



SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

People Services

Children & Families

Fostering Service

Annual Report 2020/21

Sheffield Fostering Service

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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 2020/21.
- 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 2020/21 and those planned for 2021/22.

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
 - 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 children 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 in lockdown as a response to the Covid19 pandemic. Like other areas of the Council and Country in general, this has not gone without significant disruption within the fostering community. The impact of Covid meant that our available foster carers and foster placements reduced both in-house and within the independent sector throughout the course of the year. At the beginning of the year, 66 of our fostering beds were blocked due to the age and/or health of carers which made them clinically vulnerable. Many of these blocked beds related to potential second or third placements in the fostering household or to support care placements as carers generally maintained the placements of children already in their care at the time the pandemic began and locked down together. This demonstrated the remarkable commitment of our foster carers towards our children in care. With the ease of lockdown and the vaccination roll out, carers have gradually again started to take new placements during this reporting year.

4.1 At the same time as placement availability reducing, the numbers of children entering care began to increase. By the end of this reporting year, Sheffield City Council cared for a population of 674 children in care: an increase from 628 in the previous year. 70% (469) of these children benefitted from family based foster care provision, however this is a drop of 2% from the previous year, which relates to the demands in placements.

- 4.2 Of the 469 children in foster care, 72% were placed within Sheffield City Council fostering provision and 28% within Independent Fostering Arrangements, (IFA). Sheffield has seen a slight decrease in the % and numbers of children placed in IFAs over this year. Within Sheffield City Council fostering provision, whilst the overall % has reduced the actual number of children placed with them has increased from 319 children to 336 children in this reporting year. The Service has seen a slight drop in the placements of children in Sheffield City Council mainstream provision from 254 children in placements to 247 in this year; (7 placements), which is related to the numbers of carers who were isolating during this reporting year. In contrast, the use of connected person's foster care continues to increase; a trend noted in the last three years. At the end of this reporting year, there were 89 children placed within connected person's foster placements compared with 65 in the previous year.
- 4.3 It is worthy of note that there has been a significant rise in the use of connected person's placements that 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 or Special Guardianship Orders. During the previous reporting year, 110 children were placed with connected persons foster carers through the year, this figure grew to 151 in this reporting year. The outcome for these children is that they remain with extended families or friends maintaining their sense of identity with the people they know well and outside of care. In 2020/21 44 children left care as a result of Special Guardianship Orders being granted, with another 41 children also 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 in the reporting year. Of these 81 children, 53 lived with connected persons foster carers.
- 4.4 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 2020/21 there were 44 children in Staying Put arrangements with local authority foster carers compared with 33 arrangements in the previous year. For these young people, this is the right outcome for them and also demonstrates the variety of provision provided by the Fostering Service outside of the care provision.

- 4.4 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 2020/21 The Service provided support care to 35 fostering families, including 2 IFA placements, 10 adopted families, 5 kinship carers and 9 short breaks for disabled children. During 2020/21, there were occasions where support carer was reduced or ceased due to the pandemic, however, where this intervention reduced stress for families, we maintained this in the best interest of the child. The service recognises the benefits of providing family-based support for these children and are keen to develop this service further in 2021/22.

5 Placement Stability

- 5.1 Despite the challenging year we encountered in 2020/21, we have managed to improve the performance in both the short term and long-term stability for our children in care. In 2020/21, 11.6% of children in care had 3 placements moves in a year, down from 13% in 2019/20 and closer to the national and statistical neighbour average of 11% in 2019/20. In relation to long term stability, 73.5% of children who had been in care at least 2.5 years had been in their current placement for at least 2 years. This was an improvement on our performance of 71% in 2019/20 and stronger than the latest national average of 68% and statistical neighbour average of 67%.

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 In November 2019, we began to work collaboratively with Fostering Network in developing and implementing this model of fostering in Sheffield City Council in consultation with the fostering community. Communication work began across the wider workforce in early 2020, and by the beginning of the reporting year we were in a position to launch our first constellation, when progress was disrupted due to Covid19 and lockdown. The advice from the Dfe was to suspend innovation work, and this was echoed in advice from Fostering Network. The Service challenged this, given that the model was aimed at supporting foster cares through crisis, and taking into consideration that this pandemic was a significant crisis. Dfe and Fostering Network later agreed for us to resume work and in May we therefore were able to launch our first constellation in that month. Mockingbird 1 has one hub home foster carer, supporting a constellation comprising of 8 fostering families and 13 children in care, between the ages of 1 year – 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 in lock down and because of this success other Local Authorities followed our practice.

- 6.4 With the support from the liaison worker, the hub home foster carer was flexible in communication with the satellite but responsive to the various guidance at the different stages through the pandemic. Initially, much of the activity was undertaken remotely, support groups and activities with the adults were held online on a weekly rather than monthly basis, and as restrictions reduced the hub carer made doorstep visits to the carers to introduce herself with gifts of baked goods, followed by face-to-face events. The hub carer held 'bubble activities' for satellite carers, inviting one or two carers and their children into her garden for mockingbird gatherings. This was to allow the children to meet each other in person in a secure but as low risk way as possible. One such meeting allowed for the children who are currently in a permanent placement to spend some time with their previous carers who are part of the constellation thereby maintaining links and bonds. As restrictions eased, outings and picnics have taken place, and more recently 'stay overs' for children in the constellation have taken place at the hub home in line with the model.
- 6.5 The feedback from foster carers is that they feel really supported and benefit from the swift, carer led response to issues. One example of family support within the model was where the satellite swung into action when one of their carers tested positive for Covid, shopping, cooking and baking for the family and hosting daily support calls. Another example was a carer who was able to coach and mentor another satellite carer nervous to facilitate a transition plan to adoption in order that this plan could be achieved during lockdown.
- 6.4 Whilst outside of this reporting year, the Service launched the second constellation in June 2021 and aim to launch its third by December 2021 and fourth by end of March 2022.

Aspire Project

- 6.5 The overall vision of Project Aspire is that for children and young people in care, residential provision should only be a temporary measure with permanence for children being secured in a family. It challenges the notion that for some young

people, fostering isn't right but rather we haven't found the right placement 'yet'. Sheffield City Council has two Aspire hub homes, who have a dedicated team of support which includes a life coach who is a clinical psychologist, a speech therapist and outreach workers. The model recruits foster carers who then go on to be employed as residential workers, and in this environment more natural relationships evolve leading to links and matches being made for children outside of residential provision into family-based care.

- 6.5 In 2020/21 the Fostering Service assessed and approved one Aspire foster carer, who was also later recruited as an Aspire residential worker. Whilst outside of this reporting year, the carer has since been matched and linked with a young person and plans are in place for this young person to step down from residential provision into family-based. The Aspire support will remain in place to ensure continuity and support for this young person with the foster carer.

7 Recruitment and Retention Activity and Outcomes in 20/21

- 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 2020/2021 was to approve 40 new mainstream foster carers. The Service fell short of this target with 37 foster carers were approved. This is an increase from the previous year's performance of 32 foster carer approvals. Given the pandemic and the impact that this had globally, the service feels that this was a success. Of the 37 fostering households approved:
- 18 were approved to offer task placements
 - 15 were approved to offer holiday and support care placements
 - 2 were approved to offer permanence placements
 - 1 was approved to offered Aspire care

- 1 was approved for UASC

7.3 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 20/21, 27 of these fostering households were 'lost' to the Service through resignation, deregistration, or retirement. A net gain of 10 fostering households.

7.4 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. In this particular year, the impact of Covid19 would have invariably led foster carers to question their ongoing commitment to the Service and leave sooner than they would have otherwise intended. In this reporting year, 5 foster carers decided to retire from fostering as a result of age and health. Together those foster carers had provided over 100 years of fostering for our children. 4 foster carers left as a result of practice standards being explored with them. In addition, 8 foster carers left as a result of securing permanence orders for children in their care; one child remained under staying put arrangements and 7 other children's' permanency was secured via either SGO or adoption. A great outcome for those children despite this being a loss to the Service. Other carers personal circumstances changed meaning they were no longer available to foster for Sheffield, including relocating, returning to employment, or separating from partners.

Number	Reason for leaving
4	Allegations/practice concerns
7	SGO / adoption
1	Child remained under staying put arrangements
10	Change in personal circumstances
5	Retired due to age and health

8 Recruitment Plans for 2020/21

- 8.1 A full and detailed Recruitment and Retention Strategy for 2020/21 has been produced based upon the channels and target audiences agreed with the Councils' Communications and Marketing Team. Recruitment events have been affected by the current Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and recruitment event focus has been channelled solely on social media during this time. This has meant a significant saving on the agreed budget for advertising and marketing.
- 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 2019/20 compared with 429 in this reporting year.
- 8.3 The Service adapted Information evenings to enable them to be delivered virtually via zoom, these were increased to monthly events as opposed to 6 weekly and these proved successful. These events continue to be hosted this way to date. The team adapted preparation 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 At the beginning of the year fostering assessment sessions were undertaken remotely on teams. skype or zoom with the agreement that at least one assessment session would be completed face to face subject to Covid risk assessment prior to presentation to Foster Panel. As restrictions eased a hybrid model was introduced combining a mixture of remote and home based assessment.

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. At the beginning of April, we ceased all face-to-face supervisory visits were restricted to zoom, skype and telephone support. The level of this support was increased in recognition of the difficult times the carers were facing. As restrictions eased home supervisory visits were reintroduced. Throughout lock down, in emergency situations, home visits were undertaken for example to aid transition to adoptive and other permanence placements, or where placements were in crisis.
- 9.3 Throughout the year, the Service has maintained a limited 'in-office' presence to a maximum of 12 workers/managers. This was to be enable a swift response to any needs that might arise and to maintain a close and responsive link with foster carers. We wanted our carers to know that whilst we had gone into lock down, we were still there. We opened a 'closed' Sheffield City Foster Care Facebook site and monitored this to communicate with our carers, and this has proved invaluable in terms of communicating with foster carers in a flexible and responsive way. The closed Facebook page continues to be a very interactive and well used resource to the extent that we aim to maintain this through this calendar year.
- 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 2019. This worker who is a qualified psychologist and has been a real asset to the Service during the Covid19 pandemic. Together, the Clinical Psychologist and training development officer have worked closely together and under the supervision of our clinical lead, have provided on-line consultations to fostering families in crisis during this period in order to promote placement stability across the service during this difficult time.
- 9.7 At the beginning of the year, the Service cancelled all formal 'face to face' training but increased on-line training activity to account for this. During this period of time there has been a high take up of these opportunities as foster carers have found the online access easier to attend without the added complications of juggling childcare needs with attending training. By the end of the year, of our core training, 94% safeguarding training, 90% therapeutic parenting, 85% GDPR and 75% education training has been completed in timescale. There was a delay in commissioning on line First Aid training but towards the end of the year, this was sourced and currently 69% of our foster carers are up to date with the requirement. As we ease out of the restrictions, our carers tell us that they would hope that we maintain a hybrid model of training, which combines online and face to face training events.
- 9.8 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.
- 9.9 As with training, at the beginning of the year, our 7 support groups hosted across the Council were cancelled, but by May, the Service reintroduced the same range of support groups previously held across the borough albeit

remotely and found these to be well attended and well received. The Service worked closely with our Foster Care Associate; 'Voices' who have met with senior managers on a fortnightly basis, and who in turn held drop-in workshops for carers on a weekly basis. Foster carer forums were hosted on zoom and were well attended where contentious and thorny issues such as the reintroduction of family time and the vaccination programme could be discussed with the carers, so they felt part of the plan.

- 9.10 All engagement activities planned for the year were cancelled, including our children's achievement event; 'Star Awards', Easter celebration, and Christmas parties. The Service adapted to new technology and in October we hosted our virtual 'Star Awards' entitled 'The Big Night In!'. the event took a lot of coordination but feedback on the evening was that this was a great success. The Service also hosted on zoom a children's Christmas party to bring a little magic to our children and again this was well attended and well received. Care packages were distributed to all our fostering families along with Easter eggs, Eid gifts and Christmas sweet packs. One carer told us that opening the care package she had received, for her and the children she was caring for was like opening Christmas presents on Christmas day and that everyone in the family were all as equally excited about what was in their gift box.

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 in 2020/1 the Service increased the number of panels to three 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 2020/21 Panel meeting were held on a weekly basis to reflect the number of 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. Despite some relaxing of regulations in terms of quoracy as a result of Covid, Sheffield City Council have maintained original quoracy numbers of five sitting panel members for each meeting.

10.2.2 Panel members were all subject to annual appraisals in the year, and the Panel Chairs presented a Panel Report to the ADM in February 2021.

10.2.3 The Service recruited 4 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.

10.3. Panel business 20/21

Total (20/21)	Approval	Reg 24	Review	Allegation	Resignation/ deregistration's (mainstream)	Permanence
April 2020	1	6			1	
May 2020	3	1	2			
June 2020	1	1	2			
July 2020	3	3	2	1		
August 2020	4	2	3			
September 2020	1	3				
October 2020	4	4			1	
November 2020	3	3	1	1		
December 2020	4	3	2	1		
January 2021	2	3	8	1		1
February 2021	6	6	5	1		
March 2021	8	6	7	1		
Totals	40	41	32	6	2	1

10.3.1 40 fostering assessments were presented to panel, this included 37 foster carer approvals, partner assessments and brief reports.

10.3.2 It is a requirement that a foster carer first review must take place not more than one year after approval and thereafter whenever the fostering service feels it is necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. In 2019/20, the Service introduced face to face Reviews of foster carers in the fostering home. This proved very successful. However, in 2020/21 the Service revised this as a response to the Pandemic, and Reviews took place remotely. In 2019, there were 32 foster carers approved, and in 2020/21 32 first reviews were taken to Panel in the year.

10.3.3 Due to the demand of Panel, it was agreed that resignations would not be formally presented to Panel as there is no legal requirement to do so and no decision to be made. There was also agreement that permanence matching would be formalised outside of panel in the reporting year, this accounts for the low numbers of permanence and resignations presented to Panel in the year.

11 Developments in 2020/21

11.1 As previously stated we have:

- Recruited 37 mainstream foster carers, giving a net gain of 10
- Worked flexibly and creatively as we worked through the Covid19 pandemic and the Government guidance and restrictions
- Maintained a small skeleton in-office presence to maintain a focus on supporting and maintaining placements for children
- Develop new ways of communicating and engaging with foster carers during lock down and restrictions.
- Revised our Communications and recruitment plan to enable us to:
 - Host remote information events, skills to foster training and the assessment of foster carers
 - Maintain a functioning and complaint Fostering Panel
 - Increased recruitment of new mainstream foster
 - Recruited 1 Aspire Carer
- Developed Mockingbird Model of Fostering
- Embed the new fostering review and audit process and improve quality in addition to timeliness of reviews in general, but specifically, first reviews being presented to panel

12 Developments and Improvement for 2021/22

- Continue to be flexible and creative as we work through the Covid19 pandemic and the Government guidance and restrictions
- Recruit 40 foster carers, with a focus on carers for sibling groups and older children, Aspire Carers, short break carers for disabled children and edge of care support carers
- Undertake a 'stock take' of blocked carers to maximise placement sufficiency in service
- Recruit an additional 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
- Review and expand the Connected Carers Team given the growth in workload in this team
- Launch 3 x Mockingbird Constellations
- Utilise findings from the recent 'Bright Spots' Survey to inform the Fostering Development and Action plan.
- Develop 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: (Date)

(signature)

Paul Dempsey

Assistant Director, Provider Services

Children and Families

Sheffield City Council