**Birmingham Children's Trust logo
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INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

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# LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This report is provided in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 35. and the **Fostering National Minimum Standards; 25.7.**

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| The executive side of the local authority or the independent foster service’s provider/trustees, board members or management committee members:  a**. receive** written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months;  b. **monitor** the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;  c. **satisfy** themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration |

This report therefore provides analysis and summary of the progress of the Agency for 2022 to 2023.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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| The fostering service continues to focus on the growth of foster carers, via retention and recruitment. We want to deliver a high quality service that ensures children and young people can flourish when living with our foster carers. We understand that this is important to both the foster carer and the children and young people. We have succeeding in having a greater focus on the performance reporting within the service and we are using this to understand the areas we are excelling in and those that require more attention.  As we know prospective foster carers are required to have the availability and be self-sufficient to become foster carers. We are finding that the cost of living crisis that comes in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic is having a negative impact for both recruitment and retention.  During the year 2022/23 we have achieved the following highlights:  We have continued to offer a comprehensive training programme delivered both virtually and face to face, the take up continues to be positive in improving the skills of our foster carers.  As of 31st March 2023, Birmingham Children’s Trust – Fostering Agency had 587 Foster Carers approved for 945 placements (details can be seen on page 5).  During the year a total of 77 Foster Carers were deregistered (34 mainstream, 36 Connected, 7 F2A) resulting in the loss of 100 placements. However, the service was successful in recruitment, with a total of 99 Foster Carers were approved at Panel which provided 137 additional placements, resulting in an overall net gain of 22 Foster Carers and 37 fostering placements.  The occupancy rate as of 31st March 2023 was 94.1%. This is the proportion of approved placements that were occupied or unavailable for foster placements at this time. The sufficiency of Birmingham fostering service is a high priority and regular monitoring ensures we maximise the use of placements with our foster carers.  There are 195 approved connected fostering households caring for 274 children, with 23 temporary foster carers (under Regulation 24) caring for 23 children. A total of 297 children being cared for in family placements, which equates to 13.3% of the children in care population (2,223 as of 31.03.23).  Launched a new fostering website which proven to have been important to our front facing competitive platform. Birmingham fostering agency can be seen as a preferred provider for foster carers who want to care for Birmingham children and young people Prospective foster carers have told us that this is the source of information that led to their expressions of interest. The service has also strengthened the role of the fostering recruitment ambassadors, this approach is continuing to deliver on our recruitment strategy. We continue to involve foster carers in recruitment and our support and retention work streams to ensure we have a collaborative approach.  We have improved our performance reporting with the use of our IT systems, and this provides the service from social workers to senior managers with an overview of recording and reporting. This allows for greater and quicker scrutiny on statutorily required matters. In the next reportable year, we are planning on developing a dashboard that will provide data instantly. This has been recognised in the most recent ILAC inspection, where the Trust was graded Good in all areas.  The offer to Special Guardians has been expanded to improve the support and advice they can gain internally and from Kinship care. The focus of promoting Special Guardianship Orders with our foster carers is continuing with increased purpose.  **Risks and Challenges**  We continue to focus on retention and recruitment of our foster carers and knew that the fruition of the marketing strategy would not be evident until the final quarter for 2022-23. We are pleased that the strategy is having the forecast of positive effects and we have seen an increase in the number of suitable registrations of interest progressing through to assessment. We continue to require a corporate parenting approach in attracting prospective foster carers and getting the word out that Birmingham fostering agency is the best place to be for Birmingham carers. We continue to report upon the growing age of our foster carers to ensure the Trust understand our position.  Foster carer annual reviews have been a focus since CHARMS data identified discrepancies in practice. There is ongoing work regarding annual reviews to ensure new systems demonstrate evidence of completion in timescales. Targeted actions on annual reviews has significantly improved the data and team managers’ report on the completion of reviews within performance meetings.  The ageing population of foster carers continues to be a concern, 66.5% of Birmingham Children’s Trust foster carers are aged 51 years and above. We currently have 167 carers who are aged 60 years, and over which is 29% of our entire fostering estate, an increase of 3% from last year. |

# INTRODUCTION

Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency is an Independent Foster Agency (IFA) set within the Children’s Trust. This report covers the fifth year of operation as an IFA from **1st April 2022-31st March 2023.**

This year we remain proud of our workers and foster carers who continue to keep the child at the centre of what they do. The Trust has been reinspected by Ofsted in March and is proud to be found to be ‘Good’ in all areas. The fostering service were a component in this inspection and the inspection noted:

*‘Managers have a good overview of the recruitment of mainstream foster carers and continue to recruit to offset the number of resignations. The trust is on target to recruit 30 mainstream foster carers this year. However, there has still been a decrease in mainstream foster placements available to children overall in this timescale.’ (Ofsted, April 23, p.38, pg. 7).*

We continue to learn and grow via inspection and utilise all findings to inform our practice. We believe that we have considered the recommendations from the fostering inspection and have made significant changes to process, procedure and practice.

The Fostering Agency provides all types of placements, except for remand placements - including ‘Connected Persons’ placements, due to the status of the Children’s Trust.

On the 31st March 2023 we had **587 Foster Carers** approved to take **945 placements**, of which the approval breakdown was as follows:

# FOSTERING DATA



### Comparison of Mainstream, EDT & Connected Persons



The number of Connected carers reported to Ofsted for 2022/23 was 185, and the number of places was 275. There is a discrepancy, this is due to Ofsted reporting systems not permitting the reporting on Connected carers who are approved, but do not have children in place. Of these 10 that were not reportable, 4 were newly approved carers awaiting set up, 5 had submitted resignations and were due to be closed and 1 was awaiting the placement of the approved child due to housing issues.

Birmingham Children’s Trust fostering service is integral to the sufficiency strategy and placement choice for Birmingham’s children in care.

More than ever there is a requirement for an increase of foster carers, including connected foster carers who have increased the population at a significant rate. As the fostering service focuses more on sufficiency and high occupancy rates, we are monitoring the effectiveness of carers in relation to their approvals and the retention and recruitment of foster carers. In the final quarter we have started to see a movement of a transfer of carers from other Independent Fostering Agencies to Birmingham Children’s Trust and we believe this is due to the foster carers understanding that Birmingham children are placed with Birmingham foster carers, who in turn gain a high level of support with a team around the child approach. The introduction of the website has also significantly increased the visibility of the agency for Birmingham.

Ofsted National Statistics for 21/22 stipulated that more fostering household were deregistered than were approved nationally, which led to an overall net decrease in fostering capacity. This has not continued into this reporting year for the service. Birmingham Children Trust’s foster carer age demographic for 22/23 was that 66.5% of our fostering estate was aged 50 years and above, this has contributed to the 3.4% overall decrease in our approved foster carer numbers compared to last year, due to carers reaching retirement age, resignations due to ill health, and we also had a number of foster carers who unfortunately passed away during this reporting period.

The Trust’s Partnership with St Basil’s to support 16+ young people with their families under supported lodging is an effective route for carers who may not wished to be assessed as foster carers.

### Mainstream Fostering Occupancy

As of 31st March 2023, Birmingham Children’s Trust had 464 children in a fostering placement (including Step up and Emergency (EDT) placements) and the agency had 595 approved mainstream fostering placements.

On occasion the service will have placements that are unavailable for the following reasons:

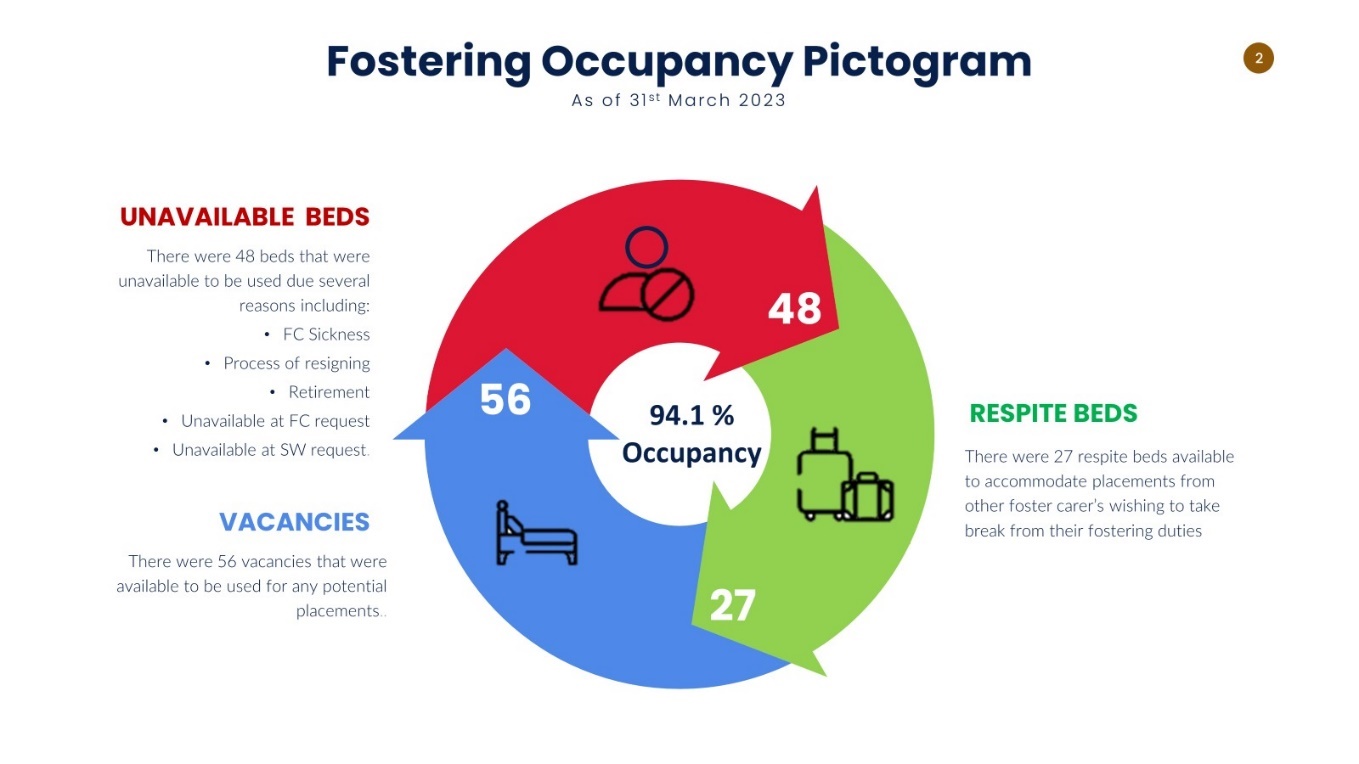
* Bedrooms being unavailable placements, due to children occupying a room that could be joint occupancy if siblings
* Foster carers being on holiday, off sick or taking a break
* Carers having personal circumstances and or reasons
* Some placements are respite only places and the referral may be for a short or long-term placement.

If we take the placements into consideration and remove the placements that could not be used, the occupancy rate would be 94%.

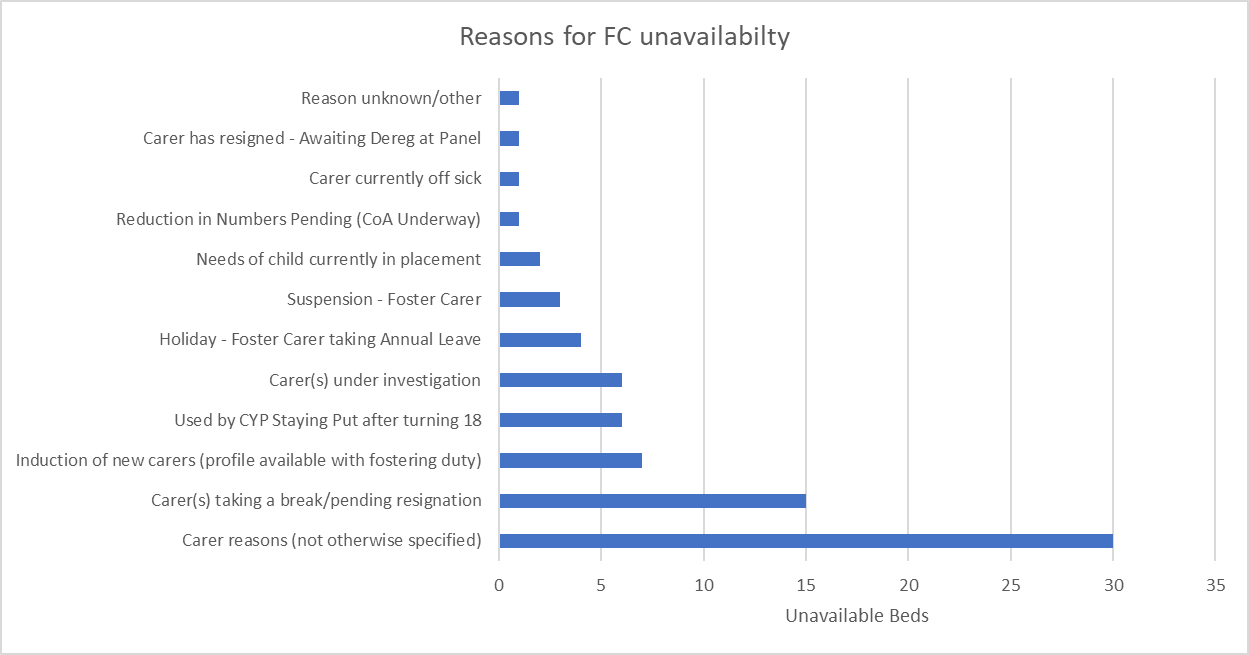
The figures are depicted below:



Those placements that are shown above as unavailable fluctuate through the days and year. They are monitored closely within fostering sufficiency meetings with a focus on ensuring foster placements are available to care for Birmingham children. This monitoring has resulted in greater efficiencies and scrutiny.

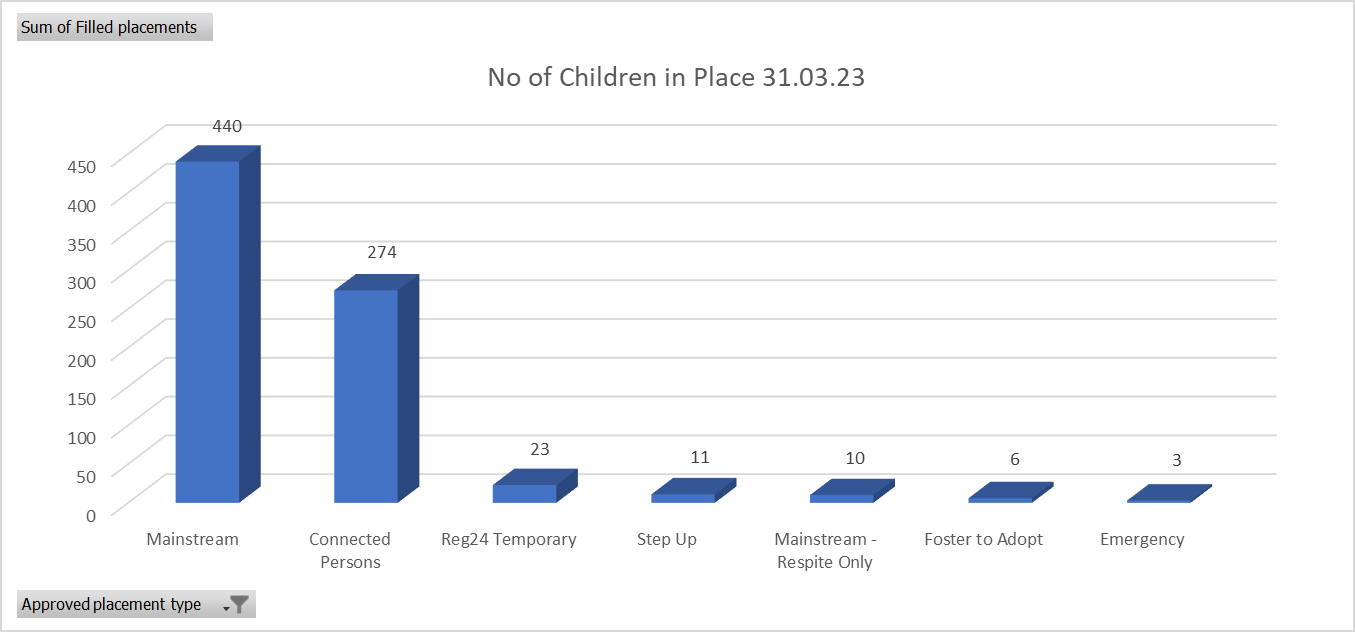


There continues to be close monitoring of placement occupancy through daily tracking of placement availability, weekly oversight by the management and through the monthly sufficiency meeting chaired by the Assistant Head of Service and or Head of Service. Each month we review data which highlights those foster carers with vacancies who decline the placement request to better understand why, to consider additional support or training to enable them to accept children who require homes. From the meetings and information, we believe that the placements that are unavailable are believed to be for acceptable reasons and time limits considered monthly to ensure no drift in placements being made available. The reasons noted for unavailability are below and as it can be viewed the highest reasons are carers circumstances changing, resignation, new carers being inducted and or the carers continue to care for a young person under staying put arrangements. The chart provides a category for ‘carer reasons’, this is usually due to personal circumstances.



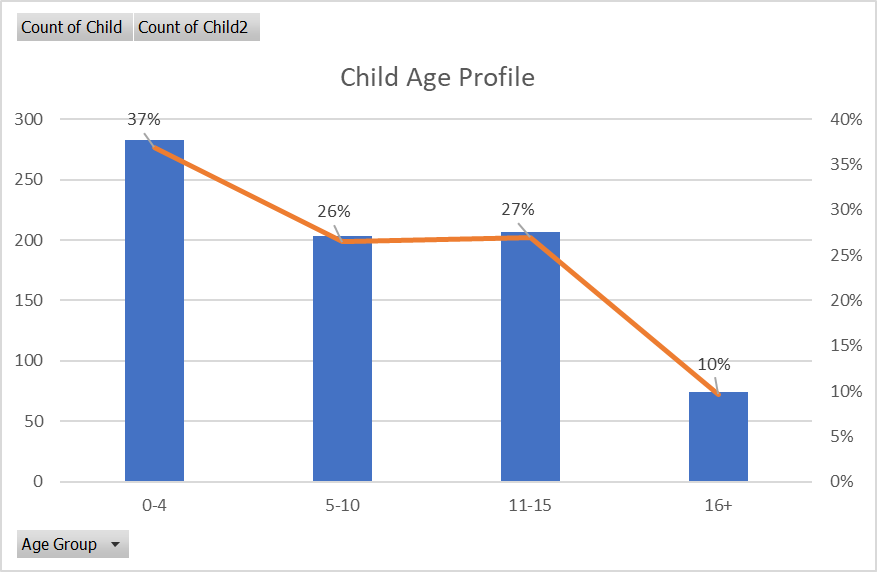
### Summary of Children in Placement

A total of 767 children are placed with our inhouse foster carers (Mainstream, Connected Persons, Step-Up, Foster to Adopt & Reg 24 placements). We have continued to focus on carers availability and considering all occasions whereby foster carers have refused to take placements when referrals have been discussed. The vacancy report has had a concentration of efforts to ensure it continues to provide an accurate picture of availability and a working list for family finding on duty. This has required a team effort from fostering duty, team managers and business support colleagues. Maximising the use of available placements, retaining our children with our foster carers remains a priority.



### Age profile of the children in placement

The majority of children within Birmingham Children’s Trust foster placements are aged under 5 years old, with 90% of children being aged 0-15 years old. The current children in care population for Birmingham as of 31st March was 2,223 children of this total 1,698 children were aged between 0- to 15-year-old this equated to 76% of the children in care population in Birmingham being aged under 15 years old. Therefore, the age trends for children and young people in Birmingham Children Trusts fostering placement is conducive to the overall children in care population.

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### Ethnicity profile of the children in placement

The ethnicity of the children in placement with Birmingham foster carers is indicative to that of its carers and the whole population of children in care of Birmingham children’s trust.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHILD ETHNICITY** | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| White - British | 352 | 47.06% |
| White and Black Caribbean | 75 | 10.03% |
| Any other mixed background | 66 | 8.82% |
| White and Asian | 44 | 5.88% |
| Black - Caribbean | 36 | 4.81% |
| Other white origin | 26 | 3.48% |
| Pakistani | 25 | 3.34% |
| Information not yet available | 20 | 2.67% |
| Any other Asian background | 17 | 2.27% |
| African | 16 | 2.14% |
| White and Black African | 15 | 2.01% |
| Gypsy/Roma | 13 | 1.74% |
| Any other Black background | 10 | 1.34% |
| Bangladeshi | 7 | 0.94% |
| Indian | 7 | 0.94% |
| Any other ethnic group | 4 | 0.53% |
| Other African | 3 | 0.40% |
| Refused | 3 | 0.40% |
| Not Known | 3 | 0.40% |
| White - Polish | 2 | 0.27% |
| White - Irish | 2 | 0.27% |

### Foster Carer Ethnicity

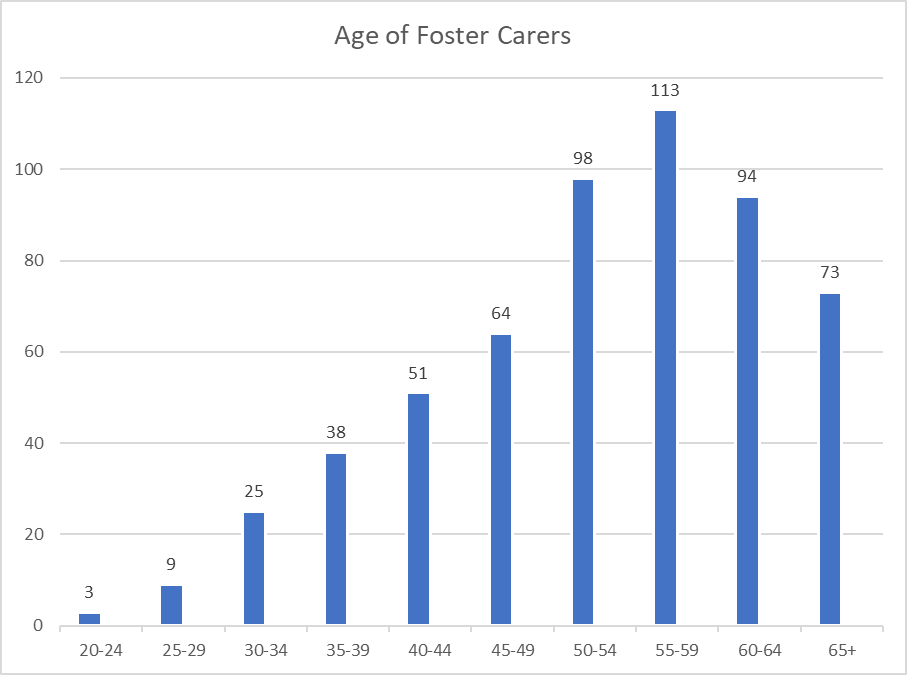
The highest ethnic demographic in our fostering population is White/UK with a majority of 60.6%, this is followed by Black Caribbean with 13.7% and 8.6% of our foster carers are of Pakistani ethnic origin. The proportion of carers from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased by 3% over the last year to 39.4%. The recruitment team are focusing on increasing carers from different ethnic backgrounds through community-based awareness raising and targeted community recruitment, this will further allow us to ensure we continue to have cultural matches for the children in care in Birmingham.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **ETHNICITY** | **No of FC** | **%** |
| White/UK | 344 | 60.6% |
| Black Caribbean | 78 | 13.7% |
| Pakistani | 49 | 8.6% |
| Indian | 16 | 2.8% |
| White/UK & Black Caribbean | 14 | 2.5% |
| Black African | 13 | 2.3% |
| Other Asian | 10 | 1.8% |
| Other White | 8 | 1.4% |
| Other Black | 7 | 1.2% |
| White /UK & Asian | 7 | 1.2% |
| Other Ethnicity | 4 | 0.7% |
| Mixed White & Black African | 4 | 0.7% |
| White/UK & Black African | 4 | 0.7% |
| Irish | 3 | 0.5% |
| Bangladeshi | 1 | 0.4% |
| Chinese | 1 | 0.2% |

### Foster carer Age profile

The three highest age profiles of our foster carers start with 55-59 years old (19.9%), then 50-54 years (17.3%) to 60-64 years (16.5%). We know that foster carers are commonly over 50 years old, as generationally they have made decisions to change their career paths and or have been parents whereby their own children have reached independence and have families of their own. We also know that Birmingham have been fortunate to maintain foster carers past the age of retirement as they enjoy the rewards they get from caring and making a difference to the lives of children and young people.

The age profiles of 50 years old and over make up 66.5% of our fostering population indicating the trend is heavily weighted to an older age demographic within our fostering workforce. As previously stated, this would be indicative to other fostering agencies. This age demographic has been factored into the Recruitment and Marketing Strategy as we strive to recruit new fostering households with foster carer seeing this as a career choice and perhaps beginning the journey from a younger age.

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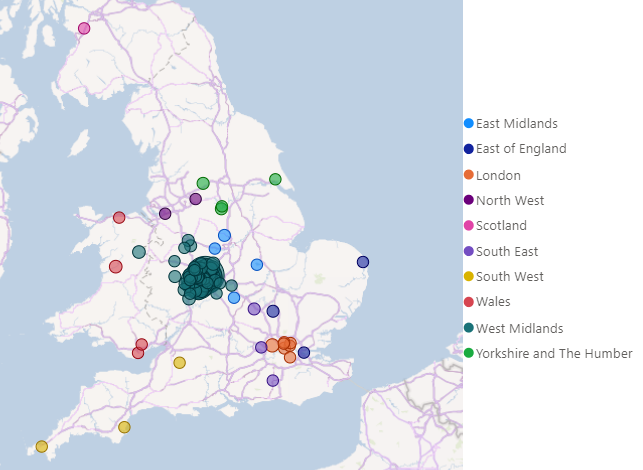
### Foster Carer Geographical Location

The majority of the foster carers for Birmingham Children’s Trust reside in the West Midlands (94%) of which 75.9% live within the Birmingham city boundary. A further 20.8% live within the Birmingham and West Midlands area, leaving 43 carers classed as living outside the Birmingham region. Of these carers 22 are connected persons foster carers. When matching children to foster carers it is always imperative that we maintain schools and familiar areas for friends and family, wherever possible and therefore it is positive that the majority of our foster carers mirror the needs of the children and those that live outside of the area do so with their close friends and family.



**West Midlands Foster Carers by District**



The map below illustrates the geographical location of our fostering estate.

# STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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| Reporting of all matters set out in schedule 6 | |
| **Summary** | Over the 12-month reporting period we received a total of 1910 schedule 6 notifications which is a decrease of 4.1% in comparison to 2021/22. The decrease was predicted when reporting methods and parameters changed as previously, we reported on nil returns, whereas now report on incidents only.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **NUMBER OF RETURNS** | | Quarter 1 | 521 | | Quarter 2 | 430 | | Quarter 3 | 470 | | Quarter 4 | 489 | | **TOTAL** | **1910** |   The most common reasons for Schedule 6 events were:   * Prescribed medication * Non-prescribed medication * Accidents, injuries and illnesses |
| **Comments** | We continue to monitor statutory matters within performance meetings to consider any themes, patterns and or trends across the service. We know the majority of schedule 6 reports are made regarding medication and none have provided any concerns to the Team Managers and or Heads of Service when oversight is made.  We have a system whereby foster carers can report on schedule 6 matters directly into CHARMS. Uptake has been positive, as indicated by the steady increase in the volume of reporting.  Our ability to actively track and report on schedule 6 matters in an efficient manner has improved and we are confident that our carers will continue to embrace the new method of recording. We ensure assurances are made that the reporting is not providing an under reporting on incidents as we know our baselines.  The service is of the belief that safeguarding matters are being reported and recorded. |

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| Compliance in relation to each child placed with foster parents, with the child’s care plan | |
| **Summary** | The Agency believes that Foster Carers contribute fully to progressing the Care Plan for every child placed in their care. This is monitored via the fostering and Independent Reviewing Officer services. Over the past year there have been changes to the methods of collating/reporting these matters. We believe that the progress made provides accurate information in a timely manner. Within this the fostering service contribute fully to children’s looked after reviews, providing outcomes achieved by the foster carers and children in placement.  The Head of Service and Assistant Head of Service for the mainstream teams have plans to conduct an audit within the next quarter, into the permanence planning for the children placed with the agencies foster carers and are committed within this to escalate any cases whereby drift and delay may be found in ensuring long term plans of fostering are made for the children and young people. Meanwhile, the family and friends team are working with colleagues in the safeguarding unit in respect of plans for Special Guardianship Orders for children living with their family and friends. Offering some challenge and providing information in order to work effectively to ensure children achieve permanence as quickly and safely as possible.  The Schedule 6 data and reporting for 2022/23 has enabled the agency to maintain a clear and robust oversight of children and young people's welfare and wellbeing. The majority of information that was included in self-reporting is now tracked through CHARMS and included in the monitoring performance reporting of the service. This provides the service and management with increased oversight and monitoring of the outcomes of our children in care and as a result any issues or concerns noted are addressed with appropriate remedial timely actions and escalation.  In 2023/24 the focus will continue to be monitored and triangulated with the outcomes for Birmingham children with Birmingham foster carers. This will be further evidenced through case auditing, reflective practice group discussions centred on the range of practice guidance, and the schedule whole service quarterly practice development workshops. |
| **Comments** | We continue to report (in CHARMS) on the documents a foster carer has received in relation to the child, such as placement plans and delegated authority, in the final quarter of this year. We know there is further focused work to be completed within the teams to demonstrate and record key paperwork in our system as we report on physical documents being saved against both child and foster carer within the CHARMS system.  Birmingham fostering agency strongly believes that key documents, such as placement plans and delegated authority forms are required and important for foster carers to inform them about the needs and care of our children, providing key information regarding their history, whilst providing autonomy enabling carers to make decisions in relation to a child’s everyday care. We also know that our carers identify with this and recognise it is integral to their roles Carers will raise and challenge any issues individually in the goal to improve the care they give to Birmingham children and young people.  During the end of 2022/23 reporting period and the start of quarter 1 2023/24 the service will be considering the process of improved recording of statutory documents to increase the accuracy in reporting within the fostering system. We know we have a higher percentage of carers who have the statutory documents, as previously we would report manually on documents in the carer’s possession.  Following on from initial changes, we have been able to generate data from CHARMS. The data below represents the first report on the progress made. The data represents the percentage of carers with placements on the 31 March 2023 who did not have the specified document. We expect these figures to improve as the usage of the portal increases and our practice is refined.  We aim to improve the number of carers who receive information on the child and therefore use an Escalation Policy, which outlines a tiered process for providing challenge for outstanding paperwork, which should address and ensure a timely response to request for missing paperwork.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Week 1 | Fostering Social Worker to Child’s Social Worker | | Week 2 | Team Manager to Team Manager /IRO | | Week 3 | HOS to HOS | | Week 4 | AD to AD (if this does not bring resolution - escalated further to Directors) |   It should be noted to date no escalations have been required past Head of Service level.  In the next quarter the service will be focusing on auditing to ensure foster carers have the information required to care for the children in their care. We expect information to have significantly improved in the reporting period, quarter 2 (2023-24). The service will be introducing a template to reflect the placement planning meeting discussions and decisions made and it is believed this will complement the information sharing with our foster carers. The service will continue to use the escalation process with the children’s teams to ensure delegated authority forms and placement plans are received in a timely way. In addition, the Head of service for fostering has been working with the Head of service for safeguarding to ensure Birmingham IRO’s are requesting delegated responsibility records are updated and shared during the child in care review. |

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| All accidents, injuries and illnesses of children placed with foster parents | |
| **Summary** | All Foster Carers are required to complete and maintain Schedule 6 recordings in relation to any accidents, injuries or illnesses for children placed in their care. There are no concerns in respect of reporting or the ability for Birmingham foster carers in managing minor illnesses for example, coughs and colds, as carers ensure if symptoms persist, they seek appropriate medical support or medication and or apply appropriate first aid techniques.  During the 12-month period from April 2022 to March 2023, a total of 660 Schedule 6 returns were reported in relation to accidents, injuries and illnesses. This is a decrease of 54% in comparison to last year when there were 1233 reports related to accidents/injuries and illnesses. The variance in the recordings in this category can be explained in part by the changes we made to the reporting method in Q3, and unusually high numbers in the second half of the previous year that comprised of reporting on increases in coughs/colds and covid symptoms. We are confident we have an improved method of capturing this data that is sustainable and accurate and provides information when an incident only when an occurs.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Reporting period 2022/2023** | **Accident, Injury or Illness** | **% of Schedule 6 incidents recorded** | | Quarter 1 | 289 | 55% | | Quarter 2 | 211 | 49% | | Quarter 3 | 62 | 13% | | Quarter 4 | 98 | 20% | | **TOTAL** | **660** | **34.5%** |     In relation to reporting on children experiencing from accidents or injuries, the majority of reported incidents have been from children playing and general accidents in the home and or school. Team managers ensure quick and regular oversight of all reported incidents.  All necessary action(s) were taken, and no further support was required. It is encouraging to view that when there may be a perceived concern the service immediately contacts the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for consultation and or to follow the referral process.  Most of the illnesses are reported under coughs and colds, bumps, rashes and respiratory infections. There were no unusual illnesses reported by the support teams. Foster Carers demonstrate through actions and reporting that they know how to contact the Children In Care Health Team for access to health advice and guidance. Health related information and guidance is shared with foster carers through regular updates sent in the Keeping in Touch briefings. |
| **Comments** | There has been significant improvement in the accuracy of recording and reporting, the service have a greater understanding of where focus is required. We continue to check matters in monthly reporting and when compiling quarterly reports. |

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| Complaints in relation to children placed with foster parents and their outcomes | |
| **Summary** | Birmingham Children’s Trust has a dedicated Complaints & Information Team that sits within the Finance and Resources Directorate. All corporate complaints and compliments are managed through this route to enable independent oversight and feedback of all complaints within the Trust. Quarterly reports are produced by the Complaints and Information Manager. During this period there has not been any trends identified that require a full-service change. The practice Hub provides a regular update of ‘learning from complaints’ which is cascaded to all staff and easily accessible on the Intranet.  The Registered Manager maintains regular communication with the Complaints Manager to ensure that all complaints are being tracked and responded to in a timely manner. The Registered Manager also collates compliments and complaints that are managed internally via the fostering complaints policy.  **Corporate complaints**  The following tables depict the number of corporate complaints received by Birmingham Children Trust.  The statutory stage 1 complaints were mostly around Special Guardianship Order assessments and more specifically financial matters related to court proceedings. Of the complaints 6 were not upheld and 2 partially upheld.   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Statutory Stage 1** | **Mainstream** | | **Connected Carers** | | | **No. of Complaints Received** | **No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld** | **No. of Complaints Received** | **No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld** | | **Carer** | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | | **Other Family Member** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | | **Parent** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | | **TOTAL** | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | |  |  |  |  |  |   The one local stage 1 complaint related to the removal of a child was not upheld as it was believed to be made in the best interests of the child and was a considered decision.   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Local Stage 1** | **Mainstream** | | **Connected Carers** | | | **No. of Complaints Received** | **No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld** | **No. of Complaints Received** | **No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld** | | **Carer** | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |   Two of the statutory stage 2 complaints are in relation to applicants not agreeing with content and or financial arrangements of assessments. The one mainstream complaint related to gaps in the life story held on two children in care. All three were partially upheld. Life story work is completed within the childcare teams.  A further stage 3 complaint regarding the standard of supervision was also partially upheld.   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | **Mainstream** | | **Connected Carers** | | | **No. of Complaints Received** | **No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld** | **No. of Complaints Received** | **No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld** | | **Statutory Stage 2** | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | **Statutory Stage 3** | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | | **Local Stage 1** | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | **Local Stage 2** | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | **Ombudsman** | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |   As a service we have continue to review and learn from complaints received. As we view complaints and compliments as a tool to reflect on practice and learn.  In respect of internal complaints, there have been 6 internal complaints received over the 12-month reporting period, the origination of the complaints was as follows:  1 x Complaint in respect of her finances and her request for level 4 fees (not upheld)  1 x Complaint made by foster regarding relationship with their Supervising Social Worker and finances (partially upheld)  1 x Complaint in respect of finances  1 x Complaint made by child’s social worker against a Foster Carer (upheld)  1 x Complaint made by a Foster Carer against a Child’s Social Worker (not upheld)  1 X Complaint from a prospective foster carer regarding their experiences with panel and their recommendation (not upheld)  In quarter 4 we had one additional complaint from a Foster Carer who disputed the need for a medical. She also stated that certain documentation had not been shared with her. At the time of the report the matter remained ongoing.  All 6 internal complaints were investigated. Of the 5 complaints that were resolved 1 of these was upheld and the remaining 3 were not upheld. The final complaint is currently ongoing as it has been escalated for the outcome to have consideration.  The escalation process we hold ensures that the issues of grumble and or complaint from foster carers are dealt with quickly and prior to formal complaints to the service or the Trust. When there are corporate complaints that link to other service areas of the Trust, the Head of Service will often work together with their counterpart to ensure a resolution, for example when we require children to have a passport and there are complications that require cooperation of parents or when carers want a match of a child to be expeditated. This provides a child led service for our foster carers.  **Compliments**  Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering service has continued to receive a high level of compliments from a range of key stakeholders. The majority of compliments are received from our foster carers. On a regular basis compliments give thanks for the support a foster carer receives from social workers and team managers.  All compliments to our foster carers from professionals are acknowledged by senior management via recognition cards, in writing or via nominations and rewards.  Some examples of written compliments received are as follows:  **Compliment from child’s court guardian (anonymised):**  ‘I'm writing to express my appreciation for the excellent care afforded L-M by P since placement. I first visited L-M in placement on the 23rd March 2023, at that time, I noted that L-M appeared developmentally delayed… I noted that throughout my visit, L-M's eyes remained focused on her carer throughout.  I observed L-M with her father yesterday (2nd May) and noticed the very great progress she had made since my March visit; she was sitting, eating well, holding her own drinking cup, babbling, and engaged with her environment. Father explained that L-M had made tremendous progress since placement with P and spoke about how much work the foster carer had invested in his daughter to stimulate her and bring her on. The contact supervisor mentioned that this is typical of this carer who puts her heart and soul into caring for the babies placed with her.’  **Compliment of Social Worker from Foster Carer:**  ‘I just want to say that that is only down to how K has supported us through this… She took time after WS went on placement day to talk to me & A and has been so supportive and has kept checking in on me… she has just been a great support, if you don’t have your SSW supporting you then you may as well stop... I just think everyone is so quick to complain but not to praise, we really wouldn’t have been continuing if it wasn’t for K.’  **Compliment from birth parents about foster carer (via Team Manager)**  ‘The feedback that we have received has been hugely positive and has included feedback from both TD’s mother and father. Mother and Father were both extremely happy with the care the family were providing to their son, and neither highlight any changes or concerns. It is clear that A and K have been able to build a positive relationship with TD’s birth parents, this will support TD in placement as it promotes consistency and also reduces any potential feelings of torn loyalty, both of which promote placement stability’.  **Compliment from foster carer about a respite carer**  ‘I just wanted to send an appreciation email about H and her family. She has gone above and beyond with X and I couldn't have asked for anyone better to watch her. She kept me updated with how she was every day and sent over pictures of her playing too. She also washed all of her clothes and packed them away so nicely. I really appreciate that. She is an absolute credit to Birmingham Children’s Trust and the children she cares for are very lucky to have her.’ |
| **Comments** | Birmingham Children’s Trust’s fostering service prides itself as a learning service. The escalation policy is working positively, and it is important to us that our fostering committee BFCA acknowledge and agreed with the process.  We feel that the escalation process has improved the timeliness of managing grumbles and complaints and believe this is one reason why our corporate complaints remain low.  The approach of managers observing practice has increased the richness of information and compliments on practice. It has provided a more proactive approach to gathering feedback and learning from compliments and complaints.  We have completed quarterly tabletop reviews; the latest review has resulted in the service considering how to use impact chronologies in order to smartly track concerns and or issues raised. This will allow the service to reflect if there are any themes and or patterns that need to be considered.  In Quarter 1 (2023-24), the Head of Service will be refreshing the fostering complaints policy alongside the Trust corporate complaint policy with the Complaints and Information Manager. This will ensure we continue to acknowledge and learn from the experiences of foster carers, children and others.  It is insurmountable to consider the changes our foster carers make to our children’s lives as they grow and achieve. We know having resilience and aspirations will be key to the future of our children. We are proud of the positive impact our carers have in the care they provide.  The service has learnt and reflected from complaints. We embrace the opportunity as a service to learn from both complaints and tabletop reviews and from this we consider reflections and improvements.  Some of the learning from complaints has led to several practice improvements some of which included:   * A refresh of the foster carer skills level framework – to assist foster carers by providing clarity about expectations and requirements at each grade, both for new entrants and those approved foster carers wishing to progress to a higher level. * Training for fostering staff on Therapeutic Life-story work led by Richard Rose. Further training on Life story work for foster carers, along with the roll out of all about me tool is being planned- which will improve the quality and consistency in the life-story work that the foster carers complete. * The development of the foster carer’s escalation process |

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| Any allegations or suspicions of abuse or neglect in respect of children placed with foster parents and the outcome of any investigation | |
| **Summary** | During the period 1/4/2022 to 31/3/2023 Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency received a total of 20 allegations:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **CATEGORY** | **NUMBER** | | Number of allegations against Foster Carers made by children | **18** | | Number of allegations against Foster Carers made by other sources? | **2** | | Total number of Foster Carers subject to allegations | **20** | | Total number of Children who have made allegations | **20** |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | **NATURE OF ALLEGATION** | **NUMBER** | | Physical Abuse | **14** | | Sexual Abuse | **5** | | Neglect | **1** |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | **REFERRAL ACTIVITY** | **NUMBER** | | Number of referrals made to DBS | **1** | | Number of referrals made to the Trust (Local Authority) child protection service | **13** | | Number of Section 47’s investigations | **18** |   **Timescales of Section 47 Investigations including duration of ongoing investigations as of 31 March 2023**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **TIMESCALE** | **NUMBERS** | | Less than 21 days | **5** | | 22 – 30 days | **2** | | 31 – 50 days | **5** | | 50 Days + | **6** |   The majority of section 47 investigations are tracked. We know those that require in-depth police involvement and investigation take considerably more time before the LADO procedure can conclude. This can create a significant delay. We do strive to ensure investigations and subsequent care standard concerns are managed in a prompt and effective manner. We understand that these can affect a foster carer. We encourage our carers to always seek independence support and believe this is strengthened with our partnership with Fostering Network. Going forward we are interested in understanding how we support carers to continue to foster when they have been through some challenging experiences following investigation. This will help us reduce the impact on Birmingham foster carers and provide consideration in learning and change.  **Outcome of Investigations**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **OUTCOME** | **NUMBERS** | | Concerns resolved /NFA | **8** | | Concerns to be monitored for a period of time | **2** | | Ongoing | **8** | |
| **Comments** | All allegations received by the service are monitored by the Heads of Service/Registered Manager ensuring that the appropriate processes and safeguarding measures are followed. The timescales for completing investigations are kept under review, ensuring that these are concluded as quickly as possible, recognising that this is a period of high anxiety and uncertainly for the foster carers. Where it is felt necessary the Head of Service will escalate concerns to other agencies such as the police or safeguarding unit.  In the next reporting period Birmingham fostering agency will be working jointly with the new provider Fostering Network to provide independent support to foster carers through the allegation process, in order to learn from the views and experiences of foster carers.  The Registered Manager continues to provide regular updates to the nominated Ofsted inspector on such cases that have yet to be concluded. This provides transparency in the service and Ofsted an independent oversight.  Discussions regarding the learning from foster carer investigations and care standard concerns are held to inform and improve the quality of practice, review procedures, the training offer and supports services available. Practitioners find the tabletop reviews as informative, reflective and an opportunity to consider change.  In 2023/24 fostering panel will be considering a new approach and reporting system to improve the frequency and response rates of feedback from applicants and professionals. This will be through an electronic survey link and reports will be provided centrally from our Birmingham’s evaluation of practice team. |

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| Recruitment records and the conduct of required checks of new workers | |
| **Summary** | The service continues to have positive recruitment of workers and staff across all functions. Where we have had a fast growth, mainly in the connected persons teams, agency staff have been used. The Trust remain committed to the option of fostering for their children in care and in turn support any staffing solutions required.  The majority of the staff have worked for Birmingham Children’s Trust and the fostering service for a considerable amount of time. When new recruitment takes place safer recruitment is a priority and this includes the verification of references for staff new to the teams and or transferring from other social work teams within the Trust.  The fostering service is continuing to consider develop the skills and practice across the teams. we are committed to supporting staff to reach their potentials and work within policies and procedures. |
| **Comments** | We are confident that our recruitment process is safe and robust, and the use of HR checklist provides evidence immediately that all steps within the Safer Care Recruitment Policy have been followed.  Birmingham Children’s Trust Human Resources have stated the following:  ‘I can confirm that we apply safer recruitment with regard to all new appointments and all checks are done and then verified by managers and signed off by the registered manager.  We also have safer recruitment guidelines’; these are saved in the appendices.  There continues to be a positive and fast response when recruiting to vacancies. Staff retention is strong, including the conversion of agency staff to permanent posts. The AYSE social workers within Fostering are positive regarding their learning experiences and upon completion of their AYSE year will remain in Fostering.  During the last quarter Birmingham Children’s Trust have adopted a new system through ‘Matrix’ in order to recruit agency workers. This ensures greater efficiencies for compliance as agencies cannot provide a candidate without evidence for essential checks such as DBS details, references and qualifications.  All staff have continued with their Social Work England registration renewal and are supported with their continuous development.  There have been checks regarding the fostering panel’s central list during this time to ensure all have current DBS checks. |

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| Notifications of Events listed in Schedule 7 | |
| **Summary** | The Registered Manager ensures all notifiable Schedule 7 incidents are logged on the Ofsted Portal, which are then monitored by Ofsted. We know that the number of reportable incidents reduced significantly from 2020 to the present day and believe that the requirements for Covid diagnosis ceasing is a large contributory factor.  During the period April 22 to March 23, we have received a total of 84 schedule 7’s incidents of which 85% were notifiable events that were investigated and reported to Ofsted.  The breakdown of schedule 7 incidents that were received and notified to Ofsted through the portal were as follows:   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **No Of SCHEDULE 7s** | **Notified to Ofsted** | **% Notified** | | Quarter 1 | 20 | 14 | 70% | | Quarter 2 | 20 | 15 | 75% | | Quarter 3 | 22 | 20 | 91% | | Quarter 4 | 22 | 22 | 100% | | TOTAL | 84 | 71 | 85% |     The breakdown of the 69 schedule 7s incidents notified to Ofsted over the 12-month period was as follows: |
| **Comments** | The Heads of Service has oversight of all Schedule 7 matters and is responsible for the reporting. The Registered Manager also ensures all actions are compliant with safeguarding processes. The Registered Manager updates Ofsted on all safeguarding notifications until concluded.  There are no concerns in respect of the understanding of the importance of reporting schedule 7 incidents and or the management across the service. |

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| Any child missing from a foster parent’s home without permission | |
| **Summary** | During the reporting period 1st April 22 to 31st March 2023 Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering service had a total of 45 missing episodes reported. Of the 45 missing episodes 37 were reported under schedule 6 matters and there was 8 reported under schedule 7 incidents which required Ofsted notification.  The most common reasons as to why these children and young people absconded from placement without permission were as follows:   * Wanted to spend time with extended family * Spending time with friends * At risk of child sexual exploitation * Anxiety about school  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **MISSING UNDER SCHEDULE 6** | **MISSING UNDER SCHEDULE 7** | | Quarter 1 | 14 | 4 | | Quarter 2 | 12 | 2 | | Quarter 3 | 5 | 1 | | Quarter 4 | 6 | 1 | | **TOTAL** | **37** | **8** |   Of the 45 missing episodes that we had reported, the following is the breakdown of the return home interviews, each child at each incident was offered a return home interview (RHI) the following table depicts the number of interviews refused and accepted over the 12-month reporting period:   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **NUMBER OF RHI OFFERED** | **NUMBER OF RHI REFUSED** | **NUMBER OF RHI ACCEPTED** | | Quarter 1 | 18 | 8 | 10 (55%) | | Quarter 2 | 14 | 5 | 9 (64%) | | Quarter 3 | 6 | 3 | 3 (50%) | | Quarter 4 | 7 | 3 | 4 (57%) | | **TOTAL** | **45 (100%)** | **19 (42%)** | **26 (57%)** |   As you can see from the above table all children who had missing episodes were offered return home interviews by the young person social worker. However, of the 45 return home interviews offered the acceptance rate of an interview was just over half at 57% and this is something that is being followed up in conjunction with the Children in care teams. We do acknowledge that some children and young people often refuse to discuss their missing episode when they return to placement. |
| **Comments** | The fostering service will continue to ensure the following actions are adhered to in respect of children missing from placement.   * SSW to ensure they follow up missing episode with the children in care teams, ascertain the outcomes of Return Home Interviews * Fostering Agency representatives to attend necessary multi agency contextual safeguarding meetings and work in partnership as per plan and risk assessments to safeguard children and seek to disrupt perpetrators of exploitation. * Agency SSW to update risk/safe caring for continued missing children in care and consider triggers, actions for the foster carer and risks.   We will also as a service continue to promote children and young people partaking in return interviews as we value the independence and importance of children and young people having this opportunity to provide their views, opinions and information as to where they had been and why they were absent or missing from foster placement. |

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| Use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home | |
| **Summary** | The fostering service is clear that no form of physical punishment or restraint should be used on any child or young person within the foster carers home or by the foster carer on any occasion. This is reflected in our policies, procedures and within the newly produced Trix Foster Carer Handbook.  Training is available for Foster Carers in respect of de-escalation techniques for behaviour management to increase an understanding of children and young people’s reasons for their behaviour. This is often in the context of the impact early life experiences/attachment issues have upon children and young people’s behaviour/trauma.  The foster carer training brochure has been refreshed and considered in line with the skills and abilities of our foster carers. This has led with an increase in the support of newly approved carers, increase in face-to-face support groups and face to face training for all carers. In the future we are organising a wellbeing day for foster carers. We are planning on developing an event to increase carers to consider special guardianships for our children to achieve a higher level of permanence.  Over the 12-month reporting period Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency had 28 incidents of foster carers using measures of control reported under schedule 6, the reporting breakdown of which is as follows:   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **MEASURES OF CONTROL REPORTED** | **Of which physical restraint was involved** | | Quarter 1 | 14 | 0 | | Quarter 2 | 3 | 3 | | Quarter 3 | 1 | 1 | | Quarter 4 | 10 | 2 | | **TOTAL** | **28** | **6** |   During this annual reporting period we have seen a decrease of 83% in measures of control being reported, compared to the previous year 20/21 which was 166. This regression is consistent with our reporting incidents only rather than nil returns and the belief that Covid restrictions in the 21/22 year caused an unusual spike in the use of measure of control. Nonetheless we need to also ensure that foster carers are adapting to the new method of recording Schedule 6s and will continue to analyse information we receive. |
| **Comments** | The Head of Service does not have any overriding concern in respect of control measures from the reports that are provided. Control measures and house rules/boundaries have been reported to have been in the guise of the removal of items such as mobile phones. Team Managers review all notifications and appropriately challenge supervising social workers to ensure these sanctions are agreed and documented in placement planning and that the discipline is proportionate and related to the presenting behaviour and or reason for discipline. |

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| Medication, medical treatment and first aid administered to any child placed with foster parents | |
| **Summary** | **Prescribed Medication**  Over the 12-month reporting period Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency received 584 incidents of foster carers administering prescribed medication under schedule 6, the reporting breakdown of which is as follows:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **No OF PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS** | | Quarter 1 | 161 | | Quarter 2 | 136 | | Quarter 3 | 100 | | Quarter 4 | 187 | | **TOTAL** | **584** |   During the final quarter, there had been 187 occasions where children have received prescribed medications. Most medications are items such as creams, inhalers and antibiotics, however there are occasions where medicines are prescribed that require at least daily administration and this would lead me to believe some incidents remain as under recorded or reported for example the use of contraceptive pills and for one child, oxygen that required administering once a day.  The checking of medication, including storage and recording is routinely monitored within the supervision of foster carers. There is an expectation that supervising social workers are confident in the recording of medication and carers understand the contraindications. In the next reporting year, we will be dip sampling supervision records to ensure supervisions demonstrate the practice of carers when providing children and young people with prescribed medications.  The most common prescribed medications administered by foster carers were as follows:   * Topical creams for rashes, cold sores, or acne * Pain relief * Asthma relief and prevention (inhalers, steroids etc) * ADHD medication * Antibiotics * Epilepsy control drugs * Allergy control * Anti-depressant tablets   **Non-Prescribed Medication**  During the period 1st January 23 to 31st March 23 we had a total of 137 schedule 6 recordings of non-prescribed medication being administered to children in care. This is evidenced via the fostering teams ensuring that none prescribed medication provided to children in care is at the advice of health, pharmacy, or GP services. There were no concerns noted during quarter 4 reporting.  The overall reporting of non-prescribed medications over the 12-month period can be seen below:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **No of NON-PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS** | | Quarter 1 | 124 | | | Quarter 2 | 97 | | | Quarter 3 | 85 | | | Quarter 4 | 137 | | | **TOTAL** | **443** |   The most common forms of non-prescription medicine administered was as follows:   * Paracetamol (Calpol) * Cough medicine * Vitamins * Antihistamines * Saline drops * Topical creams |
| **Comments** | The Registered Manager continues to have confidence that foster carers are reporting the use of medication and also correctly storing medication. This has been achieved through awareness raising with supervising social workers and foster carers  We know as a service that Team Managers continue to monitor where medication is prescribed it is given as directed by the GP/Medical professional, ensuring that there is no prolonged use. |

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| Where applicable, the standard of any education provided by the fostering service | |
| **Summary** | Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency does not provide any educational provision. However, the Agency continues to work closely with Birmingham Children’s Trust Head of the Virtual School and their partners and Leaving Care services. We work collaboratively to progress actions/plans to address any issues relating to EHCP or our NEET/generic educational issues to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people are achieved.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **NO OF NEET CHILDREN** | | Quarter 1 | 1 | | Quarter 2 | 1 | | Quarter 3 | 3 | | Quarter 4 | 1 | | **TOTAL** | **6** |     During the period 1st April 22 to 31st March 23, Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency has had 6 young people who had no access to education, employment, or training. All 6 of these young people were receiving support from the care leavers service with the plan for them to return to full time education or gain full time employment. in the last quarter there is only one young person considered as NEET. |
| **Comments** | The service continues to monitor all NEET children on a monthly basis, and we are pleased to see the number of young people considered NEET reduce in the final reporting quarter for 2022/23. The number of children who are NEET remains significantly low. The fostering service have a strong link and work closely with local education provision and the virtual school and the results are positive.  The fostering service include information on education when reporting in for children in care reviews, this is completed both virtually and within an outcome tracking report. This allows the Independent Reviewing Officers to consider the support our carers provide to the children in their care and demonstrates the positive outcomes the children achieve.  Birmingham Foster carers regularly receive information from the Virtual school to support their understanding of the support provided and information of home education materials. Within this we have secured funding to ensure all children in year 7 have laptops and appropriate equipment to support their learning, such as laptops. There are plans in the next reporting period for an Education Worker to work across the Virtual School and Birmingham fostering agency to support children to remain in school. The education worker will also work with the fostering service with improved developments in the production of sharing information via the microsite. |

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| Records of Assessments | |
| **Summary** | **Mainstream Activity**  The following table depicts the mainstream assessment activity from 1st April 22 to 31st March 23. We received 343 in the year.   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **REPORTING QUARTER** | **NUMBER OF INITIAL ENQUIRIES** | **NUMBER OF INITIAL VISITS** | **ROI’s RECEIVED** | | Quarter 1 | 69 | 9 | 6 | | Quarter 2 | 125 | 9 | 8 | | Quarter 3 | 78 | 30 | 16 | | Quarter 4 | 71 | 26 | 11 | | **TOTAL** | **343** | **74** | **41** |     Of these enquiries we were able to convert 19.5% to an initial home visit. 12% of enquiries resulted in a Registration of Interest, which compares favourably to the national rate for 2021-22 of 6%, although is consistent with conversion rates for Local Authorities. For IFAs the national rate is 4% and for LAs it is 12%.[[1]](#footnote-2)  51% of these applications resulted in an approved carer, ahead of the national figure of 28%.[[2]](#footnote-3) The data indicates that when we get enquiries our conversion rates are strong – the challenge for the service remains raising interest in fostering and attracting potential carers to contact us.  The table below shows the reasons for enquiry closure.     |  |  | | --- | --- | | REASON | NUMBERS | | Withdrawn (at initial visit) | 8 | | Withdrawn prior (to initial visit) | 9 | | Withdrawn (at Assessment Stage) | 13 | | Total did not proceed | 30 |   The main reason for withdrawal at the at the assessment stage were:   * a change in circumstances, * not being financially able to give up their employment, * not fully comprehending the impact upon the family, * pursuing business ventures, * extensive home renovations, * safeguarding issues, * concerns around pets, * fertility issues and choosing to pursue adoption, * having more birth children * applicant withdrew as a result of dissatisfaction with the service.   During the year we had 17 mainstream applicants providing 23 fostering placements approved at panel as detailed in the table below.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **REPORTING PERIOD** | **MAINSTREAM ASSESSMENTS TO PANEL** | **BEDS GAINED** | | Quarter 1 – (Apr to Jun 22) | 3 | 3 | | Quarter 2 – (July to Sept 22) | 5 | 7 | | Quarter 3 – (Oct to Dec 22) | 5 | 6 | | **Quarter 4 – (Jan to Mar 23)** | **4** | **7** | | **TOTAL** | **17** | **23** |     We continue to track the timeliness of the assessments, and all have been completed within regulatory timescale as detailed in the table below.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | QUARTER | IN TIMESCALE (8 MONTHS) | | Q1 | 3 Approvals of which 100% were in timescale | | Q2 | 5 Approvals of which 100% were in timescale | | Q3 | 5 Approvals of which 100% were in timescale | | Q4 | 4 Approvals of which 100% were in timescale | | TOTAL | 17 APPROVALS - 100% COMPLETED IN TIMESCALE |   During the forthcoming year we aim to improve our timeliness with most assessments being completed within 12 weeks from allocation to Quality assurance and submission.  We have completed a number of tasks leading to achievement from the recruitment and marketing strategy.  The service had a key performance indicator to achieve 30 additional fostering placements by the end March 2023, due to one assessment ending in the final stages and another assessment being placed on hold due to a change in family circumstances, the service achieved 23 additional placements in 2022/23. We plan to have 19 fostering household assessments to be considered by fostering panel between May and August 2023, which will provide a potential of 26 placements. We have 9 registrations of interest for May, believed to be positive to progress to assessment. These assessments include specialist fostering such as step up fostering and parent and child. Therefore, the second year is expecting a higher trajectory.  We continue to be effective in considering the retention of our foster carers and note we have 96.8% of our foster carers who are aged between 21-70 years. This allows us to know we have a strategy to maintain foster carers for the upcoming years as we know we will have further resignations due to retirement.  The occupancy rate for Mainstream foster carers, excluding respite beds, at the end of March 2023 is 94.1%. The reasons for some placements not being utilised are foster carer health, bedrooms occupied with one child (leaving no spare bedroom) and or investigations taking place. For family and friends foster carers occupancy is currently 94%, the majority of the foster carers for family and friends either come through the route of regulation 24 or have a child placed following an Agency Makers Decision. The 12 family and friend foster carers who do not have children in placement could have been approved as a contingency plan and or may be a part of a family whereby more than one set of carers were approved for the same child.    The above graph shows that since the launch of the new marketing strategy our conversions have improved and stabilised. We gather information and consider the reasons for closed enquiries and continue to follow up on those who do make enquiries.  In April, we attended Birmingham jobs fair, where 1600 people attended and we screened potential foster carers, this provided us with 33 potential prospective foster carers whom we are following up to progress forward.  We continue to refresh the information events and the attendance has increase since the changes have been made. There is an increasing number of ambassadors, that allows us to reach different groups of people in the community.  We know that retention and providing placements for our most vulnerable is key in the market. We are in the process of providing a therapeutic support offer for foster carers, regarding commissioning bespoke psychological support and consultation for staff and foster carers to compliment TESS. This will continue to improve the skills of foster carers to look after our vulnerable children and provide a real team around the child approach to care.  All of our campaigns involve foster carers, and are included the recruitment and retention workstreams, ensuring first hand experiences are shared throughout the recruitment journey. We have future campaigns regarding myth busting the role of foster carers, this is accompanied with focused campaigns for placements such as parent and child; step up fostering and we communicate this through various methods, via digital screens, taxi wraps and communications on trams and buses. Staff and foster carers have had media training to improve their abilities and understanding. We value our foster carers contribution to recruiting new carers as ‘Word of Mouth’ is a key, any foster carers that recommend fostering and the applicant is approved receive a one of payment of £1000.  We have attended schools and parents’ evenings and will continue to do this targeted approach with our work in the communities. This approach fitted in with the fostering Fortnight theme of ‘fostering communities. During the fortnight we asked for carers to provide video clips as to why fostering is important, and we plan to use the clips to increase our profile during the time.  In May we were attended an event at Birmingham bullring and Birmingham PRIDE. We continue to go out into communities that includes planning on attending events for Windrush.  We have completed a benchmarking exercise to consider the offer from our competitor fostering agencies. This allows us to consider the development of our own offer. We have since lead changes to increasing the payment for carers transferring to the Trust. We have considered the fostering fees and provided an uplift in line with the government ministers letter for 5% increase of the fee and children maintenance allowance 12.4%. Whilst we know some carers are not financially motivated this helps acknowledge the additional cost of living, we are living with nationally. This year we have also paid each fostering household a payment of £250 in recognition of inflation and cost of living.  As corporate parents we believe fostering and fostering recruitment and retention is everybody’s business. The support is believed to being firmly embedded and essential to increasing the awareness of fostering and increasing our foster carers. Ofsted have recently reported that ‘Managers have a good overview of the recruitment of mainstream foster carers and continue to recruit to offset the number of resignations.’ We believe with increased marketing we can continue to be resilient and consistent competitors in the market for foster carers.  The trajectory for the next six months looks hopeful, with an expected 21 new fostering placement being approved by September 2023. The target is to approve at least 39 new fostering placements by March 2024.  **Friends and Family Assessment Activity**  As of 31st March 2023, there were 195 approved connected fostering households caring for 274 children and 23 temporary carers (under Reg 24) caring for 23 children.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **APPROVAL TYPE** | **NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN PLACE** | | Connected Persons | 274 | | REG 24 – Temporary Approvals | 23 | | **TOTAL** | **297** |   The total number of children placed with Family & Friends foster placements is 1.3% (2223 children as of 31.03.22), which is an increase of 1.3% over the year.    The level of referral/ assessment activity in the year 2022 - 2023 has seen an increase of 9.1% from 232 to 255 referrals for assessment. There have been 60 carer approvals and 28 regulation 25 extensions confirmed at panel. The most common reason for the delay in presenting the assessments within timescale is due to checks and references not being available by the 12th week of the assessment period.  Total number of new connected persons placements approved this year is 87. Total number of SGO’s granted was 41 this is an increase from 37 in the previous year.  Of the 56 referrals received in Q4, 49 assessments were allocated internally, 2 assessments were allocated externally to Carter Brown and 5 assessments did not progress or are on hold. 87.5% are being completed internally – an increase of 21% compared to last year.  The number of assessments being outsourced has continued to reduce as successful recruitment develops.  On 31 March 2023 there were 113 active assessments of which 34 were Form C dual assessments including a temporary approval arrangement, 50 were other Form C dual assessments and 16 were SGO only assessments. A further 13 were at that point to be decided upon.    On 31 March 2023 there were 5 unregulated placements authorised by the service. There have been 13 SGOs granted during quarter 4 end of year reporting. |
| **Comments** | The family and friends service have continued to increase their foster carer. The focus of increasing connected foster carers has been successful. This is also in turn increasing the number of carers who are granted a Special Guardianship Order.  We remain optimistic in mainstream fostering that we will achieve a net gain of 39 fostering placements. We have reviewed the marketing strategy and are confident that we can continue to complete assessments in a timely manner. We understand that fostering is competitive, and we want to be strong in our offer as the lack of carers nationally continues. To assist in the attraction of new carers to the Trust we have the microsite.  This should showcase what we offer as a service and what carers can expect in return for providing a high standard of care to our children. We have a strong belief that when we have prospective carers that we can support them through the stages of expressing an interest, assessment to panel and approval. The feedback from applicants is that they have a positive experience. |

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| Records of Fostering Panel Minutes | |
| **Summary** | Fostering panels have continued to be busier and in the first quarter of 2023/24 we are planning on increasing the number of panels arranged throughout the years. The future will also see fostering panels being recorded through the CHARMS system and using SharePoint opportunities to increase efficiencies of sharing information in a secure and prompt manner.  Fostering panel continues to feel the impact on the need for carers to be approved for specific children in short time periods. As a result we have continued to increase the number of fostering panels to ensure the service can meet the needs of Birmingham children. With this we continue to consider the availability of panel members and panel chairs on the central list to ensure panels are quorate.  We continue to meet with and work with the fostering panel chairs to improve experiences for all who attend panel and ensure a seamless process.  The number of prospective foster carer assessments considered at panel over the April 22 to March 23 reporting period are as follows:   |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | **QUARTER 1** | **QUARTER 2** | **QUARTER 3** | **QUARTER 4** | **TOTAL** | | Mainstream – Approved | 2 | 6 | 4 | 5 | **17** | | Foster to Adopt – Approved | 0 | 7 | 9 | 5 | **21** | | Connected Persons – Approved | 24 | 22 | 9 | 19 | **74** | | **TOTAL** | **26** | **35** | **22** | **29** | **112** |   Total De-registrations over the 12-month reporting period April 2022 to Mar 2023   |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | **QUARTER 1** | **QUARTER 2** | **QUARTER 3** | **QUARTER 4** | **TOTAL** | | Mainstream – Deregistered | 10 | 10 | 7 | 7 | **34** | | Foster to Adopt – Deregistered | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | **8** | | Connected Persons – Deregistered | 13 | 5 | 12 | 6 | **36** | | **TOTAL** | **24** | **20** | **19** | **14** | **78** |   We believe that the reasons for carer deregistering is akin to most agencies and in the main positive as it is due to children achieving permanence. The reasons for the above 77 foster carers being deregistered is as follows:    Of the resignations received, a high proportion were connected carers whose placed child moved on to another placement or returned to their birth family. Mainstream carers who resigned were seeking career changes, had changes in family circumstances or, in one case, emigrating from the UK.  Throughout the year there has been regular meetings with Panel Chairs, alongside regular service update briefings. |
| **Comments** | A large number of de-registrations have been due to children achieving permanence. We have also had a number of carers who have reached retirement age, which has led to resignations due to ill health etc. We are considering a way in quarter 1 2023/24 of reporting more accuracy on deregistration and resignations for the future, to enable us to ensure any trends are considered by the service. To date we do not believe that we have any significant loses of foster carers who continued the role for another agency or authority. |

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| Records of appraisals of employees | |
| **Summary** | Staff Appraisals have undertaken with 98% completed to date. |
| **Comments** | The Agency recognises the importance of good recruitment and retention plans for staffing. The service has a majority of staff who have provided long service. We continue to hold at least one full-service event a year to share good practice and improve delivery with practice workshops.  All staff have regular supervisions and annual appraisals and during this time staff have also had appraisals completed. We have been successful at using a hybrid approach for supervisions and continue to increase these taking place on a face-to-face basis. There have not been any complaints and or notes from staff to suggest that they do not feel supported in the fostering service.  The agency believes that gaining 360 feedback is invaluable alongside the observations from managers in the appraisal for our staff. The feedback is gained directly from the foster carers and provides insight into the effectiveness of the working relationships of key professionals as the team around the child. Information is then fed into the development of the individual workers and the service. |

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| Minutes of Staff Meetings | |
| **Summary** | Staff Meetings are held regularly and are increasingly now held within the office space. This has led to more teamwork and cohesion in practice.  The meetings allow for information to be cascaded both from and to senior managers. There has also been a greater focus on performance within the meetings and at least once a month a performance meeting is held within the teams to consider the data provided from CHARMS recordings.  Team meetings are well attended and valued across the service. |
| **Comments** | The service believes that face to face meetings have proven to be beneficial for the individuals and teams. they take place on the majority of the time within the office environment and often include team building activities such as bring and share lunches. We are supportive and understanding that Covid changed the norm and or priorities for all staff and use flexibility when and where appropriate. |

# OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE FOSTERING AGENCY

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| Marketing & Recruitment | |
| Summary | The recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a focused priority in our Recruitment and Marketing Strategy and Sufficiency Action Plan. This year we have recruited 17 new mainstream fostering households which equated to an additional 23 placements. This was shortfall of 8 fostering placements as we did not achieve our target of 30 fostering placements.  With a national shortage of foster carers set against the increasing numbers of children in care we continue to recruit and retain our foster carers in a very challenging environment. Other challenges experienced in the recruitment of foster carers include:   * Cost of Living crisis * Increased employment opportunities * Working at home/availability of space * Change in personal circumstances * Age of carer and opting to retire     We continue to look at new and innovative ways to recruit foster carers and the Trust remains committed to placing children in Connected Persons arrangements. We require a wider variety of placements available, including foster carers from diverse backgrounds with a range of experiences so that they can better support the needs of the children and improve their outcomes. The Trust extended the offer that was provided for staff to foster carers, allowing them to have access Viv-up benefits, which brings additional savings. And as noted previously they have also invested in increases in fees for foster carers and savings for children.  We have built and implemented our Foster Birmingham ‘stand-alone’ website which provides information on recruiting foster carers. Phase 2 is now under construction for 2023/24 which will have a secure log in area for approved foster carers hosting a ‘one stop shop’ of information and services that support their fostering role. We have also raised the profile of our Fostering Service as an agency of choice with our new ‘Foster Birmingham’ logo and rebranding of our marketing materials / communications and the refreshing of our Information Events and Skills to Foster training.  We have engaged with faith groups, LGBT+ group, schools, libraries, supermarkets, shopping centres and held recruitment events. We have also increased the proportion of carers from minority ethnic backgrounds with targeted events in those communities.  To increase the number of specialist carers we have undertaken specific recruitment campaigns including ‘Step Up Carers’ and we have further campaigns scheduled in 2023/24 for Emergency carers, Children with Disabilities and we are developing our Parent and Child Scheme.  The Recruitment Ambassadors group was refreshed in 2022-2023 and we now have 11 active Ambassadors assisting in all manners of recruitment from publicity and marketing, to buddying calls, to attending information events, and assisting in the Skills to Foster Training.  In 2023-2024 we hope to replicate this success within the Support and Retention workstream. As part of our Support and Retention strategy we have an annual calendar of events including ‘Welcome to Fostering’ event for newly approved carers, ‘Family Fun Day’ and Foster Carer Award Celebration and we have received positive feedback from our foster carers about these events.  The recruitment spreadsheet is used to track all recruitment and assessment activity and to measure our performance month on month. This is used to inform our marketing strategy and communication plan. In addition, monthly recruitment meetings are held to discuss progress against the strategy and agree any new initiatives, what activities are working and what activities are not. Our data has informed us that the main sources of referrals are via the website and word of mouth.  For 2023/24 we will be re-writing our Support and Retention Strategy and we will continue to strengthen our current services including:   * Wrap around support * Training offer * Support Groups * Independent Advice and Support * Discounts * Competitive payments * Celebratory Events * The fostering service will be recruiting an apprentice to support recruitment   We will continue to work in partnership with our ‘Team around the Child’ services and external providers / advisors and foster carers to inform our practice and strategy. We look forward to the year ahead and remain hopeful in meeting our targets.  **Transferring Foster Carers**  Stages 1 and 2 continue to run concurrently when foster carers are transferring from another agency unless there are exceptional reasons. For Foster Carers Transferring from other Agencies a fast-track process is in place which has shorter timescales as we know they have already been assessed and approved. We are often able to have sight of their assessment and can make informed decisions by reading their current fostering file.  Transfer protocol meetings are held to ensure seamless transfer for the foster carer and compliance with fostering regulations.  This year we had three foster carer households transfer from other agencies. However, in the in the first quarter of 2023/24 we have seen a marked increase with two fostering households. Reasons given include lack of support from the agency; long gaps between placements; and travelling long distances to take children to school, appointments, or family time.  **Friends and Family Foster Carers**  This year has seen a continued increase in the number of Friends and Family Foster Carers. The average weekly number of referrals remained high at 4.5 per week with a total of 234 referrals received throughout the year. With attendance at LPM and close links with Family Group Conference Service has improved the early notifications of potential referrals requiring assessments.  Referrals by Area including Connected Persons, SGO and Reg 24 – 1/4/22 to 31/3/23    **Family & Friend Carers Approvals at Panel**  The reporting period has seen sustained high levels of panel activity for the Family and Friends service. This year we have seen 74 Family and Friends foster carer approved at panel, compared to the 71 we had approved at the end of year in 2023.  We also had 26 carers presented to Panel who were not approved and there were also 118 assessments that had proceeded but then the applicant withdrew, or they were closed at varying stages of the process.  Overall, the number of children placed with a Family and Friend Carer has increased this year from 186 to 274. This is a 32% increase over the 12-month period and our family and friends’ placements are now 13.3% of the overall children in care population.  The target is to have 20% of the overall children in care population within a family and friends placement. There have been several occasions this period whereby assessments have concluded SGO and so provided children and young people with greater permanence but not contributed to the overall percentage of children in family and friends fostering arrangements.  The Trust has completed regional benchmarking in terms of panel, to ensure we are innovative and productive. This is strengthened by having regular meetings with our panel chairs. The demands on panels increasing have resulted in an investment to increase the number of panels provided to ensure children can live with their family and friends. All fostering panel members also have received updated equipment to ensure we can plan to use CHARMS processes in the next quarter. |
| Training | |
| Summary | Staff  Staff continue to access the range of training and learning available through the Birmingham Children’s Trust learning and Development Academy; training and development programmes; practice learning information; resources and forums. We have successfully embedded CHARMS as an information recording system for the fostering service. Staff are starting to understand how their recording and reporting feeds into quality assurance and performance monitoring, and this has been a change in culture that’s been embedded by the majority.  Some of the staff trainings have included:   * What makes a good annual review * The voice of the child * Increased guidance on practice * Benchmarking guidance for auditors * Learning from tabletop reviews * Reflective practice * Challenging and courageous conversations * Serious case reviews * Mind Of My Own application – the voice of the child * SGO support * Conducting and completing assessment - Form F/C training   The Fostering Agency has a staff training plan will be considered for 2023/24, following the focus for this reporting year being on CHARMS practice, life story work, PACE, Relationship models of practice and improving on quality of reporting. All staff have access via weekly updates on staff training, this includes the mandatory annual training on data protection and safeguarding.  All members of staff in the fostering service will have individual PDP training plans that focuses on their learning, and this is considered during appraisal. The service invests in the focused learning and where required does provide training from external sources in recognition of a specialised field of social work.  The service made a conscious decision in the final quarter to not complete bitesize training. This was due to understanding the priorities of embedding practice and listening to the staff in what works well for them as practitioners. When stating this we know the staff have completed a variety of self-learning through the access to the Trust’s training programme, community care inform and research in practice.  Shared learning and reflective discussion are also facilitated in Team Meetings with Group supervision and topics have included managing the relationships between foster carers and supervision social workers when there are allegations; serious case reviews; the language that we use with children and young people; and the experiences of children and young people in care. We also hold quarterly Tabletop Reviews with Managers and Senior Practitioners and look at the learning from Complaints, Allegations and Standards of Care to inform and improve our practice and future developments.  The delivery plan attached within the appendices will be included in the next year’s quarter one report, along with the Statement of Purpose.  Foster Carer Training Offer  The Fostering Agency has a lead training coordinator and Support worker who delivers most of the refresher training and core programmes and training for foster carers. At the end of this quarter there are some changes in the lead coordinator, this will provide the service time to reflect and consider the evolution of the role and tasks completed. This is possible as the variety of training provided to Birmingham foster carers both internally and externally is extensive and therefore it is believed this role could conduct more in relation to consultation and or support groups for sons and daughters of foster carers, understanding that these could be the future of fostering for the agency.  Training is now booked and captured within the CHARMS system; this includes the recording of TSD. It permits both carers and social workers to consider the skills and development of each foster carer and or the full register. TSD is an area of focus for the service and continues to be monitored within performance meetings and reports. The following table summarises the TSD progress of our carers, split by approval type.   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Type** | **Not Started** | **In Progress** | **Complete** | | Mainstream | 9 | 24 | 306 | | EDT | 0 | 1 | 4 | | Connected | 76 | 71 | 53 | | **TOTAL** | **85** | **96** | **363** |   Foster carers have continued to attend training that is both mandatory but also important to their role in being skilled to care for the individual needs of the children in their care.  We have significant commitment and investment for foster carer training in 2023/24 as it is understood to be important for carers and children in turn. In 2023/24 the training also will include specific training for parent and baby placements.  **Mandatory Training**  During the reporting period 1st April 22 to 31st March 23 there has been an increased focus on getting our foster carers to comprehensively complete the outlined mandatory training. Over the past 12 months the outcome of our mandatory training is as follows:  Increase in figures completed across both Connected and mainstream for First Aid.  61% of all carers hold Safeguarding certificate, including 83% of Mainstream carers.  77% of all foster carers hold a First Aid Certificate.  The percentages of mandatory training courses attended continues to increase, with positive feedback from foster carers. This has been achieved by a targeted approach from the supervising social worker and challenge at the annual review. The training information is all now kept in CHARMS and therefore accessibly visible to both social worker and foster carer.  We will continue to increase the future plans for foster carer training and invest in foster carers training, with the availability of external placements and the training choice. In 2023-24 the service will be refreshing the offer for foster carer training and considering how across the service we look at training methods for all learners and carers.  The Agency has a comprehensive training offer including an on-line training directory for foster carers – with ACEducation online Courses. |
| Annual Foster Home Reviews | |
| Summary | Annual reviews have been a function of the service that has had change in terms of process and procedure. It had been recognised that this was an area of vulnerability within the agency and one that required the changes to take place.  The new process has immediately demonstrated that the approval status of foster carers ‘continued approval’ is being made in a timely manner. Previously there were concerns about annual reviews being completed within the 12-month period. There is no longer an ADM, unless there are plans to increase and or change the foster carers approval.  The annual review officers have been successful in providing challenge and focus on all foster carers annual reviews.  Since January the annual review officers have been reporting on occasions when reviews have been cancelled by themselves, due to not being ready and available. There have been 18 reportable incidences, of these the majority of 12 were due to the supervising social worker not completing the report, 2 were due to go to panel, 2 due to the social worker being sick and no one being available to present the review and one provided insufficient evidence for the appraisal. All of the information is presented below:  The Annual Review Officers are also quality assuring the reports presented for the annual review meeting to take place in an independent way. The following chart shows how the reports have been graded. When considering the quality assurance of documents, the Annual Review Officers found that between January and March 2023, 69% of the reports graded were believed to be good or outstanding, 23% were requires improvement and 8% inadequate. This information is available to managers and heads of service for them to consider findings and the Annual Review Officer will also raise any issues to the team manager. In the next reporting year Annual Review Officers will meet with Heads of Service to discuss findings and patterns.  In terms of improving annual reviews, we have had staff training on what makes a good review and we have learnt from the Agency Decision Makers views on areas of focus and learning.  The annual review officers escalate issues to the team managers directly and any themes through the team manager of resources for these to be shared through performance and practice meetings with the managers and Heads of service. This allows for transparency and future growth in improving the service.  As the service and number of carers grows, the capacity of the Annual Review Officer reduces. It has been clear that it is the role and responsibility of the supervising social worker to ensure timescales are maintained and reports provide evidence of a carer continuing to meet the fostering National Minimum Standards. We have considered ways of increasing capacity, and this has been improved via the use of CHARMS and focused reports as well as the actions of business support to the review process.  We anticipate further improvement in the performance of annual reviews as we increase our focus on the practice surrounding CHARMS for the process and under the new procedures.  **Number of Annual Reviews Completed Apr 22 to Mar 23**  The number reviews submitted to the agency decision maker for decisions from 1st April 2022 to 31 March 2023 was 327. However, including the 84 reviews heard at panel including first annual reviews the total number of annual reviews completed in this 12-month period was 411. This is an increase of 31% on last year and indicative of the work we have focused on to increase and improve on the completion of annual reviews within the 12-month period.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **REPORTING QUARTER** | **ANNUAL REVIEWS COMPLETED** | | Quarter 1 | 83 | | Quarter 2 | 129 | | Quarter 3 | 93 | | Quarter 4 | 106 | | **TOTAL** | **411** |   The breakdown of annual reviews per approval type and completion percentage can be seen below:   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **APPROVAL TYPE** | **ANNUAL REVIEWS COMPLETED** | **COMPLETION %** | | Mainstream Foster Carers | 257 | 75.5% | | Connected Persons | 149 | 80% | | EDT Foster Carers | 5 | 100% | | **TOTAL** | **411** | **77.5%** |   The annual review Agency Decision Maker has provided us with some themes and patterns and information on the voice of the child and foster carer from her time as the review decision maker. These were provided to the service in regular intervals to ensure impact and learning was embraced.  Our foster carers stated in their reviews that:   * 10 years with me and he has a job and thriving * Changes of children social worker can be difficult * Training was good * I can get hold of my SSW * My SSW is so supportive   We know from this that children have said:  When am I going home?  I have my own room we are going to decorate.  I like it here.  I am fed up telling my story to another worker  worker.  I feel good.  This is my family.  I will miss you. The ADM reports numerous strengths found in the foster service annual reviews. A selection are as below:  * Commitment to Improvement /development from fostering workers/ senior management * The challenge and commitment of Annual Reviewing Officers is apparent. * There is evidence of the promotion of contact/family time * The service accepts constructive advice and have made changes to ensure positive impacts for foster carers and Birmingham children * Sharing of research * ADM was integrated and involvement in service development days * Being able to evidence that recommendations of the last review have been completed.   The areas for progress identified by the ADM were:   * A variance in managerial practice in the QA process * Lack of feedback from CSWs and IRO required improvement * LADO processes are confusing. * Clearer process for identifying carers with firearms   The service has made differences following all feedback, for example managers and staff have had training on what makes a good annual review. The heads of service in fostering and the safeguarding teams have met to improve the response rate for feedback from IRO’s and children’s social workers and the LADO process will be one the service will strengthen in the next year with the use of impact chronologies and a change in our internal process for monitoring. We also introduced a firearms guidance with an assessment certificate to ensure we had completed the necessary checks were in place for any carer who held a firearm or BB gun etc in their home environment.  The next reporting period will be able to provide information on the timescales for each stage of a foster carers annual review being completed, including whether or not the service received written reports for triangulation from other professionals. We know the children social work teams are required to increase the response rates as this is integral for foster carers growth and the level of care our children and young people receive. The Head of Service continues to work with respective Heads of Service to improve the returns from other professionals such as Children Social Workers and Independent Review Officers. |
| Changes of Approval / Exemptions | |
| Summary | **Changes of Approval**  In quarter 4 we had 24 changes of approval – 9 on the older temporary template and 15 on the new template. Over the course of the year we had 130 forms submitted in total, as follows:  Permanent Changes of Approval recorded under the old system were for the following reasons:  Q1   * Increase funding level from 3 to 4 = 4 * Change in approved placements = 10 * Total = 14   Q2   * Change from mainstream to EDT = 1 * Change in approved placements = 6 * Total = 7   Q3   * Change from fostering adoption = 1 * Change in approved placements =7 * Total = 8   Under the new procedure in Q4 they were made for the following reasons   * Add Long Term approval = 1 * To be respite only = 1 * Change in approved placements = 13 * Total = 15   **Changes of Approvals at panel**  During the reporting period covering 1st April 22 to 31st March 23 there were 35 carers that had changes of approval recommended as part of their annual reviews or were referred to panel and approved.  Total Exemptions granted from 1st April 22 to 31st March 23   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **REPORTING QUARTER** | **NUMBER OF INTERNAL EXEMPTIONS** | **NUMBER OF EXTERNAL EXEMPTIONS** | | Quarter 1 | 9 | 10 | | Quarter 2 | 17 | 18 | | Quarter 3 | 7 | 17 | | Quarter 4 | 8 | 12 | | **TOTAL** | **41** | **57** |   During the 12-month reporting period 98 exemptions were received – an increase of 22 from the previous year - of which 41% were for internal exemptions and 58% were for exemptions received from external fostering agencies, an increase of 4% on last year.  Exemptions and the process of making them will be considered in the next quarter. There will be a focus on considering the independence of the decision making due to our agency being an IFA attached to the Trust. This is under Head of Service consideration and changes will be made in quarter one 2023/24. |
| Disruptions- early unplanned endings | There were 22 unplanned endings of foster placements in 2022/23 an increase of 2 compared 2021/22. The Fostering Agency contributes to the Trust wide, Learning from Disruption action plan, to improve practice such as developing the use of foster carer impact chronologies.  Total Unplanned Endings from April 22 to March 23   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **REPORTING QUARTER** | **NUMBER OF PLACEMENT UNPLANNED ENDINGS** | | Quarter 1 | 4 | | Quarter 2 | 5 | | Quarter 3 | 5 | | Quarter 4 | 8 | | **TOTAL** | **22** |   The learning from unplanned endings is one across the Trust. There are some similarities to what has been found when completing tabletop learning, such as impact chronologies, which solidifies the service need to improve upon how information is recorded and used in practice reflection.  We know that impact chronologies help us identify significant events, history, strengths, vulnerabilities, patterns and how they have impacted on the child or carer. In turn this should help us have a better understanding of the child/carer and their life journey.  Another learning was one regarding children social work teams and how they utilise professional assessments and information to inform placements on the child’s needs and therefore the skills required for the foster carer to meet those needs. There was a greater need for all professionals from child social worker to foster carer to understand the child’s diagnosis and what this means for that child and their care needs.  The last learning was for sustainability meetings to be held early on with a clear agreed action plan. It was found that if there was no action plan or it was not reviewed, the support to the placement would not be effective.  Professional curiosity & the voice of the child is always a learning subject for us to improve upon as social workers and carers. The Trust and fostering agency want us to challenge ourselves and others when a child or placement is described as being settled/happy to make sure everyone has the same understanding of what this actually means for the child. This is a subject the fostering team are going to complete training in to consider together in the staff training programme for 2023-24.  Early ending learning is discussed in managers meetings to share best practice, learning and themes and patterns regarding fostering across the Trust. This ensures we learn from early endings across all children’s fostering placements. |
| Quality Assurance | During this period, audit activity has focused upon considering the embedding of practice standards and the implementation of new systems. With the successful implementation of CHARMS we can produce more performance data in any one moment in time. This allows the monthly auditing to consider more qualitative information than quantitative as it has in this reporting period.  Team managers have spent time in the final quarter of this period closing the loop on the findings from audits and the tasks requested and required. As a service we believe it is important to ensure that follow up actions and are completed, this ensures greater quality in practice and should in turn impact positively on foster carers and children.  Team managers and Senior Practitioners continue to complete audits and dip samples, as well as using the reporting from CHARMS to triangulate the reported information from social workers and what is recorded in the system. The reporting directly from CHARMS by team managers will continue to increase as confidence and abilities increase.  The improvement of management oversight and using differing methods to monitor continues to be strengthened across the service. This informs our development planning and continues to inform all staff about the expected standards of the service.  Fostering panels provide a level of scrutiny and quality assurance as part of their monitoring role. The panel advisors, members, chairs, and ADM’s report on the quality of the reports and documents that are presented to fostering panel. They also consider the statutory requirements set out for a fostering service when making recommendations and decisions. This is independent and can shape changes in the service delivery. Findings from fostering panels are reported on within annual reports.  The fostering team managers and senior managers are committed to quality assurance and can see the value in reviewing and monitoring the work completed and achievements of the service. This allows for a whole service understanding of what is working well and what is working not so well and allows for working together collectively.  At the start of April, the quality assurance within the service demonstrated that the service required a period of reflection and consideration on the changes achieved and any learning. This was integral to service planning and delivery and resulted in having a delivery plan rather than development plan. The aim of the service is to provide a child focused fostering service, where foster carers are supported to care for Birmingham children using the framework of fostering regulations and the national minimum standards. We continue to use the quality assurance to shape the service and consider the views and needs of children, carers and staff. This information is shared across the service and forms a part of the delivery planning.  Audits completed within Family and Friends teams have identified common themes i.e., essential assessments/documents not being routinely uploaded onto Charms at point of transfer to support and supervision including Form C; assessments and reports in both parts of the service can be too lengthy with too much description rather than concise and analytical. The audit template for both assessment and support/supervision requires review and amendments as it doesn’t focus on the areas of practice within family and friends service that are essential to ensuring compliance, quality of performance and outcomes for carers and children.  Fostering assessments within the service are always quality assured by Team Managers, this includes assessments of prospective foster carers, foster carer annual reviews and standards of care reports.  In the third quarter of this year, the quality assurance continued to demonstrate a need to reflect and consider the changes achieved thus far. There has been an increase in the number of audits and auditors as Senior Practitioners were included into the programme of quality assurance.  Audits have been conducted on a thematic level; this has allowed for a more specific focus.  We continue to use quality assurance and auditing as a valuable tool to shape the service, consider needs for foster carers and children and to learn and grow. This information is shared across the service and forms a part of the delivery planning.  The achievements following quality assurance:   * Updated the quality assurance framework for the service * Completed a programme of bite size staff training sessions * Refreshed practice guidance on specific subjects * Provided CHARMS practice guidance notes * Produced guidance for auditors on grading and auditing files * Written and produced new policies and procedures * Updated forms and reporting systems * Annual away day – considered what makes a good annual review * Updated the change of approval process * New ways of panels sharing information and data * Adaptations to the matching forms: placement finding * Head of Service have clear overview and strategy to ensure forward planning     In the next year, quarter one the service are going to review the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance framework, in order to take stock and inform the scheduling of audits. Staff are now able to self-audit within the new system. |
| Foster carer support | The Agency continues to promote, provide and facilitate Foster Carers Support Development groups across the city within various geographical location. These have included Men who Foster, Step Up and Foster carers own children support groups. These are attended by carers on their own volition, as and when they wish. The feedback for all groups is that they are valued.  The service uses the principles of the mockingbird project, providing specific support and support groups with an advanced training for carers who are providing step up foster placements.  We are currently training carers to provide parent and child placements as we understand the expectations can be varied to ‘normal’ fostering to ensure we have a range of foster placements for Birmingham children. In the coming months we will also be considering placements for children with additional needs and the model our carers will need in terms of support to care for this group of children.  During this year we have developed more support groups for example for newly approved foster carers and foster carers caring for children with complex health and disabilities (co led with colleagues from the children with disabilities service).  In 2023/24 we will be considering operating a therapeutic hub, which will be an extension to the support and consultations foster carer receive from TESS. This is being developed considerably to ensure it has a true capacity to provide a team around the child approach that can be both reactive and proactive in supporting our foster carers and the children and young people in placement.  We value our foster carers and continue to formally recognise this through celebration evenings recognise achievements and informally through cards and tokens of appreciation. During this annual period we also had four carers be presented with OBEs.  BFCA/Foster Talk  During this period the Trust has a contract with both the BFCA charity and Foster Talk who both provide general support to cares and specific support when foster carers are going through an investigation process.  Carers are given the option of contacting either /or and membership to both is paid by the Agency. The partnership with BFCA is a very established arrangement and the charity fund raises for specific activities/events for Foster Carers. Regular ‘Development Forum’ meetings are held and the BFCA Executive committee support the Agency in review key policy documents.  The contract for foster carer support from Fostertalk and Fostering Network has been considered and reviewed to ensure we have one provider for foster carers and the service. From the 1st of June, this will be provided by Fostering Network.  This will provide additional value, along with local, regional and national opportunities that our service can be involved in, this included:   * Offer of 30 skills to foster places each year * Training audit- and offer to work with us to build upon this * Offer to complete a mock Inspection   During the year BFCA have provided:   * Advice and Support through texts/emails/Phone calls and WhatsApp group every day 24 hours * Quarterly newsletter for all foster carers * BFCA Foster Carers Ball had to be postponed to June 2022 * Monthly Buddy Groups- - offering a safe space for discussion * Provide training – with key speakers covering a range of subjects such as Tax & Benefits, Staying put and other related fostering topics. * Provide fun days, day trips and celebrations for all foster families * Support team – provides support, advocate and mediate over key issues offering solutions   In the next reporting period the support, advice and mediation services will be provided by Fostering Network. This is believed to be a positive move as we work with one provider to meet all of our needs. Fostering network have led good practice and this working relationship is one we look forward to in the future. |
| Foster Carer Files | Throughout the year there has ongoing improvement in this area, achieved through the continued monthly review of Foster Carers files tracked by the Team Managers to ensure that each foster carer has all of the required paperwork for the child in placement along with all statutory requirements in relation to Supervision, Annual Review, Health and Safety Visits and Unannounced visits are in timescale. Case file auditing over the past year evidence where the service requires greater focus and also the continuing improvements in compliance and in the quality of recording and practice.  Gaps in outstanding paperwork from Area social work teams are followed up and escalated if not received promptly. The functionality of Charms will enable foster carers to access and review the Child’s paperwork by securely logging into the foster carer portal ensuring that it is readily accessible.  The monthly performance and Challenge meeting reviews compliance with statutory timescales at a service team and individual level. These meetings are becoming more informative as the reportable information includes all aspects of statutory requirements and the purpose and focus of the meetings evolve.  Further embedding a performance and quality assurance culture, ensuring consistency of good and outstanding practice remains a key priority for 2023/24. |
| OLA (Other Local Authority) Placements | During the year the Agency has provided placements for 5 children from other local authorities in accordance with the West Midlands Framework Agreement (Se2 table) of which 3 children were still in placement as of 31st March 2022.  OLA Children with Trust Carers – April 22 to March 23   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **LOCAL AUTHORITY** | **NUMBERS OF CHILDREN** | | Solihull | 2 | | Devon | 1 | | Stoke on Trent | 2 | | **TOTAL** | **5** |   The two children from Stoke on Trent were in fact siblings and they have been in place with their current mainstream foster carers since September 2022.  The two children from Solihull were single placements. One child has been in placement for nearly 2.5 years. The other child has been in placement for just over 4 months.  The other placement from Devon has been with his current foster carer since August 2022 and remains in place.  We are considerate with these placements in ensuring the children can remain if relationships are built. We also consider our own sufficiency and matching children and foster carers when children from other authorities are placed with our foster carers. |
| Finance | The Fostering Agency had an annual revenue operating budget of £20.12m for 2022-23 which fully funds all costs and activities of the Agency. The Fostering Agency is one component service of the Birmingham Children’s Trust which had an operating budget of £227.1m. The Trust is a wholly owned Company of Birmingham City Council.  The Fostering agency is not facing any specific financial challenges and its financially viable. There is no risk of the organisation failing for financial reasons.  Monthly finance reporting is made to the Fostering Agency’s Executive Management Team and a quarterly report is made to the Trust Board and also to the City Council as part of our contractual requirements. |
| ‘Staying Put’  Arrangements | The Birmingham Children’s Trust encourages children and young people to achieve permanence wherever possible and this includes promoting staying put as an option for young people to remain with their foster carers. When considering sufficiency, the fostering agency regularly considers the ages of children in placement with their foster carers and ensures that the option has been explored with the foster carer. There has been 346 historical (closed) staying put arrangements since the inception of the scheme.  We have a number of fostered young people that were eligible to stay with their foster families upon reaching the age of 18. A staying put arrangement is different from a foster placement. The young person who is to be staying put must be a former foster child who is no longer a looked after child. Birmingham Children’s Trust facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for former fostered young people until they reach the age of 21 or 25 years whilst attending full-time education.    Once a staying put arrangement has been agreed via the placement planning and child in care review process, the foster carer will no longer be acting in the capacity of a foster carer for that young person, they are classed as their former foster carer and the status of the placement for that young person’s changes from one of a fostering placement to a staying put arrangement as this arrangement is not governed by the fostering service regulations. Young people under a staying put arrangement will continue to receive support, from the 18+ Care Leavers Service.    As of 31st March 2023, Birmingham Children’s Trust – Fostering Agency had 34 Young people aged 18+ in ‘Staying Put’ arrangements with internal Foster Carers. The service continues to work with and identify when staying put may be an option for the young people in placement with Birmingham foster carers. The breakdown of gender and ethnicity for the 34 was as follows:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **GENDER** | **NUMBERS** | | Male | 16 | | Female | 18 | | **TOTAL** | **34** |   52% of the young people in a staying put arrangement were female, the remaining 48% were male.  Ethnicity breakdown of the Young People in a staying put arrangement was as follows:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **ETHNICITY TYPE** | **NUMBERS** | | Black African | 4 | | Black African Caribbean | 1 | | Bangladeshi | 1 | | Mixed – White & Asian | 3 | | Mixed – White & Black Caribbean | 2 | | Mixed – Other | 2 | | Indian | 1 | | Pakistani | 3 | | White UK | 14 | | Other – Asian | 2 | | Vietnamese | 1 | | **TOTAL** | **34** |   The service continues to provide specific support for carers who are staying put, this includes for the young person in placement as well as to ensure we support carers to return to fostering. |

# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF FOSTER CARE PROVIDED BY THE FOSTERING AGENCY

Regulation 35 (1) also requires that the Registered Person must maintain a system for (b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency:

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| The Agency continues to review all aspects of the service. Additional capacity has been secured to progress this project. The Annual Regulation 35 report and Service Delivery Plan approved at Executive Committee on 13th July 2023.  The revised Service Development Plan has been compiled to outline and track the ongoing work we will prioritise during the forthcoming year. This will be regularly reviewed in Management Meetings. During the 2022/2023 a number of identified activities have been delivered as outlined below. We will monitor the impact on the outcome for our children, foster carers and in the quality of practice. There are a number of key initiatives that are planned to take place during the forthcoming six months which include:   * + Launch of the fostering service new therapeutic support offer   + Recruitment of an education support worker for fostering which sits within the Virtual School   + Launch of the Information portal for foster carers/ Guardians   + Explore the mockingbird support model   + Develop a fostering retention strategy and action plan   + Explore further the proposed regional fostering collaboration approach |

# AVAILABILITY OF THE REPORT

Regulation 35 (2) requires that the Registered Person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request to any local authority:

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| The Agency provides a 3-monthly report to the Birmingham Children’s Trust Executive Board and an annual Regulation 35 report to Ofsted and to the Board. These reports assist the Board to monitor the management and outcomes of the service and to satisfy themselves that the Provider is complying with the conditions of registration [Schedule 6 of the Fostering Regulations 2012 requires the Fostering Service to monitor and report on specific areas of the work it undertakes. This report, therefore, reports on these regulatory activities. |

# CONSULTATION

Regulation 35 (3) requires that the system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority.

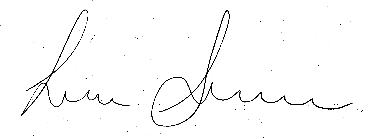
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| CONSULTATIONS WITH FOSTER PARENTS AND CHILDREN |
| The Fostering Agency consults with and gathers the views of Foster Carers in many ways throughout the year. This can be through supervisions, unannounced visits. Gathering views at training and development sessions, through the contributions BFCA who compile information from carers throughout the year, through foster care survey and through the involvement in foster carer support/working groups and consultation events. In additional we had additional feedback at the time of the Ofsted inspectors who gathered views from foster carers as part of the Inspection.  Our annual survey was completed, however did not have a large number of foster carers complete the survey. We acknowledge that the surveys can be time consuming, and the majority of our foster carers are busy with caring for children.  What we do know is that we have a number of successful support groups, including those for sons and daughters and men who foster. These support groups provide us with information and views in real time and are integral to our service development.  We learnt the following feedback from our survey which concluded in January 2023:  Foster carers:  Overall, the majority of carers have good working relationships with both their child’s social worker and their supervising social worker. The majority of carers are satisfied with the advice and support they receive from their child’s social worker, their supervising social worker, as well as from other professionals, though satisfaction has dipped particularly for TESS, CAMHS, Virtual School and Leaving Care services.   * Visits are happening more frequently than 2021 **- 91%** **visit** at **6 weeks** or less; **45%** at **4 weeks** **↑** * **85%** of carers are satisfied with the **overall support** and advice received * Carers are **most satisfied** with support and advice around **health (94%) ↑** and **least satsfied** with **family time (81%)** * **88% - 94%** of carers agreed that the **BFA training** supports them to **effective carers**, is **easy to access** and of **good quality**, and receive training updates   When carers were asked about how long they will foster for they stated the following:  This is important to us future planning and is encouraging that one of the highest reported timescales was to continue to foster for 10 or more years. We also learnt that those in the 9% of leaving under a year were due to poor health and or retirement.  We know from the service, and we hear that foster carers would like more stable children’s social workers and that these social workers would consider and consult with carers when making care arrangements for children, especially that of family time. This information has been shared by the Head of Service with the Heads of service for children’s social workers to improve communications and understanding of the competing demands on our foster carers.  We also know that our foster carers are listened to and valued by fostering social workers. This is depicted in the information below:  We know our carers value the TESS service and find this a useful resource:  This is opposed to them reporting to a CAMHS service as 50% supportive and straight forward to access. Therefore, we know as a service that Birmingham TESS service is integral to our team around the child and our approach is successful.  Children’s views and survey:  The majority of children who completed the survey stated:   * They always feel safe and comfortable with their foster family and feel accepted and part of their foster family. * There was nothing that they didn’t like about their foster family. * They sometimes feel listened to. * They never feel unhappy with their foster family. * Knew who their fostering family social worker   In the next quarter we will be working closely with our partners in Participation, as we know our children do not like to be asked the same questions or expected to complete several surveys per year and we would like to ensure we include fostering in regular surveying of the child’s voice on placement. The use of MOMO has a commitment across the fostering service and the Trust as a way of effectively communicating with children. |
| CONSULTATIONS WITH THE CHILDREN’S TRUST |
| We have strengthened and continue to strengthen our working relationship with the Children’s Trust and across the Partnership to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people are achieved. The nature of the relationship means we do not face many of the challenges that other Independent Foster Agencies face as we have close working relationships and operate within one single case records system. Regular meetings are held with the IRO service, Area Head of Service (Safeguarding and Children in Care), CAFCASS and the LADO to ensure ongoing communication and positive relationships. The IRO service also works closely to provide regular feedback around attendance and outcomes from children in care reviews.  The fostering service also attends regular meetings with other local authorities and the Independent Fostering Agency forum. Birmingham Fostering Agency has been working with Bradford’s Trust and supporting them with the journey of being IFA and learnings on statutory reporting. We have also been working with Liverpool around the use of relationship-based care and the step-down pod model. Brighton and Hove authority have had significant support in their journey with the use of the CHARMS system.  The Agency also works closely with the Birmingham Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (formerly LSCB) to ensure that children are safe and protected from harm. This allows for professional consultation within a timely manner. |

This report was prepared by:



Tracy Collins – Fostering Head of Service (Registered Manager)

Approved by:



Lisa Jamieson - Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and Commissioning (Responsible Individual)

Presented and approved by the Trust Executive on 13 July 2023.

APPENDICES:

Appendix One - Fostering Regulations



Appendix Two – F&F Performance Analysis Q4 End of Year



Appendix Three – Completed Delivery plan



Appendix Four – Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency Ofsted Inspection Report



Appendix Five – Birmingham Children’s Trust Safer Recruitment guidelines



Appendix Six – Fostering development and Staff training



1. Ofsted National Statistics: ‘Fostering in England 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022’ ([www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted)) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ofsted have not split this data by sector [↑](#footnote-ref-3)