments ongoing. There are 49 children in kinship care, 8 in Reg 24 placements – temporary approved carers at the end of the quarter.

Kinship foster care

Currently we have a total of 12 assessments underway within the Kinship and SGO Hub. 7 of these are full fostering assessments for temporarily approved kinship foster carers under Regulation 24. We do not have the capacity of our sessional social worker to fully support this level of assessment work but hopefully this will be available to provide adhoc assessment

support post in the next three months. We are not experiencing the same level of joint assessments visits from our CIN/MASH team colleagues at the moment. Compared to 25 joint assessment visits in the previous quarter we have completed 11 in this last quarter. So a significant decrease in Reg 24 joint visit requests. Interestingly there is an increase in viability assessment (pre placement) which is positive in terms of planning for children. This is will be tracked more accurately during the current quarter.

Our number of fully approved households is holding steady during the three months in 2016 this has been at a level of 32, 34, 34. This is a 25% increase compared to 2014 when the Hub first formed.

Kinship and SGO Hub Staffing

A new family support worker (30 hrs) is due to join the Kinship & SGO Hub in May which will provide much needed support to new kinship fostering families.

Special Guardianship Orders

During the quarter 3 children have moved from LAC status to permanency with Special Guardians. During 2015 there were 13 new Special Guardianship arrangements and so the initial quarter would suggest a forecast of a similar number for 2016. However with the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund for four years now available to Special Guardianship Arrangements significant effort is focussed on promoting this change, and hopefully the result will be more families will feel an SGO is an option for them.

The Kinship & SGO Hub meet the Government expectations in relation to the new improved Special Guardianship assessment. There is no doubt there is an increased expectation on SGO services providing more face to face support which will place pressure on the SGO Hub. The Hub has developed training specifically for Special Guardians in collaboration with Adoption Colleagues and this will provide training on The Secure Base Model, drawn from attachment theory, and adapted to include an additional element, that of family membership, for children who are separated from their birth parents.

The consultation in relation to allowances policies is now complete and report prepared for cabinet. The outcome of this will trigger a process of review of all SGOs which will be a

significant amount of work – the Hub has a review process in place and will be able to begin to trigger a process.

OSB – 7 Carers under assessment with our first carers going to fostering panel in May. Matching with children with disability will begin as soon as approval is given. Health training continues to be a focus and the Project Co-ordinator is planning to meet with Health Colleagues. Health Clinical Psychologist is keen to support placements for the children open to her however is unable to provide any specific training. Local OT input is needed.

SUPPORTED LODGINGS AND STAYING PUT:

One vacant social worker post is dedicated to SLP support – activity has been covered on duty until the new post holder is in place early May 2016. Of the 18 SLP providers 6 combine fostering and SLP support. Three carers are still on hold due to illness, moving house and HIPSS approval.

There are 19 young people in SLP placements at the end of the quarter (13 LAC and 6 S17 currently over the age of 18ys). The next annual data needs to be able to consistently differentiate those that are LAC and those s17 placements to refine LAC population data.

The number of SLP placements moving on and sufficiency has stagnated due to lack of housing options. This has been raised at a Strategic level with partner agencies via Corporate Parenting Panel, 16+ Team and the Director of Childrens services.

Analysis: Sufficiency targets for 6 new SLP providers over the year have not been met. We have approved one new SLP carer plus 2 approved to support existing households over the year. However, three further applications are now in process following a specific recruitment campaign:

The 2016 marketing strategy has included redesign of a teen and older young people needing support to move into independent living leaflet and poster. These have been placed around the county. Recruitment stands in Job Centre 'drop ins' and the sixth form college and art college have been set up. Twitter and website activity has been amended and the marketing officer has spent time with Children in Care council to focus on their needs and expectations as they move into independence.

This has resulted in interest in 2 adult supported lodgings scheme carers applying to us to convert to SLP and should result in further interest.

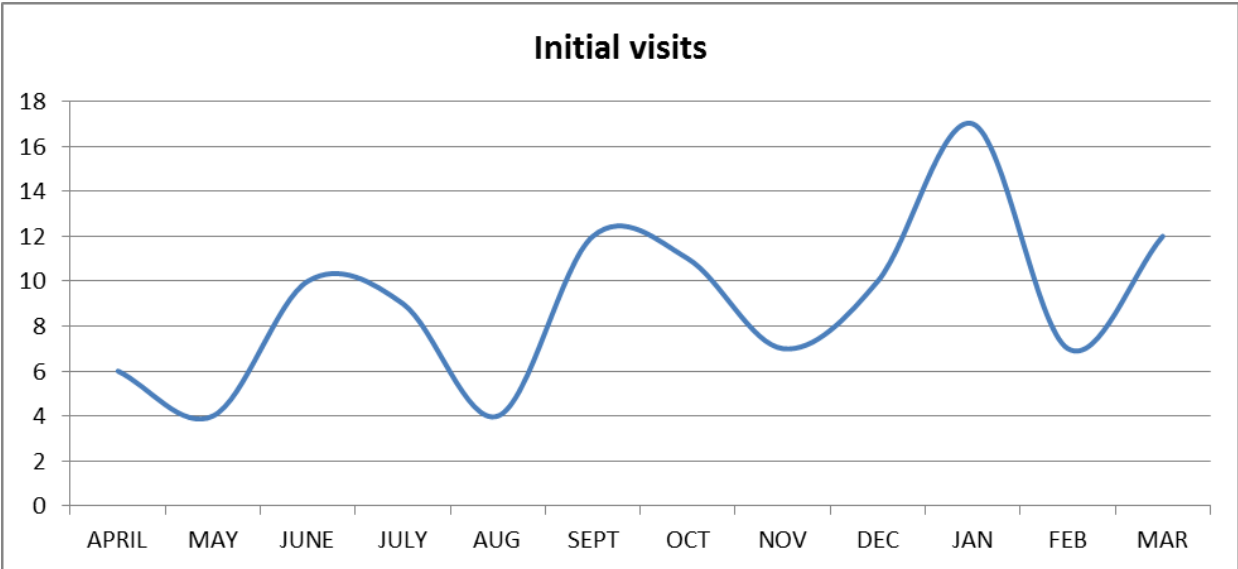
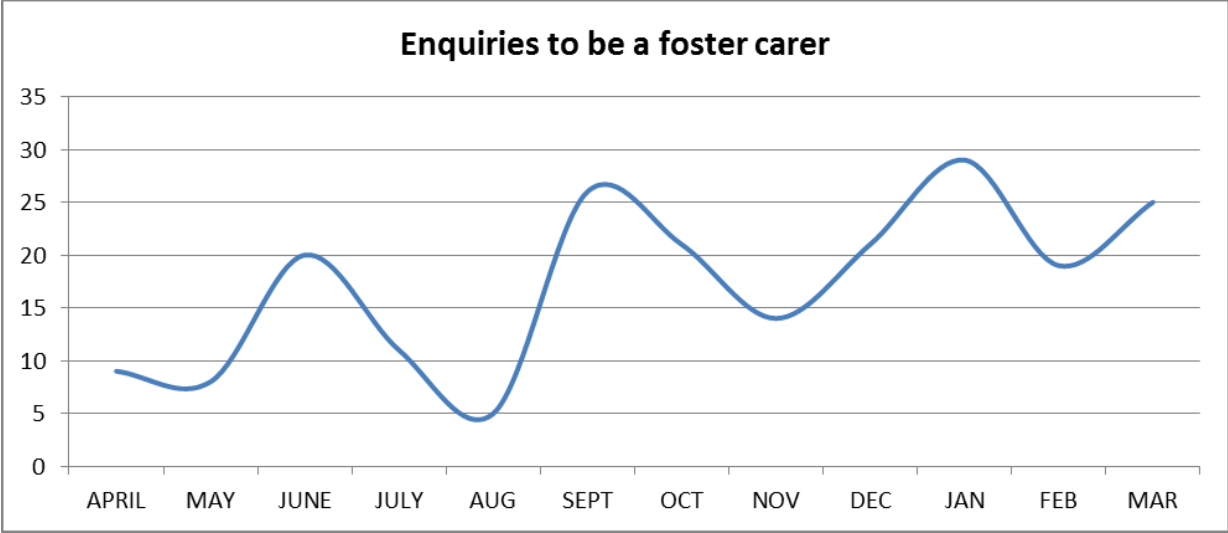
There are currently 4 SLP providers approved at Level 3 who are sufficiently skilled to take the most challenging placements i.e. Remand, risk of CSE and high drug and alcohol or offending issues. As such we have increased capacity for the more demanding placements and 'step downs' from residential where it has been determined that independence was a more appropriate route than HIPPS. These Level 3 Providers are reviewed annually and require a high level of safeguarding input. Enhanced training for this group has been implemented over the last year and this quarter a Restorative Justice course was added to supplement activity - more is planned for the next quarter with specialized training from the HIPSS team.

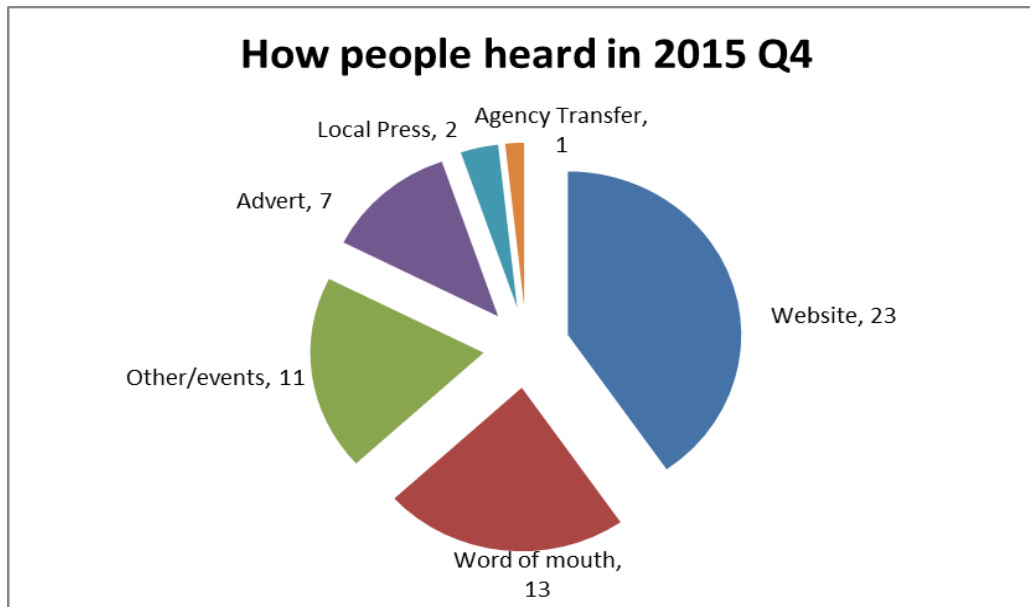
Staying Put:

There are currently 4 Staying Put arrangements: one has been in placement for two years and will be progressing to university. Figures over the year are consistently between 3-5 placements. This is a comparatively low figure compared with other authorities, less than forecast year on year and means the central government funding will cover in-house costs to date. Further work at a strategic level is required to address housing and Benefit issues to help reduce costs and support young people and former carers to have a more streamlined access to benefits and Housing to date and increase local government commitment to Staying put arrangements.

RECRUITMENT

- There is continued increase in Initial enquiries reflecting the roles of the Marketing officer and recruitment officer - refer to graph:





Analysis:

The recruitment strategy to date has shown a significant increase in Initial enquiries and average end of year data shows that 50% of all enquiries result in an initial visit. From this 25% then go on to application and assessment. The target for next year is 33% to reflect the sustained contact and support from the Recruitment officer to ‘hold ‘ on to enquiries and continue progress made to date. The quality of carers being recruited and those transferring in from IFA’s is extremely positive.

OTHER OPERATIONAL UPDATES:

- There has been 8 general fostering LADO’s held in the year, all were returned to Panel to discuss support and training needs. Of these, 2 were of significant concern, requiring carer de-registration and referral to DBS.
- All home reviews were completed within timescale, with one completed as a paper review due to carer ill health. Two unannounced visits have fallen out of timescale due to staff changeover/capacity and geographical distance. The service continues to aspire to complete 2 unannounced visits per annum.

- Challenges around UASCs and refugees have been met through a collation of foster carers experience, formulation of training materials and 'tools' required to support carers likely to offer UASC placements. Consultation with carers planned for 25.4.16 and specific training for carers has been set up with Prevent workshops on 13.6.16 and 11.10.16; and UASC on 6.10.16 and 12.1.17. Recruitment has taken place within existing carers to date and marketing is moving to engage the public through website and social media awareness of need.
- Consultation with foster carers having experience of mother and baby placements and social care managers and social workers requiring placements and assessments has taken place and this will be developed through policy and procedures over the next 6 months. The aim is for specific training for foster carers in October 2016 to prevent dependence on IFA provision.
- The panel central list has been extended by 2 more members and panel processes reviewed to ensure actions are followed up and reported on at the following panel and evaluations shared with Panel members. Panel chair and members have noted that the quality of the Brief Reports coming through and used them as anonymized good practice documents for use in other authorities.
- The Children in Care Council has met with Panel members to find out how foster carers are approved and to share some of the questions they would like to have asked. One new panel member is a previously Looked after child and helps to represent carer leavers perspectives in Panel activity.

Signed:



Carol J. Moreton, Fostering Team Manager.

Dated: 2.5.16