



INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025



Contents

Contents	2
1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK	4
2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
3. ANALYSIS OF FOSTERING DATA.....	8
Introduction	8
Mainstream & Kinship Capacity.....	8
Carers and Placements.....	9
Mainstream Occupancy	10
Summary of Children in Placement	12
Age profile of the children in placement	13
Child and Carer Ethnicity	14
Foster carer Age profile.....	15
Foster Carer Geographical Location.....	16
4. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS	18
Schedule 6 Monitoring Events.....	18
Compliance in relation to each child placed with foster parents, with the child’s care plan	19
Accidents, injuries and illnesses	20
Medication, medical treatment and first aid	21
Absent & Missing Children	23
Measures of control, restraint, or discipline	25
Schedule 7 Notifiable Events	26
Allegations	27
Foster Carer’s Documentation.....	29
Complaints	30
Compliments	32
Provision of Education.....	35
5. RECORDS OF ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS	37
Mainstream Recruitment Activity.....	37

Kinship Assessment Activity.....	41
Fostering Panel Activity.....	41
Records of Fostering Panel Minutes.....	42
ADM Timescales.....	45
Panel Feedback.....	45
6. OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE FOSTERING AGENCY.....	47
Marketing.....	47
Training.....	48
Foster Carer Reviews.....	52
Variations/Exemptions.....	53
Early endings.....	55
Quality Assurance.....	57
Other Local Authority Children.....	62
‘Staying Put’ Arrangements.....	63
Reg 24 Placements.....	64
Foster to Adopt.....	65
Staffing.....	66
6. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT.....	68
7. AVAILABILITY OF THE REPORT.....	69
8. CONSULTATION.....	69
Appendices.....	70

1. 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.

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 a summary of the progress of the Agency for the fiscal year 2024/25.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As of 31st March 2025, Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency had 597 Foster Carers approved for 1048 placements. We had a greater number of children in placement this year and were also able to increase capacity through our existing households with changes of approval.

Panel approved 26 mainstream carer households and 63 kinship carer households, providing a combined 138 placements this year.

The proportion of children in care in Kinship placements increased to 16%. The proportion of internally fostered children in Kinship placements is now 45.1%.

The occupancy rate at the end of March was 91%, of available placements- over the past 12 months we have consistently been over 90%.

We remain below the national figure of mainstream foster carers ceasing to foster (5%) at 2.9% , but know we need to do more to retain and support our foster carers.

The total number of SGO's granted this year is 44 - this is a decrease from last year which is due a slowing in the progress of cases in quarter 4 while wide ranging changes to SGO processes are being made across the Trust.

This year we converted 7.1% of enquiries and 56% of registrations of interest into fully approved foster carers.

This year we have stepped down 6 children, which is 1 more than last year. This delivers potential savings of £451,200 and has provided stable placements for those young people.

We continue to have consistently low rates of fostered children classified as NEET, going missing from the foster home and of restraint or measures of control being administered by foster carers.

We have no concerns in respect of our oversight of schedule 7 notifiable events, section 47 investigations or allegations against our foster carers.

There has continued to be a strong focus on fostering sufficiency, with changes being made in how we monitor the effectiveness of our marketing and recruitment and retention strategy.

Priorities and improvements

The fostering service continues to be committed to Birmingham foster carers to ensure children and young people have an aspirational future and can live with local foster carers. The service has a strong focus on sufficiency, ensuring as much as possible that Birmingham children and young people can live with Birmingham foster carers, using the clear recruitment and retention strategy. We are committed to provide a high level of support to our approved foster carers in order to strengthen their skills and maximise the number of children in their care. There is a focus on the growth of our family and friend foster carers, understanding that this should be the first consideration for children who cannot remain with their parent(s).

In October 2024 Foster Birmingham received Ofsted for a full inspection. The outcomes were very positive for the service as we received a "strong good" overall, and good in all three categories (please refer to Appendix 3 for the full report).

- Overall experiences and progress of children and young people
- How well children and young people are helped and protected
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Inspectors were able to see how children in foster care are benefitting from living in 'stable' and 'safe' homes where they feel part of a family, with their diversity, difference and identity celebrated. They also found that foster carers feel positive about the support they receive from Foster Birmingham, led by a skilled, experienced and long-standing leadership and management team.

Birmingham Childrens Trust have been working with consultants Newton-Europe on our Trust 2025 programme which is designed to improve support for children, young people and families by providing earlier help and prioritising relationship-based approaches. It aims to achieve better outcomes and experiences. Fostering Sufficiency is one of the workstreams and we are focusing on increasing the number of successful fostering enquiries, reducing de-registrations and ensuring we are fully utilising the foster carers we have. We have reviewed our recruitment and retention processes and our governance arrangements and now have an infrastructure in place where there is greater data visibility and targeted approaches, and we have seen improvements with carer utilisation and capacity.

We are all passionate and committed to delivering a high-quality fostering service that ensures children and young people can flourish when living with our foster carers and we know this requires a high level of support and supervision. We have succeeded this year in continuously improving our performance data and culture for performance and quality assurance. This allows us to have greater monitoring, scrutiny and an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service.

We know that nationally and regionally based on the feedback from children, young people and foster carers that Fostering Agencies are no longer referring to foster carers as 'respite' carers. This is understandable when you consider the definition of the word in its truest sense and the negative connotations that come with it. We met with our respite carers and then made the decision to change the title of our Respite carers to 'Support Foster Carers' and from 01/04/25 this came into effect.

We have increased our therapeutic offer through the commissioning of a two-year contract with Meadows Psychology Services Ltd. They are offering support to our foster carers and staff with therapeutic approaches and interventions via clinical psychology consultations. The aim being to develop therapeutic understanding, support placement stability and ultimately achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their carers. This is supplementary to Birmingham Childrens Trust Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS) offer.

We have created a traffic light system for each carer which is recorded in CHARMS by Supervising Social Workers to identify those carers that are at risk of de-registration. This enables supervising social workers and managers to have earlier conversations with carers to prevent the de-registration and explore other opportunities to remain in fostering e.g. becoming a Support Foster Carer.

We continue to require a corporate parenting approach in attracting prospective foster carers and have had webinars with staff across the wider Birmingham Children's Trust emphasising that 'recruitment is everyone's responsibility'. We have introduced a refer a carer scheme for Trust staff who can receive £1000 if they recommend someone who goes on to be a carer. We recognise that the wider staff group has a critical role in raising the profile of fostering through engagement in their personal and professional networks / communities.

The ageing population of foster carers continues to be a concern. It is a risk most fostering agencies face as people often choose to become foster carers in the later stages of their life and or careers, and the most experienced carers will naturally be getting older. 20% of Birmingham Children's Trust foster carers are aged 60 years and above, although 52% of foster carers recruited this year were 49 or younger.

The service has a continued focus on practice to improve the availability of written documents for carers in a timely manner, such as care plans and placement plans. This year we have completed a review across the trust of the process of acquiring, storing and sharing these documents, and raised our reportable rate up to 80%. Carers assure us that they know the plans and needs of children and young people, however we continue to strive to ensure original documents are provided.

In the forthcoming months we will continue in our determination to embed and sustain the changes to the recruitment, retention and sufficiency of our foster carers. We will also be supporting and contributing to Birmingham Childrens Trust locality-based working as part of the Families First national agenda.

3. ANALYSIS OF FOSTERING DATA

Introduction

Birmingham Children Trust Fostering service is an Independent Foster Agency (IFA) established within the Birmingham Children's Trust. The Fostering Agency provides all types of foster placements, including 'Connected Persons' placements and foster to adopt, due to the status of the agency within Birmingham Children's Trust.

Mainstream & Kinship Capacity

Approval Type	2023/2024		2024/2025		Trend Carers	Trend Placements
	Carers	Placements	Carers	Placements		
Mainstream	340	620	330	643	-2.9%	3.7%
Kinship	215	326	236	366	9.8%	12.3%
TOTAL	555	946	566	1009	2.0%	6.7%

Foster Birmingham has successfully increased its capacity for placements in all areas this year. This is a result of concerted effort in every service area, as well as focussed development work led by BCT Trust 25 project with a goal to ensure we have sufficiency within our inhouse provision.

The trend across England is that services are experiencing high rates of mainstream carers to retirement and deregistration, outweighing the number of carers that can be recruited. The last nationally reported figure from Ofsted was a loss of 5%. In this context our loss of 2.9% is favourable, however we remain committed to doing all we can to recruit and retain mainstream carers and where they wish to retire exploring utilising their valuable skills in other areas such as being support carers.

We have gained 1 net mainstream placement this year as a result of focussed capacity reviews for every foster carer across the service, resulting in 27 additional placements from changes of approval and a further 26 placements gained from carers able to place additional children in sibling groups.

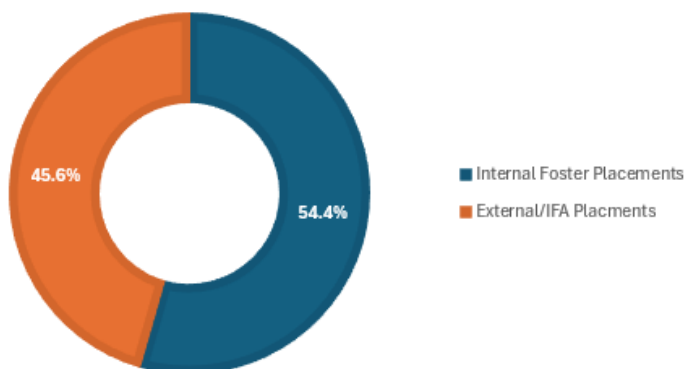
The growth of Kinship placements remains strong and allows a greater proportion of Birmingham children to live with their family or friends network. Positively there were 26 children who achieved permanence as they were granted Special Guardianship Orders. While this is 8 less than the previous year, this trend is accounted for by a Trust wide recalibration of process around SGOs as a part of Trust 25 which has slowed the progress of cases in the short term while new intelligence tools and initiatives are developed. These include the establishment of a new discharge from care team and an end-to-end case tracker.

Within the Fostering and Kinship services we are focussed on progressing our open SGO assessments, which numbered 48 on the 31 March 2025. Managers are working to identify priority cases and “quick wins” and engaging with partners across to unblock more complex assessments. The team have dedicated an experienced assessor to enable SGO plans to be achieved quicker through timely assessment and working closely with the children social work teams. This is an area the service will continue to place a high level of importance and monitoring.

The number of referrals being received by the Kinship service has declined slightly from 227 to 222. This as a result, in part, of more effective filtering of referrals at an early stage. We can also see CASS and ASTI services using early help and other interventions that prevents some cases going into court proceedings. While the number of assessments commencing has remained stable the service has been able to progress a higher proportion to approval. 78% of positive Kinship assessments were approved by the ADM this year, an increase of 10% from last year.

Carers and Placements

On 31st March 2025 we had an overall number of 597 Foster Carers approved to care for 1048 children or young people. Of these approved placements 833 were occupied on the reporting date, which is 54.4% of children in the care of Birmingham Childrens Trust.



Approval Type	Approved Carers			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Mainstream	320	326	319	317
Emergency	6	5	5	5
Step Up	11	8	7	8
Connected Persons	220	227	232	236
Temporary/Reg24	26	26	27	29
Foster to Adopt	5	7	4	2
TOTAL	588	599	594	597

Approval Type	Approved placements			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Mainstream	587	596	615	618
Emergency	16	13	13	13
Step Up	15	12	13	12
Kinship	334	342	348	366
Temporary/Reg24	38	37	37	37
Foster to Adopt	5	7	4	2
TOTAL	995	1007	1030	1048

Approval Type	Children in Place			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Mainstream	448	436	432	439
Emergency	2	9	6	5
Step Up	12	12	9	11
Kinship	311	320	330	338
Temporary/Reg24	38	35	40	38
Foster to Adopt	5	7	4	2
TOTAL	816	819	821	833

Mainstream Occupancy

On 31st March 2025 Birmingham Children's Trust had 444 children in mainstream fostering placements and the service had 596 mainstream fostering placements (including 12 Step Up). This is an occupancy rate of 91%.

Occupancy Total	31/03/2025
Placements	600
Children in Place	444
Vacancies	63
Unavailable	101
Occupancy Rate	90.8%

The average occupancy for the last year is 90.6% which is an increase of nearly 2% from last year and compares favourably to our statistical neighbours nationally who averaged 84% last year. Additionally, as indicated by the trend chart below, we have maintained a consistent level over the last 12 months with far fewer sharp drops around holidays and festival times than in previous years. The regular oversight from leaders and managers within the service is believed to be a driver to ensuring occupancy rates are high. We will continue in the coming year to forward planning and anticipate change with solutions to maintain high occupancy.



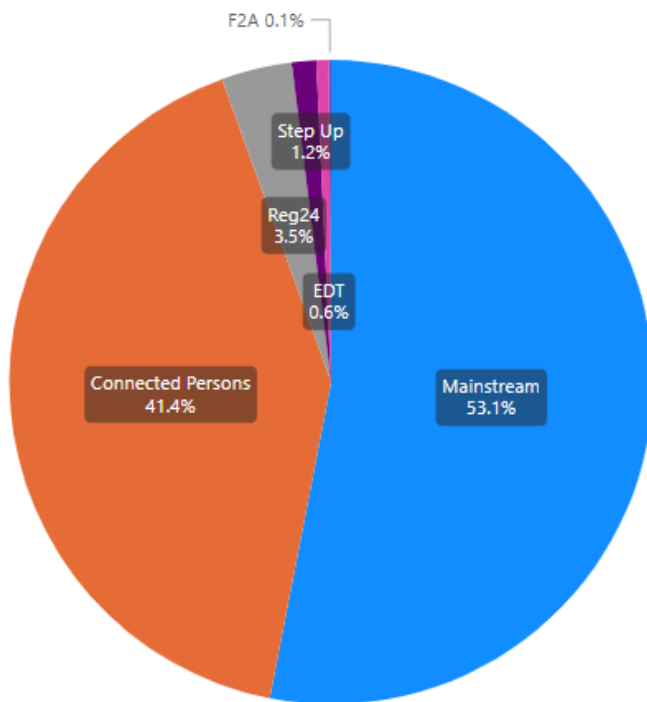
At the end of quarter 4 we had 101 unavailable placements which is 6 less than at the end of Q3. While the target for occupancy of 94% was only reached on a few occasions, we ended the year higher than 12 months before. We continue to be active in our scrutiny considering placements where carers can care for children in the same bedroom as full, to provide a clearer and truer picture. The chart below specifies the reasons noted for unavailability of placements, the most common reason being for sibling groups, followed by general reasons not otherwise categorised.



Summary of Children in Placement

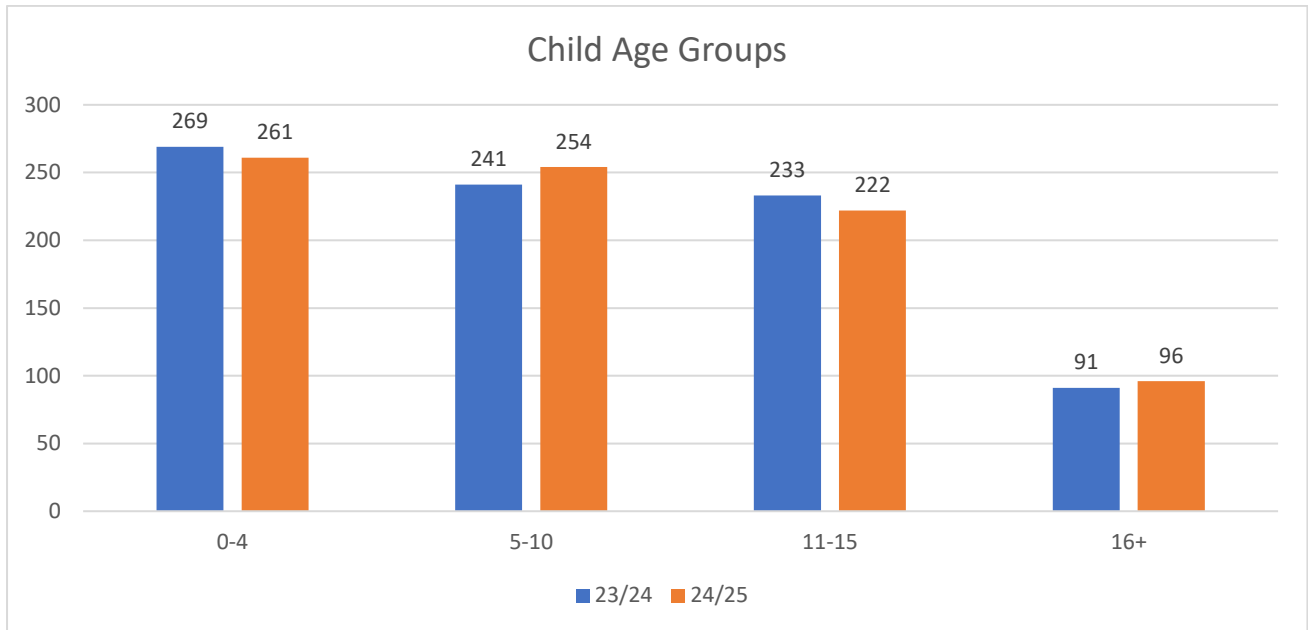
Out of a total of 833 children placed with our foster carers, as in the previous year, the majority remain (53%) in our mainstream placements. The combined number of placed children supervised by the Kinship service has increased steadily this year from 43.2% to 44.9%. This is 16% of the total children in care population at the end of 2024/25.

The chart below provides an overview of the approval types of the foster carers where our children are placed:



Age profile of the children in placement

Birmingham fostering service continues to care for a wide age range of children, we consistently provide placements for younger children, who then remain with their carers on a long-term basis. As in previous years the age profile of children and young people in Foster Birmingham placements is lower than the overall children in care population. The highest proportion of children within Birmingham Children's Trust foster placements are aged under 5 years old at 31.3%, while 88.5% of children are aged 0-15 years old. By comparison 74.2% of the overall children in care population are aged under 15 years old. We continue to approve carers for teenage children, with targeted recruitment to increase the number of older children living with our carers. This is shown in the growth this year in young people aged 16 plus.



Child and Carer Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Children	Carers
White - British	46.7%	57.6%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	10.2%	2.7%
Mixed - Any other mixed background	7.1%	0.8%
Black or Black British - Black Caribbean	6.8%	14.1%
Mixed - White and Asian	4.6%	1.2%
Refused	4.1%	0%
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	3.8%	9.0%
White - Any other White background	3.0%	1.8%
Black or Black British - Black African	2.5%	2.3%
Black or Black British - Any other Black background	1.9%	1.3%
Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background	1.7%	1.7%
Mixed - White and Black African	1.8%	0.5%
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1.4%	2.8%
White - Gypsy/Roma	1.2%	0%
Other Ethnic Group - Arab	0.8%	0.2%
Information not yet available	0.7%	1.5%
Any other ethnic group - Any other ethnic group	0.7%	0.5%
Asian or Asian British - Other Asian	0.4%	1.5%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	0.2%	0.8%
White - Irish	0.2%	0.8%
Other Ethnic Group – Chinese	0%	0.2%

We review demographic data each quarter to ensure that we understand the ethnicities of our carers compared to that of children in our care, enabling us to match children closer to their identity. The table above indicates the range of ethnic groups our carers identify with. We know that the majority (57.6%) of our carers are of White British ethnicity, compared to 46.7% of children. We have put significant effort into targeting minority ethnic communities for recruitment to increase the cultural diversity of our fostering cohort and have seen the proportion of carers from other ethnicities increase by 3% in the last two years.

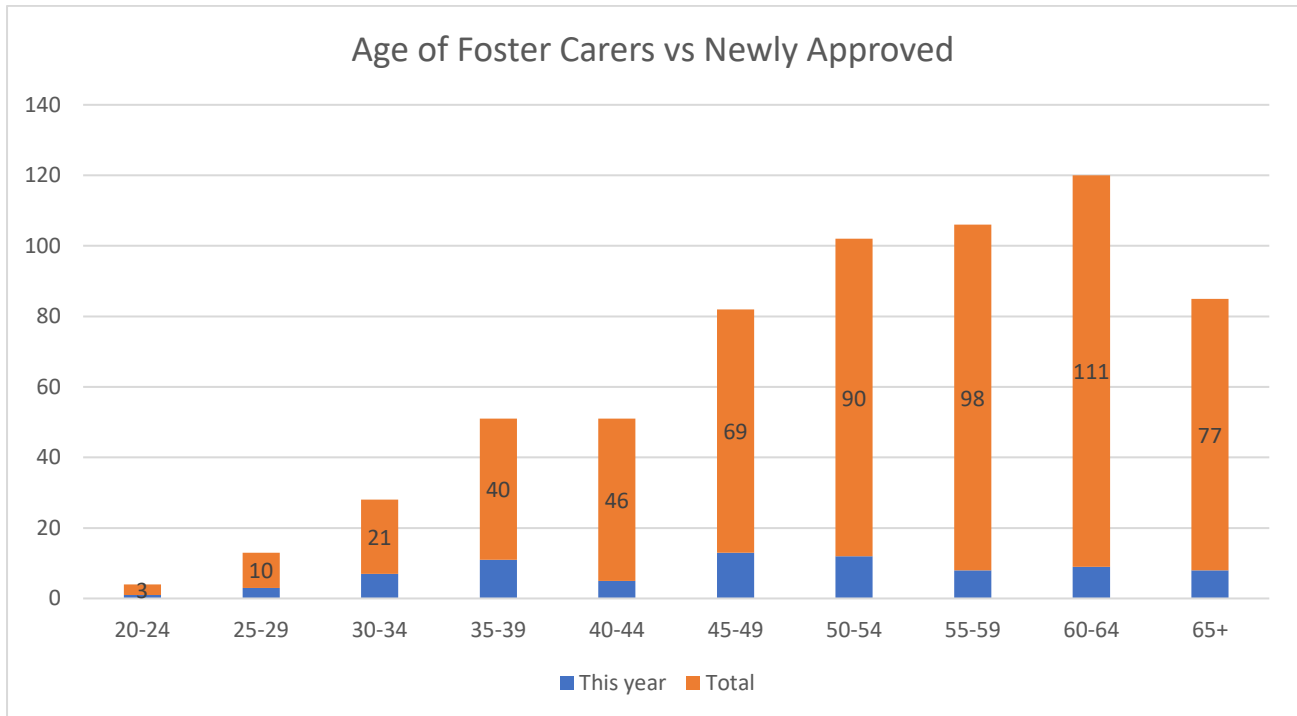
When compared against the ethnic profile of children in foster care we know that a far higher proportion of children are from mixed backgrounds than carers. This is a demographic shift is considered within our matching and training of carers, and we are proud that we have foster carers who understand the complexity of need for children, including their identities and they are proactive in meeting those needs.

We intend to improve the quality of the demographic/equalities data that we hold on families and children in the coming year, which will allow us to understand more detail such as religious beliefs and the blend of people within the household.

Foster carer Age profile

The three highest age profiles of our foster carers are 60-64 years old (20%), then 55-59 years (17%) and 50-54 years (16%). While there has been little change in these percentages compared to last year, we have increased the number of carers in the 35-39 category from 37 to 40. 52% of foster carers recruited this year were 49 or younger.

The chart below indicates that over the last year we have successfully recruited to younger age groups: 45-49 being particularly fruitful with 13 new carers.



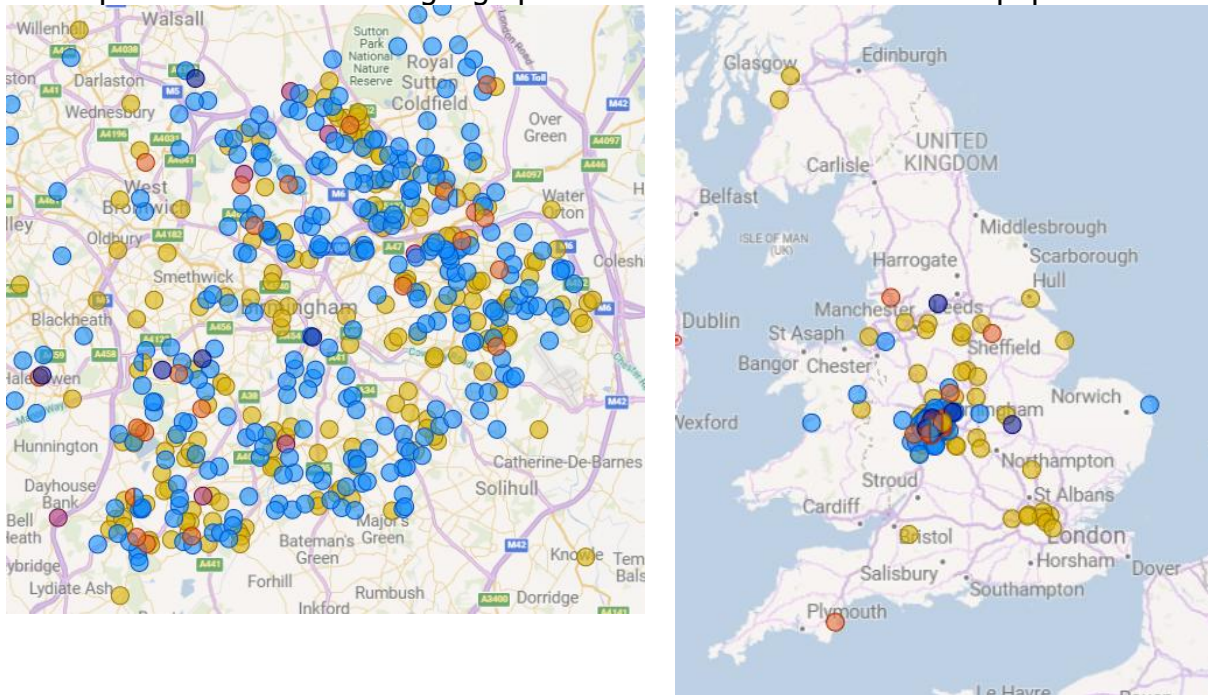
Foster Carer Geographical Location

The majority (93%) of the foster carers for Birmingham Children’s Trust reside in the West Midlands while 70% live within the Birmingham city boundary. These rates are the same as last year. The next highest represented district is Solihull with 31 carers (5.5%). 38, or 7% of carers live outside of the region. Of these the majority (31, or 82%) are kinship carers. When matching children to foster carers we understand the importance for children maintaining links with family and friends and their school life and therefore it is imperative that we consider children living in familiar areas wherever possible.

Region	Kinship	Mainstream (inc. EDT)	Total
West Midlands	205	319	524
East Midlands	9	2	11
London	8	0	8
Yorkshire	4	1	5
North West	4	1	5
Wales	1	2	3

East of England	1	1	2
Scotland	2	0	2
South East	1	0	1
South West	1	0	1

The map below illustrates the geographical location of our foster carer population.



Placement_Type

- Emergency
- Kinship
- Mainstream
- Reg24
- Step Up

4. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Schedule 6 Monitoring Events

Summary	<p>Foster Birmingham had a lower number of schedule 6 events in 2024/25, compared to the previous year. This year we had 1881 compared to 2135 in 23/24, a decrease of 12%. This is largely the result of improved foster carer understanding and guidance on recording prescribed medication.</p> <p>Against this we have seen an increase of 12 absences from the foster home increase compared to last year. The Absent & Missing section below provides some analysis of this, as it pertains to a small number of children who were going missing frequently early in the year.</p>																																		
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>REPORTING PERIOD</th> <th>23/24</th> <th>24/25</th> <th>% change</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Prescribed Medication</td> <td>1228</td> <td>1142</td> <td>-7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Non-prescribed medication</td> <td>442</td> <td>280</td> <td>-37%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accidents and injuries</td> <td>403</td> <td>385</td> <td>-4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Absent</td> <td>50</td> <td>62</td> <td>24%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Measures of control</td> <td>12</td> <td>7</td> <td>-41%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Restraint</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>2135</td> <td>1889</td> <td>-12%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			REPORTING PERIOD	23/24	24/25	% change	Prescribed Medication	1228	1142	-7%	Non-prescribed medication	442	280	-37%	Accidents and injuries	403	385	-4%	Absent	50	62	24%	Measures of control	12	7	-41%	Restraint	0	0	0%	Total	2135	1889	-12%
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	<p>Within the year we have seen the overall number of Schedule 6 recordings reduce steadily each quarter, however when prescribed medication is excluded the rates have been stable since the start of Q2. The social workers within the service continue to ask foster carers during supervision, about possible events to ensure reporting is accurately completed.</p>																																		
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	Included in the above are 8 administrations of non-prescribed medication to a child in Foster to Adopt placements. We are assured that the agency is monitoring events and that the method of recording across both Adoption and Fostering systems is bedding in.
Comments	Performance meetings monitor statutory matters, including those of schedule 6 events. We know the majority of schedule 6 reports are made regarding medication or absences from home, none have provided any concerns to the Team Managers and or Heads of Service when oversight is made. We are confident as a service that there is a positive knowledge of schedule 6 events and that safeguarding is high on the agenda of carers and staff.

Compliance in relation to each child placed with foster parents, with the child's care plan

Summary	<p>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 Officers within the Trust. The fostering service contribute to children's looked after reviews, providing outcome trackers to demonstrate the achievements of all children in placement.</p> <p>Permanence planning is important to the fostering service and is an area monitored via Team managers and Heads of Service and one that will be targeted further across services in 2025/26. We act as advocates for carers and children and if we have any concerns around drift and delay they are escalated to ensure long term plans are achieved in a timely manner. Meanwhile, the Kinship team continue to strengthen working with colleagues 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.</p> <p>The available performance data confirms that there are 489 children matched long term to their foster carers. This represent 59% of all foster placements that are matched.</p>
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	We also know that our placement stability rates are positive with 317 children in matched placements remaining in the same placement for over 24 months, equating to 38% of children and young people in Foster Birmingham placements.
Comments	<p>Permanence is an outcome we want all children to achieve within our fostering homes. We believe fostering plays a key role in ensuring children achieve this with stability and we know children are matched well and their futures are strengthened with the majority remaining living with their carers when it is their plan.</p> <p>We pride ourselves as a service in being advocates and believe that this has improved the outcomes of our children and continues to build the confidence of our carers in being good corporate parents.</p>

Accidents, injuries and illnesses

Summary	<p>All Foster Carers are required to complete and maintain recordings in relation to any accidents, injuries or illnesses. The recordings are monitored via Charms reporting, the supervision of foster carers with their supervising social workers and their team managers.</p> <p>There are no concerns in respect of reporting or the ability for Birmingham foster carers in managing minor illnesses.</p> <p>During Quarter 4 a total of 100 Schedule 6 returns were reported in relation to accidents, injuries and illnesses. While this is more than quarter 3, we tend to see an increase in this category over the winter.</p>										
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Reporting Period</th> <th>Accident, Injury or Illness</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Quarter 1</td> <td>116</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quarter 2</td> <td>85</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quarter 3</td> <td>84</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quarter 4</td> <td>100</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Reporting Period	Accident, Injury or Illness	Quarter 1	116	Quarter 2	85	Quarter 3	84	Quarter 4	100
Reporting Period	Accident, Injury or Illness										
Quarter 1	116										
Quarter 2	85										
Quarter 3	84										
Quarter 4	100										

	Total	385
	The total of 385 represents a decrease of 4% from last year.	
Comments	Foster carers continue to consistently report on accidents, injuries and illnesses. There is monthly reporting and analysis. There are no themes, patterns or trends that give cause for concern and seasonal changes account for increases.	

Medication, medical treatment and first aid

Summary	Reporting period	Prescribed Medication	Non-Prescribed medication & first aid
	Quarter 1	476	92
	Quarter 2	404	54
	Quarter 3	162	64
	Quarter 4	100	62
	TOTAL	1142	272
	<p>Prescribed Medication</p> <p>At the end of quarter 2 we revised our guidance to foster carers requiring them to only record prescribed medication once per month per placed child. This resulted in a greatly reduced number of individual recordings in quarters 3 & 4, resulting in 7% less recordings in this category across the year.</p> <p>During the quarter 4 reporting period we had 100 instances of foster carers administering prescribed medication for children in their care. The most common forms of prescription medicine administered was as follows:</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhalers for Asthma • Epi pen for allergies • ADHD medication • Melatonin for sleep aid • Anxiety medication <p>Non-Prescribed Medication and First Aid</p> <p>In quarter 4 we received 62 schedule 6 reports of foster carers administering non-prescribed medication for children in their care. While consistent with the previous quarter, this is less than at the same stage last year (119); the last 12 months have shown a steady decline in the number of recordings being made and we have convened a group to review our guidance for foster carers in this area, as we need to ensure that this is not a case of carers under-reporting the administration of medicine.</p> <p>The reasons for giving the medication were considered as proportionate to the health needs. The most common forms of Non-Prescription medication administered was as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paracetamol/Calpol/Ibuprofen • Multi vitamins • Vapour stick medicine • Lyclear for Headlice • Plasters and bandagers
Comments	<p>We continue as a service to be confident in the manner our foster carers manage the health needs of the children in their care. There has not been any concern raised within the reporting. The records show that there is both appropriate reporting and recording of the use of medication by Birmingham foster carers. Medication continues to be monitored by all staff and Head of service. There is a requirement to ensure foster carers supervisions included this detail of information and that social workers checked the medication sheets and storage of all medications in the home.</p>

Absent & Missing Children

Summary

During quarter 4 Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering service had a total of 5 absent and missing episodes reported, 4 of which were recorded as Schedule 6 matters and 1 as Schedule 7. The 5 reported incidents have been made in respect of 5 different children.

The reasons why these children and young people were missing from placement were as follows:

- Ran away because he was grounded
- Spending time with friends
- Spending time with family

Upon analysis we are satisfied that the discipline measure used with the young person that ran away was appropriate and proportionate.

Quarter 4 saw a notable drop in the number of absences being reported. This is likely because of the winter months curtailing opportunities to socialise outdoors. Despite this we had 12 more absences reported this year than in the previous year. Our analysis indicates that small number of children were absent frequently at this time: 2 children went missing five times and another four times. Safeguarding measure were put in place alongside close monitoring from the heads of service and team managers, which will also be a factor in the reduction in the second half of the year.

REPORTING PERIOD	Absent	Missing
Quarter 1	23	1
Quarter 2	25	2
Quarter 3	10	2
Quarter 4	4	1
TOTAL	62	6

Return Home Interviews

This year we have asked the EmpowerU service to check if RHIs were offered to all children Missing and whether they were accepted, which they were in all cases.

REPORTING PERIOD	NUMBER OF RHI OFFERED	NUMBER OF RHI REFUSED	NUMBER OF RHI ACCEPTED
Quarter 1	1	0	1
Quarter 2	2	0	2
Quarter 3	2	0	2
Quarter 4	1	0	1*

*The interview for Q4 took place after the end of the quarter in April 2025.

Comments

Over the year we have had 62 absent and 6 missing episodes, which have been due to 23 Children. Whilst there continues to be a small representation of young people involved, we remain vigilant on these as safeguarding concerns and reflect on the match of placement. We work with colleagues to consider how risks and missing episodes are mitigated. Team managers ensure that any identified actions are adhered to in respect of children missing from placement. The fostering service understands the importance of tracking children who may be absent or missing. We request that team managers are chasing incidences where children have not had a return interview to ensure fostering understand the reason for refusal and the context of missing episodes.

We continue to educate and request our carers to follow the Philomena protocol.

The fostering service believe that all information gathered from a return interview is important. It is positive that the fostering service experience low levels of missing episodes, leading us to believe that we complete good matching and children feel safe and secure at home with their carers. It is unfortunate when children and young people wish to be absent or missing in order to be with their family and this is continuously reviewed, and risk assessed with the child's social worker.

Measures of control, restraint, or discipline

Summary	<p>As a service we have committed to ensure all foster carers attend PACE training in 2024/25. There were zero recorded instances of restraint being applied by Foster Carers across the year. We believe that this has been a successful strategy to train and or refresh the knowledge of our carers and this is reflected in the reduction of measures of control, restraint and or discipline.</p> <p>As an agency we do not support the use of restraint, we have been providing PACE and de-escalation training for all of our carers to ensure safety is paramount, whilst not permitting restraint. As we are committed to the methods of PACE, all staff have completed PACE training. This allows for staff to understand the importance of carers feeling in control, meeting the needs of children and then being equipped and ready to manage scenarios they may face when caring for the children placed with them. Safer care plans should note how and when de-escalation techniques are used and how the foster carer should record the incidents, if any bruises/marks appear as a direct result of the hold.</p>		
	Reporting Period	Measures of Control	Restraint
	Quarter 1	4	0
	Quarter 2	1	0
	Quarter 3	0	0
	Quarter 4	2	0
	TOTAL	7	0
	<p>There were two measures of control reported in quarter 4. The Team Manager reports that this category was used to record a safe hold by the carer during an episode of dysregulation, involving verbal and physical aggression in the foster home. This was used for a short period of time and it was judged to be suitable action to help the child regulate their emotions.</p>		

	The Agency is clear that no form of physical punishment should be used on any child or young person. This is reflected in our policies, procedures and within the Foster Carer Handbook.
Comments	<p>This reporting period, akin to previous reporting throughout this year, demonstrates that the use of positive parenting techniques correlates with achievements for children and a happy and safe environment. It is encouraging to have evidence that this year's PACE training programme has been effective.</p> <p>The agency and foster carers believe in positive parenting, understanding that on occasion the removal of privileges may be required for a short time. We are requesting that any forms of control or discipline are proportionate to behaviour and or noted in the assessments and plans for the children and we believe our foster carers are adhering to this when we consider their accounts.</p>

Schedule 7 Notifiable Events

Summary	<p>The Registered Manager ensures all notifiable Schedule 7 incidents are logged on the Ofsted Portal, which are then monitored by Ofsted. This year we have made 60 such notifications. In 23/24 we made 61.</p> <p>During the period January to March 2024, we have received a total of 18 Schedule 7 incidents which were all events that were investigated and reported to Ofsted.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Schedule 7 Category</th> <th>Q1</th> <th>Q2</th> <th>Q3</th> <th>Q4</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Child Missing</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Section 47 enquiry</td> <td>6</td> <td>5</td> <td>4</td> <td>9</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Police Involvement</td> <td>0</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>1</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hospital Admission</td> <td>3</td> <td>9</td> <td>3</td> <td>6</td> <td>21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TOTAL</td> <td>11</td> <td>18</td> <td>13</td> <td>18</td> <td>60</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>We have seen a slight increase in the number of Section 47 enquiries in quarter 4. We have not detected any increasing concerns and there is appropriate support and mitigating actions and plans in each case.</p>	Schedule 7 Category	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Child Missing	1	2	2	1	6	Section 47 enquiry	6	5	4	9	24	Police Involvement	0	2	3	1	6	Hospital Admission	3	9	3	6	21	Other	1	0	1	1	3	TOTAL	11	18	13	18	60
Schedule 7 Category	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total																																						
Child Missing	1	2	2	1	6																																						
Section 47 enquiry	6	5	4	9	24																																						
Police Involvement	0	2	3	1	6																																						
Hospital Admission	3	9	3	6	21																																						
Other	1	0	1	1	3																																						
TOTAL	11	18	13	18	60																																						

Comments	The Head of Service / Registered Manager has oversight of all schedule 7s, ensuring that there is timely reporting and compliance with safeguarding processes. Regular updates are provided to Ofsted on safeguarding notifications until concluded. Across the year we have not noted any themes or patterns to raise concern, and we are assured in our remedial actions and support.
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Allegations

Summary	<p>Over the course of the year we have received 24 allegations against Foster Birmingham carers. This compares to 21 in 2023/24:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>CATEGORY</th> <th>NUMBER</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Total allegations</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of allegations against Foster Carers made by children</td> <td>13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of allegations against Foster Carers made by other sources</td> <td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total number of Foster Carers subject to allegations</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total number of Children who have made allegations</td> <td>13</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>NATURE OF ALLEGATION</th> <th>NUMBER</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Physical Abuse</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sexual Abuse</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neglect</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Emotional Abuse</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	CATEGORY	NUMBER	Total allegations	24	Number of allegations against Foster Carers made by children	13	Number of allegations against Foster Carers made by other sources	11	Total number of Foster Carers subject to allegations	24	Total number of Children who have made allegations	13	NATURE OF ALLEGATION	NUMBER	Physical Abuse	9	Sexual Abuse	9	Neglect	5	Emotional Abuse	1
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	<p>We received three additional allegations against children in foster care.</p> <p>On 31 March six allegations were open as active investigations. Three of these have been open for less than 21 working days, two has been open for between 4 and 6 weeks and one has been open for more than 50 days.</p> <p>We have seen an increase in the number of section 47 investigations this year, up 5 from 19 last year.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>REFERRAL ACTIVITY</th> <th>NUMBER</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Number of referrals made to DBS</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of referrals made to child protection service (LADO)</td> <td>19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of Section 47's investigations</td> <td>24</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	REFERRAL ACTIVITY	NUMBER	Number of referrals made to DBS	1	Number of referrals made to child protection service (LADO)	19	Number of Section 47's investigations	24
REFERRAL ACTIVITY	NUMBER								
Number of referrals made to DBS	1								
Number of referrals made to child protection service (LADO)	19								
Number of Section 47's investigations	24								
Comments	<p>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. Where it is felt necessary the Head of Service will escalate concerns to other agencies such as the police or safeguarding unit. Recognising that this is a period of high anxiety and uncertainly for the foster carers alongside the support of their Supervising Social Worker, they can also access independent support via two routes, our Birmingham Foster Care Association and Fostering Network.</p> <p>The Registered Manager continues to provide regular updates to the nominated Ofsted inspector on Schedule 7s of this nature until conclusion. This provides transparency in the service and Ofsted an independent oversight.</p> <p>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</p>								

	<p>available. Practitioners find the tabletop reviews as informative, reflective and an opportunity to consider change.</p> <p>The management of the allegation process plays a significant role in the retention of our foster carers. This has been recognised by the government, and they are encouraging Local Authorities and Trusts to have a conversation with them as part of their review of allegation guidance. In the forthcoming months we will be engaging in the conversation with the DFE and reviewing our allegations practice/process to ensure it is fit for purpose.</p>
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Foster Carer's Documentation

Care Plans	At the end of quarter 4, 79% of Child records had a recorded Care Plan on their record.
Placement Plans	At the end of quarter 4, 59% of Child records had at least one recorded Placement Plan on their record.
Delegated authority	<p>At the end of quarter 4, 81% of children in foster care had a recorded scheme of delegated authority.</p> <p>The service continues to focus on improving the number of reports within the recording system and where required escalations occur to ensure carers have delegated authority and know what day to day decisions that they can make when caring for the child.</p>
Comments	<p>We continue to report on the documents a foster carer has received in relation to the child, such as placement plans and delegated authority, since the start of this year we have worked with colleagues to increase our records in respect of documents. This has led to positive outcomes as we believe our carers should be well informed on the needs of children and how to meet their wishes and feelings.</p> <p>We will continue to work together to increase our reporting and monitoring what records foster carers have received. It is important to note the majority of foster carers report that they do have all statutory documents.</p>

The following table demonstrates our success in ensuring documents are detailed within the fostering recording system:

Document	End of Q4 23/24	End of Q2 24/25	End of Q4 24/25
Care Plans	13%	93%	79%
Placement Plans	14%	62%	59%
Delegated Authority	41%	79%	81%

Complaints

Summary	<p>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. The Complaints and Information Manager produce quarterly reports. During this year 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.</p> <p>The Registered Manager maintains good communication with Birmingham foster carers and believes in resolving issues whilst they are grumbles, before a carer would wish to make a complaint. The manager also has quarterly meetings with the Complaints Manager to ensure that all complaints are being tracked and responded to in a timely manner. Information on both compliments and complaints are collated, and success are celebrated and shared across the Trust.</p> <p>Corporate complaints</p> <p>During Q4 there were 3 Stage 1 complaints. The breakdown was 3 for kinship and 0 for mainstream, of which 0 were upheld due to being outside jurisdiction. There was also 1 Stage 2 complaint for Kinship, this was not upheld.</p>
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The breakdown of complaints for the year is as followed:

Corporate complaints	Mainstream		Kinship	
	No. of Complaints Received	No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld	No. of Complaints Received	No. of Complaints Upheld or Part Upheld
Statutory Stage 1	1	0	5	0
Statutory Stage 2	0	0	1	0
Statutory Stage 3	0	0	1	0
Local Stage 1	0	0	2	0
Local Stage 2	0	0	0	0
Ombudsman	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	2	0	9	0

Reporting Period	Complaints total
Quarter 1	0
Quarter 2	5
Quarter 3	2
Quarter 4	4
TOTAL	11

As a service we continue to review and learn from complaints received. As we view complaints and compliments as a tool to reflect on practice and learn.

	<p>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.</p> <p>When there are corporate complaints that link to other service areas of the Trust, the Head of Service will often collaborate with their counterpart to ensure a resolution.</p>
Comments	<p>The number of complaints are low when you consider the foster carer population. Managers are proactive with early identification and resolution of issues before a formal process is initiated and where necessary prioritise a home visit to a carer.</p> <p>The Head of Service liaises regularly with the Complaints Manager for effective tracking of complaints and timely responses. This provides an opportunity to learn from the experiences of carers, children and others. We also consider complaints at our quarterly tabletop reviews and use the learning to improve practice.</p> <p>Where there are complaints which involve other service areas in the Trust, the Head of Service will work with peers for a resolution. The Head of Service and Managers also work closely with BFCA to address issues and concerns raised by carers swiftly. We also have a BFCA Partnership Action Plan which captures Fostering and wider Trust issues and actions in a 'You said we did' framework. The plan is reviewed regularly and six monthly with BFCA and the Trust Leadership team including the Chief Executive Officer.</p>

Compliments

Summary	<p>Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering service consistently receive a high level of compliments from a range of key stakeholders. We have reported 40 written compliments in charms this year. 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.</p>
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All compliments to our foster carers from professionals are acknowledged by senior management via recognition cards, in writing or via nominations and rewards.

Compliment category	Number of compliments
Compliment about carer(s)	11
Compliment about child	1
Compliment about other professionals	2
Compliment from carer(s)	6
Compliment from child	6
Compliment from other professionals	13
Compliment from parents of children	1

Some examples of written compliments received in the final quarter are as follows:

Compliments from our foster carers about our social workers:

I am writing to express my sincere appreciation for the outstanding support and dedication shown by our most recently allocated supervising social worker K.

Compliments about our foster carers:

I would like to commend the foster carers for their exceptional support of the young person with additional needs. They demonstrated extraordinary care and quick action by saving him during a fit. Their continuous support, advocacy, and child-centred approach are truly admirable. They also continue to support the young person's sibling, ensuring a stable and nurturing environment for both children.

These carers exemplify dedication and compassion in their role, making a significant positive impact on the children's lives.

	<p>Compliment from colleagues:</p> <p><i>'A did a fab job with the paperwork which meant we were all happy with the content of the report to be able to proceed with the meeting'.</i></p> <p><i>'Very well done and a big thank you from me.'</i></p> <p>Compliment from foster child:</p> <p><i>Christmas cards from XX to Y and Z with special messages included in them about the love and care she is receiving from them.</i></p>								
<p>Comments</p>	<p>It is always a pleasure to continue to see a high number of compliments for the service and this shows the commitment and dedication of the staff within the service. Quarter 4 of this year saw a rise in compliments for the Kinship service. We think it important to celebrate all of our achievements across the service and we are keen to note that the above are a snapshot and range of the number of compliments and range of those who have taken the time to put gratitude and recognise good practice in a written format.</p> <p>BCT believes it is important to be a learning agency, often contemplating and reflecting on both compliments and complaints and consider the impact of practice and outcomes for children and future practice. We continue to exceed in compliments versus complaints.</p> <p>The majority of complaints are often regarding matters of the wider Trust, rather than related to the practice of the fostering service. The escalation process being an option has improved the timeliness of managing grumbles and complaints and believe this is one reason why our corporate complaints remain low, and our escalations are also low. We have raised 46 individual escalations over the course of the year, for the following reasons:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Case Management</td> <td>19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Placement/matching concerns</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SGO/Permanence Completion</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Childs Passport</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </table>	Case Management	19	Placement/matching concerns	14	SGO/Permanence Completion	6	Childs Passport	5
Case Management	19								
Placement/matching concerns	14								
SGO/Permanence Completion	6								
Childs Passport	5								

	DBS Delays	1
	Delegated Authority missing	1

Provision of Education

Summary	<p>Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency does not provide any educational provision. However, the Agency collaborates closely with our Virtual School partners and Leaving Care services.</p> <p>The reported NEET children over the year per reporting period are below:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #ffcc00;">Reporting Period</th> <th style="background-color: #ffcc00;">NEET children</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Quarter 1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quarter 2</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quarter 3</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quarter 4</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #ffcc00;">TOTAL</td> <td style="background-color: #ffcc00;">5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>In quarter 4 there was 1 young person classed as NEET placed with Foster Birmingham carers. This young person is 17 years old and lives with her two younger brothers in a kinship carer arrangement with her grandmother. Unfortunately, her application for college was submitted late rendering her NEET. However, securing a college place or apprenticeship is being prioritised as part of her Pathway plan.</p> <p>We continue to collaborate closely with the virtual schools ensuring that our foster carers have up to date information regarding the virtual school offer and the additional support available to our children in care.</p>	Reporting Period	NEET children	Quarter 1	1	Quarter 2	3	Quarter 3	0	Quarter 4	1	TOTAL	5
Reporting Period	NEET children												
Quarter 1	1												
Quarter 2	3												
Quarter 3	0												
Quarter 4	1												
TOTAL	5												
Comments	<p>The numbers of young people that are considered NEET remains consistently low and represents a small proportion of children in the care of Birmingham foster carers. There is minimal drift and delay in the monitoring of young people within care planning procedures with</p>												

	<p>clear and timely pathways to ensure young people are engaged in education employment and training.</p>
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	<p>The fostering microsite includes information and resources provided by the Virtual school. This will contribute to a quick and effective way of communicating together within fostering and with our foster carers.</p>
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5. RECORDS OF ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS

Mainstream Recruitment Activity

The recruitment team have seen a rise in enquirers who have more than 1 bedroom which is key to maximising our capacity, as well as increasing sibling placements. We continue to see an increase in recommendations from our foster carers and staff, so it is clear word of mouth remains the main source of enquiries. Frequent staff Webinars to share updates on recruitment activity is also helping drive some of this.

Enquiry closures are always kept to a minimum wherever possible as we continue to seek out the strengths of our enquirers. We are reducing the delay in receiving Registrations of interests (ROI) by completing these directly at the initial visit. Once completed we invite the applicants onto the next available skills to foster slots, again hopefully reducing the length of time they have to wait to be invited to attend this. Similar issues still remain around spare bedrooms being on different floors to the enquirers, and in these circumstances seek to negotiate to ensure the foster child would be on the same floor and again we utilise the enquirers by progressing them to care for babies 0-2, if their own bedroom can accommodate this.

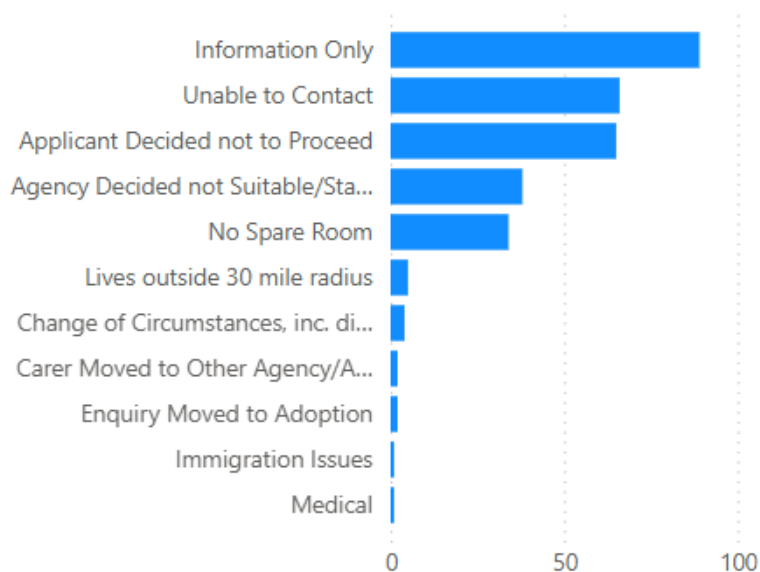
We have identified that there are still a higher proportion of enquires who are seeking information which suggests this is likely due to exploring alternative agencies. Therefore, our engagement, and timely response in all stages are key and we have recently implemented an allocations process to ensure the officer who starts the initial call back will be assigned to that applicant up until skills to foster. We are diarising to call enquirers back if appropriate and carry out research on what other agencies are offering to ensure we remain competitive.

We continue to hold information and market events which also include Mainstream support teams in order to assist in promoting the specialist schemes.

The mainstream recruitment activity for the year was as follows:

Reporting Period	Initial enquiries	Home visits	Registration of interest received
Quarter 1	74	14	5
Quarter 2	101	21	6
Quarter 3	95	15	9
Quarter 4	95	13	13
TOTAL	365	63	33

Reasons for withdrawal before approval

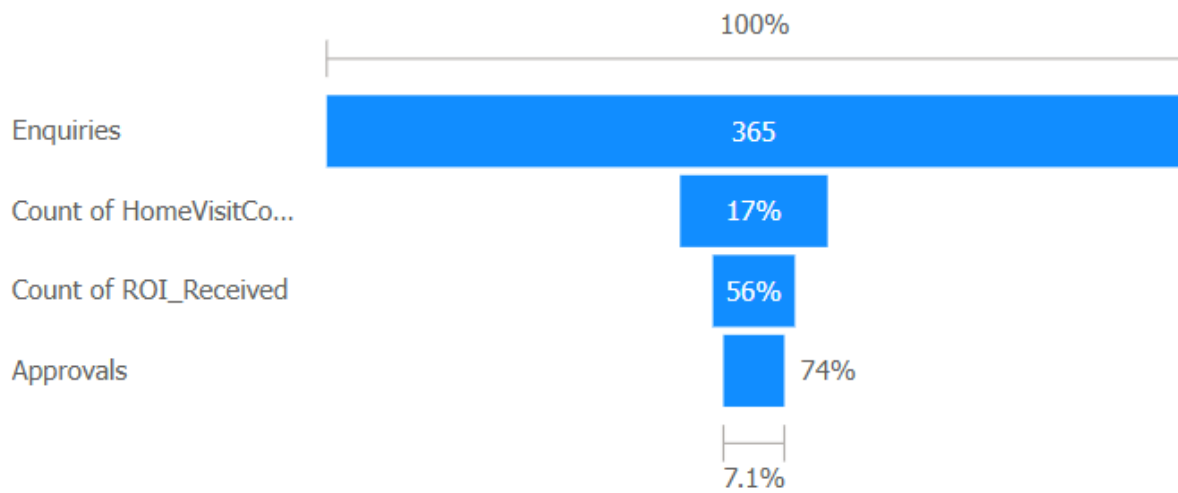


We have developed a dashboard which affords us greater visibility and data on our recruitment process to improve timescales and reduce withdrawals. Enquiries are routinely monitored and the reasons why enquirers are not progressing. Home visits are reviewed taking a strengths approach, this quarter all the home visits this quarter progressed to Registrations of Interest.

Conversion Rates Enquiries to Approvals

In Q4 Foster Birmingham received 90 enquiries which led to 23 Registration of interest applications being received, representing a conversion rate of 20%, which was 5% higher than our previous quarter.

Conversions Year to Date

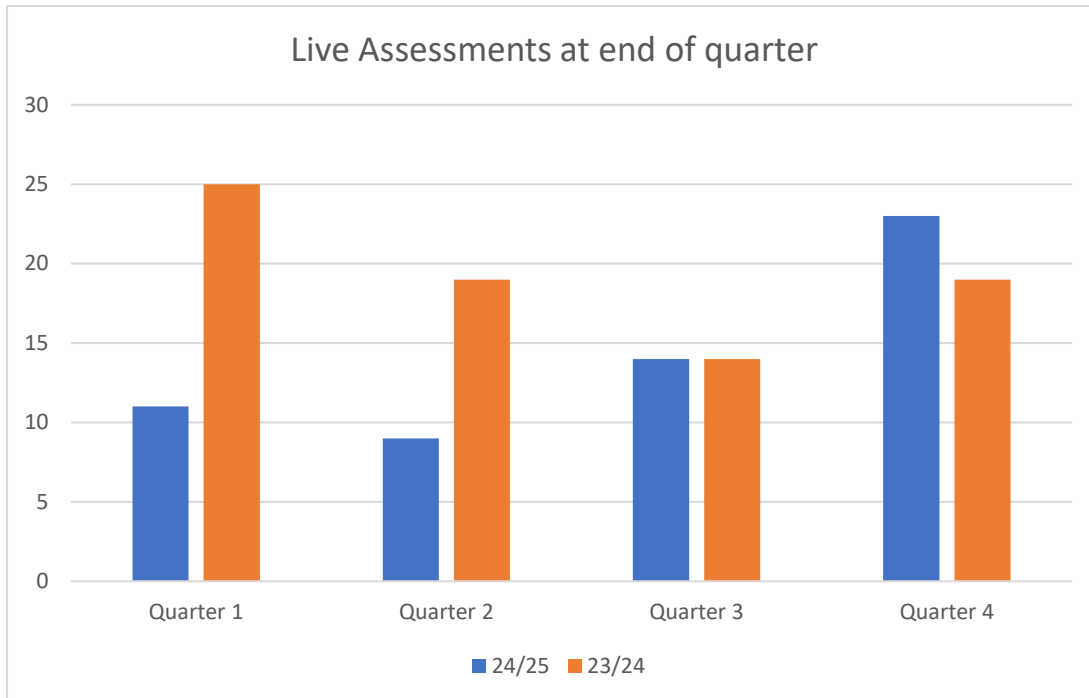


Over the last 12 months we have approved 26 mainstream foster carers and received 33 total Registration Of Interest (ROI) applications, a converting 9% of enquiries into applications and 7% of enquiries into approvals.

Compared to last year, where we had a very similar number of enquiries, we can see that we converted far fewer into Home Visits (-23%) and fewer of these to ROIs (-12%) but far greater percentage of ROIs into approvals (+39%). The overall conversion rate of enquiries into approvals was therefore 2% lower than last year.

Our target for fostering recruitment for 2024/25 was to recruit 60 new mainstream fostering placements: at the end of Q4 we had 41 new placements approved, which is 8 less than last year. While we are disappointed not to reach the target, we have a firm understanding of the challenges we face and how to mitigate them better in the future: as our conversion rate remains within a similar range to last year, we must focus on raising and progressing a greater number of enquiries across the year. To assist with this additional Enquiry Officer post has been added, along with an increase in the Marketing budget for 25/26.

To help us reach these targets we have developed statistically modelled targets for enquiry rates and end-to-end analytics of all new candidate carers, to help the recruitment team nurture and retain their interest. We have already seen improvements – on the reporting date we had 23 open assessments, which is the most for a year, and 4 more due to be allocated in April.



Over the reporting period Panel received 25 mainstream assessments of which 4 were out of timescale.

Apr – Jun 2024	5 in timescale
Jul – Sep 2024	9 were in timescales and 3 were out of timescales. The reasons for this delay was that one carer did not meet the standards and was offered additional training therefore the assessment was put on hold. One carer made the decision to go on hold and then returned, and the assessment was resumed. One carer also made the decision to go on hold due to wanting to wait for the assessing social worker to return from an extended period of leave. This carer was offered another assessor; however, they declined and made the decision to go on hold until their assessor returned.
Oct – Dec 2024	3 were in timescale.
Jan – Mar 2024	4 within timescales and 1 out of timescales due to outstanding Health and Safety actions.

Kinship Assessment Activity

There have been 64 carer approvals during the year 2024/25, and 70 temporary approvals granted under regulation 24 of the fostering regulations. Additionally, there were 34 extensions to temporary approval noted at panel. The most common reason for the delay in presenting the assessments within timescale remains checks DBS and/or medical not being available.

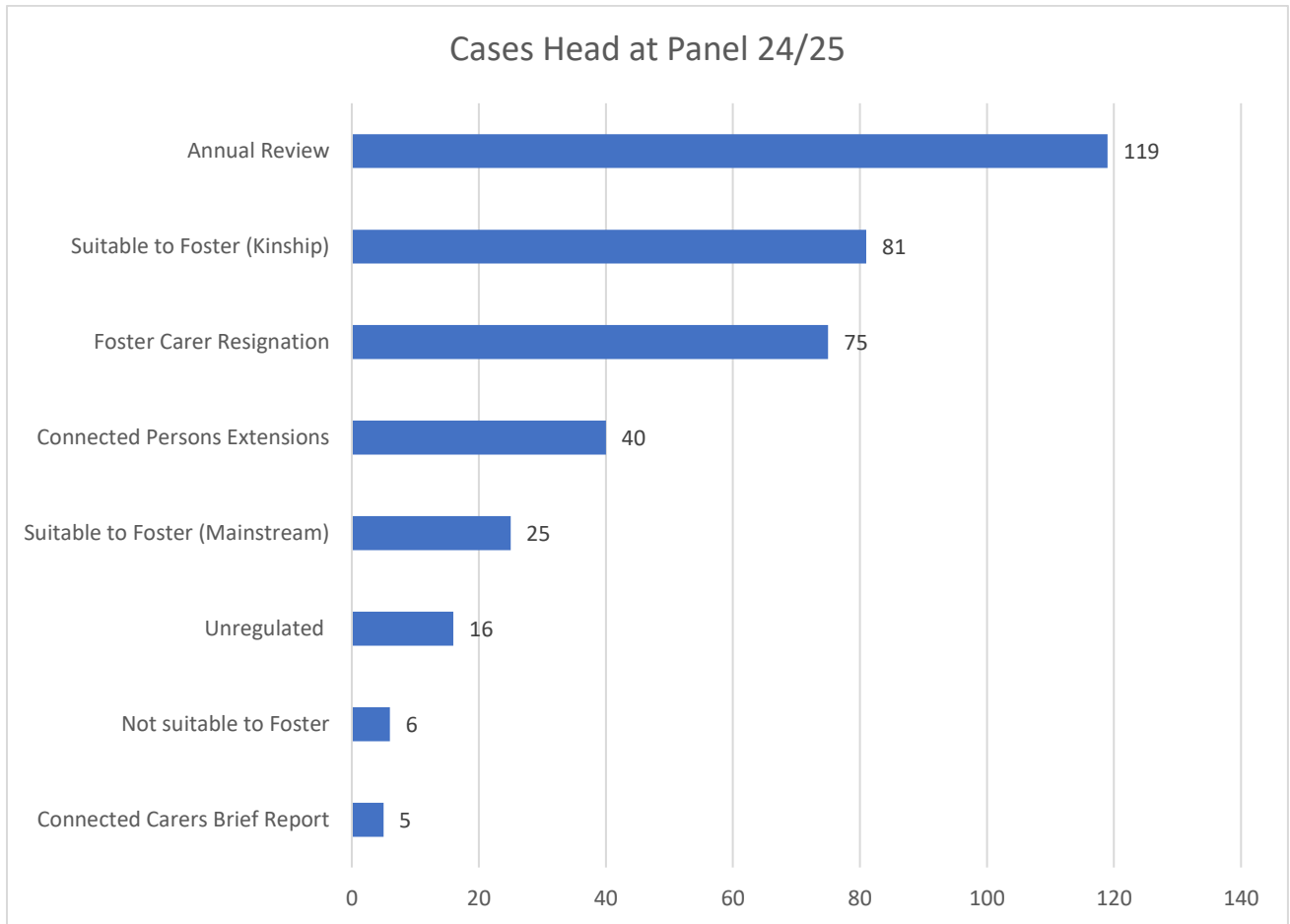
There were 15 unregulated placements considered by the service and noted as matters arising by fostering panel and the Agency Decision Maker. This is five fewer than last year. The placements are monitored effectively and regularly, via the Head of Service to ensure policy is adhered to and safeguarding matters considered. They are then prioritised at panel as soon as practicably possible, as they usually became unregulated because there were outstanding checks.

The total number of SGO's granted this year is 44, including 25 to former foster carers, 15 direct alternatives to care, 3 as a private family arrangement and 1 via the Adoption agency. Please refer to the Kinship Assessments Performance Report in Annex 4 for more information.

Reporting periods	SGOs granted
Quarter 1	16
Quarter 2	12
Quarter 3	10
Quarter 4	6
TOTAL	44

Fostering Panel Activity

The fostering panel continues to be busy with a high volume of requests for panel recommendation and an ADM decision. Over the year the fostering panel heard 363 agenda items, including 102 Suitable to Foster cases.



Records of Fostering Panel Minutes

Approvals and de-registrations

In 2024/25 the agency decision maker approved 26 mainstream carer households and 63 kinship households, providing a combined 138 placements this year. The breakdown of these approvals was as follows:

Mainstream including EDT & Step Up

Month	Foster Carer Deregistered	Placements Lost	New Foster Carers	Placements Gained
Apr	4	4	1	1
May	0	0	1	3
Jun	5	7	3	3
Jul	3	5	7	9
Aug	2	3	5	6
Sep	3	5	1	3
Oct	5	8	0	0
Nov	1	1	1	2
Dec	4	7	1	1
Jan	1	1	0	0
Feb	1	2	1	2
Mar	5	7	5	11
Grand Total	34	50	26	41
versus 23/24	-3	-3	-6	-8

Kinship

Month	Foster Carer Deregistered	Placement Lost	New Foster Carers	Placements Gained
Apr	5	6	9	18
May	5	6	7	7
Jun	3	5	2	4
Jul	5	7	6	8
Aug	1	2	8	18
Sep	6	7	2	2
Oct	2	2	7	9
Nov	4	4	7	7
Dec	4	5	4	5
Jan	5	6	6	11
Feb	2	2	3	3
Mar	1	1	2	5
Grand Total	43	53	63	97
Versus 23/24	-2	-5	-6	+1

Panel agreed with the recommendation to close 77 fostering households in 24/25, of which 34 were mainstream foster carers and 43 were kinship carers. As shown below, the most common reason for closure for Kinship was a Special Guardianship Order being granted.

For mainstream the most common reason was the foster carer wishing to leave fostering. We understand that some carers leave fostering for financial reasons, or because of job opportunities. We have resolved to increase the level of detail we capture on mainstream closures to ensure that we can identify those which were unavoidable and those that were preventable. We will present the first tranche of data on this in the 2025/26 Q1 report.

The below table shows the full range of reasons for de-registrations for 24/25:

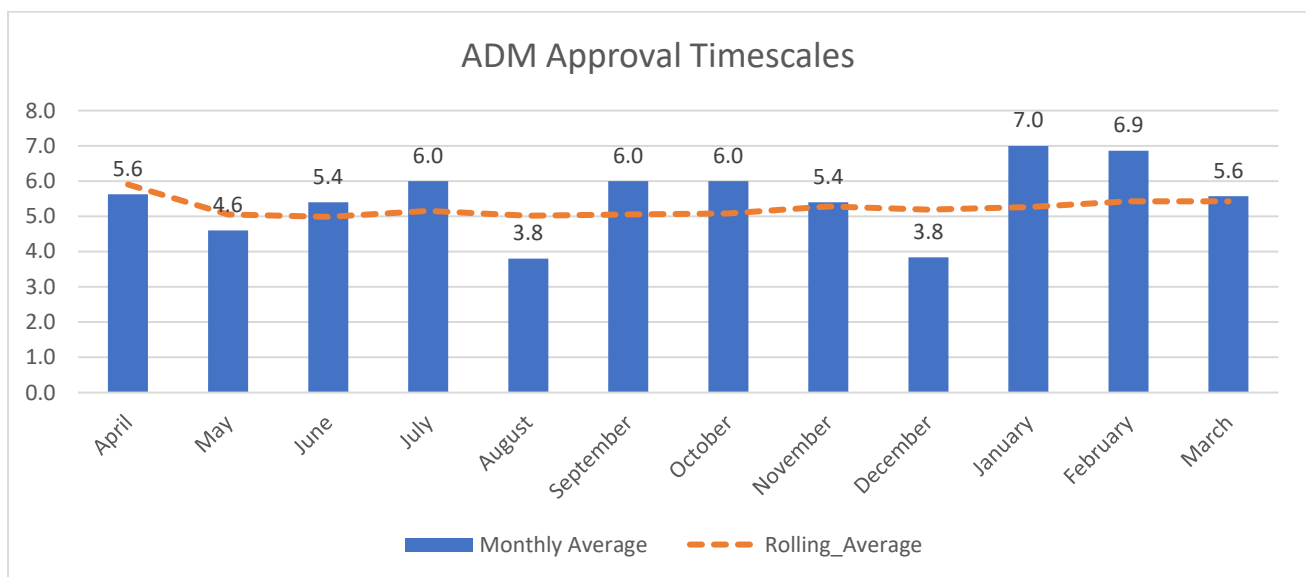
REASONS	Mainstream	Kinship	TOTAL
Special Guardianship Order Granted	0	26	26
Leaving Fostering/Change of Career	15	1	16
Carer Retired	9	0	9
Remained with Carer Post 18	2	3	5
Change of Circumstances, inc. divorce/separation	1	4	5
Deregistered - not suitable to foster	4	1	5
Connected child moved placement	0	4	4
Carer Moved to Other Agency/Authority	1	1	2
Agency Decided not Suitable/Standards not met	1	0	1
Carer Deceased	0	1	1
Medical Reasons	1	0	1
Connected child never placed	0	1	1
Child Arrangement Order Granted	0	1	1
TOTAL	34	43	77

In Quarter 4, we had 11 mainstream foster carers resign. Four of these were due to the carer no longer wishing to foster, with another two choosing to leave the service after the looked after young person turned 18 and stayed put. Three more were due to retirement and one where the carer moved to an independent agency. In one case the carer was de-registered as they were no longer suitable to foster.

We are pleased with our fostering marketing, recruitment and retention activity and the outcomes have been recognised by Ofsted and Fosterlink as independent organisations. We continue to consider how we can encourage those who would not usually think about fostering as a vocational career. The fostering website continues to assist with our recruitment as we continue with the positive feedback from existing and prospective foster carers.

ADM Timescales

The average time for ADM approval in 2024/25, calculated per panel meeting, was 5.4 days, 0.6 days more than last year but still comfortably within the statutory 7-day timescale. Some of the longer timelines in quarter 4 were a result of ADMs being on leave unexpectedly. The available ADM capacity has been expanded.



Panel Feedback

During this time feedback has been gathered from the Panel chair who has reported that fostering panels are robust, effective with a strong professional relationship between chairs and advisors and a diverse list of panel members.

Feedback from attendees, whether carers or professional workers, generally tends to be positive. Comments often make note of the welcome received by panels and support from

their social worker to attend panel. Feedback about the experience of all panel attendees is now obtained via a new online questionnaire which is shared following each panel. Where there are specific comments of concern, these are tackled immediately by discussion with them and the Chair of that Panel and /or panel members.

There is also a process for Panel Chairs to feedback on individual panel members which then feeds into their annual appraisals. During this period, we have had one Panel chair resign, the service has been able to use the capacity within the current cohort of Panel chairs.

Panel chairs have reported feedback this year regarding what is working well and what is working not so well, and the following has been noted:

Working well:

- Virtual panels are well structured and organised.
- Panel questions are clear and concise.
- Communication between Panel Chairs and panel members, including the continued use of Sharepoint and the introduction of Charms.
- Panel minutes are a good quality and are provided for quality assurance in a timely fashion.
- Regular meetings are held between the chairs with Heads of Service and Agency Decision Makers to reflect on and improve panels.
- Individuals attending panel felt the panel members were professional yet welcoming and made them feel at ease.

Working not so well:

- The quality of reports varies significantly across the service.
- The panel is often made up of a majority of social workers
- Paperwork is often incomplete at the time of submission to panel advisors, and this leads to a more time-consuming process or gaps in panel agenda items at late notice
- Some carers felt uneasy due to meeting calls being sent out just before the meeting rather than in advance.

We continue to work with the Panel Manager and Panel Advisors, along with Managers across the fostering service to address the areas highlighted by the Fostering Panel Chairs.

6. OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE FOSTERING AGENCY

Marketing

Marketing Overview	<p>This year has built on the foundations laid in the previous financial year in terms of marketing and recruitment.</p> <p>We have advertised Birmingham as a preferred agency in various locations, such as radio adverts and Facebook advertising.</p> <p>We continue to communicate with our foster carers with our Keeping In Touch monthly newsletters and are looking forward to utilising our website portal in the next quarter to provide information electronically. Alongside this we utilise the support of our recruitment ambassadors at events.</p> <p>We are proud that a lot has been achieved this year, including the following events in Q4:</p> <p>Information Events (6 – 7:30pm) as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 Jan in Sutton Coldfield • 16 Jan Online • 13 March in Moseley • 20 March Online <p>Specialist Schemes Marketplace Events (10am – 2pm)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 Jan at Free@Last • 21 Jan at The Shires <p>Other events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WM Public Sector Careers Fair, 23 Jan, 11am – 2pm at The Library of Birmingham • Compass Jobs Fair, 17 March, 9:30am – 4pm at Birmingham Conference and Events Centre <p>We continue to think innovatively in how we can reach our existing foster carers and prospective foster carers. Within this we have welcomed two independent reviews of the service and have considered any recommended approaches we could add to the strategies in place to increase our fostering population.</p>
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Transferring Foster Carers	This year we had 3 foster carer households transfer from other agencies. This is 3 less than last year. The reasons given in transferring to Birmingham include a lack of support from the agency; long gaps between placements; and travelling long distances to take children to school, appointments, or family time.			
Kinship Referrals	This year has seen a slight decrease in the number of referrals for assessment to the Family & Friends service, 222, down from 227 last year.			
	Referral Source	Viability Assessment	Reg24	Total
	East	41	24	65
	South	54	18	72
	NWC	31	19	50
	Private SGO	16	0	16
	Disabled Childrens Team	3	0	3
	Other	13	3	16
	Total	158	64	222

Training

Staff Training	<p>The Fostering Agency has a staff training plan which outlines the range of training and learning opportunities. The management oversight for the planning and delivery, lies with the Assistant Heads of Service. During the year staff have had access to a range of wider Trust training alongside specific Fostering Service training that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's Voice • Recruitment is Everyone's Responsibility • CHARMS Functionality
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Fostering • Sensitive conversations with children in Kinship arrangements <p>All staff have access to Community Care Inform, Research in Practice and BCT learning pool, and this provides a wide range of training in the field of social work and fostering. All staff are required and monitored by the Trust to update GDPR and data protection training.</p> <p>Appraisals take place annually evaluating performance against agreed objectives, achievements and areas for further development.</p>
Foster Carer Training	<p>We continue to improve by having a higher number of foster carers accessing essential training online via a webinar or face to face delivered by Fostering Training. Using data collected from Charms, 76% of carers have an up-to-date safeguarding qualification and 85% of carers have an up to date first aid qualification. This ensures foster carers work collaboratively, safely and in turn minimize risk to children and young people they care for. Some of this work, setting the scene and engagement will commence at the pre-approval stage with closer working alongside recruitment and assessment staff holding in mind our connections count model.</p> <p>Ideally we need to achieve being in the late 90's up to 100% over the coming months as all carers need to be up to date in their essential training. Workshops for TDS's will remain in place but the frequency will be reduced as the uptake is low and some support can also be offered by SSW during supervision sessions.</p> <p>Specialist schemes will continue being promoted, will be included into the training brochure and will be seen as a career progression opportunity for carers. As well as direct carer feedback, visits to support team meetings in kinship and mainstream, will take place to determine the needs of carers, obtain feedback and enable further thought as to whether newly devised courses can be considered in preparation for the next brochure 25/26. Training venue's with Creshe facilities and family centres will continue being explored.</p> <p>The mandatory training courses for foster carers are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PACE • First aid • Safeguarding

- TSD

We continue to improve by having a higher number of foster carers accessing mandatory training online via a webinar or face to face delivered by Fostering Training. 76% of carers have an up-to-date safeguarding qualification and 85% of carers have an up to date first aid qualification. This ensures foster carers work collaboratively, safely and in turn minimize risk to children and young people they care for.

PACE

PACE	
End of quarter	% of Households Trained
Q2	31%
Q3	57%
Q4	71%

This year we committed to enrolling all foster carers in PACE training. PACE (playful, acceptance, curious empathy) is a model for foster care and social work that is embedded in the Trust-wide Connections Count model.

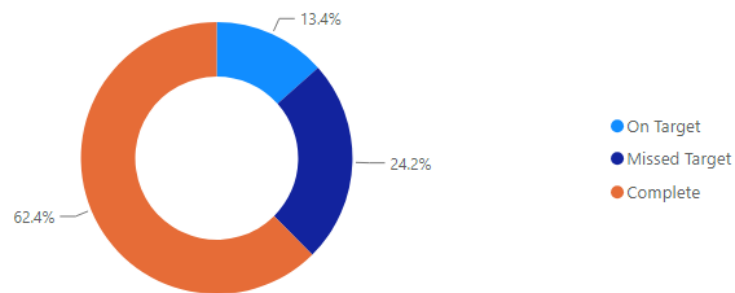
On 31 March 2025 we had 397 fostering households with at least one individual PACE trained, which is 71% of all approved households, up from 57% at the end Q3. The progress in PACE training highlights an impressive level of commitment and engagement from carers and staff.

Of the 29% who have not yet been trained, non-attendance can stem from a variety of factors:

- Personal Circumstances – Illness, family emergencies, or other personal issues can prevent individuals from attending.
- Lack of Awareness – Some individuals may not be fully informed about the event or its importance.
- Work & Time Constraints – If schedules clash or workloads are overwhelming, attendance may drop.
- Accessibility Issues – Physical or digital accessibility challenges can prevent attendance.

TSDs

All Foster Carers TSD Status



We continue to improve the number of carers who have achieved their TSD standard workbooks through 1:1 support and workshops. At the end of Q3 2024 18.2% of TSD's were overdue. This has improved to 24% at Q4. The overall number of households with a TSD remains stable, with a statistical decrease being due to carers resigning and new carer approvals.

We continue to offer TSD workshops alongside supervising social workers who offer ongoing support with carers during their visits and supervision.

In Q4 there were 5 workshops held. This information is communicated with fostering team managers, SSW's, advertised via the fostering portal and shared with BFCA. There is a higher percentage of kinship carers that have not completed TSD in comparison to mainstream carers. To help rectify this, fostering training provide supplementary training to coach kinship SSW's to an understanding TSD is mandatory and part of the fostering regs. SSWs are to utilise fostering supervisions and foster carers are to utilise the regular and ongoing TSD workshops.

As predicted, there is a higher percentage of kinship carers that have not completed TSD in comparison to mainstream carers. Whilst we understand the complexities for Kinship carers, we continue to promote the requirement to complete TSD and support their ability to achieve. To help rectify this, fostering training provide supplementary training to coach kinship SSW's to an understanding TSD is mandatory and part of the fostering regs. SSWs are to utilise

	fostering supervisions and foster carers are to utilise the regular and ongoing TSD workshops.
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Foster Carer Reviews

<p>Annual Review activity</p>	<p>At the end of the year, we had 93% of foster carers with a completed review within the previous year which is the same as the previous year. 287 out of 460 Annual Review meetings have been held by the ARO's during this annual period (April 2024 to March 2025). There have been 173 meetings cancelled during this time. The main reason for review meetings being cancelled is due to reports not being completed within timescales to allow the meetings to take place.</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <table border="1"> <caption>Annual Review Completed- Annual</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Support Team</th> <th>Percentage Completed</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Mainstream support 1</td> <td>80%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mainstream support 2</td> <td>68%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mainstream support 3</td> <td>62%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kinship Support Team 1</td> <td>45%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kinship Support Team 2</td> <td>30%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <p>A summary of the Annual Review Officers findings are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoking policy has now added to the FC Comments on CHARMS to encourages carers to complete this. • The scaling criteria in the feedback form requested from the CSW's has now been removed following feedback from foster carers. • We have seen improvement in communication between Business Support officer's, Independent Reviewing Officer's, 	Support Team	Percentage Completed	Mainstream support 1	80%	Mainstream support 2	68%	Mainstream support 3	62%	Kinship Support Team 1	45%	Kinship Support Team 2	30%
Support Team	Percentage Completed												
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	<p>Child social workers and Heads of service where feedback has been escalated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervising Social Worker’s continue to document their observations of foster children in placement although these needs improving and the relationship with their carers including babies and children who are non-verbal. This also supports to evidence the outcomes children reach due to the carer’s skill set and practice. Feedback from Birth Children of carers is now being monitored and encouraged to ascertain their views and ensure they feel supported. 111 out 249 responses have been received, and they have highlighted their views of feeling supported. We continue to encourage further engagement through SSW’s. <p>As we know triangulation of information is key the annual review process and as such, we track those who provide the information. The following table outlines the feedback provided for foster carer reviews during this annual period:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Feedback Type</th> <th>% Received</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Child’s Social Worker</td> <td>58%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Independent Reviewing Officer</td> <td>81%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Children Who Foster</td> <td>45%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fostered Children</td> <td>30%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Feedback Type	% Received	Child’s Social Worker	58%	Independent Reviewing Officer	81%	Children Who Foster	45%	Fostered Children	30%
Feedback Type	% Received										
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Fostered Children	30%										

Variations/Exemptions

Changes of Approval	We have developed a better understanding of how changes of approval can support mainstream sufficiency. This year we have undertaken targeted conversations with foster carers to encourage them to consider making unused bedroom space available for
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placements and have better procedures in place for the monitoring changes in capacity that result.

During quarter 4, a total of 6 Changes of Approval were granted. 4 were increases in approved numbers and 2 decreases in approved numbers leaving a net gain of 4 placements.

Across the year the service has increased the number of available placements by 27, with changing the approval status of existing foster carers. Thus, ensuring we are utilising our carers to the maximum capacity.

Reporting period	Increase	Decrease	Net
Quarter 1	11	-2	9
Quarter 2	13	-3	10
Quarter 3	11	-5	6
Quarter 4	4	-2	2
TOTAL	39	-12	27

A further 12 changes of approval were authorised this year which had no impact on capacity, for example changes of approved placement type, such as adding or removing Long Term.

Exemptions

This year a total of 69 exemptions were granted, 21 to Foster Birmingham and 48 to other local authorities and independent fostering agencies. This is 21 more than last year in total: 7 more to Foster Birmingham and 14 more to other agencies. It is believed to have been a positive as this has increased the number of children living with Birmingham carers and children remaining in their local area. It is also positive that other agencies continue to make requests and demonstrates a clear line of communication with local IFA's.

Reporting period	BCT Fostering	Others	Total
Quarter 1	7	12	19

Quarter 2	3	16	19
Quarter 3	4	8	12
Quarter 4	7	12	19
TOTAL	21	48	69

There were 3 additional applications made by external agencies that were not approved. The top reasons for exemptions being requested were as follows:

- To keep siblings together
- Carer has special skills to meet the needs of the child.
- Children previously placed with the carer

The service has one exemption that is currently active, with the children remaining in placement.

Early endings

Early Endings	<p>Early endings is the term used in Birmingham Childrens Trust for disrupted placements. During this annual period there has been three early endings. One for a sibling group of three and two early endings for single placements.</p> <p>We hold learning conversations after each early ending for BCT foster carers, in order to share information and reflect on the process, the placement and the ending without assigning blame. During the conversations wider learning outcomes may also be highlighted for development in policy and practice in all of the involved agencies. The learning from each meeting is considered by the Team Manager and Head of Service to improve practice and support improvement in practice.</p> <p>We know that BCT fostering have a consistently low number of early endings compared with other foster placements Birmingham children live within. We believe this to be indicative to the support, supervision, training and matching of child to foster carer.</p>
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Referral rates are noted for all placements across the Trust.

The majority of referrals are identified by the Early Ending Learning project through placement end data analysis.

The reporting year totals are below:

Source	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4 (Jan only)	Totals
Mainstream	6	8	2	0	16
Kinship	2	4	4	2	12
Total	15	22	11	4	52

The Independent Review Service experienced staffing issues which mean that no early ending reviews were held after the start of February. So while compared to last year the service has handled 1 more mainstream case and 2 less kinship cases, the projection was for a slight increase in internal fostering reviews until the curtailment.

The last available review of themes from these meetings indicated the following factors:

- Lack of professional curiosity
- Impact of changes in the professional network
- Understanding the impact on children who have remained in placement – siblings or not
- Lack of shared narratives about move

Planning is underway to hold a further whole service-learning session on professional curiosity, as part of the annual Service event in 2025.

Quality Assurance

<p>Quality Assurance</p>	<p>The use of performance data and changes in the CHARMS system has enabled the quality assurance ability for the service from dip samples to full audits. It also allows everyone to see a high-level compliance, for teams, caseloads and or individual carers. All staff from Heads of Service to supervising social workers are also able to run reports to consider compliance.</p> <p>The quality assurance within the service has been focused on specific focused audits as well as full audits to consider quality of practice. It is believed that focused audits can provide detailed information on specific practice and in this quarter newly approved carers, Early Permanence Carers and contacts closed at the enquiry stage are areas that have been considered. During this quarter we also conducted 150 phone calls to explore ways we could find more placements with our existing carers.</p> <p>All of the findings from audits are used to improve the service. The service continues to use performance reporting in order to quality assure a variety of areas within mainstream fostering.</p> <p>Some improvements this year include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained greater compliance and oversight of regulatory matters • Improved governance arrangements to drive recruitment, retention and sufficiency. • Development of pod and extension offer. • Increased therapeutic offer through clinical psychological consultations for foster carers. <p>The Kinship service has been piloting an audit tool they believed would be more beneficial to their specific work with kinship carers. The service knows the importance of auditing the quality of work from assessment to support, this will complement the performance data they monitor and review</p> <p>Learning and developments are shared by both briefing notes and Tabletop learning reviews. This can be reflective and often provide actions for reform in process, policy and or practice.</p>
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	<p>Foster carers have reported in a recent annual survey that they felt supported by the fostering service and that they have a good relationship with their supervising social worker.</p> <p>We have learnt from our carers' perspective that the team around the child approach required more collaboration. This was escalated via Heads of service to consider how communication and working together could be improved for foster carers and ultimately reaching goals for children and young people.</p> <p>In the coming year we will have a main focus on the voice of the child. We will be considering the different methods of gaining the voice of the child and how we have meaningful engagement with our children and young people. We will also be embedding and sustaining the new ways of working as part of the Trust 25 programme.</p>
BFCA	<p>The Heads of Service and managers meet with BFCA on a regular basis to discuss key themes and trends regarding foster carers experience. BFCA often challenge the service on behalf of their foster carers and work together to improve services within quarterly joint development meetings. Most recently the committee have highlighted grumbles around the communication with the children's teams, which can hinder the team around the child approach. We continue to work closely with Area colleagues and partners ensuring that our foster carers continue to be valued and respected as equal members of the Team Around the Child, as they are often the 'expert' of the child in their care.</p> <p>BFCA have direct communications with all members of the fostering service, from senior managers to supervising social workers. This has proven effective in grumbles and information being shared across the fostering service and with partner agencies and resolved in a timely way. The fostering escalation process is proving effective in ensuring early resolution.</p>
The voice of the foster carer	<p>The voice of the foster carer is gathered routinely throughout the year. This is often reviewed in auditing and dip sampling of case files, supervision sessions and various communication methods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual foster carer survey

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BFCA meetings • Feedback from concerns and compliments • Feedback from training • Annual review meetings • Fostering Panel attendance and feedback forms • Support groups • Home visits, meetings and telephone calls • Achievement awards and events across the service • Manager home visits • Carers attendance involved in recruitment and support and retention activities and task groups <p>Please refer to appendix 5 for a detailed overview of our approach.</p> <p>We have successful and positive relationships and methods for carers to provide views independently via the BFCA committee and or fostering network.</p> <p>The fostering service has a participation framework that provides an overview of how participation is important and used within the service. The framework included a consultation with Birmingham’s participation service and demonstrates a pledge to improving services through the voice of others and learning. This can be found in the appendices of the report.</p>
<p>The voice of the child</p>	<p>The fostering team request the voice of the child formally and compile their wishes and feelings on a regular basis informally. There are regular meetings and communications with the participation service for Birmingham Children Trust to triangulate findings and ensure the fostering service stay connected to the children and young people in care, across the Trust.</p> <p>The fostering team have completed some workshops for workers to look at how we capture and record information about the children, this came from listening to the children who had expressed a wish for them to be written to rather than written about within their files.</p> <p>This is an area of focus for the next year, to ensure we can summarise the voices captured from several sources, as we learn from the voices previously where children do not wish to answer the same questions from different sources such as CiC review meetings, annual surveys and child participation services. The fostering service</p>

	<p>would like any engagement to be meaningful, using creative ways of communication. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two participation events per year jointly with the children in care teams • Our own groups including children in care and foster carers. • Carer training to include former care experienced children • Former care experienced care leavers on fostering panel and as apprentices
<p>Foster carer support groups</p>	<p>Birmingham Children’s Trust Fostering Agency continues to provide several support groups, in various locations, across the city. Foster carers are consulted with, and our focus has been to relook at the current offer of support groups to ensure these are still in demand and something foster carers are attending.</p> <p>We recognise that our carers are busy, and we are adopting a hybrid approach with some of our groups where they are online as well as face to face. This has seen an increase in the uptake of foster carers attending these support groups.</p> <p>Our support groups on offer, target a range of matters, including Men who foster, caring for teenagers, emergency foster care, newly approved foster carers, caring for children with disabilities, staying put, and support and retention. Up to date information about support groups can be accessed by foster carers on portal on our microsite.</p>
<p>Foster Carer Support</p>	<p>We are committed to the importance of the facilitation of a range foster carer support groups and our development groups including the Recruitment Ambassador group and the Retention and Support groups. These provide us with the opportunity to inform the service, developments and ensure different levels of support.</p> <p>We have an established partnership with BFCA with regular Development Forum meetings with the BFCA Executive committee to consider practice and policy which impact on foster carers and the children and young people in their care. It is attended by fostering and colleagues from the wider trust including Child in Care, TESS, Virtual School, and Leaving Care. This Forum continues to be an effective mechanism to raise issues and seek resolutions. For</p>

example, the Child in Care Service introduced a new streamlined process to reduce delays with the processing of children's passports.

The Fostering Network membership continues to strengthen the support to our foster carers. The membership offers a range of benefits such as legal protection insurance for the whole fostering family in the event of an allegation, Helplines that can advise on many aspects of fostering, Access to mortgage, tax and home insurance providers who understand fostering and discounts on days out and holidays for the family to name a few. The Fostering Network provide added value in the national context and latest thinking in the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

We know that both foster carers and the BFCA committee know who and how to contact staff where and when required. Team Managers will consider the practice of Supervising Social Workers to ensure they are providing good support to their foster carers and respond swiftly to issues raised individually by carers or by BFCA.

As a service we continue to advocate for our carers and ensure there is a joint understanding about the role and what the daily routine of a foster carer can entail. We are committed to ensuring our carers feel an equal partner in the team around the child and their expertise is valued and respected. We are exploring ways with BFCA of raising awareness across the Trust and particularly strengthening relationships with social workers. Moving forward the role of the foster carer will be included in new starter social work induction and Executive Committee members will periodically attend Child in Care management meetings to share their experiences.

We have further strengthened our therapeutic support offer to our foster carers, through the commissioning of Meadows Therapeutic Service, which provides consultation sessions for the foster carer, supported by their social work. This is in addition to the work that TESS also provides.

The Ofsted Inspection in December 2024 where we were judged 'Good' made the following comments specific to foster carer support:

	<p><i>Most foster carers feel valued by their staff and managers, and this is reflected in the number of carers who have been caring for children for a long time.</i></p> <p><i>Many foster carers spoke positively about the support they have and continue to receive from managers and staff.</i></p> <p><i>Overall, foster carers feel positive about the support they receive from the agency.</i></p> <p>We value our foster carers and continue to formally acknowledge this through annual events including a celebration evening to recognise achievements, the welcome to fostering newly approved carers event and the family fun day. These events are well attended by mainstream and kinship carers.</p>
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Other Local Authority Children

	<p>This year Foster Birmingham has had 4 children placed from other local authorities, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandwell x2 • Walsall x1 • Worcestershire x1 <p>At this stage last year, we had seven children placed. The children from Walsall and Sandwell are in settled placements lasting for a year or more. The carers reside within the placing LA's boundaries.</p> <p>The Worcestershire placement began in November and is expected to remain for a few months until the child can be moved to live with his father.</p> <p>The agency continues to maximise the placements of Birmingham children with its own foster carers where possible. The placements noted above are historical arrangements. It is believed to be in the best interests of the children and young people to remain in placement.</p>

'Staying Put' Arrangements

We continue to be committed to Staying Put arrangements and view them as successful for supporting young people in permanent arrangements. We actively promote foster carers to keep young people under staying put arrangements as we value permanence for children. The fostering service has an established support group for Staying put carers, which captures the permanence aspects for Birmingham children and ensures joined up thinking across to shared lives wherever appropriate.

The numbers of young people in staying put arrangements has remained stable across the year, with a total of 38 Young people aged 18+ in Staying Put arrangements with Foster Carers at the end of March; this is 4 more than at the same stage last year. 16 were female and 22 were male.

The ethnic background of the Young People in a staying put arrangement was as follows:

ETHNICITY TYPE	NUMBERS
African	1
Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background	3
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	1
Black or Black British - Black Caribbean	3
Mixed - White and Asian	2
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	4
Other – Vietnamese	1
White - Any other White background	1
White - British	21
TOTAL	34

Reg 24 Placements

Over the course of 2024/25 the Kinship service supported a total of 71 Regulation 24 Temporary Approval arrangements. The service averaged around 27 reg24 carers at any given time. This is 7 less than last year's average, and 22 less temporary approvals in total.

While this is a notable decline, we have seen an increase in the rate of Reg24 carers receiving full approval from the ADM– 65% this year up from 61% the last. Gradual improvements to the early-stage filtering of referrals are likely to be leading this change. Refer to the Kinship Assessments report in appendix 4 for more information.

End of Reporting Period	Reg24 Carers	Reg24 Children
Quarter 1	26	38
Quarter 2	26	37
Quarter 3	27	37
Quarter 4	29	38
Average year to date	27	38

15 cases exceeded 24 weeks, as follows.

End of Reporting Period	Families Outside of Regulations
Quarter 1	4
Quarter 2	4
Quarter 3	2
Quarter 4	5
Total	15

	<p>The reasons for these cases lapsing the maximum allowable time for a temporary fostering arrangement was due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were outstanding checks • There were positive DBS and outdated medicals that needed updated information

Foster to Adopt

	<p>Fostering to adopt cases are managed via the Regional Adoption Agency. The Head of Service for BCT Fostering, maintains oversight of all Foster 2 Adopt carers. This is to ensure that in the dual approval stage fostering regulations are met and statutory requirements completed. On rare occasions this results in a foster to adopt carer attending fostering panel for a first review.</p> <p>The Foster 2 Adopt scheme for 2024/25 is summarised as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Total families with Foster to Adopt placements during 2024/25</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>New Families recommended as suitable for Early Permanence in 2024/25</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Foster to Adopt Placements Started in 2024/25</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Foster to Adopt families deregistered in 2024/25</td> <td>13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Families with Foster to Adopt placements started in Q4</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Children in Foster to Adopt placements started in Q4</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fostering to Adopt families requiring Annual Review in Q4</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </table> <p>Suitability for Early Permanence is considered at Panel when families are approved as adopters; but they are not formally given Temporary Approval as Foster Carers until they are successfully matched with a child.</p>	Total families with Foster to Adopt placements during 2024/25	12	New Families recommended as suitable for Early Permanence in 2024/25	9	Foster to Adopt Placements Started in 2024/25	9	Foster to Adopt families deregistered in 2024/25	13	Families with Foster to Adopt placements started in Q4	2	Children in Foster to Adopt placements started in Q4	2	Fostering to Adopt families requiring Annual Review in Q4	0
Total families with Foster to Adopt placements during 2024/25	12														
New Families recommended as suitable for Early Permanence in 2024/25	9														
Foster to Adopt Placements Started in 2024/25	9														
Foster to Adopt families deregistered in 2024/25	13														
Families with Foster to Adopt placements started in Q4	2														
Children in Foster to Adopt placements started in Q4	2														
Fostering to Adopt families requiring Annual Review in Q4	0														

Staffing

<p>Summary</p>	<p>The mainstream Fostering Service continues to be able to recruit in a positive way and to retain staff. We acknowledge this is a specific and specialist role and want to ensure that any candidate has the skills required to support panel and staff across the service. At the end of this reporting period the mainstream service will be in the position of being fully staffed. The service has been successful in achieving a permanent and sustained workforce.</p> <p>The Kinship Assessment teams find recruiting to permanent roles more of a challenge as the service continues to grow with an increase in assessment and approved kinship foster carers. The Trust committed to increasing the offer for staff who wish to join the Kinship assessment team as a recognition to the role being important and requiring stability.</p> <p>The Fostering service comprises of 117 FTE posts, with a culturally stable diverse workforce.</p> <p>Within the Kinship Support and Supervision Teams, we have recently been successful in recruiting to 3 full time Senior Social Work vacancies, leaving just a 0.5 post vacant. There are 5.5 Senior Social Work vacant posts in kinship Assessment Teams. 2 agency Senior Practitioners in the assessment teams have now converted to permanent contracts.</p> <p>Some vacant senior social work posts are covered by agency staff – 1 in assessment and 2.5 in support and supervision that will soon be filled by new permanent staff. In support and supervision there is an agency Senior Practitioner covering maternity leave.</p>
<p>Recruitment</p>	<p>The service continues to have positive recruitment of workers and staff across all functions with staff making transition from agency to permanent or joining from other services within children’s social work teams. It continues to be more difficult to find social workers for family and friend assessments. The Trust has committed to supporting the service and improving the offer to attract experienced assessors to the growing teams.</p>

	<p>We continue to have assurances that the fostering service will be financially viable for the forthcoming year. During this annual period, the mainstream fostering teams have continued to have a stable workforce. Where vacancies occur, they are advertised and recruited to promptly.</p> <p>The majority of the staff in the fostering service have worked for Birmingham Children’s Trust for a considerable amount of time. Safer recruitment is high on the agenda for the fostering service and therefore they work closely with Human Resource colleagues to ensure compliance is met.</p>
<p>Staff Meetings and briefings</p>	<p>Staff Meetings are held regularly and are increasingly now held within the office space. This has led to more teamwork and cohesion in practice.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Team meetings are well attended and valued across the service. The teams also have the opportunity to attend briefing sessions provided across the Trust and senior managers.</p>
<p>Finance</p>	<p>The Fostering Agency had an annual revenue operating budget of £25.3 M for 2025-26 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 £339M. The Trust is a wholly owned Company of Birmingham City Council.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

6. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

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:

The areas of reportable safeguarding noted within the report show no notable safeguarding concerns and they are regularly monitored via the Head of Service, including those from BCT Safeguarding Board and this has been replicated in previous reports. The service continues to provide focused training to all staff on areas identified to improve across all of fostering and this helps with an understood culture across the teams.

We have been proud of our achievements this year and the fact that this has been noted by external agencies, including Ofsted. We believe that we have a strong service with experienced leaders and managers, and this enables the service to achieve and grow, ensuring children are safe and achieve.

The Agency continues to review all aspects of the service, Birmingham Fostering service believes that it has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service, and this has been improved upon with increasing amounts of performance data and structure. The monitoring and reviewing continues to be reported and scrutinised on a regular basis. The performance culture continues to provide strength to understanding the outcomes for foster carers, children and young people and staff.

The Heads of Service continue to report to Birmingham Children's Trust Executive Board and Senior Managers to provide an overview of the service and assurance that we continue to meet statutory requirements.

The service has a focus to continue to plan for improved services and to increase its sufficiency of foster carers in all aspects. Here are some of the key points we would like to achieve in 2025/26:

- Embed and sustaining the new ways of working from the Trust 25 programme.
- Capturing the Voice of the Child.
- Set the Marketing and Retention strategies for 2025 –2028.
- Register with Ofsted our Supported Lodgings Scheme.
- Explore a pilot of the Mockingbird Model.

7. 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:

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

8. 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).

This report was prepared by:



Tracy Collins – Assistant Director- Commissioning and Specialist Services (Registered Manager) Approved by: Date: 13.06.2025



David Stringfellow - Director of Commissioning & Corporate Parenting (Responsible Individual)

Date: 17.06.2025

Presented and approved by the Trust leadership Board 24th June 2025

Appendices

Appendix One – Service development plan



Fostering Continuous
Improvement Plan 24_

Appendix Two – Ofsted Inspection Report



Ofsted Inspection
Report.PDF

Appendix Three – Kinship assessments analysis



Kinship Performance
Summary 2024-25.doc

Appendix Four – Statement of Purpose



Statement of
Purpose 2024-2025 \

Appendix Five – Position statement Voice of the Child & Foster Carer



Position Statement
Voice of carer & Child