

**Children & Young People  
Scrutiny Committee**

**An Introduction to Fostering**

**7 May 2024**

# Introduction to Herefordshire Fostering Service

- Herefordshire Council provides a range of Foster Care provision to children in care of the Local Authority through its in-house Fostering Service
- Unlike Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), which are private or voluntary organisations, the Fostering Service is a Local Authority resource.
- The Fostering Service currently has **168** approved fostering households, with the capacity to care for **272** children in our care
- A broad break down of our approved fostering households is as follows;
  - 86 x Foster Care households
  - 69 x Connected Care households (also known as 'Family and Friends' or 'Kinship Carers')
  - 15 x Respite Carer households
- There are currently 25 Foster Care households that have some capacity to offer respite or short-term care.

# Staffing In the Service

- A priority improvement action in 2023-24 focused on stabilising and building capacity in the Fostering Service workforce to deliver more relational and restorative support to Foster Carers and address the recruitment and retention priorities
- In the last year the Fostering Service has stabilised its management structure by appointing a;
  - Seconded Head of Service who is a permanent Council Employee
  - Permanent Service Manager; and,
  - 3 Permanent Team Managers
- The service has 20 permanent practitioners and 11 agency practitioners.
- There is an on-going and active recruitment campaign to attract permanent staff into the Fostering Service

# Service Re-Alignment

- In January 2024, a proposal was agreed for the Fostering Service to be re-aligned in order to deliver a more efficient and effective service with more clearly delineated roles and functions
- The Fostering Service now has four teams, which are as follows;
  - Recruitment and Assessment Team
  - Connected Persons and Special Guardian Team
  - Fostering Support Team
  - Home Finding Team

# Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

- The Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team comprises of a Team Manager, Recruitment Officer, Marketing Officer, Training Officer and 2 Fostering Assessing Social Workers.
- The Team is responsible for:
  - Attracting new foster carers through pro-active marketing campaigns
  - Recruitment activity, including engagement, initial visits and responding to enquiries
  - Undertaking assessments (known as Form F assessments) for mainstream foster carers
  - The provision of training for all Foster Carers, including with prospective Foster Carers being assessed
- A new permanent Team Manager recently started in April 2024

# Fostering Recruitment Developments

## Some of the recent recruitment developments include:

- There are now regular Newsletters, including a Training Newsletter, sent to Foster Carers, to improve communication
- Digital marketing, with improved social media activity and a revamp of information events has helped to start promoting the role and importance of fostering with Herefordshire
- Development of the recruitment strategy through the successful retention of current Foster Carers who will champion and promote becoming a Herefordshire Foster Carer, including a £500 referral scheme for Foster Carers.
- New Foster Care marketing recruitment campaigns
- Increased quality assurance and scrutiny of recruitment enquiries and assessment standards
- Plans for Foster Care Fortnight (13 – 16 May) are being finalised with activities and events to promote and celebrate our Foster Carers and the role they play with our children in care.
- Currently recruitment activity indicates that 5 assessments are in progress, 2 enquiries will progress to assessment upon receipt of applications and 3 other enquiries are progressing to initial visits.

# Connected Persons & Special Guardian Team

## Staffing:

- Permanent Team Manager (started March 2024),
- 8 social workers (2 permanent, with 1 more joining shortly, plus 6 agency)
- 1 permanent Kinship Support Worker (offer just made)

## The focus of the team is;

- Viability and full assessments for Connect Persons and Special Guardians
- Supervision and support for Connected Persons and Special Guardians.
- Private Fostering

# Connected Persons & Special Guardian Team

## Priorities:

- Undertaking viability assessments and completing full assessments in accordance with statutory guidance, practice standards and agreed timescales
- Awareness raising for PF and identification of PF children, review PF policy and process
- Foster Panel training regarding Connected Foster carers
- Designated Administrative support to help support progress of all necessary checks and ensure compliance
- SGO policy and Family & Friends policy



# Fostering Support Team

## Staffing:

- 2 Permanent Team Managers (1 started in February 2023 and 1 more joins in May 2024)
- 4 full time permanent social workers of which 2 permanent social workers who work 0.5 FTE, and one permanent social worker who works a 0.6 FTE role
- 1 full time permanent social worker recruited and due to start in June 24.
- 1 part time permanent social worker (0.5) recruited and due to start in May 24
- 2 full time agency social worker currently, but this will reduce to 1 0,5 FTE agency social worker once new appointments starts.
- 2 Fostering Support Workers, both permanent positions of which 1 is currently on maternity leave.
- **The focus of the team is to;**
  - Supervise and support Foster Carers, as per the National Minimum Standards (NMS, 2011)
  - Include our Foster Carers who are approved or dual approved to provide short term, long term, respite, overnight short breaks and/or supported lodgings (for young people aged of 18-21 years of age).

# Fostering Support Team

## Priorities:

- To ensure that the Fostering Support Team are well supported with clear managerial guidance, regular supervision and work in an environment of high challenge and high support.
- To ensure that our foster carers are supported and supervised to ensure compliance in regards to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering being met.
- To continue to promote placement stability.
- To retain of 'good quality' foster carers to ensure that our children / young people are offered high quality care and support. This retention priority along with the recruitment of foster carers will reduce the cost of seeking alternative placements externally.
- To develop new and updated policies and guidance e.g. for Supported Lodgings, the Foster Carer handbook is updated.
- To provide efficient and effective administration to track all necessary references, checks and reporting to achieve and maintain compliance.

# The Home Finding Team

## PRIORITIES

- To identify and secure suitable provision, including;
  - Residential Care
  - Foster Care (IFA)
  - Supported Accommodation
  - Short breaks
  - Secure welfare for vulnerable children and young people age 0-25
- To ensure value for money for the Council.
- To work strategically with providers to secure sufficient local provision
- To secure local homes for local children

**The Home Finding Team  
Identify planned & emergency homes for Herefordshire children in care**

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Relationships with providers
- Prompt and accurate payments to providers for services provided
- Negotiations with providers
- Quality assuring homes for our children
- Collating Data
- Communication with relevant professionals
- Taking prompt and effective action to safeguard our children when required

# Herefordshire Fostering Panel

- The Fostering Panel's function is to make a recommendation about a person's suitability to be a Foster Carer
- The Fostering Panel considers the terms of the person's approval, including the number and age of children, and makes its recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker
- The Panel has a Panel Advisor (currently interim) to advise Panel members and manage the relationship between the Local Authority and the Panel, including quality assuring practice and feeding back to everyone involved with Panel work
- Panel members are independent of the Local Authority and representative of the local community in Herefordshire. Panel members also included elected members; Cllr Diana Toynbee and Cllr Robert Highfield
- There have been 3 new panel members recruited within the last 12 months.
- There have been 22 panels held between March 2023 - March 2024.
- Panels consider new Foster Carer approvals of Foster Carers and Connected carers, annual reviews, changes to terms of carers approval, post LADO reviews, resignations and notes exemptions to terms of carers approval.
- A Fostering Panel brochure introduces Panel Members so Panel invitees know who they will meet when they attend panel.
- Feedback from Fostering Panel invitees reports a positive and welcoming experience.

# Any questions?