Rotherham Fostering Service

Annual Report

2017/18

1. Introduction

1.1 This report is an annual report to brief on the business and activity within Rotherham Borough Council's Fostering Service in 2017/18.

1.2 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 through 2018/19.

2. The Fostering Service

2.1 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 The fostering service in Rotherham comprises of three teams; 'Recruitment Team'; which focuses on the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers; 'Mainstream Support,' which focuses on the support and supervision of foster carers and 'Specialist Support,' which support and supervise Foster Plus carers, carers providing short break care for disabled children, Private Fostering and Connected Carers, and delivers the Mockingbird Project.

2.4 In line with the Regulations, the service has a Fostering Panel chaired by a skilled and experienced independent social work professional. The Panel considers and makes recommendations about the suitability of foster carer applicants and their ongoing terms of approval, matching of children requiring long term placements and are advised about foster carers leaving the agency. An Independent panel advisor role was introduced in 2017/18 who is a suitably experienced social worker with a strong knowledge and background in fostering. Previously this role had been covered by the recruitment manager. However it was noted as part of the Peer Review of fostering undertaken in 2017/18 by Lincolnshire County Council (partners in improvement) that this was not sufficiently independent, and recommended reviewing the panel process and introducing this post.

2.5 The Head of Service for Looked After Children performs the role of Agency Decision Maker 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.

3. Panel Functions

3.1 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.*"

3.2 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.

3.3   Rotherham Foster 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).

- It matches children who have a plan for long-term fostering with suitable foster carers.

4.   Panel Composition

4.1   The Panel maintains 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 2017/18. The panel membership includes members with a range of professional backgrounds and interests including elected members, social workers, foster carers, an adopter and virtual school members. Each member has many years of experience of public service and fostering in particular. The table below provides the details of the 'Central List'.

Name of Panel Member	Type of Member
Fred Lillie	Independent Chair
Andrew Walker	Independent Chair
Catherine Boaler	Independent Panel Advisor
Jenny Hosker	Social Work Member (Locality Team Manager and Vice Chair)
Carol Stickland	Social Work Member (fostering team)
Katie Duffield	Social Work Member (fostering team)
June Watson	Independent Member (foster carers for Sheffield City Council)
Betty Brothers	Independent Member (foster carer for Sheffield City Council
Karen Holgate	Designated Nurse for Looked After Children
Sadia Alam	Social Work Member (fostering team)
Tina Hohn	Virtual School (education) for Looked After Children
Claire Brennan	Social Work Member (Locality Team)
Amie Scaife	Social Work Member (fostering team)
Debbie Willis	Social Work Member (fostering team)
Andrew Bosmans	Independent Member
Arron Batley- Simpson	Independent Member (Adult Care Leaver)
Cllr Victoria Cusworth	Elected Member
Cllr Jayne Senior	Elected Member
Sarah Thompson	Social Work Member (adoption service).

4.2 Recent recruitment to Panel in 2017/18 has been Cllr Jayne Senior and Arron Batley – Smith (Adult Care Leaver now training to be a Social Worker). In the reporting year 2016/17 it was noted that the panel would benefit from recruiting a young person with 'care' experience and a representative of the BME community. In 17/18 this was achieved. The

Panel continues to aim to target additional members with either a CAMHS or therapeutic background, and a teacher to supplement the Virtual School involvement.

4.3 The following training has been made available for Panel Members in 2017/2018:-

- Panel Member Training -6th October 2017
- Half a day SOS Training- 14th February 2018
- Panel Induction/ Group Performance Review/ Functioning as an effective Panel (Appropriate Questioning, Panel etiquette, SCR's)- 26th March 2018
- Data Protection Work Shop- 21st May 2018
- Skills to Foster Assessment Training- 6th July 2018
- Mockingbird Family Model Presentation- 30th July 2018
- Plan to include Panel Members in whole service training/ events moving forward

4.4 In November 2017 an independent consultant & professional advisor was recruited to undertake an independent review and scrutiny of fostering panel and to act as Panel Advisor. This was a recommendation of the Strategic Commissioning Review of the service with a rationale that having team managers acting in this capacity would not promote an unbiased, impartial and independent function when advising the panel chair and panel members or the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

4.5 Whilst outside this reporting year, the fostering service would want to make the panel advisor resource a permanent position, but recognises the tight budget constraints and the financial challenges faced by Rotherham Council may delay this aspiration. However, as the fostering service continues on its improvement journey, the role of the panel advisor has been identified as central in ensuring panel focus and oversight of all panel business, including quality assurance and service development with a focus on better outcomes for Rotherham Looked after Children.

5. **Panel Business 2017/18**

5.1 There were 24 Foster Panels convened in 2017/18, with 189 agenda items discussed, an average of 8 items per Panel, which is an increase in panel business since last year. In 2016/17, there were 21 Foster Panels with 104 agenda items, and an average of 5 items for each panel.

5.2 The Panel Advisor receives the draft reports for Panel and gives written feedback on the quality of the reports, where appropriate, as well as practice advice. The paperwork submitted to panel is always shared seven days before panel meets to comply with National Minimum Standards and in most instances panel members receive paperwork even earlier.

5.3 When Panel minutes are completed they go firstly to the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor to read and then following any necessary amends/ additions the minutes are then distributed to panel members/ and professionals in attendance at panel. 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.

5.4 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 standards.

5.5 The feedback from Panel Chair indicates that the quality of reports presented to panel in 17/18 was variable, including 'Skills to Foster' assessments and Foster Carer Statutory Reviews and has been a key area of development. The introduction of a dedicated Panel Advisor has given greater scrutiny and challenge to the service which has led to some improvement in this area although through 2018/19 this scrutiny will continue. With an ambition to improve practice the Fostering Service have received training around best practice in assessment, with themes including exploration of vulnerabilities, support needs for new carers, and

more triangulation and verification of information from multiple sources rather than relying on self-reporting. 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 arising concerns or themes. Practice Monitoring Meetings have also been introduced which are facilitated by the Panel Advisor, chaired by the Head of Service and include Panel Chair, Panel Advisor and Senior Management. The meetings focus on performance and practice issues with clear actions agreed; for example the best practice training was arranged following the first meeting as this was identified as a staffing need. This improved focus on the service ensures that it is not operating in a silo and provides an environment for more accountable and collaborative practice development as we move into 2018/19. Further development work in 18/19 will include consultation in gaining the views of the placing social worker and the voice of the child. The process and timeline for reviews and the responsibilities placed on the supervising social worker has been revised and a training event is arranged in 2018. Following this event there will be focused scrutiny in these areas which again will enrich the quality of reports, but more importantly evidence joined up working in promoting best outcomes for children in care.

5.6 Training records are maintained for primary carers within the training 'tab' of Liquid Logic recording system. Each carer household is provided with a Continual Professional Development portfolio to develop their own training history. Personal Development Plans (PDP's) to assist with carer's development are completed annually in conjunction with the Supervising Social Worker. Each carer is required to complete a minimum of three development activities with a review period, at least one of which must be a face to face course. This is reviewed as part of the carers Annual Review and it has been noted in 2017/18 that some carers employed outside the home do not adequately manage training requirements due to their work commitments. In response to this the Fostering Service is offering 'safer caring' evening training in October 2018. If well attended further evening training will be facilitated.

5.7 Panel administration is reported as being efficient, with reports circulated in good time giving five working days to read paperwork. Panel minutes are detailed and draft minutes are usually available on the second working day following panel. The business support review is currently looking at different options in terms of the recording of panel meetings that are more cost and resource effective. This includes the move towards paperless panel, work which began in 17/18 led by the panel advisor with plans for implementation in 2018. The cost saving to the local authority is estimated in the range of 10/15K a year aside from the other additional benefits such as reduced business support requirements.

6. Fostering Families – Placements

6.1 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.

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.
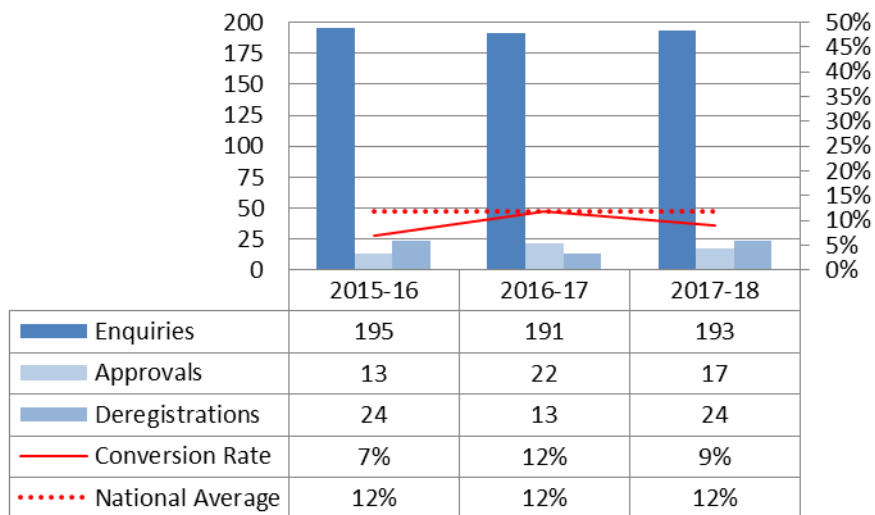
Fostering Plus: a Rotherham Borough initiative to accommodate Rotherham's most vulnerable children, typically teenagers. Fostering Plus carers receive a weekly fee and high levels of support and therapeutic intervention in managing and sustaining placements and in developing meaningful relationships to enable children in their care to achieve better outcomes. The Fostering Plus scheme also encompasses the placements for children at risk and/ or subject to CSE and continues to support these placements with a high level of support and supervision. Intensive therapeutic provision continues to be provided by Rotherham's Therapeutic Team, and as Foster Plus 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. In 2017 – 2018, Rotherham had 8 Families Together foster carers.

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.

7.   Approvals, Deregistration and resignations

Recruitment and Retention

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Enquiries	195	191	193
Approvals	13	22	17
Deregistrations	24	13	24
Conversion Rate	7%	12%	9%
National Average	12%	12%	12%

7.1   Following a downturn in enquiries which was understood to be due to the negative media attention following the publication of the Jay Report, 2015/16 saw some growth in enquiries from 147 the previous year to 195 although there was a relatively low conversion rate to foster carers of 7% (13 foster carers approved), as compared to a National Average of 12%.

7.2   The number of enquiries remained stable in 2016/17 with 191 enquires into fostering culminating in 22 foster carer approvals, with potential placement capacity for 30 children (placements - excluding respite and short break care for disabled children); a conversion rate of 12%, putting the Fostering Service in line with the National Average. During the year

there were 13 resignations equating to 7.6% of the in-house population which compared well with the national average of 10% (Local Authority Fostering Service benchmark 2014/15).

7.3 2017/18 saw the number of enquiries at a consistent level with 193 enquiries of which 17 have been approved as foster carers, a conversion rate of 9%, equating to 26 placements. During this year there had been 24 de-registrations and resignations (12.7%) and a loss of 38 placements, a net loss of 12 placements within the service. Rotherham's data performance analytics indicates that the days of fostering gained in 2017/18 from newly approved foster carers as compared to the days 'lost' from foster carers leaving in that same period shows a gain of 1553 days of care. This is due to many of the newly approved foster carers actively taking placements from point of approval, as compared to carers leaving the service being inactive for some time prior to resignation/ deregistration. Whilst outside this reporting year, based on carers approved in 18/19 to date the conversion rate is 10%, with an overall projection of 25 newly approved foster carers by year end.

7.4 In addition to this, whilst the service has 'lost' foster carers, it should be noted that some of the reasons are very positive, for example:
- One child who turned 18 remained with their fostering family under a staying put arrangement.
- One child with a disability, who had also turned 18 years of age, remained in the fostering family, under 'shared lives' (family homes for adults with disabilities) again a positive outcome for this young person.
- Two foster carers secured Special Guardianship Orders for the children in their care, given a greater sense of security for those children.
- Two children who were placed with connected carers returned to their birth family, and so the carers retired as they wanted only to commit to these children from their extended family.

- Two children who turned 18 years moved on to independence and the carers retired after giving 36 years to the service.

Of foster carers who left the service:

Placement Type	Number
Family and Friends	5
Fostering mainstream	14
Foster plus	1
Short breaks	4

7.5   All fostering services lose carers during the year to retirement, deciding fostering is no longer for them, or that their family circumstances have changed, so there is a need to continually recruit significantly just to maintain capacity. The Fostering Stocktake (Narey & Owers February 2018) noted that around 10% of fostering households leave agencies in anyone year. They noted that this included those leaving fostering for explicable reasons, including retirement, change in personal circumstances; because they become adopters or special guardians; or because their child has reached 18 and is now living with them under a Staying Put arrangement. This is consistent with Rotherham Fostering.

7.6   The past year has seen a significant increase in the number of resignations and de-registrations due to the reasons noted above, some of which are for positive reasons. However this does also include an increase in de-registrations due to safeguarding concerns relating to foster carer practice. Rotherham fostering, as with the wider children's services has been on an improvement journey and expects the highest standard of care for our children, whose early life lived experience will have largely included some level of trauma. In 2017/18 as new workers were recruited following the retirement of established workers with many years in the team, this gave "fresh eyes" to practice, and safe guarding. It would seem that the worker/carer relationship may have become "too

comfortable" and high support/high challenge practices less robust then they are currently.

7.7 Although there has been an increase in de registrations for the reasons stated above there are some encouraging signs. As mentioned previously the majority of the carers who were deregistered were inactive whilst the newly approved carers from April 2017 were immediately active giving net gains in the days of foster placement provision, and the service could target foster care support towards those carers providing that service rather than on those who were not. It has also been noted that there were a number of newer approved foster carers who left the agency shortly after been approved and the service, has undertaken a review of this. The service reviewed all foster carers who left the agency in the two year period 2016/18 and found that four carers had left within two years of being approved. One of these carers was a connected carer who left the agency when the child returned to family; two left as a result of health issues and one due to change in circumstances whereby the main carer was being made redundant and planned to focus on fostering but then was given an attractive financial package to remain in paid employment. The service recognises the important value of retaining foster carers and whilst outside this reporting year has recently engaged in a project in partnership with Fostering Network and other agencies around best practice in retention.

7.8 More positively enquiries over the first quarter as compared with the previous year have increased by 60% from 45 to 73 which could be attributed to the newly recruited dedicated 'Fostering Marketing & Communications' lead but also because Rotherham received a 'Good' rating in the 2017 Ofsted inspection. The current projected approvals based on already approved foster carers or in assessment is 17 approvals up to December 2018. The service is increasing promotional activities during the summer months, which is a period of time when it is traditionally quieter for fostering services and it is hoped that this will generate an increased level of enquiry which potentially can convert to

approvals. Based on the foster carers approved to date, and those in assessment, the projected number of approved foster carer for 2018/19 is 25. However if enquires continue to increase at their current trajectory and the recruitment initiatives successful then there is a possibility to exceed this 25 target of approvals for 2018/19.

7.9 Since the beginning of 2018 the fostering service has embarked on a number of recruitment initiatives which is hoped will engage the local community in understanding that there is an urgent need to recruit more foster carers to meet the sufficiency strategy. The fostering service recognises that there is a need for community engagement within Rotherham so that members of the local community are aware of the sufficiency issue for Rotherham Council and the need to increase awareness of the need to recruit additional foster carers. In order to achieve the aspiration of providing significantly more in-house foster placements the following initiatives are being implemented:-

- **Challenge 63:** This is a recruitment initiative that has been designed to involve local Councillors in promoting the need for more foster carers in their wards. This initiative is in its infancy and there will be a relaunch of this in September. If each of the 63 elected members are able to nominate only one suitable prospective carer every two years current recruitment levels would be surpassed by this initiative alone.
- **Muslim Foster Carer project:** In September 2017 the foster service took part in a research project undertaken by Fostering Network alongside other Local Authorities and an Independent Fostering Agency, to better understand and explore how we can recruit more Muslim foster carers. The findings of the research project are to be published shortly. RMBC have decided to set up and deliver a Muslim foster carers project in order to recruit foster carers who will be able to meet the cultural needs of children in their care. In addition the project aims to support the needs of non-Muslim foster carers who are caring for Muslim children and ensure that there are training, development and mentoring opportunities available. The project aims to raise more awareness in the local community of the need for more foster carers within Rotherham. An unforeseen benefit of this project has been the development of the

Eid host family plan whereby Muslim children will be linked with a Muslim family to participate in this cultural event.

- **Profile Raising:** The fostering service will continue to remain visible in the local community by attending events such as Gala's and having information drop in sessions on a monthly basis with foster carers present. In addition to this the fostering service is updating the fostering website and information packs that the general public receive in order to target more effectively potential foster carers who may be interested in fostering. The Fostering service also has employed a dedicated 'Fostering Advisor' who processes all the initial enquires and undertakes all the initial visits. This has led to a more streamlined approach and a consistent person who can guide prospective foster carers from initial enquiry to fostering assessment.

- **Retention:** The fostering Service acknowledges that retention of foster carers is equally as important as recruitment of foster carers and has recently delivered a team away day with a focus on foster carer retention. As a result of this, the foster services are working in collaboration with Fostering Network on a project centred on retention of foster carers. This is part of a country wide research project, involving 6 fostering agencies, and an independent fostering agency. The outcome of this will be fed into the fostering report 18/19 and it is hoped that it will be evident that the Fostering Retention Project will have an impact on retention of foster carers whilst ensuring that our current foster carers continue to remain motivated and happy with the service that they receive from the Fostering Team.

- **Mockingbird programme:** aims to prevent placement breakdown and increase stability of the fostering households. Rotherham fostering's first Mockingbird hub was launched in May 2018 with and additional hub to be launched later in 2018, It is envisaged that the Mockingbird model will result in a decrease in disrupted placements, increased stability for children in fostering placements, and improved retention of foster carers.

- **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, 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. This has recently been relaunched in Rotherham Fostering Services.

- 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.

8.   Children Placed in Foster Care - Information 2017/18

Proportion of LAC in Fostering Placements

IFA Placements 39%

Rotherham Fostering 30%
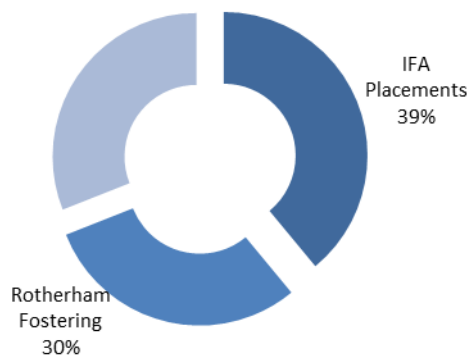
8.1   At year end 2017/18 there were 176 children placed with RMBC foster carers, and 164 fostering households. In addition to this, there were a further 5 Regulation 24 (temporary approved foster carers) looking after 7 connected children, and 6 children in the fostering stage of a fostering to adopt (early permanence placement) equating to 189 children in RMBC in-house fostering households, (30.38% of total number of children in care).

8.2   Many of the temporary approved 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
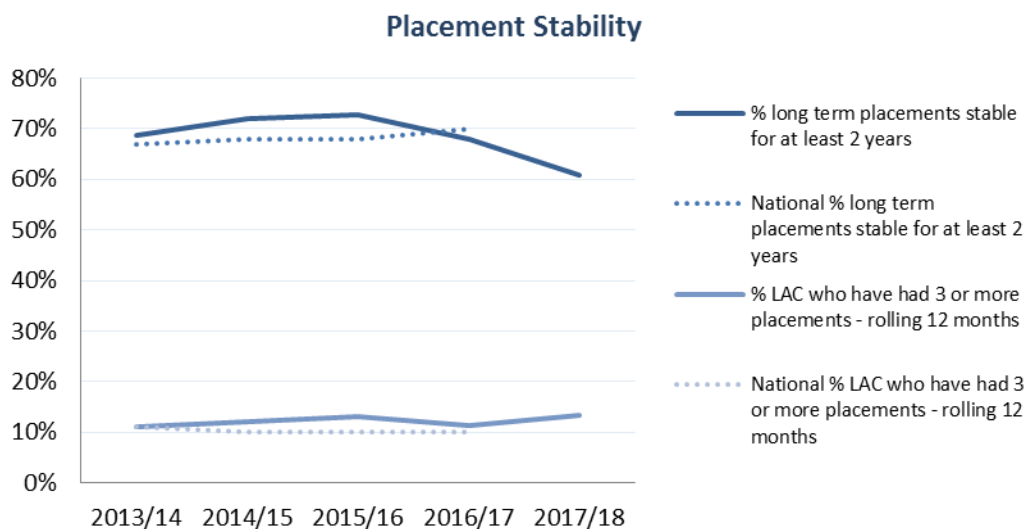
children. This is in-line with Rotherham's "Right Child – Right Care" agenda, and the principal of securing permanency outside of care. The impact of this on fostering means that there are fewer foster carers as temporary approved foster carers do not progress to permanent kinship foster carers, and established carers leave the agency by committing to SGO and permanency for the child/ren they look after. RMBC fostering recognises however, that for the child this is the best and right outcome.

8.3 As stated above 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. At the end of this reporting year, there were 622 children in care compared with 480 at year end 2015/16.This is an increase of around 29.58%.

8.4 As of March 31st 2018 there were 244 children in IFA placement which equates to 39% of the children in care population as compared to the 189 children (30.38%) within in-house family based provision.

8.5 Of those 244 children in IFA placements, despite 99 (41%) being within a 20 mile radius of their home postcode, only 60 children (25%) 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 identify 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).

8.6 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 significantly invested in the support and allowances offered to foster carers to attract and retain carers as noted above. There is a further review of the foster carer scheduled 2018/19. This will be reported to Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and be incorporated in the Annual Fostering report 18/19.

8.7 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.

9. Placement Stability

Placement Stability

Legend:
- % long term placements stable for at least 2 years
- National % long term placements stable for at least 2 years
- % LAC who have had 3 or more placements - rolling 12 months
- National % LAC who have had 3 or more placements - rolling 12 months

*Note that the national data for 2017/18 has yet to be published. Good performance for % long term placements stable for at least 2 years is a high percentage. Good performance for % LAC who had 3 or more placements is a low percentage.

9.1 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 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.

	Roth 2013/14	Roth 2014/15	Roth 2015/16	Roth 2016/17	Roth 2017/18	England 2017
No. of long term LAC placements stable for at least 2 years (NI063)	108/157	110/153	109/150	100/147	90/148	-
% long term LAC placements stable for at least 2 years (NI063)	68.8%	71.9%	72.7%	68%	60.81%	70%
No. of LAC who have had 3 or more placements - rolling 12 months (NI062)	44/393	49/409	56/431	55/487	83/620	-
% LAC who have had 3 or more placements - rolling 12 months (NI062)	11.2%	12.0%	13.0%	11.29%	13.38%	10%

9.2 There has been a decrease in performance around placement stability in 2017/18 as demonstrated above; last year the NI063 placement stability figure which was 68% at year-end, this year the figure is 60.81%, (56 children). Of those 56 children, 21 moved for positive reasons, for example moving into adoptive families, moving to reside with connected carers, moving into long term placements or moving back to, or more local to Rotherham.

9.3 The national indicator NI062 has also evidenced a dip in performance at end of reporting year, and at 13.38% at March 2018 is outside of the target of 10%, and higher than the national average, (10%). On reviewing the current data analytics provided by RMBC performance team, over the previous 12 months (August 17/18) there has been an increase in

placement stability with 11.44% of children experiencing 3 or more placements in that period. This is an improvement on the figure at year end.

10. **Unplanned Endings & Disruptions**

10.1 Unplanned endings are when a foster placement ends outside of the child's care planning arrangements. A disruption occurs when a child who has been permanently matched long term within that placement moves as a result of the placement breakdown.

10.2 In the period 2017/18, there were 11 unplanned endings of placements involving 15 children in RMBC foster care. In 2016/17 there were 11 unplanned endings involving 13 children and 11 RMBC fostering families. Of the 11 unplanned endings in 2017/18 5 carers had their category of approval amended as a result of the move, and carers were placed on hold until the disruption meeting was held and action plans devised.

10.3 Of the 15 children, 5 were long term matched, the remaining 10 children were in task centred (short term/ emergency) placements.   Key themes include:
- The importance of matching, and information sharing
- Child's needs, age and complexity of placement
- Change of social worker

10.4 This compares with 54 unplanned endings whereby the fostering agency provider gave notice on the placement during the same timeframe. 17 of these children had been in placement for two years and over. This is suggestive that stability is more likely with in-house care and another rationale for the need for effective recruitment and retention of Rotherham Foster carers.

11. **Staffing in the Fostering Service**

11.1 It has been a year of change and development within the Fostering Service, which has seen the appointment of a number of permanent social

workers joining the supervision and recruitment teams, the introduction of a marketing and communications lead, and the introduction of a dedicated duty worker, whose role is to lead on matching and making placements, and dedicated fostering advisor role, who is the first 'friendly voice' of fostering when expressing an interest or making an enquiry into the service. The foster service has also recruited a dedicated fostering panel advisor to bring more scrutiny and rigour to the service, and has recently appointed a second panel chair and both roles have the aim and intention to drive up practice of the fostering service.

11.2 2017/18 also saw the introduction of the Mockingbird family based model of fostering. In December two hub carers were interviewed and recruited and whilst outside of this reporting year, the first constellation was launched in May 2018 with a second scheduled for launch in October 2018. In addition to this, a number of other carers, including the foster plus carers have expressed an interest in becoming hub carers and developing constellations.

11.3 The Foster Carer Association was also relaunched and this will enable the service to formalise an effective two-way consultation and information sharing that is both open and transparent. In addition the Foster Carer Association will facilitate service development and ensure that carers feel that their voice has been heard and understood. Whilst outside this reporting year, the FCA facilitated the inaugural fostering families camping weekend in July 2018 which was very successful and aims to be an annual event. The FCA are also being consulted and contributing to the retention project.

12. Fostering Supervision and Support

12.1 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.

12.2 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.

12.3 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.

Foster Carer Visits
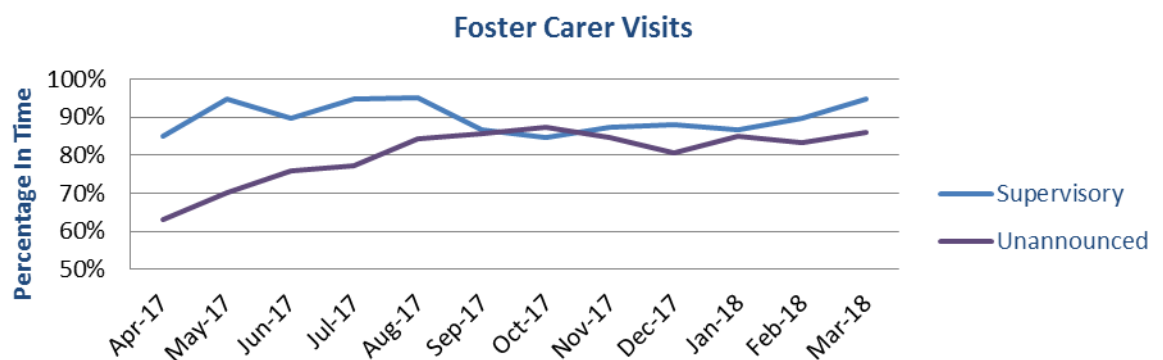
12.4 The supervising social worker continues to support and guide the foster carer through their journey through fostering, by providing guidance, support and development to the foster carer. All foster carers within the fostering service are allocated a supervising social worker prior to attending panel for approval.

13. Activities and Events

13.1 The Fostering Service host an annual diary of events for fostering families and this is foster carer led in consultation with the department. In 2017/18, this included:

- Fostering family Christmas celebration
- Foster Carers Christmas Meal
- A Halloween Party
- Easter Party
- Parties in the park run throughout the summer vacation
- Pride of Rotherham – achievement celebration for children in car-October 2017
- Foster carers conference
- Fostering Fortnight celebration event
- Quarterly foster carer forums involving carers, team managers, service manager, and head of service.
- *fostering services are currently introducing a wider range of cultural events

13.2 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.

13.3 **Support Groups**: there are four formal support groups hosted across Rotherham and facilitated by supervising social workers:-

- An induction support group for carer in their first two years of fostering (Unity Centre) (morning)
- Dinnington (evening)
- Rockingham (afternoon)
- Listerdale for carers with children aged 0 – 4 years (morning)

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

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: has recently been reintroduced and already has a very active membership. Whilst outside of this reporting year, the FCA recently held a successful camping weekend for fostering families.

14. Consultation:

14.1 In 2017/18, there have been two foster carer forums around the introduction of the Mockingbird Family Model and two 'You said – We did' meetings with foster carers. Changes to the service as a result of this were:

- The Mockingbird Family Model going live in May 2018
- The introduction of a Foster Carers Association
- The introduction of an electronic fostering newsletter and a web platform for sending and receiving information. Text connect (a text messaging service which enables all foster carers to receive a text from the service) has been discussed and implementation will be introduced in 2018/19.

15.2 A Foster carer's conference was held in June 2017 with a high number of foster carers attending this with speaker Zoe Loderick giving a presentation about Child Sexual Exploitation and the impact on young people. The event was so successful a foster carer's conference has now been built into the yearly foster carer's events calendar.

15. Complaints and compliments:

15.1 In the reporting year 2017/18 there were 2 complaints specifically about the fostering service by young people, and 3 complaints made by foster carers. The three complaints made by foster carers were made in circumstances where practice issues were already being addressed. Of these five complaints, one of the carer complaints was upheld, and one of those made by a young person was upheld. Additional work was undertaken by the fostering service as a result of these complaints, including changing a carers terms of approval, and providing additional support for a young person. In the same reporting year, there was 13 compliments about the fostering service; 9 compliments about social workers in the service and 4 about foster carers.

16. Training

16.1 Rotherham Fostering has a training coordinator who plans and coordinates training and ensures that mandatory training is in place for foster carers. The table below represents some examples of the training and development evidence by foster carers in 2017/18.

Qualification	Number
CWDC Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Care	16
Foster Carer conference (Safeguarding)	85
Emotional Health and Wellbeing	
Attachment of children in care	27

Therapeutic Parenting course	15
Managing Challenging Behaviour	29
Life story work	11
Bonding through Play	16
Safeguarding: CSE training/ E-safety for Foster Carers/ Safeguarding training courses/ Living with sexually abused children / radicalisation	118
Education: Epep and other courses provided by the Virtual school	58
Health: Foetal Alcohol syndrome Disorder First Aid Course & Paediatric First Aid Drugs and Alcohol Awareness Self Harm Autism Awareness Child specific specialist health training	15 67 21 19 19 6

17.   Fostering Recruitment Activity and Outcomes

17.1 The public perception of Fostering in Rotherham has continued to move towards a more positive picture. "Good news" stories are regularly featured in local media and on-line and the Ofsted report have helped towards this end. In 2017/18 the fostering service employed a full-time communications and marketing officer to work solely on the fostering service account with a focus on recruitment and retention of foster carers. The marketing and communications officer has refreshed its approach to digital communications. There is now a systematic approach to creating content for social media, website and e-newsletters.

17.2 **Website** – a review of the existing websites has resulted in the decommissioning of the fosteringinrotherham.org.uk and driving all web traffic through the main RMBC hosted fostering pages. This has resulted in the URL www.rotherham.gov.uk/fostering being at the top of Google searches for fostering in Rotherham. The council has plans to create a much-improved website and fostering has now positioned its content to be ready to be among the first services to fully transition when the new RMBC site becomes live in April 2019.

17.3 **Digital Content** – in 2018 the fostering service began work to update its use of digital content. A series of videos have generated increased user engagement across social media, Twitter and Facebook, as well as website traffic. The result has been an increase in fostering enquiries through the website and Facebook.

17.4 Communications with the existing fostering community have been transformed from traditional mail outs, paper-based newsletters and limited use of bulk emails to a digital platform, GovDelivery. Carers receive fortnightly e-newsletter containing news, training dates, support group times and dates as well as invitations to help at recruitment events. The e-newsletter has an average open rate of 60 per cent (Marketing industry average 25 per cent), and will invariably lead to cost savings as a result of reduced printing and posting costs.

17.5 Work began at the start of 2018 to introduce an SMS service for sending text messages to targeted groups of foster carers. It is envisaged this service will commence in August 2018.

18. **The Fostering service recruitment target key areas:**

18.1 The Fostering service has used traditional marketing activities of drop-in sessions, information stands well in the past. The Rotherham Show and Rotherham District General Hospital are good examples. In addition it was recognised there was a need to attend events and venues with a high footfall and a good demographic match for recruitment in favour of small

neighbourhood events. Examples include a regular information stand at Tesco in Wath which is providing strong leads. However, this generic approach may be having a limited impact and the fostering service is actively considering a more forensic approach for future marketing strategies. Key target areas include:

- Positive public profile – generating positive coverage and PR in local media
- Public awareness – using the sufficiency story to alert residents borough-wide of the urgent need for more foster carers in all areas and across all sectors, including, teenagers, sibling groups and children with disabilities.
- Elected members – our Challenge 63 campaign was designed to engage local elected members to promote fostering within their wards and communities and will be relaunched in September 2018.
- The recruitment of Muslim families for Muslim looked after children.

18.2 In collaboration with the marketing lead, the newly established fostering advisor manages a more sophisticated pipeline tool to record and track the progress of fostering enquiries. Enquiries are now tracked through to approval or closure as well as those "not yet ready" who progress to a "Keeping in Touch" list. Those on this list receive an e-newsletter four times a year to let them know about drop-in sessions, good news stories and contact information so they are more likely to come back to RMBC when they are ready to foster. This also adds an additional layer to our fostering community, promoting the services good customer service and caring approach. The number of enquires 2017/18 were roughly the same as the previous year, but it should be noted that the first quarter of 2018 has shown a 60% increase in enquires from 45 to 73. It is hoped that if an increase in enquiries continues in the same trajectory that this will lead to increased approvals in 2018/19.

18.3 The Service hold a 6 weekly 'Foster Carer's "what's on what's new" meeting with a hub of 10 foster carers who help with the recruitment activities and retention. In 2018/19 the service plans to implement a new

initiative "FosterCarers4FosterCarers" to mobilise this cohort of foster carers to help recruit new foster carers into the service.

18.4 Throughout the year 2017/18 there was a calendar of monthly recruitment activity, where the fostering service attended events to promote fostering, there were adverts in the press, on line and in social media adverts/videos, bespoke flyers and posters.

19. Key Challenges, Developments, Targets and Actions for 2017/18

19.1The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a challenging task, and the Rotherham Fostering Service recognises that there is no room for complacency. The service need to continually review practices and consider innovative ways of recruiting and attracting foster carers to Rotherham whilst ensuring our existing foster carers remain well supported and motivated. New schemes planned to be implemented in 2018/19 include:

- Further development of the STAR parties (start thinking about recruitment) and fostering champions to promote fostering across Rotherham
- Implementation across the service Mockingbird constellations
- Developing the Muslim Project and Challenge 63
- Participate in the Foster Carer Retention Project in consultation with Fostering Network and translate into practice
- Review foster carer payments to maximise retention and increase placement provision across in-house fostering services and encourage new foster carers into the service
- Embed the Foster Care Association
- Continue to develop marketing and communications across RMBC and within fostering. This includes text connect to contact foster carers on a more informal level, and refresh of the RMBC website and fostering provision.
- Refresh of the 'Refer a Foster Carer' to be rolled out across RMBC
- Develop and implement the virtual assessment team
- Recruit a permanent Foster Care Panel Advisor

- Introduce exit interviews for foster carers
- Increase community engagement
- Widening the fostering family activities to include a more diverse range of cultural celebrations, and
- Linking Muslim children in White/British family placements with host Muslim families in order that there is a golden thread of continuity when celebrating the cultural events, such as Eid for Muslim children in our care.
- 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.

20. Summary.

20.1   Rotherham Fostering Service acknowledge that in order to reach the sufficiency plans, Rotherham Fostering 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 a successful recruitment of social workers who are skilled and motivated. Interest in fostering has increased, modern technology is used to communicate with foster carers in a more cost effective and timely way. Publicity and marketing materials have been refined and refreshed. The service has stream lined the enquiry process with a dedicated fostering advisor and a dedicated matching and placing duty worker. The call for action regarding the sufficiency agenda is well promoted in Rotherham evidenced in the increase in enquiries. 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, which sets Rotherham apart from other fostering agencies, and in a position to attract these potential fostering families in the future as they have already been engaged in the "fostering conversation".