

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 7 MAY 2024 - APPENDIX 2

This Appendix has been prepared in response to a request for additional data and information from the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 2 May 2024 for consideration on 7 May 2024.

1. How many children are currently in fostering care?

We currently have 386 children in our care; of these;

- 78 live with Kinship Carers** (20%)
- 204 live with Foster Carers (53%)
 - of these 95 live with in-house carers
 - and 109 live with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

(**Kinship Carers – also referred to as 'Connected Carers' or 'Family and Friends' Carers)

2. What is the age profile of these children?

	Kinship carers	In-House Foster Carers	IFA Foster Carers
Age 0 – 5	25	32	14
Age 6 - 10	25	12	27
Age 11 - 15	21	38	45
Age 16 – 18	7	13	23

3. How many placements are out of county?

- Kinship Carers: 9 are placed out of county (of 78)
- In-House Carers: 6 are placed out of county (of 95)
- IFA Foster Carers: 43 are placed out of county (of 109)

4. What is the age profile of the current fostering capacity? Do we struggle to recruit foster parents for any particular age ranges?

Herefordshire continues to prioritise the recruitment of Foster Care Households as part of its overarching improvement journey. Herefordshire is seeking to recruit as many local Foster Carers as possible but like many Local Authorities is competing against Independent Fostering Agencies based in and near to the county. In terms of meeting the placement needs of children and young people in care, the challenge is often in respect of recruiting Foster Carers for sibling groups and children who are disabled with complex and additional needs, but the most acute challenge is in respect of young people / teenagers aged 12 to 18 years of age.

The age profile of the current fostering capacity is as follows;

Age Range	Availability	Type of Placement Offered
0 - 5	5	3 respite placements and 2 short-term placements
6 -10	5	2 respite placements and 3 short-term placements
11 - 15	1	1 respite placement
16 - 18	6	6 respite placements

Herefordshire Fostering Service has recently been part of a DfE funded programme of research called 'Fosterlink' focusing on foster care recruitment and approval practices. The written diagnostic report is due to be received imminently and will be used to refresh our plans. It is anticipated that this may also include some additional support and intervention as part of phase two of the research programme.

5. The sections from the most recent improvement programme reporting that pertain to fostering and adoptions

The draft refresh of the Children's Improvement Plan is due to be considered at the Improvement Board on 9 May 2024. The relevant priority improvement draft actions are as follows;

- Point 2.8: Further develop the All-Age Commissioning Service and implement the refreshed Sufficiency Strategy to increase the availability and choice of provision and support for Herefordshire's children and young people.
- Point 3.5: Develop and publish an updated Special Guardianship policy that reflects best practice, removes obstacles to becoming an SGO carer and supports increased uptake of kinship care and Special Guardianship Orders.
- Point 5.4: Review the capacity of the fostering service and further develop the activity to recruit and support Foster Carers so that there is a net increase in fostering households at the end of each year

6. Adoption

The Children's Improvement Plan does not mention adoption specifically, although adoption is one pathway to achieving permanence for children who need alternative permanent care. In 2023/24;

- 9 children were adopted; this equates to 4.2% of the children leaving our care (compared with 14% for our statistical neighbours and 9% for England).
- There are 20 children who are currently waiting to be adopted

- For 1 child in the previous 12 months, the decision for adoption was reversed and the plan is no longer one of adoption.

Adoption Central England, ACE, is the Regional Adoption Agency formed in 2018 which provides services on behalf of Herefordshire, Warwickshire, Coventry, Worcestershire and Solihull. The central purpose of ACE is to find the right families for children needing permanent homes through adoption.

There has been, and continues to be, a focus on achieving permanence for children which can be achieved in a number of different ways including adoption, long term fostering, Special Guardianship plus reunification to birth parents. During 2023/24, 22 children and young people had their Care Orders discharged by the Court with a further 4 children and young people currently awaiting confirmation of dates for court hearings.

7. The relevant measures that matter;

There have been 'Measure that Matter' incorporated into the Children's Improvement Plan following the Ofsted (2022) inspection, including about Foster Carer's occupancy. The refresh of the Children's Improvement Plan is due to be considered by the Improvement Board on 9 May 2024. The recent development of the Partnership Executive Group, chaired by the Council's Chief Executive, is aiming to develop a multi-agency report of key performance indicators to drive the delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan.