

**Foster
Sheffield's
Future**



SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

People Services

Children & Families

Fostering Service

Annual Report 2021/22

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1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report is an annual report on the business and activity within Sheffield City Council's Fostering Service in 2021/22.
- 1.2 The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Fostering Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in 2021/22 and those planned for 2022/23.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 Sheffield City Council Fostering Service operates within the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the "2011 Regulations"), and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, which form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.
- 2.2 It is a legislative requirement that the Fostering Service reports on its activity and performance to Elected Members.
- 2.3 Sheffield City Council Fostering Service's remit is to provide family-based placements for Sheffield's children in care. The Service recruits and approves prospective foster carers, matches and places children with approved foster carers, and provides support and supervision to approved foster carers.
- 2.4 At the end of reporting year Sheffield City Councils' Fostering Service comprised of:
 - three fostering social work teams who support and supervise our foster carers
 - a recruitment team which focuses on the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers,
 - a placement team whose role is to accept and quality assure referrals for children requiring placement provision, and undertake placement searches
 - a dedicated connected carers team. The connected carers team undertake Regulation 24, (temporary approval of a foster carer) assessments through to full Connected Persons Foster Carer approval. Childcare legislation requires

that these connected carers, who are most often grandparents to the child, be assessed and approved, where suitable, as local authority foster carers. Many of these connected carers go on to provide permanence for these children outside of care by becoming Special Guardians and the team maintain responsibility for providing this ongoing support where it is required. This team also undertakes Private Fostering assessment and support.

- 2.6 Our foster carers do a remarkable job for Sheffield's children in care and in transforming the lives of so many of children.

3 Our Vision and Aims

- 3.1 Our City's 'Big Ambition' is that every child, young person and family achieves their full potential. We are determined to ensure our children and young people in care, adopted children and care leavers succeed. Our vision is that 'children and young people are safe and supported to achieve their full potential'. We set out four elements to how we will work to achieve this, as follows:

- Children are at the centre of our practice
- We intervene at the earliest opportunity
- Our workforce is skilled and supported to do the work that they need to
- Children and families benefit from high performing and high-quality services

- 3.3 The Fostering Service supports the department's policy to enable children and young people to stay with their birth families wherever this is safe and possible and where they cannot, to place them without delay with alternative carers.

- 3.4 The aim of Sheffield's Fostering Service is to provide high quality foster care as part of a full range of accommodation provision for children in care and provide the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children who cannot live with their own families. In doing so the service strives to:

- Provide a service that is local, accessible, and inclusive
- Provide a choice of high-quality foster placements to meet the individual needs of children and young people

- Ensure foster carers provide a high quality parenting to all children in foster care and assist children and young people to engage in their care and placement planning
- Work together with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people, to enhance and develop health, education & well-being
- Work with foster carers to support 'staying put' placements for children remaining in the family home post 18
- Provide support and assessments for family and friends of foster carers

4 Looked After Children and Foster Placement Data

4.1 At the beginning of this reporting year the UK was beginning to come out of its third lockdown. At the end of March, the 'rule of 6' was in place which limited social gatherings. Like other areas of the Council and Country in general, this has not gone without significant disruption within the fostering community who were also becoming exhausted by not being able to physically connect with their wider fostering community. The impact of Covid has led to a national shortage of foster carers and this is reflected in Sheffield, with fewer available family-based placements both in-house and within the independent sector both locally and nationally. Despite of all this, our Sheffield City Council in-house foster carers have continued to do a remarkable job, caring for Sheffield children, accepting placements, and supporting children through transitions on to adoption or returning home.

4.2 At the end of the reporting year 31st March 2022, Sheffield City Council cared for a population of 666 children in care: this is a slight decrease from the previous year when 674 children were placed in care. Of these children, 71% (473) children benefitted from family based foster care provision; a rise by 2% from the previous year. Of the 473 who were in family based foster care, 70% (332 children) were placed in Sheffield City Council in-house provision and 30% (141 children) were placed with Independent Fostering Provision (IFA).

The 332 children placed within SCC fostering provision comprise of both mainstream and kinship care arrangements. There were 86 children in kinship

arrangements and 242 were placed within mainstream fostering. The remaining 4 children were in the fostering element of foster to adopt placements.

- 4.3 Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations, enables children to be placed with people they have a connection with where the local authority is satisfied that an immediate placement with the connected person is the most appropriate placement for the child. In these instances, the carers can have a temporary approval as a foster carer for a maximum period of 24 weeks in order to allow for full assessment to be conducted and presented to foster panel for approval. As described above on the 31st of March 2022 86 children were placed in such arrangements.
- 4.4 In April 2021, the Connected Carers Team began a project to lead on the Regulation 24, viability of temporary approved foster carers. The aim of this was to provide a first point of contact from one lead area who assess the suitability of the arrangement and where safe and appropriate to then begin the full assessment. In the reporting year 21/22 186 viability assessments were referred into the Service. Some of these arrangements were time-limited and in many cases alternative plans were quickly made for these children, which included returning home to their parents, being placed with another family member, or being placed within a mainstream carer household. Throughout the year a total of 168 children were placed with connected carers for a period of time, an increase from 151 in the previous year.
- 4.5 The trajectory to utilise connected carers plays a significant role in fostering and this isn't fully reflected in the end of year data. This is because many of these carers go on to secure other arrangements outside of care, such as Child Arrangement Orders, (CAO) or Special Guardianship Orders, (SGO). In 2021/22 41 children left care as a result of Special Guardianship Orders being granted, with another 55 children ceasing to be looked after as a result of Child Arrangement Orders being granted, equating to 31% of the population of children who ceased to be looked after, or 96 children.

- 4.6 In 21/22 the Connected Carers Team was increased by 4.5 social workers and 1 (FTE) Team Manager to reflect the increase of work within this service and to avoid the cost of recruiting agency workers.
- 4.7 From the age of eighteen young people are no longer legally 'in care' or 'looked after' and therefore fostering arrangements and legislation relating to children placed with foster carers no longer applies. However, it is also recognised that young people of 18 years are still vulnerable and for these young people it is important that wherever possible, they can continue to live with their foster family where it is right to do so. These arrangements are called "Staying Put" arrangements. In 2021/22 there were 54 children in Staying Put arrangements with local authority foster carers. This is an increase of 10 Staying Put arrangements compared with the previous year. This is the right outcome for these young people and demonstrates the variety of provision provided by the Fostering Service outside of children looked after care. It also highlights the added pressure on the Service as these 54 placements are not available for children entering care.
- 4.8 In addition to provision for children in care, the Fostering Service also provide short break care for disabled children and support care intervention for families on the edge of care including adoptive families and special guardians. Support care is also utilised to support other foster carers where placements are complex or fragile. During the year 2021/22 the service provided regular overnight support care intervention to 80 children in 69 families. This included 4 IFA placements and 14 families on the edge of care. 10 families also benefited from support care through short breaks for disabled children. In addition to this brief support care intervention was offered to 12 children in 11 families who needed brief support care to support their main placement. This included 3 children in Kinship care (2 families). The service recognises the benefits of providing family-based support for these children and are keen to develop this service further in 2022/23. Approval was given to recruit a part-time Manager to lead on this.

5 Placement Stability

- 5.1 We have continued to improve the performance in the short-term stability for our children in care. In 21/22, the number of children in care who had experience 3 or more placement moves during the year dropped from 12% to just under 11%. However, there has also been a slight dip in the % of children in care for more than 2.5 years who have been living in their current placements for more than 2 years, (72% to 70%).

6 Innovations

Mockingbird Family Based Model of Foster Care

- 6.1 The Mockingbird Family Model, supported by The Fostering Network, brings ‘satellite’ fostering families together in groups, known as ‘constellations’ with a ‘hub’ home at its centre. The hub foster carer is a suitably experienced foster carer who lives in close proximity to the other fostering families and acts as coordinator for constellation activity, and support and mentor to the other fostering households. Based on the premise that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ the family-based model gives foster carers a support network to turn to during difficult times, thereby promoting placement stability and carer retention.
- 6.2 In 2019 the Department for Education, (DfE) announced further innovation funding to expand the Mockingbird approach across the UK and Sheffield along with 9 other areas made successful bids and we successfully secured £300K innovation funding to establish Mockingbird in Sheffield.
- 6.3 Unfortunately there was some delay in the Mockingbird development which related to the pandemic and the direction from DfE and Fostering Network to cease all work on this innovation until May 2020. In May 2020, we launched our first Mockingbird 1 constellation. The constellation has one hub home foster carer, supporting a constellation comprising of 8 fostering families and 13 children in care, between the ages of 1– 18, 3 sons and daughters of foster carers, 1 adopted child and 1 staying put child. Each constellation is supported by a liaison worker, and in Sheffield City Council the liaison worker is also the supervising social worker for the constellation. Sheffield was the first Local

Authority to launch a constellation during the lock down period and because of this success other Local Authorities followed our practice.

- 6.4 The feedback from foster carers is that they feel really supported and benefit from the swift, carer led response to issues provided through the Mockingbird model. The carers report that without the support of the model, placements would have broken down, and carers may have left the Service. This was because the model allowed for consistent and responsive intervention from within the model, such as overnight stays for children where carers were experiencing difficulties. The carers felt supported and valued and because the children were staying over with carers they knew well, it created a more 'family based' environment like going to aunties or grandparents' home. The model has also allowed for siblings who live with different carers but in the constellation to have more 'normalised' time with siblings. More recently one fostering family requested some sleep overs as it was their anniversary. The hub carer was able to arrange to take the child away in a caravan to the coast with another carer who looked after the sibling and was also in the constellation. This meant that the carers, both single carers, got to enjoy time away together, the children got to experience a holiday with their siblings, and another fostering couple were able to enjoy their anniversary.
- 6.5 In March 21/22 the Service also launched a second constellation, unfortunately the hub carer stepped away from the role due to family issues, which meant that the second constellation was not within the fidelity of the model. Following consultation with the carers involved in mockingbird 2, fostering network, the liaison worker and Senior Fostering Managers, the decision was made to close this constellation. Towards the end of 21/22 expressions of interest were taken from carers and following interview the Service recruited a new hub home carer. Following extensive engagement with foster carers, a new constellation has been formed. Whilst outside this reporting year Fostering Network have confirmed that the constellation is within fidelity. A formal launch celebration is planned for August so carers and children can celebrate this achievement. Our ambition is to launch a further two constellations by the end of 2023.

Bright Spots – Fostering Five Conversations

6.6 The Bright Spots Programme is a partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford. It supports local authorities across the country to systematically listen to the voice of the child, and what makes them happy. The survey isn't based on attainment or other outcomes measures, like medicals, dental checks, and educational results but about the things that really matter the most to our children and what makes them feel happy, or an emotional wellbeing check.

6.7 This survey is very much about the collective voice of the child in care and care leavers. In early 2021 Sheffield City Council delivered the Bright Spot survey to our children in care population which was then analysed by Coram Voice and because of this the fostering service introduced the fostering five conversations. These conversations are held with our carers and training material has been developed to support this. This was rolled out in 2021 to all our carers, and features in our supervising social worker visits and recorded on the carers files. The areas that children tell us that they want more support with are:

- Having someone to talk to about the things that matter the most to them
- Liking how they look and how they feel
- Being able to do the same things as other children their age
- Having good friendships and being able to join shared interest groups
- Help to like school

6.8 The Service have linked the finding to the fostering national minimum standards, and have hosted joint training with children in care services to ensure a collaborative approach. Coram Voice have noted this as an area of good practice, and this work is now featured on Bright Spots practice bank. Whilst outside of this reporting year, the service aims to reflect the five conversations in the carers review to ensure that this is embedded in what we do.

7 Recruitment and Retention Activity and Outcomes in 21/22

7.1 Recruitment and retention of foster carers is probably the most important factor for any fostering organisation in delivering an effective fostering service for

children in care. In achieving this, Sheffield City Council has invested in the fostering service 'offer' which includes attractive financial incentives and wrap around support to carers with an ambition to recruit and retain Sheffield City Council foster carers looking after Sheffield's children.

7.2 The target set for the service in 21/22 was to approve 40 new mainstream foster carers. The Service fell short of this target with 26 mainstream fostering households being approved, and a drop from the previous year where we approved 32 families. Whilst outside this reporting year, to date this year we have approved 7 foster carers this year.

Of the 26-mainstream approved:

- 14 were approved to offer task placements
- 9 were approved to offer holiday and support care placements
- 2 were approved to offer permanence placements
- 1 was approved for UASC

Please note this refers to mainstream foster carers and does not include connected persons carers (see 4.4)

7.3 It is important to note that all fostering services lose carers during any one-year. Carers may decide fostering is no longer for them, or that their family circumstances have changed, so there is a need to continually recruit significantly just to maintain capacity. Whilst it is clearly important that we maintain a focus on our recruitment activity, it is equally important that we consider the retention of our Sheffield City mainstream fostering population. In 21/22, 27 fostering households were 'lost' to the Service through resignation, deregistration, or retirement or changes in family circumstances

8 Recruitment Plans

8.1 A full and detailed Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been produced based upon the channels and target audiences agreed with the Councils' Communications and Marketing Team. Recruitment events were affected by

Covid-19 during 21/22 and whilst we were able to do some 'face to face' recruitment events, most recruitment and marketing was channelled on social media.

- 8.2 The service continued to have high visibility on Facebook/Twitter updating posts 2-3 times per week and throughout this pandemic fostering enquires remained consistent with previous years with 519 enquires in 20/21 compared with 429 in this reporting year.
- 8.3 Information evenings were continued to be delivered virtually and were increased to monthly as opposed to 6 weekly and these proved successful. These events continue to be hosted this way to date. The team have adapted preparation to foster training to be hosted online to avoid delay in assessment and approval, ensuring this training was interactive, utilising video clips, discussion break out rooms, and case studies. This remote training continues to date.
- 8.4 The assessment of prospective foster carers has largely returned to face-to-face assessment sessions, although there are benefits for undertaken some assessment visits remotely. Foster Panel continued to operate remotely during 21/22.

9 Support and supervision for carers:

- 9.1 All carers are allocated a fostering social worker who undertakes their assessment; where possible for consistency they will maintain some involvement until the point of first placement being made. A supervising social worker will be identified pre-approval and allocated post approval, who will continue to support and supervise the foster carer in their journey as foster carers.
- 9.2 Our policy states that carers are visited a minimum of every 6 weeks and 12 weeks if providing support care. In 21/22 the Service began to undertake

home supervision visits to foster carers but continued to operate a hybrid model.

- 9.3 Throughout the year, the Service maintained 'in-office' presence to a maximum of 12 workers/managers. This was to be able to offer a swift response to any needs that might arise and to maintain a close and responsive link with foster carers. During the year 21/22 more of the social workers returned to the office on a hybrid model of working from office/ working from home model.
- 9.4 During office hours we have a duty service available to carers and outside working hours we have a foster carer's telephone helpline. This was maintained throughout the pandemic.
- 9.5 Sheffield City Council has invested in a Clinical Psychologist within the Fostering Service. This enables a better understanding for foster carers on the impact of trauma and abuse on children and the significance of building healthy attachment relationships. During this year, there has been a more intensive focus on remote consultation for foster carers in addition to providing team around the placement meetings to give a therapeutic perspective of the needs of children and carers, and how best to support everyone.
- 9.6 There has been additional investment in training and development and the Fostering Service recruited a second part-time training and development officer in 2021. Training has continued to be delivered remotely and has increased to accommodate foster carers learning needs. It has been noted that as a result of this that the take up of training opportunities have increase, and carers have reported that they find the online access easier to attend without the added complications of juggling childcare needs with attending training.
- 9.7 The service also recruited a part time speech and language therapist who started in post in September 2020. The speech and language lead provides training to carers and workers, consultation to carers, intervention with families and has hosted a series of 'sing and sign' events for carers and children during this year which has proved successful.

- 9.8 As with training, at the beginning of the year, our 7 support groups were moved on-line although we have maintained the same numbers of support groups and used zoom rather than teams, the facility of being able to see each other, gave the sense of being in the room together.
- 9.9 Towards the end of 21/22 the Service were able to reintroduce some face-to-face fostering events. In August 21, the Service hosted our first 'Fostering Fiesta' held at Mylnhurst School. The event saw fostering families, children, social workers, managers and the Senior Leadership team come together and celebrate being together again. The event included an animal petting corner, swimming sessions facilitated by Mylnhurst school swimming coaches, Pyjama Drama's activities and storytelling, soft play areas for toddlers, face paints, crafts, ice creams, BBQ, refreshments and was well attended and well received. The Service hosted a Foster Carer Celebration Event at the end of November 21 for our Foster Carers to enjoy and celebrate their achievements over the last two years. The event comprised a dinner and dance and was very well attended, well received and missed when it was cancelled in the previous year. In December 21, we hosted a children's Christmas party, games, food and disco hosted by Mylnhurst School where Father Christmas dropped by to deliver special presents to our very special children.

10 Fostering Panel:

10.1 Panel Functions

- 10.1.1 Regulation 23(1) of the 2011 Regulations states that "*the fostering service must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering Panel ("the central list"), including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post qualifying experience.*"
- 10.1.2 Regulation 23(4) states that "*...the fostering service must constitute one or more fostering Panels, as necessary, to perform the functions of a fostering Panel under these Regulations, and must appoint Panel members including:*
- (i) *A person to chair the Panel who, in the case of any appointment made after 1st October 2011, must be independent of the fostering service provider, and;*

- (ii) *One or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the Panel is absent or that office is vacant (“the vice chairs”) from the persons on the central list.*

10.1.3 Sheffield City Foster Panel has the following primary functions (under Regulation 25(1) of the Fostering Regulations 2011:

- To consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent (including “connected persons” under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010).
- Where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given.
- It is to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster carer, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate - (i) on the first review and (ii) on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service (e.g. following allegations or complaints against foster carers).

10.2 Sheffield Panel Business 2020/21

10.2.1 The Service has 3 panels, each with different membership. Each Panel has an independent chair with significant knowledge and experience of fostering issues and all panel meetings have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members. During 21/22 Panel meetings were held on a weekly basis to reflect the increase in Reg 24/ Connected Carer assessments, approvals, reviews and changes of approvals presented to Panel. Each Panel was supported by a Panel Chair and Panel Advisor. In 21/22 all Foster Panels were held remotely. Panel members are all subject to annual appraisals in the year and training that has been facilitated in the year for Panel Members includes GDPR, unconscious bias training, Connected Carer training and Panel functions including quality assurance challenge.

10.2.3 The Service recruited 3 new panel members in the year all of whom had an induction to panel comprising a welcome pack, the opportunity to observe panel and a mentor who is an experienced panel member.

11 Developments in 2021/22

11.1 As previously stated we have:

- Continued to be flexible and creative as we work through the Covid19 pandemic and the Government guidance and restrictions, being responsive to the restrictions when required, and using opportunities to engage in physical fostering family's events when enabled to do so.
- Recruited 26 SCC in-house foster carers
- Undertook a 'stock take' of blocked carers to maximise placement sufficiency in service
- Recruited an additional 18.5 manager to develop the short break and support service, with a specific emphasis in increasing provision for short break care for disabled children and edge of care intervention
- Reviewed and expanded the Connected Carers Team given the growth in workload in this team
- Launched 2 x Mockingbird Constellations
- Utilised findings from the recent 'Bright Spots' Survey and introduced our Fostering Five based on what children say that they want more of from their foster carers.

12 Developments and improvements 2022/23

12.1 As previously stated we have:

- Increase the number of SCC in-house foster carers in the year and work towards a target of 40 fostering families approved in the year.
- A refresh of our recruitment and Marketing Campaign, and a redesign of our images and messages to reach out to a wider audience, to reflect the diversity of children in care, and carers required to meet their holistic needs.
- Increase the numbers of face-to-face events open to our fostering community, including presentations at fostering panels, reviews, supervision visits. The Service will be mindful of the benefits of the hybrid model of working however more opportunities to meet in person will be the focus of the year.
- Further review of the Connected Carers Team given the growth in this area

- Recruit to and launch a further Mockingbird Constellation
- Developed a foster carers satisfaction survey and use the findings to inform our fostering development and action plan.

Approved and signed off by the Senior Leadership Team: 05/08/2022

**Sally Williams – Interim Director of Children and Families
Sheffield City Council**