

Rotherham Fostering Service

Annual Report

2022/23

1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023

1. Introduction

This report is an annual report that provides an overview of the business and activity within Rotherham Borough Council's Fostering Service in 2022/23.

The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Fostering Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving into 2023/24.

Local and National Context

The following statistics give the context coming into the start of 2022/23 to provide an understanding of the circumstances the service is working in during this reporting period.

An area for concern is that the demand for foster carers is rising due to increasing numbers of children in care, however approved fostering places have decreased by 5% since 2018 to 74,660 in England as of March 2022. The demand nationally for foster carers has increased by 11% whilst fostering households have only increased by 2%. (Source DfE). The number of children in care reached just over 82,000 in the UK as of March 2022 – up 2% on the previous year and continuing the increase seen in recent years. The rate of looked-after children increased from 67 per 10,000 children as of March 2021 to 70 per 10,000 children as of March 2022 (Source: DfE).

In Rotherham, the rate of children in care (per 10,000 children under 18) as of the end of March 2022 was 99, a reduction from 2020/21's local rate of 104. It is higher than the average rate in Yorkshire and The Humber of 81 (which increased from 78 in 2020/21). (Source: LG Inform).

In the most recent national reporting, mainstream and family and friends' carers have been split to provide a more accurate picture of fostering families in England. In England, as of 31 March 2022, there were a total of 43,905 fostering households; 36,050 were mainstream fostering households and 7,855 were family and friends' households. There was a total of 61,360 foster carers. This represents a slight decrease compared with last year. However, if the last 2 years are excluded as potential anomalies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it represents an overall decrease in the number of foster carers over the years, with a 4% decrease from 2017 to 2018 (63,815 carers).

As in previous years, local authority agencies continue to account for about 6 in 10 of all carers (58%). In the local authority sector, the number of carers has decreased by 8% since 2017 to 2018; in the IFA sector, it has increased slightly, by 2%, in the same period. (Source: DfE)

The national age demographic presents a picture that the current foster carer workforce is aging, and with retirement presented as a key reason as to why foster carers are leaving the workforce (Source: DfE), this is another challenge to consider and is reflected in our local deregistration statistics also.

It is clear that Rotherham needs to increase its placement sufficiency for children in care to meet increasing and predicted demand.

The number of fostering households are not increasing in line with this and therefore, we are at risk of not having sufficient placements available. As of 31 March 2022, there were 562 children in care in the RMBC district – of which 158 were in an in-house provision.

The Focus in Rotherham in 2022/23

Our fostering strategy in 2022/23 focussed on the continued use of online marketing through our partnership with communications and marketing agency BrightSparks and a significant return to our in-house marketing strategies in addition to this. The primary difference being our increased physical presence in the community which had significantly reduced during the COVID pandemic. In addition, there has been a drive to improve the retention of our existing foster carers through an improved support offer and development opportunities for carers.

Section 2 of this report will present more in-depth local data from 2022/23.

A significant challenge continues to be the number of independent fostering agencies who are actively recruiting foster carers in the area and the difficulty that the council has in competing with their offer to foster carers. However in 2022/23 our ambitious recruitment and retention strategies have yielded good results when looking at the comparative data.

Our strategy consists of:

- An enhanced and comprehensive learning offer with flexible options to suit all types of foster carers.
- Enrichment opportunities both as a service and in partnership with the Rotherham Foster Carer Association (RFCA).
- An enhanced financial offer to account for increased cost in living and to enhanced and complex care payments available where required. Discounts also available to foster carers through access to a MAX card.
- Robust support offer including support groups, our use of the Mockingbird Family Model and easy access to our in-house Rotherham Therapeutic Team
- Opportunities to develop and progress as a carer through our payment for skills model.
- An improved welcome pack and a buddying system to support newly approved foster carers.
- Recognition of good practice and long service through nominations celebrated during foster carer forums.
- Pathways to Care – to extend foster carers property and increase fostering capacity in existing pool of foster carers.
- Multiple opportunities for foster carer consultation and feedback through foster carer forums, working together groups and the foster carer health survey.

This annual report outlines the work of the Fostering Rotherham service during 2022/23 to become more competitive in the marketplace, and ultimately attract and retain quality foster carers.

Despite national challenges and the legacy impact of the pandemic there were many successes:

- Achieved Ofsted status of GOOD.
- Approved 11 mainstream foster care households with the capacity for up to 18 task centred placements and 2 second home placements and approved 1 family and friends carer providing a placement for 3 children.
- 'Matched' 9 children to permanent foster homes over the year including 6 with independent fostering agencies and 3 with in-house foster carers.
- Conducted first fostering health survey which demonstrated that almost all foster carers feel highly supported by their supervising social worker and the wider fostering community.
- Returned to in-person marketing, panel, training, support, and activities following the pandemic with positive outcomes for both recruitment and retention.
- Implemented a new process for foster carers transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies which makes use of the records already held on a carer within their current agency. This has enabled us to significantly reduce the time taken to complete an assessment, therefore allowing carers to transfer agencies much more quickly and reducing drop off as a result.
- Uplifted fostering skills and allowances 2023/24 in line with the national increase of 12.43% including holiday, birthday, and celebration allowances.
- Secured a fostering recruitment Pledge from each Directorate. The action plan and progress are reported into the Strategic Fostering Working Group. Examples of things we have achieved include a Council Tax leaflet mailout to advertise fostering, Finance webpage link to fostering, supported attendance at community events, publishing fostering in the Home Matters Magazine, secured additional funding for recruitment activity from the Rotherham Partnership Fund, established Library fostering ambassador, secured a regular feature across 10 months of the year in the Rotherham Advertiser and a screensaver to promote Fostering.
- Increased the number of support groups.

Key Outcomes from 2022/23 recruitment communication and campaign plan

- 1300 information packs downloaded.
- 251 initial enquiry calls completed.
- 90 (approximate) households interested in fostering visited
- 11 newly approved mainstream foster carers for a range of placement types including short term, parent and child, long term and second home.
- 9 ongoing assessments by year end

Retention of Foster Carers

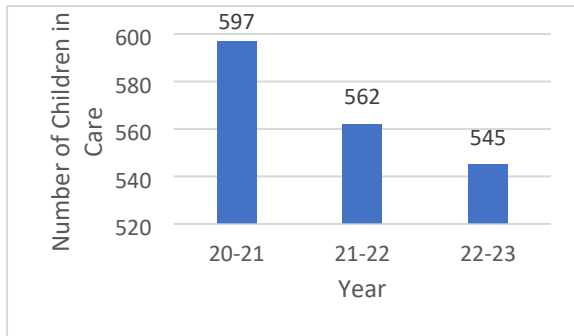
Foster carers from independent fostering agencies continue to express interest in being carers for Rotherham – demonstrating the service are perceived as an attractive option for carers – and whilst recruitment is ultimately important to bridge the increase of children in care, a lot of work is also put into supporting and retaining current Rotherham foster carers.

- Inclusion of BrightSparks in our retention strategy to optimise digital resources.
- Return to in person events – foster carer forums, celebration events and activities.
- Increase in financial offer – option of enhanced and complex care payments for foster carers caring for children with more complex emotional, behavioural and/or health needs.
- Over 30% of the fostering cohort are supported by the Mockingbird Family Model with a plan to extend this to over 50% in the next 6 months.
- Rotherham Foster Carer Association – run by Rotherham foster carers, for Rotherham foster carers.
- Improved consultation with carers through forums, working together group and the foster carer health check survey.
- 31% decrease in deregistrations from previous reporting year

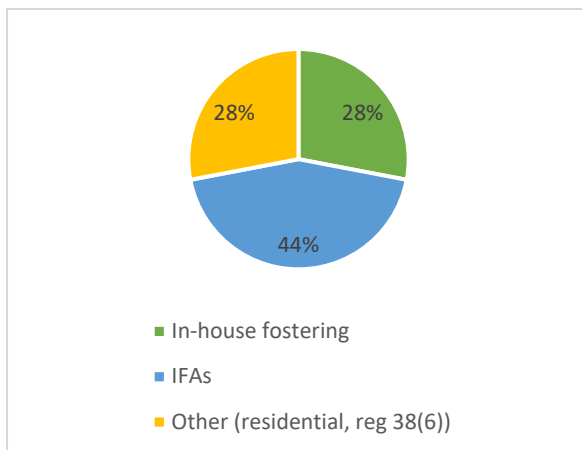
2. Rotherham's children in care population and impact on fostering

Children in Care population

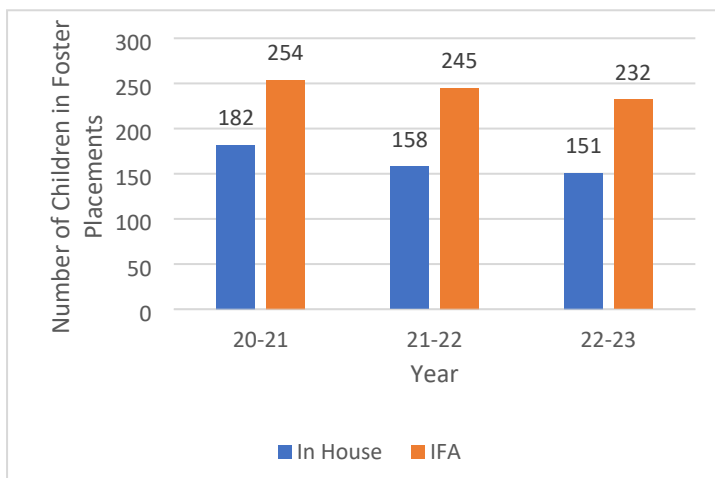
The graph below provides a snapshot of the number of children in care over recent years and highlights how as of 31 March 2023 this has increased to 545 children in care.



Proportion of children in care in in-house foster placements, independent fostering agencies, and residential provision on 31 March 2023



Number of children in foster placements (in-house and independent fostering agencies)



Placement stability, disruption, and unplanned placement endings

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 child in care. Rotherham Fostering's robust offer of support includes support groups and access to the Rotherham Therapeutic Team. In addition, in 2022/23 an enhanced payment offer was agreed whereby additional financial support can be used to support a placement where the needs of the child are deemed to require this. This is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the right carers are in receipt of such payments at the right time.

In 2022/23 4 pre-disruption meetings were held in situations where a placement was identified to be at risk of breakdown to determine what immediate support can be offered to support the continuation of the placement.

In the table above we can see that whilst we are very close to the most up to date national average figures regarding children who have experienced 3+ placements in the last 12 months however there has been a reduction this year in the percentage of children in placements that have been stable for at least 2 years and we are below the national average in this area. It should be noted that this data covers children in care in all types of placements, both in-house and IFA foster care and residential, so this figure is not necessarily a reflection of the stability of our in-house foster placements this year.

Looked After Children Placement Stability	March 2020	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	National Average (March 22 – latest data)
%LAC who have experienced 3+ placements within the last 12 months	11.1%	8.9%	9.3%	9.8%	10%
% LAC who have been looked after for two and half years and more in the same placement 2+ years	62.1%	69.2%	70.2%	64.7%	71%

Unplanned Endings & Disruptions

In 2022/23 there were 9 disruption meetings held following the unplanned ending of the placements of 10 children in care.

Key themes included:

- Difficulty in obtaining respite when needed.
- Increasing challenging/ risky behaviour beyond what was manageable for the carers, particularly in the case of sibling groups.
- Foster carers own emotional wellbeing.
- Matching considerations and impact on other fostered children in the home.

- Emergency placement when new into care so information not known / Not enough information provided in initial referral preplacement – changes in CSW also impacting on information available and case management in general.
- Pressure of school being far from placement in terms of transport, time and social impact on child and local authority not supporting a school move
- Impact of covid 19 pandemic and resulting effect on access to support from other carers as well as additional pressures placed on carers.
- The need to make more use of pre-disruption meetings to put in more support at an earlier stage.

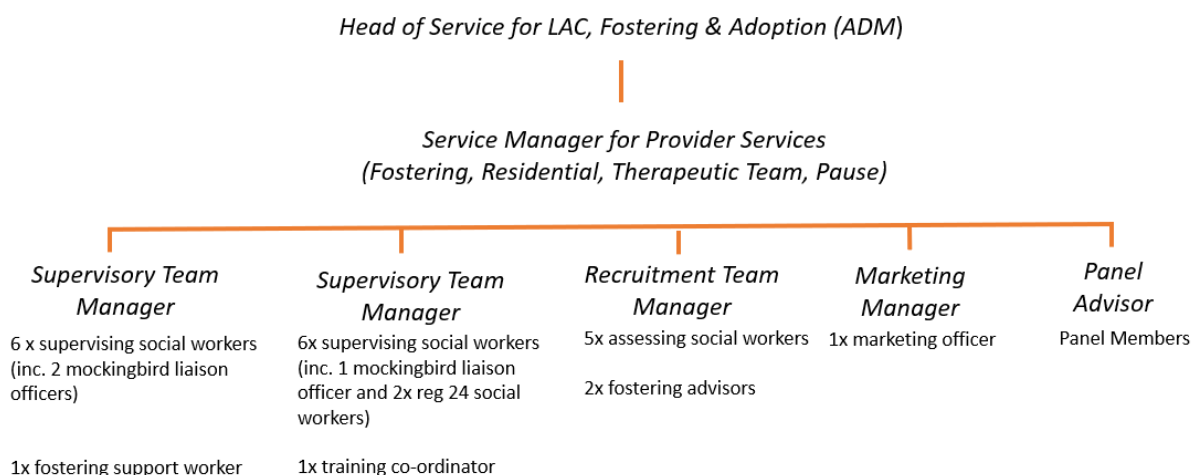
3. The Fostering Rotherham Service

The day-to-day management of the fostering service is the responsibility of the fostering management team. These team managers report to the fostering service manager, the head of service for Looked After Children, the children’s social care service assistant director, Rotherham’s children’s social care service director. As the fostering service is a local authority council service it is also accountable to the council’s cabinet. The fostering service provide regular updates to the senior management team and the corporate parenting panel.

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

In line with the regulations, the service has a Fostering Panel chaired by a skilled, independent, and experienced social work professional. The Panel considers and makes recommendations about the suitability of foster carer applicants and existing foster carers’ ongoing terms of approval and are advised about foster carers leaving the agency. The service also employs a panel advisor who is a suitably experienced social worker with a strong knowledge and background in fostering and who also supports with service development across the whole service.

An overview of the service structure can be seen in the figure below:



The level of experience, expertise, and stability of staff in the fostering service is a strength. It enables the service to build strong relationships with foster carers, children's social workers, as well as other parts of the organisation and partners.

The Fostering Rotherham service is also committed to a workforce that operates a therapeutic approach, with this embedded in the supervision, training and support offered to fostering households. The service has good ties with the Rotherham Therapeutic Team who offer regular training opportunities to the team to continue to embed a therapeutic model across fostering practice. This is an area that will have continued focus in the next financial year.

What types of placements do we offer?

The Fostering Service aims to provide suitable placements for all children and young people who are in care in Rotherham and offers a range of foster placements:

- *Task centred foster placements* for children of all ages needing emergency and short-term placements;
- *Respite care (also known as Second Home care)*, offering time-limited breaks to families;
- *Day care* for looked after children and young people when foster carers need to attend meetings or training events;
- *Long term permanence placements* for children and young people who cannot return to birth family and where adoption is not the plan;
- *Parent and child placements* - these placements are to assist in assessing parenting abilities to safely care for the baby and where appropriate to help in developing parenting skills
- *Rotherham's Mockingbird Family Model*. This is an extended family model that provides second home care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. Within each Mockingbird Hub there will be a Hub Home Carer whose role it is to build strong relationships with everyone in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown, which increases protective factors around the children. They do this through providing regular second home care and planning activities and events which bring the constellation together as a supportive community.
- *Families Together* – short break placements in partnership with parents/carers, for children and young people with a disability.
- *Family and friends foster care (also known as kinship care)* to enable 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;

- *Transition foster care* for children and young people who are currently placed in residential care but for whom their longer-term care plan is foster care. These carers undergo an additional assessment to determine their suitability for the role. They then work alongside the residential care home and the Rotherham Therapeutic Team to gradually transition the child or young person from the residential home and into their fostering family. These carers receive a weekly fee, which accounts for the high level of commitment and skill required, as well as high levels of support from both the fostering service and the Rotherham Therapeutic Team.
- *'Staying Put' arrangements* - foster carers can continue to care for young people after their 18th birthday through a 'staying put arrangement'.
- *Supported lodgings carers* provide family-based support to young people, aged 16-21 (25 if in full time education), who cannot live with their own families and who are not yet ready for independent living. In supported lodgings, a young person is provided with a room of their own in a private home.

The Roles and Responsibilities of the Different Fostering Teams

Fostering Panel

The fostering panel is responsible for helping to maintain quality services for children in care and making recommendations about Rotherham foster carers. The panel advisor is responsible for the day-to-day management of the panel system. This includes liaison between the fostering service and panel, monitoring the performance of the panel, and overseeing the administration of the fostering panels to ensure that they work effectively and meet required timescales set out in the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.

The panel advisor also quality assures all reports prepared for panel to make sure they are comprehensive and of a suitable standard to be presented, ensuring compliance of Rotherham Council's fostering policies and procedures, and that all relevant documents are available for panel members within statutory and regulatory timescales.

The fostering panel makes recommendations on subjects, such as:

- Whether people applying to foster should be approved as foster carers, and the terms of their approval.
- Whether foster carers, following an annual review, should continue to be approved as foster carers – in Rotherham, reviews are presented to panel at least once every three years following the carer's first review.
- A review of approval following an allegation, complaint, or a serious concern about a foster carer. In some cases, the panel may recommend that the carer's is deregistered.
- Whether family members or friends should be approved as foster carers for specific children. This is known as a Regulation 24 placement.

Who is part of the fostering panel?

There are specific requirements about the membership of a fostering panel. Rotherham's fostering panel is composed of people with a range of experiences and backgrounds who have been recruited by the panel advisor, on behalf of the fostering service, to be on a central list. To be quorate, the panel must have at least five people sitting, including:

- The chair or vice-chair.
- A social worker with at least three years of relevant post-qualification experience.
- And at least three other members.

All panels retain a full membership and any issues of quoracy have been managed by central list members joining panels on a temporary basis to cover for absences.

Rotherham's Fostering Panel Membership

The Panel maintained a comfortable number of panel members on a 'Central List.' Each panel member who served for a year had an annual professional development review within the year and the panel Chair's annual appraisal was also conducted by the Panel Advisor and ADM within the year.

The panel membership included members with a range of professional backgrounds and interests including elected members, social workers, members with therapeutic backgrounds, foster carers, and members with LAC health backgrounds. This year there have been several new members recruited to the central list including additional social work members who have ensured there are no issues regarding quoracy due to social work presence. We have also welcomed two new elected members, the fostering training co-ordinator who is able to provide scrutiny regarding training and development and an additional foster carer member who works for an IFA. We have also successfully appointed a Vice Chair which was an action from the previous reporting year. Anne Lindsey is an experienced fostering social worker now retired from the Rotherham Fostering Team with a background in fostering both in LA and IFA settings as well as many years in frontline social work.

The current central list can be seen below:

Name of Panel Member	Type of Member
Maggie Kirwin	Independent Chair (Social Worker, care experienced, foster caring experience)
Anne Lindsey	Independent Vice Chair (Social Worker)
Andrew Bosmans	Independent Member
Ninda Randhawa	Independent Member (Magistrate – Youth Justice Courts, clinical background)
Sandra Griffin	Independent Member (Foster Carer for neighbouring Local Authority)

Lynda Briggs	Named Nurse for Looked After Children
Laura McMenamin	Social Work Member (Learning and Development Team – Practice Consultant)
David Busby	Independent Member (Retired LAC Nurse)
Joanne Kelly	Panel Member (PAUSE Project Team Manager)
Alice Kears	Social Work Member (Rotherham Therapeutic Team)
New Members in 2022/23:	
Karen Smith	Independent Member (Foster Carer for IFA)
Laura Marshall	Social Work Member (Fostering Recruitment Team)
Chantal Higiro	Social Work Member (Pause Team)
Sarah Harpham	Panel Member (Fostering Team Training Co-ordinator)
Katie Brooke	Social Work Member (Children with Disabilities Team)
Cllr Gina Monk	Elected Member
Cllr Lyndsay Pitchley	Elected Member
Members who stepped down in 2022/23	
Jordan Haslam	Independent Member (Care Experienced)
Steven Hawksworth	Independent Member (Social Worker and Care Experienced)
Cllr Robert Bird	Elected Member

The panel needs a member with an education background and would benefit from a member who is care experienced in addition to the panel chair. There is also a need to recruit at least one member from the LGBTQ+ community. This will be the focus of the recruitment activity in 2023-24 in addition to any ongoing recruitment which ensures enough on the central list as people naturally move on due to other commitments.

Quoracy has been an issue at times this year where panel members have been unable to attend at the last minute. This has always been managed with other members stepping in at short notice however in the next financial year it has been decided that each panel will have 6 members scheduled in order to ensure quoracy even in the event that someone cannot attend.

Panel Training and Development

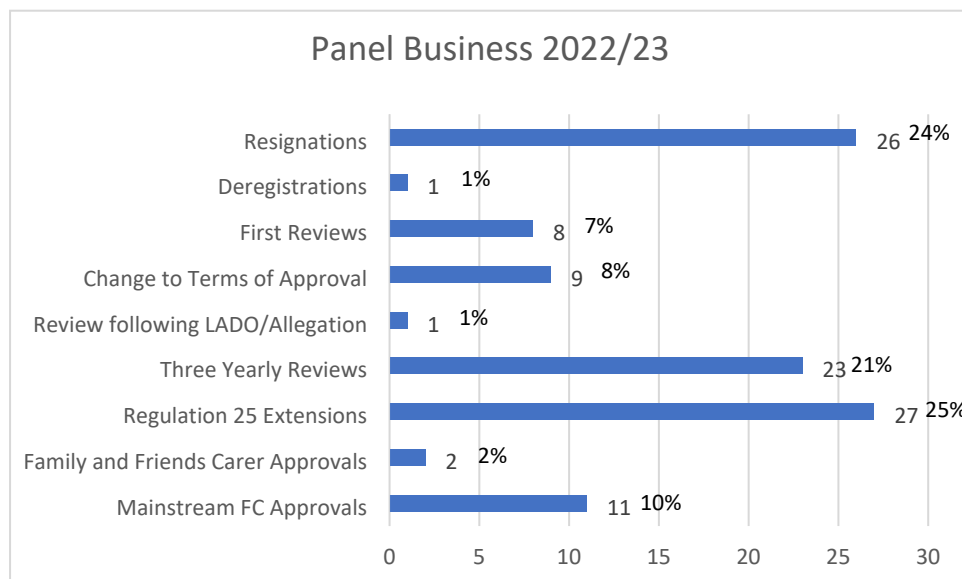
The following training has been made available for Panel Members in 2022/23:

- Panel Members training day in November 2022 which covered Ofsted outcomes, resignations and reasons, regulation 25, parent and child placements and preparing for panel.
- Online PREVENT training.
- Various relevant articles and research papers also sent to Panel Members over the year including links to Coram BAAF online workshops and training courses.

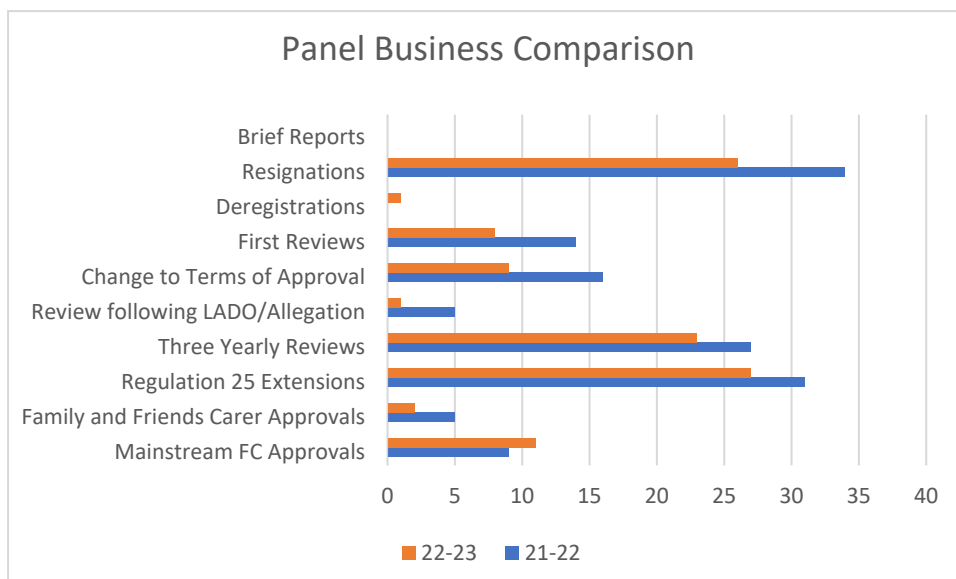
Overview of Panel Business in 2022/23

Panels continued virtually for most of the year however the first in-person panel took place towards the end of March 2023 with a plan to hold alternate panels in-person going forward. This decision was made following consultation with foster carers, panel members and fostering staff and is felt to be an arrangement which will allow the service to benefit from the positives of both formats. In general, more complex cases such as prospective carer assessments and reviews where there has been an allegation or complex situation will be heard at in-person panels and more straightforward items such as three yearly reviews and regulation 25 extension requests will be heard at virtual panels. This arrangement will be reviewed in Autumn 2023.

In the 2022/23 reporting period, there were 108 items within 18 which panels considered the approval of:



The below chart shows a comparison in panel business this year to the previous reporting year. There has been a reduction in items coming to panel with 141 in 21-22 and 108 in 22-23 – this is primarily as a result of a significant reduction in the number of deregistrations in 22-23 in addition to the reduction in first reviews as a result of a lower rate of recruitment in 21-22 to 20-21 (which saw an unusually high number of carers recruited).



Quality Assurance

The Panel are highly motivated to check and challenge by appropriately maintaining the role of 'critical friend' to the department with equal emphasis on both aspects. Where appropriate the Panel will offer flexibility without compromising the fostering regulations and standards. To improve the Panel's role in quality assurance panel members are now asked to comment on report quality within their preparation sheet and this information is fed back to the service via the panel advisor. It would be beneficial if panel's quality assurance role could be strengthened further, and this is something that can be considered for the next financial year.

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

Panel Feedback

Obtaining feedback forms from carers on the panel process has always been a challenge and although these are sent out after every panel, they are mostly not returned. However, of the forms that were returned the feedback is very positive and included comments such as:

'We found everyone to be really friendly and positive which really reassured us. Everybody put us at ease quite quickly.'

'I wouldn't recommend you change anything.'

'I have found the transfer process a lot easier than I thought it was going to be. Rotherham has communicated really well with us from the beginning.'

'The panel were very clear with their questions and made us feel at ease, asking us if we had any questions for them. They were very reassuring.'

'Encouraging and very approachable.'

Panel Chair's Report

The RMBC Fostering Panel continues to evolve and develop in these post pandemic days. Although the virtual panels proved to be efficient and effective in managing large volumes of work there was also a recognition among senior managers and panel members that the experience for new applicants and for those carers involved in complex cases might be enhanced by 'in person' panels. This allows for a more personal interaction with panel members which is particularly important when there are more difficult issues to discuss – such as allegations against a foster carer. Feedback of panel's recommendation to carers in such cases is felt to be enhanced by the more personal touch which being physically in the same space allows.

A decision was made to alternate virtual and in person panels to try and allow for the needs of attendees and the service to be more closely met. The continuation of virtual panels does allow for larger volumes of straightforward cases, such as annual reviews, to be handled as all the preparation is collated by the panel chair ahead of the meeting, meaning larger agendas can be managed on these days. It is hoped, going forward, that foster carers own preferences can be met as to which type of panel they attend (as many gave feedback that they preferred virtual panels which often allow them to more easily meet their child care responsibilities as they are done from home with no travelling time and no requirement for day care).

The appointment of a vice chair has been a welcome development. Anne Lindsay is an experienced panel member who has recently retired from her role as a supervising social worker with RMBC, so whilst being independent she has a wealth of knowledge about the service and many of the carers who come through panel. She can offer flexibility to support the running of the panel. It is anticipated she will chair several panels over the coming year.

The quality of reports and assessments continues to improve and develop which is attributable to the team managers and social workers within the fostering team. The QA function of the panel advisor is also pivotal to this. This ensures that a full suite of documents comes to panel with all the information that panel needs to make its recommendations. There is professional respect in the relationship between the panel and the department with the panel advisor liaising appropriately and professionally to manage any difficulties which arise.

The chair, vice chair and panel advisor are continually exploring the make-up of the panel and what can be done to enhance the diversity of experiences within the central

list. This has led to increasingly creative ideas around recruitment. Panel did experience a challenging time when a shortage of social worker members threatened quoracy on a number of panels but the hard work of the panel advisor and the flexibility of members of the central list meant last minute substitutes were always found. I would like to thank my panel colleagues for their commitment at such times.

Once again, the contribution by members of the business support team has been a major factor in the smooth running of the panel operation. Their efficiency and attention to detail is central to the capacity of panel to make its recommendations. Being involved in a number of panels, I am acutely aware of the professionalism which this team brings to the challenge.

Maggie Kirwin
Panel Chair

Summary of the Fostering Panel

Overall, panel is functioning well and there are no areas of concern.

- The panel processes work smoothly, and papers are generally submitted by staff to panel admin on time.
- The QA process is robust and there is an effective feedback loop from panel through to the service via the panel advisor.
- Panel minutes are of a high standard and are prepared and sent to the chair well within the statutory framework.
- Carers are informed of decisions within statutory timescales.
- The Central List is well balanced and foster carers and applicants find panel to be warm and friendly during panel meetings.

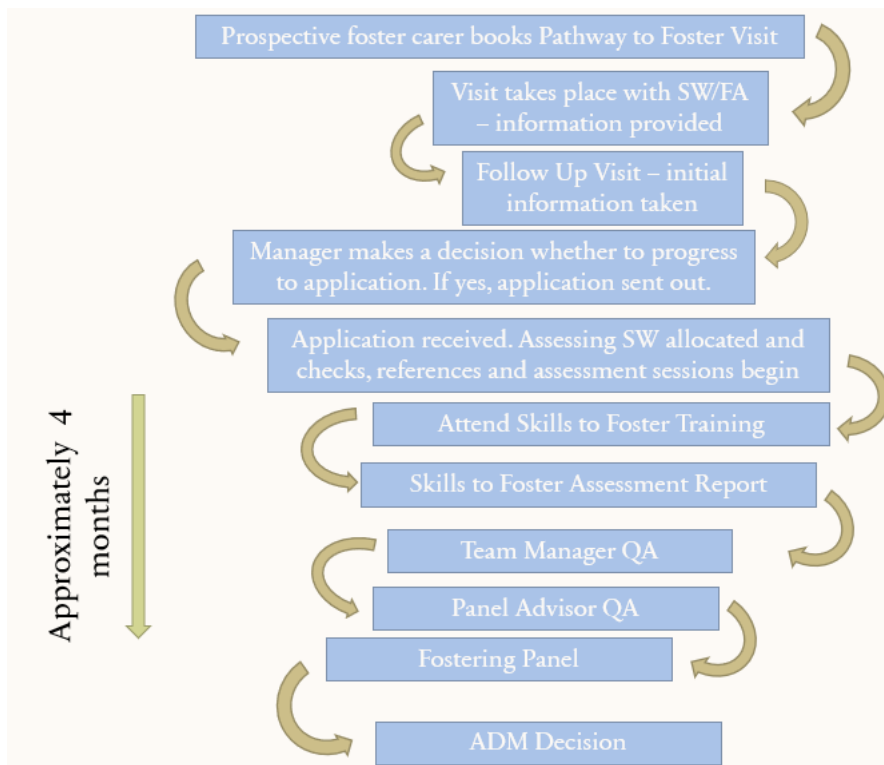
Recruitment Team

The fostering recruitment team has continued to be passionate about recruiting new foster carers through 2022 -2023. We want local people for local children who can open their homes and their hearts to children. We pride ourselves on robust assessment, and knowledgeable and sensitive support to people starting to think about fostering and recruitment. Being accountable, honest, and respectful to all new enquirers is crucial and we are ambitious about what we can achieve in terms of recruitment always striving to engage with as many people as possible.

Recruitment Team and Prospective Foster Carer's Journey

Our fostering recruitment team has 2 fostering advisers, a marketing officer, 5 social workers and an advanced practitioner managed by one team manager. The fostering advisers undertake the first home visit to a new enquirer. When they visit the enquirer will have already spoken with one our colleagues from Bright Sparks. The fostering advisers hold a 'caseload' of enquirers and will visit them on average 2-3 times before compiling a pathway report which makes a recommendation about progressing to the application stage. Once we receive an application form it is allocated to a recruitment social worker who will plan the assessment with an aim of presenting their report to a panel within 4 months. During this four-month period the applicants will attend Skills to Foster training which is run by the recruitment social workers. Other training may

be made available within this period to help prepare the applicants for the role of fostering. As a result of the new processes, we have found that no enquirer is ever lost and those that progress to an application and start an assessment are much more likely to become approved carers. New foster carers have spoken about good customer service, knowledgeable workers who guide them and generally have a positive start to their fostering journey. The image below shows the journey of a PFC in Rotherham.



We recognise that some new applicants have existing skills, and we will make an assessment regarding the most suitable skills level payment. We introduced an offer of skills level 2 for all child work force professionals and a minimum of level 3 for all applicants with previous experience of fostering.

Like many authorities we found recruitment challenging in 2022 – 2023 due to the cost-of-living crisis, the end of the pandemic meaning many people returned to work outside of the home.

Bright Sparks

We have worked with the digital media organisation Bright Sparks since Sept 2019 and renewed our contract with the company in April 2022. As part of the new contract, we worked closely with Bright Sparks to develop a new, ambitious way of working with potential foster carers. From our joint work we recognised that not every potential

foster carer (PFC) who made an enquiry with us and downloaded our information pack was ready to progress to being a foster carer. However, they may be ready in the future. The new approach meant we spent more time working with people in these early stages, answering their questions, sharing resources with them, putting them in touch with other foster carers and helping them to feel confident in moving forward to application stage. If they still need more time, then our bespoke system keeps in touch with them through emails and newsletters as well as a phone call when the time is right for them to come back. Nobody is lost from the enquiry process, but everybody should be worked with at the pace that is right for them whether that means they are contact in 3 months or 2 years.

Bright Sparks continue to manage our online presence on social media, google ads and run our virtual drop ins with support from our fostering staff team.

Place Based Marketing

From January 2023 Fostering Rotherham have benefited from a Team Manager and Marketing Officer partnership focus on marketing and recruitment. An RMBC and Brightsparks co-produced Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been created with a clear plan of how the budget will be spent throughout the financial year to maximise number of approvals for 2023/24.

There has been a re-branding of Fostering Rotherham with new merchandise to support the place-based marketing campaign. Fostering Rotherham have achieved a greater presence within the local community hosting information stands in different wards and handing out leaflets at Parkgate Shopping Centre and RUFC. We have been working closely with SLT leads to draw up fostering pledges from each department. With the support of our Rotherham partners, we have a regular feature in the Fostering Families Digital Newsletter, the Home Matter's Magazine and an article in the e-bulletin that goes to 24 different wards. A fostering advert also featured on the back of the Council Tax letter to all households in the Rotherham borough in March/April. We have undertaken some internal marketing targeting council retirees and we attended a Women's International Day providing a supervising social worker and foster carer to answer some questions about fostering.

We also started to revamp and expand on our selection of leaflets: What Makes a Good Foster Carer? Fostering siblings and Fostering Teenagers, Myth Busting, Families Together, Different Types of Fostering, Fostering Children with Disabilities and a general fostering leaflet including Punjabi, Urdu and Arabic translation calling potential foster carers from ethnic minority groups to action. March marked the beginning of a bespoke recruitment campaign to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds with Fostering Rotherham having a presence at the Asian Bazaar. We were able to use the John Lewis Christmas advert as a platform to launch our own 'Get Your Skates On' campaign skating event, a comment from the male foster carer in the advert and media coverage.

Throughout the final quarter of the year, we have continued to advertise Fostering Rotherham with Heart FM and we now have a regular feature in the Rotherham Advertiser and Weekend newspapers.

We made a successful application to the Rotherham Partnership fund, and this has enabled us to secure a partnership with Rotherham United Football Club and have featured in the programme and advertisement of fostering for Rotherham on two billboards in prime locations in Rotherham.

Several of our foster carers participated in interviews to provide us with new material to use for place based and social media marketing enabling us to continually re-fresh our content.

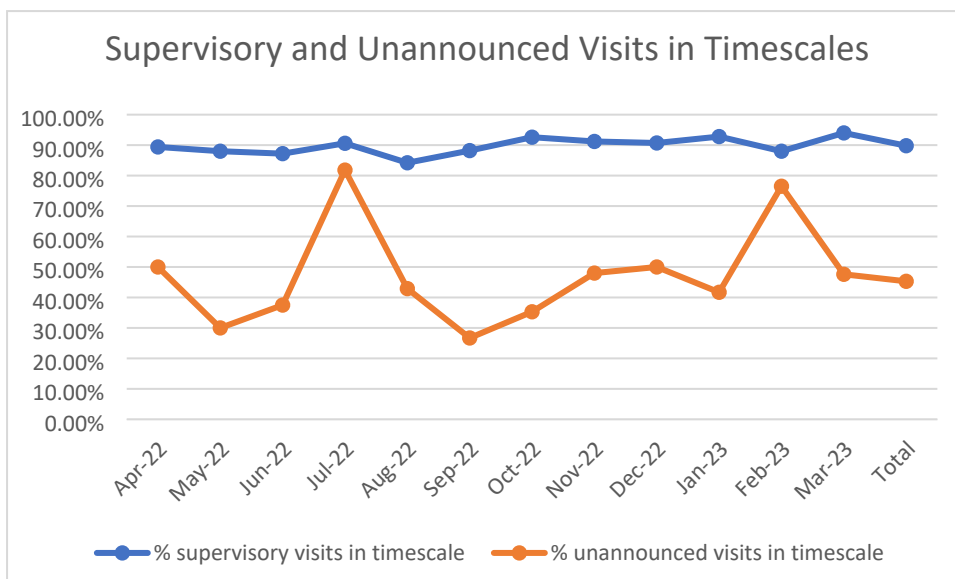
There has been strong senior management support with review of fees and allowances, consideration of new financial rewards and an enticing 'pathway to transfer' for independent foster carers wanting to return to local authority fostering in Rotherham. Fostering has become everybody's business in the council, and we will be continuing to push this agenda into the new financial year.

Fostering Supervisory Teams

Fostering Supervision and Support

Foster care is a demanding task involving significant responsibilities. 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. We are continuing to work on providing clear evidence as to why placements are on hold and to ensure that these on hold arrangements are regularly reviewed to ensure that placement capacity across the service is always as high as is can be.

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. The graph below shows how many visits were completed within timescales each month in 2022-23. On average 89% of supervisory visits were completed within timescales within the review period however an average of only 45% of unannounced visits were completed within timescales. This is something that we will be working to improve significantly in 2023-24 as we introduce an improved performance monitoring process specific to fostering.



Support Groups and training are encouraged and facilitated by the supervisory teams as a significant part of our support offer. More information will follow about our support group and training activity.

All foster carers are required to have an annual review, and these are all signed off by the ADM with panel also having oversight at least every three years and when there has been a disruption or allegation.

Private Fostering

In 2022/23 there have been 11 private fostering arrangements that we have been aware of and where assessments have been completed to ensure children are safe. A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately, without the involvement of a local authority for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative (grandparents, sibling, aunt/uncle or step-parent) with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

The importance of raising awareness of private fostering living arrangements across the organisation and within the local authority is crucial to safeguarding children and young people in the region. During this review period there have been several activities undertaken by the service's marketing officer to help raise awareness in the community. This has included the distribution of leaflets to NHS providers and community venues and adverts on social media platforms. We also asked heads of service to promote this through their services and promoted on fostering information stands. In addition to this, the fostering service has distributed information and resources to all CYPS staff via internal email in place to help raise awareness of this type of living arrangement.

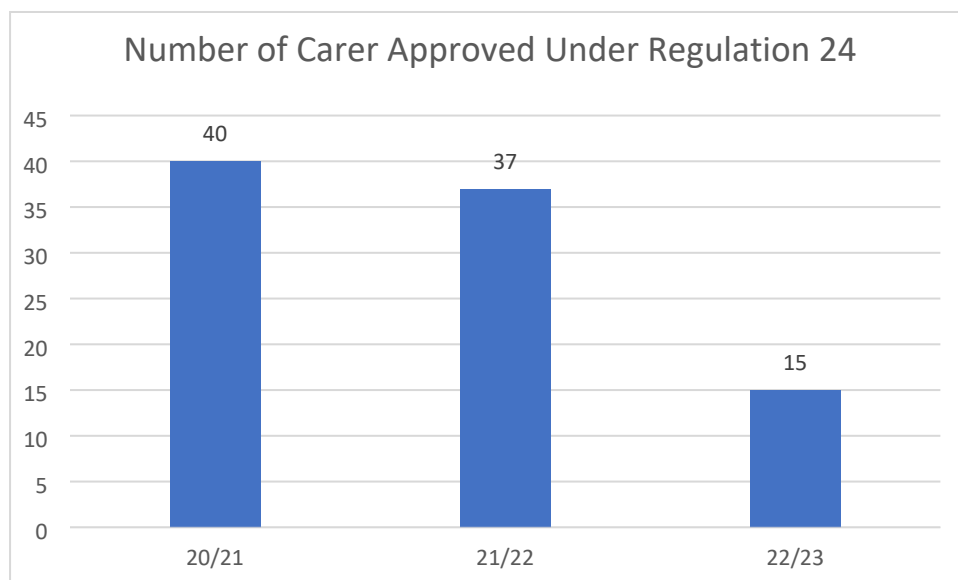
Several fostering social workers have upskilled in this review period to be able to complete private fostering assessments when notifications have been referred through. This has been a benefit to the fostering service in that we have moved away from these types of fostering assessments being the responsibility of one person. It has given staff members the opportunity to learn and develop skills and knowledge of

different aspects of working within a local authority fostering setting. In addition to this, meetings have taken place with front line and locality team managers to consider the internal working processes of private fostering; whether this is working effectively and where we can make improvements to streamline this to ensure drift and delay does not occur at the point of notification to allocation and completion. This work is on-going and has involved key members of staff connected to internal recording systems.

Family and Friends Carers

The service historically had two dedicated family and friends supervising social workers named in the team who were responsible for assessing and supporting connected carers approved temporarily under regulation 24. However, in this reporting year, work has been completed with the staff team to upskill them in terms of completing full family and friends' assessments to support the needs of the service and to further support staff development opportunities.

Whilst there has been a gradual decrease in the numbers of carers being approved under regulation 24 as reflected in the chart below, the number of type of placement can vary month to month. However, to support locality care teams in making decisions to place children and young people under regulation 24 the fostering service has done a significant amount of work in supporting teams to better understand when it is appropriate to use regulation 24 for family-based placements. The downward trend as can be seen below is reflective of this work and the work completed with team managers and Heads of Service across social care.



Towards the end of the reporting year there has been a recognition that regulation 25 used to extend the temporary approval of a connected person has not always been used in 'exceptional' circumstances as the regulation dictates. There has therefore been a push to ensure that regulation 25 is being used only in 'exceptional' circumstances and that assessments both in locality and fostering teams are being completed in a timely manner, ideally within the 16-week approval period wherever

possible. As a result of this we have started to see a significant decrease in the number of regulation 25 reports being presented to fostering panel.

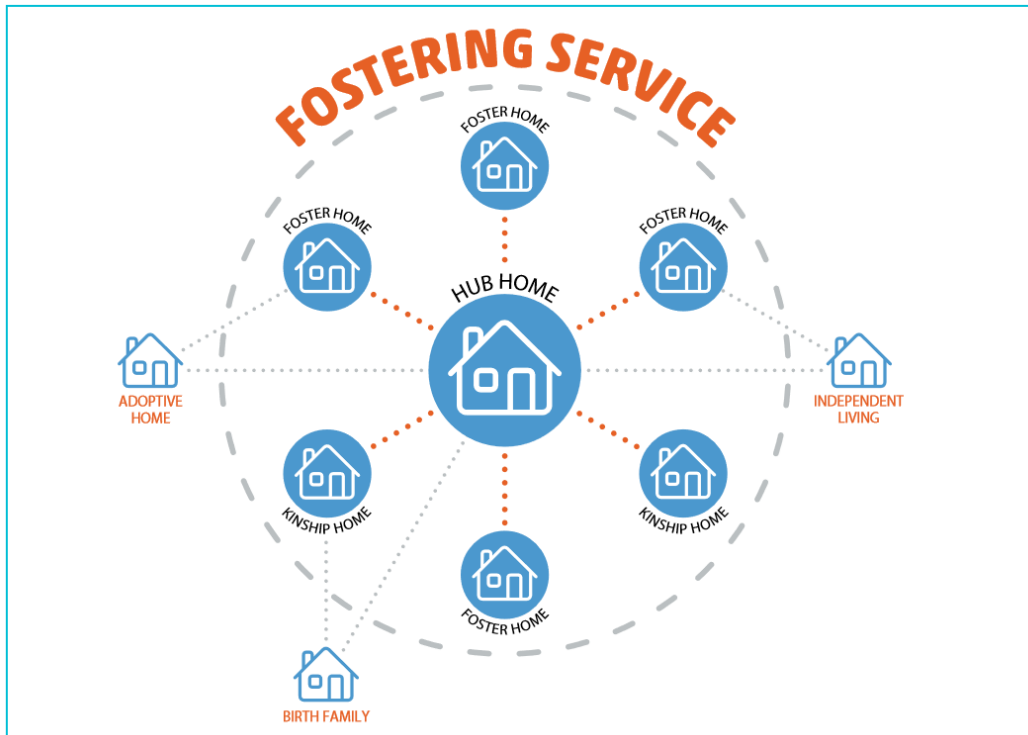
To further support work carried out with family-based placements approved under regulation 24, there has been a significant amount of work undertaken to embed a collaborative approach to this placement type across social care and fostering but not excluding other service areas connected to health, education and housing. Social care and fostering meet on a regular basis throughout the period of temporary approval to ensure that children, young people and their families feel supported, professionals are clear about their role and what steps need to be taken during the initial 16 week period to complete assessment work to achieve permanence for children (where possible) with extended family members.

There is a recognition within the service of the unique difficulties that connected carers often face when caring for children within their family network and therefore the need for targeted support. It is acknowledged that family carers may often struggle financially to meet the demands of caring for children connected to them when thinking about the cost-of-living crisis. Therefore, the fostering service have clear finance processes in place to assist families in caring for children under regulation 24 and post SGO or CAO being granted. In addition, the fostering service has formed close links with RMBC's Post-SGO Service to provide connected carers with access to support groups with other carers in more similar positions. There is also help and support available to family carers in terms of access to a comprehensive training package to help them skill up to manage responsibilities that come with the fostering task such as recording, facilitating family time, and developing their understanding of safeguarding.

Mockingbird Family Model

Some of our Rotherham fostering families are part of The Fostering Network's Mockingbird Family Model. This is an extended family model that 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.



Benefits to both carers and looked after children and young people include:

- Significantly improved placement stability and reduction in placement breakdown.
- Stronger relationships that support looked after children, young people and fostering families.
- The provision of a robust and resilient structure, which offers support through times of crisis and transition.
- Improved second home care.
- Increased skills, confidence, and role satisfaction for foster carers.
- Higher levels of foster carer retention and recruitment.
- Improved experience of peer support.
- Better experience of birth family contact, including siblings.
- Costs saved and costs avoided.

Rotherham launched its first Mockingbird constellation in May 2018 with a second following shortly afterwards, and then a third being set up in July 2021. One of the hubs also hosts a weekly term time youth club which all RMBC foster carers can attend even if they are not within the Mockingbird hubs. The youth club is well attended and is a popular addition to our core offer.

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

There are plans to continue to expand the Mockingbird Family Model to include two additional constellations in 2023-24. This will require the appointment of two Mockingbird Hub families. Each constellation will comprise of up to ten satellite families, including a maximum of 18 looked after children.

Feedback on the hubs has been positive from both satellite carers and children with comments such as:

“[The hub carers] are an essential part of the team, both for us and the young person we care for. Their respite care and the advice they give are an integral part of our current placement. Speaking from personal experience, I'm sure they actively save placements from breaking down.”

“[Hub Carers] have provided us with practical help on numerous occasions. They are always pleasant and a joy to work with as part of the Mockingbird Group and always help where possible. [LAC] loves to go and stay over and always comes home saying she has had a really good time.”

“The Mockingbird Hub has been invaluable for us and our two foster children. We are first time carers and we can honestly say that the help and support from [Hub Carer] has been a lifeline for us. She's such a good listener and never offers advice without working really hard to understand the situation first. She is able to offer different perspectives on situations to help us understand what might be going on for the child, as well as for us. She is also very human in her approach and can empathise very well with frustrations we have - however big or small! Our children are calmer when they come back from a sleepover, and it means we can enjoy some time off without worrying about them while they are away or what they will be like when they come home.”

4. Recruitment and Supervisory Activities and Outcomes 2022/23

Number of Enquiries, Approvals, and Deregistration's in 2022/23

Key figures to note:

- 1300 information packs downloaded.
- 251 initial enquiry calls completed.
- 90 (approximate) households interested in fostering visited
- 11 newly approved mainstream foster carers for a range of placement types including short term, parent and child, long term and second home.
- 9 ongoing assessments by year end
- 27 deregistrations – 31% decrease from previous reporting year

In 2022/23 we changed our approach to new enquiries. Whereas in the previous years we were visiting people in their home to have the first discussion about fostering in 2022/23 we made a change and our colleagues in the Bright Sparks agency undertook the first discussion with new enquirers.

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

	Downloaded information packs and financial guides:	Information held:
2021/22	1217	257
2022/23	1529	251

Despite a difficult climate our downloads have increased significantly and our calls with new people has remained steady. It is worth noting that there was a period when recruitment activity was stopped in respect following the death of HM The Queen.

Within our new processes for 2022/23 Prospective Foster Carers (PFC) are engaged by the BrightSparks team who book an Information Call. This call is to go through the benefits of fostering with Rotherham and to help people make an informed decision about moving to the next stage of the process. At the next stage RMBC fostering advisers meet with the PFC in their home. We call this meeting a Pathway Visit. Instead of just holding one meeting we offer the option of multiple visits at this stage ensuring we go at the right pace for the family or individual.

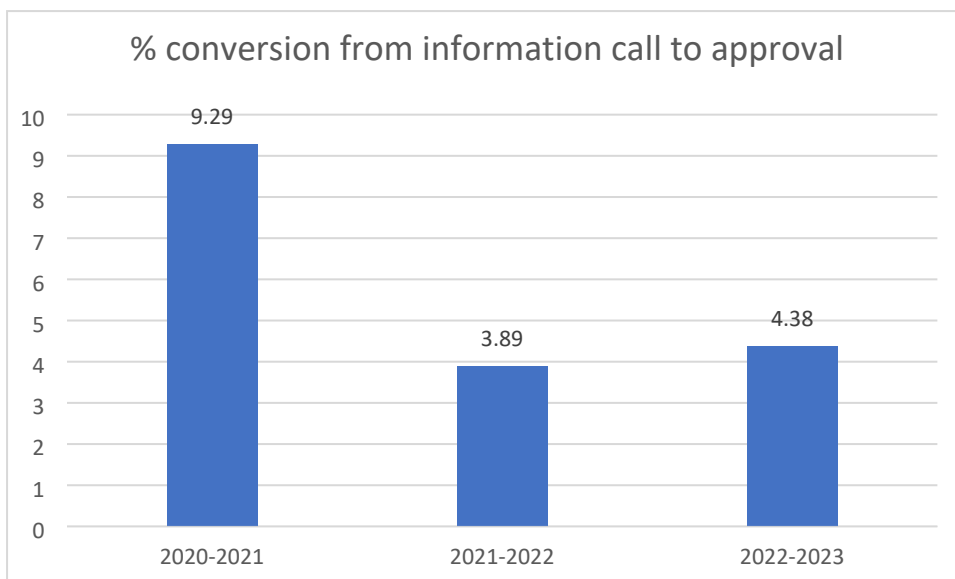
The table below shows how our conversion from Information call to Pathway visit remains similar to the previous 2 years though, as will be detailed in the next section, our conversion to approval has been slightly higher in 2022/23.

2020/21	Information Visits	226
2021/22	Information Visits	257
2022/23	Information Call	251
2020/21	Follow Up Visits	93
2021/22	Follow up Visits	92
2022/23	First Pathway Visits	94

Approvals

In 2022/23 we approved 11 fostering households; this is an increase on the previous reporting year (10 fostering households in 2021/22).

Our conversion rates for the last 3 years can be seen in the graph below:



Whilst the increase in 2022/23 is modest, it is an increase, and we hope to build on this moving into 2023/24.

Nationally it is noted that there have been reducing numbers of applications for mainstream fostering over the last 5 years and that in both Local Authority and IFAs a large number of enquiries are not translating into applications. The significant increase in cost of living over the last year is likely to have had a further impact on this and it is therefore imperative that we do what we can as a service and a council more broadly to support foster carer financially in order to remain competitive in the market and to retain the foster carers in our current cohort.

Family and Friends Carers

The number of family and friends carers approved as full foster carers has remained reduced slightly with only 1 carer being approved in the reporting year. A reduction compared to previous years as can be seen below:

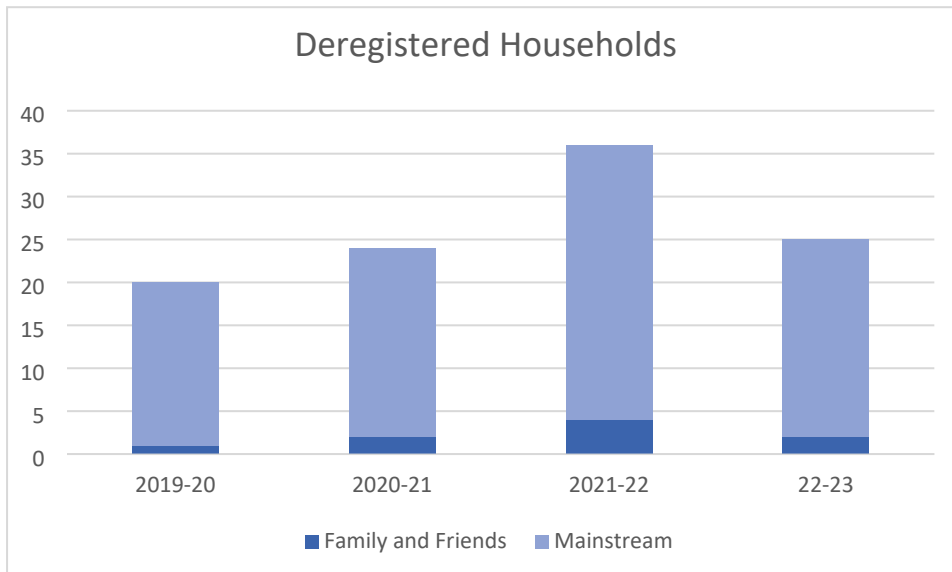
2020/21	2
2021/22	3
2022/23	1

It is anticipated that the number of family and friends carers being approved as full foster carers may increase in the next reporting year as there is a drive to use Regulation 25 extensions to temporary approval as foster carer only in exceptional circumstances meaning some carers may need to be fully approved to ensure placements remain regulated.

De-registrations

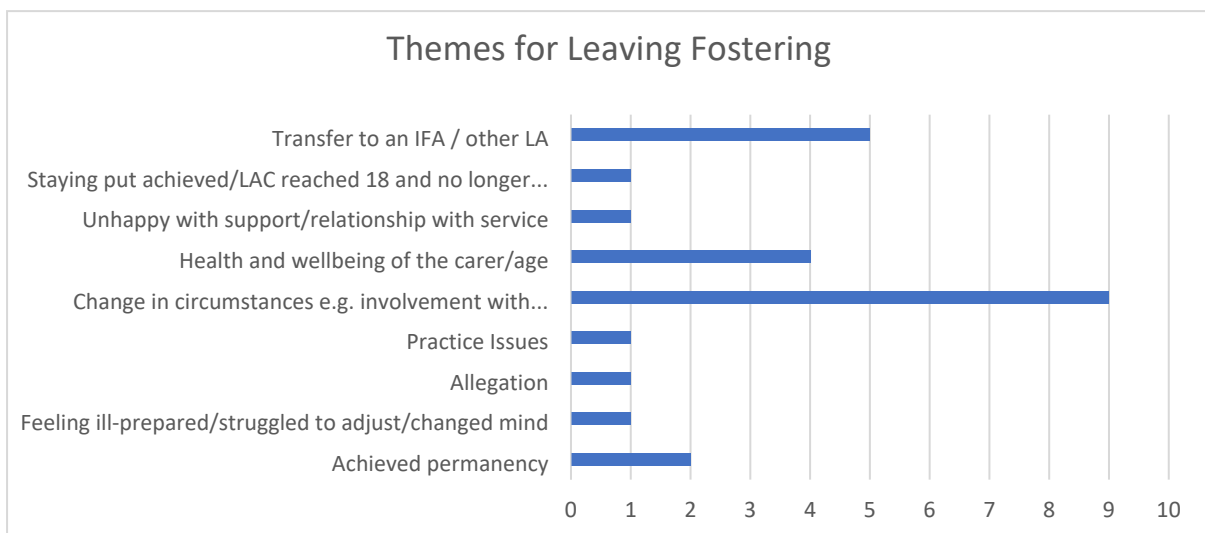
We had a 31% decrease in households deregistering during 2022/23 compared to the previous year bringing the number back to the region of the previous years (see figures below). A total of 25 households, including 2 family and friends carer deregistered. 23

households were carer resignations and 1 was deregistered by Fostering Panel/ADM and 1 was a carer resignation we would likely have deregistered had the carer not resigned first.

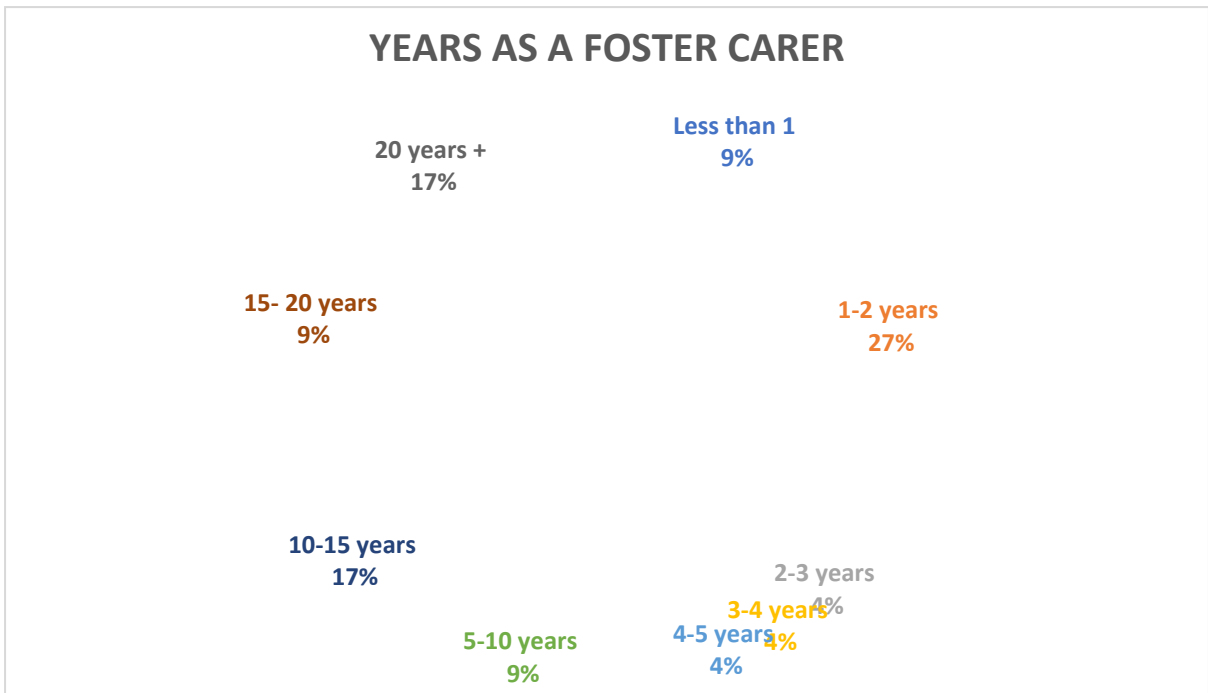


	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family and Friends	1	2	4	2
Mainstream	19	22	32	23

Within the 25 deregistrations in 2022/23 the following themes were identified as reasons for leaving fostering.

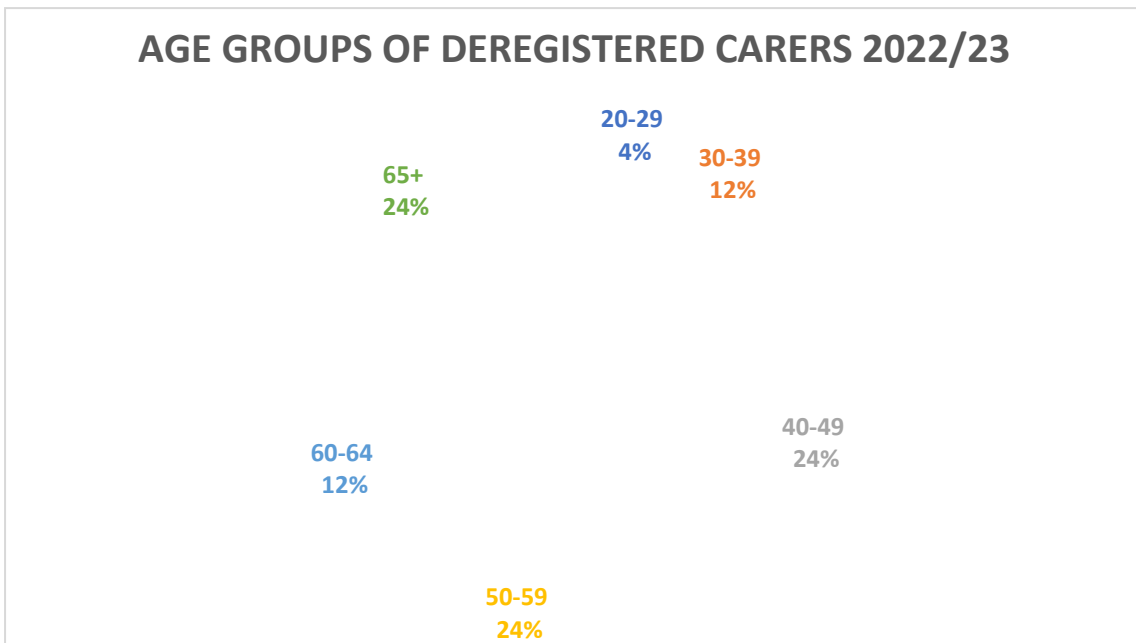


The following chart shows deregistrations broken down by years as a foster carer (mainstream carers only – excludes family and friends who obtained SGO).



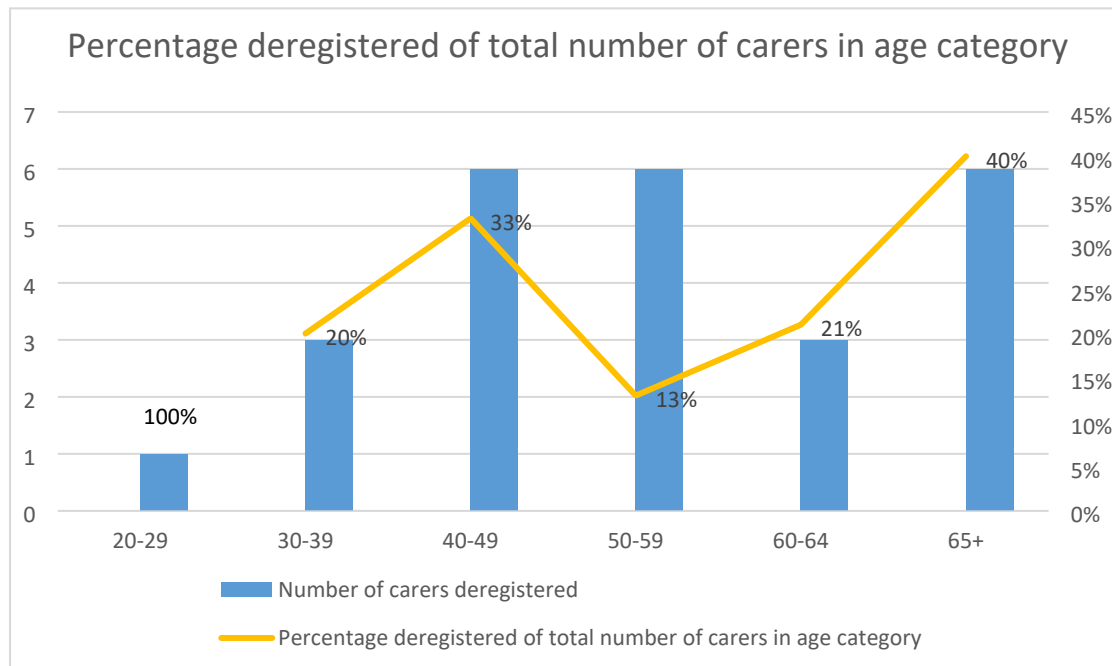
36% of those deregistered had fostered for less than two years, however this figure is not too far away from the national average of 31% (DfE 21-22 - most recent data). We rate significantly better than national average for number of carers fostering with us for over 10 years with the national average being 28% (DfE 21-22 - most recent data) and our data showing that 43% of carers deregistered had been with us for over 10 years.

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



Nationally the largest group of all approved foster carers were in their 50s and almost 65% of those deregistered were over 50 (DfE 21-22). This is also reflected in our resignation data with 60% of carers resigning being over 50 (main carer age at point of deregistration).

The graph below breaks down this information further, showing the number of carers resigning as a percentage of the total number of carers in each age category.



The 20-29 age bracket has not been included so as not to skew the graph – this figure was 100% as we only had one couple in this age bracket who resigned due to moving abroad for work. As can be seen on the graph below, although the 50-59 age bracket had one of the highest deregistration numbers, this is the lowest percentage of total number of carers because we have more carers in this age bracket than any other. The 40-49 age bracket also shows a high number of losses, and this is a more significant percentage of our carers in this group. This is impacted however by the two deregistrations that came because of family carers obtaining permanence and therefore would be a lower percentage (22%) when these are taken into account. The highest losses as a percentage of total carers are in our 65+ age range which reflects the number of carers who naturally choose to retire due to age or ill health.

Most recent national data (DfE 22-23) reflect the same trend where those carers in their 50s had the highest proportion of deregistrations (35%) and those in their 20s had the lowest (2%). However, when looking at the proportion of carers who deregistered within each age bracket, those in their 50s had the lowest proportion of deregistrations (22%) and those in the 20 to 24 age brackets had a similar percentage of deregistrations to those aged 65 and over (16%).

We can conclude that the majority of our deregistrations for 2022/23 were unavoidable and as a result of natural change in circumstances – for the most part this was due to carer’s long term commitment to children either through legal permanency or having cared for a child until adulthood and also due to carers whose health and age has led to retirement. Where other issues resulted in a resignation or deregistration, the service had generally done what they could to support the carers.

Our data shows that we are generally in line with national averages in respect of the age that people leave fostering and the length of time that they foster for. We need to continue to carefully assess and then support our new carers to reduce resignations

within the first two years post approval. We then need to ensure we think creatively about how we can retain those people who have fostered for several years and are often entering a new time in their lives (retirement/grandchildren etc.). This will be a focus of work across the service in the next financial year.

Engagement, Foster Carer Development and Retention Work

As a service we recognise how crucial it is to ensure our foster carers are adequately equipped, trained, and supported to do their vitally important work. The highlights of our work this year include:

- **Support Groups:** (evening, daytime, and baby carers group) Three groups facilitated on a regular basis giving carers the opportunity for participation and peer support. Utilising a hybrid of both face-face and virtual mediums to suit all carers needs and family situations.
- **Peer support:** foster carers routinely buddied up with other carers, who provide coaching and peer support, particularly to new carers foster carers.
- **Sons and Daughters groups:** a monthly group 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, in recognition of the crucial role they play in fostering families and placement stability.
- **Foster Care Association:** A charity run by Rotherham foster carers, for Rotherham foster carers, supported by the service. Multiple events and activities have been supported across the year, bringing foster carers and LAC together including:
 - Weekly youth club
 - Forest School activities
 - Summer Fair
 - Coach trips to York and Scarborough
- **Activities and events:** An annual diary of events for fostering families, foster carer led in consultation with the department. This years' events have included:
 - Easter egg competition
 - Walk at Rother Valley Country Park
 - Picnic at Langold Park
 - Children in need event
 - Mockingbird hub celebration event with Department of Education
 - Skating event – drawing on the John Lewis Christmas Advert
 - Gifts to celebrate sons and daughter's week and hampers for each carer of the festive period in December.
- **Consultation:** We believe that consultation with foster carers is essential to ensuring foster carers feel supported in their task and ultimately enables us to retain carers. There are several ways that we consult with carers on a regular basis:
 - Working Together Group - virtual meeting held quarterly providing the opportunity for a small group of foster carers to meet with a Team Manager and the Service Manager. Actions for the service are then taken from this meeting.
 - Foster Carer Forums – this year saw the return of face-to-face forums every other being in person. Forums are a quarterly opportunity to come

together as a whole fostering community to share updates and feedback to carers and to celebrate good practice and learn together.

- Foster Carer Health Check – introduced for the first time in 22-23 the health check is a survey which covers all aspects of fostering in Rotherham and allows carers to provide anonymous feedback on the issues that most impact on them. The information gathered from the health check in December 22 was analysed by Bright Sparks Agency as part of their contract around retention and highlighted some key areas, primarily foster carer finance that we were then able to respond to as a service. The health check also demonstrated that most carers feel very well supported by their supervising social worker and other carers in the fostering community.
- **Training** - Our training and development co-ordinator understands the unique needs of foster carers and can obtain training accordingly. Fostering is an ever changing and complex landscape where we hold in balance the dynamic of the needs of the specific children in a foster carer's home with the needs of the foster carer themselves. A 'one size fits all' approach to training and development is not sufficient, therefore, we offer a wide range of training courses which enable foster carers to not just meet the National Minimum Standards, but to grow into their potential with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. Our training is also linked to our payment for skills model, making it clear to foster carers what they need to do to develop their skills to progress in their fostering career. Below are some of the key highlights across our training provision from 2022/23:
 - 867 instances of training and development have been undertaken (not including some courses where partner agencies have not yet shared number)
 - 56 different courses offered to foster carers (not including virtual school courses or e-learning)
 - 221 individual carers attended/completed learning activity.
 - Carers continue to appreciate the blended approach to learning activities – virtual face to face and E learning. The extended provision and range of e-learning continues to prove invaluable in meeting development courses for carers who find it difficult to access the more traditional face-to-face provision.
 - There is a strong link with the Rotherham Therapeutic Team and the Virtual School which allows us to support carers to attend training delivered by these teams.
 - Carers tell us that their highlights are courses delivered by care experienced adults (Through the Kids Eyes, Impact of Sibling Separation) and those courses delivered by trainers who are also foster carers themselves such as the Men who Foster session.
 - New courses for this year have included LGBTQ+ awareness and Transgender awareness which has been commissioned in from a local charity in Sheffield due to the increasing number of our young people who were able to tell us that they identified in this group. In consultation with carers and the fostering team new courses Teenage Attachment, Fuelling Little Tums and Grief and loss were also introduced which were well received.

- There is a good balance in most accessed courses between practical fostering practice matters such as first aid and recording, and matters related to supporting the emotional and behavioural development of children. Most highly attended courses were First Aid, Recording and Safer Care and other popular courses were:
 - CCE
 - Drugs and Alcohol awareness
 - Sexual health
 - E safety
 - LADO
 - Teenage Attachment
 - FASD

5. Key Challenges, Developments, Targets and Actions for 2023/24

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

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

Recruitment

- Grow the staff team to help meet the higher demand for assessments and continue to grow placed based marketing.
- Further develop the fast-track assessment process for existing foster carers moving from other agencies.
- Introduce the Form F assessment template to the service.
- Improve handovers and buddy system for new carers with a recognition that this is key to ensure a smooth transition into fostering.
- Renew video content to share with new enquirers so they can hear first-hand from foster carers and staff in the fostering team.
- Ambition to recruit 20 households in 2023/24.

Fostering Panel

- Improve fostering panel's role in quality assurance with a new QA template and QA time during panel meetings. Themes can be fed into quarterly panel business meetings to ensure actions are followed through into change in practice.
- Recruit additional panel members to ensure better representation – specially from the LGBTQ+ community and from the education sector.
- Review and strengthen the long-term matching panel report and process.

Supervisory Team

- Increase Mockingbird constellations with a plan to add and fourth and fifth.
- Work with Bright Sparks to strengthen and embed our retention strategy.

- Embed exit interviews for foster carers.
- Widen the fostering family activities to include a more diverse range of cultural celebrations.
- Revise the matching process and placement agreement to strengthen decision making around linking and matching.
- Revise and strengthen duty process, with the aim to recruit a member of staff specifically to focus on fostering duty.
- Improve foster carer wellbeing offer in recognition of the highly expectation and challenge the role entails and the need to support carers to prevent burnout and improve retention.
- Reduce the number of regulations 25s by working with locality teams to promote better planning and by encouraging fostering panel to only approve regulation 25 extensions in 'exceptional circumstances' as the regulations dictate.
- Focus on providing clarity around on hold placements, ensuring rationale is clear and a regular review of these decisions is in place.
- Review and revise exemptions and variations process to ensure all parties are clear what is required under regs and that these decisions are made safely.
- Make more use of pre-disruption meetings at an early stage to try to prevent placement disruptions through an early action plan of support.
- Reinstate the annual conference for foster carers.
- Introduce performance and quality assurance monitoring process specific to fostering.

General

- Implement a Fostering Action Plan 2023-24 to drive forward a programme of continued improvement and development.
- Implement a Quality Assurance framework for Fostering.
- Put in place a programme of staff training specific to the Fostering Team to continue to upskill fostering staff and ensure continuous professional development.
- Work on forecasting of placements becoming available both within supervisory and recruitment teams to improve forward planning and try to reduce the number of children being matched at short notice and to strengthen the
- Review and improve the placement matching and planning process to ensure that foster carers have the support in place to enable children to thrive in their care.
- Enhance the Placement stability offer and further embed therapeutic approaches through a closer relationship between the Rotherham Therapeutic Team and Rotherham Fostering.
- Set up a clear quality assurance framework for fostering including an audit template and dip sampling process.
- Review and refresh the skills progression plan to make this clearer for carers and to ensure that the current skills levels available fit with what we need as a service. Included in this a review of how we support new foster carers to enter the service at skills levels beyond level 1.

6. Going Forward

The fostering service will continue to report progress to the Corporate Parenting Panel and Rotherham's Senior Leadership Team.

The Fostering Rotherham service continue to be ambitious in its plans to recruit and retain more local authority foster carers to increase placement choice for its children in care and meet sufficiency plans.

From feedback from children and young people, carers, and wider partners, we know we are making a difference but aim to be excellent. To achieve this, we intend to continually think creatively, and develop and implement service improvements that will result in the highest quality foster care. This will be backed by a strong and forward-thinking communications and campaign plan for recruitment, which together will work to ensure Rotherham's children in care have the best start in life, experience safe and positive care, and can achieve their full potential.