

Fostering Service Annual Report 2018 - 2019

OFSTED Registration: SCO56304

1. Executive summary

The Fostering Service is staffed by an experienced and committed team. The team have been successful this year in increasing the number of children placed with family and the overall number of foster carers has increased this year. However due to the continued high number of looked after children and an increase in carers leaving the service there remains a significant shortage of in house placements. Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a priority particularly for older children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and long-term placements. Targets for 2019/20 are set out in the Sufficiency Strategy and within the Recruitment and Retention strategy.

2. 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.

3. Establishment

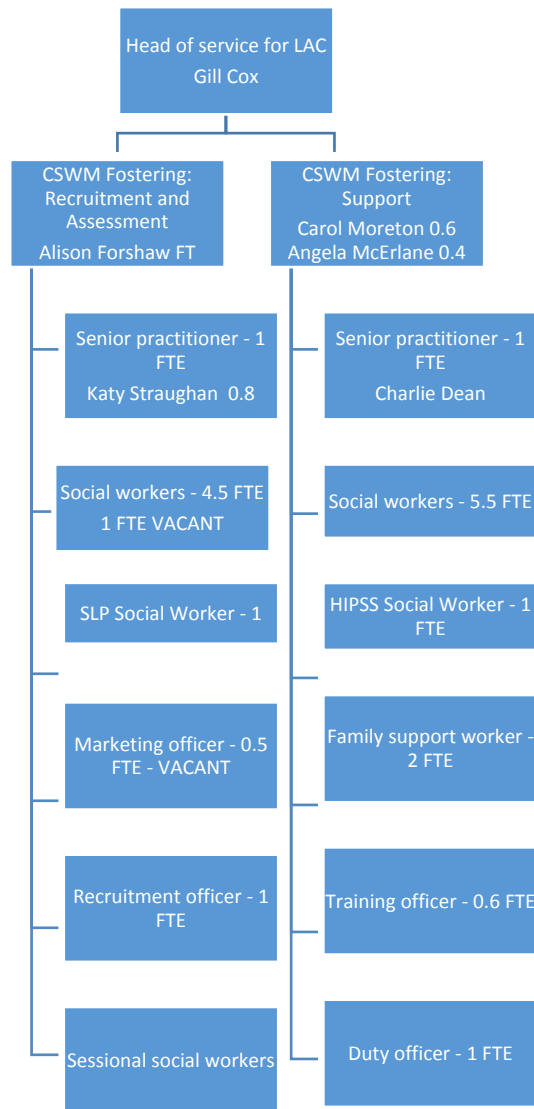
Early 2019 saw the introduction of a new model of working with the Fostering Service. The service now has two operational strands, a Fostering Assessment team and a Fostering Support team.

With a focus on recruitment and retention the new model ensures there is opportunity for a proactive approach to these two key areas rather than a generic team approach that tends to be reactive in nature particularly when short timescale kinship assessments have to take priority. Social Workers should become highly skilled in their particular area.

The risk is that social workers become too specialist and the plan is to provide opportunities to develop skills in each area. Monthly whole service meetings ensure continuity of information and learning. The teams are fully operational now and together staff share the delivery of the training programme and share the Duty system tasks on a daily basis.

Long term sickness impacted on marketing activity and short term support was sourced – recruitment to this temporary post is underway.

Unusually the Fostering Service has not been able to easily recruit permanent social workers through the year. Agency fostering social workers have been employed. However this is now resolved with new social workers now recruited. There remains a secondment vacancy within the Assessment team that will be re-advertised.



4. Foster Carers

General Foster carers

Statistics published by OFSTED in January 2019 show Local Authorities continue to experience a decrease in recruitment of foster carers at -1%. Herefordshire Fostering Service has continued to expand albeit at a much slower rate of growth this year:

2015/16 performance of 15% growth, (131 households)

2016/17 overall growth was at 10% (144 households)

2017/18 growth at 7.6% (155 households)

2018/19 growth at 4.5% (162 households)

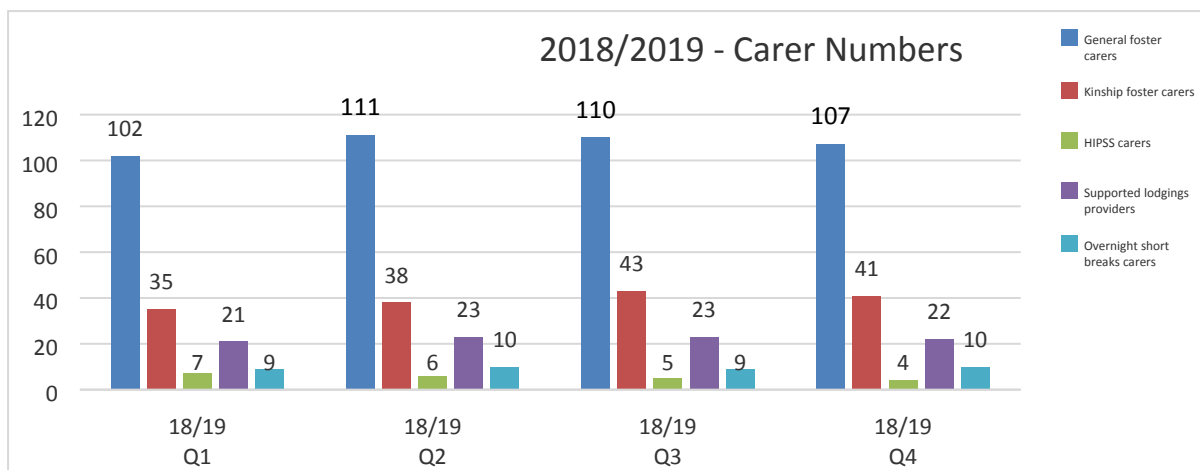
It is evident that recruitment is not keeping pace with the demand. There are significant risks if this trend continues particularly if existing foster carers choose to transfer to Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) which we have seen an increase in during this year. A revised recruitment and retention plan has been agreed to provide renewed impetus and focus during 2019/20.

Foster carers as at end of month	March 2019	
General	104	
HIPPs	4	
Sleepover	10	
Kinship	44	55 children placed
TOTAL	162	156 children placed
Number of vacancies of which:	39	
• Respite carers only	24	
• Carers on hold	22 (14%)	

Supported lodgings and Staying Put	March 2019	Young people in placement
Supported lodgings	15	24
Staying put - general	10	10
Staying put - kinship	5	5

Carer type	New applications	Resignations
General	14	14
HIPSS	2	3
Kinship	18	12
Overnight short breaks	3	1
Carers not recommended by panel	1	N/a
TOTAL	37	30

We have successfully recruited 37 new foster carers this year which means we have more than offset the resignations again (30). One general carer was for a foster to adopt placement and three were Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) or local authority transfers in with existing skills able to take sibling placements. For general carers resigning themes reflect retirement, change of circumstances (pregnancy, employment) or allegation; one transferred to an IFA. For kinship carers these are reunification or change to Special Guardianship Order (SGO). There have been no significant changes to previous patterns. Three kinship carers successfully transferred to the general foster carer population.



Retaining carers continues to be a challenge and we are beginning to note an increase in IFA transfers due to new agencies opening within the county offering enhanced fees and online training packages. Carers have raised concerns regarding support levels, lack of online training and lack of increase in fee payments since 2009. This is being addressed by the change in team structure, a business case regarding increasing the training budget and consultation and scoping around other local authority fees and allowances. Carers continue to receive an annual uplift in the child's allowance to at least match the Department for Education recommended minimum allowances. We continue to offer respite support assessments to formalise family and friend support to carers and reduce the number of moves a child experiences.

HIPSS carers

HIPSS (Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service) carers provide therapeutic placements for 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 service was intended to have 8-10 approved carers but has reduced from 5 carers to 4 over the year despite 2 new assessments.

The two new carers withdrew after comparatively short periods of work – one due to a new relationship and one due to a placement disruption/unable to work within model. The HIPSS Fostering social worker post was vacant for 5 months whilst the post was recruited to. The post has now been filled and a renewed recruitment and assessment plan is in place.

Three out of four carers have been with HIPSS since the scheme inception and it is important to recognise the additional emotional strain of such intense work with challenging placements and risks of “burn out” and the need to be prepared for this pool of carers reaching a natural retirement point.

Sufficiency has increased in that two further carers have been dual approved to take a new HIPSS placement whilst existing placements have stepped down to become ‘general’ placements. There is no longer an assigned HIPSS respite carer in place however, to date we have been able to provide respite on either regular or emergency basis from our existing pool of carers (one previously HIPSS) and SLP resources.

The HIPSS service has had staffing changes, but a dedicated manager and child psychologist are now in place. A HIPSS recruitment strategy is in place and will be implemented again with a new HIPSS social worker in post.

The contract for TISS, which provided therapeutic support to foster carers through consultations with clinical psychologists, training and some direct work with children, ended on 31st March 2018. Carers have missed this additional resource, however HIPSS have been able to offer consultation to social workers and a limited number of carer consultations. In order to mitigate the impact we have offered more training across both agencies i.e. Foundations of attachment to carers and staff to enable general carers to become more resilient in meeting the needs of more challenging placements.

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

During 2018/19 there were 5518 residential bed nights purchased. 3600 is the target for 2024. To achieve this we will need to recruit and retain a pool of 8-10 HIPSS carers.

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. During the period 75 viability (pre placement) and 14 Regulation 24 temporary approval assessments were completed.

As an example of work undertaken during Quarter 4 there were 22 full kinship assessments underway and at various stages of completion. Of these to date 6 have been fully approved as kinship foster carers and of the remainder it is likely 3 further may be approved. Drop out is due to:- withdrawal from the process, not approved, re-unification with birth parents, court order, carer not required i.e. a back-up plan for a child.

Year on year there has been an increase in children remaining with connected carers (kinship). At the same time last year we had 37 kinship fostering households and so the number has increased by 18.9% during the year.

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 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) where this is assessed to be in the child’s best interests. During Quarter 4 the real impact of a changing focus of permanence via SGO for children began to emerge with Orders being made for 5 children. Assessments were underway for a further 5 children in Quarter 4 with planning in place to complete further assessments in 2019/20. The new financial support policy for Special Guardians has had an impact.

Sleepover Scheme Carers

The Sleepover Scheme provides family-based overnight short break care to children with disabilities who ordinarily live at home with their parents. At year end we have 10 Sleepover Scheme foster carers providing breaks to 8 children under the Sleepover Scheme and 1 Looked-after child for regular respite. They have provided a total of 306 overnights under the Sleepover Scheme and 74 nights LAC respite. One household withdrew having made the decision to offer a long-term full time Shared Lives placement. 2 assessments for Sleepover Scheme Carers have been approved over the year.

Number of carers: 10

	Year 1 (2016-17)	Year 2 (2017-18)	Year 3 (2017-18)
No. of Enquiries	86	17	10
No. of Carers Approved	6	6	2
Carer withdrawn/resigned (drop-off)	1	2	1

Number of Placed Children: 8 (Sleepover Scheme)

Year	2016/17				2017/18				2018/19			
Quarter	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
No. of Children	1	4	3	3	6	5	6	8	8	9	9	8

LAC Respite and Overnight Short Break (OSB) capacity: We are continuing where possible to dual approve carers to meet the needs of children living with their parents and those who are looked after in order to support general foster carers and to prevent placement disruption/breakdown. It has been a challenge to develop capacity within the Sleepover Scheme by increasing the number of placements offered by one caring household. Most Sleepover Scheme Carers want to offer one placement to one child and to support one family with carers on the whole (with one exception) wanting to maintain a balanced lifestyle which incorporates some OSB care.

On the 31st March 2019 there were 2 children on the waiting list.

Family Support Worker within the Sleepover Scheme: Elaine Nation was successfully appointed to this post. Elaine works flexibly over 15 hours a week. This provides greater capacity to work with families accessing the scheme and OSB carers to ensure and support successful placements. This increased staffing also helps the Sleepover Scheme to work with families of children either on the waiting list or for whom an appropriate match cannot be identified at the point of referral.

Support and Training: The Sleepover Scheme continues to offer access to a OSB/Sleepover Scheme Carer's Group which is a group facilitated by the Sleepover Scheme Project Co-ordinator and Family Support Worker. We have been able to organise a shared training event in Positive Behaviour Support with other short-breaks providers to address a clear training need around Behaviour Management. Attendance at the carer's group and training is often low due to OSB carers more often than not having other employment which clashes with the training and group meeting times. This has been opened up to general foster carers also. Additional training is provided by colleagues in health for our carers usually on a child specific basis. Occupational Therapy 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 on the OSB scheme is very positive from children, families and carers. In March 2019 a review was completed with some of the comments received below:

- Sleepover scheme is "a lot of fun"
- "The sleepover is amazing"
- "We don't have to constantly be looking at the constant risks to their safety"
- "Feel more relaxed"
- "Very well matched"
- "Lucky to have the carers that we have"
- "Happy to go & has a great time when there"
- "I love it!"
- "It is fulfilling for us to know we are helping others".
- "The scheme is working brilliantly"
- "Knowing we are doing something valuable"

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.

The number of looked after children remains high compared with statistical neighbours. We need to improve planning and supporting arrangements to live with family members, reunification, SGO and adoption as above.

Placement stability

Placement stability and permanence remains a focus of work. There have been 25 long term matches presented to panel and a growing number of kinship or general foster carers seeking Special Guardianship orders for children which takes them out of the care system: in 2018/19 5 SGO completed, 3 are filed and 9 currently in assessment stage following a revised SGO policy to increase financial support. Research published in March 2019 showed a statistical reduction in placement

disruption for children in SGO arrangements, but highlighted the need for greater support. However it is also indicative of the further work required to improve permanency for children outside of the looked after system.

Disruption rates:

Allegation (not resulting in s47)	1
Young person left placement	1
Internal 28 days' notice/Planned notice	22
Internal immediate notice	7
LADO	1
Regulation 24 breakdown	1
S47	9

We continue to work with carers to ensure a planned placement move when carers serve notice. The use of consolidation meetings and support plans prevent emergency moves.

The number of children in placement for over 2.5 years has reduced in the last year from 101 on 31st March 2018 to 81 on the 31st March 2019. Additionally the number of children experiencing more than 3 moves in 12 months has increased from 10 children to 31 children over the same period. The significant change in performance in this area is at least partly due to improved data quality but is very concerning. One of the reasons for re-structuring the team into an Assessment team and a Support team was to improve the quality of the support provided to foster carers with the intention that this will improve placement stability. This will be a priority for improvement during 2019/20 with development of the core training offer focussed upon understanding and providing therapeutic care, training pathways for foster carers to develop their knowledge and skills and those of the team who support them.

A new service called SEEdS (Social, Emotional, Educational Support) has been launched and will provide advice and support to foster carers and schools in understanding and responding to the needs of looked after children. The service is being run by Educational Psychologists within the authority and uses a strengths based approach.

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.

In-house foster care - £550 per week

Independent Fostering Agency - £780 - £920 per week

The number of kinship care arrangements continue to vary across local authorities.

Supported lodgings provider (SLP) and Staying Put carers

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' extremely difficult facing higher levels of risk around budgeting, substance misuse, unemployment and unstable relationships. Supported Lodgings providers support for young people and helps them prepare for living independently in a safe environment.

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 fostering 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 development of independence skills, employment and education.

Currently there are 24 SLP beds available. There are 7 foster carers approved to provide either fostering or SLP placements offering potentially up to 7 beds at any one time but this is often impacted upon by demand for foster placements. One approved SLP carer offers placements specifically for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. We have a provider retiring soon.

The SLP support group has developed well and are actively engaged in service development e.g. contributing to the development of a Supported Lodgings Providers Practice Handbook.

We currently support 24 young people in SLP provision projections are for the next period that we need to provide for 30 young people each year through to 2024.

Staying Put

Staying put gives young people the right to remain living with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 as long as both they and their carers want this to happen. Herefordshire compares well with other local authorities (regional Fostering Network reports) and continues to pay fees for this time, but ceases mileage and additional allowances.

Staying Put activity has continued to grow gradually year on year with a steady growth in placements from 5-8 in 2017/18 to this year being 9-12 at any one time. This evidences we are meeting sufficiency and stability targets for older teens needing support onto independence. Carers are also becoming more accustomed to anticipating longer term commitments to children.

5. Recruitment and Assessments

Analysis of recruitment and assessment activity 2018/19:

- 191 Enquiries received
- 63 initial visits completed
- 20 applications received out of these enquiries
- 3 counselled out and 1 withdrawn
- 16 continued to assessment with 6 of these already approved

After a period without a Marketing Officer in May 2018 saw the arrival of a new marketing officer. Unfortunately long term sickness for the officer began shortly afterwards. In September a temporary contract arrangement saw a previous Marketing Officer return to cover the post.

Reigniting the Facebook and Twitter campaign has seen an increase in enquiries from 5 in April 2018 to 27 in March 2019 and an updated Recruitment and retention strategy. The Council has agreed additional investment to support this work which includes an additional Assessing Social Worker from September 2019.

Alison Forshaw took over the management of the marketing and recruitment function from February 2019. Looking forwards there is an ambitious marketing and promotional plan with stands at major county events, digital media around these and around social media platforms and some innovative approaches to raising awareness that Herefordshire children need Herefordshire carers. [Truth Be Told](#) a film made in collaboration with other local authorities was in creation during the period. Early stage ideas and planning to include an exhibition and a local film – script has been completed. Word of mouth remains important and foster carers are now offered £500 incentive for “referring a friend” who is subsequently approved as a foster carer.

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

We have a new Panel Chairperson and a Helen M vice Chairperson; the panel works well bringing a range of skills and experiences to the table. We were sad to lose Jenny Hyde as a councillor she was a long serving and very valued member of the fostering panel, her commitment and contributions will be missed. Foster panel would welcome future members who are able to be a champion for looked after children.

Panel membership has been boosted by recruitment of social work representatives on a rolling plan of attendance and a new Foster Carer representative ensuring that panel remains quorate at all times.

Fostering Panel training was held in December and focussed on feedback from the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and good examples of Determination letters; the Role of a Panel Member and on the structure changes within the Fostering service. It also provided a good opportunity to introduce our new TRix Fostering Handbook that has been rolled out to foster carers.

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’ 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 resulted in a request by the applicants/foster carers for an independent review by the Independent Review Mechanism. The Local Authority recommendation was upheld.

Panel Activity 2018/19	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Total
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Long-term Match	7	1	5	12	25
Brief Reports/Others	2	2	2	3	9
Resignations/Terminations	4	5	3	5	17
New Applications	11	11	6	8	36
First Reviews/Reviews	13	9	12	7	41
Home Reviews	18	26	19	33	96
HIPPS Assessment	2				2

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 was 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.

There has been one appeal to the Independent Review Mechanism. The Independent Review Mechanism for Fostering and Adoption (IRM) provides independent panels that review decisions made by adoption and fostering providers. The IRM upheld the decision made by our Agency Decision Maker to not approve an applicant.

7. Training

Fostering team:

- Managers have attended operational training where appropriate.
- Mandatory on line training, including information governance update
- DDP training – Foundations for attachment completed by all service staff
- Therapeutic parenting, PACE and emotional coaching workshops.
- Learning sessions – all staff – learning from case reviews
- Connected person assessment training

Foster carers

The training officer has refreshed and extended the training programme available to carers utilising the skills of fostering social workers and partner agencies. Our limited budget only covers mandatory first aid and one 2 day Positive Handling course per annum.

Of particular note has been the quality of training provided by fostering staff working with partners such as HIPSS, i.e. Foundations in Attachment and Family Support workers providing Solihull training to aid understanding of children's attachment needs and appropriate therapeutic parenting strategies. A programme of wellbeing and solutions circles has been developed to support carers themselves (and help prevent 'blocked care' or placement disruption through exhaustion.) The virtual school and Amanda Cotton and Ursula Beck in particular have provided high quality training with positive qualitative feedback reported to home review chairs.

In this year we have had 2 carers transfer to agency citing the quality of an agencies online training was a contributory factor in their decision making. A business case is being presented to increase

funding to facilitate this type of accredited training for those carers who live outside the county (i.e. kinship) or those who prefer to learn using these resources.

All foster carers undergo the Preparation to Foster training and Induction. Mandatory training is monitored through formal supervision and the annual review process. Fees are linked to a commitment to training as this is clearly linked to carers' resilience and capacity to support the needs of LAC children.

Quality assurance

The format for quality assurance of assessments was implemented for 2018/19 but the systems across the quality assurance unit, Business Support, fostering managers and panel chair have not become embedded due to changes in staff and structure. This will be revisited to enable the quality of assessments to be monitored and reported in a standardised format.

Complaints

There have been 4 formal complaints in the period, 2 around communication of decisions and 2 related to finance, one SGO and one fostering level. All were resolved at stage 1.

LADO

There were 21 referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for in house general foster carers of which:

- 13 were no further action/ threshold was not met.
- 6 contacts where allegations were substantiated of which three foster carers were subsequently de-registered and 3 foster carers who were reviewed at panel and were approved to continue as foster carers having received support and training.

Two foster carers subsequently resigned.

A further 4 referrals were received for kinship foster carers of which:

- 2 carers were subsequently de-registered
- 2 are due to be presented to fostering panel.

Compliments

Below is a sample of compliments formally received during the last quarter. Below an example of foster carer feedback to panel.

"The support from Celia was wonderful. She is a lovely, lovely person, not just an empathic social worker who "gets us", all of us. I was reluctant to accept yet another person to help because of T's reaction but Celia persuaded me that Georgina (Family Support worker) could support us too and she was brilliant! We are so very grateful for the support because we have managed to avoid a repeat of T having a total breakdown again and I feel this is because of the support and intervention that was put in place in a timely manner, and with monthly core group meetings. Without this I honestly don't believe we could have carried on much longer."

From a Kinship foster carer to their fostering social worker and family support worker *"thank you Sue and Ruby – it's been tough – thank you for support"*.

Feedback from the child’s social worker for panel. A kinship foster care arrangement - “...are fully committed to caring for L and his half sibling ‘M’.

“The foster carers are excellent in all areas both children are loved and part of their family.”

8. Key performance indicators

	Herefordshire	Statistical neighbours	National
Number of looked after children	92 per 10,000	53 per 10,000 (2017/18)	64 per 10,000 (2017/18)
Recruitment of foster carers	Growth of 4.5%	Not available	Decrease of 1%
Percentage of children placed with local authority foster carers	73%	Not available	67% (2017/18)
Percentage of children placed with independent fostering agencies	27%	Not available	33% (2017/18)
Number of children with 3+ moves in 12 months	10%	11% (2017/18)	10% (2017/18)
Number of children in the same placement for more than 2 ½ years	71%	71% (2017/18)	70% (2017/18)

9. Key achievements during 2018-19

- Restructure of the service to improve recruitment and retention.
- Increase in fostering enquiries
- Higher number of carers seeking Special Guardianship arrangements
- Increase in Staying Put arrangements
- Good working relationships established with other social work teams
- Broadening of training programme

10. Key priorities for development during 2018-19

- Increase in number of carers approved; HIPSS, General and Supported Lodging providers
- Increase in number of available beds with current cohort of carers
- Improve retention through improving benefits package available to foster carers
- Increase in children achieving permanency in special guardianship arrangements
- Increase placement stability
- Increase in support for SGO
- Development of training programme – therapeutic parenting and online resources
- Mosaic workflow upgrade completion
- Update foster carers charter