

Fostering Service Annual Report 2016-17

OFSTED Registration: SCO56304

1. Introduction

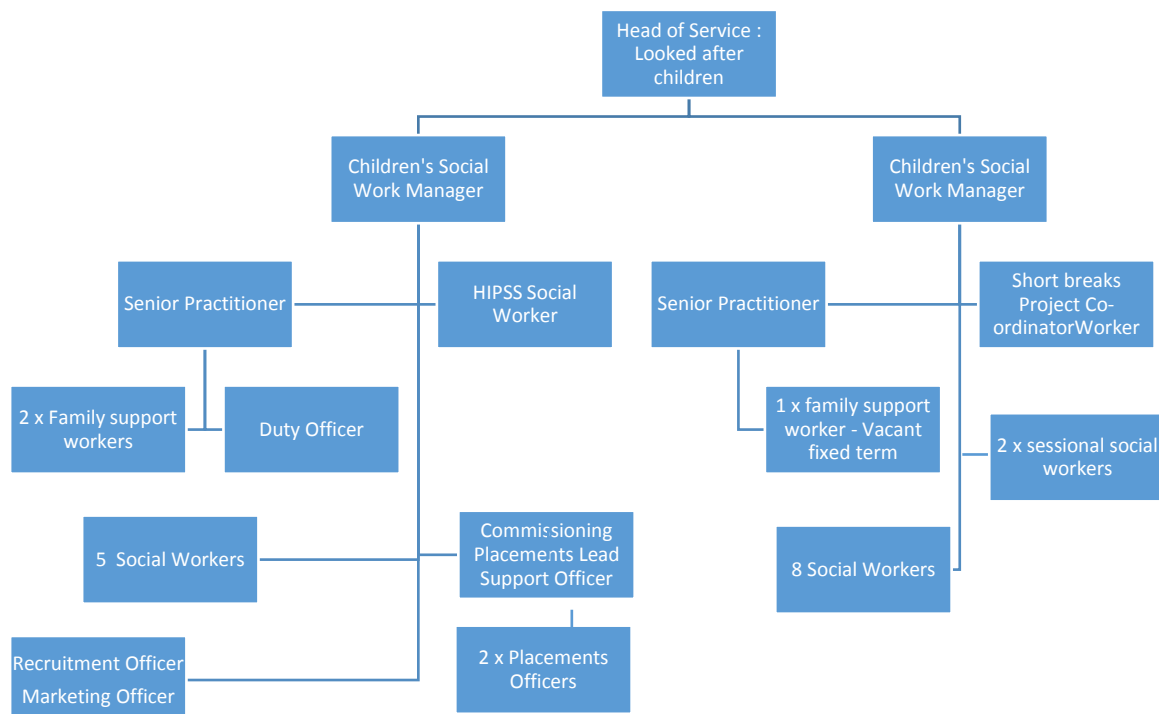
Report Owner –Carol Moreton (Registered Person) Childrens Social Work Manager, Fostering

Alison Forshaw – Childrens Social Work Manager, Fostering

Gill Cox (Responsible Person) – Head of Service for Looked After Children

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.

2. Establishment



The fostering service has merged the general and kinship teams to ensure there is a fairer spread of social work supervisory responsibilities across the two managers as a result of the change to the senior practitioner supervision responsibilities. This is detailed in the structure chart above. At the same time the Placements Team joined the service to help provide greater continuity of placement searches and shared information about placements needed.

It was identified that the service would benefit from having a dedicated Duty Officer role to provide a single point of contact for foster carers and the children's teams. A vacant post was reconfigured to meet this need and has already resulted in more efficient gathering of information and searches which require a single point of contact - data sets are likely to improve next year.

The restructure created some anxieties within the staff teams however the changes are now in place and the teams are functioning well.

Vacancies as at 31st March 2017 are:-

- 1 x 30 hour fixed term family support worker to cover the kinship family support worker who is currently seconded to the short breaks social work assistant role until March 2018
- 1 x Placements Officer to replace the worker who left in March 2017

Social work vacancies during the year have been filled by the recruitment of two former Fostering team members returning and by increasing the hours of part time staff. Being able to fill the gaps with experienced staff has been really positive for the team.

3. Foster Carers

General Foster carers

Last year's (2015/16) performance of 15% overall growth was in dramatic contrast to the national rate with other local authorities generally varying between -1% to 1% growth. This year's overall growth is at 10% which continues to be positive. Overall we now have 144 households compared with last year's total of 131.

We have successfully recruited 21 new foster carers this year to the General, Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service (HIPSS) and Overnight Short Breaks (OSB) teams.

We have equalled last year's recruitment of 15 new general fostering households. Three carer households are joining us as respite carers. We have seen a reduction in the number of foster carers transferring to us from other agencies, this year we have had 2 transfer compared with 7 last year. This means that carers need additional support which we hope to mitigate with our model of family support, buddy plans via the Foster Carers Association (FCA) and continued recruitment of respite carers.

Over the year we have had three general foster carers also apply to be dual approved as supported lodgings providers (SLP) for mother and baby, unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) or post 18 support.

This year there have been 12 resignations compared with previous years averages of 10. One resignation is due to a carer transferring to an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), five due to

health reasons, one to retire, one limited capacity, two moved to other employment, two change of circumstances.

Over the year we have implemented new annual review forms to improve evidencing the quality of care young people receive and also to recognise the work undertaken by foster carers to make a difference to children's lives through feedback from children's social workers and other agencies. For example this is a nomination received from the Virtual school for the 2017 Foster Carer Forum:

"Julie has three placements with very differing needs.

She brought one extremely shy child out of her shell and encouraged her to join groups and have some independence which the young person had never done before. She is helping this young person to see that school isn't always the negative place she believes it to be and is giving her strategies to deal with issues as they arise.

She has supported another young person through a series of school exclusions, been supportive of the alternative curriculum that was put in place and has managed to get this young person to attend the school that he said he was NEVER going to go to (and now he's passing exams!!).

Thirdly, she has been the rock in the tumultuous life of another young person and tries to keep her grounded and picks up the pieces to help her have another go when things fall apart both in education and with her birth family."

Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Scheme (HIPSS) carers

HIPSS carers provide therapeutic placements for our most challenging children who are either currently in residential care or at high risk of requiring a residential placement. We aim to be able to place these children locally in Herefordshire within a family based setting.

As at 31.3.17 we have 7 HIPSS carers providing 5 placements – one provides regular respite to others and one is between placements with introductions being planned. Over the year we have approved 1 new HIPSS carer and one assessment withdrew following checks and references. This is below the targets set of having 10 approved HIPSS carers to provide 10 placements. Two carers who converted from general fostering and kinship have reverted back. One of these carers had a successful period as a HIPSS carer then appropriately was stepped down back to a kinship arrangement. This carer has now applied to become dual approved to also provide respite for other HIPSS carers. The other carer's skill base matched more appropriately with general fostering.

We successfully recruited our new HIPSS Project Co-ordinator from our existing fostering team staff group. A HIPSS recruitment strategy is prepared and will be rolled out early June 2017.

Foster Carers now have access to Therapeutic Intervention Support Service (TISS) consultations via the monthly clinics that HIPSS have set up. This began in September and we have had 3 consultations per month since totalling 21 appointments.

Kinship carers

A Connected Person is defined as;

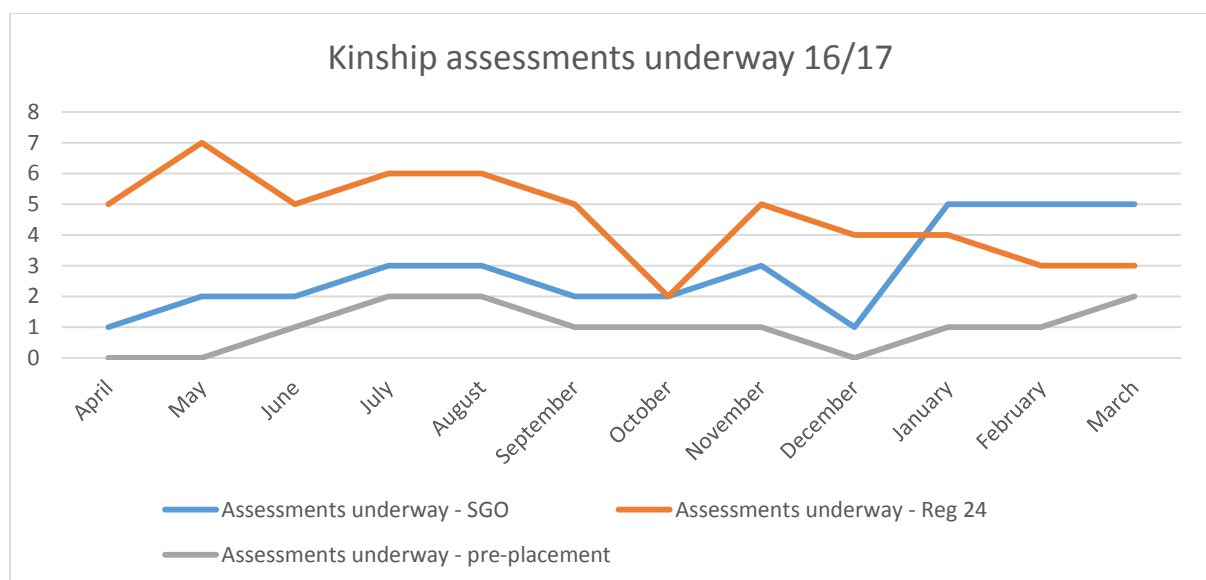
"A relative, friend or other person connected with a child. The latter is someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend', but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child. It could be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as (for example) a child-minder, a teacher or a youth worker.

Relative is defined as "a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent."

In Herefordshire and other local authorities a connected person is referred to as a Kinship Carer. The term Friends and Family carer is sometimes used by other authorities. Locally the service can be directed by court to provide a 'kinship assessment' this can result in either a kinship fostering assessment or a Special Guardianship assessment depending upon the care plan.

As directed by Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 if a decision has been made that a child needs to become looked after and needs to be placed immediately with alternative carers the child can be placed with a 'connected person' and a temporary approval of the connected person can be made following initial safeguarding checks. The temporary approval can last for up to 16 weeks (with an extension of up to 8 weeks to be used in exceptional circumstances). During this 16 week period a full assessment of the carers is made as for any other foster carer.

There are currently 35 approved kinship foster carers and 3 temporarily approved kinship carers. We have had 8 resignations within the Kinship cohort over the year. However four have moved to become Special Guardians and we have had two where the children have returned to parents, 1 carer became a staying put carer, and one where the child moved to General foster carers following an allegation.



The graph above shows a significant change, for the first time in the past three years the number of SGO assessments underway are greater than the number of assessments following temporary approval of foster carers ie. where children have been placed with a connected person in an emergency. The latest three month trend suggests pre placement assessment of prospective kinship foster carers will overtake temporarily approved foster carers also. Regulation 24 should only be

used in exceptional circumstances and so it is positive that there appears to be a reduction in the number of children placed in an emergency.

A Special Guardianship order (SGO) is a private Order whereby the Special Guardian shares parental responsibility (PR) with the parent(s) but can exercise PR to the exclusion of all others. A focus over the past year has been to develop better support for special guardians and this has included a dedicated support group that has been running for 6 months, giving special guardian's access to all fostering training, arranging consultations with TISS for special guardians, providing information via a quarterly newsletter, and the provision of an allowance policy that provides clarity and transparency.

Telephone support and advice is available to special guardians during the normal working week and we have provided mediation for 1 family where there have been contact difficulties.

We have enabled 1 special guardian to access our 12 week Solihull Course; and 2 special guardians to access the Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) taster day – they will now be invited to attend a 3 day workshop on DDP – Foundations for Attachment.

Our family support workers have worked directly with 7 special guardianship families. This has included helping carers to understand the impact of trauma on brain development and presenting behaviours; working with a special guardian to assess need for an Adoption Support Fund application; understanding the impact of trauma on a child with learning difficulties. The SGO support group have engaged speakers on specific topics e.g. Pupil Premium.

Where a special guardianship order is made for a former looked after child then access to funding for therapeutic services is now possible through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). To date applications to the fund total £5,699 for special guardianship arrangements this includes 1 successful application and 1 where we are awaiting a decision. In comparison with neighbouring local authorities we have been successful at obtaining funds for carers through the ASF.

Overnight Short break carers

As a new addition to the Fostering Service the overnight short break service provides overnight care to disabled children living at home with parents. We now have 5 carers providing breaks to 6 children for a total of 238 nights per year. Unfortunately we had one couple resign at the beginning of service development - it appeared that the impact of caring for children with complex needs had not been fully recognised by the couple. We are currently assessing 2 additional carers, unfortunately one assessment has stopped for a while due to the serious ill health of the applicant's parent. We are also in the process of dual approving a general foster carer who has an interest in providing respite placements for looked after children and children with disability. In addition we also have new applicants who will attend preparation to foster training in May prior to the start of the full assessment. So potential for a further 4 OSB carers in the coming months.

The OSB have formed their own support group facilitated by either the OSB project co-ordinator or family support worker. Additional health training is provided for OSB carers. More challenging has been the securing of OT service should we need it in the future. It may be that the OT services within Adult services can support this and this is being considered against service level agreements with child health services by commissioning (however we have been advised that children's OT service cannot support us).

Feedback for the service is good as evidenced by comments from a parent:-

Feedback from Nigel Gilboy, father of Jack

(Mr Gilboy has confirmed that he's happy for his family's details to be shared)

I was aware that the Ledbury Road respite care unit was shutting down and at first wanted to stick with this as I was worried about what else might be on offer for Jack. Once I was aware of the new family based overnight short break service being set up by Herefordshire Council, I was keen to find out more. I wanted to look earlier rather than later and became anxious not to leave it too long to take a look at what was on offer. I knew we would need an alternative respite care option.

After meeting Stuart and Sue from the new service, everything sounded okay and I was happy to see what happened next.

When a match was found for Jack with an overnight short break carer, I went to meet Ian, the prospective new carer, with support from Stuart and Sue. We immediately hit it off.

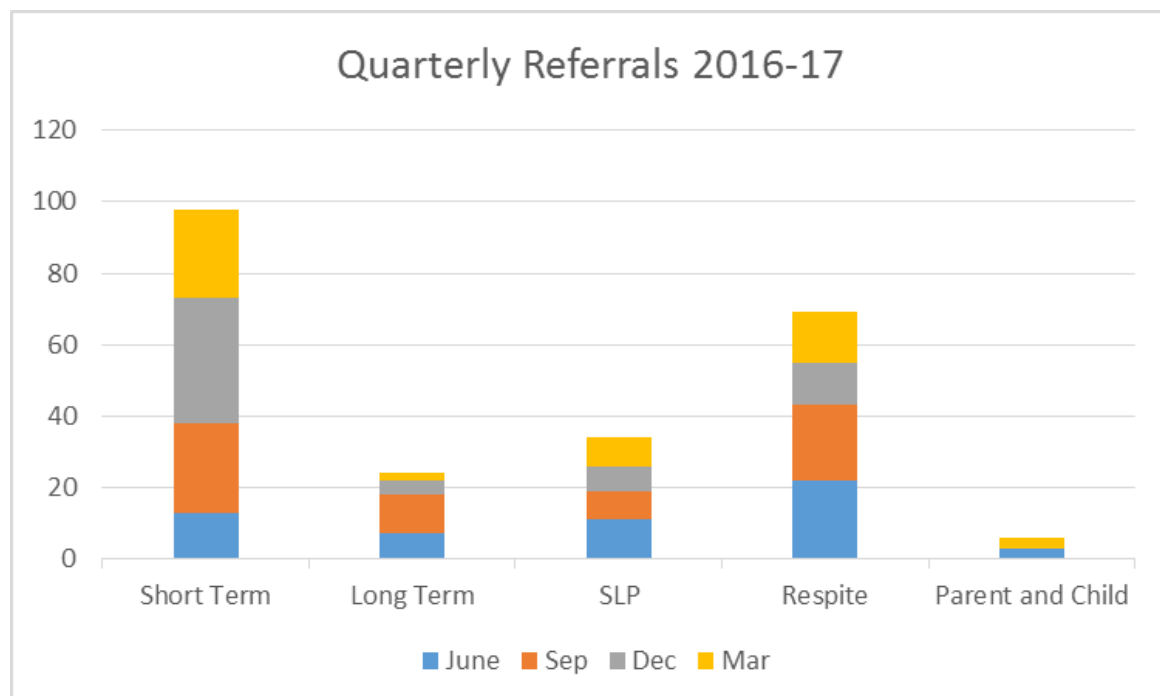
I feel that Ian has given Jack a new dimension to his life, he has new people that he spends time with, people that he likes. Jack is no longer afraid of dogs, he likes Ian's dogs and he likes Ian's children and gets on with his wider family really well.

I no longer have to force Jack to go to respite. In the past, I had to really encourage him to go to the previous respite unit. Jack still says "no Ledbury Road".

Overall, I feel the respite care provided by his overnight short breaks carer has done Jack the world of good and it's a shame there aren't enough carers like Ian. The new service has been brilliant for Jack and our family; we all talk together and that's important, we solve issues together and we are very happy with the way things are arranged.

4. Placement activity

Referrals



The levels of referral activity remain high as last year. There has been a reduction in the number of requests for long term placements through shared learning with referring teams. The levels of respite remain high in order to meet the demands of complex placements and older children in teens.

Children in placement

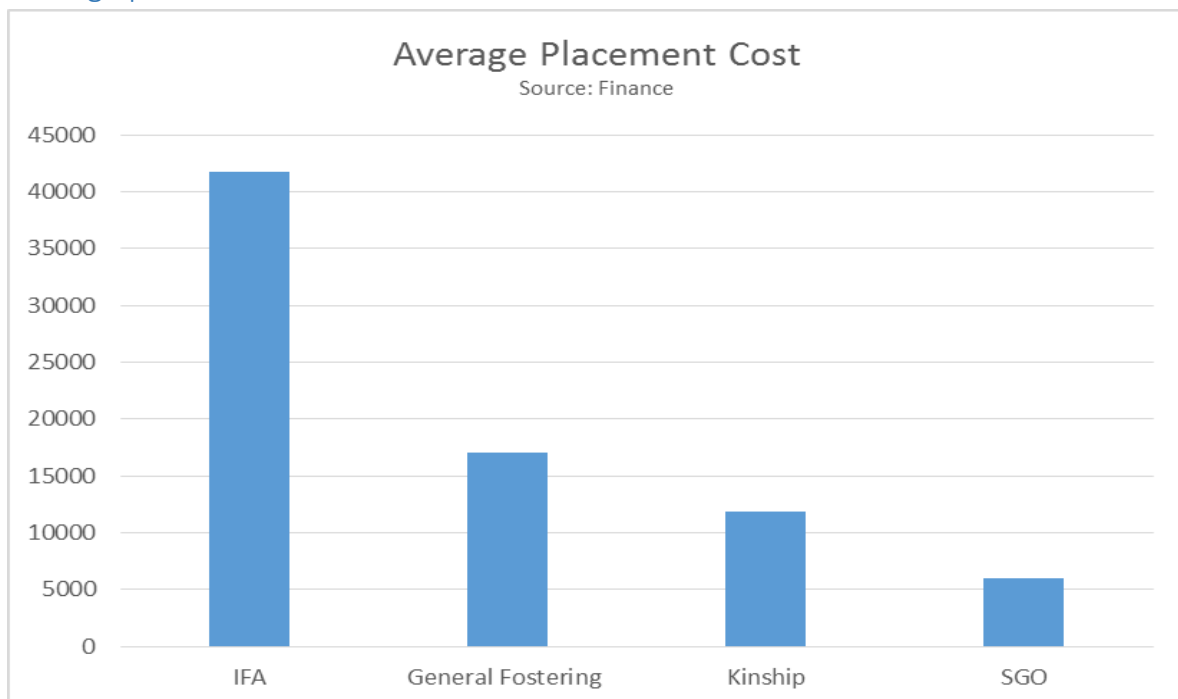
Through improvements within Mosaic and improved data gathering methods quarterly statistical data relating to children in different types of placements will be available over the next year.

LAC numbers have continued to grow and are at 303 children and young people.

Herefordshire figures are high compared with statistical neighbours. We need to improve planning and supporting arrangements to enable children to return to live with family members where this is safe and where appropriate support carers to apply for SGO's.

Proportionately by type national figures are similar to last year at 67% in house, 33% IFA and 8 % residential.

Average placement cost

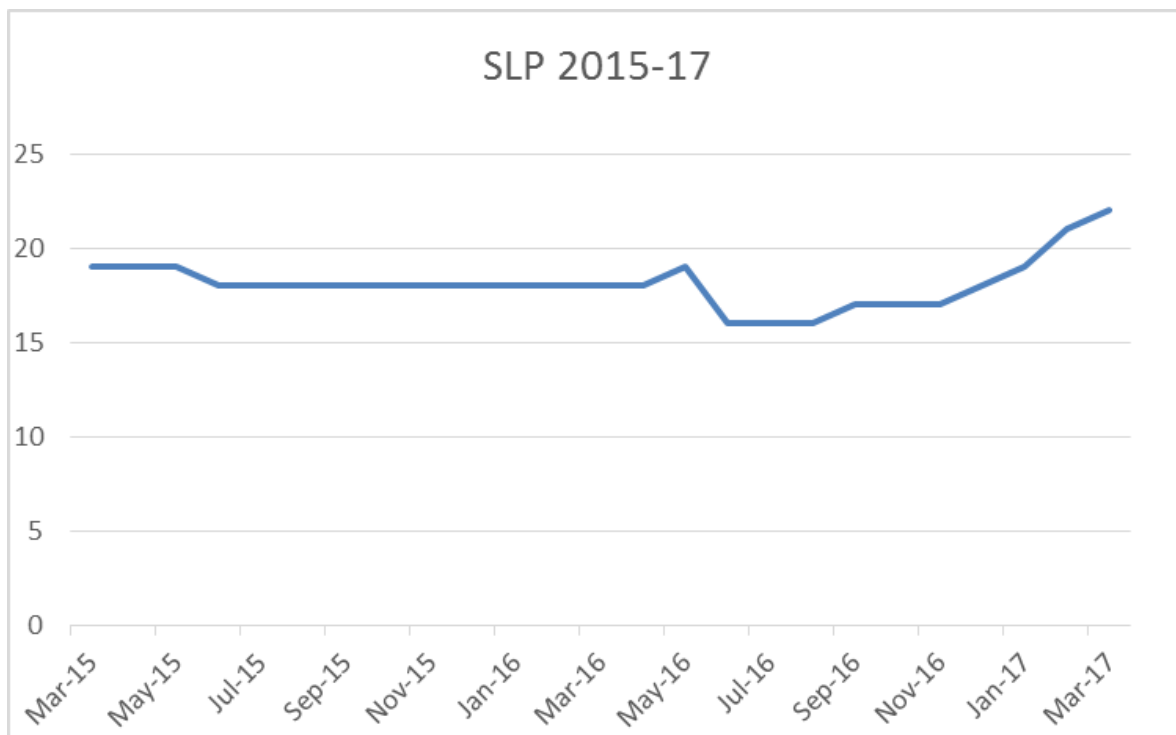


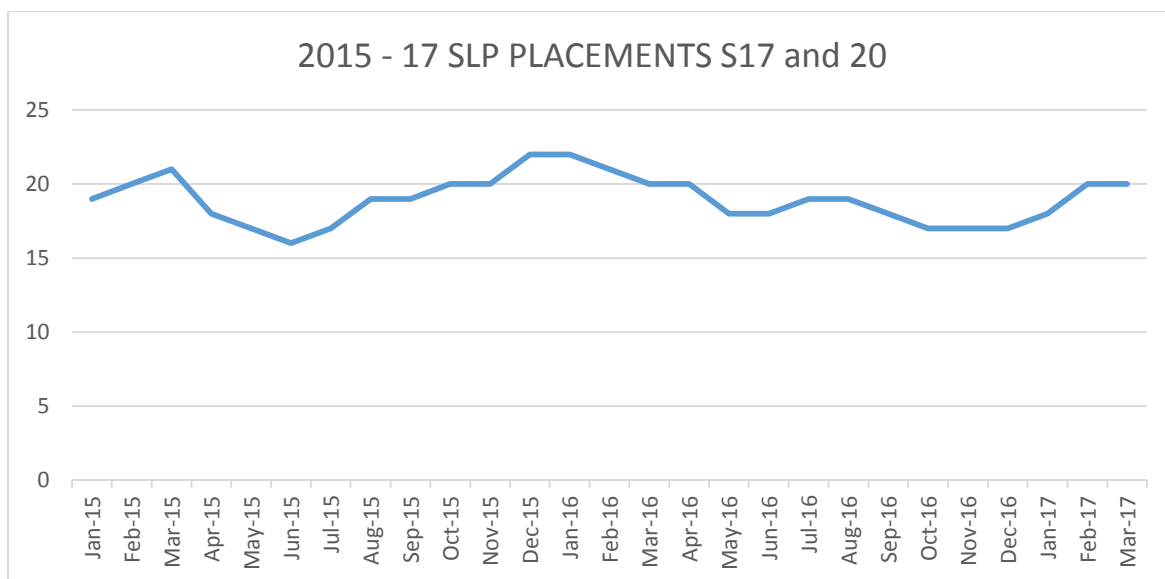
A greater number of looked after children are likely to move from a kinship fostering arrangement to an SGO arrangement more than any other care arrangement. Kinship care arrangements costs on average are £5k less than a general fostering arrangement. The number of kinship care arrangements vary across local authorities. Herefordshire currently has 32 approved households and 3 temporarily approved households, Somerset who is statistically similar has around the same number.

Supported lodgings provider (SLP) and Staying Put carers

Supported lodgings providers have a shorter assessment than General foster carers, but include independent references, health and safety checks and safer carer policy. They are approved by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) outside of panel processes. Supported lodgings differ from foster placement in that they offer more 'long arm' support and advice and are expected to focus on independence skills and engaging young people in employment and education.

Prior to 2014 there had been no growth in this service and recruitment in 2015/16 just replaced and maintained carers available. In early 2016 some providers retired or ceased providing placements through lack of availability. In August 2016 we undertook a recruitment campaign on the back of the need for more UASC placements and national awareness of the need for placements. This has resulted in 8 new providers and sufficiency targets of 6 households have been surpassed. Three are dual approved foster carers offering SLP to foster placements and or SLP dependent on placement levels of need i.e. mother and baby or matching preference. Four new providers and one emergency resource for temporary homeless young people. This latter has particularly been as a direct response to last years reported needs of the 16 + team and young people's representation to Corporate Parenting panel. These young people have a higher than usual level of struggling to manage when they first move out of foster placements and, as for all our own children, often find 'leaving home' extremely difficult facing higher levels of risk around budgeting, substance misuse, unemployment and unstable relationships.





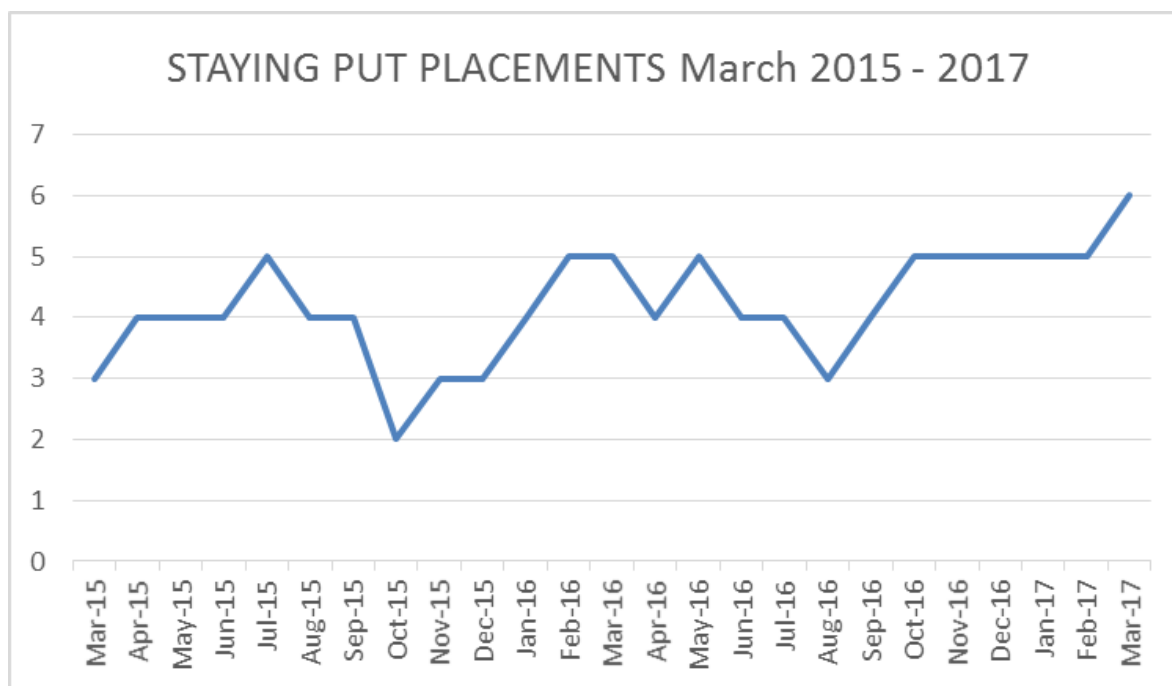
Note this is manual data.

Note this does not include those placements in separate supported accommodation i.e. 2 beds at Bobblestock and UASC shared accommodation.

The number of SLP placements as at March 2017 now includes 2 UASC SLP placements made through the National Transfer scheme with a third placement about to be made. Nationally 13% of LAC over 16 year olds are UASC placements and in Herefordshire this is 15% currently. Plus one young person in a general placement, 4 in an IFA and 3 in a shared house with support.

There has been huge learning around these placements: namely that there has been significant additional support required by providers to help settle young people in and support a high level of health and legal appointments regarding asylum status. One carer has required additional counselling as a direct result of the secondary trauma experienced from a female UASC's disclosures regarding her experiences. We need to review the finance and support arrangements in place due to the level of additional support anticipated. Further training for UASC placements is booked for July and October 2017.

Our SLP fostering social worker is working at full capacity with 17 providers to support, several with multiple placements.



Staying Put activity has shown gradual growth with an overall additional staying put each year (March '15 – 3; March '16 -5; and March '17 – 6 placements). There is an interesting dip in Staying Put placements emerging each summer, possibly because young people find this an easier time of year to move out or the end of college academic years.

Further development work is required with the Housing Benefit team and policy to set up Local tenancy agreements to claim Housing Benefit.

5. Recruitment and Assessments

Analysis of recruitment and assessment activity 2017:

- 184 enquiries received
- 40 applications received
- 17 withdrawn or counselled out
- 23 have gone onto assessment
- 7 of these already approved

There has been learning around our initial screening particularly focussing on health history and fitness to work. A long term difficulty has been trying to encourage GPs to prioritise foster carer medicals, a letter was sent out to GPs in relation to this over 12 months ago and the plan is to repeat this exercise.

6. Fostering panel

The Fostering Panel meets regularly twice a month on average. Since February 2017 Alison King has acted as Independent Chair, with Chris Cooke as Independent Vice Chair, both being social workers with many years' post qualification experience. A pattern has been established whereby Chris Cooke chairs the panel once every two months. Other members of the Central List include a registered

foster carer, County Councillor, representative from the virtual education team, representative from the LAC health team, and staff members from fostering and HIPSS teams.

The panel is independent of the Local Authority and as such its remit is to make recommendations on whether applicants are suitable to foster, and if current foster carers should be re-approved. It also has a quality assurance and monitoring role in terms of the work of the fostering service. The majority of cases heard by the panel are either new applications, including from 'connected persons' (relatives or friends of the child/ren), and first reviews of foster carers, but panel also considers reviews post allegation, brief reports (where a concern has arisen partway through an assessment) and a variety of other matters. During the year the panel has considered some highly complex and contentious situations, some of which have resulted in a request by the applicants/foster carers for an independent review by the Independent Review Mechanism.

Feedback is sought from all those whose cases are presented to panel and is generally positive. The implication of negative feedback is carefully considered, and panel adjusts its conduct where necessary. Panel provides feedback on assessment reports presented to it, and over the last year has found these to be overwhelmingly of a good or excellent standard. Other matters of concern relevant to the operation of the panel are fed back directly to the LAC Head of Service as Agency Decision Maker.

7. Training

- Managers training programme during 2016-17 is currently being reviewed and will recommence during 2017-18
- Managers, and the Senior Practitioner completed the NSPCC Safeguarding Supervision course
- Gypsy and Romani Traveller training
- Serious Case review child H training
- Mandatory on line training, including Mosaic update
- DDP training for 2 members of staff
- All foster carers undergo the Preparation to Foster training, and Induction. Mandatory training is monitored through formal supervision and the annual review process. However it is difficult at the moment to have clear numbers attending all of our courses due to loss of business support data gathering and co-ordination of course.
- Additions to the fostering programme have been PREVENT and HIPSS training including direct 1-1 consultations

8. Performance and quality assurance

Analysis regarding relevant KPI's i.e. placement stability

Approved Carers 2016-2017	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
General foster carers	99	102	101	107	104
Kinship foster carers	34	32	34	34	32
HIPSS carers	8	8	6	7	7
Supported lodgings providers	18	19	17	19	22
Overnight short breaks carers	0	3	5	5	5
Regulation 24 carers	7	5	3	2	3
TOTAL	166	169	166	174	173

Complaints

4 complaints were made by foster carers during the period. 1 upheld in relation to communication between the Fostering and LAC teams. 1 not upheld and responded to by another service. 2 related to confidentiality breaches made by foster carers.

3 were made by young people - 1 relating to respite arrangements, 1 relating to identifying an acceptable SLP placement, 1 relating to house rules. All were resolved with the young people at an informal level.

2 complaints made against the fostering service in relation to finance and nursery fees both not upheld.

2 complaints made by birth parents neither upheld.

Key learning from above is for example communication with the LAC team, joint learning lunches are now taking place.

LADO

Referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) – 4 during the period. 1 is serious with an ongoing police investigation. 1 substantiated – foster carer reported the incident, risk assessment completed; 1 unsubstantiated further support put in place around behaviour management; 1 substantiated – planned changes to care arrangement after a period of support and family support.

Fostering Approval Decision Appeals

2 Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) appeals made by Kinship Foster Carers – both recommended approval, both sets of carers were able to evidence positive change by the time the appeals were heard.

Special Guardianship Allowance Appeals

The SGO allowance policy was reviewed and there were a number of phone calls that came into the Fostering service in relation to the policy that were dealt with at the initial point of contact satisfactorily. There were 5 formal appeals and a query from an MP. One appeal may remain unresolved at this point as we are awaiting the completion of a Means Test form that was sent out in March this year.

Compliments

Below is a small sample of 17 compliments formally received during the period. Recognition of achievements and good practice is very important and alongside the formal recognition of social work good practice we have now introduced a better way of recognising and celebrating our foster carers work, for example celebration event to be held during the Foster Carer Forum in May.

“I was impressed with the way you supported the kinship carer (grandmother) at the LAC review”

“Thanks for all your time and support you have given us over the last few months. You have been an amazing Social Worker and appreciate the support during the SGO.”

“I just wanted to give some feedback to you regarding foster carer and wanted to let you know that the move was extremely positive and described by staff as “a joy to be a part of”. This was as a result of foster carer absolute professionalism and child led approach and the excellent rapport that was established with the adopters.”

“Legal are very happy with the Kinship Reports... he referred to them as ‘fabulous’ so well done you all”

“It has been a pleasure to complete an assessment visit with you because I have really valued your expertise and experienced eye for assessing potential carers emotional responses in addition to their verbal responses.”

“Thank you so much for family support workers help. She has been great this morning and given me some good strategies to try, and a better understanding of child's needs.”

9. Key achievements during 2016-17

- Having an overall 10% increase in the number of carers from 131 at 31.3.2016 period, we end this period 31.3.17 with an overall total of 144 carers despite restructuring, moving offices, some staff vacancy and the retirement and resignation of some carers (due to moving to SGO, Staying put, reunification of child(ren) change in family circumstances
- New model of family support – every newly approved carer has an allocated family support worker to help with the reality of having a first placement.
- Growth in over-night short break, Supported Lodgings (from 18 to 22 as a %), Homeless and UASC provision
- Increase in mother and baby provision
- Implementation of the Special Guardianship Allowance Policy
- Formation of SGO and SLP support groups
- Stability of staffing particularly following restructure, including management team
- Implementation of consolidation meetings to prevent placement disruption
- Better mechanisms for recognising and celebrating good practice from our foster carers
- Positive transition from Moor House

10. Key priorities for development during 2017-18

- Training – Solihull facilitators course for the 2 family support workers, DDP Level 1 & 2 for staff, joint training with HIPSS Impact of Trauma on Development, co-learning with LAC and Adoption
- Increasing the number of carers to meet demand for placements
- Increase in special guardianship arrangements for LAC
- Further improve placement stability and support carers to offer permanency to children
- Supporting increasingly challenging placements
- Recruitment campaign to continue to develop HIPSS provision
- Developing policies and procedures particularly the Foster Carer Handbook
- Improving placement data gathering/statistical data