

**ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

**STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING REVIEW OF
'IN-HOUSE' FOSTER CARE.**

March 2017

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- Fostering Team Service Development Plan
- Workstream lead individual review reports
- Benchmarking IFA's and Other LA
- Foster Carer consultation group and questionnaire feedback
- Fostering Team Performance Scorecard
- Provision in the foster carer market

**Commissioning Project Group
March 2017
(Author: Angela Tracey)**

1 NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

National Context

- 1.1 The review of the In House Foster Care Service was completed against a backdrop of significant national and local strategic change. The Association of Directors of Children's Services longitudinal study (Phase 5 Executive Report) describes the clear reduction in resources between 2010 and 2016, the increasing and more complex needs of children, young people and their families and the increased expectations of the regulatory regime. All are set to continue and require a strategic and financially sustainable response if good outcomes are to be achieved for children in care. The sufficiency of in-house foster care placements is a key response to these challenges.
- 1.2 The National Minimum Standards (NMS) apply to the provision of fostering services (both in-house or independent). The NMS, together with Regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the 2011 Regulations), form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of fostering services. They aim to enable, rather than prevent, individual providers to develop their own particular ethos and approach based on evidence that this is the most appropriate way to meet the child's needs. Where it is helpful this review will refer to them.

Local Context

- 1.3 As set out in the Corporate Plan 2016-17, the Council has prioritised Rotherham becoming a child-centred borough, where young people are supported by their families/carers and community, and are protected from harm. The pledge is that every child gets the opportunity to make the best start in life. The Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2017-21 sets out an intention that for those children who remain in our care we will ensure that we have good quality placement in a family setting in or close to Rotherham.
- 1.4 There has been a consistent upward trend year on year in the numbers of children and young people looked after by the Local Authority. This is in common generally with the national and regional sufficiency trends and challenges. Rotherham, in common with local authorities across the Yorkshire and Humber region, has a shortage of all foster care placements, in particular in relation to placement sufficiency for:
 - Older children - adolescents aged 12+
 - Larger sibling groups
 - Children and young people described as having 'challenging behaviour'
- 1.5 However in Rotherham the number of children in care has increased from 424 as of January 2016 to 488 as of December 2016 (15% increase in a 12 month period) and is expected to increase until the investments in services made by the Council start to have an impact. Historically poorly performing services have left a legacy of more complex need as well as a legacy of rising numbers.
- 1.6 Growing the in-house foster care placement provision is central to closing gaps in the provision of sufficient local placement accommodation and increasing the number of looked after children in a family setting and is an important element of the financial sustainability of the Directorate.

- 1.7 In response to this the Council and Commissioners approved a significant investment in the In House Foster Care in August 2016, improving the offer to Foster Carers on the expectation that the number of foster care placements will increase.
- 1.8 There is further work to be done to ensure that the in-house Fostering Service is improved and capacity is increased to complement and indeed lead the role played by the external market. A key Strategic priority of the Children and Young People's Services Directorate is to shape and develop a 'one market' approach to the commissioning and provision of localised family based support, for which the fostering offer is no exception.
- 1.8 As at the end of December 2016 Rotherham Fostering Service had 163 in house foster carers registered caring for 199 children and young people, equating to 41% of the placement market. (Appendix 2).
- 1.9 This joint review of the in-house service is undertaken to inform its future position in the 'one market' approach, to maximise and increase its capacity and quality of offer to achieve an estimated 70% of the market share moving forward.
- 1.10 In order to achieve the Directorates vision of outstanding by 2018 it needs to ensure that the Fostering Service in Rotherham is improved and transformed to meet the current and future sufficiency challenge and is befitting of a child centred borough.

2 METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

- 2.1 The review started in August 2016 and was completed at the end of November 2016. The scope of the review was the In-House Fostering Service.
- 2.2 A Project Team was established to undertake the review and leads allocated to each workstream and reports with findings prepared for all.
- 2.3 The methodology included:
 - The completion of an 'as is' desktop exercise which looked at current budgets, staffing structure, training, engagement with partners, voice and experience, innovation.
 - Face to Face meetings were held with a cross section of key stakeholders which included but was not limited to the current staff team, a group of current carers, the LAC Council, Independent Fostering Agencies, the Shared Lives Team from Adult's social care and a range of people in Children's Social Care.
 - Views were also received by email from the Police, the community and voluntary sector and Adult Services Commissioning.
 - An analysis of performance information was completed which included complaints and compliments.
 - Clarification meetings with the In-House Fostering Management Team.

3 REVIEW FINDINGS

THE IN-HOUSE FOSTER CARE OFFER

- 3.1 This review will focus on the In-House 'Offer' to Foster Carers and Children. It is a requirement of Standard 1 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and Regulations 3 and 4 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Fostering Service Provider must compile a written statement in relation to the Fostering Service, a 'Statement of Purpose', which details the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and the services and facilities provided by the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service has a comprehensive Statement of Purpose 2016/17 however, the status of the document in terms of sign off is unclear.

The In House Fostering Team Structure/ workforce analysis

- 3.2 The In-house Fostering Service sits within the CYPS Directorate of the Council, and specifically in Children's Social Care. The Cabinet and Lead Executive Member is Councillor Watson and the Chief Officer responsible for the Service is Ian Thomas, Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services. The responsibility for Social Care is delegated to the Deputy Strategic Director, Mel Meggs, who has line management responsibility for the Head of Service, Ian Walker, who takes the Strategic lead for Children in Care, including Fostering and Adoption. The Head of Service has line management responsibility for the Service Manager for Fostering, Anne Marie Banks.
- 3.3 Rotherham Fostering Service comprises of 23.38 FTE across three separate teams:
- Recruitment Team - 6 FTE including 1 Marketing Officer working across Fostering and Adoption and Supported Lodging Coordinator
 - Fostering Supervision team - 11 FTE Supervising Social Workers
 - Specialist team - 6 FTE social worker posts and 1 training coordinator
- 3.4 Within this there are now three team managers, each managing one specific area. Two managers (supervision and specialist) are permanent, and one is stepping up on a temporary basis. All the managers are new to the post, two were externally appointed. Although new to their posts, they all bring with them a mix of skills from within and outside RMBC, which provides opportunities for fresh learning. All have some experience of managing people and/or leading in fostering development programmes.
- 3.5 The service is dealing with a legacy of insufficient managerial oversight. Whilst the Service has recently recruited externally to two vacancies which helps to provide fresh ways of thinking and working, the team is made up of workers who have worked within fostering for a number of years. This has provided stability but there are long established working practices which require improvement/update if the service is to deliver improved outcomes for children and lead the local market. This now places a high priority on managing performance, and supporting and coaching staff to drive up the quality of practice.
- 3.6 The Specialist Team have recently recruited a permanency worker to focus on Special Guardian Orders and fostering permanency and lead responsibility for private fostering arrangements. This is an area for development given the potential it has to reduce the number of children in care.

THE OFFER TO THE FOSTER CARERS

- 3.7 An improved financial package was implemented in October 2016 following significant effort from the Service Manager to consult with Foster Carers and benchmark against the sector. Foster Carers are now generally happy with the financial package and are paid promptly notwithstanding some immediate issues following 'go-live' of the Liquid Logic system.
- 3.8 Providing foster carers with the best support possible directly helps them provide quality care to children, and helps them have a better future. This support extends beyond the financial package they receive to the support for the child in their care, their training and development, crisis help and professionalisation of the foster carer role.

Supervisory Visits

- 3.9 Supervision and support to Foster Carers is provided by qualified and experienced supervising social workers (SSW). Each SSW holds a manageable caseload of 15/16 cases. Workers are expected to attend reviews, Personal Education Plan and other meetings pertaining to the children in care in any placement they support and any issues relevant to foster carers.
- 3.10 The Fostering Service performance is monitored in fortnightly performance meetings and shows that supervisory visits are currently sustained around 80%. Workers visit foster carers 6 weekly (local measure) and the aim and purpose of these meetings are to support, stretch and develop foster carers. Some workers do this more fully than others. Workers upload their visits onto the electronic recording system and write up the visit on the SSW visit report. However, whilst the visits are recorded, the timeliness of uploading reports onto the system across the team is questionable. Some workers do this in a more timely way than others.
- 3.11 Evidence suggests that the SSW have strong relationships with their respective foster carers, some of which are longstanding. Whilst this is a strength there is evidence that SSW do not consistently bring the necessary level of challenge to Foster Carers. This is not only from a practice perspective but our 'ask' of foster carers - placement availability, training attendance, being a 'pushy' parent and the child's educational potential. Recent work to improve the quality of supervision of the SSWs by the Team Manager in this area has brought the necessary management oversight to SSW practice at a case level, but this is not yet embedded.
- 3.12 Relationships in respect of those professionals around the child (Foster Carer, SSW, the child's locality social worker, LAC team etc) are essential to achieving placement stability and permanence and ensuring children are able to enjoy continuity of relationships. Having the social worker and SSW within the same authority is a key advantage over the IFA provision and there is evidence that effective joined up planning and delivery is not being maximised. Eg within the Team Around the Placement meetings. Work is required to improve internal relationships across the various Social Care disciplines for the benefit of the child.
- 3.13 Until January 2017 placement disruption meetings were chaired by a social worker and were not routinely taken back to panel, nor an analysis made of the outcomes on any meaningful level. From January 2017, all disruptions meetings have been chaired by a Team Manager and will be presented back to fostering panel. It is too early to assess impact yet, but this is an area of weakness which where focus needs to be maintained.
- 3.14 Locality Social Workers view was that there is a lack of visibility for them when placements were in danger of breaking down and a lack of clarity about what resources were available from the Fostering Service with SSWs to support

placements potentially breaking down. Both Locality and IROs felt that the service were too quick to offer respite to carers rather than address the underlying issues when breaking down and that when respite is offered it is done without consultation with the Locality Social Worker.

Duty System

- 3.15 SSW also resource a duty system where they cover duty calls predominantly for placement requests. The high demand for placements means that when on duty workers day are fully taken up with duty matters and often other team members are pulled in to helping secure placements as often placement requests are required on that date without pre-planning. As the number of Children in Care has risen there is a capacity issue for the service and a strategic organisational issue. The placement matching process is wider than the In-House provision. The Duty SSW has particular knowledge for In-House provision but not necessarily across other providers and the market. Alternative solutions to support the placement matching process should be considered.
- 3.16 Duty social work cover is from 9.30am until 5.30pm. An out of hours team provide cover from 5.30pm until 12.30am with a social worker being on call from 11.00pm until 8.00am. There is anecdotal evidence of poor transference of information from out of hours cover to the duty social worker.

Training and Development & Annual Reviews of Foster Carers

- 3.17 As part of the foster carer Annual Review process, carers personal development plans are updated, and this is used to plan training needs for the year. Currently, this is not utilised as rigorously as it should be. This needs to be developed further to ensure that the foster carers are a skilled up work force. Historically the level of training provided has been sufficient to at least meet the National Minimum Standard. Funds have been secured during 2016 to improve the training offer to foster carers and a training programme is currently being developed. In addition to this, Annual Reviews of Foster Carers are presented to Foster Panel on the national minimum requirement.

SUPPORT FOR THE CHILD

- 3.18 The Rotherham Therapeutic Team (RTT) provide advice to carers and professionals working with the foster child to support the emotional wellbeing of young people in their care. Contact and access to support is via the carer's supervising social worker. Additional provision is currently being developed to meet the need of children in foster care thus contributing to placement stability.
- 3.19 The adequacy and sufficiency of respite care was raised as an issue. Some carers are registered for respite care which would include taking a child whilst the regular carer was on holiday. Holiday Support is sometimes available as respite as occasionally a looked after child cannot or does not wish to go on holiday with a foster carer. Respite Support is also available hired in to undertake an activity with a Looked After Child for a few hours to give carers a break. There is no clear information about the quality of this support but it is largely undertaken on a spot purchase basis with agencies, representing poor procurement practice and poor value for money.

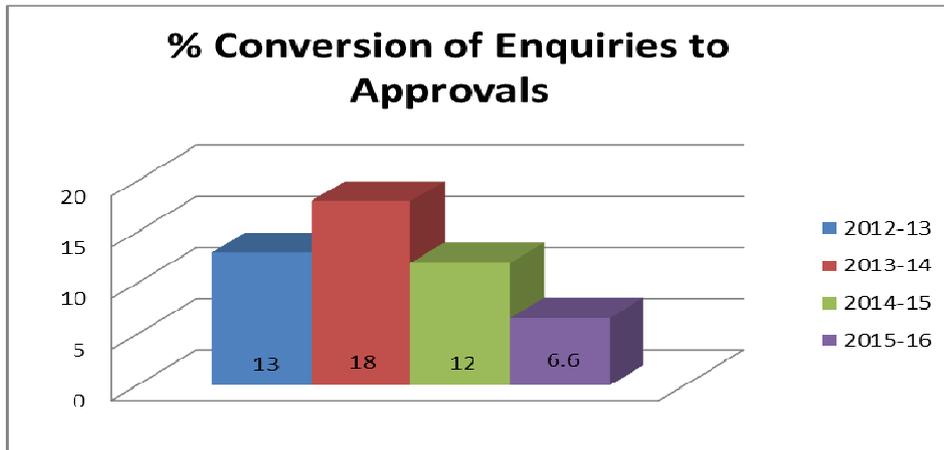
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FOSTER CARERS

- 3.20 Part of the investment in the In House Foster Care in August 2016 included making sure recruitment and retention programmes are fit for purpose in order to meet targets on market share, cost reduction and improved outcomes for children.

- 3.21 The Council needs to increase the numbers of people who can foster children in the care system, and in particular needs to increase the number of foster carers who can look after teenagers and those with complex needs. The target is a net increase the Council's filled foster placements of at least 15 places each year to 2021.
- 3.22 In order to meet this challenge the Council needs to make sure anyone considering fostering in Rotherham contacts the local authority ahead of other fostering agencies. Not only will this benefit the local authority in terms of value for money and cost reduction, but it will reduce the need to place children out of the local authority area.
- 3.23 Whilst the service holds regular recruitment days, uses local radio, and the initial 'Be a Local Hero' campaign in 2016 had some impact on recruitment, the service is currently underdeveloped in its approach to recruitment of foster carers. There is no clear promotion of the new 'offer' to prospective foster carers using a variety of channels in order to get the message out.
- 3.24 By way of example, the 'Statement of Purpose' is a requirement on all foster care providers. When compared with a number of independent fostering providers Rotherham's document meets what is required but misses a real opportunity that others have taken to set out their 'offer' in a way that it can be readily digested by the primary audience, i.e. prospective foster carers. This clearly would help in terms of recruitment but also of understanding of other stakeholders including Ofsted and partners. There is scope for improvement of marketing to accelerate the rate of recruitment.
- 3.25 A number of foster carers sit on the Marketing Group to inform and support recruitment of new carers and work is in early stages to establish a team of recruiting foster carers to help with recruitment events and new initiatives.
- 3.26 The investment by the Council in the service included the appointment of a Marketing Officer for the service. The Corporate Communications Lead for CYPS is working to develop this with the Service Manager. A Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been drafted and the job role for the Marketing Officer. The Fostering Service needs to be more responsive in working together with Corporate Communications at pace to deliver and develop a clear project implementation plan.
- 3.27 Alongside this, the Corporate Communications and Marketing Team are supporting the Fostering Service to retain existing foster carers. This will include promoting networking sessions, foster parties and other events planned by the fostering service.

APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE

- 3.28 Follow up by the Service to initial enquiries from prospective carers is timely. The Recruitment Team respond to the enquirer within 72 hours.
- 3.29 The time frame from initial enquiry to becoming an approved foster carer is approximately 8 months. Only a small percentage of enquiries result in approved foster carers, with the national average being 11%. Rotherham had historically achieved an above national average conversion but Diagram 1 shows a dip in 2015/16. This corresponds with a reduction in applications in that year. It is thought that this reduction was an impact from the Jay and Casey Reports with a number of potential carers already in the application process leaving. Conversion rates to date in 2016/17 stand at 12%. Much needed information which provides visibility across the conversion process as prospective carers pass through from enquiry to assessment approval is not available.



- 3.30 The Foster Care team are making good progress against the target of 15 in 2016/17, having exceeded this at the time of writing. However some of the recruitment can be attributed to the placement review of all Foster Carers undertaken by the Service Manager which aimed to look at existing placements, managing them from latent placements into active foster caring. This was absolutely the right course of action but assurance is required that the service can sustain the increased numbers and in the target area of teenagers into 2017/18 and beyond.
- 3.31 There is capacity issue associated with reaching the target. Recruiting a net 15 foster carers per annum would mean that the service would need to receive in excess of 140 enquiries each year increasing the number of formal assessments. Around 11% of enquiries (in line with national average) would result in an applicant being successful in their formal assessment and approved as a foster carer.
- 3.32 The recruitment process has changed relatively recently and potential carers take part in training and speaking to existing foster carers prior to the formal assessment being undertaken. This was seen as very positive by carers as it gives potential carers the opportunity to better understand the role and whether it would suit them prior to time and resources being spent on the formal assessment. The service believes it could do more earlier to filter out those assessments that may be unlikely to progress.
- 3.33 Currently the Assessment Team staff are not able to clear the number of assessments required in an appropriate timescale. At the time of writing there are 6 applications awaiting formal assessment. Beyond the impact it may have on achieving the target, the regional market is competitive and Rotherham runs the risk of losing potential foster carers to neighbouring boroughs or Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 3.34 Foster Carers were consulted with regard to the process for assessment and approval. Foster Carers understood the assessment process was necessarily personal, intrusive and intense. The assessment process was noted to be easier if there is a good relationship with the recruitment social worker; the age and gender of the social worker can also make a difference.
- 3.35 Existing foster carers noted that a longer transition period at the time they become approved in terms of changing social workers (from recruitment SW to SSW) would be beneficial to facilitate relationship building and handover. This was an issue also raised by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Foster carers suggested that it may be beneficial for newly approved carers to initially provide only respite care as a way of easing into caring rather than the sudden shock of having a child full time.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- 3.36 The Senior Leadership ambition is clearly reflected in the Directorate's Improvement Plan. The vision is ambitious in its commitment to be received as outstanding by 2018. However, the strength of vision and ambition has been diluted historically as it cascades to the specifics of the Fostering Service. The service does not appear to mirror the same level of expectation and ambition with no finalised Vision, Business Plan or Service Development Plan. This was further compounded by an inconsistency of leadership at Head of Service level which more recently has been stabilised and has resulted in an evidenced focus on the leadership and improvement of the service.
- 3.37 The Service Manager brings a passion to the service and is progressing the historical lack of Strategic Plans, but there remains much work to do. The Service is extremely aware of the challenges and the areas for improvement. A considerable amount of work has been completed recently in relation to the sufficiency of the Service provision. This will support the leadership team to develop its strategic and operational offer and its position in the wider market. A number of Service Development Days have been held recently which will again strengthen leadership visibility and direction.
- 3.38 The visibility and profile of the Service is not a noticeable feature of the wider LAC Service. In addition, there is also a Service Development Plan, which is attached, however, again the status is unclear and does not appear to reflect the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.
- 3.39 The developing strategic documents (business plan etc) lack a positioning of the national and regional context, with limited reference to national policy and national minimum standards. There appears to be a gap in relation to outcome evidencing of the quality of life experienced by the young person.
- 3.40 The Service has a wealth of performance data which feeds into the Looked After Children and Care Leavers weekly Performance Report. However, it is unclear how such data is used and maximised by the service to improve performance and outcomes and how different sources of data and service activity are brought into one place to support service planning, improvement and development.
- 3.41 There appears to be a lack of qualitative data and outcomes reporting and little analysis with a focus on statistics. The engagement with Commissioning strategically in the sharing of the data to shape a 'one market' approach is again unclear.
- 3.42 There are a series of highlight reports which are presented to the Deputy Director and Heads of Service and shared with all teams across Children's Services as part of the 'check and challenge', namely fostering supervisory and a recruitment tracker. Again this activity information appears fragmented.

PROCESSES AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- 3.43 The fostering placement process starts with a referral form received by the Placements Team and is sent on to duty social worker. The duty social worker reviews the vacancy list and contacts any potential carers to see if they are interested in fostering the child. If they are the duty social worker will speak to the child's social worker for full matching and the child's social worker and foster carer's social worker progress the placement. The foster carer's social worker is responsible for arranging and undertaking the 72 hour meeting following placement.

- 3.44 The high demand for placements means that when on duty the worker's day is fully taken up with duty matters and often other team members are pulled in to helping secure placements as often placement requests are required on that date without pre-planning. The co-location of the Fostering Team with the Placements Team has brought much closer working relationships and helped with twin-track searches, as has attendance at Fostering Service team meetings by members of the Placements Team.
- 3.45 The placement search process and duty processes are functioning but the approach is not joined up approach across the In-House and external provision, so the opportunity to build up a knowledge base of placement choice/ matching across the provision is not being optimised.
- 3.46 The Service Manager is reliant on manual spreadsheet lists to keep a record of in House foster placements at the present time. Data issues and changes in process following the implementation of the Liquid Logic Social Care System in October 2016 are preventing a real time view of provision.
- 3.47 There is a lack of appropriate business support in Fostering. There are two dedicated fostering admin workers with a business support manager. This is not just a matter of capacity but a matter of level and skill. This creates a barrier to smooth running of processes, and effective day to day grip of the service for the Service Manager.
- 3.48 Specific technical tasks such as the administration and effective governance around the fortnightly foster care panel are being undertaken by a resource that is spread thinly across the service with no consistent person involved. This is having an impact on the effectiveness of the panel. Similar scenarios exist around business support of up to date to oversight of foster carer DBS checks and medicals and payments to Foster Carers.
- 3.49 There are significant financial targets associated with the work and progress in this Service for the Directorate and a lack of grip or visibility of performance in this area will have serious implications for the budget. Priorities around Liquid Logic developments, business support and project resource is not aligned proportionately to the level of financial risk associated with the financial investment.
- 3.50 The Fostering Service is competing in a market with other IFA's and having robust business arrangements in place are essential to performance. This should be reviewed and resolved as part of the Business Support Review.
- 3.51 Process issues still exist from recent changes to commissioning placements. The Placements Team do not have access to the Fostering Service Duty mailbox and as some referrals still going there and it not being constantly monitored this can lead to delays. This is a straightforward issue and should be resolved.
- 3.52 It would be helpful if an A4 carer profile was available for in-house carers as it is for IFA carers so locality staff could compare like with like.

CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

- 3.53 There are strong relationships between the SSW, the Service Manager and Foster Carers. Foster Carers are responsive when asked to be involved in any initiative. However much more needs to be done to find an effective way to consult and engage foster carers. Four locality Support groups are poorly attended, appear to be ad hoc and there is no information available on regularity. A new foster carer group,

which new carers can attend for 12 months, is more popular but it was not felt that this helped new carers to integrate with existing groups.

- 3.54 Foster carers feel much more needs to be done to facilitate natural developments such as a buddy system and perhaps information being shared on who else fostered in each area. Informal networks are in place between foster carers but these are where friendships have naturally developed.
- 3.55 Foster carers consulted during this review felt that locality social workers did not appreciate or value their views, despite their experience and knowledge of the children they care for. An example was given where foster carers are asked to provide information to social workers for Team Around the Placement meetings but not allowed to attend. Similarly carers are not always made aware of strategy meetings etc where they felt they could attend and offer insights and information on the behaviour and feelings of the children they care for.
- 3.56 Foster carers felt that they were consulted with but that they did not receive feedback on what changes had or had not occurred as a result of their consultation. Carers specifically requested feedback from this consultation.

VOICE AND INFLUENCE OF THE CHILD

- 3.57 Foster carers felt that the voice of the child could sometimes be lost to processes and best practice, with the individual needs of the child and what they wanted being overlooked. The Directorate's intentions and approach to ensuring voice and influence of the child prevails have been set out in the LAC Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2021 but this is yet to be embedded in practice. This is an area of weakness.
- 3.58 Work has been undertaken to produce a new referral form which puts the views of the child at the forefront of the process. These views are to be borne in mind when social workers are undertaking matching for placements but there is currently no feedback loop to ensure that the placement continues to be in line with the views of the child on an ongoing basis.
- 3.59 Looked After Children fed back that when a SSW visits their carers they are usually not informed of the purpose of the visit, often not spoken to by the SSW, not introduced and always asked to leave the room. They are aware they are being spoken about and left to wonder what is being said. One YP said he is usually left to sit on the stairs until the SSW leaves.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND KEY RELATIONSHIPS

- 3.60 The existing Service Plan is disappointing in terms of partnership working. Whilst there is mention of the need for development work with carers and young people and certain other functions within Children's Social Care there is no mention of work with any other partners either internally or externally. This gives the impression that the culture within the service is, or certainly has been historically, an introspective and silo based one rather than one which is outward looking.
- 3.61 There are clearly issues with how the Fostering Service staff are perceived by the rest of the Children's Social Care workforce. The staff team's perception was that they are seen as separate to social care and viewed as of lesser importance than locality when they often see the young person (YP) more often than the Social Worker (SW). Fostering social work is not part of the training a social worker receives and the staff team fed back that whilst student social workers did use to spend some time with the service this practice appears to have stopped

- 3.62 Concerns were expressed by IROs, MASH/Out Of Hours and Locality Team Managers that on occasion the relationship between Supervising Social Worker's (SSWs) and the carers they supervise had become skewed to the Foster Carers. It has become more child focussed since the new Service Manager was appointed but is still too focussed on the needs of the carer rather than the child with not enough challenge provided to carers, particularly at point of placement. The relationship is described as "...not a business like one and often too friendly".
- 3.63 Attendance at meetings was seen as an issue from all involved. Locality Team Managers fed back that SSWs are poor attenders at Looked After Child (LAC) reviews and other meetings. By contrast Fostering staff felt they were given little notice to attend review meetings and when they attended felt their views were not valued.
- 3.64 Carers did not feel valued by locality social workers and wanted to be regarded as part of the workforce, indicating that they would routinely like to be invited to professional meetings e.g TAP meetings, as they often know the child best.
- 3.65 Matching, and long term matching was another issue raised by all parties. IROs expressed the view that carers were being pushed to accept young people beyond their skill level and that assessments of carer capacity appeared to be poorer recently than in the past. There was a sense that all those capable of having teenage placements had already been pushed to accept them and that now the service were pushing those that weren't.
- 3.66 The Service also fed back that matching forms within the Service and Locality are different but that both should be completed jointly.
- 3.67 Representatives of the Virtual School felt that whilst much of the practice within the team was good there still remained a sense that staff still did not fully understand the importance of education and did not give it a high enough priority.
- 3.68 It was felt that not all SSWs appear to be encouraging carers to attend educational training (e.g. mandatory PEP training) and that stability of school placements is not always given a high enough priority particularly when a placement becomes long-term or an adoptive placement.
- 3.69 At times it was felt that some Supervising Social Workers lose sight of the professional relationship which should exist with carers and support their carer rather than remaining impartial or challenging the carer when there is an educational issue.
- 3.70 There is clearly a need for the Fostering Service and the Virtual School to develop a greater understanding of each other's work and perspectives and to work more closely in partnership to put the needs of the YP at the centre of what they do together.
- 3.71 Health felt that the Local Authority need to consider the outcomes from a gold standard Foster Care Service alongside health colleagues rather than doing this individually. There is a need to develop a Fostering Service that understands the importance of health, dental and optician appointments, that ensures that Foster Carers attend appointments and follow up health needs in a timely manner. Children in care should have a robust health plan in place and Foster Carers need to be supported by their SSW in demanding appropriate and effective delivery of healthcare when health needs have been identified. Health would like to see confident Foster Carers able to articulate the child's health needs as an outcome measure.

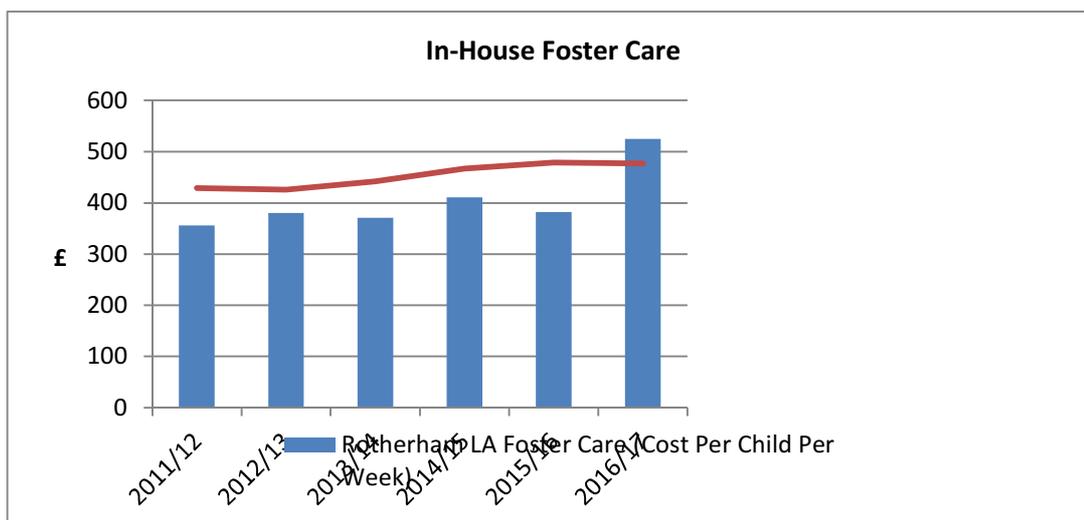
- 3.72 Health believes there is a need to improve the status of Foster Carers nationally. There is a need to view them as a professional support worker working on our (public) behalf to care for children and young people. We need to demonstrate our gratitude to them for doing such an important job. The impact of getting 'health outcomes' achieved is in breaking the cycle of vulnerability and long term health consequences. We know that children in care are more likely to become parents at an earlier age, their children are more likely to be removed and they often have long term self-harm and/or mental health challenges.
- 3.73 IFAs do not currently work closely with the in-house service as they are in competition with them but there is still scope for more closer working. Joint recruitment might be difficult as there is huge potential for issues around trust and concerns around the poaching of carers. Whilst difficult it would not necessarily be impossible as long as very clear parameters were in place and work could be done jointly on wider issues such as what attracts carers.

FINANCE

- 3.74 The current total foster care budget for 2016/17 is £10.9m of which £3.1m is made up of fostering allowances and £5.1m independent fostering placements. A full breakdown of the 2016/17 current budget and current forecasts compared to 2015-16 is shown at Appendix 1.
- 3.75 The in-house foster carer's package has been reviewed and improved with new foster carer payments being increased from October 2016. The current projections for 2016-17 expenditure include estimates for this increase.
- 3.76 The Fostering Service staffing budget is currently projected to overspend by £105k in 2016/17, this is mainly due to the need to recruit 3 agency staff to cover for staff sickness.
- 3.77 Current budgeted staffing comprises 23.38 FTE comprising:

Job Title	Grade	FTE	Budget (£)
Co-ordinator	G	0.8	26,597
Marketing Assistant	G	0.7	23,227
Social Worker	I	3	130,600
Social Worker	J	15.88	774,935
Team Manager	L	3	176,636
TOTAL		23.38	1,131,995

- 3.78 In previous benchmarking reports Rotherham has been consistently below the average weekly cost per child for in-house foster care. This corresponded to a low market share of In House Foster Care of 41%. From 2016-17 this below average weekly cost per child changes following an improved payment scheme introduced in October 2016. The current gross unit cost for in-house provision (including overheads) is £525 per child per week.



Invest to Save Proposals

- 3.79 The implementation of an improved allowances offer and subsequent expected rise in placements with in-house foster carers will lead to long term savings on the overall Looked after Children budget. Assuming overall LAC numbers remain broadly static, there would be a corresponding fall of fifteen in the number of LAC being placed in more expensive settings; a saving of £1.3m per annum.
- 3.80 Additional resource has been invested in a wraparound service for current and new in-house foster carers. This is designed to increase retention of in-house foster carers.

Support Worker	£35,000
Carer Recruitment Resource	£35,000
Out of Hours Support – Foster Care duty team	£54,750
Training and fostering network membership	£30,000
TOTAL WRAP AROUND COST PER YEAR	£155,250

- 3.81 Recruitment of in-house foster carers is a key element of the Sufficiency Strategy and the Directorate financial sustainability plans. The main investment has been in an improvement of the financial offer in terms of skills payments for local authority foster carers. Whilst an improved offer has increased costs increasing the numbers of in-house foster carers, this will help to reduce the reliance on more expensive independent fostering placements.
- 3.82 The placement costs used in 2017-18 budget setting, per child, per week are shown in table below:

Setting	£
In-House Fostering *includes full year effect of new scheme, placement costs only. Including overheads (Budget set on £343 which excludes overheads)	525
Independent Fostering Placements *based on current placements in December monitoring but a full year effect	877
Difference IFA vs In House per week	+352

PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

- 3.83 The number of complaints with regard to the In-House Fostering is low (2 out of 473 in 2015/16 and 4 during 2016/17 to date. Where complaints have been made and upheld they have been about the quality of service. No information was available on lessons learned or any changes made to procedures or working practices following the upheld complaints. This shows that a learning culture is yet to be developed within the service.
- 3.84 During the year 2015-16 around 72 (20%) of the CYPS Directorate compliments related to the Fostering Team and two (3%) to Foster Carers.
- 3.85 A scorecard is currently in development to facilitate a one market approach showing the same performance information for in house and IFAs.
- 3.86 The review found that information is not captured against outcomes of placements by either the in house fostering or commissioning teams for external or internal placements with the expectation being that these are monitored by the child/young person's social worker, which is outside of the remit of this report.
- 3.87 Recent improvements have been made to the quality monitoring framework. Questionnaires are used by the Commissioning Team to gather the views of in House and IFA foster carers on their foster placements. However, the questionnaires do not cover all the areas needed to inform the new requirements of the new service specification, for example how safe a child feels. The questionnaires formed part of the contract in respect of the IFAs, following wide consultation, this is a barrier to a one market approach and will require consultation with all the IFAs on the framework.

4 BENCHMARKING/ NEW MODELS

Benchmarking

- 4.1 Benchmarking data described below applies to the in-house and independent providers. Availability of a split information to compare and contrast across the sector has been impacted by the implementation of the new electronic case recording system.
- 4.2 Placement stability continues to be a factor in offering an effective Fostering Service and crucial to ensuring that the Council delivers good outcomes to each looked after child. Stability is measured by 2 national indicators, NI062 relating to children who experience 3 placement moves within 12 months and NI063 which relates to children looked after for 2.5 years who have been in the same placement for 2 years.
- 4.3 There has been steady improvement over the last 3 years in the placement stability NI063 placement stability figure which was 72.7% at March 2015. There has been a small decline in year at December 2016 to 68.9%. However the longer term trend is upwards and remains higher than statistical neighbours (67%).
- 4.4 Foster placement disruptions happen when the placement has had an unplanned ending outside of the child's care planning arrangements. In 2015/16 within RMBC in-house fostering service there were 15 foster placement disruptions involving 17 children in care. This compares with 40 placement disruptions that took place, during the same timeframe from within independent fostering agencies. It could be argued that the higher number of breakdown in IFA placements is attributable to the tendency for IFAs to have some of the more
- 4.5 The national indicator NI062 shows steady increase to 13% in 2015/16 in placement breakdowns. This trend has continued into 2016 and is higher than statistical neighbours and higher than Rotherham's target of 10%. This show that placement stability is still an issue for the In House service.

Comparison with Others

- 4.6 Independent Foster Care agencies were asked to share information on the carers they had in Rotherham and the surrounding areas for comparison, with 15 agencies responding. The number of carers in Rotherham and the rest of the South Yorkshire are shown in Appendix 3 below.
- 4.7 The age categories for IFA foster carers are much wider than those of Rotherham's in house carers. Within South Yorkshire 134 IFA carers are registered to take children aged 0-18 years and 34 aged 5-18 years. Only 23 are registered for narrower categories; information for 29 carers was provided without the age categories they work with. This demonstrates a challenge across sector regionally with regard to sufficiency of placements for adolescents.

New Models

- 4.8 The Service is actively looking at new models to meet its sufficiency challenge whilst seeking the best outcomes for Rotherham children in its care. One such model being considered is the Mockingbird Family Model, an alternative method of delivering foster care with the potential to improve placement stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and to improve support for, and retention of, foster carers.

- 4.9 The Mockingbird model is based on the idea of the extended family as a network of support. It uses the concept of a 'constellation' which is where six to 10 'satellite' families of foster and kinship carers live in close proximity to a dedicated 'hub' home of specially recruited and trained carers who offer peer support, regular joint planning and social activities to the satellite fostering families.
- 4.10 That the Service is looking to new models is to be welcomed but assurance that the Service has the capacity and grip in terms planning and delivering the new model is required. i.e. given the identified issues relating to project and business support.

5 SUMMARY

- 5.1 The findings demonstrate the Service is going some way toward improving but that there is a lack of capacity and capability within the in-house fostering service to deliver against the increased demand for placements and the improved offer to Foster Carers.
- 5.2 The findings highlight key issues around organisation, support and a culture of performance and learning, all of which are directly impeding the Service's ability to operate effectively in the market and improve the quality of practice.
- 5.3 There is a lack of a joined up approach across the In-House and external market. This means there is a lack of clarity in relation to the respective functions and focus which subsequently fails to maximise quality of provision/ optimum matching of placements.
- 5.4 Detailed recommendations follow which are aimed at ensuring that the Fostering Service can deliver to the intentions set out in the LAC Sufficiency strategy investments and the CYPS Medium Term Financial Sustainability Plan.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 This report should be considered by the Foster Care Panel and Corporate Parenting Panel. Recommendations, set out by each theme in the review, are as follows:

THE IN-HOUSE FOSTER CARE OFFER

- 6.2 That consideration be given to employing a dedicated Interviewing Officer who can work across IFA and In-House fostering and Commissioning to prove a more responsive delivery of placements for Rotherham children. This would be a technical role (not social work qualified) and responsibility would include ensuring all necessary matching processes were followed and paperwork completed appropriately.
- 6.3 Team around the placement meeting to be chaired by Team Managers (either within fostering or locality) but fostering service to take lead responsibility to ensure that this happens.
- 6.4 The provision of respite care is considered and improved as part of Foster Carer placement sufficiency.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FOSTER CARERS

- 6.5 . An implementation plan should be developed which includes the urgent appointment of the marketing officer, the development of a targeted marketing strategy for the recruitment of new foster carers. The Service should receive appropriate project support resource to help drive implementation plans in a structured way.
- 6.6 This should include a refresh/redesign of the Internet site to create a rich Rotherham presence of information for existing and prospective foster carers.

- 6.7 Ensure that capacity is in place to clear the backlog of unallocated assessments. On an ongoing basis ensure the capacity is in place to flex to process the expected number of assessments. E.g. establishment of Virtual Assessment Team.
- 6.8 Create performance reporting to track progress of each enquiry to better identify conversion rates and understanding of reasons for prospective carers dropping out of the process. Proactive follow up where further support might increase the numbers going through to full approval.

PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS

- 6.9 Robust Business Support arrangements should be put in place. The level and skill of Business Support Resource should be reviewed as part of the current Business Support Review.
- 6.10 Issues with regard to the input of data to Liquid Logic by the social workers/ business support and its consequent impact on the quality of management and performance information should be resolved.
- 6.11 That the same approval be sought for an in-house placement as for an IFA search.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- 6.12 Provide an additional resource to the Service to ensure the refresh, completion and publication of all Strategic Documents by June 2017. Apply the National Minimum Standards to the Strategic refresh to ensure consistency and compliance.
- 6.13 That a Service and Market Improvement implementation Plan be developed having regard to projects related to the investment made by the Council. Ensure within this that plans exist for all the investments made in the Service, that issues and risks are identified, effectively managed and escalated as appropriate. This should be supported with project resource.
- 6.14 A Foster Care Service Improvement Group including key officers across the Service, Corporate Communications and Finance should be established to accelerate the pace and grip. Progress and assurance should be reported monthly to DLT.
- 6.15 Develop a Performance Reporting co-ordinated scorecard which is outcome based and measurable to ensure visibility of service performance and that this is in one place.
- 6.16 Produce an up to date Service Structure for Fostering.
- 6.17 Provide leadership learning and development and mentoring support to the Fostering Service.
- 6.18 That the operation of Foster Care Panel be the subject of a separate review.

CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

- 6.19 Better use should be made of consultation with fostering families and children in our care. This will enable the service to be more accountable, and will better support the development of the service, by providing a listening ear to the voice of the child and fostering community.

VOICE AND INFLUENCE

- 6.20 That SSWs should routinely begin each visit, as appropriate, by explaining to both the carer and young person what the purpose of the visit is, This will assist in maintaining a more balanced relationship with carers as well as keeping the young person better informed as to what is happening to them.

PARTNERSHIPS AND KEY RELATIONSHIPS

- 6.21 The refreshed service plan should seek to build on skills and best practice developed elsewhere and to make best use of the contribution other partners could potentially make to improve the overall quality of the service.
- 6.22 Sessions should be arranged with staff from the Fostering Service to attend other staff team meetings or have a specific themed event to increase understanding of the role they undertake. The practice of placing student social workers with the team should be revisited.
- 6.23 That staff from the Shared Lives Team are invited to regularly attend Fostering Service Team meetings, say monthly, to increase understanding between the teams to promote closer working relationships and to develop an information sharing protocol between the two teams.
- 6.24 The Fostering Service Manager and Virtual Head to work together with their staff teams to develop closer understanding and joint working protocols.
- 6.25 The Fostering Service Manager to explore how the Service can work more closely with Health colleagues and involve them in, and keep them informed about, the work of the team.
- 6.26 Continue to explore potential opportunities to work more closely in partnership with IFAs through the regular framework partner meetings.

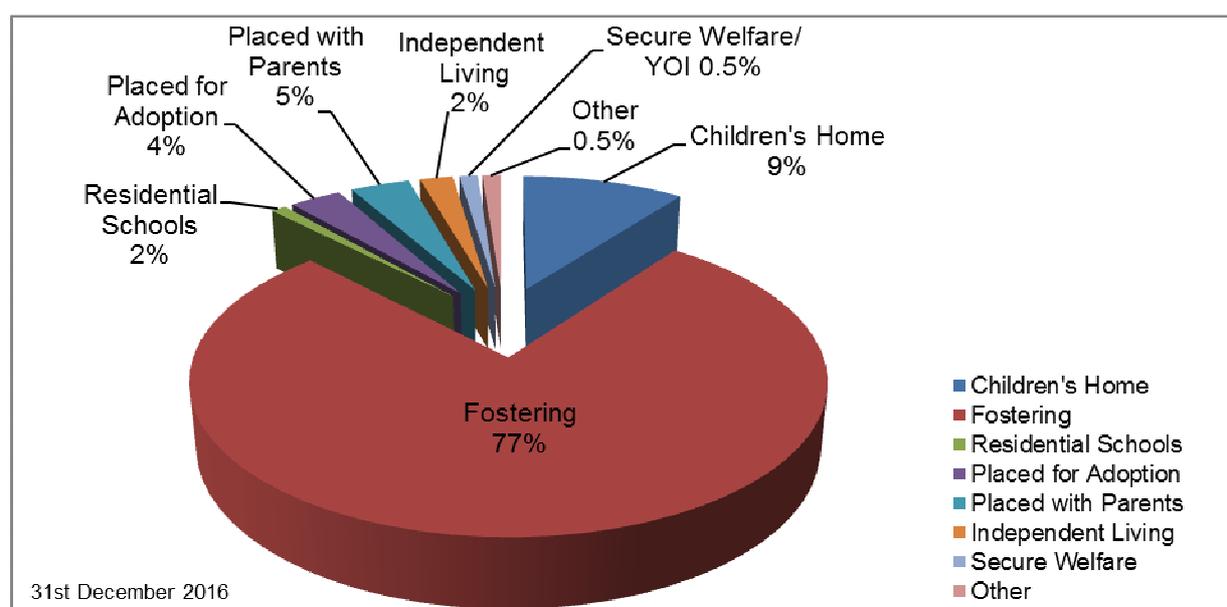
QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 6.27 That the quality assurance framework is further developed to ensure that a joined up approach is in place with the external market to maximise quality of provision.
- 6.28 That there is an increasing focus on outcomes for the children within the QA framework.

Appendix 1 – Benchmarking provision

Numbers of Looked After Children by Placement Type as at Period End

Placement Type	31 st March 2014	31 st March 2015	31 st March 2016	31 st Dec 2016
Children's Home in-house provision	19/ 5%	16/ 4%	3/ 1%	0
Children's Home provision by others	22/ 6%	30/ 7%	41/ 10%	45/ 9%
Fostering in-house provision	155/ 39%	167/ 41%	178/ 41%	179/ 36%
Fostering with 'connected people' (relatives or friends)	10/ 3%	16/ 4%	20/ 5%	20/ 5%
Fostering provision by others (IFAs & other LAs)	102/ 26%	110/ 27%	136/ 32%	176/ 36%
Residential Schools	3/ 1%	3/ 1%	4/ 1%	9/ 2%
Placed for Adoption (with prospective adoptive parents)	37/ 9%	24/ 6%	14/ 3%	21/ 4%
Placed with Parents (and subject to a FCO or other Order of the court)	18/ 5%	14/ 3%	16/ 4%	23/ 5%
Independent Living	10/ 3%	11/ 3%	9/2%	11/ 2%
Secure Accommodation (Welfare grounds)	4/ 1%	2/ 0%	5/ 1%	1/ 0%
Young Offender Institute or Prison	3/ 1%	1/ 0%	0%	1/ 0%
Other	11/ 3%	13/ 3%	5/ 1%	2/ 0.5%
Total	394	407	431	488



The breakdown of placements by type indicate that the vast majority of LAC are placed in foster care (77%) which is consistent with the department's commitment to place children in family based arrangements. Of the 77%, 41% are in-house placement (including connected people, relatives or friends) and 36% with Independent Fostering Agencies.

Appendix 2 - 2016/17 Current budget and current forecasts compared to 2015-16

Cost Centre	Description	Actual 2015-16	Budget 2015-16	Variance 2015-16	Actual 2016-17 (to 01/02/2017)	Estimated YE Actual (as at 01/02/2017)	Budget 2016-17	Estimated Variance 2016-17
371110	Fostering Team	1,110,811	1,108,300	2,511	1,123,550	1,352,491	1,246,748	105,743
371120	Fostering Equipment	120,844	110,000	10,844	116,537	131,056	113,240	17,816
371130	Fostering Allowances	2,758,901	2,353,643	405,258	2,562,464	3,099,651	3,098,573	1,078
371170	Independent Fostering Placements	5,496,503	4,951,529	544,974	5,656,012	6,993,484	5,071,529	1,921,955
371150	Families Together Care Packages	101,041	107,130	-6,089	55,317	74,878	110,368	-35,490
371160	Foster Carer Home Adaptations	69,709	75,584	-5,875	74,951	74,951	77,733	-2,782
371180	Child Arrangement Orders	1,297,652	1,185,029	112,623	1,126,585	1,370,511	1,220,580	149,931
TOTAL		10,955,462	9,891,215	1,064,247	10,715,416	13,097,022	10,938,771	2,158,251

