

<b>Questioner:</b>	Anonymous, Herefordshire
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	7 May 2024
<b>Question:</b> Are Herefordshire Children's Services biased towards mum and why do dads not get the same help and support that mum's do?	
<b>Response:</b>	
<p>The Children Act 1989 refers to parents, not mothers or fathers. The assessment of parents is determined by their capacity to meet the needs of their children. Help and support provided by Children's Services should be inclusive of both fathers and mothers.</p> <p>There is a positive impact on children when fathers have a positive and caring relationships with them so it is important to promote a 'Think Family' approach whereby the inclusion of fathers, as well as mothers, will help to achieve the best outcomes for the children.</p> <p>In practice, this means a child's father should be encouraged to engage and participate in assessments, planning and reviews about help and support. Children's Services do not consciously seek to disadvantage fathers or show unfair bias towards mothers at the expense of father and if there is a cause for concern it should be raised with the allocated social worker and their line manager so this can be considered and addressed.</p>	

<b>Questioner:</b>	Ms Maggie Steel, Hereford
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	7 May 2024
<b>Question:</b> If a member of the public has safeguarding concerns over a foster carer or a kinship carer, is the fostering panel made aware of those concerns?	
<b>Response:</b>	
<p>The Fostering Panel promotes safe, secure and stable placements. It carries out a rigorous quality assurance function and promotes thorough assessments, support and training for foster carers. As part of this function, the panel oversees the conduct of assessments and annual reviews of approved foster carers.</p> <p>Any allegations about safeguarding concerns in respect of a foster carer, including a kinship carer (also known as 'Connected' or 'Family and Friends Carers'), raised by anyone, including a member of the public, will be responded to in accordance with established multi-agency Child Protection Procedures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will also work with</p>	

multi-agency partners and employers, to manage allegations about people who work with children in paid or unpaid positions, including foster carers.

Allegations made about foster carers will necessitate an early fostering review and the matter being referred to the Fostering Panel to consider the continuing suitability to foster. The supervising social worker for the foster carer and/or the children's allocated social worker will inform the Fostering Panel about safeguarding issues regarding the foster carer for the Fostering Panel to consider during the foster carer's annual review. The Fostering Panel can subsequently make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker which could include the recommendation to terminate the foster carer's approval.

<b>Questioner:</b>	Ms Donna Conway, Leominster
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	7 May 2024
<p><b>Question:</b> On page 6 of the presentation about fostering in Herefordshire it states this:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"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 <u>£500 referral scheme</u> for Foster Carers."</i></p> <p>What assessment procedures and safeguards are in place to ensure that all foster carers and kinship carer applicants, those selected and retained are safe to care for children?</p>	
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>The recruitment of foster carers is in line with the Department of Education's Fostering Services National Minimum Standards. Careful recruitment and regular monitoring of carers by our Fostering Service is designed to prevent unsuitable carers from being recruited and having the opportunity to harm children or to place them at risk.</p> <p>The relevant authorities are informed of any concerns about inappropriate adults. The recruitment, assessment, preparation, training and support of foster carers by our Fostering Service has a strong focus on child protection and keeping children safe, including help to ensure that children living in foster homes are safe, and feel safe.</p>	

Foster carers are reviewed annually by the Fostering Panel who will make appropriate recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

<b>Questioner:</b>	Ms Reid, Hereford
<b>Scrutiny Meeting:</b>	7 May 2024
<p><b>Question:</b> I refer the presentation 'An introduction to Fostering' (Agenda Item 8). According to a Freedom of Information request the average cost of <u>one child</u> in care for <u>one year</u> was in January 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-house Fostering: over £16,000</li> <li>• Private Fostering (Independent Fostering Agencies, IFAs): over £46,000</li> <li>• Children's homes: over £260,000</li> </ul> <p>It is very likely that costs have increased since then.</p> <p>I understand that in Herefordshire the rate of children privately fostered is high compared with rate of "Statistical Neighbours" or nationally. Also, the rates of looked-after children and children in children's homes are high.</p> <p>Inter alia, looked-after children's costs can be reduced by reuniting children with their families and encouraging private fosterers to become in-house fosterers. How will the council reduce the costs?</p>	
<p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>We currently have only one child who is subject to 'Private Fostering'. This is not high; our numbers remain very low, and we suspect this is due to under-reporting which is a challenge for many local authorities and partnerships. 'Private Fostering' is a different arrangement to that of a looked after child. A privately fostered child is a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled) who is cared for by an adult who is not a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, stepparent (including civil partnerships), sister or brother where the child is to be cared for in that person's home for 28 days or more. These placements are subject to checks to ensure the child is safe; Private Fostering arrangements are not paid for by the Local Authority.</p>	

Our current Placement Sufficiency Strategy seeks to recruit more local in-house foster carers and improve working relationships with providers in order to increase choice and value for money. We are also seeking prevent children entering care with expansion and development of our Edge of Care and Home (ECHO) Service.

Whilst Children's Services seeks to manage children's placements as part of the agreed financial savings strategy for 2024/25, it is important to ensure that the needs, risks and circumstances of children are paramount and that, where possible, we continue to reunify children with their families, where it is safe to do so. In the last year, 22 children have been reunified with their parents. A further 22 children are living with their parents under a Care Order (Placement with Parents Regulations). These children's plans are subject to ongoing review and, when it is appropriate to do so, we will apply to the court for a discharge of their care orders.