

Fostering Service Annual Report 2017 - 2018

OFSTED Registration: SCO56304

1. Introduction

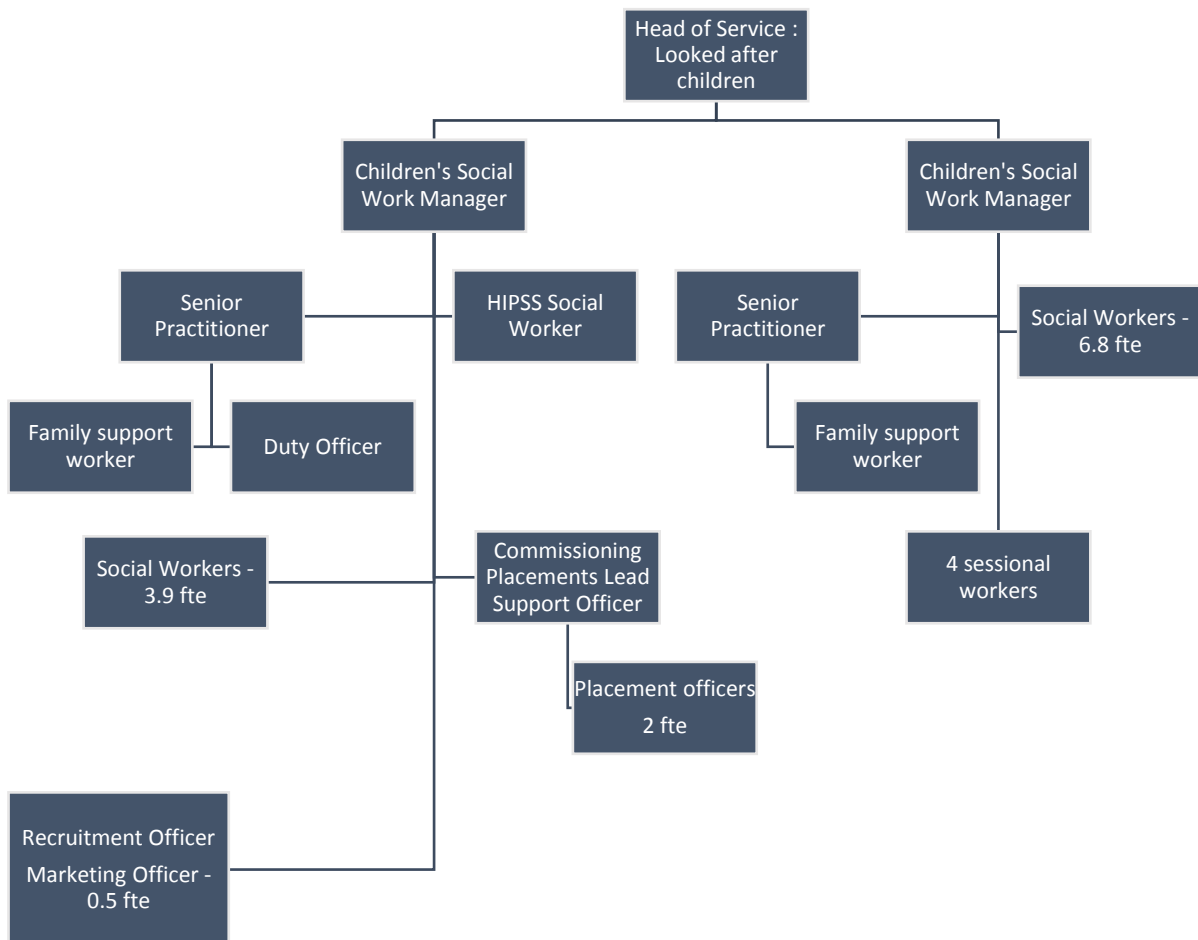
Report Owner –Carol Moreton (Registered Person) Childrens Social Work Manager, Fostering

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



Following a restructure of the fostering service the two managers have shared supervisory responsibilities across kinship, SGO and general fostering domains. However with Alison Forshaw also covering the 16+ team from September 2017 the senior practitioners have been upgraded temporarily to help ensure supervision responsibilities within the above structure chart are met. The Placements Team joined the service in January 2017 to help provide greater continuity of placement searches – both ‘stepping up and stepping down’. They are temporarily being lined managed by Business support to help streamline some administrative systems identified as requiring improvement and line management arrangements will be reviewed after 6 months in October 2018.

The restructure created some anxieties within the staff teams, especially when followed by stretching manager cover, however the changes are embedded and the teams are functioning well.

One part time worker has left in the year due to her family circumstances and some part time hours have changed enabling the creation of one full time vacancy currently being recruited; and a training officer post has been created, recruited to and will commence employment shortly.

There has been some turnover of sessional assessing social workers completing assessments needing to be ‘fast tracked’ which have been replenished in recent months.

3. Foster Carers

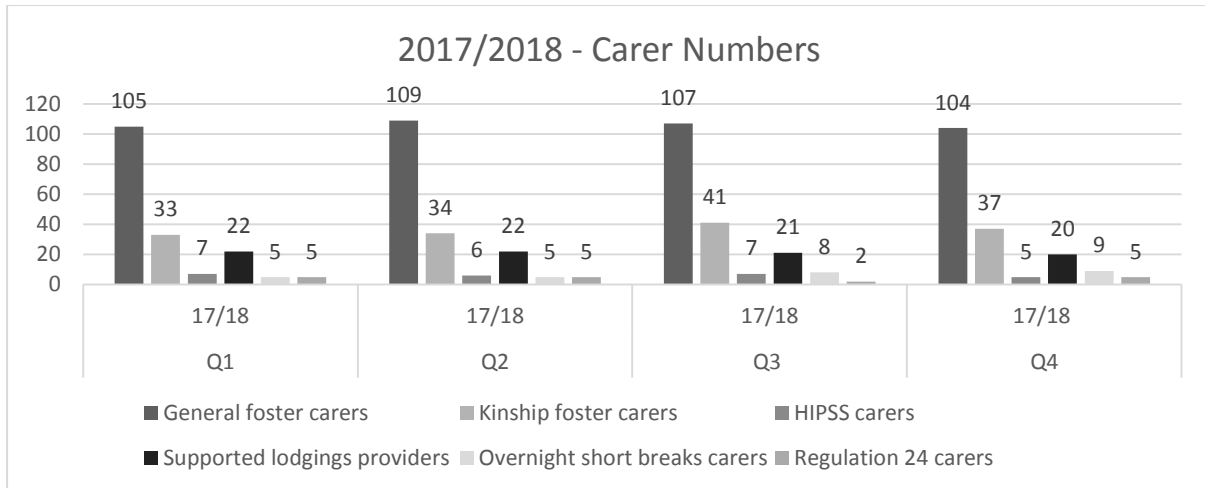
General Foster carers

Statistical national figures show most local Authorities still struggling to recruit at minus 1 to 1% growth. Herefordshire Fostering Service has continued to expand albeit at a slower rate of growth this year: (2015/16) performance of 15% growth, (131 households) 2016/17 overall growth was at 10% (144 households) and this year’s growth of 155 shows continued growth at 7.6%. Overall including SLP and regulation 24 the figure of 180 represents 4% growth. Some of this reflects the increase in Staying Put, SGO and adoption conversions (refer to resignation data set below) and the more challenging nature of those children requiring placement.

	Q1 16/17	Q2 16/17	Q3 16/17	Q4 16/17	Q1 17/18	Q2 17/18	Q3 17/18	Q4 17/18
General foster carers	102	101	107	104	105	109	107	104
Kinship foster carers	32	34	34	32	33	34	41	37
HIPSS carers	8	6	7	7	7	6	7	5
Overnight short breaks carers	3	5	5	5	5	5	8	9
Regulation 24 carers	5	3	2	3	5	5	2	5
SUBTOTAL FOSTER CARERS				151				160

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Supported lodgings providers	19	17	19	22	22	22	21	20
TOTAL	169	166	174	173	177	181	186	180



We have successfully recruited 26 new foster carers this year to the General, and OSB teams compared with 21 during 2016/17. HIPSS has temporarily dipped from 8 to 5 with 2 assessments booked into panel in April 2018.

We have exceeded last year’s recruitment of 15 households with 18 new general fostering households approved during the year. We have continued to see a low number of foster carers transferring from us to other agencies – 2 during 2017/18 comparing with 2 during 2016/17 and 7 during 2015/16. By contrast we continue to recruit from other agencies with 3 currently in the process of transferring to the Local Authority. This would indicate that we are meeting carers need for additional support with our model of family support, buddy plans via the Foster Carers Association (FCA) and continued recruitment of respite carers.

However, despite the increased recruitment this year has also seen an increased number of resignations with 17 general carers resigning as compared to 12 during 2016/17 and averages of 10 – 11 in previous years.



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Resignations were due to two carers transferring to an IFA, one specifically for a black heritage long term placement and specialist agency, 4 due to age retirement, 7 due to changes of circumstances i.e. move out of area or family changes/health.

We have had to implement a more vigorous approach to carers being “on hold” due to personal circumstances and unable to provide us with a resource as we still have to maintain regulatory requirements (training, DBS, medical) which detracts from support available to other carers and have advised several carers to withdraw and return for updated assessments when their situation has stabilised.

Retaining carers continues to be a challenge and there has been significant learning around placing 2 long term placements within families with young birth children and without prior experience.

Over the year we have introduced new respite support processes to enable carers to formally use their own support networks, particularly for support to long term placements and to help facilitate complex transport arrangements. To date 9 respite support assessments have been brought to Fostering panel this year. This involves DBS checks, references and checks being completed and a specific report written and presented to panel and Agency Decision Maker (ADM). It also makes clear children’s wishes and feelings. The arrangement is reviewed at the foster carer’s annual review. This provides children and families with a more “normal” family life where children can spend time with close family and friends of the foster family as is common for any family. It also reduces pressure on existing respite carer resources. We aim to increase this activity and incorporate such formal supports being available at the point of assessment or early on post approval.

HIPSS carers

HIPSS (Herefordshire Intensive Support Scheme) 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.

The scheme has gone from 8 carers to 5 in the last couple of months:

During the year there have been 3 resignations: one resignation due to ill health; however, of the others, none have actually left Herefordshire Fostering service with 1 reverting to Supported Lodging Provider (SLP) status, 2 returning to general respite which evidences an ongoing commitment to the service and support offered.

All had been carers since the HIPSS scheme inception and it is important to recognise the additional emotional strain of such intense work with challenging placements.

There has been one new approval which has now taken a young person on a planned step down from residential care. Sufficiency has also increased in that one carer has been dual approved to take a new HIPSS placement and one has stepped down to a general foster placement.

4 young people have ‘stepped down’ from HIPSS provision to foster placements (all had previously been in residential care), one received outreach support to enable a reunification plan with family. One emergency intervention with a young female at high risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), regrettably the risks within Herefordshire were so high she required placing in a specialist CSE residential provision to keep her safe.

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Whilst the current number of HIPSS carers is below targets set of 10 HIPSS carers to provide 10 placements we have 2 assessments nearing completion and due to come to panel on 9th May. One will provide valuable respite support as part of an induction plan for both HIPSS and general carers.

A HIPSS recruitment strategy is in place and will be implemented again in summer 2018 with a new marketing officer in post. Across the region there has been interest in our success in recruiting therapeutic foster carers for the HIPSS project.

The contract for TISS ended on 31st March 2018 and so this service is no longer able to offer direct work to LAC children and consultations for foster carers will reduce significantly.

Carers have missed this additional resource, but HIPSS have become more responsive to crisis consultation to social workers. In order to mitigate the impact we are also opening more training across both agencies i.e. Positive handling, PACE to carers and PACE, emotional coaching and DDP training to staff to upskill fostering social workers.

During 2017/18 there were 3,001 residential bed nights purchased against a target of 1,774.

Quote from a child in care on HIPSS respite carer for her annual review:

'Hello Kelly, Its BH here. Alison was like family to HIPSS, the carers and the kids in care. This year Alison looked after me when V and Colin was on holiday. I had a lovely time with Alison... Alison was interested in what I liked to do in my own time. Alison was interested in history, movies and chess.'

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 for the child.

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.

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There are currently 37 approved kinship foster carers and 5 temporarily approved kinship carers. Year on year there has been an increase in activity both in assessments and approvals over the year - 18 approvals and 11 withdrawals within the Kinship cohort over the year. However of the 11, 4 have achieved permanency via Special Guardianship order (SGO), 5 children reunified to their birth family; 1 child was not placed and was placed with birth father; 1 has converted to staying put.

Compared with statistical neighbours Herefordshire LAC figures are high – the figures above represent positive permanence outcomes for Looked after children and Herefordshire has a LAC reduction strategy that is particularly focussed on supporting kinship carers to apply for SGO's where this is assessed to be in the child's best interests.

In total Herefordshire supports 109 Special Guardians. A 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, giving special guardian's access to all fostering training, arranging consultations with TISS for special guardians, an online and telephone advice support service for Special Guardians, providing information via a quarterly newsletter, and the provision of an allowance policy that provides clarity and transparency. As the TISS service has now ended this will no longer be available from April 2018.

The fostering service completed 14 SGO assessments this year, of which 9 were SGO's to foster carers, kinship carers or temporary approved (Regulation 24) foster carers. The remaining 5 were private applications instructed by court. The fostering service also responds to instructions to review SGO contact arrangements or support plans if requested by court.

Our family support workers have continued to work directly with 13 special guardianship families, an increase from 7 last year, indicating a doubling of demand. 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 4 applications to the fund have been successful for a range of therapeutic and occupational therapy resources; two application are awaiting a decision (as compared with 2 the previous year).

Sleepover Scheme Carers

The Overnight Short Breaks Service was re-branded as the Sleepover Scheme when The Duchess of Gloucester visited the Fostering Service in September 2017. The change of name arose following formal consultation with birth families and children who felt this was a friendlier child centred title. The Scheme provides family-based overnight care to disabled children living at home with parents. We now have 9 Sleepover Scheme foster carers (up from 5 carers end of last year 2016/17) providing breaks to 8 children for a total of 348 nights a year (214 nights were provided in the financial year 2017-18). Two households have withdrawn due to changes in personal circumstances (pregnancy and new relationship). A total of 6 assessments have been approved over the year.

Number of carers:

	Year 1 (2016-17)	Year 2 (2017-18)
No. of Enquiries	86	17
No. of Carers Approved	6	6
Carer withdrawn/resigned (drop-off)	1	2

Number of Placed Children:

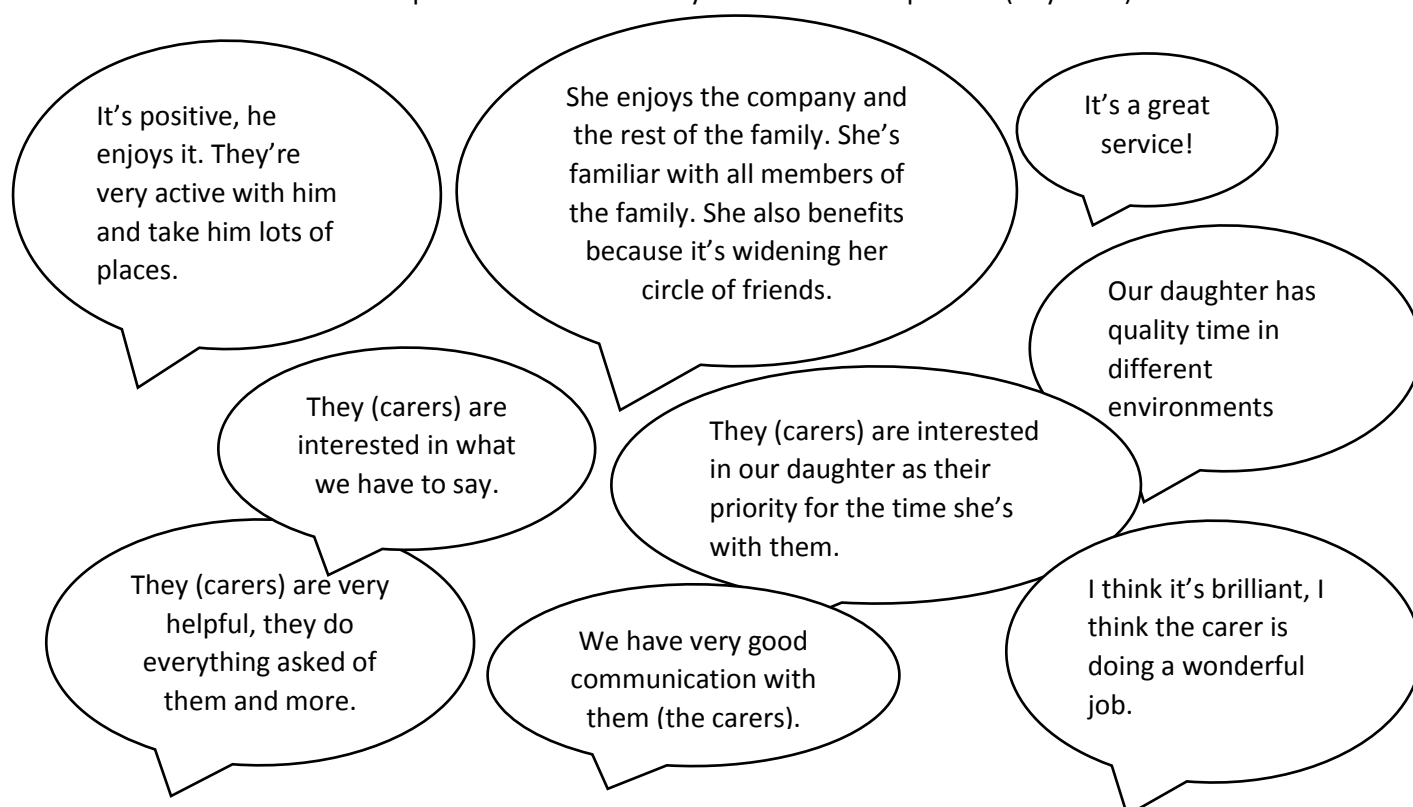
Year	2016/17				2017/18			
Quarter	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
No. of Children	1	4	3	3	6	5	6	8

We are developing the process of dual approving carers in order to meet the needs of children living with their parents and those who are looked after with specific planned overnight stays to help prevent placement disruption. It has proved extremely challenging for the fostering service to provide consistent respite care for children with disabilities as emergency placements or changes in plans for short term placements often displace plans for regular respite. However, those carers do need a similar level of respite support to that offered to birth families – especially if also providing other foster placements or having birth children as well as a child with complex needs. One foster carer is now receiving invaluable overnight respite for 4 nights per month for a child with highly complex health needs.

Stuart Barber, Sleepover Scheme co-ordinator, has moved to be based with the Children with Disabilities (CWD) team in order to streamline and raise the profile of the Sleepover Scheme and this is resulting in increased referrals and applications.

The Sleepover Scheme have formed their own support group facilitated by either the Sleepover Scheme Project Co-ordinator or Family Support Worker. Additional training is provided by colleagues in health for our carers usually on a child specific basis. OT assessment services are purchased privately on a case-by-case basis due to a lack of capacity in local NHS provision making all take-up of referrals much delayed and way outside the timeframe for placement planning.

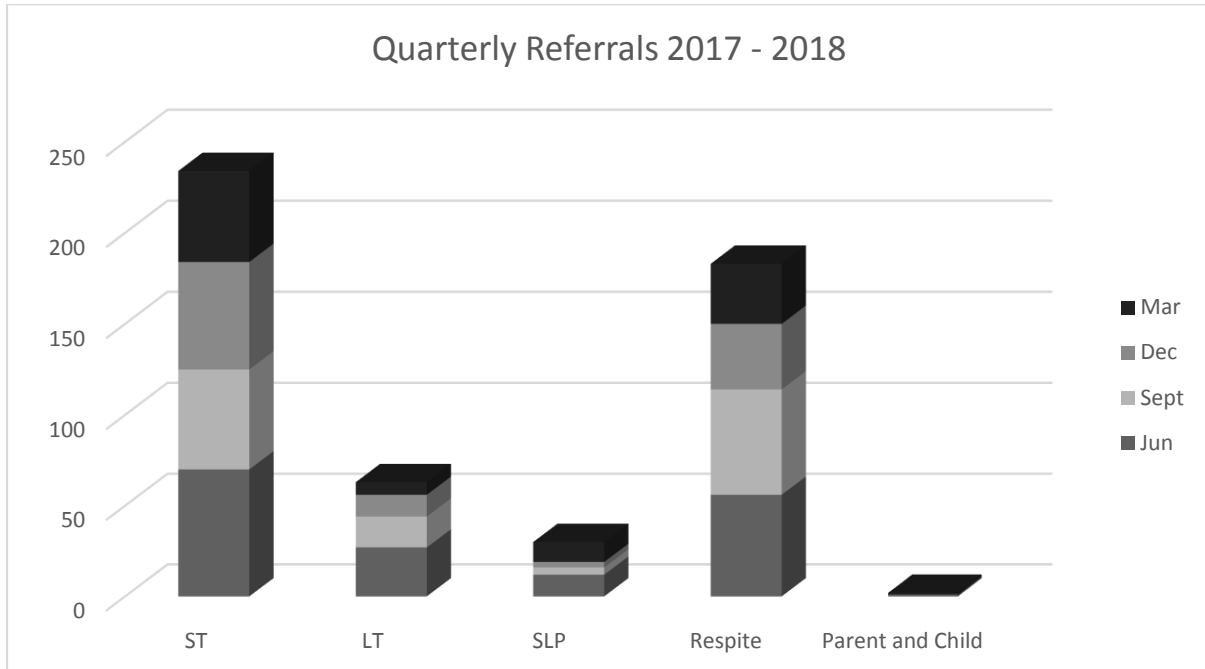
Feedback for the service is positive as evidenced by comments from parents (July 2017):-



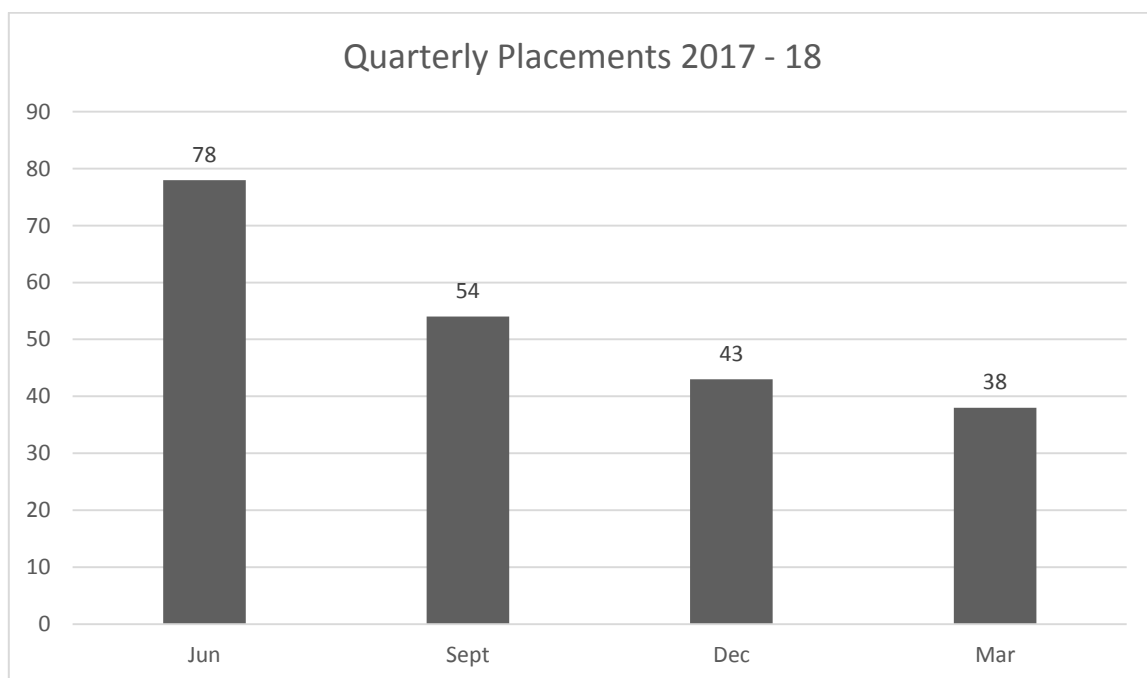
4. Placement activity

Referrals

There has continued to be a high number of placement requests during the year.

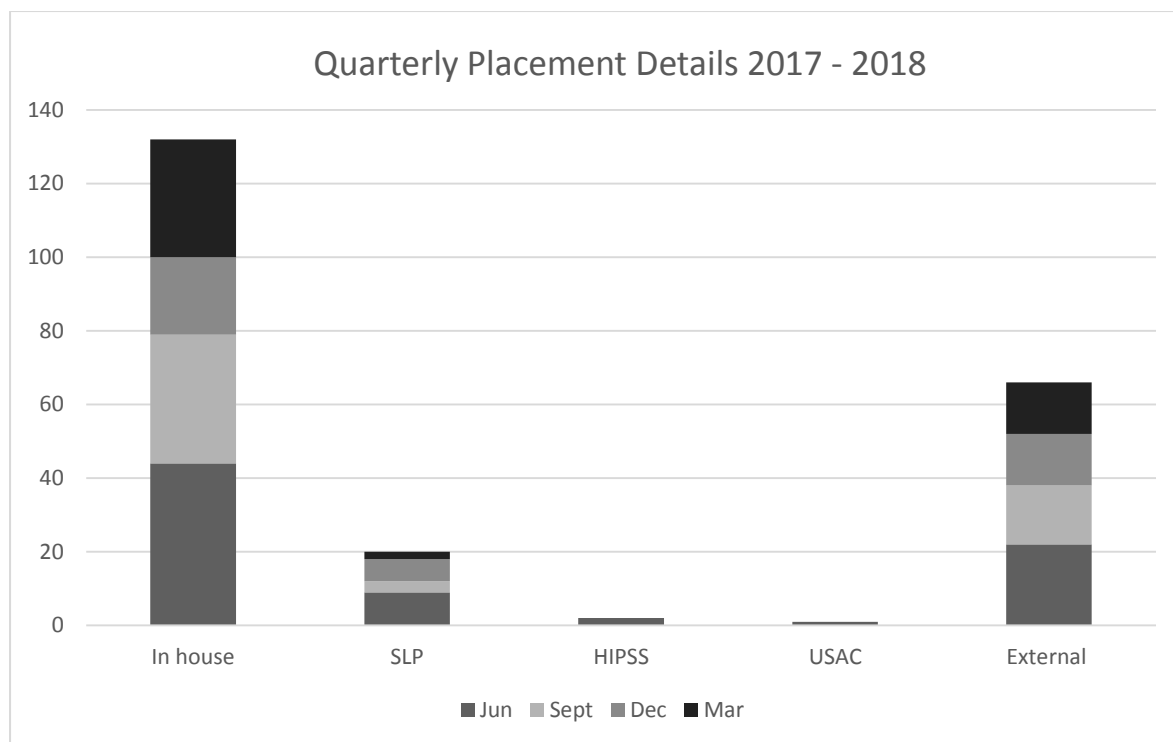


The graph above shows types and numbers of placement requests during the year whilst the graph below shows the total number of placement requests for each quarter. The lead up to summer is always a very busy period for placement requests but the reasons for a reduction in requests each quarter are unclear.



Quarterly Placements made

The graph below shows the number and types of placements actually made during the year. The continued high numbers of looked after children have meant a continued reliance on independent fostering agencies.



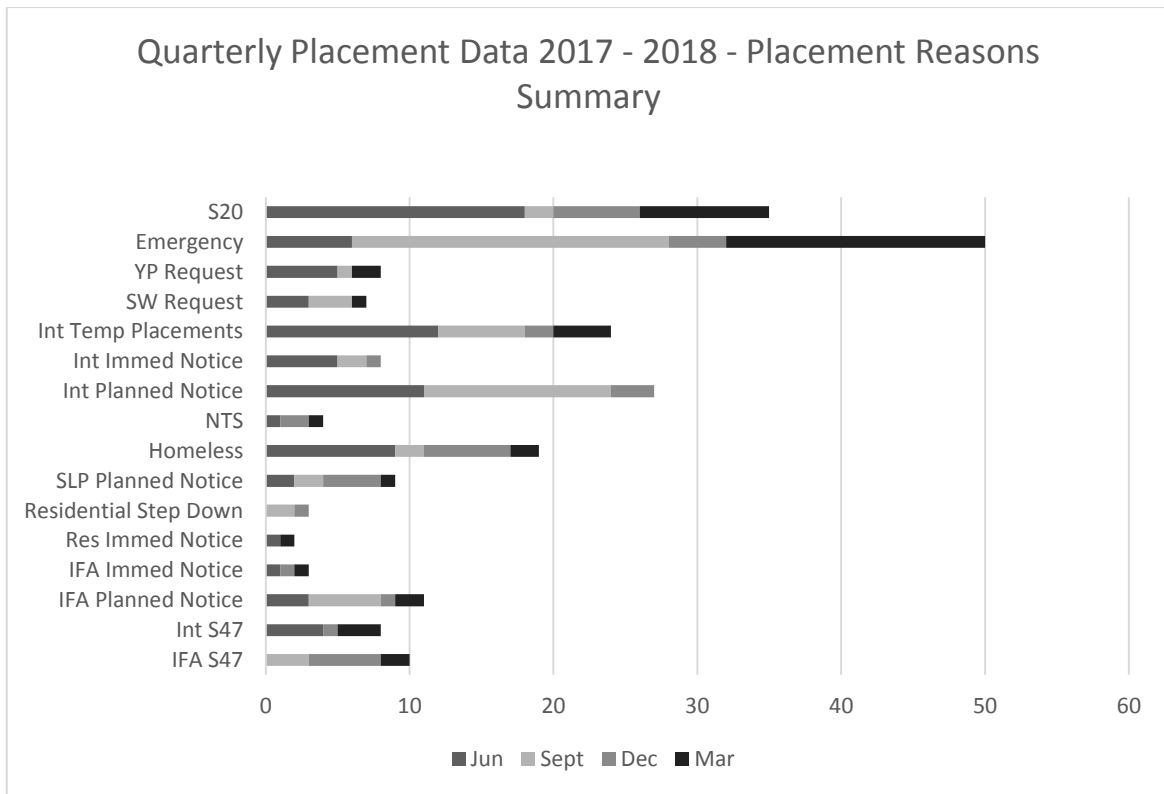
Placements Made – Summary of the Reason why the placements were needed

The levels of referral activity remain high as they were 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 their teens.

The number of mother and baby placements has reduced since last year. The reasons for this are unclear but may be due to changes in the Child Protection/Court team culture.

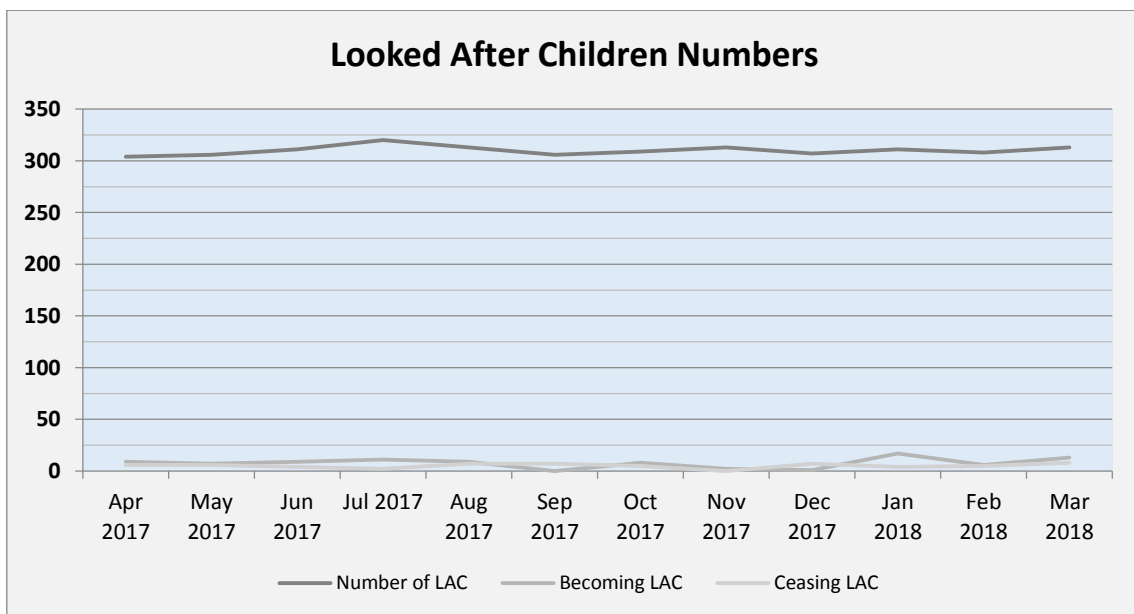
Further work is needed on early notification of placement requests to allow for planning times and good matching of placements and prevent the high level of emergency placement requests.

Placement panel has oversight of referrals and further work is planned to re-look at reviewing placement need for step down from IFA placements i.e. to long term placements or after assessment periods.



Children in placement

Through improvements within Mosaic and improved data gathering methods quarterly statistical data relating to children in different types of placements is now available and is being reported on a monthly basis. This has shown LAC figures continuing to rise over the year with 313 children looked after on 31st March 2018.



Again whilst increased LAC numbers is in line with national statistics (Ofsted 2016/17 national report) at 313 Herefordshire figures are high compared with statistical neighbours. We need to

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improve planning and supporting arrangements to live with family members, reunification, SGO and adoption as above.

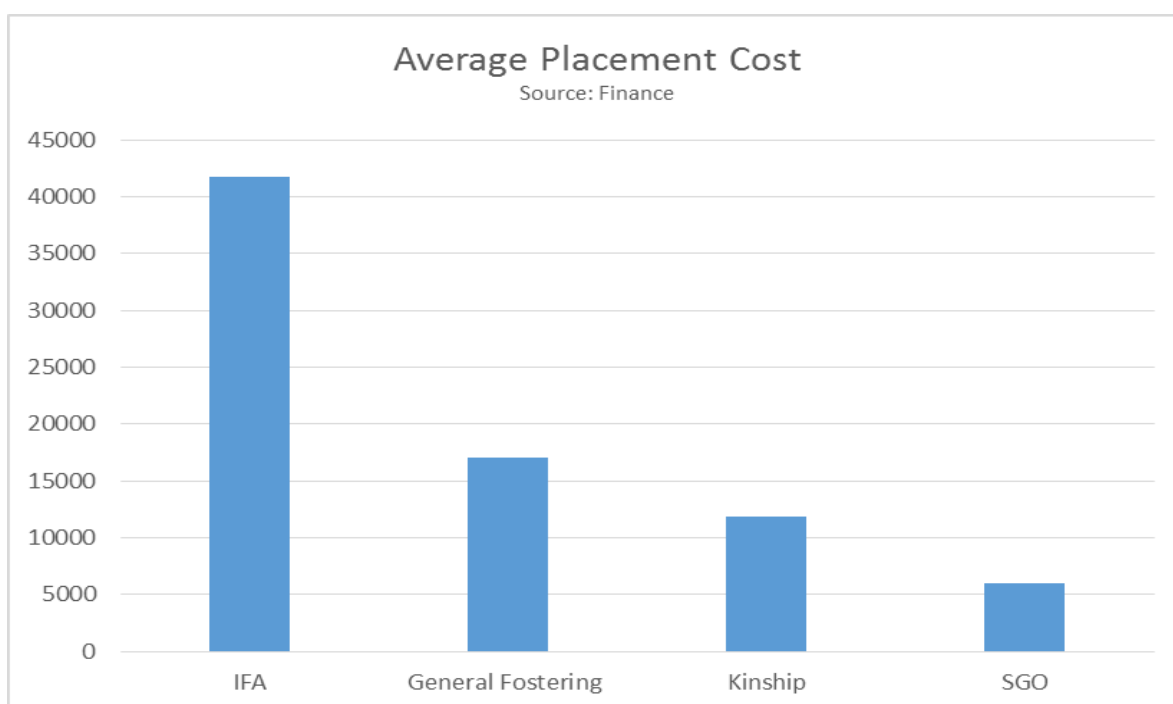
Placement stability

Placement stability has continued to improve throughout the year. This does indicate that support levels, the role of family support workers and formal support plans are working and is reflected in the increased Panel activity for long term matches (see section 6). However it is also indicative of the further work required to improve permanency for children outside of the looked after system.

Average placement cost

A greater number of looked after children are likely to move from a kinship fostering arrangement to an SGO arrangement than any other care arrangement. Kinship care arrangements cost on average £5k less than a general fostering arrangement. The number of kinship care arrangements continue to vary across local authorities. Herefordshire currently has 32 approved households and 5 temporarily approved households.

It should be noted that the costs of general fostering and kinship fostering placements are not directly comparable with the costs of IFA placements as they do not take account of staffing and infrastructure costs as IFA costs do. Work will be completed to inform the Placement Sufficiency strategy during 2018/19 to enable accurate comparisons.



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 and safer carer policy. They are approved by the 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 development of independence skills, employment and education.

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Following last year's successful recruitment on the back of national awareness regarding the need for placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children we have had 2 providers resign and numbers have dipped from an average of 22 to 20. Of these 7 are dual approved SLP/ foster carers whose availability varies according to placement needs i.e. fostering or SLP.

Although the numbers of providers has dipped from 22 to 20 we have 2 providers who have moved to a larger house or are extending their accommodation and wish to increase their offer to us.

Work across the fostering service and 16+ has been focussed on reducing crises and more planned work. Qualitatively, SLP providers are reporting improved planning and less crisis driven work. An SLP support group is meeting monthly to discuss issues, practice and policy and guest speakers which is driving quality of care and planned moves to independence up.

The availability of an emergency temporary SLP in response to young people's representation to Corporate Parenting panel in 2017 has been positive and absorbed pressure from duty. This carer has had 6 emergency homeless placements, 3 placements did not progress as the young person chose to go elsewhere and 3 planned respite between placements.

However, inevitably some remain in situ longer than 48 hours and approval is increased to 'time limited placements' with a plan to move to other providers or independence.

Many young people struggle to reach independence but with planned high quality work they can be supported with a plan to achieve positive outcomes.

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' for the first (couple) of times extremely difficult facing higher levels of risk around budgeting, substance misuse, unemployment and unstable relationships.

One young person started two university courses – both ended in him leaving the course and accommodation debts. He was able to return to his previous SLP placement in June 2017. Support focused on maintaining a daily routine, obtaining secure employment, attending GP appointments and meeting his own mental and physical health needs with the aim to increase social interaction and support networks.

After 9 months the young person now has secure full-time employment with promotion and development opportunities in catering which he loves, he is ordering cook books, trying recipes, and purchasing kitchen equipment to cook a wider variety of recipes.

His annex is tidy and clean and he takes initiative in doing his own washing and shopping.

All previous debts have been resolved. The young person is now sending money to his younger sister at University to encourage and support her. He is also paying rent to SLP by standing order with an additional overpayment that will be returned to him towards a flat deposit when he moves on to independent accommodation.

The young person has friends who visit and go out socially together and they are even talking about getting a shared house together. He has attended GP and dentist appointments and is now managing these himself. He is looking well is able to buy his own clothes and takes pride in his appearance and has a girlfriend.

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Staying Put activity has continued to grow gradually year on year with an average of 5 – 8 placements at any one time. There tends to be a dip in the number of Staying Put placements emerging each summer, possibly because young people find this an easier time of year to move out at the end of college academic years.

Development work with the Housing Benefit team and a policy to set up Local tenancy agreements to claim Housing Benefit has been delayed due to changes in management cover over fostering and 16+ but will be pursued during 2018/19.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

Nationally 13% of LAC over 16 year old are UASC. Herefordshire joined the National Transfer scheme in 2016. Whilst we have 2 SLP, one foster carer and one respite SLP support provider specifically available for UASC there has been significant difficulty with sustaining placements. This is in part due to the rural location which had not been anticipated by Asylum seekers expecting to be placed in a city but also due to concerns they cannot access the type of full time education they expected. The fostering service continues to offer twice a year training for foster carers and SLP on UASC and regional training is also being offered. Strategic work is planned with 16+ staffing and links with NTS to prepare UASCs more thoroughly before being placed in Herefordshire to help pre-empt unrealistic expectations.

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

5. Recruitment and Assessments

Analysis of recruitment and assessment activity 2017/18:

- 161 enquiries received
- 81 initial home visits
- 24 applications received
- 5 withdrawn 1 counselled out
- 18 continued to assessment with 6 of these already approved and the other 12 still in assessment
- 19 approvals over the year

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 GP's to prioritise foster carer medicals, a letter was sent out to GP's in relation to this over 12 months ago and further work is underway to help GP's understand the process and the impact of delays. When comparing regional data supplied from the West Midlands Recruitment Forum, it is clear that Herefordshire performs well with regard to enquiries, visits and overall approval of foster carers. It is evident at the forum meetings, that other LA's have increasingly large budgets on top of recruitment staff (some equating to £45,000) for recruitment and marketing purposes, using a lot of this to procure outside businesses and consultants to help with some of their social media, producing of materials, data research etc whereas in Herefordshire we employ the Recruitment Officer and also the Marketing Officer to cover these areas meaning the small budget that we have (£3,000) for this purpose is kept for marketing materials, advertising, and booking of events thus keeping the costs to a minimum.

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It is important to note that Herefordshire figures do not include enquiries into the Sleepover scheme, or kinship assessments

	Yearly totals
Approved starters (TC) - Birmingham	20
Approved starters (TC) - Coventry	36
Approved starters (TC) - Dudley	0
Approved starters (TC) - Hereford	19
Approved starters (TC) - Sandwell	6
Approved starters (TC) - Shropshire	0
Approved starters (TC) - Staffordshire	20
Approved starters (TC) - Stoke	5
Approved starters (TC) - Telford & Wrekin	11
Approved starters (TC) - Walsall	12
Approved starters (TC) - Wolverhampton	16
Approved starters (TC) - Worcestershire	16



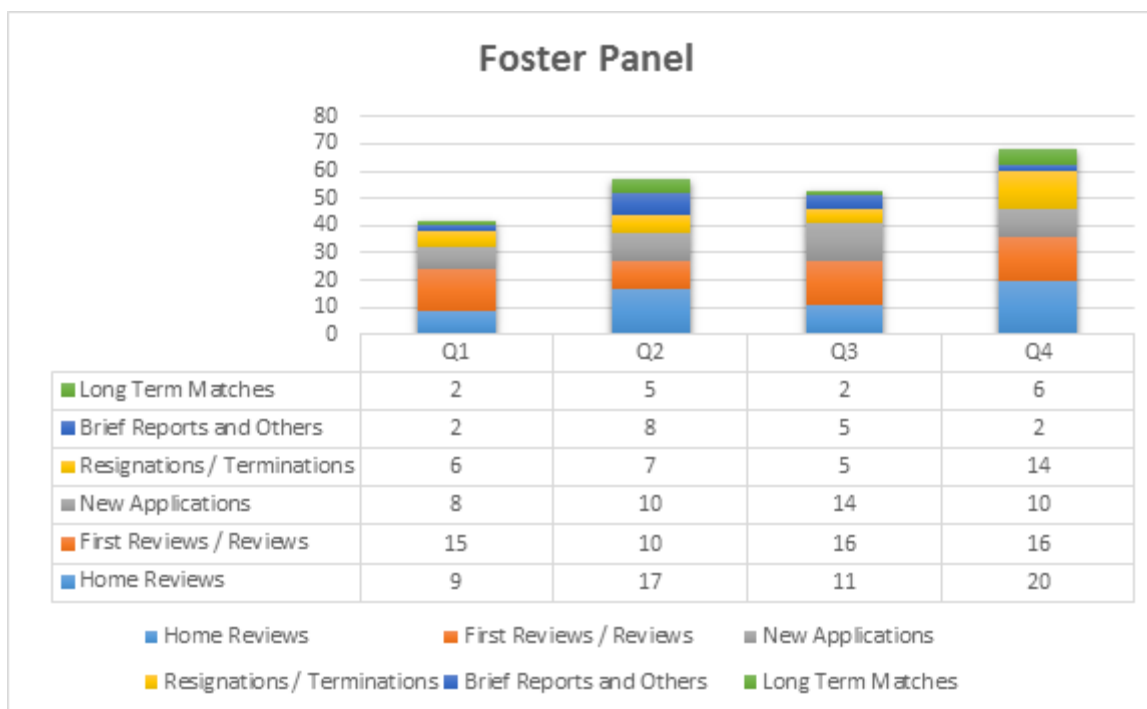
Recommendation (word of mouth) and website continue to be the top two ways in which enquirers are aware of fostering for Herefordshire. We have always been able to evidence that if we are not out in the community promoting fostering, the enquiry figures will dip.

A number of regional partners have asked for information about our recruitment strategy (Twitter, website and leaflets) particularly in relation to our use of the recruitment officer completing home visits (not a social worker) and specialist schemes such as HIPSS.

6. Fostering panel

The Fostering Panel meets regularly twice a month on average. Alison King is stepping down as Independent Chair, and this post has been successfully recruited to. We have also recruited 2 Vice Chairs, Hilary Jones (Virtual School Head) and Helen McNamara (previous employee of Herefordshire) as it became apparent one was not sufficient to cover eventualities such as sickness or holiday periods. A rotation pattern is in process to ensure consistency between panel chairs. Other members of the Central List include a registered foster carer, County Councillor, representative from the virtual school 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, one 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.

Policy development around quality assurance processes across the local authority has included a revision of panel quality assurance paperwork and the system for collating and reviewing the performance of staff and the quality of work presented which is being implemented from April 2018.

Other matters of concern relevant to the operation of the panel are fed back directly to the relevant Heads of Service. For example, this resulted in a shared training workshop to look at administrative processes across both fostering and adoption services with Business support and helped clarify expectations, minutes and times allotted on agendas.

7. Training

Fostering team:

- Managers have attended operational training where appropriate.
- A team member has been trained and has delivered two Graded Care neglect tool courses across the directorate.
- Family group Conferences for 3 staff
- Serious Case Review for S family
- Mandatory on line training, including information governance update
- DDP training for 1 member of staff
- UASC and independence planning for SLP
- Therapeutic parenting, PACE and emotional coaching workshops.

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- Senior Practitioners are embedding a culture of “learning lunches” e.g. recognising and managing aggression towards foster carers, learning from good practice examples and case work reflections.

Foster carers

Foster carers have raised concerns that the CPD online and co-ordination of a varied training programme has been difficult this year following the decision that this role should be undertaken by the team instead of fostering panel co-ordinators. It is vital that we upskill and equip carers not just to manage challenging behaviour but also to offer therapeutic responses to children to help their recovery from trauma.

Consequently the staffing structure was reviewed to enable the creation of a new Training officer post which will be piloted initially for 12 months to develop the training programme for 2018/19. Given our small budget of £3,000 the aim is to co-ordinate with partner agencies offering or needing similar training and increasing joint training to social workers, HIPSS and fostering and education to ensure consistency of models and approaches.

All foster carers undergo the Preparation to Foster training and Induction. Mandatory training is monitored through formal supervision and the annual review process. It has been difficult to have clear numbers attending all of our courses due to loss of business support data gathering and co-ordination of course which will now be taken up by the Training officer post.

Additions to the fostering programme have been HIPSS training including direct 1-1 consultations and carer self-care.

8. Performance and quality assurance

See Section 3 for details of numbers of foster carers.

Quality assurance

The format for quality assurance of assessments has been reviewed this year with the new process due to be implemented for 2018/19. This will enable the quality of assessments to be monitored and reported in a standardised format.

Complaints

Four complaints were made by foster carers during the period. One was upheld in relation to communication between the Fostering and LAC teams; one was not upheld and responded to by another service; and two related to confidentiality breaches made by foster carers.

Three complaints were made by young people. One relating to respite arrangements; one relating to identifying an acceptable SLP placement; and one relating to house rules. All were resolved with the young people at an informal level.

Two complaints were made against the fostering service in relation to finance and nursery fees and neither were upheld following investigation.

Two complaints were made by birth parents and neither were upheld.

Opportunities to learn from complaints are considered in all cases and as a result of the complaints about poor communication with the LAC team joint learning lunches are now taking place.

LADO

There have been 6 referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) during the period. Two were substantiated, 1 kinship (child not placed) and 1 carer failing to report a safeguarding incident; 4 were unsubstantiated but related to concerns or allegations of mishandling by young people. In response an additional positive handling course has been arranged, jointly funded with the HIPSS service, and support plans were presented to panel alongside post LADO reports. One carer attended Panel due to practice concerns and a support plan to consider terms of approval.

Fostering Approval Decision Appeals

1 Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) appeal was made by a Foster Carer regarding the terms of approval being changed. Subsequently the carer was able to define her availability and type of fostering which has been positive for both parties and the carer continues to provide invaluable planned and emergency respite.

Compliments

Below is a small sample of compliments formally received during the last quarter.

'They were very complimentary about the prep training you facilitated this week. They felt the training was very good, the content very good and the delivery was excellent. They felt that the training was very much based in practice and that the trainers conducted themselves very professionally. They felt that you did a 'superb' job of bringing in case examples in a professional and anonymised way and that your ability to do this made everything seem very current. Although they intend to be introduced to fostering through OSB they felt on the back of the training that you offered that they may in the future progress to short-term fostering'. From SB, OSB co-ordinator.

... 'I hope you do not mind me dropping you an email about the support me and my family have had from H B over the past few months.

Throughout this difficult period (which has coincided with other family issues of a serious nature) Heidi has been a significant help to myself, my wife and my family - not only has Heidi provided valuable support / guidance and practical help, she has gone the extra mile with ad hoc calls / dropping in on the way to other meetings/visits but more importantly she has always taken our calls / responded in a timely manner and as a family we can genuinely tell she cares about what she does and is devoted to us helping this through this period - it is obviously more than "just a job" to her.

There is much in the media about how poor our social services support is - but if Heidi is an example of how social services support families is in Herefordshire then the local community should be extremely proud of the services we have... Thank you Heidi we value your commitment and caring attitude to me and my family.' From an SGO family to fostering manager.

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 June this year.

'D and B are an asset to the Fostering Service. They are compassionate and dedicated to the children placed in their care and I have seen how they do emotionally invest into the child too. Over the time of my involvement with D and B, I have seen how the couple have developed their skills. D's ability to be reflective is clearly evident. B has the balance of being a responsible caregiver and being a fun-loving person. D is calm and consistent – she has been able to demonstrate/apply PACE and together, they are a great couple who brings their heart into fostering the LAC of Herefordshire.' From CSW LC

'(they are) Helping me be happy...since I've been here I've had a lovely amazing life with HD and AD and everyone else in their family and also my mum and dad'..., I feel safe with H and A because they love us and they care about us so much'. Children in long term placement.

9. Key achievements during 2017-18

- Having an overall 6% increase in the number of carers from 148 to 154 carers despite restructuring, moving offices, some staff vacancy and the retirement and resignation of some carers.
- Increased permanence planning and placement stability via long term matching, kinship and SGO arrangements.
- 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 scheme, Kinship and Regulation 24 assessment work and providing placements for young people presenting as homeless
- Maintenance 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
- Improved relationships and joint work with colleagues in Children's Social care teams around Regulation 24 and kinship work, LAC reduction planning and long term matching.

10. Key priorities for development during 2017-18

- Training – development of a revised training programme to reflect greater skills around re-parenting traumatised children including 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
- Sufficiency – increase in foster carer recruitment especially around teen, SLP and HIPSS carers – and retention of carers, linking support planning and core group meetings with the LAC service and training development in emotional and therapeutic responses by foster carers, including workshops on 'self-care and resilience building' for carers.
- Increase in special guardianship arrangements for LAC
- Placement stability (and retention of carers).
- Supporting increasingly challenging placements and 'step down from HIPSS.
- Recruitment campaign to be driven by new marketing officer.
- Developing policies and procedures particularly the Foster Carer Handbook using Tri-x handbook
- Improving placement data gathering/statistical data via Mosaic and duty officer role.
- Development of Mosaic register and Form F Mosaic workflows through to panel process.



Signed
Carol Moreton
20.4.18