

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date and Time :-	Tuesday 28 March 2023 at 3.00 p.m.
Venue:-	Rotherham Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.
Membership:-	Councillors Browne, Burnett, Z. Collingham, Cusworth (Chair), and Pitchley (Vice-Chair)
Contact	Dawn Mitchell, Governance Advisor Dawn.mitchell@rotherham.gov.uk

The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details.

Rotherham Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair or Governance Advisor of their intentions prior to the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence.

To receive the apologies of any Panel Member who is unable to attend the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

3. Exclusion of the press and public

Agenda Item No. 11 (Fostering Health Check and Recruitment Action Plan) is exempt from the press and public:-

Therefore, when considering this item, the Chair will move the following resolution when considering the appendix:-

That under Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of such Act indicated, as now amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 (information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual/financial information).

4. Minutes of the previous meeting (Pages 3 - 7)

To consider the minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 31st January, 2023, and approve them as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

5. LAC Update Report

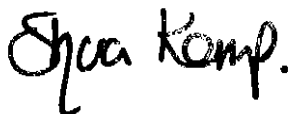
To receive verbal update (3.10-3.20 p.m.)

6. Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report (Pages 9 - 38)

- Jo McCartan to present
(3.20-4.00 p.m.)
7. **Children in Care Council/Little LAC - Plans for Summer Festival**
Discussion
(4.00-4.15 p.m.)
 8. **Performance Monitoring (Pages 39 - 55)**
Anne Hawke, Performance and Quality, to present
(4.15-4.45 p.m.)
 9. **Samantha Sykes Foundation Trust (Pages 57 - 61)**
Julie Warren-Sykes to report
(4.45-5.05 p.m.)
 10. **Rotherham Fostering Service 2021-22 Annual Report (Pages 63 - 104)**
Toni Traynor, Kelly Oxer and Sarah Kennedy to present
(5.05-5.25 p.m.)
 11. **Fostering Health Check and Recruitment Action Plan (Pages 105 - 125)**
(5.25-5.45 p.m.)
 12. **Draft LAC Posters (Pages 127 - 132)**
 13. **Frequency of Meetings**
Tuesday, 13th June, 12th September, 12th December, 2023 and 19th March, 2024
 14. **Urgent Business**

To determine any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.
 15. **Date and time of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be held on Tuesday, 13th June, 2023, commencing at 4.00 p.m. in Rotherham Town Hall



Sharon Kemp,
Chief Executive.

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
Tuesday 31 January 2023**

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Browne, Burnett, Z. Collingham and Pitchley together with Matthew Boud, Lynda Briggs, Pete Douglas, Monica Green, Anne Hawke, Rebecca Wall and Julie Warren-Sykes.

56. REBECCA WALL

The Chair reported that it was Rebecca's last meeting before she left the Authority. The Panel wished her well for the future.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

58. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items to be considered that necessitated the exclusion of any members of the press or public.

59. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2022

Resolved:- The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20th September, 2022, were agreed as a true record.

60. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN COUNCIL - DECEMBER AND JANUARY UPDATE

Angie, Baron, Bell, Bobby, Emil, Hope and Rosie, supported by Lisa Duvalle, gave a presentation to the Panel on the work of Rotherham's Looked After Children's Council drawing attention to:-

- Amplify Event, Manchester
- Advocacy and Independent Visitors Consultation
- Remembrance Sunday Parade and Service
- York Visit and Pantomime
- LACC Animation Project
- International LAC Council Tour (may be France)
- LAC Campaign Priorities 2022-23:-
 - Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - LACC Animation project
 - VIP Summer Fest Awards 2023

The LAC Council had tirelessly campaigned for a free leisure pass for Looked After and Leaving Care young people for the past 3 years. In December 2022 the Panel shared an update with the LAC Council on the free leisure activities secured so far:-

- VIP Big Brother Project 2023 – free gym membership for 50 boys aged 11/15 years
- VIP Sister Project 2023 – from gym membership for girls aged 9-15 years
- VIP Swimming – free swimming for Looked After and Leaving Care young people across 4 leisure centres aged 0-25 years

However, the young people shared their frustration and not being provided with the access codes for the gym so they could not be used and the amount of personal budgetary information that had to be provided to access the VIP Sister Project.

Issues were also raised about family time once a LAC was post-18. It was felt that communication need to be clear so all parties were aware of the expectations

Resolved:- (1) That the update be noted.

(2) That a meeting be held with a representative of the LAC Council, the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Head of Service Children in Care and Regeneration and Environment to discuss the issues raised with regard to the free leisure pass.

(3) That when the IRO review report was submitted in June that it include feedback on family time and focus on the child's voice.

(4) That consideration be given to including a standard agenda item of an update from the Head of Safeguarding.

61. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2023 - 2028

Rebecca Wall, Head of Service Children in Care, presented a report , for information, previously approved by Cabinet on 17th October, 2022 (Minute No. 57 refers).

The Strategy identified the principles that were applied when commissioning the provision of secure, safe and appropriate accommodation and support to children in care and care leavers over the next 3 years. It provided the needs analysis that would inform market management work seeking to ensure that there was the right mix of provision available to meet the needs of children and young people and that the provision mix provided positive outcomes and value for money.

The previous Strategy (approved in June 2019) had 6 key priorities for the Market Management Project. Progress against all these priorities had been reviewed to support the development of the new Strategy.

The revised Sufficiency Strategy focussed on what Rotherham Council

knew about its children and young people and the information about local homes for children. It included the voice of Looked after Children.

Discussion ensued on the Strategy with the following issues raised:-

- The last year had seen an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children which had placed pressure on 16+ provision
- Work with Roundabout (to commence on 1st March) with an offer of 8 beds
- Due to successful DfE funds, the number of 16 residential beds for emergency accommodation would increase to 20 across 7 Rotherham settings
- Real focus and linkage throughout the Strategy to Early Help, managing demand as it came through the “front door”
- 25% reduction in the initiation of Care Proceedings
- Joint commissioning between the Council and ICB bringing everyone together for collaborative planning
- Challenge to remain competitive for foster carers
- Work had taken place on joint commissioning for Social Care and Education. Visits had been made to ensure the appropriate care was in place together with safeguarding and that the education was of a high standard

It was noted that the report had also been considered by the Improving Lives Select Commission.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

62. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 2 2022/23

Consideration was given to the Quarter 2 2022/23 Corporate Parenting performance report which provided a summary of performance for Key Performance Indicators across the Looked After Children (LAC) Services. Appendix 1 of the report submitted provided performance on a page giving an overview of the Service's performance in comparison to the same period 2020/21 and Appendix 2 provided trend data, graphical analysis and benchmarking data against national and statistical neighbour averages where possible.

The report highlighted:-

- The number of children and young people Looked After had increased by 6 to 535, however, it was 29 below the same period in 2021/22. A key increase had been linked to unaccompanied asylum seeking children arriving via the National Transfer Scheme but also being placed as adults by the Home Office in hotels, who after accessing legal advice, sought support as a child
- 54 children had become Looked After and 46 ceased to be Looked After

- There were currently 33 unaccompanied asylum seeking children that were looked after by the Authority. The Commissioning Team were working hard to ensure that the Authority was able to offer placements/accommodation commensurate to need
- 90.2% of eligible Looked After Children had an up-to-date plan, a decrease of -1.9% in comparison to last year (92.1%)
- 76.5% of LAC in a family based setting had decreased compared to 79.8% at the end of Q1. Placement stability was an area of focus that the Fostering Service, responsible Team Manager and IRO had been engaged with to review what worked and what their roles were in working to prevent placement breakdowns
- 119 in-house foster carer households registered at the end of the quarter in comparison to 133 (-14). There were 4 foster family approvals in Q2 making 6 approvals year to date. However, 4 families had ceased to be foster carers bringing the total so far to 11, 5 less foster families at the end of the quarter. There were 9 prospective foster families in the recruitment process 7 of which had panels scheduled between October, 2022 and January, 2023
- Of the 541 children and young people Looked After by Rotherham, 6 were known to the Youth Offending Team
- 8 children had been adopted since April 2022 which was a reduction of one adoption for the same period last year
- 13 children had been adopted since April 2022, a decrease (-4) compared to the same period last year
- Since the Covid-19 pandemic, an improvement in the percentage of up-to-date health and dental checks was being seen with 68.5% of dental assessments and 83.1% of health assessments being up to date
- 77.2% of initial Health Assessments had been completed in time
- 92.8% of reviews during 2022/23 had been completed within timescales equating to 706 reviews in time out of 761 that were completed April to September 2022 (91.7% (341/372) in Q2)
- At the end of the Summer term 97.5% had a PEP compared to 98.3% Summer term 2020/21
- At the end of Q2 there were 311 young people in the care leavers cohort, an increase of 27 compared to the same point in 2021 (284) 78.1% of which had an up-to-date pathway plan (2.0% improvement)
- 97.4% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation. Of the 8 in unsuitable accommodation, 4 were in custody. However, the percentage of care leavers in employment, education and training showed a 9% increase with 71.2% at the end of the quarter compared to 61.6% at the same point in 2021

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- A South Yorkshire group had been established to look at dentistry, flexible commissioning and how to move it forward. A training package had been compiled for dentists to understand the vulnerabilities but there had been a slow uptake

- Consent was also an issue for dentists and unaccompanied children requiring the assistance of a translator
- A child placed with a foster family would normally attend the same dentist as its foster family unless the practice was full. In those cases the child would be referred to the Smile Foundation
- The Community Dental Service targeted vulnerable groups, dental phobic, children with learning disabilities etc. Someone with a dental phobia would not be referred to the Smile Project

Resolved:- (1) That the Quarter 2 2022/23 performance report be noted.

(2) That the next performance monitoring report include an update on dental checks.

63. PROMOTION OF FOSTERING THROUGH FILM

Resolved:- That this item be deferred until the next meeting with a representative of the Children's Capital of Culture Working Group being invited to the meeting.

64. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

It was noted that the report was submitted for information with the 2022/23 annual report being submitted to the June meeting.

65. SAMANTHA SYKES FOUNDATION TRUST

Resolved:- That this item be deferred until the next meeting.

66. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to consider.

67. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on 28th March, 2023, commencing at 4.30 p.m. to be held in the Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.

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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S
SERVICES**

Independent Reviewing Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2020/21

The Independent Reviewing Service has provided a high standard of service to children in our care throughout 2021/22, with performance remaining relatively stable despite the ongoing challenges of Covid 19.

The service has moved towards returning to a similar model to pre-pandemic, however we have learnt that for some children the online approach has been beneficial for their engagement and attendance at the meeting and with professionals in the process.

In summary the findings are:

What's working well?

- Review meetings held within statutory times scales maintained at above 94%, and the 6% out of time rearranged in the shortest time frame
- The offer of virtual reviews for some children has provided flexibility in the service to meet the needs of individual children
- IROs have continued to prioritise quality and compliance, utilising the challenge and resolution process, and with significant impact
- IROs use the informal resolution process effectively which prevents delay in resolution and reduces the need to then progress to formal challenge

What are we worried about?

- We need to work with children and young people on how they want to participate in their reviews, virtual or in person
- There is a need to improve the timeliness and challenge around adoption timescales
- We need to improve performance and challenge around the timeliness of social work reports for the meeting, and whether these are shared with children, families and carers in advance of the meeting

1. Purpose and Focus of the Report

The IRO Handbook provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and their employers on their functions in relation to the case management and reviews for looked after children. The statutory guidance states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership.

This report provides:

- The purpose of the service and legal context
- Governance arrangements
- The responsibilities of the IRO
- The development and make-up of the IRO service
- Information relating to performance and children and young people's participation
- Information in relation to disputes and IRO challenge
- Resources
- Areas for development

This report highlights key activity and performance undertaken in 2021/22 and in respect of 775 children. It draws from quantitative and qualitative information from the Insight reporting system and service reporting mechanisms.

The IRO handbook (Statutory Guidance) states:

'The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. To be successful, the role must be valued by senior managers and operate within a supportive service culture and environment. An effective IRO service should enable the local authority to achieve improved outcomes for children'.

2. Purpose of the service and legal context

The Children Act (1989) and the Adoption and Children's Act (2002) (Home Office) make it a legal requirement for the local authority to appoint an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to each child in care, to participate in case reviews. The IRO has the authority, independent of their employing local authority, to refer cases to the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) should they believe the local authority's plan for the child is not in their best interests.

The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) extends the IRO's responsibilities from monitoring the performance of the local authority on their functions in relation to a child's review to monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's case.

The intention is that these changes will enable the IRO to have an effective independent oversight of the child's case and ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

Together, the amended Children Act (1989) and the regulations specify:

- The duty to appoint an IRO
- The circumstances in which the children's social care department must consult with the IRO
- The functions of the IRO both in relation to the reviewing and monitoring of each child's case
- The actions that the IRO must take if the social care department is failing to comply with the regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way

The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. It is not the responsibility of the IRO to manage the case, nor supervise the social worker or devise the care plan. Although it is important for the IRO to develop a consistent relationship with the child, this should not undermine or replace the relationship between the social worker and the child.

There are now two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO, namely:

- Chairing the child's review meetings
- Monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis

As part of the monitoring function, the IRO also has a duty to identify any areas of poor practice, including general concerns around service delivery (not solely around individual children). The IRO should immediately alert senior managers if any such areas are identified. Equally important, the IRO should recognise and report on good practice.

In March 2014, the National Children's Bureau published an important piece of research entitled 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England'. The foreword was written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson who made the following comment:

"The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment or whether we are failing".

3. The Core Responsibilities of the IRO

The National Independent Reviewing Officer's manager's Partnership (NIROMP) offers practice standards for all IROs, namely that the IRO will:

- Ensure the child is central to all planning and decision making
- Ensure the child's wishes, views and feelings are given full consideration
- Be satisfied that each child's care arrangement is meeting their needs
- Ensure that each child knows how to contact you between reviews
- Make sure each review process results in clear, robust and informed judgements about the progress of the care plan
- Make sure care plans and decisions have a realistic timescale attached in keeping with the child's needs and a named person to implement them
- Challenge where there is drift in care planning and where necessary escalate to formal dispute resolution
- Be satisfied that plans for permanency have been identified by the second review
- Be satisfied that the corporate parent is meeting the requirements of the care planning regulations
- Pro-actively chase progress of the child's care plan and the implementation of review decisions
- Determine whether a review needs to be convened when there is a significant change/event in the child's life
- Champion the rights and entitlements of children living in care including their right to advocacy, legal support and redress through complaints and challenges
- Engage with the child's guardian in line with the Cafcass and IRO good practice protocol, to ensure effective communication about the child's care plan
- Provide both positive and constructive feedback to all the stakeholders to actively
- Promote good outcomes for children

Mission Statement

RMBC's Independent Reviewing Service exists to ensure that when Children and Young People are looked after by the Local Authority that they receive the highest possible level of care, support and planning. We will do this by adopting an unwavering and steadfast commitment to the following 'Pillars of Practice', with the understanding that we work for the child first and foremost. This mission statement sits alongside RMBC's commitment to all of the children in the borough, that they will be:

Resilient, Successful and Safe

Why am I here – What's going to happen? (Building Resilience)

- The child will always have a positive, sensitive and accurate understanding of why they are in care and what the plan is for them, they will have homes which are stable and supportive
- Moreover, the child will be an active, informed, and powerful participant in the planning and decision-making process

I want to be the best version of myself I can be. (Building Success)

- The IRO will ensure there is a clear vision of success for the child, we will always be aspirational for children in RMBC's care and will hold the Local Authority to account in meeting the child's goals
- The child's achievements will be celebrated within the review process and we will build upon the strengths demonstrated

How will you deliver for me? (Ensuring Safety)

- We will robustly monitor and review the standard of care and planning that every Looked After child is entitled to and will rigorously challenge areas of concern
- The review will be an inclusive and supportive forum for open and honest discussion between participants, where the contributions of all are valued. The focus will first and foremost be on maximising and developing the child's strength and wellbeing and ensuring that they have a strong and supportive network throughout their childhood and beyond
- The IRO service will work supportively, proactively, and positively with professional colleagues across the review spectrum, recognising that we will achieve the best results for the children we work for when we demonstrate honesty, integrity and respect

4. Extended Functions of an IRO

The statutory guidance makes clear that the social worker must inform the IRO of significant changes in the child's life. Examples of this being:

- Proposed change of care plan, for example arising at short notice in the course of proceedings following directions from the court
- Major change to family time arrangements
- Changes of allocated social worker
- Any safeguarding concerns involving the child, which may lead to enquiries being made under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 ('child protection enquiries') and outcomes of child protection conferences, or other meetings not attended by the IRO
- Where the child is excluded from school
- Where the child is running away or missing

- Significant health, medical events, diagnoses, illnesses, hospitalisations, serious accidents
- Agency Decision Maker decisions in relation to permanence

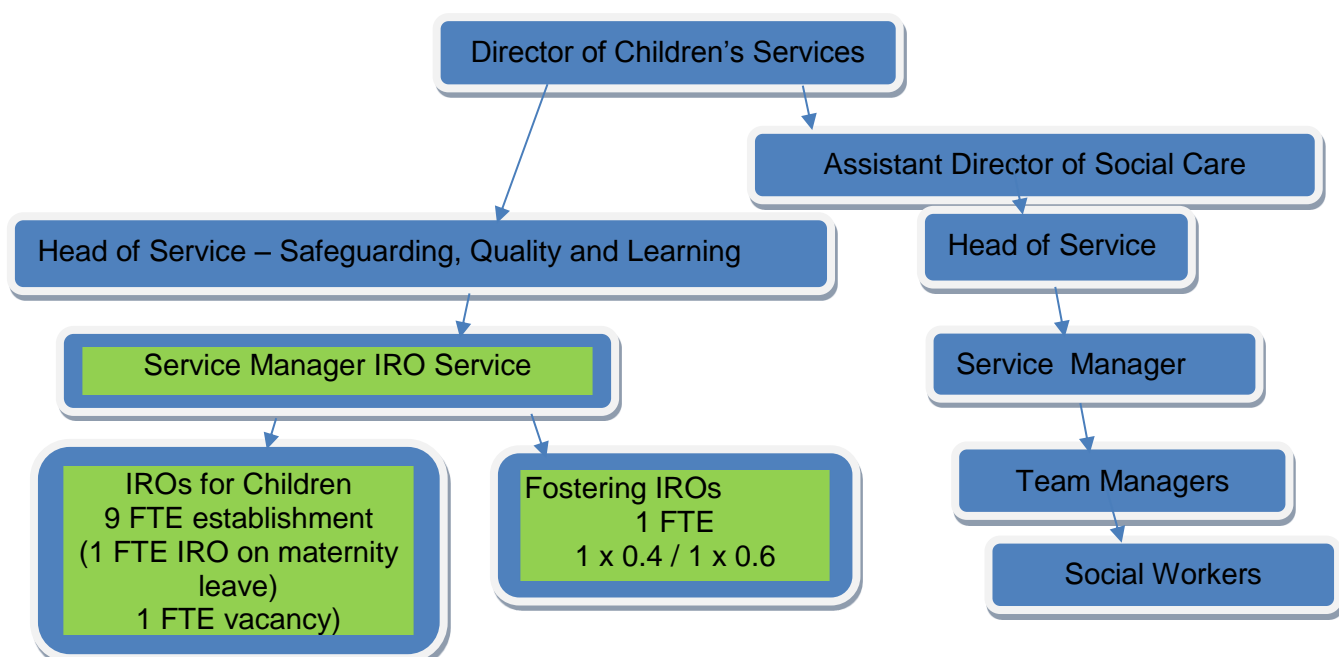
Furthermore, the statutory guidance sets out when an additional review must be convened prior to any of the following changes being implemented:

- Whenever there is a proposal for a child to leave care before the age of 18, i.e., for the child to become a relevant child, rather than an eligible child
- Wherever there is a proposal for the child to move from foster care, a children's home or other placement, to supported lodgings, or to other kinds of 'semi-independent' or 'independent living' before the age of 18 (i.e., from accommodation regulated under the Care Standards Act to unregulated accommodation)
- Prior to children subject to care orders being discharged from custody
- Wherever any unplanned change is proposed to a child's accommodation that would have the effect of disrupting his/her education or training
- Where a change of placement is proposed that would interrupt the arrangements for the education of a child in Key Stage 4
- When a change of placement is proposed for a child who has remained settled and established with the same carer for a significant period of time

In Rotherham like many other authorities, a small number of children are at times accommodated in unregistered settings for short periods, for these children reviews take place on a monthly basis, this is to ensure safety and quality of care provision for those children, and to drive the plan and provision for the child to be cared for within a registered setting as soon as possible. These settings and the review process for the children placed is discussed in this report.

5. RMBC Children's Services IRO Service

The IRO Team consists of the following staff (in green) as at 31 March 2022:



- The team consists of nine female and two male staff who are all White British, the service manager is male and white British
- Seven IROs were in work on a FTE basis with one IRO on maternity leave, this was supported by a 0.8 agency worker during some of 2021/22
- All IRO's receive monthly supervision and a yearly PDR which is reviewed at six months
- Team meetings are held twice monthly to provide updates to the team and focus on performance and service development
- All IROs have link teams across CYPS social care, they attend team meetings throughout the year and are the point of contact for any general issues raised and support
- The service manager and an IRO attend the Regional IRO Managers and IRO Group respectively. The IRO manager has taken up a position as regional representative at the National IRO Managers partnership (NIROMP)
- The IRO manager attends quarterly meetings with CAFCASS partners

The IRO handbook recommends an optimum caseload of 50-70 children per IRO in order to ensure adequate performance. IRO caseloads are impacted upon by several factors including:

- Whether the child is in On-going Court proceedings: Reviews are held more regularly within Care proceedings as a consequence of a new LAC status and reviews being required to ratify the final care plan.
- Children placed in unregistered accommodation: These children receive monthly reviews to monitor their progress and address the need for a registered setting.
- Placement moves: A placement move for a child requires a restart of the review process with reviews at 1, 3 and 9 months
- Children placed out of borough: At 31 March 2022 there were 122 children placed out of the RMBC area
- If children, carers or parents request an early review, or if the IRO feels this is necessary
- The number of siblings placed together on caseload: As larger sibling groups often require less separate review meetings to arrange.

6. Progress on the 2021/22 action plan

Area for development	Actions	Progress
Key performance objectives will be met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes within 15 days = 90% • Midway Reviews = 90% • Quality and Compliance (Q and C) check completion in all reviews • Quarterly performance report by the IRO service Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved • Midways and Q and Cs at 70% frustrated by capacity and sickness • Achieved
Attendance and Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Signs of Safety (SofS) review minutes template will be embedded into Liquid Logic (LCS) by year end 2022 • IRO visits to children to resume where possible on a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is now part of the wider LCS update being led by the IRO SM. Completion date end September 2022 • 113 children have not received a face to face or

	<p>face to face basis, all children to have had at least a virtual visit within the previous 12 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new report to be generated to capture IRO visiting data • New children's consultation form to be launched. • Participation figures for 'attended and spoke for self' to increase to at least 35% by the end of the year 2021/22. • IROs to support broader attendance by those in the child's network and to encourage SWs to consider this in their invitations. • A new data set and analysis to be generated regarding professional attendance at reviews, IROs to record this in all instances • New guidance, setting out the expectations and focus of LAC reviews will be shared with all social work teams. 	<p>virtual visit in the 12 months to 31 March 2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved • Achieved • Achieved, currently at 36.9% • Achieved and Continuing • Achieved but requiring further refining • Achieved
Impact and Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escalation figures have dropped for the year. All IROs have been requested to review their caseload and ensure they are satisfied that the LA is offering good or outstanding care to those children. The Q and C data will support whether formal challenges should be issued. This is also discussed in every supervision session. • IROs will be supported and encouraged to seek clear and time limited trajectories for children in the review process. The intent is that the provision of care for the child is always purposeful and rooted in the aspirations for that child. The review process should always result in a clear endorsement that the child should remain in care, or alternatively what specific action is required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escalations have increased this year. • Continues

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager to manager discussions have improved over the year, with the creation of the IRO/TM meetings also acting as a helpful touch point. This will continue into 2021-22. • The new Quality and Compliance Form is now added to LCS in order to support data analysis – this will inform the quarterly performance report. • The section 20 report will continue on a bi-monthly basis. In addition, the IRO service manager will complete a bi-monthly report regarding children subject of placements with parents regulations, this report will provide a similar analysis and action plan. • Where social work reports are not received in a timely manner the IRO will raise an informal challenge in all cases and hold a discussion with the Team manager. If the report is then not completed within 2 working days, the challenge will be made formal and sent to the manager for resolution. • Where the Fostering IRO identifies inadequate practice, this will be formally escalated through the existing challenge and resolution process. • IROs will be expected to report on delayed adoption and 3+ placement moves and to raise challenge where necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues • Complete • Complete, although the PWP report is quarterly given relative stability of these arrangements • This continues although formal challenges are not often lodged when they should be • This is now in place. • Continues
Looked After Children will have access to Health support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IROs will ensure dental checks are discussed at every review and escalations raised where required. The IRO manager will seek clarification as to the plan to address the backlog via the AC (Physical & Emotional Health) Workstream. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work has been completed regarding this area, see report under Health.

7. Feedback from Children, Young people, professional and carers

Consultation and feedback is essential in order to know that the service we are delivering fits with our aims and has a positive impact on the lives of children and young people. As this reports demonstrates, involving children in their reviews is a central tenet of our practice. The feedback below has been offered via the various adults present in reviews. This is positive to read and reaffirms the consistency and impact that an IRO can bring to the lives of looked after children. The aim going forward is to devise a more structured feedback system for professionals cares and children.

“You are the best IRO In have ever had and this has been the best review”

Child felt listened to, there was space for a joke or two.

“The structure of the review really gave me a good insight into the young person’s care and his circumstances- the scaling helped my understand where he was on the various aspects of his care plan in preparation for his pathway plan”

Personal Advisor

(He) is a brilliant IRO because he gets ‘stuff’ done!

Young Person in care

“I like the way each area of the care plan is broken down and discussed in detail as this helps me to think about what scale to give and to think about what I think needs to happen next...I feel like included in discussions and that my voice is being heard”

A parent reflecting on how Signs of Safety has helped in reviews

Young person who chaired his own review.

"I like the structure (of Signs of Safety LAC reviews) because of the what's working well and what we are worried about. This is because it helps us work out next steps to address the worries. I really like scaling each part of the care plan separately because it gives others a good insight as to how I feel about different aspects of my plan when I scale and sometime leads to further discussion about more actions that can be added to next steps- hearing other people's scale also helps me to know what other people feel about how I am doing in the different areas of my life and because we scale it at each review I can see when things are getting worse or better."

Foster carer feedback

"I find the review process quite straightforward and a good opportunity to discuss issues arising since the last review. I consider I have a good relationship with my IRO. I feel I am listened to, treated fairly and appreciated. Whilst the virtual review has its place, let's face it we all have such busy lives, however the face to face is much better and I do miss it."

The fostering IRO has helped me deal with a very proactive parent. Handled legal issues and general disputes. All of it done in a firm, respectful manner. She has always been available to me for advice which I have found very useful."

I am extremely happy with my IRO"

8. Consistency offered by the IRO

One of the significant benefits of the IRO role is the consistency that this offers to the child. IROs often have over 10 years post qualification experience. They tend to remain an IRO for some considerable time, as the role draws on multiple skills and turnover is low within RMBC with the newest IRO having been with the service for 3 years. Some children have experienced the same IRO for over 5 years, this is invaluable for children that often experience multiple changes in social worker and placement moves.

9. The Profile of children in care

On 01 April 2021 596 children and young people were looked after by RMBC. This represents an increase of 2 children at the same point the year before. This figure equates to 106.1 children per 10,000 of the population and sits in comparison to a statistical neighbour average of 92.0 and a national average of 65.0. By 31 March 2022 there were 551 children looked after indicating a reduction of roughly 7.5% throughout the year.

9.1 Children ceasing care

216 children ceased to be looked after in the reporting period, compared with 186 in the previous year. A high of 31 Children ceased care in March 2022, compared with a low of 12 children in June. Last year it was identified in this report that more children ceased to be looked after in the second half of the year. 110 children ceased care in the first half of 2021-22, compared to 108 in the second half of the year. This suggests that the upward trend in children being discharged from our care had continued. Notable figures from the table below are

- Despite the cessation of care for an additional 32 children in 2021/22 compared to the previous year. There is no increase in those aged over 18, thus the discharges were achieved through practice rather than purely the child's age.

- There was 100% increase in relation to children ceasing to be looked after due to moving to 'somebody without previous parental responsibility'. On interrogation this appears to be due to the award of Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) – often in interim Court proceedings. This may have converted to Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) in due course. In addition 12 ICOs, 9 Full care orders, 10 on s20, 1 Placement Order granted (appears to have been incorrectly recorded).
- There has been an increase in SGOs compared to the previous year with 27 being made in this year.
- Roughly the same amount of children have returned home on a planned basis. This suggests that reunification is an area that could reduce strain on the service and that children could have the opportunity to live within their families where safe.
- 48 children have ceased care for 'any other reason'. (24 of these are aged 18)

Reason Ceased LAC	Number Ceased LAC	
	2020/ 21	2021/ 22
Aged 18 (or over) and remained with current carers (inc. under staying put arrangements)	23	20
Adopted - application unopposed	29	26
Adopted, consent dispensed with	5	6
Left care to live with parents, relatives, or other person with no parental responsibility (CAO)	16	32
Moved abroad	1	0
Died	2	0
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	5	5
Returned home - Residence order	7	9
SGO made to former foster carer(s), who were a relative or friend	19	27
SGO made to former foster carer(s), other than relatives or friend	1	2
SGO made to former foster carer(s), other than former foster carer(s) who were a relative or friend	2	2
SGO made to carer(s) other than former foster carer(s), other than relatives or friends	0	2
Planned return home to live with parents (no order)	31	29
Unplanned return home to live with parents (no order)	1	4
Independent arrangement with formalised support	5	0
Transferred to adult social services	2	3
CLA ceased for any other reason	36	48
Sentenced to custody	1	0
Accommodation on remand ended	0	1
Age assessment, age determined to be over 18	0	2
Grand Total	186	216

9.2 Children entering care

In 2021/22 176 children became looked after on 180 separate occasions (meaning that a small number of children became looked after more than once). Admissions are spread without any clear pattern throughout the year with a high of 26 in August 2021 and a low of 6 admissions in May the same year. Notable areas are the 39 children placed within their families; this constitutes nearly 22% of all placements made. In addition to these the Court made orders under section 38(6) for another 20 (11%) of children placed within their networks and requiring assessment.

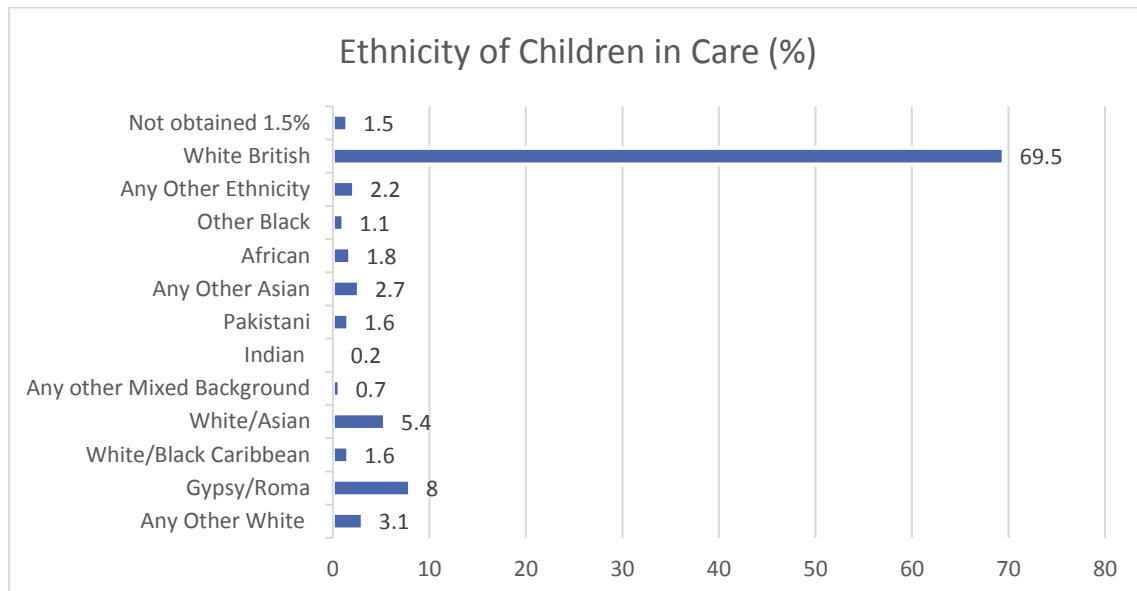
Placement Type made on admission	No of Episodes	No of Children
Children's Homes	3	3
Placed with parents or other with Parental Resp.	3	3
Independent living (flat/lodgings/friends/B&B)	21	20
Residential Care Home	1	1
NHS / Health Trust or other Establishment	2	2
R38(6) - Court Directed Placement	20	20
Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA	39	39
Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering	6	6
Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter- FFA	2	2
Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA	65	64
Unregistered Emergency Accommodation	8	7
Unregistered Unregulated Accommodation	7	7
Z1 - Other Placement	3	3
Total	180	176

It is also notable that out of the 180 admissions to care, 50% (90) were as a consequence of section 20 (s20). The IRO service manager checks and reports on s20 admissions on a bi-monthly basis and these reports offer assurance that the majority of these placements are appropriate, and that delay in issuing proceedings, where warranted, is minimised. The majority of s20 admissions convert to care orders or return home within a satisfactory timeframe. The IROs have a core role in ensuring delay for all children looked after is minimised. They achieve this through monitoring of the plan and any legal proceedings, scrutiny of information and plans, check and challenge and dispute resolution process. In addition, children were admitted to our care as a consequence of:

- 72 Interim Care Orders
- 1 remand to LA care
- 12 Police Protection events
- 2 Emergency Protection Orders
- 3 short breaks

9.3. Ethnicity and age of children in care

Current (as of 19.08.22) data shows the distribution of the ethnic backgrounds of RMBC's children in care as demonstrated below.



The 2011 Census (detail on Ethnicity from the 2021 census will be released October 2022) revealed that Rotherham has a White British Population of 91.9%, with the largest other communities coming from the Pakistani population (3%) and White Other (1.4% and recorded for people of Eastern European backgrounds). The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population in Rotherham in 2011 was recorded as 8.1%. At present Looked After Children from BME backgrounds represent 29% of all children in care. This is an increase of 2.6% from the previous year. This is disproportionate to the demographics in Rotherham, with for example people from a Gypsy/Irish Traveller background being representing 0.049% of the population of the borough, but with 8% of children in our care from a solely Gypsy/Roma background. Similarly, children from a Black African background are at least twice as likely to be in care, the population of people from this background constituting roughly 0.65% of the borough but 1.8% of those children in our care.

10. IRO Activity and Performance

There were 1753 LAC reviews held in 2021/22, a reduction of 38 reviews from the previous year, with full time IROs holding 216 reviews in the year on average. IROs completed an average of 210 reviews each this year with the highest number being 230 and the lowest being 185 for a full time IRO over the course of the whole year. This disparity is explained by changes to plans for children after allocation, such as placement moves, unregistered provision or IROs adding in additional reviews to track progress. In addition to covering reviews for colleagues.

Over the course of the year 94.4% of reviews were held in time, equating to 1687 reviews undertaken. This is a reduction from 96.2% in the previous reporting year. Review timeliness was impacted upon by IROs covering reviews for colleagues and changes of agency worker, with gaps in between new appointees.

11. Review Reports

All professionals attending the child's review are expected to provide a written report, constituting either a LAC review or Pathway review report. These will be collated prior to the review and sent to IRO to prepare for the meeting. The 'key' report is completed by the social worker for the child. It is expected that this report will clearly set the scene, detailing

the successes and worries over the preceding period and how the plans made for the child have progressed. The report should also set a clear vision for the continued care of the child. It is expected that this report is shared with attendees, including the child where possible, in advance of the meeting in order to support collaboration

Pre-meeting Report Timeliness	No.	%	No.	%
	2020-21		2021-22	
5+ days before	414	23.6%	333	26.1%
1-4 days prior	613	35.0%	346	33.6%
Same day	353	20.1%	440	19.8%
After Review	373	21.3%	567	20.5%

As can be seen from the table above, 26.1% of social work reports were received 'in time' for the review. Whilst this is an improvement from last year non-completion remains an issue and impacts on the quality of reviews, this also leads to reviews being cancelled.

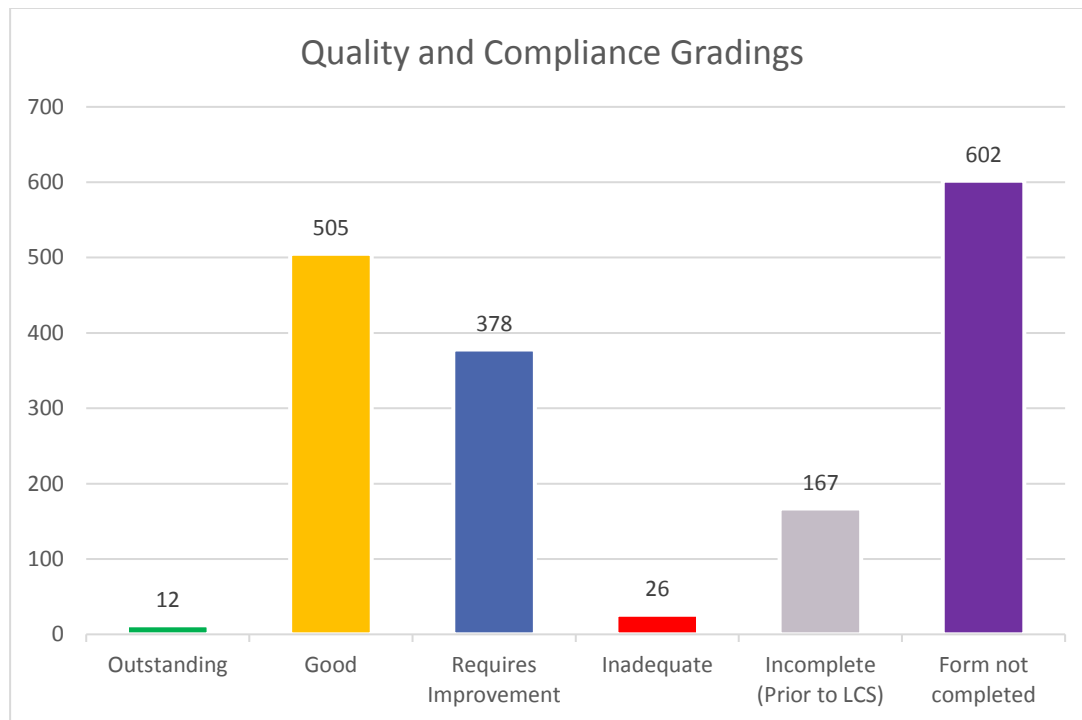
Statutory Guidance states that review recommendations are produced within 24 hours of the review held and distributed within 5 working days. The data suggests that this is achieved. In addition, review minutes should be distributed to all parties within 20 working days of the review meeting. IROs record and complete their own minutes, business support is responsible for distributing such via email and postal services.

12. Quality Assurance

Central to the IRO role is the quality assurance function. The review itself provides ample opportunity to ensure that the Local Authority is carrying out its duties to those children that it looks after. In the vast majority of these cases, the Local Authority acts as corporate parent, and IROs, with their 'arm's length' independence are key to holding the Local Authority to account.

In preparing for reviews IROs complete a 'Quality and Compliance' Form on LCS. One of the key achievements this year has been the redesign of this form in order to provide a more detailed view of the child's circumstances and the work of the LA, to include scaling. In addition, in devising a 'feedback loop' to the IRO in order to check any actions required or views from the receiving team manager. The form was devised and tested as a word document word prior to embedding it as an LCS form, as such the cohort figures for the year are impacted.

Quality and Assurance Grading Outcome



As the chart above demonstrates, of the 1753 reviews completed in 2021-22, quality and compliance forms were completed on LCS for roughly 64% of reviews since the LCS form was adopted. This low figure is due to many reviews requiring short-notice IRO cover due to staff absence and as a consequence of general capacity issues within the service. Where the form was completed, it was found that 46% of situations for children were reviewed at good or outstanding, with twelve Q and C checks graded at outstanding. A finding of requires improvement was found in 33% of reviews with an inadequate finding made in 2% of reviews (26 Occasions) there were no findings of critically inadequate practice, scaled at either 1 or 0.

The intent of the new LCS report is to generate thematic information in relation to outstanding and inadequate practice, with the aim that this information will support managers to address practice issues and to create opportunities for learning and this data is shared with the LAC service manager in a monthly keep in touch meeting. In relation to inadequate findings IROs found that this was in relation to;

- Assessment and planning on 5 occasions
- Outcome and Impact on 5 occasions
- Child's views on 2 occasions

In addition, Team Managers are supported through the form to respond to the issues raised and detail any actions needed, the IRO then reviews this response before closing the form down. The aim being to encourage a dialogue a restorative resolution.

13. Formal Challenge and Escalation

Challenge and escalation is a cornerstone of effective IRO practice, with IROs having the ability to escalate to CAF/CASS in the most serious of situations, for independent oversight and resolution. Fortunately, this has not been required.

IROs have several avenues for progressing plans and ensuring oversight, this is termed the 'IRO footprint'. Where there are concerns that a child's care journey is drifting, or there are serious concerns about the standard of care and social work intervention, the IRO will most commonly revert to a formal escalation.

In 2021-22 20 Escalations were initiated with all resolved at stages 1-2. This is an increase of 3 from the previous year. Formal Challenge Themes were as below:

Key theme	Drift and Delay	Management Oversight	Quality of Provision	Quality of Plan
Specific Issue	No Pre-Meeting Report (7)	Placements with Parents Regulations (5)	Safeguarding Concerns (1)	Changes to family time/plan (1)
Specific Issue	SGO planning drifting (4)			
Specific Issue	Lifestory work (1)			
Total	12	5	1	2

Drift and delay remains the most common theme for concern, with specific factors leading to the challenges made. These challenges led to resolution in relation to SGO plans drifting, although a lack of SW reports was also seen within this category. For 2022-23 this issue will be separated out from drift and delay as this is a more common theme. Management oversight was also an area for challenge with the majority of these issues being linked to outstanding 'sign off' of Placement with Parents regulations. IROs were instrumental in supporting the Local Authority to resolve outstanding regulations for many children. There were no imminent concerns about these placements however the interventions of IROs yielded formal approval and supported clarity regarding the longer term plans. As a consequence of this work the IRO service manager completed a report in 2021/22 and updates this on a twice-yearly basis. Informal challenge remains the preferred route to resolution for IROs with 96 informal challenges and resolutions being recorded this year.

14. Lifestory Work

It is essential for children to have a clear sense of identity, if for example they have been adopted, or for children in care to understand their plan and how this relates to their history. As such 'life story work' has a series of flexible definitions, dependent on what is required for the child concerned, this is discussed and agreed at the review and IROs make recommendations in respect of lifestory work completion.

The extent to which this lifestory work is completed has been captured in the IRO quality and compliance form since November 2021 and to date this indicates that 31.9% of all children looked after have completed lifestory work as required by their circumstances and wishes.

IROs are encouraged to escalate such matters if drift is felt to be unacceptable. This year, only one such formal escalation was recorded, suggesting that IROs accepted the plan to complete this work, or indeed the necessary escalations have not been made. It is expected that all review recommendations address any outstanding explanations for children and if not completed by the agreed timeframe, that a formal escalation is made.

15. Midway Reviews

Midway reviews provide an essential checkpoint for the IRO to measure the progress of the recommendations, this helps to avoid delay and also should allow the opportunity for the IRO and social worker to plan ahead for the next meeting. In 2021/22 898 Midway reviews were completed by IROs. Some children will have had several midway reviews due to their complex circumstances whilst others may not have had a midway review.

At 31 March 2022 midway review performance was at 65% for the service. This has steadily decreased in 2022 as the impact of vacancies within the service has gained momentum.

16. Broader Impact

The IRO service manager continues to complete a review of all children placed under section 20 on a bi-monthly basis, this report gives a qualitative insight into the status and plans for those children looked after under section 20. There has been a steady increase in children looked after under section 20 from 36 children in March 2021 to 49 children in April 2022. A review of these reports has found that:

- Children aged under 5 do not 'drift' in section 20, Care Orders are sought where required without undue delay
- Section 20 is used effectively for those children seeking asylum in our area
- Consent is largely gained and recorded on file when children are placed – the report advises where this has not occurred and as a consequence managers have been informed
- Management oversight on section 20 arrangements and for children returning home is strong
- The IRO footprint and quality assurance for children subject of section 20 is also generally robust
- Children placed under section 20 are often in Public Law Outline (PLO) processes alongside, where drift is identified the IRO service manager is well placed to follow this up as line manager of the PLO case manager.
- The bi-monthly section 20 report is circulated at Senior Management Team (SMT) and distributed to all senior managers in social care

In addition, the IRO service manager produced a report on PLO and Court outcomes in January 2022, alongside the PLO case manager. This report is intended to be completed on a 6 monthly basis. Findings from this report have been revealing and suggest that there is an increased use of PLO and an enhanced understanding of threshold. These factors, alongside the application of the PLO panel appear to have contributed to a reduction in Court proceedings and ultimately 'Care' applications. Timeliness of PLO processes continues to be an area for internal check and challenge. The IRO service manager has collaborated with the Principal Social Worker (PSW) in completing a revised parenting assessment.

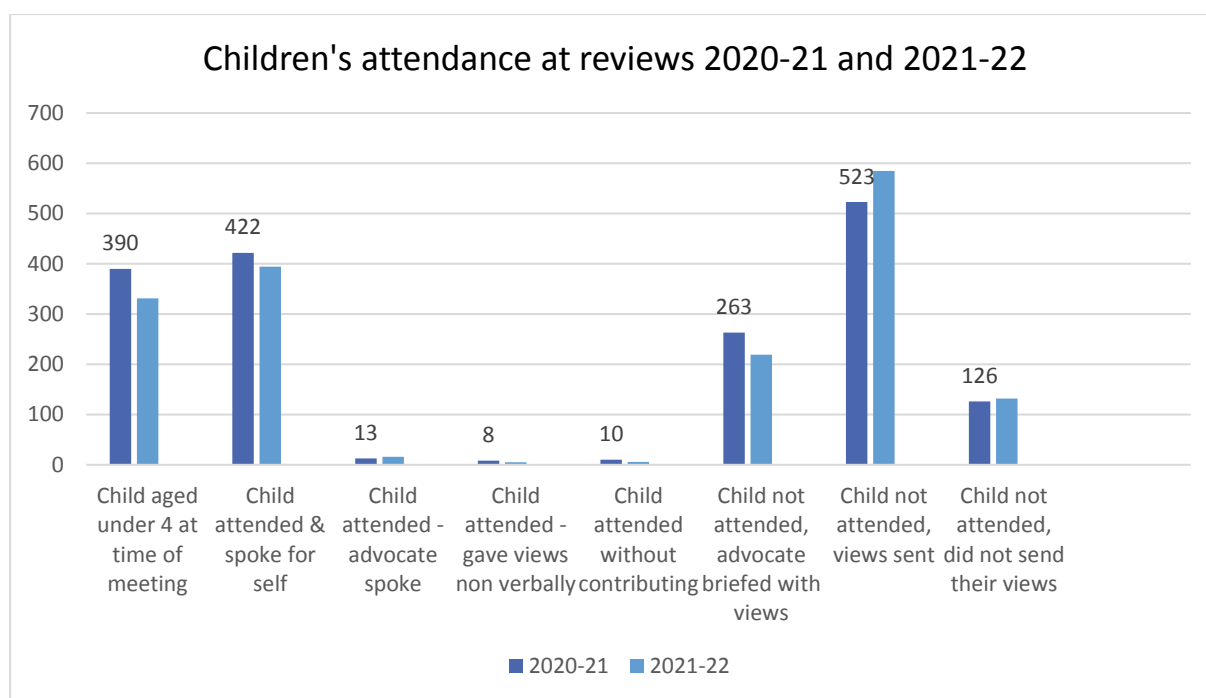
The IROs completed 47 case file audits in 2021/22. This supported the broader learning for the department, and in line with audit practices, offered assurance or challenge with regards to social work practice for those children. The outcomes of these audits is subject to reporting via the Quality and Learning Service and supports system wide learning.

17. Signs of Safety and Success

Rotherham operates under the Signs of Safety (SofS) practice model, which is incorporated in the LAC review process. This model assists IROs to simplify reviews for children and carers and focus upon ‘what’s working well, what are we worried about and what needs to happen?’ This approach supports IROs to meaningfully include strengths in the review process, asking about the positives for children and how this translates to planning– for example in relation to family time, career and educational aspirations, and relationships with others, whilst not missing what needs to change to develop smart focused plans.

18. Participation in Reviews

The majority reviews held in 2021/22 were held on a virtual basis due to continuing restrictions related to the Covid pandemic. Restrictions started to be lifted in the latter part of the year and IROs increased face to face visits to the children on their caseload. Feedback from children and young people suggests that for some of them, virtual reviews work well – sitting in a room with professionals can be daunting and a hybrid approach, where the child can be supported by their carer is preferable. In 2021/22 91.4% of children either attended or gave their views to the review process. In 2022/23 consultation will take place with children and young people on how we can support them to meaningfully participate in their review as we emerge from the pandemic and learn from the experience.



The table above shows that children either attend or share their views in over 90% of reviews. The IROs support children to take an active role in planning and leading their review, where able and appropriate. For example, child A chairs her own reviews and directs care planning – she is supported in preparing for these meetings and formulates her own worry statements and success goals.

The use of virtual reviews has had some success. For example, one child has attended all of their reviews, they enjoys the use of technology, having struggled with larger face to face meetings and rarely attending these. This child is now increasing in confidence and the IRO is looking forward to supporting them to their own meetings.

The newly amended review minutes on LCS will have the facility to record attendance in professional groups, this will support monitoring and reporting on these figures in a more

efficient manner. At present professional attendees have to be created on LCS which is not always possible. In addition, the attendance is ascribed to job role, therefore grouping by profession is challenging.

19. Visits to Children by the IRO

In recent previous years COVID-19 restrictions had a significant impact on the visits IROs made to children in care, the issues linked to the pandemic continued throughout much of 2021/22, lessening in the final quarter of the year. Virtual visits, using WhatsApp or Microsoft Teams became the norm in the context of lockdown, with 94 Virtual visits being recorded. In early 2022, face to face visits resumed as much as possible, targeting those felt to be most vulnerable first of all – children in residential settings including and specifically those out of area, those with additional risk factors risk such as missing or child exploitation risk and or out of education and where there may be other concerns.

Face to face visits to 116 children were completed in the year, with 79 or 68% of visits undertaken in the last quarter of 2021/22.

20. The Health of Looked After Children

IROs monitor the extent to which the health of Children Looked After is checked and any issues addressed. The child's health is a standing agenda item for reviews.

Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

At 31 March 2022, 403 or 94% of children had an up to date health assessment.

137 Initial Health Assessments were completed over the year, with 69.3% being completed within the prescribed 4 week timeframe. The reporting figures have oscillated throughout the year, revealing no particular trend. IROs are expected to escalate undue delay in relation to Initial Health Assessments (IHAs), however no formal escalations on this matter have been raised. The IRO service manager attends the LAC Physical & Emotional Health sub-group and the health check performance is monitored and discussed there with all relevant managers present.

Strengths and Difficulties

The IRO ensures that each eligible child (Aged over 5 and Looked After for 12 months +) has an appropriate strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) which is used to assess the child's emotional and psychological health needs. In 2021/22 274 SDQs were completed meaning that 60% of eligible children had an SDQ undertaken. Further analysis is needed to understand why 40% of Looked After Children do not have up to date SDQs. In Rotherham the Local Indicator gives a larger cohort of children i.e., those aged 3+ and Looked After for 12 months or more. As a consequence, for these children the performance drops to a completion rate of 49%. This performance has dropped from last year by roughly 10%.

Dental Checks

As at 31 March 2022 Dental checks were completed on 78% of children, this is a significant increase compared to the 32% of checks completed in time throughout in 2020/21 and the 59% reported at the same point in 2021. The IRO service was pro-active in addressing these outstanding checks as IROs felt that the figures were not an accurate representation of what was being reported by social workers in reviews. As a consequence, IROs agreed to contact allocated social workers and encouraged them to update the child's case file.

This had in an improvement in the performance reporting with a jump of over 20% or 86 children from 30 September 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The IRO service manager has also engaged with the Oral Health Lead for RMBC, attending the Local Dental Council for the region. This has enabled discussion in ensuring Looked After Children have access to dental care in the wake of COVID restrictions and IROs have been briefed to share information with social workers and carers for any children with these problems, and will signpost to the 'SMILE foundation' if required.

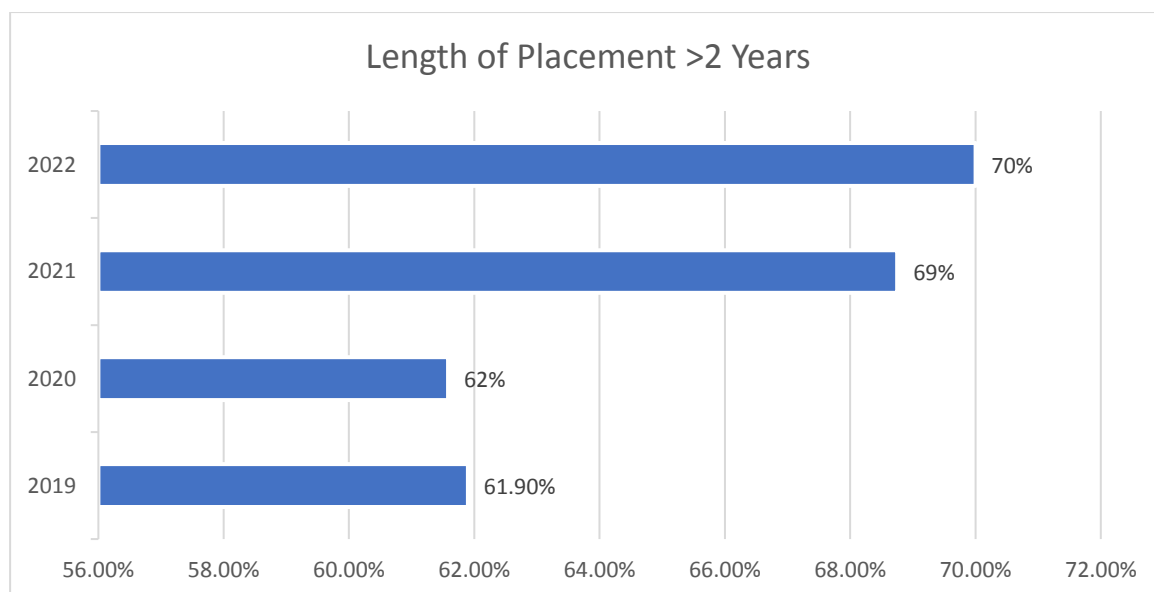
21. Education for Looked After Children

The IRO is responsible for reviewing the personal education plan as part of the statutory review ensuring the child is being provided with the support they need to reach their maximum potential. Within the review process the IRO is responsible for ensuring the PEP (personal education plan) is up to date and is sets clear aspirations, which are reflected in the care plan. At 31 March 2022 93.7% of PEPs were completed within timescales and is consistent with throughout the year prior, recorded at 94.6%.

The IRO monitors the extent to which the child has 25 hours education and will escalate any concerns as part of the child's review process. The IRO quality assures that the pupil premium has been utilised to support the educational outcomes for the individual child. Any concerns are raised with the individual school and the virtual school, via the Virtual Head for Looked After Children. Educational provision is overseen for children placed within residential care or complex settings as part of the 'Residential Panel' attended by the IRO service manager.

22. Placement Stability

RMBC is committed to ensuring stability for all children looked after, where this is not possible and children move on an unplanned basis, disruption meetings are held and attended by the IRO, the meeting is chaired by the Supervising Social Work Manager.



As can be seen above, placement stability has remained consistent over the course of 2021/22, improving slightly against last year's figure. Out of a cohort of 241 children (looked after for more than 2.5 years) 169 have been in the same placement for 2 years or more. IROs are encouraged to consider escalation processes if placement moves are considered

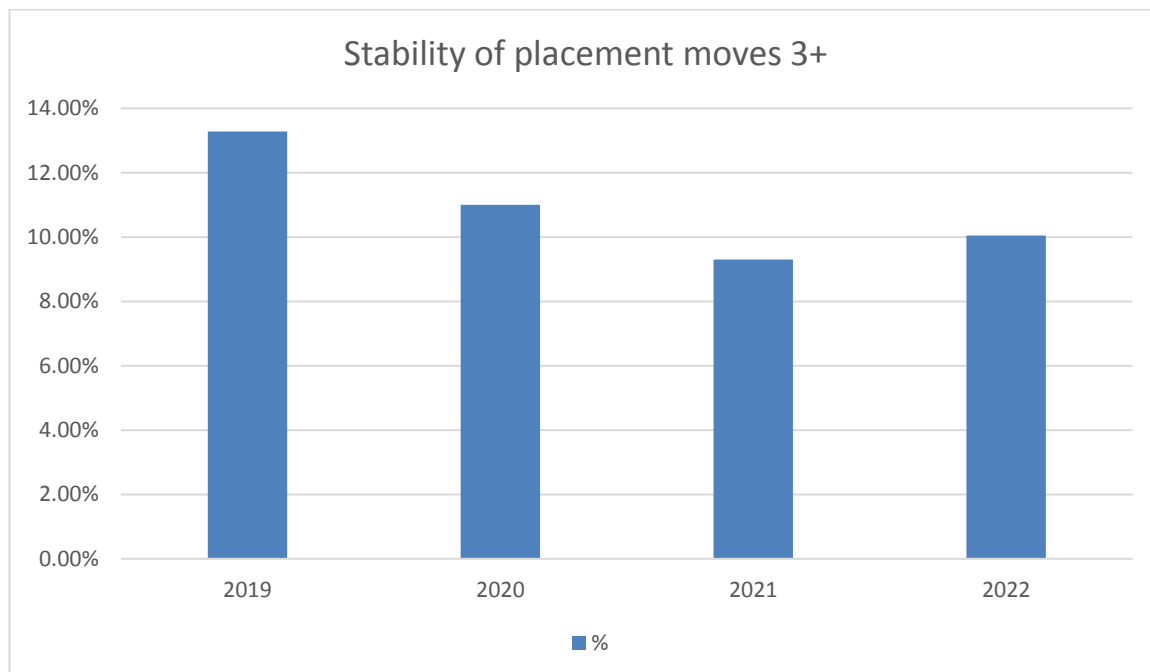
to cause any detriment to the child. During the year, 542 new placements were commenced in total, with 362 of these being placement moves, i.e., for children already in local authority care. This a slight increase on the figure from 2020/21.

Placements end for various reasons, planned and unplanned. Clearly unplanned moves are less supportive for the child and potentially introduce complications and risks. The table below gives some insight into common causes of the placement ending on an unplanned basis.

Reason given for placement ending	Number of children
Carer requests placement end due to placement becoming unmanageable	56
Carer requests placement end other than due to other than due to placement becoming unmanageable	20
Allegation (s47)	9
Child requests placement end	16
Standards of Care concern	10
Responsible/Area authority requests placement end	7
Adoption	21

The information above shows that 76 children had their placement end at the carer's request, and IROs are expected to address any issues where they view the Local Authority has not adequately supported the placement to continue if this is in the child's interests, this could be linked to fostering social work support for example.

The proportion of children experiencing three or more placement moves has decreased by 1.7% from last year and by 4% from 2018. As illustrated in the table below, 56 children had 3 or more moves in 2021/22, an increase of 2 children. IROs will hold a review within 28 days of a placement move and are responsible for ensuring that the move is in the child's interest and that children achieve stability as far as possible.



23. Unregistered Care

In 2021/22, 14 children were placed in either unregistered emergency accommodation or unregistered unregulated accommodation. This is accommodation which is not subject to OFSTED inspection, yet is providing 'care' to children.

Children placed in these settings have an enhanced offer of monthly LAC reviews in order to monitor quality, provide additional safeguards, and to track placement moves. This year has been challenging in terms due to limited placement options, which can be seen in many other authorities.

Unregistered family settings also fall into this category, whereby family members are awaiting assessment or would not meet fostering regulations. However, in these circumstances the arrangement were in the child's best interest.

Since June 2022, regular meetings have taken place to monitor the provision of children in registered and unregistered residential care settings. These meetings include representation by the IRO Service Manager and colleagues from Commissioning and Residential services. These meetings promote IRO oversight and feedback in terms of the standards of care provided to children and ensure that these children receive a high level of additional scrutiny.

24. Regulation 44 Visits

Regulation 44 visits (The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015) are completed by an independent visitor, in order to ensure that registered provision such as children's home are well managed and to report on the standard of care provided. These visits take place on a monthly basis and the independent visitors completes a report, detailing their findings.

RMBC commissions regulation 44 visits to its own children's homes from an independent agency, these reports are distributed to the allocated IRO for child resident and allocated. IROs share any views regarding the standard of care in RMBC or private homes and their feedback is sought within the meeting referred to in the section above. The R44 reports are

provided to the IRO for consideration as part of the review process. IROs do communicate with Regulation 44 visitors and OFSTED inspectors in order to share their views regarding the provision, this supports OFSTED to make rounded findings in relation to their inspection of children's homes.

25. Children Placed Out of Authority

As of 31 March 2022, 316 children were placed out of the Rotherham area, this is a slight decrease from 333 as at March 2021, and from 345 at the same point in 2020, as such there is assurance that these figures are gradually reducing.

At 31 March 2022 114 children were placed over 20 miles from their family home, in the following provision:

Number of Children	Type of Provision
26	Residential Children's Home
6	Placed for Adoption
6	Independent Living
1	Court Directed Placement
1	Residential School
2	Family Placements
71	Foster Care
2	Unregistered Emergency or Unregulated Accommodation

Several of these arrangements are to enable adoption or to remain within their birth family. Long-term fostering arrangements and Residential care constitutes placements for 97 of those children placed over 20 miles away. For these children it is key that their long-term future is considered in terms of the benefits of being closer to Rotherham – this could lead to greater support from their birth network and familiarity as they leave care, conversely for some children a return would increase risk or be against their stated wishes. IROs are expected to monitor, scrutinise and challenge these placement locations if needed in order to ensure that they are in the best interests of the child, for example, a specifically required resource not available in our area. IROs take a firm and clear view about whether these arrangements should be maintained or whether a return to the RMBC area is required and this is visibly endorsed in the review record.

26. Fostering

RMBC employs one full time equivalent fostering IRO (FIRO), in 2021-22, this role was split between 2 part time workers. This has been beneficial in that the two FIROs are able to have flexibility in allocation.

As at 31 March 2022, RMBC employs 125 foster carers. In 2021-22 115 Fostering Reviews were completed, with 70% of these recorded as being in timescale. The review process supports the information needed to approve foster carers. The FIROs have been developed the challenge and resolution process, bringing this in line with their children's counterparts. A culture of open discussion between FIROs and team managers has been in place over time and has supported working relationships, whilst the escalation process has been embedded.

27. Adoption

In 2021/22 32 children were adopted, a reduction of 2 from the previous year, with 15% adopted within 12 months of the SHOBPA (Should Be Placed for Adoption) decision, a drop of 8%, this drop is due to various factors in individual circumstances, such as Court reporting and timescales and some complex adoption matters for particular children. IROs chair reviews for children in the adoption process:

- No later than 3 months after authority to place the child for adoption has been obtained;
- At least every 6 months thereafter until an adoptive placement is made.

The IRO monitors the progress in making an adoptive placement for the child, if this is not achieved by the first 6 month review after the placement order was made, the IRO confirms that adoption remains the best plan for the child via the review process.

Where the child has been placed for adoption, arrangements must be made so that an Adoption Review is held:

- Within 4 weeks of the placement;
- Not more than 3 months after the first review unless an application for an adoption order has been made;
- At least every 6 months thereafter until an adoption order has been made or the adoptive placement ends.

Where a child has been placed for adoption but not adopted within 12 months, the child's social worker must present a further report to the Adoption Panel identifying the length of the delay, the reasons and the steps being taken to address any difficulties. The IRO ensures that these steps are taken and raises any concerns that they have regarding this through the challenge and resolution process. In 2021-22 there were no challenges regarding the adoption process. However, it can be seen that 5 children were adopted outside this timescale. For all of the children, the IRO remained informed and sought reassurance that the Local Authority was taking the appropriate steps in relation to progressing the Adoption Order. The issues involved were:

- Complex assessment as siblings had to be separated
- High level of need, with adoption remaining the best plan for the child
- Court delays caused by further expert assessment and hearing availability

Adoption Performance for the past 2 years		
<u>2020/21</u>		
Days between Placement Order and Matching	Days between Becoming Looked After and Adoptive Placement Commencing	Adopted within 12 Months of a SHOBPA decision
Target of 121 days Average of 183 days Within Timescale 58.8%	Target of 426 days Average of 470 days Within Timescale 47.1%	23.5%
<u>2021/22</u>		
Days between Placement Order and Matching	Days between Becoming Looked After and Adoptive Placement Commencing	Adopted within 12 Months of a SHOBPA decision

Target of 121 days Average of 305 days Within Timescale 62.5%	Target of 426 days Average of 613 days Within Timescale 28%	15.6%
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The table above is slightly misleading as one child was the subject of complex Court proceedings from July 2017 to September 2021.

28. Children Missing from Care and subject to Child Exploitation concerns

In 2021/22 64 children looked after by RMBC went missing from their placement, with 370 missing episodes in total for those children. There were 24 occurrences of children missing on more than three occasions in the year.

Of the children looked after that were missing in the year 70 were felt to be at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and 26 Child Criminal Exploitation. Strategy discussions were held on 232 occasions for the children in the missing cohort, although this does not necessarily mean that these were held due to them being missing, all children missing for over 24 hours had a strategy discussion within the year and 22 children in the cohort were without 'Find Me Plans'. In addition, 184 Return home interviews were completed, with 162 return home interviews declined by young people.

IROs are invited to all consequent strategy discussions and ensure that LAC reviews address the current safety plans and required responses and offer challenge if these are felt to be sufficiently robust. IROs are mindful of risks associated with child exploitation and contextual safeguarding – and ensure that review decisions reflect any protective action required. An IRO attends regular focused meetings to discuss practice in these areas.

29. Children looked after and subject to child protection plans

For children subject to Child Protection Plans, the IRO will usually cease the plan at the first LAC review, provided there is clarity about the placement, progress and legal status. For some children looked after under section 20 and in a PLO process it may be that the IRO maintains the plan, if for example it is anticipated that the child will return home shortly.

At 31 March 2022 16 children were subject of joint CP and LAC plans, all of these plans except one was ended within the subsequent three month initial review period. The outstanding CP plan remains in place due to care arrangements made by the Court.

The IRO and CP service managers meet on a quarterly basis adding additional reassurance to the evidence that delay is minimised, as many children on CP plans are looked after under section 20, the IRO SM's section 20 report offers a further layer of scrutiny. This liaison ensures that communication between the two services is effective and supports the 'birds eye view' that IROs and Child Protection Chairs have as part of their role.

30. Working with Children's Guardians

The IRO and Children's Guardian (CG) share a focus for the child in Court proceedings, the CG and IRO communicate at the beginning and end of proceedings and at any other point during the process. The IRO provides valuable insight for the CG in respect of their independent view on the child's circumstances. At times this may be in contrast to the views of the local authority and the IRO can convey this view, subject to all efforts to resolve any issues, via the CG. Similarly, the CG should keep the IRO briefed on the Court progress and any reason for delay.

Regular meetings between the IRO service and CAFCASS were arranged up until around 2020, these were impacted upon by the pandemic and are being reinstated. The IRO and CAFCASS service manager meet within the PLO panel process and on a quarterly basis. A joint audit completed between CAFCASS and RMBC Social Care was completed in March 2022, this revealed good working relationships and communication between the CG and IRO at the time of the proceedings and until the completion of these.

31. Concluding comments and areas for development

Throughout 2021/22 the IRO service maintained a good level of performance in review timescales. This had a beneficial impact in ensuring the plans for RMBC's looked after children were carried out. In addition, the evidence offered in the report in respect of children looked after under section 20, on Care orders or in the Adoption process suggests that these children receive a timely and effective level of oversight and engagement from the IRO service. Children played a meaningful role in their review and the IRO supported them to contribute.

IROs have also demonstrated the impact of the review process and their oversight on the health of children looked after, in increasing the uptake and evidence of dental checks.

32. Key Actions for 2022/23

Issue	Action
Key performance objectives will be met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minutes within 15 days = 90% Midway Reviews = 90% Quality and Compliance completion in all reviews Quarterly performance report and monthly highlight report to be completed by the IRO service Manager and shared with the Head of Service
Attendance and Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance data to be embedded into LCS by December 2022 IRO visits to return to face to face for all children. The IROs will ensure each child is seen in placement in 2022/23 Participation figures for 'attended and spoke for self' to increase to at least 35% by the end of the financial year 2023. IROs to support broader attendance by those in the child's network and to encourage SWs to consider this in their invitations.
Impact and Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children in unregistered care settings will be closely monitored and will be subject to formal challenge if delay occurs IROs will seek to confirm and clarify aspirations for all children with pathway plans, to include their educational plans, employment hopes, the vision regarding their supportive networks and housing and any other areas felt important to that young person. IROs will discuss these with the young

	<p>person and ensure their views are central to the review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IROs and Team managers will meet on a monthly basis to discuss thematic issues and agree plans going forward • The section 20 report will continue on a bi-monthly basis. In addition, deep dive activity regarding children placed with parents is planned for 2022/23, to be supported by the IROs service • The IRO Service Manager and PLO manager will produce a 6 monthly PLO and Court practice report, ensuring IROs receive relevant information to inform their oversight • IROs will ask in each review process as to the Local authority care plan and the rationale for the child remaining in LA care. This includes the plan for family time and what the vision is for this in the longer term.
Children placed in unregistered private care settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation (reg) 44 reports for RMBC provision will be shared with IROs, they will ensure that any concerns are taken account of in respect of the child they are allocated to. IROs will ensure that they have sight of Reg 44 reports for any children in private provision • All children placed away from the Rotherham area in private settings will be seen by their IRO in that setting prior to their review and a view conveyed in the review process as to the quality of the care provided
Children at risk from exploitation/significant harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IROs will attend the 'Operational Missing Meeting' on a monthly basis to ensure that children looked after receive a swift and proportionate response and that plans (such as find me plans) are sufficient and up to date. Thematic information and feedback to individual IROs will be gathered • The IRO and CP service managers will continue to meet on a monthly basis to monitor to discuss shared activities and performance
Looked After Children will have access to Health support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IROs will continue to ensure dental checks are discussed and updated at every review and escalations raised where required. • All children without a health check in time should be discussed with the LAC nurse and an action retabled in the review recommendations

Lee Durrant
 IRO Service Manager
 Rotherham MBC Children's Services

14 October 2022

Public Report
Corporate Parenting Panel

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Corporate Parenting Panel – 28 March 2023

Report Title

Corporate Parenting Performance Report – Q3 2022/23

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nathan Heath, Acting Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

Matthew Boud, Head of Children in Care,
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Rebecca Harrison, Performance Officer
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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report provides a summary of performance for key performance indicators across the Looked After Children (LAC) services. It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying performance data reports, Appendix 1 which provides performance on a page giving an overview of the services performance in comparison to the same period 2021-22 and Appendix 2 which provides trend data, graphical analysis, and latest benchmarking data against national and statistical neighbour averages where possible.

Recommendations

1. The panel is asked to receive this report with the accompanying dataset (Appendix 2) and consider any issues arising.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Performance on a page

Appendix 2 Looked after children quarterly performance – December 22 (Q3)

Background Papers

Children's Social Care Monthly Performance Report – December 22 (Q3)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Corporate Parenting Performance Report – Q3 2022/23

1. Background

- 1.1 This report provides evidence to the council's commitment to continuous improvement and providing performance information to enable scrutiny of the impact on the outcomes for children and young people in care. It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying performance data report which provides trend data, graphical analysis, and latest benchmarking data against national and statistical neighbour averages.
- 1.2 Targets, including associated 'RAG' (red, amber, green rating) tolerances, are included. These have been set in consideration of available national and statistical neighbour benchmarking data, recent performance levels and, importantly, Rotherham's local service context.
- 1.3 All benchmarking data is as at the latest data release by the DfE and relates to 2021/22 outturn.
- 1.4 The narrative supplied within the report has been informed by the Assistant Director for Children's Services and the Head of Service – Children in Care.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 **Looked After Children** – At the end of quarter 3 we saw the number of children and young people we look after increase by 7 to 551 when compared to the end of Q2 (544), however, it is 23 below the same period in 2021/22 when there were 574 LAC. As in Q2 a key area of increase has been linked to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) arriving via the National Transfer Scheme but also being placed as adults by the home office in hotels, who after accessing legal advice seek support as children. This continues to be a regional and national trend and pressure. If we removed the number of UASC children the number of LAC would be 509, which demonstrates a reducing number of LAC.

During Q3 57 children became looked after equating to 147 year-to-date, compared to 52 in Q3 2021/22 (132 ytd). 47 children ceased to be looked after (153 ytd), compared to 46 (155 ytd) in the same quarter last year.

The benchmark measure of 10k population rate of children looked after has reduced to 95.9 at the end of Q3 compared to 99.9 last year. This is now below the latest statistical neighbour's average of 102.4 but remains significantly higher than the national average of 70.0.

There are currently 42 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), an increase of 9 when compared to the end of Q2, however, it is 29 more than the same period in 2021/22 when there were only 13 UASC looked after by the local authority (LA). The commissioning team are working to ensure we are able to offer placements and accommodation commensurate to need. We know this is a potential ongoing pressure due to the growing need to support more UASC, and impact on local placement sufficiency is being monitored.

- 2.2 **Plans** – At the end of the quarter, 90.4% of eligible LAC had an up-to-date plan, which is in line with Q2 (90.1%) and a 0.9% decrease in comparison to last year when it was 91.3% at the same point.

2.3 Placements – The percentage of LAC in a family-based setting has remained stable during Q3 reaching 77.0% when compared to 76.7% at the end of Q2 but a decrease when compared to 79.3% at the end of the Q3 last year. 66.1% of long-term LAC had been in a stable placement for at least 2 years at the end of Q3 showing a 3.2% increase when compared to the end of Q2, but a 5.2% decrease to the same period last year (71.3%). Placement stability is an area of focus that the fostering service, responsible Team manager and IRO have been engaged with to review what works and what their roles are in working to prevent placement breakdowns. The fostering service has sought to strengthen placement stability via completing the mapping assessment to identify support needs and ensure these are met via the service. The fostering service is expanding their support offer recruiting additional Family Support workers and an extended on-call support offering after hours and weekend contact, as these have been highlighted as best practice. Team Around the Child meetings are in place to support all placements, with a particular focus at linking in support from the agency or Rotherham Therapeutic Team earlier, to prevent disruption.

The percentage of children having had 3 or more placements in the last rolling 12 months has decreased to 9.2% which is below the latest national average (10.0%) but above the statistical neighbour (8.6%). This is a 2.2% decrease on the end of Q2 and a 0.6% decrease when compared to the same period in 2021/22 (9.8%). The work linked to the team around the child will support strengthening placement stability. Additional support packages to grow foster carers for older children, have also been proposed and piloted, to improve local sufficiency.

2.4 In-house fostering – There were 113 in-house foster carer households registered at the end of the quarter, a decrease of 12 in comparison to 125 at the same period last year. There were 2 foster family approvals in Q3, making 8 approvals year-to-date. However, 9 families also ceased to be foster carers in the quarter bringing the year-to-date total to 20, therefore equating to 12 less foster families at the end of the quarter. At the end of the period there was a total of 7 prospective foster families in the recruitment process, all of which have panels scheduled between January 23 and April 23.

Placement sufficiency remains a key challenge and Brightsparks continue to support us in fostering recruitment work. After a boost last quarter this three-month period has been quieter with 2 approvals creating 2 new placements. Placement sufficiency linked to our residential offer also continues to be positive with a 3rd young person moving into our 4-bed provision.

2.5 Youth Offending – Of the 551 children and young people looked after by Rotherham at the end of the quarter, 8 were also known to the youth offending team. At the same period last year there were 5 out of 574 looked after children.

2.6 Adoptions – 19 children have been adopted since April 2022 which is a decrease (-2) when compared to the same period last year when there had been 21 adoptions.

At the end of Q3, the A10 measure (Average number of days between a child becoming LAC and having an adoption placement) was 552 days (457.1 days Q3 2021/22) and the A2 measure (Average number of days between placement order and being matched with adoptive family) was 210 days (263.9 days Q3 2021/22). The A2 figure from placement order to adoptive match indicates that

we are matching children and placing with adoptive families sooner. The A10 measure performance is directly linked to the court delays caused by the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

- 2.7 Health** – The percentage of LAC having an initial health assessment (IHA) within timescale has also improved in 2022/23 with 71.1% of IHA's being in time year-to-date, compared to 64.3% at the same point in 2021/22.

The number of up-to-date health checks has seen a decrease at the end of Q3 to 74.5% when compared to 85.2% at the same point last year, however, up to date dental checks has seen an increase from 50.5% (21/22) to 59.6% (Q3 22/23). Dental assessments continue to be an area of focus and is being reviewed via the LAC Health and Emotional Well Being Partnership and is a national issue that we want to ensure does not become a trend here in Rotherham.

- 2.8 Reviews and visits** – 92.2% of reviews during 2022/23 were completed within the timescales set, which equates to 1042 reviews in time out of 1130 that were completed April to December 22 (94.7% (1167/1232) in 2021/22).

At the end of the quarter, 96.4% of visits were up-to-date and within timescale of the national minimum standard. At the end of the same period in 2021 98.4% were in time, showing a 2.0% decrease this year.

- 2.9 Education** – The performance reporting for PEP's is moving from being a manual data matching process to being recorded and reported by the ePEP system. Currently the system can only report % of up-to-date PEP's and not the % of children and young people with a PEP in the last 3 terms. Rotherham's local standard which ensures that each PEP is refreshed every term (rather than the annual minimum standard) was 91.9% at the end of the autumn term 2022/23, compared to 94.1% autumn term 2021/22.

Virtual school (VS) advisers are continuing to escalate concerns and provide high levels of support and challenge to schools to ensure timely completion of PEP meeting records. The VS has piloted and launched a new PEP quality assurance framework and trained designated teachers around the new expectations.

- 2.10 Care Leavers** – At the end of Q3 there were 322 young people in the care leavers cohort which shows an increase of 31 when compared to the same point in 2021 (291). The Leaving Care Cohort remains high with the level of UASC growing making up 20 of the current cohort with this set to grow over the coming months. The service is working close with the wider partnership to ensure there is a clear pathway of support recognising the vulnerability of this cohort.

74.8% of care leavers had an up-to-date pathway plan at the end of the quarter which is a 3.6% decrease when compared to the same period last year (78.4%). 97.2% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation compared to 95.5% at the end of Q3 last year. Of the 9 young people in unsuitable accommodation 6 are in custody.

73.0% of care leavers were in employment, education, and training (EET) at the end of this quarter compared to 73.2% at the same point in 2021. There is a steady improvement in the numbers of our young people activity engaged in EET, which occasionally fluctuates as it has this quarter. The service remains ambitious but want to ensure this translates through to Plans. Pathway planning continues to be an area where we are scrutinising quality, as well as compliance.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1** The full corporate parenting performance report attached at Appendix 2 represents a summary of performance across a range of key national and local indicators. Corporate Parenting Panel members are therefore recommended to consider and review this information.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1** Not applicable

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1** Not applicable

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

- 6.1** There are no direct financial implications to this report. The relevant Assistant Director and Budget Holder will identify any implications arising from associated improvement actions and Members and Commissioners will be consulted where appropriate.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

- 7.1** There are no legal implications to this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1** There are no direct human resource implications to this report. The relevant Assistant Director and Heads of Service will identify any implications arising from associated improvement actions and Members and Commissioners will be consulted where appropriate.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1** The performance report relates to services and outcomes for children in care.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1** There are no direct implications from this report.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 There are no direct implications within this report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 The Partners and other directorates are engaged in improving the performance and quality of services to children, young people, and their families via the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (RSCP). The RSCP Performance and Quality Assurance Subgroup receive this performance report within the wider social care performance report on a regular basis.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Inability and lack of engagement in performance management arrangements by managers and staff could lead to poor and deteriorating services for children and young people. Strong management oversight by Directorship Leadership Team and the ongoing monthly performance meetings mitigates this risk by holding managers and workers to account for any dips in performance both at a team and at an individual child level.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Matthew Boud, Head of Children in Care,
matthew.boud@rotherham.gov.uk

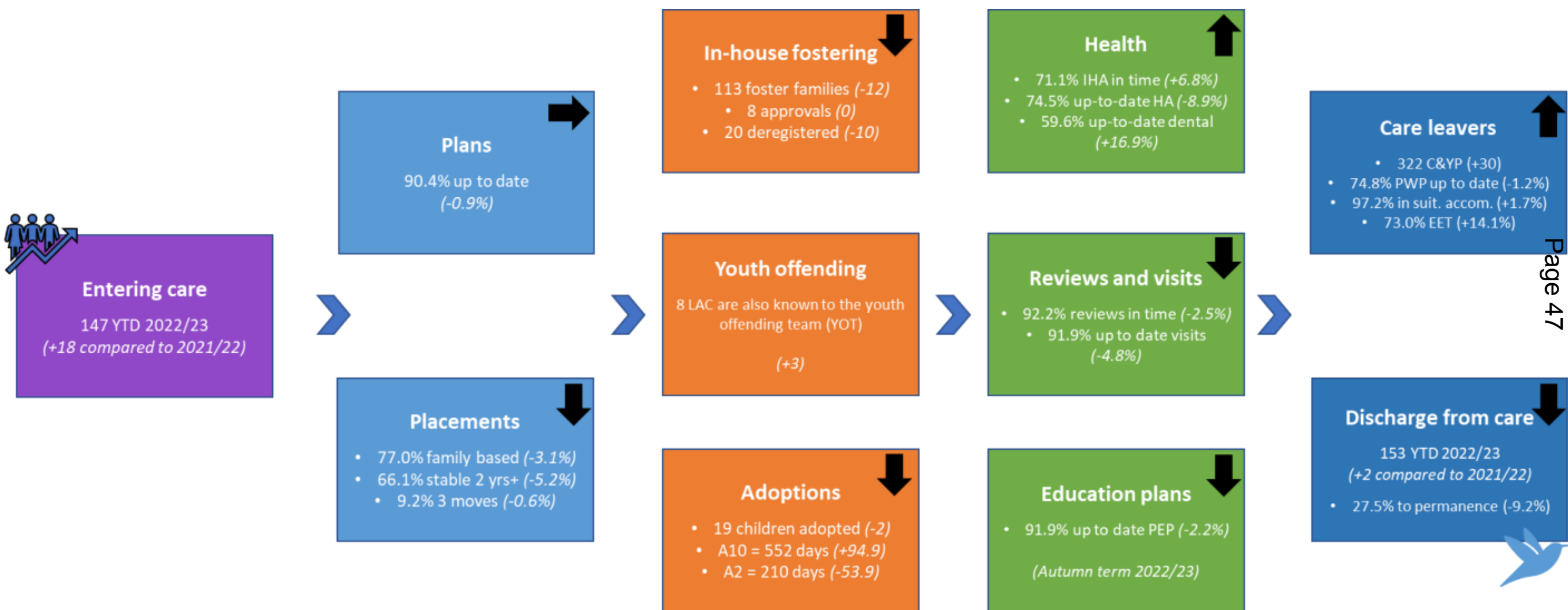
Monica Green, Assistant Director Safeguarding Children
monica.green@rotherham.gov.uk

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).

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Performance on a Page

As of 31st December 2022 (Q3 - 2022/23)



All performance is year to date cumulative or as at the end of December 2022 (end of quarter 3) unless otherwise stated.
Figures in brackets show the difference compared to the same period in the previous financial year (2021/22).

↑ Good performance ↓ Bad performance → Stable performance

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Children's and Young People Services Corporate Parenting Performance Report

As at month end: December 2022 (Q3)

Document details

Status: Issue 1

Date created: 31/01/2023

Created by: Performance & Quality Team

Contact: cyps-performance@rotherham.gov.uk

Please note: Data reports are not dynamic. Although care is taken to ensure data is as accurate as possible every month, delays in data input can result in changes in figures when reports are re-run retrospectively. To combat this at least two individual months data is rerun for each indicator where necessary.

Our Vision

"Working with Rotherham's children, young people and families to be resilient, successful and safe"

↑

→

↓

- increase in number/percentage (info measures)

- remained same as previous month (info measures)

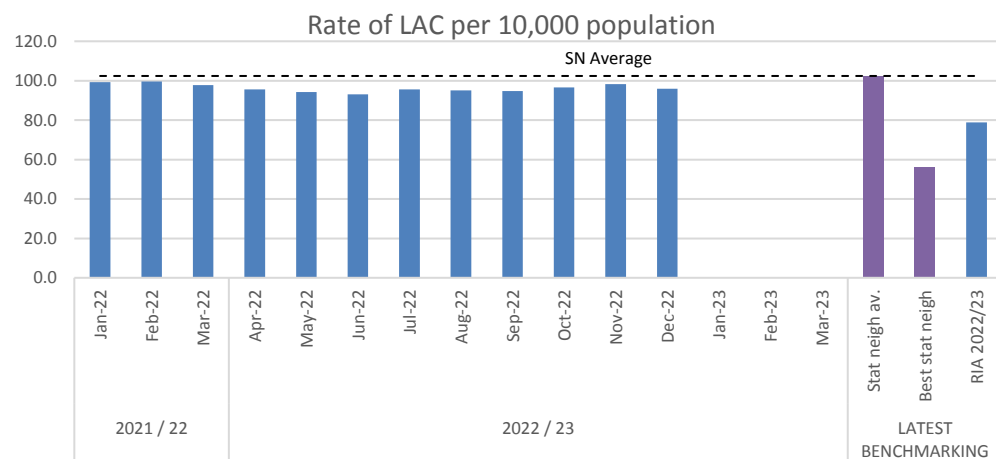
- decrease in number/percentage (info measures)

REF NO.	INDICATOR	Success Measures	Council Plan Measures 22/25	TIMELINE	DATA NOTE	2022 / 23							TARGET & TOLERANCES			YR ON YR PERFORMANCE		LATEST BENCHMARKING						
						Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	2022/23 YTD		Good perf is	DOT* (month)	RAG (month)	Red	Amber	Green (target)	2021/22	Yr on Yr trend	Stat neigh av.	Best stat neigh	Nat av.	Top qtile threshold	RIA 2022/23	
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN	4.1	No. of looked after children	TB5		monthly	Count	555	565	551	-		info	⬇️					562						
	4.2	Rate of looked after children per 10,000 population aged 0-17		CH04	monthly	Rate per 10,000	96.6	98.3	95.9	-		low	⬇️	🔴	95.2+	-	<95.2	97.8		102.4	56.0	70.0	-	78.9
	4.3	No. of admissions of looked after children	TB4		monthly	Count	23	24	10	147		info	⬇️					175						
	4.4	No. of looked after unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)			monthly	Count	37	42	42	-		info	➡️						New measure 2022/23					
	4.5	% of eligible looked after children with an up to date plan			monthly	%	93.0%	91.7%	90.4%	-		high	⬇️	🟡	<87%	87%+	95%+	96.6%						
	4.6	% of looked after children visits up to date & completed within timescale of national minimum standard			monthly	%	96.6%	96.0%	96.4%	-		high	⬆️	🟡	<90%	90%+	98%+	96.8%						
	4.7	% of looked after children care plans reviewed within timescales			monthly	%	86.2%	88.9%	97.3%	92.2%		high	⬆️	🟢	<87%	87%+	95%+	94.3%						
	4.8	% of looked after children having an initial health assessment within timescale			monthly	%	42.9%	73.3%	44.4%	71.1%		high	⬇️					68.5%						
	4.9	% of looked after children with a up to date health assessments			monthly	%	82.4%	77.9%	74.5%	-		high	⬇️	🔴	<87%	87%+	95%+	71.0%						
	4.10	% of looked after children with a up to date dental assessments			monthly	%	68.7%	62.9%	59.6%	-		high	⬇️	🔴	<87%	87%+	95%+	44.0%						
	4.11	No. of looked after children who are known to the youth offending team (YOT)			monthly	Count	8	6	7	-		info	⬆️						New measure 2022/23					
	4.12	No. of children with an Education Health & Care plan in the looked after children cohort			monthly	Count	100	101	94	-		info	⬇️						New measure 2022/23					
	4.13	No. of looked after children having at least one missing episode within the period			monthly	Count	15	10	7	49		info	⬇️					64	New measure 2021/22					
	4.14	No. of children who have ceased to be looked after children			monthly	Count	10	14	23	153		high	⬆️					212						
	4.15	No. of special guardianship orders (SGO) or child arrangement orders (CAO) granted after a period of being looked after children (Legal Status)			monthly	Count	4	6	4	59		info	⬇️					85	New measure 2021/22					
	4.16	No. of looked after children who have ceased to be looked after due to a special guardianship orders(SGO) or hild arrangement orders (CAO)	TB5		monthly	Count	3	6	2	25		info	⬇️					42	New measure 2021/22					
	4.17	% of looked after children who have ceased to be looked after due to permanence (SGO, CAO, Adoption)			monthly	%	50.0%	57.1%	8.7%	27.5%		high	⬇️	🔴	<27%	27%+	35%+	34.8%						
	4.18	% of long term looked after children in placements which have been stable for at least 2 years			monthly	%	62.6%	63.8%	66.1%	-		high	⬆️	🟡	<62%	62%+	70%+	70.2%		71.1%	77.0%	71.0%	74.1%	-
	4.19	% of looked after children who have had 3 or more placements - rolling 12 months		OLD	monthly	%	9.9%	9.7%	9.2%	-		low	⬇️	🟡	16%+	8%+	<8%	9.3%		8.6%	5.0%	10.0%	9.9%	-
	4.20	% of looked after children in a family based setting		OLD	monthly	%	76.4%	75.2%	77.0%	-		high	⬆️	🟡	<77%	77%+	85%+	79.4%						
	4.21	% of looked after children placed with parents or other with parental responsibility (P1)	TB4		monthly	%	4.3%	5.1%	5.1%	-		low	➡️					4.6%						
	4.22	% of looked after children in kinship care			monthly	%	9.4%	9.4%	8.9%	-		high	⬇️	🟡	<8%	8%+	12%+	10.5%	New measure 2021/22					
	4.23	No. of placements that have been created for children via foster care (approvals)			monthly	Count	0	0	2	13		high	⬆️					13	New measure 2021/22					
	4.24	No. of adoptions completed within 12 months of SHOBPA			monthly	Count	0	0	0	6		high	➡️					4						
	4.25	Av. days between a child becoming looked after and having a adoption placement (A10)			monthly	YTD Average	534.0	567	552	-		low	⬇️	🔴	487+	-	<487	418.9		350.1	274.0	367.0	317.5	362.6
	4.26	Av. days between a placement order and being matched with an adoptive family (A2)			monthly	YTD Average	180.8	218	210	-		low	⬇️	🔴	121+	-	<121	292.2		160.4	90.0	175.0	135.5	154.0
	4.27	No. of care leavers			monthly	Count	314	319	322	-		info	⬆️					292						
	4.28	% of eligible looked after children & Care Leavers with an up to date pathway plan			monthly	%	82.1%	79.9%	74.8%	-		high	⬇️					82.8%						
	4.29	% of care leavers in suitable accommodation			monthly	%	97.5%	97.8%	97.2%	-		high	⬇️	🟢	<88%	88%+	96%+	96.6%		90.2%	96.0%	88.0%	93.1%	-
	4.30	% of care leavers in employment, education or training			monthly	%	72.0%	73.7%	73.0%	-		high	⬇️	🟢	<58%	58%+	66%+	71.6%		53.7%	75.0%	55.0%	61.1%	-
	4.31	No. of care leavers who are former unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)			monthly	Count	17	17	20	-		info	⬆️						New measure 2022/23					

Looked After Children (LAC)

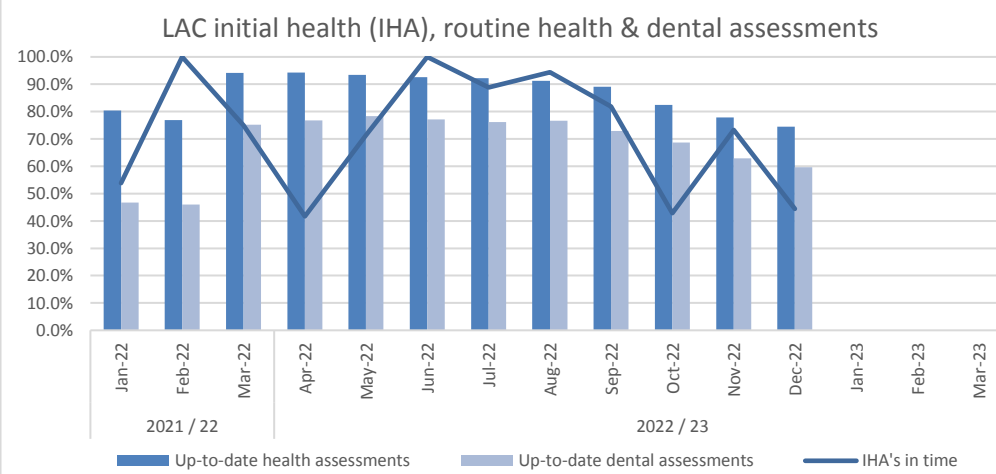
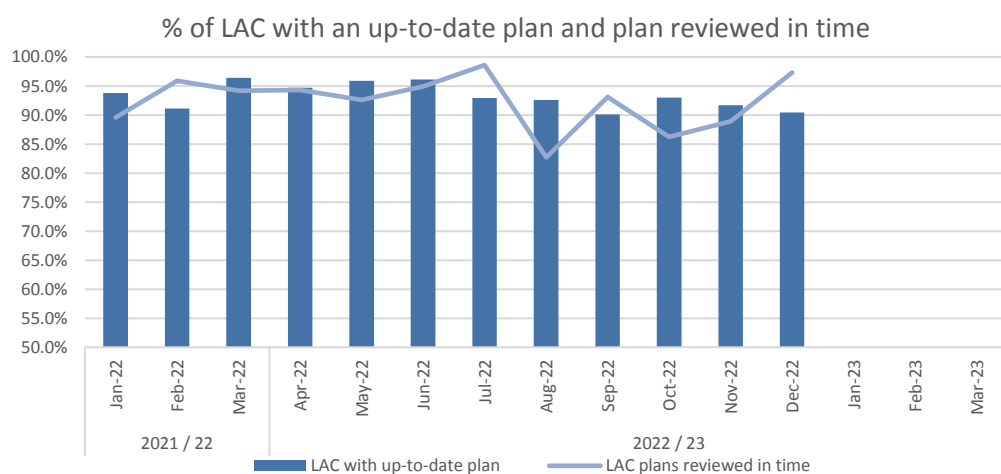
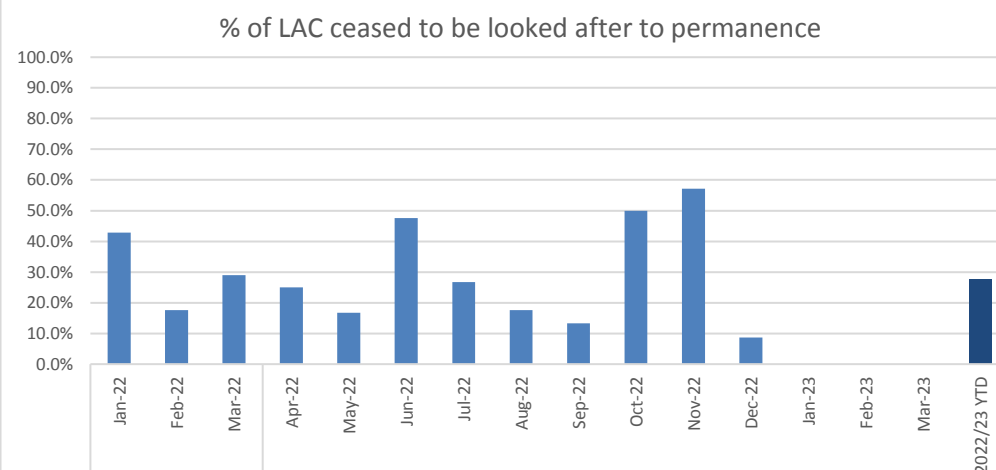
Children in care are children who have become the responsibility of the local authority either voluntarily by parents struggling to cope or through an intervention by children's services because a child is at risk of significant harm. LAC review meetings are convened to consider the plan for the welfare of LAC and how to achieve permanence for them within a timescale that meets their needs. The LA is responsible for visiting LAC wherever they are living to ensure his/her welfare continues to be safeguarded and promoted and the LA should ensure that every LAC has his/her health needs fully assessed and a health plan clearly set out.

551 LAC as at period end



147 Admissions (ytd)

153 Discharges (ytd)



96.4% of LAC visits are up-to-date & complete (NMS)

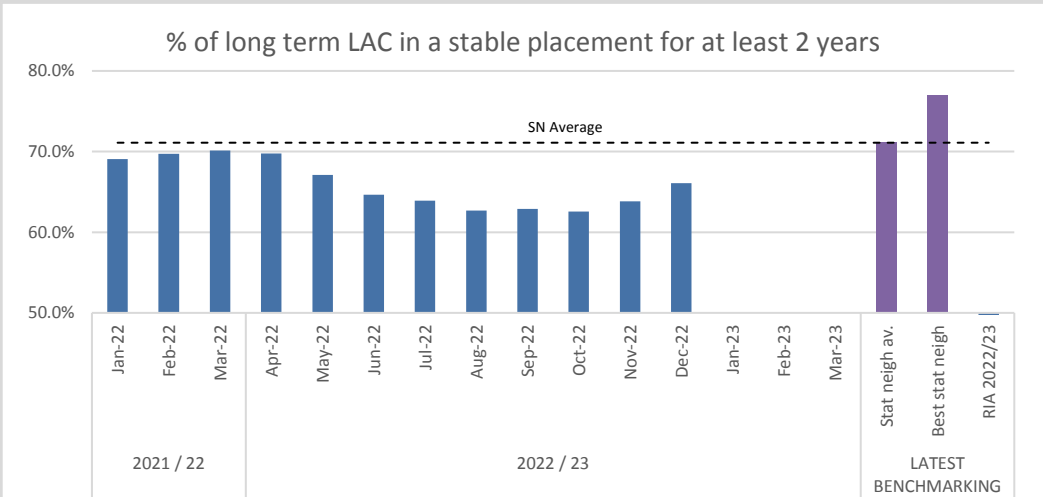
(National minimum standard is within 1wk of placement, then 6wkly till in placement for 1yr, then 12wkly after.)

71.1% of IHA's completed in time (ytd)

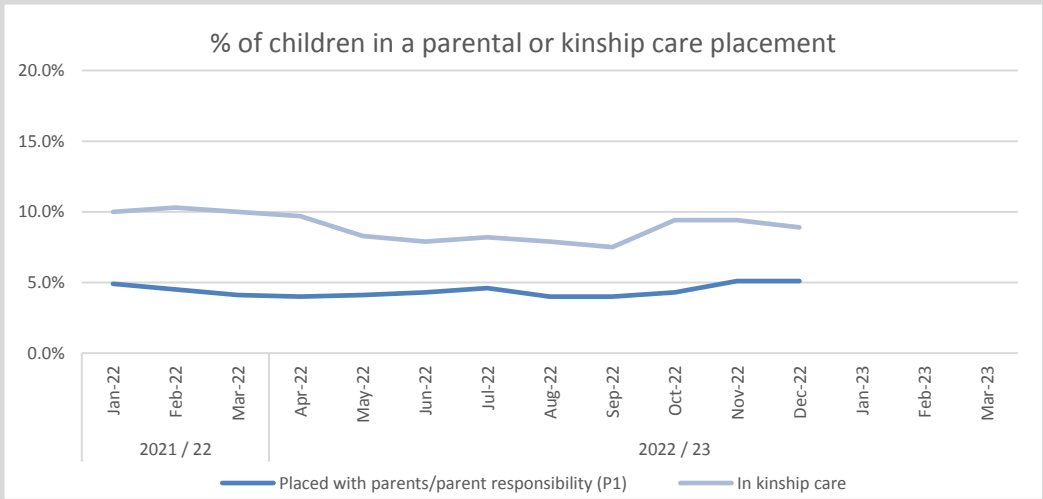
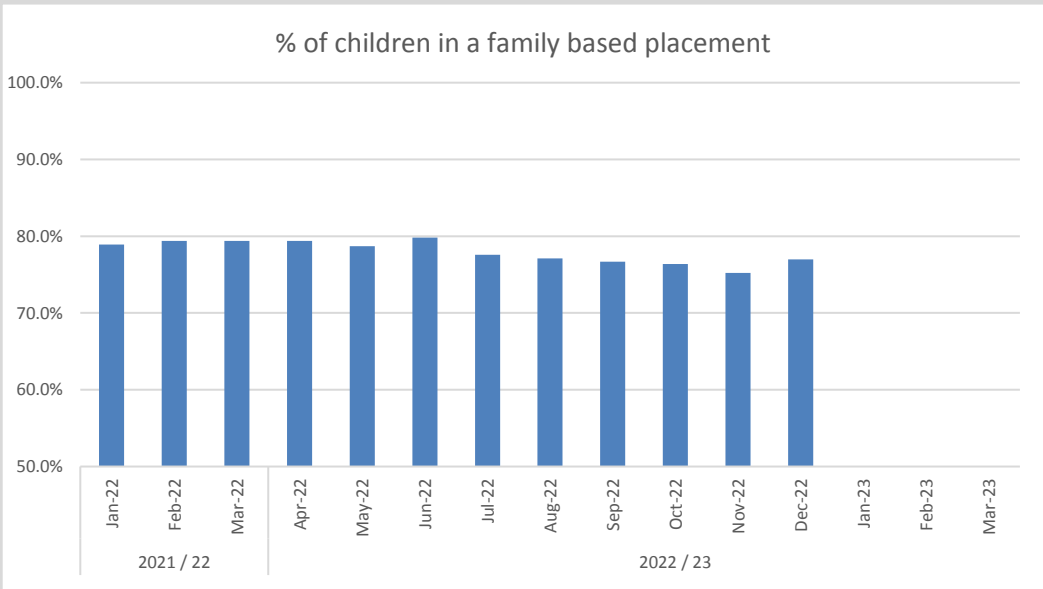
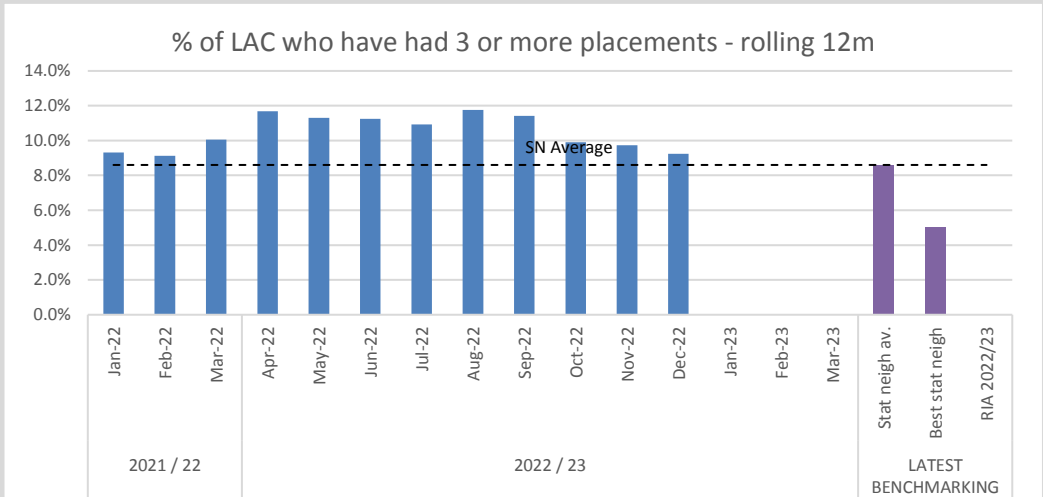
Placements

A LAC placement is where a child has become the responsibility of the local authority (LAC) and is placed with foster carers, in residential homes or with parents or other relatives. A foster care family provide the best form of care for most looked after children. Rotherham would like most of its children to be looked after by its own carers so that they remain part of their families and community.

66.1% of long term LAC in a stable placement for 2 years+



9.2% of LAC have had 3+ placements as at period end

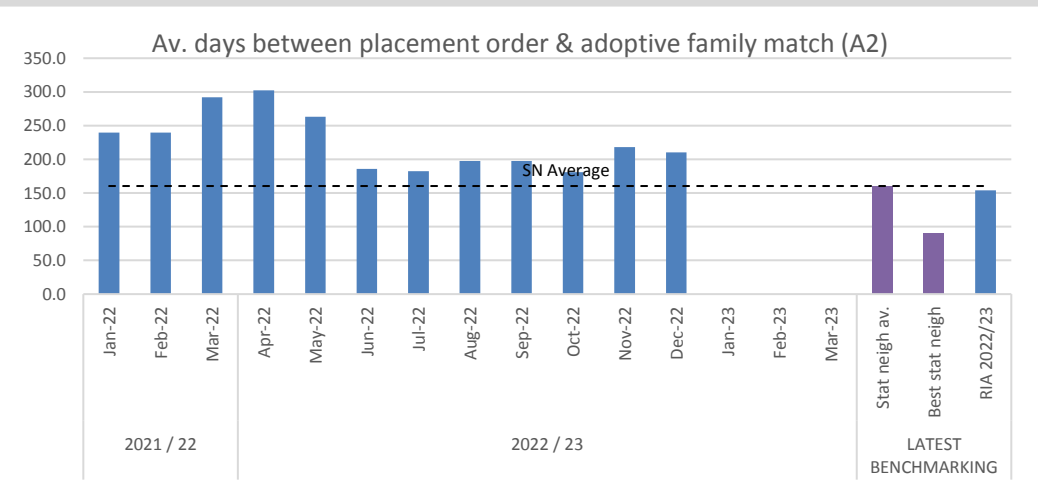
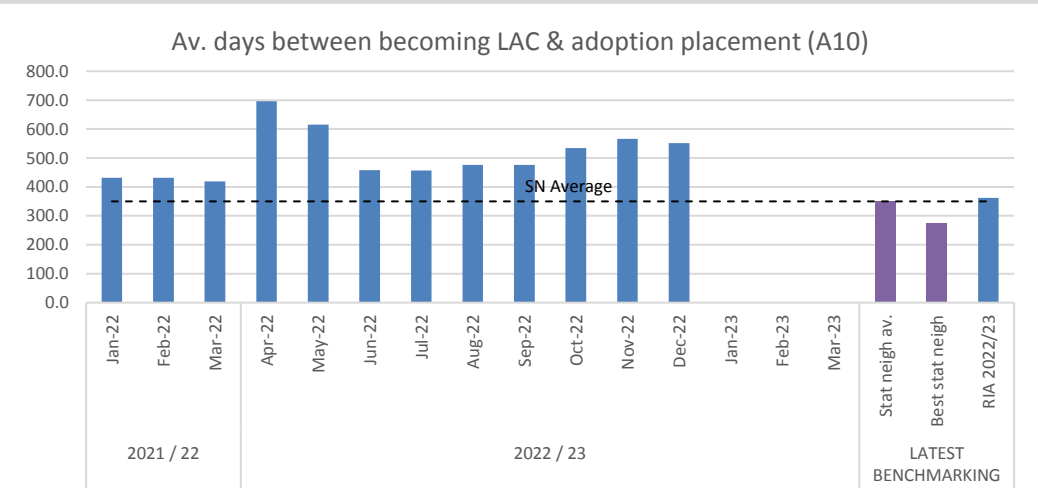


13 placements created via foster carer approvals (ytd)

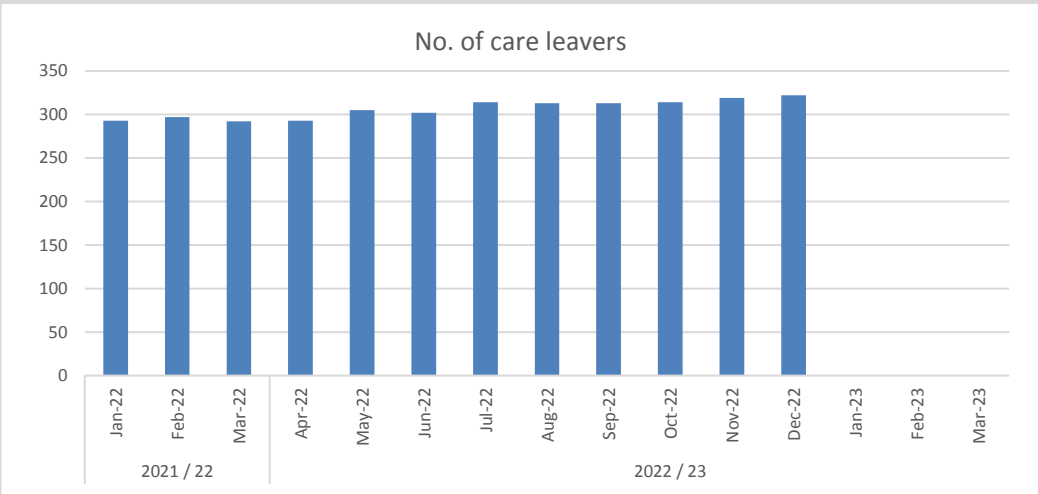
Adoptions & Care Leavers

Following a child becoming looked after, it may be deemed suitable for a child to become adopted which is a legal process of becoming a non-biological parent. The date this is agreed to be in the best interests of the child is known as their 'SHOBPA'. Following this a family finding process is undertaken to find a suitable match based on the child's needs, followed by placement with their adopter(s). Placement are monitored and assessed before the final adoption order is granted. A care leaver is, a person 25yrs or under; has been looked after by a LA for 13wks+ since 14yrs; and has been looked after by a LA at school-leaving age or after.

Adoptions



Care Leavers



322 care leavers as at the period end

74.8% of eligible LAC & care leavers had an up to date pathway plan at the period end

97.2% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation at the period end

73.0% of care leavers were in employment, education or training at the period end

6 adoptions completed within 12 months of SHOBPA (ytd)

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The Samantha Sykes Foundation Trust (SSFT) was formed following the tragic murder of our daughter, Samantha, in 2012, aged 18, as a way of continuing her legacy, which was to help disadvantaged young people and children. The Samantha Sykes Foundation Trust was first registered in 2014.

Although the charity is named after Samantha, its purpose is about the life experiences of some of the people Samantha tried to support. Its two purposes are;

1. To support looked-after children and care leavers to access further and higher education by providing them with items such as laptops, travel passes, books or anything else we believe will help them to fulfil their true potential.
2. To support victims and those at high risk of child sexual exploitation by funding specialist therapeutic interventions to help them re-build their lives.

Please see below some of the examples of how the donations we receive have contributed to making a difference to someone's life. Please note that the content may be upsetting.

Case 1.

Young female who had been trafficked across Europe by her family. Provision of a laptop, so she could access therapy online due to the pandemic. Also, to support academic achievement. £325.00

Case 2.

Young female care leaver who has experienced significant sexual abuse/exploitation during her life. In need of therapy but does not wish to have the traditional type of therapy/counselling. Appropriate therapy identified and sourced. £1,000

Case 3.

This care leaver had just started a degree in Graphic Design at a local university. He has been in the care of his local authority since the age of 14. Due to the nature of his course he requires a much higher spec machine than the one he currently owned. He had no family support, no access to financial resource and unable to afford to fund this from his student loan. A very resourceful and proactive student who had started his own YouTube channel to gain more experience. Consultation with his tutors about what kind of laptop he would ideally need for the course, identified a MacBook Pro. £1275

Case 4.

18-year-old care leaver and father to a one-year old baby. His daughter is currently not in his care. Trying to (in his words) get his life on track. Would like to access and complete basic GCSEs in Math's and English, look at specialist qualifications in the Arts, but also find a part time job. He is currently in temporary accommodation as the Local Authority are trying to find him a permanent home. No access to IT, which keeps him in a cycle of being unable to achieve progress. A Social Enterprise organisation were willing to support him, if he could get access to a laptop. The young person also suffers from anxiety and uses Art as a medium for mental health support. £275

Case 5.

This young person has experienced severe developmental trauma and sexual abuse from her father from the age of 3 to the age of 15 which included sexual exploitation with other males within the community. She fled the family home at 16 and was homeless. The young person is now accessing therapy on a weekly basis since last year. She is only able to access this remotely due to her location and difficulties with travel.

Her previous experience of support was from a therapist provided by her father from their local place of worship who invalidated the abuse that she had suffered. Understandably she does not trust services and is unable to register with a G.P or engage with mental health services. She is frightened to own a mobile phone due to the belief that she will be found and harmed. She suffers with severe anxiety, paranoia, depression, suicidal ideation, and emotional unstable moods because of her experiences.

As a result of sustained abuse, neglect and systemic failures, the young person requires long term therapy to help her to heal from her experiences. After 12 months of consistent therapy sessions, she has just reached the point of being able to touch on the details on her traumatic past and to begin to process these. The young person is a talented artist with a world of potential. At SSFT we believe that this potential should be nurtured, and supported to grow, so that this young person can go on to reach their full potential in life. £1, 820 (to date)

Case 6.

Young female looked-after child, whose foster carer has made a commitment to move her over to the 'staying put' strategy, which will mean she can remain in foster care and have a stable home through their A Levels and University education. The young person wants to apply for a Fine Art degree at the end of her A levels in 2024. Local universities where the young person wants to study use digital technology in the creation of Fine Arts, more and more Fine Arts based outputs are becoming digital and product driven.

This is a specialist field of study, with major needs with regards to equipment. The young person needed to have the same amount of time to enable her to develop to her digital art skills during A levels, to be on par with her peers. Otherwise, she would be significantly behind at the start of university. Following advice from University's, the iPad pro was deemed to be the appropriate equipment and is seen as the new drawing pad for students. The young person is currently excelling in her A levels, and her school are thrilled with her progress. iPad pro purchased. £749

As you can see, we believe that the work we do is incredibly important. There are many more tragic stories where SSFT has made a difference, but it is only with the support from like-minded people who work hard on behalf of these vulnerable groups to raise awareness and funds, that we can continue. Every donation, no matter how small, is valued.

We look forward to working with you to make the lives of our children and young people better.



Julie Warren-Sykes Trustee

Please do check out our website <https://samanthasykesfoundation.com/>

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SAMANTHA SYKES

FOUNDATION TRUST

Registered Charity 1161175

In 2012 two Wakefield teenagers were murdered, Samantha Sykes & Kimberley Frank. This Charity is in remembrance of these two young people, both remarkable in their own way. Check out the full story @ <https://samanthasykesfoundation.com/>

Care Leavers: The Facts:

Young people who are in the Care of the Local Authority are too often forgotten, Locally & Nationally. Without family support many, who have huge potential, are forgotten or abandoned. This Charity recognises the gap and endeavours to help these young people gain access to Further & Higher Education. We provide funds for equipment, travel, short courses, books etc.

Only 6% of Care Leavers go on to Higher and Further Education, mainly due to lack of funding or support. This Charity has helped over 3,000 young people.



Victims of Child Sexual Exploitation

All too often we hear in the media about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Frequently, the focus is about the perpetrators, we rarely hear what happens to the victims. Many have mental health issues, experience trauma and have also suffered psychological and physical abuse. This Charity recognises the devastation caused, and supports the young victims to access specialist therapeutic interventions and counselling. By helping these young people to become survivors, we help to rebuild broken lives.

Your Support Matters

Our Charity is run 100% by volunteers, we have 6 Trustees who give their time freely. In 2020/2021, 96.4% of funds raised went directly to young people. Our only costs are items such as this leaflet, hosting events, and other low value items. We can honestly say 'your money is well spent!' We are a Yorkshire based Charity who currently work predominantly in West & South Yorkshire, so you know anything you help us with will go to people close to home.

<https://samanthasykesfoundation.com/>

Find Us @



Believe AND
BE Inspired

Registered Charity 1161175

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Rotherham Fostering Service

Annual Report

2021/2022

1. Introduction

This report is an annual report to brief on the business and activity within Rotherham Borough Council's Fostering Service in 2021/2022.

The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Fostering Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving into 2022/23.

2. The Fostering Service

Rotherham Borough Council Fostering Service operates within the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the "2011 Regulations"), and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, which form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.

Prior to September 2013, local authority fostering services were inspected separately by Ofsted. Since then, inspection of local authority fostering services work has been incorporated into the Single Inspection Framework which takes into account the role of fostering in the wider children's services department.

The fostering service in Rotherham comprises of three teams; 'Recruitment Team'; which focuses on the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers; and two 'Supervisory Teams' which focus on the support and supervision of mainstream foster carers as well as our carers offering more specialist care including carers providing short break care for disabled children, Private Fostering and Connected Carers, and the Mockingbird Project.

In line with the regulations, the service has a Fostering Panel chaired by a skilled, independent and experienced social work professional. The Panel considers and makes recommendations about the suitability of foster carer applicants and existing foster carers' ongoing terms of approval and are advised about foster carers leaving the agency. The service also operates a separate Long-Term Matching Panel which

makes recommendations about the matching of children requiring long term placements. The service also employs a panel advisor who is a suitably experienced social worker with a strong knowledge and background in fostering and who also supports with service development across the whole service.

The Head of Service for Looked After Children, Rebecca Wall, performs the role of Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the fostering service. The Agency Decision Maker considers and makes decisions (qualifying determinations) on Panel recommendations. The Agency Decision Maker also has responsibility to agree the continued suitability to foster following a foster carer's annual fostering review.

For a period of this year Rebecca Wall stepped up as Acting Assistant Director role within RMBC and then stepped back down to her role as Head of Service for Looked After Children (and therefore the ADM) at the end of the financial year. Further staffing changes will be shared later on in this report.

The service has continued their contract with Brightsparks, a creative communications and business development agency, on the foster carer recruitment programme. Through targeted a specific digital marketing strategy Brightsparks aim to significantly increase the number of enquiries made to the service, thereby increasing the number of suitable prospective foster carers coming through to assessment stage and ultimately being recommended at Panel and approved by the ADM. The continued work of Brightsparks will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

3. Panel Functions

Regulation 23(1) of the 2011 Regulations states that *"the fostering service must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering Panel ("the central list"), including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience."*

Regulation 23(4) states that *“...the fostering service must constitute one or more fostering Panels, as necessary, to perform the functions of a fostering Panel under these Regulations, and must appoint Panel members including:*

- (i) A person to chair the Panel who, in the case of any appointment made after 1st October 2011, must be independent of the fostering service provider, and;*
- (ii) One or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the Panel is absent or that office is vacant (“the vice chairs”) from the persons on the central list.*

Rotherham Fostering Panel has the following primary functions (under Regulation 25(1) of the Fostering Regulations 2011).

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

The designated Long-Term Matching Panel makes recommendations about matches for children who have a plan for long-term fostering with suitable foster carers.

4. Panel Process and Administration

Panel Process

The Panel Advisor receives the draft reports for Panel three weeks prior to panel and then gives written feedback on the quality of the reports, where appropriate, as well

as practice advice. The final paperwork submitted to panel is always shared at least seven days before panel meets to comply with National Minimum Standards but in general panel members paperwork two weeks in advance of panel.

When Panel minutes are completed, they go firstly to the panel members and social workers in attendance at panel for any factual amendments and then to the Panel Advisor and the Panel Chair for final amendments or additions. This process usually means that final minutes are available for the Agency Decision Maker in a timely manner by the end of the week following Monday's panel. The ADM then has 7 working days from receipt of the minutes to make a decision.

Following receipt of the ADM decision, the panel administration team will send these onto allocated social workers who will inform the foster carer/ applicant of the decision within 2 working days in line with NMS. Panel Admin will send the decision in writing within 5 working days, again in line with NMS.

Panel Administration

Panel administration has seen a change in 2021/22 with one member of staff moving on to a new role and therefore a new member of staff joining the team of three who facilitate the work of fostering panel in addition the Long Term Matching Panel and Adoption Panel. Panel administration is efficient, with reports circulated in good time. Panel minutes are detailed, and draft minutes are usually available on the second working day following panel. Panels became paperless in at the start of lockdown in March 2019 and have remained so which has resulted in a significant cost and time saving for business support. Information is shared securely using SharePoint which panel members are given access to via their own extranet email address. Anything which is emailed, such a panel preparation sheets, is anonymised in order to prevent any confidentiality breaches.

Virtual Panel

Panels have remained virtual since the lockdown in 2019 and this is next due to be reviewed in Autumn 2022. Feedback from panel members, fostering team staff and business support is that they would prefer panels to remain virtual as this saves a huge amount of time and expense (car parking, fuel etc.). The majority of foster

carers have told us that they also prefer virtual panel as they find the medium to be less intimidating and also find it easier to attend panel around child care and school runs. Some foster carers have commented that they feel the virtual panel does not provide the same sense of celebration of their good practice as the in-person panel did, as, although panel members are just as encouraging and complimentary of foster carers as they were when panel was in-person, there does not feel the same sense of occasion when carers are attending virtually.

The virtual panel process has remained the same with panel members being required to submit written preparation prior to panel detailing the strengths and vulnerabilities they have identified and proposing questions to be asked. These are then reviewed by the Chair and a final list of strengths, vulnerabilities and questions is put forward to the Panel Advisor who agrees to the questions or discusses any concerns with the Chair, before the questions are then sent to the allocated workers to be shared in advance of panel with foster carers and applicants. This has been working very well and has made the panel meeting much more efficient as no time is spent deciding what the questions should be. Foster carers and applicants report that they appreciate receiving the questions in advance, however there have been some concerns that this results in more rehearsed answers which panel members feel gives less of a sense of the foster carer/applicant. This is therefore planned to be reviewed and consideration will be given to not providing the questions in advance now that everyone is used to communicating via a video medium.

5. Panel Composition

The Panel maintained a comfortable number of panel members on a 'Central List'. Each panel member who served for a year had an annual appraisal within the year. The panel membership included members with a range of professional backgrounds and interests including elected members, social workers, foster carers, and members with LAC nursing backgrounds. Throughout the year 2021/22 some panel members left their role and new members were recruited; members that left this role during the year are indicated below with an asterix. The table below provides the details of the 'Central List'.

Name of Panel Member	Type of Member
Maggie Kirwin	Independent Chair
Jenny Hosker	Vice Chair/Social Work Member (Children with Disabilities Team Manager)*
Claire Brennan	Social Work Member (Advanced Practitioner - Locality Team)*
Andrew Bosmans	Independent Member
Paula Bielby	Independent Member (Foster Carer for IFA)*
Ninda Randhawa	Independent Member (Magistrate – Youth Justice Courts)
Sandra Griffin	Independent Member (Foster Carer for neighbouring Local Authority)
Lynda Briggs	Named Nurse for Looked After Children
Robert Bird	Elected Member
Laura McMenamin	Social Work Member (Learning and Development Team – Practice Consultant)
Ellen Holliday	Social Work Member (Therapeutic Team)*
Sarah-Jane Madden	Independent Member (Foster Carer for IFA and previous deputy head-teacher)*
Lauren Bruce	Social Work Member (Advanced Practitioner – Locality Team)*
Steven Hawksworth	Independent Member (Social Worker and Care Experienced)
Alice Kearse	Social Work Member (Therapeutic Team)
David Busby	Independent Member (Retired LAC Nurse)
Jordan Haslam	Independent Member (Care Experienced)

Joanne Kelly	Independent Member (PAUSE Project Team Manager)
Anne Lindsey	Social Work Member (Fostering Team)

As can be seen above, four panel members stepped down in 2021/22, this was due to moving onto new roles/retirement or due to changes in availability for panel following a move to part time hours. Sadly one panel member, Sarah-Jane Madden, unexpectedly passed away in this period. Alice Kearse remains on hold as a panel member as she is currently on maternity leave.

Two new independent members were recruited in the period; Joanne Kelly and Jordan Haslam. Joanne manages the Pause Project and therefore provides excellent insight for Panel into the perspective of birth mothers in particular. Jordan is care experienced and also has a large amount of relevant professional experience. Anne Lindsey was also recruited as a social work member from the fostering team to ensure the number of social work members on the list is sufficient to ensure quorate panels.

As Jenny Hosker stepped down from Panel due to her retirement, this does leave a vacancy for a Vice Panel Chair and this will need to be recruited to in 2022/23.

:

The following training has been made available for Panel Members in 2021/22:

- Panel Members training day – training on Shared Lives and Supported Lodgings, Foster Carer Disruptions, Preparation for Panel and Question Formulation, Caring for Harder to Place children, Autism/ADHD and Attachment Disorder.
- Various relevant articles and research papers also sent to Panel Members over the year.

Panel Advisor Abi Hall went on maternity leave in April 2021 and her post was covered by Samantha Jones until she returned to work in May 2022 and therefore for

the period covered by this report, Samantha was managing panel business and the central list.

6. Panel Chair's Report – Maggie Kirwin

The panel has continued to operate efficiently and effectively during the past year. There appears to have been ongoing improvement in the way members scrutinise reports and contribute to the strengths, vulnerabilities and questions which they submit to the panel chair. As has been mentioned elsewhere, we now believe the time is right to ask attendees questions on an impromptu basis; without them receiving the questions ahead of their attendance at panel. This will be closer to the experiences of those who attended panel before the Covid 19 pandemic when all applicants attended in person and did not have sight of any questions in advance. We believe this will enable panel to more effectively see the 'real' responses of attendees rather than a more rehearsed answer.

The virtual panel does require more input from the Chair and the Panel Advisor as all the panel members preparation work must be collated ahead of a virtual panel rather than 'in the room' during the panel day. This extra workload is more than offset by the increased efficiency of the panel which now benefits from a more condensed panel timetable and the ability for presenting social workers to dial in to the panel from anywhere via the internet rather than having to attend Riverside House.

The quality of reports received by panel has improved over the last year as the work of the Team Managers supporting newly recruited staff has paid dividends. Alongside this the work of the Panel advisor has been crucial both in the quality assurance function before panel and ensuring assessing social workers are clear about the information panel requires to enable it to make a recommendation.

Business support continues to provide outstanding support to panel members and the Chair. All documents are uploaded for panel members in a timely manner and the team all keep panel updated if there are any problems relating to this. The minutes are circulated promptly and efficiently.

Working relationships continue to be very positive between the Panel Chair, panel members and the Department. There is clear understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities with professional respect evident. This is supported by the Panel advisor who liaises extremely well to ensure any issues or concerns are dealt with promptly. This in turn influences and underpins the panel training agenda to ensure engaging and relevant training is provided to panel members.

7. Long Term Matching Panel Business 2021/2022

Panel membership this year can be seen below:

Name of Panel Member	Type of Member
Sajel Hira	Panel Chair – Fostering Team Manager
Debbie Willis	Panel Chair – Fostering Team Manager
Kelly Oxe	Panel Chair – Fostering Team Manager (covering Sajel Hira's maternity leave)
Anne Lindsay	Social Work Member – Fostering Team
Sandra Griffin	Independent Member (Foster Carer for neighbouring Local Authority)
Lynda Briggs	Named Nurse for Looked After Children

2021/22 saw 11 LTM Panels take place with a total of 27 long term match cases heard, 22 matches with IFA carers and 5 with in house carers, and 3 Supported Lodgings assessments heard. 1 panel was cancelled due to no items being booked on.

8. Fostering Panel Business - 2021/22

There were 20 Fostering Panels convened in 2021/22 and 2 cancelled due to insufficient panel business. Within these panels 141 agenda items discussed, an average of 7 items per Panel.

For comparison, there were 24 Fostering Panels convened in 2020/21, with 163 agenda items discussed, an average of 7 items per Panel. This demonstrates that the amount of business was similar across the two years with a slight decrease in agenda items which has been reflected in 4 less panels in the year.

Panel business was split as follows in 2021/22:

Skills to Foster Assessments: 9 = **6%**

Brief Reports: 0 = **0%**

Family and Friends Assessments: 5 = **4%**

First Reviews: 14 = **10%**

Three Yearly Reviews: 27 = **19%**

Change of Category: 16 = **11%**

Review following investigation/allegation/unplanned ending: 5 = **4%**

Regulation 25 Extensions: 31 = **22%**

Resignations: 34 = **24%**

De-registrations: 0 = **0%**

Panel capacity has generally been sufficient, and this is partly due to the virtual nature of panel meaning that each item on panel takes less time and also due to the continuation of foster carer reviews only coming to panel every three years rather than every two. Forecasting for the next financial year with regards to assessments of new foster carers suggests that there will be an increase in the number of skills to foster assessments being presented at Panel. In general, it is agreed that no more than two skills to foster assessments of full family and friends assessments should be presented on the same Panel due to the volume of reading required of panel members for these items. Should capacity become an issue in relation to the number of assessments coming through, consideration will be given to holding additional panels.

The Panel are highly motivated to check and challenge by appropriately maintaining the role of 'critical friend' to the department with equal emphasis on both aspects. Where appropriate the Panel will offer flexibility without compromising the fostering

regulations and standards. In 2019/20 it was noted that the service would benefit from an increased role in the quality assurance of the reports that come to panel and whilst work began on a process this, it was put on hold when the covid lockdown was implemented and virtual panel was established. This is something that will now need to be picked up again in the next financial year.

The continued use of a dedicated Panel Advisor gives greater scrutiny and challenge to the service which ensures continued improvement in the quality of reports presented to Panel. The Panel Advisor also produces a Service Feedback Report after every Panel which is shared with the ADM, Service Manager and Team Managers and comments on good practice in addition to any concerns or themes. Quarterly Practice Monitoring Meetings continued to be facilitated by the Panel Advisor, chaired by the Head of Service (ADM) and included the Panel Chair, Panel Advisor and Senior Management. The meetings focused on performance and practice issues with clear actions agreed. This ensures that the service is not operating in a silo and provides an environment for accountable and collaborative practice development. Themes from these meetings and reports are fed into both panel member and fostering service staff training.

Obtaining placement reports from children's social workers for fostering reviews continues to be a problem at times. The report has been moved onto LCS and a task is now triggered into CSWs worktrays to complete the report in advance of the review. This has made the report more visible for CSWs however there continues to be a challenge in getting these reports completed at times. This lack of the child's voice in fostering reviews then follows through into panel and limits the evidence upon which panel can make their recommendation, making the process less holistic. In the next financial year it would be beneficial to look at the data from LCS on how many of these reports were completed and this may provide further insight into how to increase the number of reports returned.

9. Fostering Families – Placements

The Fostering Service is an integral section of Children and Young People's Services, providing fostering opportunities to children in care through a range of fostering placements, which include:

- *Day care*: for foster carers who need to attend meetings or training events.
- *Second Home Care*: placements that offer support to primary foster carers.
- *Task Centred Placements*: which are placements for children entering care.
- *Long term permanence*: placements for children and young people who cannot return to birth family and where adoption is not the plan.
- *Family and friends foster care*: (Connected Carers) enabling children and young people who are unable to live with their parents to be cared for by extended family members, friends or other people who are connected with them.
- *Step Down from Residential Care*: a Rotherham Borough initiative to accommodate Rotherham's most vulnerable children, typically teenagers who are receiving residential care but require a foster placement. Step Down from Residential carers receive a Skills Level 4 allowance per child and high levels of support and therapeutic intervention in managing and sustaining placements and in developing meaningful relationships to enable children in their care to achieve better outcomes. As Step Down from Residential carers, they will receive a higher level of supervision and remuneration rate.
- *Aiming High for Disabled Children Families Together Scheme*: provides short break care for children with disabilities. The aim of this fostering provision is to provide respite for children with a disability to give a break to a family in order to enable the child to live at home.
- *Mockingbird Family Based Model of Fostering*: is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.

10. Enquiries, Approvals, Deregistration and Resignations

10.1 Enquiries

Since the onset of our contract with the Bright Sparks Agency we collect data regarding new enquiries in two ways. We are able to log the number of people that download rate sheets, information packs, sign up to a newsletter or engage in live chats. In the last two years the figures are shown below.

2020 – 2021	Enquiries	347
2021 – 2022	Enquiries	1217

The reason that 2021 – 2022 shows such a large increase is that this is the first full year that we benefitted from the contract with Bright Sparks. We were able then to log all the interactions with our website and also provide much more information through electronic means which meets the needs of the people we are trying to reach.

Within our new processes the first step on the Prospective Foster Carers journey (PFC) is to register interest and then they have the option to book a information call or visit with a fostering adviser. This meeting is to go through the information booklet, share the benefits of fostering with Rotherham and if suitable look to book a further initial assessment visit (now called Follow up Visit)

The number of Information Call/ Visits and Follow Up visits are as follows.

2020 – 2021	Information Visits	226
2021 – 2022	Information Visits	257
2020 – 2021	Follow Up Visits	93
2021 – 2022	Follow up Visits	92

Of all enquiries received in 2021 - 2022, 35.79% progressed to a follow up visit. The figure the year before was almost identical and for the two years back to 2018 the conversion rate was around 28%.

The primary reason for closures at the enquiry stage (ie, people not progressing to an application) was that the PFC self-withdrew (32.2%). However, it is not always known why they have done this. Many will have made an informed decision discussing it with the Fostering Advisers, others simply stop engaging with us. Medical reasons (17%) were the second highest reason for withdrawal, followed by complex family situations (14%) that needed resolving and fourthly people choosing to go to another agency (9.7%). It's worth noting that many of the self – withdrawals are also likely to be the PFC choosing another agency but not telling us about this and can also be people returning to the process as a later date.

10.2 Approvals

In 2020 – 2021 we approved 21 Fostering Households. Due to the change in our model of recording data it is difficult to give a conversion rather that covers the whole of the year. However, from Sept 2020 to March 2021 the conversion rate was approximately 8.5%

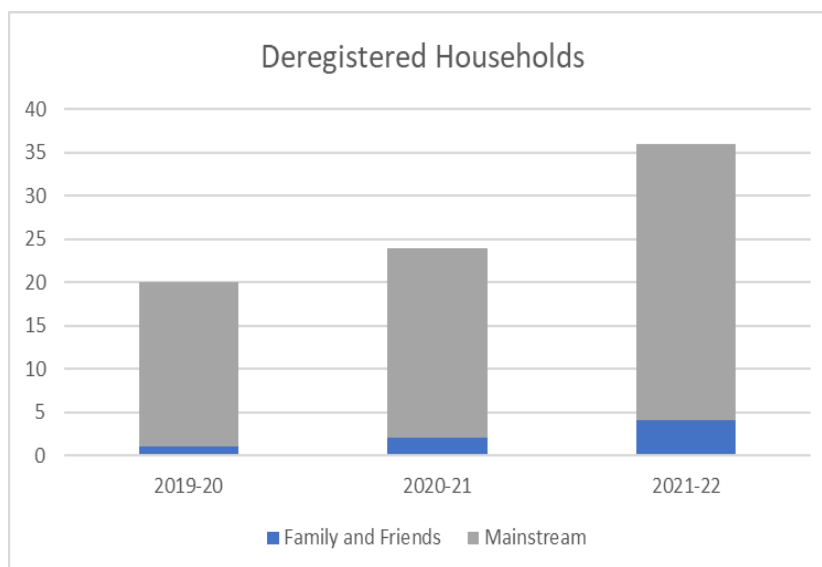
By comparison, in 2021 – 2022 we approved 10 households which gave us a conversion rate of 3.89%. This is a significant drop in our conversion rate and through our strategic and operational meetings which include senior social care management and commissioning managers it is acknowledged that the impact of Covid 19 has had a detrimental affect on our recruitment of carers. Initially when the pandemic hit the UK interest in fostering increased but as the pandemic went on PFC's have been less likely to take financial risks through a new career path and the online marketing costs have increased by between 89 and 108%, meaning we are unable to fund as wide-reaching marketing campaigns across as many platforms. The most recent government statistical release commented that 2020-21 was an outlier in that there were unusually high figures in several areas including enquiries, applications and approvals and this was also reflected in our own data and should be acknowledged when comparing this 2021-22 data to the previous reporting year.

The number of family and friends carers approved as full foster carers has remained stable with 3 being approved in 2021-22 as compared to 2 in 2020-21 and 3 in 2019-20.

Nationally it is noted that there have been reducing numbers of applications for mainstream fostering over the last 5 years and that in both Local Authority and IFAs a large number of enquiries are not translating into applications.

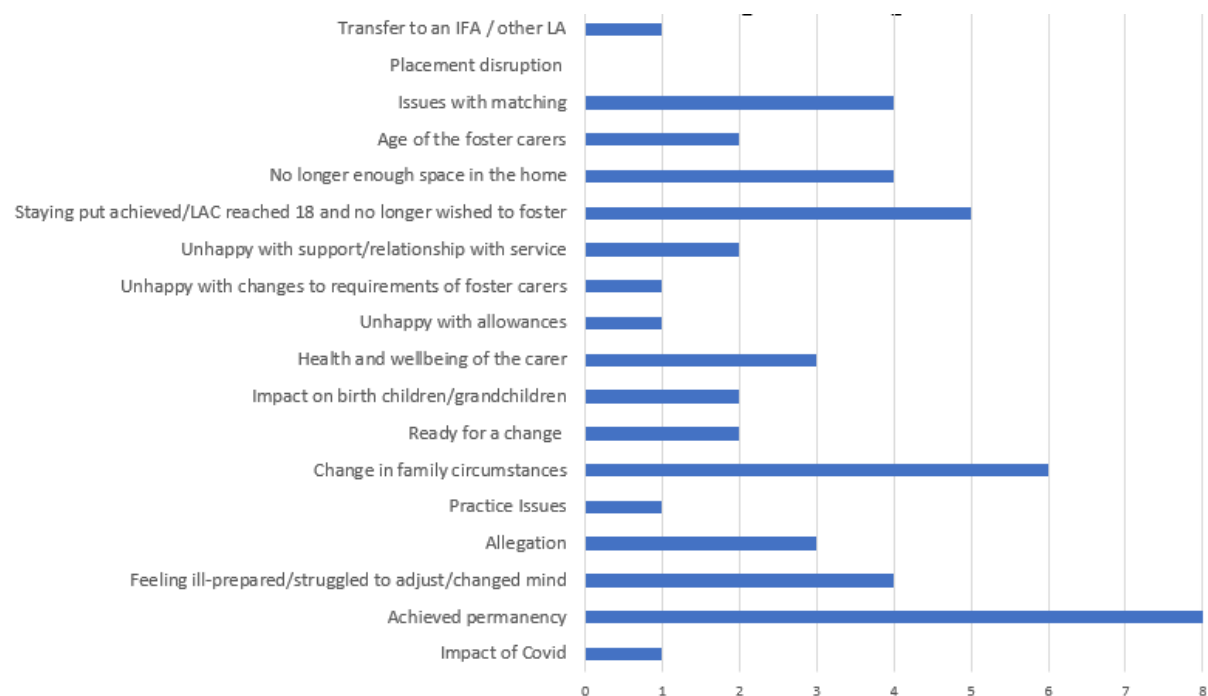
10.3 De-registrations

We had a 33% increase in households deregistering during 2021-22 compared to the previous year. A total of 36 households, including 4 family and friends carer deregistered. 28 households were carer resignations and 1 was deregistered by Fostering Panel/ADM and 3 were carer resignations but were cases where we would likely have deregistered had the carer not resigned.

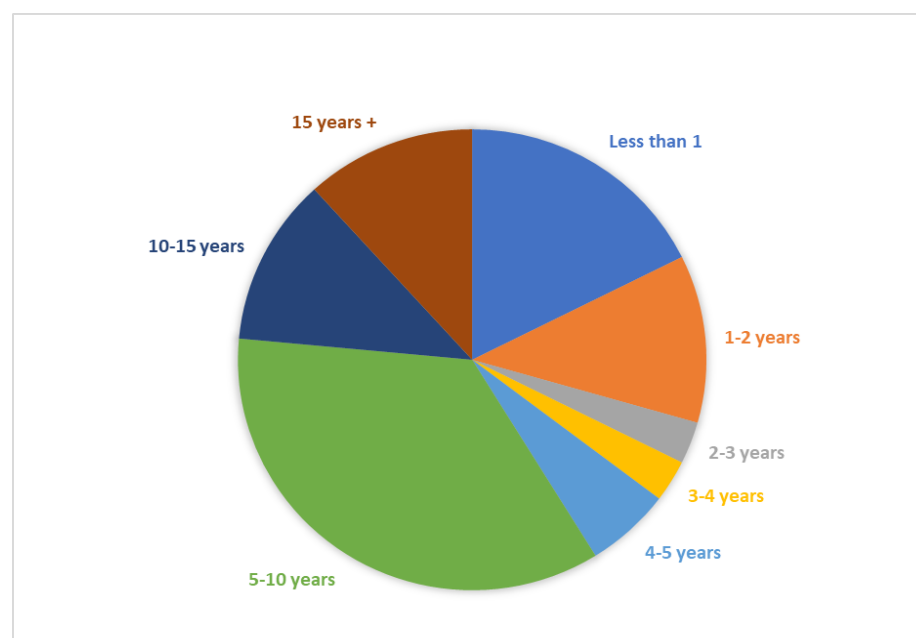


	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Family and Friends	1	2	4
Mainstream	19	22	32

Within the 36 deregistration's in 2021-2022 the following themes were identified as reasons for leaving fostering.

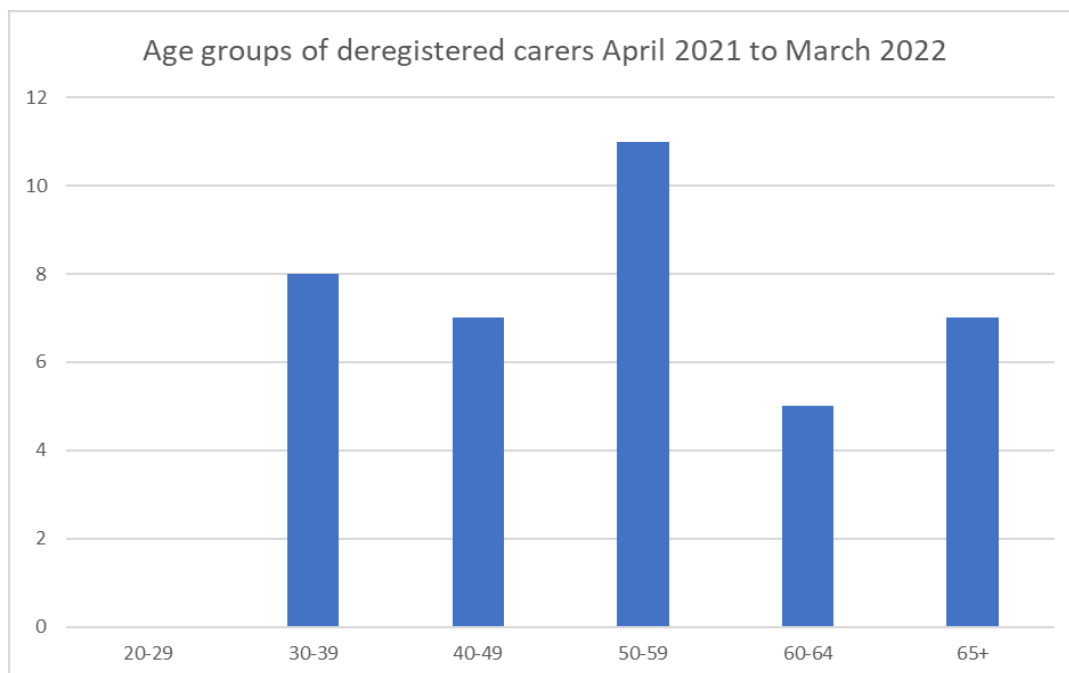


The following chart shows deregistrations broken down by years as a foster carer.



29% of carers who resigned had fostered for less than 2 years. However, the national average for 20-21 (most recent data) was 30%. We also rate similarly to national average for number of carers fostering for over 10 years.

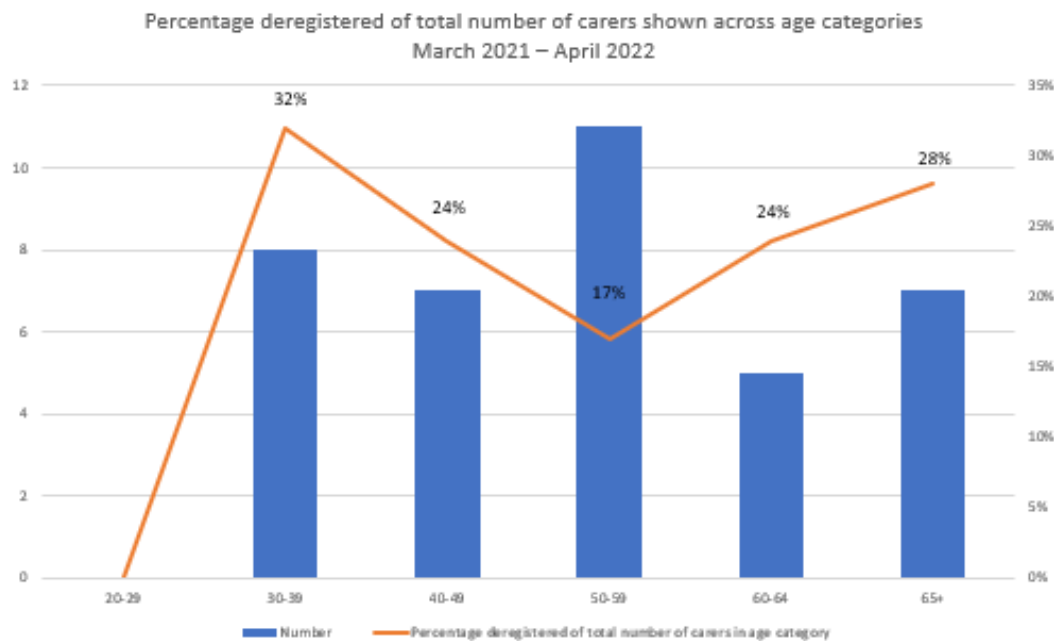
In terms of age at time of deregistration, our data is also similar to national data.



Nationally the largest group of all approved foster carers were in their 50s and almost 60% of those deregistered were over 50 (DofE 21-22). This is also reflected in our resignation data with 68% of carers resigning being over 50 (main carer age at point of deregistration).

As can be seen on the graph below, although the highest number of deregistrations were in the 50-59 age bracket, this is actually the lowest percentage of total number of carers because we have more carers in this age bracket than any other.

The highest losses are in our 30-39 age range which may link to new carers or reg 24 carers who obtain permanence.



Most recent national data (DfE 21-22) reflects the same trend where those carers in their 50s had the highest proportion of deregistrations (32%) and those in their 20s had the lowest (5%). However, when looking at the proportion of carers who deregistered within each age bracket, those in their 50s had the lowest proportion of deregistrations (13%) and those in their 20s the highest (27%). Of those deregistrations of carers in their 20s, 80% were family and friends carers in the LA sector.

We can conclude that the majority of our deregistration's for 2021-2022 were unavoidable and as a result of natural change in circumstances – for the most part this was due to carer's long term commitment to children either through legal permanency or having cared for a child until adulthood and now choosing to retire (38%). Where other issues resulted in a resignation or deregistration, the service had generally done what they could to support the carers.

In a few cases there was evidence to suggest that carers were either not fully prepared for the reality of fostering or that they may not have been adequately protected or supported in the first few months of their fostering journey. Having said this, the pressures on the service to find placements does mean that finding a good match is often not possible, furthermore there is only so much that can be done to

prepare a carer for the reality of fostering and much of learning has to be done 'on the job'.

Our data shows that we are generally in line with national averages in respect of the age that people leave fostering and the length of time that they foster for. We need to continue to carefully assess and then support our new carers to reduce resignations within the first two years post approval. We then need to ensure we think creatively about how we can retain those people who have fostered for several years and are often entering a new time in their lives (retirement/grandchildren etc.).

10.4 Profile Raising

The Fostering Service continues to remain visible in the local community though due to national lock downs this has been more challenging than usual. We have attended Virtual Pride event, the Rotherham Show, made our selves visible in the community through leaflet drops into people's letter boxes, leaflet in with the council tax bill for all residents, a presence in local libraries and shopping centres as well as radio adverts, press releases and marketing in local publications. Please see section 17.4 for more detailed information regarding our internal marketing strategy.

10.5 Retention

The Fostering Service acknowledges that retention of foster carers is equally as important as recruitment of foster carers. The conclusions drawn from our work in understanding the deregistrations that have happened in this year will inform our work in retaining our foster carers. Work is in place to improve the financial offer to our carers and ensuring that we remain competitive with IFAs in terms of support available.

A lot of council investment has gone into the recruitment of new foster carers in the commissioning of Bright Sparks and it is acknowledged that this does now need to follow through into a retention strategy. This will ensure the gains made in recruitment are followed through in order to support foster carers to have a long and fulfilling fostering career. A key target for the next year will therefore be to more fully

understand what our carers need and to consider what work Bright Sparks can do to support the service with a retention strategy going forward.

In addition to this it is acknowledged that the relationship that foster carers have with their supervising social worker is often one of the key factors in retention and therefore a stable fostering staff team is also key to the retention of our carers.

Mockingbird programme

Aims to prevent placement breakdown and increase stability of the fostering households. Rotherham fostering team's first Mockingbird hub in Conisborough was launched on the 14th May 2018. An additional hub was launched in Thurgroft on the 8th November 2018, followed by a third hub in Maltby on 3rd July 2021. The Mockingbird model has resulted in a decrease in disrupted placements, increased stability for children in fostering placements, and improved retention of foster carers. The Conisborough Hub host a weekly term time youth club which all RMBC foster carers can attend even if they are not within the Mockingbird hubs. The Youth club is well attended and is a popular addition to our core offer. The fostering team are looking to launch another hub in 2022, swiftly followed by a fifth hub early 2023.

Foster Carer Association

A Foster Care Association is a formal body set up by and run by foster carers who represent and advocate for the wider fostering community. The key roles of the association is to offer mutual support, promote working in partnership, develop awareness, knowledge and skills and share this across the service. It also aims to create opportunities for fostering families to meet together, and act as a bridge between the fostering community wider service to promote best practice for children in care and their fostering families. The foster carer association was relaunched by Rotherham Fostering Service in the latter part of 2018 and is now fully established. Rotherham Foster carers association (RFCA) applied for charitable status and has since achieved this.

The aim of the foster carer association is to provide support and advocacy to all foster carers. Within the foster carer association it is planned that it will deliver

mentoring/buddying to newly approved carers and training will be sourced to support this. In addition, the Foster Carer Association will coordinate social activities which will help embody a sense of community and social cohesion for our fostering community. The foster carer association will also act as a representative voice of the carers and advocate on their behalf to the Senior Management Team.

11. Children Placed in Foster Care - Information 2021- 2022

At 31st March 2022, there were 125 registered fostering households with 121 children in placement. There were an additional 37 children placed with 25 family and friends carers going through regulation 24 assessments. This takes the total to 158 in house foster placements, 28.1% of the total number of children in care.

Many of the temporary approved family and friends foster carers will go on to secure alternative permanency arrangements for the children that they are caring for, such as Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Orders, whilst the children in the early permanent placement are likely to be adopted meaning that these children will be no longer looked after children. This is in-line with Rotherham's "Right Child – Right Care" agenda, and the principal of securing permanency outside of care. The impact of this on fostering means that there are fewer foster carers as temporary approved foster carers do not progress to permanent kinship foster carers, and established carers leave the agency by committing to SGO and permanency for the child/children they look after. RMBC fostering recognises that this is the best and right outcome.

One of the significant issues that Rotherham faces is the high number of children and young people that have been placed in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. As of March 31st 2022 there were 245 children in IFA placements which equates to 43.6% of the children in care.

Of those 245 children in IFA placements, 181 lived (73.9%) within a 20 mile radius of their home postcode, only 44 children (17.9%) lived within borough. This is a concern as it is well understood that the needs of children and young people can only be met effectively if they live in an environment that provides a high quality of care and support, generally within a family home setting and in a geographical

location that is familiar. Wherever possible, children and young people should be placed within their own community which enables them to continue to have contact with the people and community of the most importance to them, thus promoting identity and strong sense of self, fundamental to resilience in later life. In addition, placing children in the RMBC area ensures a better oversight and control over education provision and other support services such as health and Children's Adolescent Mental Health service, (CAMHS).

Children and Young People's Service has recognised that it will not meet its sufficiency of placement provision for looked after children without attracting additional carers to foster for Rotherham and ensuring existing foster carers are retained and developed. As a result of this, Rotherham Borough Council has continued to significantly invest in the support and allowances offered to foster carers to attract and retain carers.

Rotherham also recognises the benefits of adopting a 'one market' approach by utilising commissioned (IFA) placements who live local to Rotherham Borough when considering matching and placing Rotherham children with Rotherham families. Significant work has been undertaken across the commissioning team and fostering services to secure local IFA provision when making matches in line with the 'Right Child – Right Care' agenda.

12. Placement Stability

Placement stability continues to be a factor in offering an effective Fostering Service and is crucial to ensuring that the Council delivers good outcomes to each looked after child. Stability is measured by 2 indicators, firstly children who experience 3 placement moves within 12 months and secondly children looked after for 2.5 years who have been in the same placement for 2 years.

The percentage of those who have had 3 or more placements in the 12 month period of April 2021 to March 2022 has very slightly increased to 9.3%. The figures from previous reporting years can be seen in the table below for comparison.

Reporting Year	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
3 or more placements during the year	9.3%	8.9%	11.1

We are performing in line with the latest published (2021-22) national average of 9% (the lower the figure the better).

At the end of the 2021/22 year, 70.2% of placements had been stable for at least 2 years. Data from the previous two reporting years demonstrates a positive upwards trend in placement stability as can be seen in the table below.

Reporting Year	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Percentage of placements stable for at least two years	70.2%	69.2%	62.1%

This performance is impacted by the move to support long term foster placements to permanence i.e. Special Guardianship Orders. This is a positive outcome for children but effects performance negatively.

13. Unplanned Endings & Disruptions

In 2021/22 there were 7 disruption meetings held following the unplanned ending of the placements of 11 Looked After Children.

Key themes included:

- Difficulty in obtaining respite when needed
- Increasing challenging/ risky behaviour beyond what was manageable for the carers
- Emergency placement when new into care so information not known / Not enough information provided in initial referral pre placement – changes in

CSW also impacting on information available and case management in general.

- Pressure of school being far from placement in terms of transport, time and social impact on child and local authority not supporting a school move
- Impact of covid 19 pandemic and resulting affect on access to support from other carers as well as additional pressures placed on carers
- Impact on birth children/grandchildren
- Impact of allegations

14. Staffing in the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service has one Service Manager overseeing the service. There are two Supervisory Team Managers, managing 12 supervising Social Workers and one Training Co-Ordinator. One of the Team Managers is currently on maternity leave and her post has been covered. There is one Recruitment Team Manager overseeing a Marketing and Recruitment Officer, two Fostering Advisors, one Advanced Practitioner and three Assessing Social Workers. One of the Assessing Social Workers is currently on maternity leave and her post remains uncovered. There is one Fostering Panel Advisor also managed by the Service Manager. The Fostering Panel Advisor has been on maternity leave since April 2021 and is due to return to her post in May 2022. During this period her post has been covered. There is one Fostering Support Worker who is currently taking maternity leave. Her post remains uncovered and she will be returning to work in November 2022. After a period of instability, the staff team has now been stable for some time which has benefitted foster carers in that they have not had changes in supervisory workers, which in turn benefits the children in their care.

In 2017/18 RMBC introduced the Mockingbird family based model of fostering and the first constellation was launched on the 14th May 2018. On the 8th November 2018 a second constellation was launched and in this reporting year, on the 3rd July 2021 a third constellation was launched where there was the introduction of new hub carers and satellite families. This resulted in another supervising social worker from within the Fostering Service stepping into the role of Mockingbird Liaison Worker.

There are now three supervising social workers, in the role of Mockingbird Liaison Worker overseeing the three well established constellations.

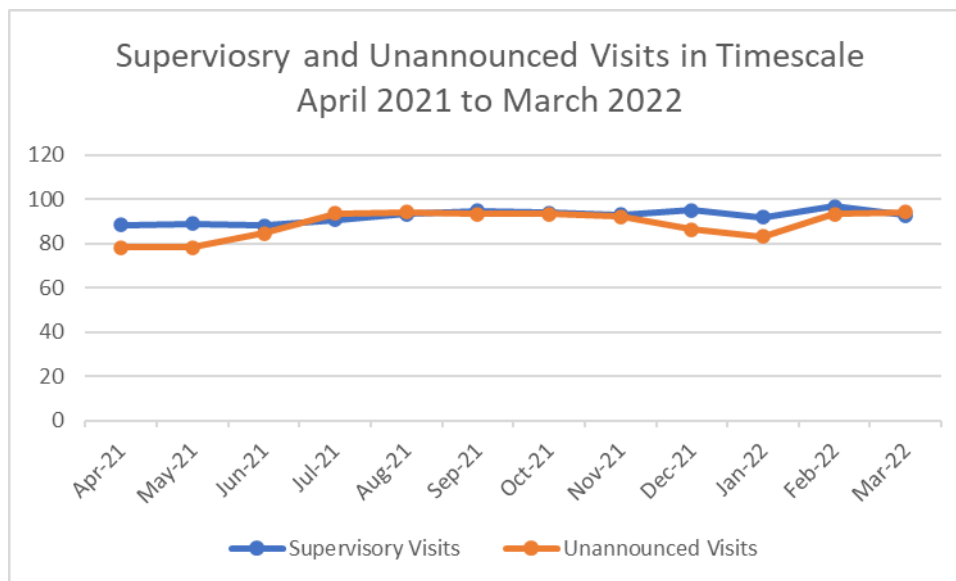
There are plans to continue to expand the Mockingbird Family Model to include two additional constellations. This will require the appointment of two Mockingbird Hub families. Each constellation will compromise of up to ten satellite families, including a maximum of 18 looked after children. It is hoped this will be achieved within the first quarter of 2023.

15. Fostering Supervision and Support

Foster care is a demanding task involving significant responsibilities. Support to foster carers begins at the point they make contact to the service, which includes telephone support, training and assessment from the recruiting team.

From the point of approval, foster carers all have a dedicated supervising social worker. Best practice includes formal handover from recruitment worker to supervising social worker with the foster carer. The recruiting social worker will be consulted around matching, and in some circumstances will undertake joint visits with the supervising social worker to support the first placement where it is appropriate to do so. One of the key performance indicators for the Fostering Service is to provide family based placements for the children, and supervising social workers review with foster carers any of their placements that are “on hold” to manage these breaks and support the carers in taking new placements.

Foster Carers require a level of support and supervision commensurate with the tasks they perform on behalf of the Local Authority. Foster Carers are visited at a minimum every six weeks, with newly approved foster carers visited / supported more frequently at the start of their fostering journey. Both supervisory visits and unannounced visits are monitored and reviewed in RMBC performance clinics and both are evidencing an upward trend from the previous reporting year.



Throughout this review period over 90% of supervisory visits were noted to be completed within timescale. However, approximately 63% of unannounced visits were undertaken in timescale. This is reflective of the lockdown period during the Covid Pandemic. This is monitored through staff supervision and monthly performance meetings.

The supervising social worker continues to support and guide the foster carer on their journey through fostering, by providing guidance, support and opportunities to develop skills and knowledge as foster carer. All foster carers within the fostering service are allocated a supervising social worker prior to attending panel for approval.

16. Activities and Events

The Fostering Service host an annual diary of events for fostering families and this is foster carer led in consultation with the department. 2021/22 was impacted by the Covid Pandemic which led to some activities and events being held virtually. In 2021/22, this included:

- Fostering family Christmas celebration
- Halloween Party
- Easter Party

- Parties in the park run throughout the summer vacation
- Pride of Rotherham – achievement celebration for children in care October 2021
- Son's and Daughter's month – all birth children received a Thank you letter, certificate and keepsake
- Foster carer Christmas hampers/selection boxes for the children
- Foster carers conference
- Fostering Fortnight celebration event
- Quarterly foster carer forums involving carers, team managers, service manager, and head of service.
- Odd sock day in support of anti-bullying week

These events offer an opportunity for foster carers to network, normalise a looked after child's experience by enabling them to spend time with other children in care, provide informal support to foster carers, and be involved in the fostering, children's social care and wider RMBC developments.

17. Support Groups

There are three formal support groups hosted across Rotherham and facilitated by supervising social workers:-

- Dinnington (evening)
- Rockingham (afternoon)
- Listerdale for carers with children aged 0 – 4 years (morning)

The aim of the three support groups is to provide a greater opportunity for foster carers to participate and gain support.

The new carer support group and family and friends support group which was set up in 2020 ended in 2021 due to low attendance at these groups impacted by the Covid Pandemic these groups subsequently ceased.

Peer support: foster carers are routinely buddied up with other carers, who provide coaching and peer support to other foster carers. Whilst outside of this reporting

year, the plan is to further formalise these arrangements by offering peer mentoring training to carers and staff. The Foster Care in England review by Department for Education (2018) emphasised the importance of Peer Support. Recommendation 10 *“All Fostering Services should consider introducing structured peer support for carers”*

Sons and Daughters groups: is run monthly facilitated by the service. The group is open to birth children aged 8 – 16 years. Each meeting incorporates an activity and consultation element to listen to the views of birth children involved in fostering.

Foster Care Association: This committee is now well established. It consists of foster carer members with the support of an identified supervising social worker who acts as a link between the Foster Carer Association and the Fostering Service.

18. Consultations

Foster carers have been consulted in multiple ways throughout the year. 2021-22 saw the introduction of our Working Together Group which is a virtual meeting held quarterly which provides the opportunity for a small group of foster carers to meet with a Team Manager and the Service Manager and to raise any issues or concerns they may have. Actions for the service are then taken from this meeting.

In addition the foster carers forum also continued virtually this year on a quarterly basis. This is primarily an opportunity for staff to come together with the foster carers and share any service updates, provide an opportunity for learning together and can be a place to discuss changes. It is hoped that at some point in the next financial year, some of these forums may be able to return to face to face. Due to COVID-19 it was not possible to run a foster carer conference this year however we hope to reinstate this in the future when it is safe and practical to do so.

Support groups have continued, as mentioned earlier in this report, and during these groups any issues raised by foster carers are taken back to managers by the social workers facilitating the group.

The Rotherham Foster Carers Association is another channel in which feedback can be given to the service and lines of communication can be kept open between carers and staff in order to resolve any issues and support carers in the fostering task. The RFCA will advocate for carers who do not feel confident in sharing their views and this is supportive for those carers who want to give feedback and want to be consulted with but find it difficult to do this personally.

Fostering Panel provides another opportunity for consultation in that carers can share with Panel compliments or criticisms around the fostering service and other professional involvements they have and panel can provide advice to the service on these where appropriate. This is then overseen by the ADM who can follow up on any action required. In the relation to the panel process itself, carers are sent a feedback form following attendance at panel which they are asked to complete and return to provide feedback on the panel process. Although only a small percentage of these are completed, those that are do provide valuable insight into how carers experience panel and how practice can be improved where necessary.

19. Complaints and Compliments

In this financial year there was one official complaint made regarding a decision not to return a child to the care of a couple following a period of carers ill health. This was resolved at stage 1.

There were two official compliments made regarding the fostering service. One in relation to a reg 24 assessing worker and one in relation to an assessing worker from the recruitment team.

20. Training

20.1 Our Training Model

In Rotherham's fostering service, training is viewed as an essential part of the fostering journey. We believe that a growth mindset is crucial for everyone, both staff and carers, as this perspective helps us recognise that there is always more to learn and to be eager to be the best that we can be for the children in our care. We employ a training and development co-ordinator who sits within the fostering team so

understands the unique needs of foster carers and is able to obtain training accordingly. Fostering is an ever changing and complex landscape where we hold in balance the dynamic of the needs of the specific children in a foster carer's home with the needs of the foster carer themselves. This means that a 'one size fits all' approach to training and development would not be good enough. Therefore, we offer a wide range of training courses which enable foster carers to not just meet the National Minimum Standards, but to grow into their potential with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills.

20.2 Training and the Foster Carer's Journey

Training and development begins for our carers at the very start of their fostering journey. We offer prospective carers access to not only our Skills to Foster training course, but also to other courses that the assessing social worker feels would be beneficial during the assessment process. Often this will be our therapeutic parenting courses which we access via the Rotherham Therapeutic Team. This is as we recognise that therapeutic parenting is often new to prospective foster carers, but we feel is an essential skill to begin to develop in readiness for caring for a looked after child.

Our foster carer payment for skills model is heavily linked to training and development with carers being required to complete specific courses as part of their evidence to be able to move to the next level. This supports our growth and development ethos and provides a clear pathway for foster carers to progress. Therapeutic parenting courses are intentionally a significant part of this model as we recognise that all looked after children need trauma informed, therapeutic care and so want to support and enable our carers to provide this. New foster carers enter in a level one but can enter at a higher level if they can evidence that their knowledge and skills are sufficient. This ensures that our approach to development is dynamic rather than prescriptive and that we meet carers where they are on their journey already.

Our supervising social workers know their foster carers well and use supervision sessions as a reflective space to nurture carers' development and reflect on their experiences. This then feeds directly into the personal development plan that every foster carer has, resulting in a bespoke package of training and development

opportunities curated by the supervising social worker in partnership with the foster carer. Although training is a requirement for foster carers, we want it to be a supportive and positive experience, where carers feel in control of their own learning and enabled to reflect on what their learning needs might be. It is vitally important that carers do not feel 'done to' but rather, that we are working together to meet their needs and, therefore, the needs of the children in their care.

Training and development is also considered as a part of the fostering review process giving the FIRO the opportunity to make suggestions about training that may be beneficial or is required. It is also considered within the panel process where PDPs are presented as part of the panel pack for prospective foster carers and when reviews are presented to panel every three years. Panel are given access to the training offer and so can encourage carers to take up certain training where they notice an area for development.

20.3 Training in the 2021-22 period and changes made

Our foster carers have embraced the new online way of accessing learning and development brought about as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. Whilst some courses, such as first aid, have always remained face to face, the majority of what are traditionally considered classroom-based courses have been run virtually over MS Teams. As a service we have continued to work closely with our colleagues in health and education and with our in-house therapeutic team to ensure our training programme reflects the needs of our foster carers and the children and young people in their care.

In the period 1/04/21 to 31/03/22, 1114 learning and development activities have been undertaken by foster carers and prospective carers, in comparison with 780 in the same period pre-pandemic 2019/2020 when the majority of courses were face to face. We are beginning to move back to more face-to-face training but lessons learnt from the uptake of virtual training have meant we will move forward with a mix of face-to-face and virtual training in order to meet all carers learning needs.

We have strengthened the provision of our e-learning package, investing in access to a service where considerably more topics for training are available and the quality of this learning is also superior to previous e-learning services we have used. This

has allowed us to create more bespoke development plans for carers based on task related needs, recognising that each individual carer will have their own areas for development according to their background and skills and specific children in their care. As the e-learning, unlike our directed training courses, is accessible at any point in the year, it also gives us the opportunity to quickly provide high quality information to a carer who may suddenly find themselves in need of training on a specific topic. Another advantage has been our ability to use e-learning to cater to carers who may struggle to attend many courses during usual working hours due to other commitments. For our more established carers who have an extensive training record, the e-learning has provided a fresh, new way to continue their professional development with topics that they may not have covered for some time or that may even be new to them. Our foster carers have told us that they have valued the option to access their learning in this manner and the increased uptake of training opportunities overall supports this.

In addition to the introduction of the improved e-learning offer, we have also introduced several new directed learning courses. New courses are added in every new training programme to ensure the service keeps up with changes in both fostering and in society more generally. In the 2021/22 programme these included:

- Impact of Sibling Separation
- Gambling and Gaming Awareness
- Pause Project and Family Time
- Loss and Grief
- Men in Fostering
- Trauma Informed Practice

Our foster carers told us that they wanted access to more twilight training courses to fit around their daytime commitments and so, in the most recent training programme, the frequency and variety of twilight sessions was also increased. These sessions have been well attended and, in addition to the e-learning offer, provide a highly flexible training programme which can fit into the busy lives of our carers.

Our in-house therapeutic team offer a variety of therapeutic training courses which our carers can access. This includes both in depth therapeutic courses and shorter

introductory courses to ensure that there is something suited to all levels and needs. For example:

- Introduction to Attachment – one day course
- Bonding through play – one day course
- Foundations for Attachment – 6 week course
- Non-Violent Resistance – 10 week course

Supervising social workers will work with their carers to assess what level of therapeutic training and support they may need according to their skills, experience and the children in their care. Our carers can also access therapeutic consultations from the therapeutic team where the carer, supervising social worker and child's social worker will be provided with advice and support by a worker from the therapeutic team. The supervising social worker will then continue to support the carer with these suggestions through reflective supervision sessions. This close partnership working with the therapeutic team supports our aim to embed therapeutic practice throughout our fostering service.

In the period 01/04/21 – 31/03/22 the following learning and development activities were accessed:

Total number of training instances undertaken in period	1114
Number of courses in period	63
Number of individual carers attended training in period	256

Highlights and most popular courses included:

<i>Course Name</i>	<i>Number of attendees</i>
First Aid	70
CCE – County Lines	53
Pause Project and Family Time	47
Safer Care	47

Recording in Foster care	35
Gaming and Gambling Awareness	29
Attachment	27
Managing Challenging Behaviour	25
LADO	23
Education	22
Life Story Work	21
Equality and Diversity	20
Black Lives Matter	20
Sibling Separation	20
Through the Kids Eyes	20
CWDC Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Care	18

These figures demonstrate that there is a good balance between practical fostering practice matters such as first aid and recording, and matters related to supporting the emotional and behavioural development of children.

Our foster carer forum continues to be well attended, with a significant increase in attendance now that the forum is virtual. Carers have told us that they find it easier to fit in a virtual forum to their day alongside school drop offs etc and, therefore, we have taken the decision to keep the forum virtual to allow more carers to continue to access. As well as the forum giving carers updates on developments in the fostering and wider service, it gives us the opportunity to share good practice nominations for our carers, as well as to listen to presentations from guest speakers. These have included the Virtual School, DIVERT, FAB Team and foster panel members. These bitesize learning opportunities have been very positively received by foster carers and provide a chance to learn about something that would not be appropriate for a full or half-day of training.

21. Fostering Recruitment Activity and Outcomes

21.1 Bright Sparks Contract Update

In September 2020 RMBC commissioned work with Bright Sparks who are a creative communications and business development agency who have recently completed a significant piece of work exploring regional sufficiency for LAC. They bring a wealth of knowledge and experience in both market management for C&YP service and digital design expertise. The primary goal of the project has been to create an inbound marketing funnel designed to move prospective carers from initial awareness raising, engagement stage, through to the lead prospective carer stage and then into the fostering service assessment and approval process.

Under the name 'FosteringRotherham' a dedicated website was launched to attract prospective foster carers (PFCs). This has been a significant change that means all our advertising and engagement with PFC's had at it's a heart a highly informed understanding of marketing theory that now underpins our approach. This is a level of knowledge that was not available to the service before we commissioned Bright Sparks Agency.

Through our joint work with Bright Sparks a responsive and detailed approach to engaging PFCs has been developed and required wide ranging changes to the way new foster carers are recruited. The recruitment team has embraced these changes and been open to the changes needed and a strong relationship has built up with our partners at Bright Sparks.

Whilst there were high levels of success in 2020 -2021 in terms of increased recruitment the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic severely affected recruitment of new foster carers in 2021 – 2022. With Bright Sparks providing a database to gather and analyse trends in the market place, tracking behaviour of our target audience and through a thorough granular levels of data collection we have been able to adjust and respond quickly to changes in the market. There was initially a national upsurge in recruitment of foster carers in the first year of the pandemic when the national lock down changed people's lifestyles and they considered other employment opportunities. As the second national lock down took affect late in 2021 the

landscape had changed. Online media buying costs increased exponentially, sometimes as much as 100% and the outcomes Bright Sparks had predicted for the amount of money they would spend on advertising was severely cut. Additionally we were unable to hold any community events or have a presence with the RMBC area to offset a reduction in online marketing.

Within the 2021 – 2022 financial year a re-tender process was conducted. Bright Sparks had a 6 month extension to their contract that was due to end in September 2021. By the end of March 2022 they had been offered the contract going forward and were ready to roll out changes to the programme from April 2022.

21.2 Digital Content

This is probably the area of biggest change for Fostering Rotherham as we have a carefully managed programme of PPC advertising across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google, Tiktok and other social media platforms. We are able to target exactly the demographic we want to reach and Bright Sparks and the Recruitment Team work very closely to ensure we are marketing in the right places to increase our sufficiency. We meet weekly and monthly with Bright Sparks to inform their actions and they report back to us at every level of the organisation about every part of their activity. With a bespoke website PFC's can book all their calls and visits electronically and also complete an online application form. There is also a dedicated phone line for PFC's to use. The application form has also been revised this year to improve the customer experience whilst still meeting Fostering Regulations.

One of the biggest strengths has been our ability to track all PFC's and ensure we re contact at the times they request and keep in touch with them through regular newsletters in between personal re contacts.

21.3 Virtual Content

During lock down in 2020 the recruitment team worked closely with foster carers and bright sparks to produce an on line virtual drop in. This was a professionally produced video that is shown as a webinair with workers available to answer all questions that PFC's may have. This has been used since January 2021 as a means to share care stories and information about the process with PFC's. Prior to this drop ins were face to face but poorly attended not leading to any enquiries. The new

Virtual Drop in easily signposts people to book enquiry calls and was effective in leading people further along the recruitment journey. In 2021-2022, 43 people attended Virtual Drop ins with 18 people booking information calls as a result.

21.4 Internal Marketing

This remains a pivotal part of our marketing strategy. Despite the obstacles from the pandemic internal marketing remained a high priority for the service. Work undertaken included radio adverts, print advertising, sourcing digital / electronic marketing within the community (billboards, I van, Library screens), leaflet drops in community venues, mail drop (using Royal Mail) to targeted parts of RMBC, promotion of Word of Mouth reward scheme for foster carers and attendance at events like Rotherham Show and Pride Events. Additionally, a visual presence in the community is achieved through frequent stalls at supermarkets, shopping centres and popular coffee shops (when lock down allowed). Press releases and work with other corporate partners has been ongoing through the year as well.

Both internally and through work with Bright Sparks we are engaging our approved carers into our recruitment. We gain support from foster carers at our skills to foster training, through buddying during assessment and beyond, through gathering care stories some of which are supported with a talking head style video, others being anonymised and available on our website.

Creating a link between foster carers and the recruitment of new foster carers is pivotal in helping to enthuse and motivate PFC's but also to help support them once they are approved giving them a sense of belonging to a community. It also utilises are best resources – real foster carers who can share their experiences.

21.5 Assessments

Assessments were completed through a mix of virtual video sessions and home visits which were risk assessed. We worked hard to complete our assessments within 4 months though this can become slightly longer due to the themes that can arise during an assessment. We have overhauled our statutory checks to ensure we

are getting the best, most up to date and relevant information to protect our foster children.

21. The Fostering Service Recruitment Target Key Areas

Our overriding aim is to provide high quality foster placements to Rotherham children, reduce our reliance on independent fostering agencies and bring down our costs. Whilst marketing campaigns looked initially to swell the numbers within our pool of carers for all children more focus on advertising for carers of teenagers has taken place later in the year.

Key areas for recruitment include the need for foster carers to offer placements to teenagers, children and young people who have multiple placement moves and sibling groups. Our marketing materials reflect the need for these carers, for example using photos of older children with carers, creative content that myth busts and shows the positives of working with this age group.

We have had considerable success in engaging with and recruiting younger foster carers over this year.

22. Key Challenges, Developments, Targets and Actions for the Fostering Service

The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a challenging task, and the Rotherham Fostering Service recognises that importance of this. Over the year lots of work has been undertaken to review the fostering service with proposals to make some changes and improve the Rotherham Fostering offer.

In the next year our key aims will be as follows:

- Increase Mockingbird constellations with a plan to add and fourth and fifth.

- Develop in house 'step down' foster carers.
- Continue to increase the diversity of our foster carers to meet the diverse population of Rotherham LAC.
- Review of foster carer payments to maximise retention and increase placement provision across in-house fostering services whilst encouraging new foster carers into the service.
- Undertake an in-depth analysis of IFA transfers, looking at historical enquiries and what learning we can take from the ones which didn't progress.
- Continue to embed our Readiness to Foster model to recruit new foster carers whilst working alongside Brightsparks.
- Supervisory team to work with Brightsparks to make sure the fostering Rotherham branding is continued through the service. This will also include a well thought out strategy around retention of foster carers.
- Enhance our corporate marketing offer to regain some ownership. Developing community activities to recruit carers.
- Embed exit interviews for foster carers.
- Widening the fostering family activities to include a more diverse range of cultural celebrations.
- Continue to improve the quality of panel reports and specifically consultation with the children's social workers in seeking their views around the experience of the child in placement
- Improve children and young people's input in the carer review process.
- Improve recording of placement disruptions and reasons

23. Summary.

Rotherham Fostering Service acknowledge that in order to reach the sufficiency plans, we need to recruit and retain more foster carers, enabling Rotherham Looked After Children to be placed within the community which they know and where they belong.

The indicators that the service is well placed to achieve this include the successful recruitment and retention of social workers who are skilled and motivated resulting in stable supervisory and recruitment teams who are

passionate about working in fostering. Staff are well supported by a stable management team who are highly knowledgeable and who work together for the continued improvement of the service. Staff are flexible and willing and regularly go above and beyond to support their carers and the needs of the service. Placement stability is in line with national averages and the percentage of children stable for two or more years has been increasing year on year. This, combined with a relatively small number of placement disruptions (7 across the year), demonstrates the impact of the hard work and tenacity of our fostering service in supporting carers, as well as the way in which initiatives such as the Mockingbird constellations are improving carers support for one another.

Our work with Bright Sparks has been innovative and has led to increasing interest in fostering across the board. Fostering assessments are progressed in a timely way for families ready to foster, and for those still thinking about fostering and not ready “yet”, these are held by the service in the “keeping in touch” initiative. There is more to be done to try to recruit more carers, however, it should be acknowledged that this is a national issue and Rotherham are not unique in this struggle.

Whilst we have lost an unusually high number of carers this year, a review of these figures shows that the vast majority of this loss is due to carers commitment to children or a natural end to a fostering career rather than a move away from fostering due to dissatisfaction with the service or the fostering task. This is therefore in line with RMBC’s Right Child Right Care initiative and demonstrates that as a service we are contributing significantly to achieving best outcomes for children.

Foster Carers report that they feel well supported by their supervising social workers and we have multiple mechanisms for feedback and consultation with managers to ensure that foster carers feel listened to. Support groups for foster carers have continued and adapted around the changing restrictions of covid-19 and we hope that the next year will allow for more opportunities to bring carers back together in person to support one another.

Our training and development offer is fluid and adaptive as we ensure that we keep up with changing times and new challenges, as well as listening to what our carers tell us about what they need. Our training co-ordinator provides an excellent service which ensures that we have a comprehensive training package which is responsive to carers needs. We want to give our carers the best training we can, to enable them to provide the best care for our looked after children.

Covid-19 has continued to impact this year, but we have worked flexibly and creatively as a service to continue to meet the needs of our carers despite changing restrictions and general anxiety in our fostering community. As a result, we have found new hybrid ways of working which have improved both efficiency and our ability to support carers which we will be able to take forward into practice as we move beyond the pandemic.

Whilst there are improvements we need to make in the next financial year, it is clear that this year we have remained committed to recruiting and supporting carers to provide the best possible care to our Looked After Children, and we are really proud of the work we have achieved.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 2, 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Are you aged between
9 and 15 and looking for
a way into physical activity?

BE PART OF THE BIG SISTER PROJECT

Find out more at

www.placesleisure.org/big-sister-project

Help us
change the
lives of local
children

www.fosteringrotherham.com



THE BIG SISTER PROJECT

Places Leisure are partnering up with Women In Sport and Hey Girls to deliver the Big Sister project, a programme designed to help all girls achieve their goals, whatever they may be.



They are offering free three month onsite memberships to girls between 9 and 15 years of age, which include:

- Unlimited gym, which includes a 1:1 gym induction (11-15 year olds)
- Unlimited swimming
- Selection of group workout classes
- Friendly on-site team, to support you through your activity
- Free period products and advice
- Free access to Places Locker App and Virtual Studio which includes a Big Sister channel, chats and general advice



Find out more at
www.placesleisure.org/big-sister-project

Are you in foster care?

Are you a boy aged 11 to 15?

BE PART OF THE BIG BROTHER PROJECT

Find out more at

www.rotherham.gov.uk/children-families

Help us
change the
lives of local
children

www.fosteringrotherham.com



THE BIG BROTHER PROJECT

Places Leisure and Rotherham Council are offering 50 free six month gym memberships to young people in foster care in Rotherham.

All you need to do is ask your social worker for the link and code, have an adult who can support you on your first visit to register and be committed to attending the gym for the next six months!

The membership can be used across the four leisure centres in Rotherham including:

- Rotherham Leisure Complex
- Maltby Leisure Centre
- Aston-Cum-Aughton Leisure Centre
- Wath-upon-Deane Leisure Centre

REF: 87210 - MARCH 2023



Find out more at
www.placesleisure.org/big-sister-project

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VIP SWIMMING 2023

www.rotherham.gov.uk/children-families

VIP SWIMMING

Aged between 0 and 25?

In foster care or recently left care?

You could get free swimming sessions at any of our leisure centres in Rotherham!

All you need to do is register with the leisure centre for a membership and use the code **VIP SWIMMING**. If you are under 18, you must take a carer or trusted adult with you for the first visit and then you are free to swim!

For young people aged 0-11, one named adult can also access free swimming.

Once registered you can swim across the different leisure centres across Rotherham, including:

- Rotherham Leisure Complex
- Maltby Leisure Centre
- Aston-Cum-Aughton Leisure Centre
- Wath-upon-Deane Leisure Centre



Find out more at
www.XXXXXXXXXXX???