

Kirklees Children and Families Service

Fostering Report

October 2022 to March 2023



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1. Introduction

The purpose of the report as set out in regulations is to inform the Corporate Parenting Board about the work undertaken by the fostering service. Reporting periods for our annual report are usually in line with financial reporting periods (April to March), however the services provided an eighteen-month report to October 2021 due to an Ofsted Monitoring visit, and a further report following 12-month period between October 2021 and September 2022.

This report covers the six-month period between October 2022 and March 2023 to realign the reporting period and enable the service to provide comparative data from national and regional service reporting in future reports.

The report updates the Board on activity in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers and developments within the service.

A key priority for Kirklees Council is to ensure that children can be brought up safely with their birth parents or within their wider extended family network. Where it is identified that children cannot remain within their family, the fostering service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people who are looked after.

The Kirklees Sufficiency strategy describes our aim for children to live in a family environment, within the boundaries of Kirklees wherever possible. Fostering plays a vital role in supporting this ambition.

Kirklees Fostering Service and our team of foster carers work in partnership to ensure children live in safe, nurturing family homes where they can achieve their potential and enjoy their childhood.

This six month Report provides a summary of the performance of the Fostering Service during the past year looking at work undertaken by our:

- Recruitment Team
- Connected Persons' Team
- Fostering Support Team
- Fostering Panel

2. Background information

In Kirklees the number of children who are looked after has decreased over the past 12 months. The table below shows the snapshot position on 31st March each year, apart from the position for 2021/22.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	30/09/22	2022/23
Children Looked After	621	665	661	604	609	592
Rate/10,000	62	66	66	62	62	60
Stat Neighbours	75	78	80	83	N/A	Not yet available

The number of Children Looked After per 10,000 people in Kirklees has historically been much lower than that of all Kirklees' statistical neighbours and is lower than that of the Yorkshire & Humberside region and England as a whole. The 2022-2023 data has not yet been published therefore a comparison for this reporting period is not yet available.

The demographic of Children Looked After in Kirklees is that the majority of children are over the age of 10 years old. This can present difficulties in recruiting and retaining foster carers to meet the needs of our Looked After population and with the necessary skills to care for older children.

Age Range	31/03/22	Proportion of Care Population	31/03/23	Proportion of Care Population
Under 1	21	3%	32	5%
Between 1 and 5	102	17%	78	13%
Between 5 and 10	93	15%	88	15%
Between 10 and 16	254	42%	236	40%
Over 16	134	22%	158	27%
Total	604		592	

Only 33% of children in care are of primary school and non-school age and this has remained fairly consistent with the previous year. The proportion of children requiring care are older.

Type of accommodation of Children in Care

As of 31 March 2023 Children in care in Kirklees lived in the following types of care provision;

Care Type	Number of Children	% of Care Provision
Fostering- Unconnected Person	155	26%
Fostering- Connected Person	76	13%
Fostering- IFAs	160	27%
Fostering- Reg 24	42	7%
Placed for Adoption	10	2%
Placed with Parents	46	8%
Children's Homes	27	4%
Residential School	1	0.1%
Supported Living	57	9%
Other	18	3%
Total	592	

In total 391 children are placed with approved foster carers, either through a Kirklees fostering or through an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). Of these, Kirklees fostering provides 231 children with a foster placement and 160 are looked after by an IFA carer.

It is a strength that 73% of all children in care are living within a family. This level of performance places greater pressure on the demands of fostering families and services.

3. Recruitment and Retention

The Fostering Service plays a key role in our overarching strategy to reduce the number of young people living in residential care and improve outcomes for children and young people. To do this we plan to increase the overall number of Foster Carers, maintain levels of retention and increase the skills of foster carers to develop a more wide-ranging offer that meets the varying needs of our children.

Our ambition is to achieve an increase in the number of foster carers on an annual basis therefore increasing the number of children and young people in Kirklees remaining close to their families and communities.

Between October 2022 and March 2023 Kirklees has approved 23 new fostering families. Over the same period 28 foster carers have resigned or were de-registered. This gives us a decrease of 5 fostering families.

The 23 approved foster carers were made up of 16 connected carers and 7 unconnected carers.

Increasing the number of in house foster placements within Kirklees will improve outcomes for children, allowing children to continue to attend their existing school, continue to take part in leisure and social activities and retain links with their wider family and community network.

As well as improving outcomes for children and young people; increasing the number of foster placements will reduce spend on external residential and independent fostering placements in line with the Children and Families Directorate budget strategy. The Fostering Service has developed a recruitment strategy and is working towards delivering a greater number of local fostering placements to achieve this.

The Council faces competition for recruiting carers from Independent Fostering Agencies operating in the Kirklees area when recruiting new foster carers. This reinforces the importance of an effective marketing strategy, high quality support offer and smooth, effective processing of applications.

During October 2022-March 2023 there were 101 enquiries relating to becoming a foster carer. There is a process which is followed, and the table below shows the flow through this process.

Stage	Number of People
Enquiry	101
Expression of Interest	73
Initial Visit	29
Essential Info Sent	16
Essential Info Returned	12
Approved at Panel	7

As can be seen the number of people reduces as they go through the application process. Of the 101 people who enquired to become a foster carer, 7 were approved. This figure is known as the conversion rate, in 20/21 the conversion rate was 8.4%, in 21/22 it reduced to 5.7%. The conversion rate for this reporting period is 7%

7 new unconnected fostering households were approved during this period, that is where the foster family has no previous connection to the child.

A total of 28 fostering and connected households resigned. The reasons are varied, but the majority of deregistration's are for positive reasons. 18 resignations were from Connected Carers, for reasons such as becoming Special Guardians or children returning to parents and their connected carer's approval has ended.

4. Foster Carer Support and Retention

Retention of foster carers is critical in providing high quality care and security for children who may have experienced a troubled start in life. Alongside financial support to carers, Kirklees has developed a range of other services to support foster carers and their birth children to deliver high quality care.

Kirklees has a reward system which gives foster carers a professional payment for their services linked to their skills. Foster carers can receive 3 payments; an allowance for the child, a skill element and a long service payment. Together these allowances can provide financial security for foster carers and reflect Kirklees Council's commitment to the carer.

In April 2023 Foster Carers were awarded an uplift to their allowances for the financial year 2022-2023. The tables below show the updated allowance structure and examples of weekly payments to carers. The rates increase in line with their skill level, which is described below.

Skill Level	Allowance Rate
1	£106.47
2	£133.09
3	£186.32
4	£239.56

Level 1 progression- completed Journey 2 Foster Training, completed a portfolio, which demonstrates that the National Fostering Standards have been met.

Level 2 progression- completed all mandatory training, completed TSD workbook and undertake a minimum of 4 further days or equivalent hours training or activities (classroom training, work with the placement support team, online training) to meet identified needs within your first year of practice.

Level 3 progression- completed the Level 3 Diploma or have a relevant equivalent qualification.

Level 4- is paid in certain circumstances. If a child placed is in receipt of the highest rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP it will be paid).

Foster carers are also paid different 'maintenance allowance' rates depending on the ages of the children they care for. Uplifted rates for 2022/23 are shown in the table below.

Age Range	Child Allowance
0-4	£155.00
5-10	£175.56
11-15	£219.80
16+	£267.38

Kirklees Foster carers are also rewarded through long service, receiving £10 per week for every year of service, up to a maximum of 15 years. Therefore, a foster carer with 5 years' experience, looking after a 10-year-old child and having reached Level 3, will receive £411.88 per week.

Alongside the financial element there are a number of non-financial benefits available. These include;

- A supported induction programme to be completed within 12 months of becoming approved
- A minimum of monthly support groups, including information from the Placement Support Team, Mockingbird, CAMHS, Kirklees' Legal Team and the Virtual School.
- Two celebration events
- 4 weeks paid annual leave
- Birth children/family events including camps, football matches
- Access to Kirklees Council's Employee Health Scheme
- 6 weekly supervision
- Discount card for shops, restaurants and cinemas
- Provision of laptops, Kirklees based email address and access to IT infrastructure

Mockingbird

The Mockingbird model includes a Hub Home Carer, who is developing positive relationships with the carers in the constellation and providing support to carers through daily/weekly telephone calls, messages and or visits depending on the needs of the carers and young people.

The model consists of support networks known as constellations. Kirklees implemented the first Mockingbird constellation in October 2021. A further two Hub Home Carers were appointed in December 2022, with work underway to form the constellations within this reporting period.

The first constellation consists of 8 families of short and long term carers and Special Guardianship carers. There are 8 children aged between 3-14 years old, and one young person on a Staying Put arrangement.

The Hub Home Carer provides sleep overs with the children offering them one sleep over per month. This provides tremendous support to the carers knowing they have that planned sleepover in advance providing them with the break they need. It also creates opportunities for the children to socialise and develop friendships as well their independence.

Formulation and Emotional Wellbeing

Kirklees has developed an integrated Emotional Wellbeing Service with its mental health partners Locala and South West Yorkshire Primary Foundation Trust (SWYPFT). This model ensures that all children entering care will have a Formulation undertaken before their first Children in Care review. This formulation will give foster carers the information, advice and support to deliver high quality care.

In 2022/23 Supervising Social Workers were trained in using Formulation as a tool to support their work with and support to Foster Carers. The impact of the use of Formulation with Foster Carers is to be reviewed.

5. Staying Put

Kirklees' Staying Put policy has been developed to address and meet the requirements of the many pieces of legislation and Guidance that exist in relation to children and young people, Fostering and Care Leavers.

The main aim of Staying Put is to ensure that young people do not experience a sudden disruption to their living arrangements, that educational and training achievement and continuity is promoted and that all young people can make a gradual transition from care to independence or to an Adult Service if the young person's assessed needs meet this criteria.

Each young person will have differing needs, so it is right that the individual aims of Staying Put arrangements are made specific to each young person with their best interests and welfare at the heart of any decision making.

6. Connected Persons and Special Guardianship Orders

Supporting Children to grow up in permanent arrangements with families is the core goal for children's services. Where appropriate, enabling children to be cared for by their extended family either through fostering or through Special Guardianship Orders can provide significant benefits to the child's sense of belonging and security. Social Workers will continually assess and review children's plans for permanency and

consider where appropriate and feasible how Special Guardianship applications can best be supported for children in Connected Persons and Foster Care arrangements.

We know that in order to provide these types of arrangements for Foster Carers and Connected Carers those carers need to be assured that the support the authority provides is equivalent to that which they receive as Foster carers and Connected Carers, and that this support remains available on an ongoing basis. Kirklees has developed a consistent offer for Foster Carers who move to support children via an SGO. This offer ensures that the carer is not at a disadvantage in caring for a child via an SGO.

The Connected Persons' team undertakes a range of interventions.

- initial viabilities of prospective carers
- Regulation 24 assessments
- Full fostering assessments
- Special Guardianship Order Reports
- Special Guardianship Support Plans

The Connected Person's team works to very short timescales, which are primarily under the fostering regulations but also led by the Family Court system. Between October 2022 and March 2023 the Connected Persons' Team has undertaken 32 viability assessments which led to Regulation 24 approvals. Alongside this, 42 children had their futures secured through connect carers receiving Special Guardianship Orders.

7. Foster carer training and development

Caring for our children and young people requires a range of skills and knowledge. Our training offer to them is critical in helping them manage difficult situations and care effectively for our children. Developing the skills of our Foster Carers will support them in being able to care for children with more difficult and complex behaviours, reducing our reliance on external placements and improving outcomes for young people.

All applicants to the fostering service are required to participate in training. Initially this was planned as a group based course, but since the Covid 19 pandemic, has become an online course like other training offers. The current courses cover a range of topics that includes Core Values and Skills, Working with Adolescents, Understanding Trauma, etc. Prospective carers are also required to attend a selection of taster courses prior to their approval at Fostering Panel. These new courses give prospective carers a better understanding of the role of being a foster carer, introduce some of the issues they may encounter as carers and explains more about the social care system.

A training and development programme is provided for all approved foster carers and is linked to the Payment for Skills model. Foster carers are required to attend training or development opportunities dependant on their payment fostering skill level. The training framework is reviewed and updated by the foster carer training steering group alongside colleagues from Workforce Development.

The Fostering Service maintains a very close working relationship with the Placement Support Service. They offer training and support groups to foster carers. We are also reviewing the potential to offer courses online.

As stated above, Kirklees introduced a new Placement Support Service integrated model of therapeutic support, ensuring the right person works with the child and fostering family at the right time in the right place. A refreshed name (the Emotional Well-being Team) accompanied this development. This will reduce delay and build upon relationships which already exist for the child and foster carer. Part of the model is the introduction of Formulation. Formulation provides an opportunity for all those involved in the care of a child to come together and understand what is driving their behaviour. This enables the participants to begin to think about how they can help the child change their behaviour and agree specific offers of support and intervention. This helps improve placement stability and security by ensuring that everyone is working from a common plan and to common goals. Formulation is guided by trained staff who are able to support carers and the team around them. It is aimed that the Formulation model will be rolled out more widely across Children's services.

We need to ensure that our ambition to offer a wider range of foster placements to children with more complex and challenging behaviours and needs is underpinned by a suitable training programme so that foster carers are better equipped to understand and manage the behaviour of children who may present in ways that are hard to understand or manage. Developing this offer will help our carers look after children and young people with a broader range of behaviours and will contribute to reducing demand for external residential placements.

8. Fostering Panels

There are currently three Fostering Panels which meet on a monthly basis. We have one Independent Chair, and one Vice Chair and 20 other members from various backgrounds. All Panels complete a quality assurance audit of each item heard. This is then collated and provides evaluation of the reports to panel. Overall, the feedback from the Fostering Panels is positive. Where opportunities for improvements to reports are identified, feedback is given to the author, their manager and improvement actions agreed.

The fostering panel considers assessments of connected and unconnected carers, extensions to Regulation 24, changes of approvals, first annual reviews and long-term matching. The table below shows the work of the panel over the past 6 months.

Panel Activity 2021/22	Number
Change of Approval / Amendment	1
Connected Persons Carer Approved	16
Short reports	1
Deregistered Connected Carers	1
Deregistered	3
Extension Regulation 24 Approved	18
Extension Regulation 24 Not Approved	1
Long Term Match	0
Mainstream Carer Approved	8
Post Allegation	4
First Annual Reviews Connected Carer	2

The resignations are linked to carers moving from fostering to Special Guardianship Orders, retirement and changes in the foster carer's personal circumstances.

9. Quality Assurance Information

It is essential to have confidence in the quality of practice in fostering. This is assessed in a number of ways;

- Supervision
- Fostering Panel
- Annual Foster Carer Reviews
- The Family Court

The initial fostering assessment and the carer's first annual review is considered by the Fostering Panel. Within the reporting period there has been additional resource provided to our Quality and Improvement service to enable them to support that

reviews are primarily undertaken by an Independent Reviewing Officer, with some being undertaken by fostering managers who do not have line-management responsibility for the supervising social worker. These provide reassurance that the current work is assessed for quality and meets all minimum standards. The fostering service will be implementing additional managerial audits across the three areas of fostering in the coming period.

10. Diversity of Foster Carers and CLA

Kirklees has a diverse population, and it is important that our foster families reflect this diversity.

The ethnicity of Kirklees children in care on 31 March 2023 was as follows;

Ethnicity	Number of Children
White British	373
Any other White background	16
Traveller of Irish Heritage	1
White Romanian	1
White and Black Caribbean	40
White and Black African	3
White and Asian	29
Any other mixed background	19
Indian	6
Pakistani	42
Bangladeshi	1
Any other Asian background	25
Caribbean	3
African	12
Any other Black background	1
Any other ethnic group	20
Total	592

Ethnicity	Number of carers		
	2021	2022	2023
Asian Indian	21	21	19
Asian Other	2	2	1
Asian Pakistan	18	22	22
Black African	1	1	1
Black Caribbean	5	5	4
Black Other	3	2	1
Mixed Other	1	-	0

Mixed White & Black African	1	1	1
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	4	5	6
White British	302	298	301
White Irish	1	2	2
White Other	5	5	3

This shows some differences between the profile of children in care and approved foster carers. As a service there is a need to ensure that the profile of our foster carers reflects that of the children they look after and the wider diversity of the Kirklees population.

11. Future Priorities

Our Future Priorities for the fostering service are;

- To increase the number of foster carers in Kirklees and to reduce the use of Independent Fostering Agencies and residential placements out of Kirklees
- To develop different strands of foster carer offer, in particular to support for children of secondary school age with complex behaviours
- To review our Payment for Skills model to attract carers from a more skilled background, to enable the development of a stronger offer for older children, or children with more challenging behaviours.
- To increase the number of foster carers from diverse backgrounds so that the percentage of our foster carer cohort is similar to that of the young people we work with
- To maintain our scrutiny of external placements and ensure that we only place children in external placements when necessary and that when placed, outcomes are good.
- To review the offer to foster carers who want to become Special Guardianship Order carers
- To implement the Financial Policy to provide transparency and consistency across payments
- To review and develop the use of Formulation to support all children in Kirklees foster placements
- To increase the number of Mockingbird Constellations

12. Corporate considerations

Consultation and engagement

The Kirklees Fostering Network meets monthly with senior officers to discuss areas of service development and any issues of concern. Foster carer representation and stakeholder involvement in new service developments remains a key principle of the service.

The work of the Fostering Service is overseen through the Homes for Children Board and the Corporate Parenting Board. The Corporate Parenting Board has representation from services, partner agencies and from Elected Members and provides oversight of the work of the Fostering Service.

Resources, procurement and value for money

The offer of Foster Care placements continues to provide a good use of resources. Foster placements are not only less costly than other types of offer but offer young people a safe family experience within Kirklees which has lifelong effects on their ability to parent.

Risk management

It is a regulatory requirement of the local authority that this report is prepared and presented to the Corporate Parenting Board of the Council. The report is linked to the corporate risk on Safeguarding Children.

13. Conclusions

The recruitment and retention of foster carers and the development priorities of the fostering service will continue to be addressed in order to achieve a high quality service and best outcomes for children and young people looked after. These will be considered within the Fostering Service continuous improvement plan and with the oversight and scrutiny of the Homes for Children Board.

14. Recommendations

That the Corporate Parenting Board receives this report and continues to support the work of the Fostering Service and promote best outcomes for children.

That the Corporate Parenting Board support the following specific recommendations.

- To increase the number of current foster care placements available to children and young people cared for by Kirklees and to reduce the use of external residential and Independent Fostering Agency placements for children.
- To grow the number of Mockingbird constellations.
- To increase the diversity of our foster carers so that it matches that of the communities we serve and the children we care for.
- To increase our ability to meet a wide range of children's complex needs by developing a broader service offer underpinned by an enhanced training programme.
- To review and support the implementation of Formulation to support our Foster Carers and Looked After children with plans that meet their needs.
- To continue with our work to improve and enhance the offer for Foster Carers taking on Special Guardianship Orders.
- To improve the corporate commitment to Looked After Children and Fostering across Kirklees services.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Connected Person	A connected person, is a foster care who has a link to the child before they take on a caring role. The person can be a relative, a parent of a friend, a person who knows the child in a employment role such as a teacher.
Viability Assessment	This is an assessment carried out prior to a child being placed with a connected person.
Unconnected Person	This is a foster carer who has no connection with the child prior to them being placed with the carer.
Fostering Panel	The fostering panel is a statutory function of the fostering service. It recommends the approval of prospective foster carers and the terms of their approval.
De-registrations	Foster carers are legally registered with one Fostering Service. At the end of their fostering period they need to formally resign and be de-registered from the fostering service.
Mockingbird Model	This is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides sleepovers and short breaks, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.