



**Surrey County Council
Fostering Service
Annual Report
2013-2014**

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INTRODUCTION

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) requires that all fostering agencies provide written reports for their Executive or Trustees on a 3 monthly basis. In the case of local authorities, the 'executive' is the Elected Members of the County Council. In Surrey this is done in the form of a Quarterly Report of statistics and information.

The Annual Report is for a wide audience of stakeholders and other interested parties including Elected Members, service users, staff and colleagues from other agencies. It gives details of activity, performance and developments in the Fostering Service over a 12 month period. This report sits alongside the Statement of Purpose that is updated on an annual basis.

Context

The Fostering Service is part of the Countywide Service in the Children's Schools and Families Directorate.

The Fostering Service works to the following legislation, standards and regulations:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Children & Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010 & Update 2013

The Fostering Service has been inspected by OFSTED both in its own right and as part of the Looked After Children inspection in 2010. The last fostering inspection was in January 2011, when we were rated 'good' with 2 'outstanding' features.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 fulfilled commitments made in the White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' in imposing a duty on local authorities to find sufficient, appropriate fostering accommodation in the local area. As a Fostering Service we are committed to provide stability, security and nurture to looked after children and ensure that foster carers are able to meet the individual needs of children. Surrey's placement strategy details how we aim to provide placement choice, which promotes children's welfare, giving preference to placing them within their family & friends network, near to their home, with their siblings (if they are also in care) and making all efforts to ensure that their education is not disrupted

The previous Government put in place the Every Child Matters framework:

- staying safe
- being healthy
- enjoying and achieving
- making a positive contribution
- achieving economic well-being.

These were the outcomes against which fostering services were assessed and Standards set. However, the current coalition Government has initiated a wide range of initiatives seeking to improve outcomes for children in care further with added responsibilities upon

fostering services to be able to evidence the impact of improving outcomes, paying careful attention to the voice of the individual children and consider foster carers as parental figures.

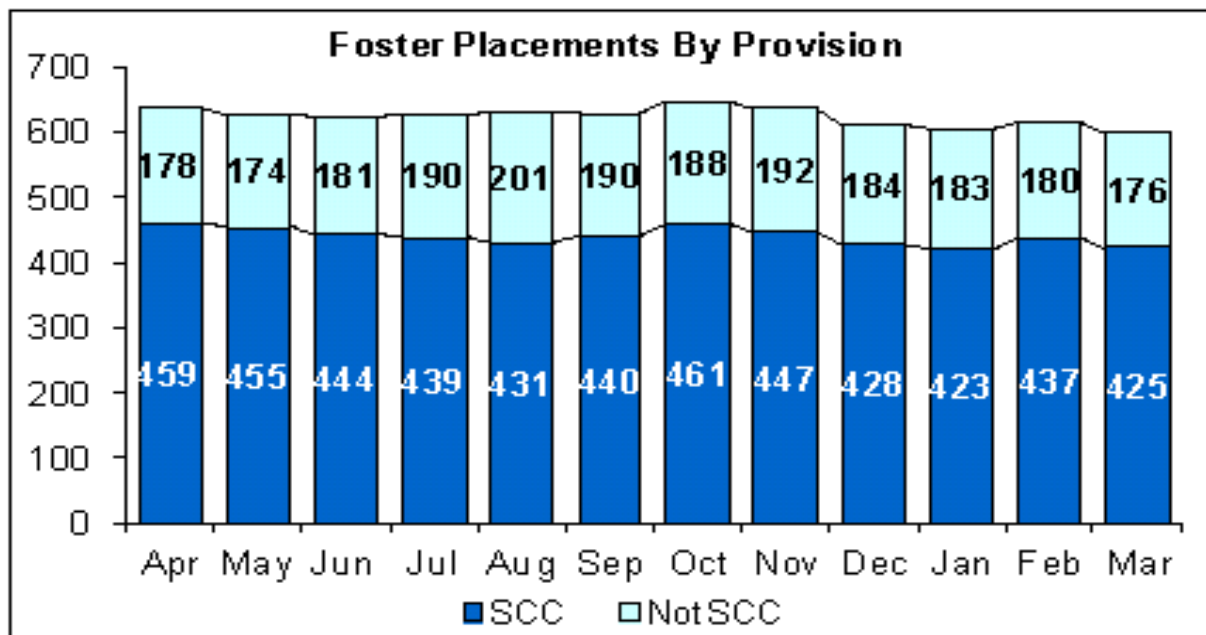
Placement stability is regarded as very high priority, and there are a range of initiatives and training programmes that enhance the ability of foster carers to meet the complex needs of children and young people in foster care

In March 2013 over 60% children needing a foster home were placed with Surrey approved carers. Given that the number of looked After children has risen substantially over the past two years it is positive that such a high proportion of children are placed with Surrey carers.

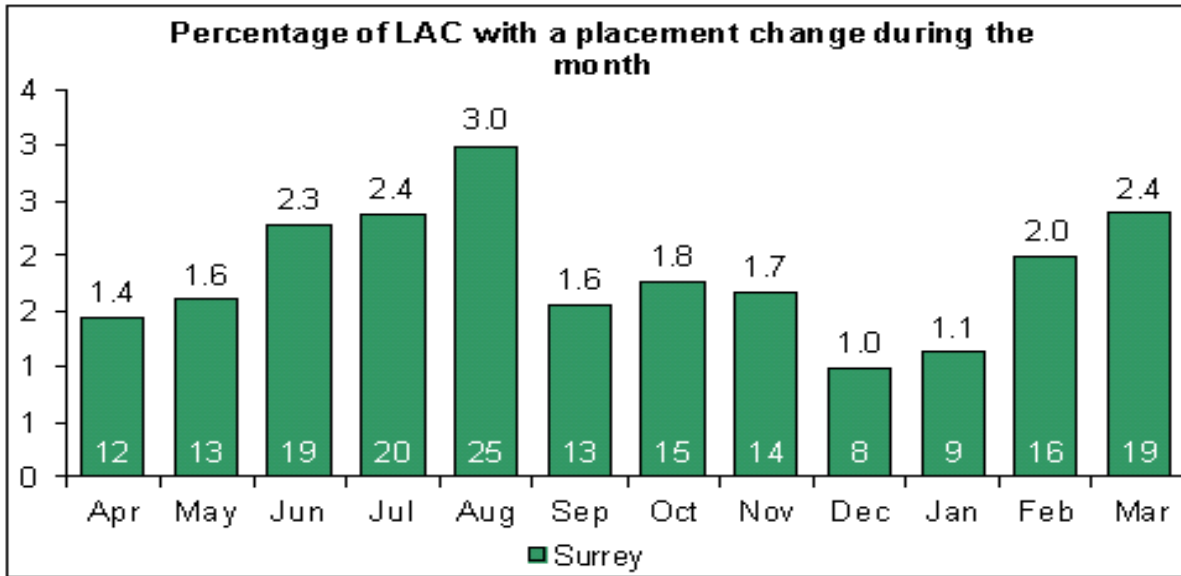
TEAMS IN THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The Fostering Service is based on two sites, in Chertsey and Redhill. The Service has expanded in the last couple of years with specialist schemes and teams focusing on a range of services for children.

The number of Looked After children rose substantially a couple of years ago and has since then remained consistent. The overwhelming majority of children in foster homes are placed with Surrey approved foster carers.



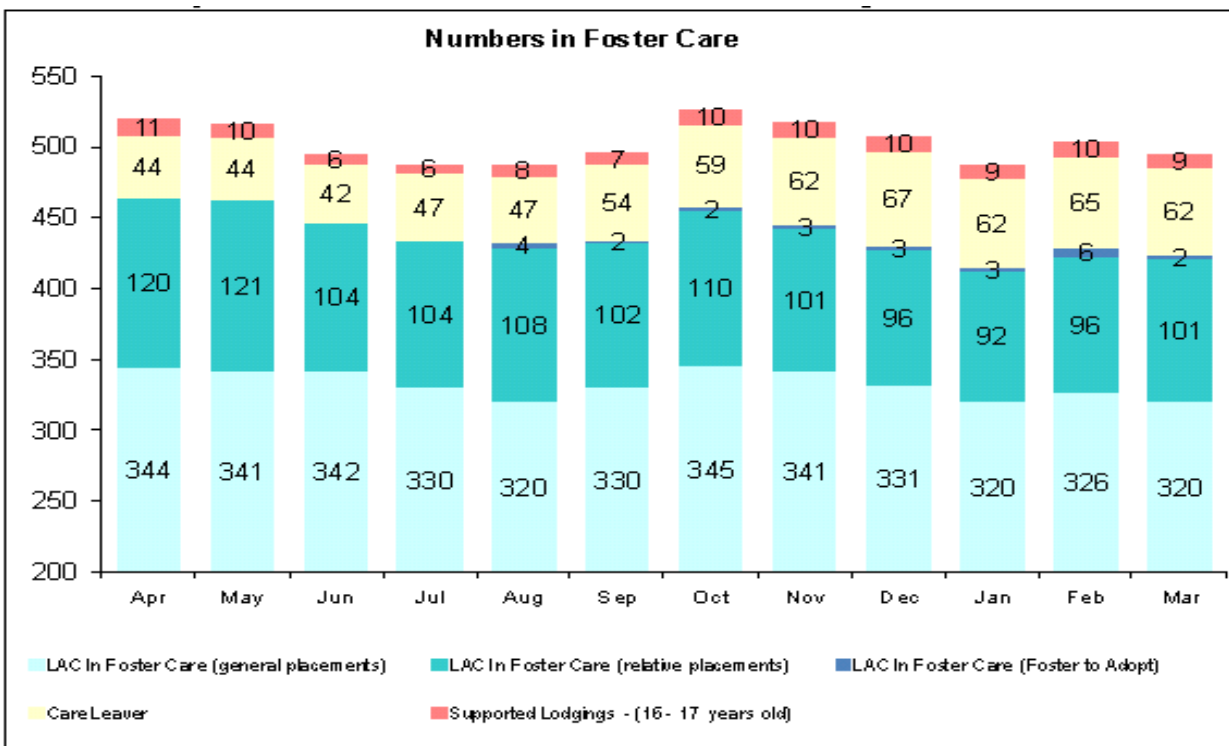
Maintaining stability for children and young people in their foster homes is critical to positive outcomes. The fostering teams work closely with children's social workers, CAMHS 3Cs (specialist mental health team working with Looked After children) and the Youth Service, recognising the importance of the restorative approaches to managing disagreements. The number of children moving foster homes fluctuates month by month but ensuring stability of placements for children is of prime importance.



General Fostering

The Fostering Service has a pool of general foster carers to care for the majority of Surrey’s children needing foster homes. Foster carers are assessed by supervising social workers over a 6 month period; approval is recommended at foster panel and ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. They are encouraged to take a wide age range of children based on their capability. All foster carers have an allocated qualified worker that visits on a monthly basis as a minimum, and access to additional support, training, support groups

Looked after children live with general foster carers, Family & Friends carers and supported lodgings providers. Through the ‘Staying Put’ initiative, a Government initiative for looked after young people to remain with their foster carers post 18 years, a substantial proportion of care leavers (over 18 years old) have been able to remain with their foster carers. This continues to be an area for development



Enhanced Fostering

The enhanced fostering scheme provides specialist foster placements for the most traumatised, challenging and vulnerable young people. There are a small number of looked after children who have particularly challenging needs and enhanced fostering gives them the opportunity to live in a stable home environment.

Enhanced scheme foster carers have experience of working with vulnerable children and young people. To enable the one-to-one support of young people placed with enhanced carers, there are no other children under 16 years of age living in the foster home. One carer is at home full time to support the young person who may not be in full time education or may be at risk from regular exclusion.

Foster carers receive individual intensive support from supervising social workers on a weekly basis and a fostering support worker offers additional support to the children. Enhanced scheme carers have direct links with worker from CAMHS 3Cs and access to an informative training programme to enable them to meet the needs of this small group of young people. The intention is that there will be at least eight foster carers in the scheme and currently there are four foster carers fostering four young people.

Parent/Child Fostering

Parent and child placements are often high risk placements that need to be monitored very closely, and are often complex and intense for the carers to manage with little respite. The supervising social workers split the work, one supporting and supervising the placement whilst the other completes the parenting assessment. Placements are task-focused and last approximately four months. Foster carers have experience of caring for babies and are at home full time. They have specific training, and contribute to the community-based assessment of the parent's ability to care for their child. Some of the parents placed through the scheme are themselves Looked After and others are not either because they do not reach the threshold or because they are over eighteen years old. There are eight foster carers in the scheme, some specialising solely in parent/child fostering and others that are also general foster carers.

Family & Friends Fostering

The family & Friends team is responsible for Private Fostering arrangements, Family and Friends fostering and Special Guardianship.

Private Fostering

The Fostering Service is responsible for the assessment and monitoring of Private Fostering arrangements in Surrey, as stipulated under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

About 50% of notifications of Private Fostering arrangements come from children's services because the young people are known to the Department and the young people have made their own living arrangements. The other 50% are from either the carers themselves, or through language schools as the young people have come to the UK from abroad for their education. Social workers in the Family & Friends team are responsible for assessing the safety and suitability of the arrangement and Family Support Workers then do statutory visits every 6 weeks for the first year and 12 weekly thereafter.

The Local Authority is responsible for awareness raising to ensure that the public is aware of its duty to notify the Local Authority of all Private Fostering arrangements. Over the last year the service has concentrated on publicity through schools and the assistant team manager with the lead for this work has met with Child Protection Liaison Groups across Surrey.

The number of young people in Private Fostering arrangements fluctuates from month to month and this year although there have been many more notifications, the number of young people in these arrangements has ranged from 9-15 at any one time.

Family & Friends Fostering

Local authorities have a responsibility to consider a member of the family or a friend (referred to as a Connected Person), when a child needs to become Looked After.

Before the child can be legally placed an assessment visit is undertaken to ascertain the suitability of the applicant to be temporarily approved under Regulation 24 of The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations vol.2 If a young person is 16 or 17 and no longer in statutory education, a decision may be made to give temporary approval as a Supported Lodgings Providers rather than foster carers. Temporary approval lasts for 16 weeks, during which time a full fostering assessment is completed, concentrating on the carers ability to meet the child's needs on a short-term basis and potentially permanently. This is presented to foster panel towards the end of the 16 week period. Foster Panel may recommend an eight week extension of the temporary approval to allow for any outstanding checks or additional work required to be completed.

Special Guardianship

In January of this year, the responsibility for the assessment for Special Guardianship Orders moved to the Fostering Service.

When the care plan is for a child not to return home the Family & Friends carers are encouraged to apply for a Special Guardianship Order, thereby taking the child out of care and giving parental responsibility to the carer. This has been an area of considerable growth and development.

As a result of the Family Justice Review it has been decided that the Family & Friends team will do the permanency work leading to Special Guardianship Order. This will give continuity of assessing worker and streamline the process.

Connected Persons Referrals 2013

Month	Number of Connected Persons referrals received	Number of Connected Persons referrals temporarily approved	Number of Connected Persons temporary approvals becoming Supported Lodging Providers (for over 16's)	Number of Connected Persons temporary approvals for Foster to Adopt	Number of Connected Persons approved at foster panel	Number of Connected Persons placements still being assessed for approval at foster panel	Number of Connected Persons placements ending before approval at panel where SGO was granted	Number of Connected Persons placements ending before approval at panel where child returned home	Number of Connected Persons placements ending before approval at panel where no ICO made and/or child not placed	Number of Connected Persons placements ending before approval at panel where the arrangement broke down	Number of Connected Persons placements ending before approval at panel where full approval not recommended	Number of Connected Persons placements ending within temporary approval period since placement was intended to be for temporary period only
Apr-13	12	6		1	3				1		1	
May-13	11	7	1		3				1	1		1
Jun-13	4	2							1	1		
Jul-13	21	14	1		8		1	2		1	1	
Aug-13	14	11	1	1	4	0		1	1	1		2
Sep-13	9	6	1		4			1				
Oct-13	11	5	1		1			1	1	1		
Nov-13	13	5	1	1		1		1	1			
Dec-13	4	3				2						1
Jan-14	10	9	1			6	1			1		
Feb-14	8	6	1			5						
Mar-14	7	6				3			2	1		
Total	124	80	8	3	23	17	2	6	8	7	2	4
		64.52%	10.00%	37.50%	28.75%	21.25%	2.50%	7.50%	10.00%	8.75%	2.50%	5.00%

Supported Lodgings

Supported Lodgings offers young people over 16 years old a secure place to live, whilst at the same time providing them with a supportive adult who can help them to develop vital life skills necessary to live independently such as budgeting, cooking, and emotional support. Supported Lodgings providers can work alongside having young people in placement. They are committed to providing a minimum of 6 hours support to young people, helping them to develop into confident independent adults. Having a Supported Lodgings scheme in Surrey offers young people the opportunity to move towards independence in a planned and secure way, whilst remaining close to their network of friends and family

The Supported Lodgings team supports some young people who have been enabled to 'stay put' with their both in-house and IFA foster carers, by their carers becoming Supported Lodgings Providers specifically for those young people. This has been very positive for those young people in that they have been enabled to remain with their former foster carers.

Young people supported through the Supported Lodgings Scheme are:

Young people that have experienced the breakdown of their adoptive family

Asylum seeking in different stages of the process

Young people who have been trafficked.

Young people with mental health issues and/or learning

Young people attending university and returning to placement at weekends and during holidays

Short Breaks

Supervising social workers for the Short Breaks Service assess and supervise carers who are approved as foster carers and offer regular short breaks to children with disabilities. Carers are matched with a long term view with one or two children who stay the carers for one or two nights each month. The children, who are all supported by a social worker from one of the disabilities teams, remain living with their parents and the regular stay with the carer offers them a new experience and gives their parents a much needed break. Across the county there are currently 30 short breaks carers offering care to 34 children.

Under the umbrella of Short Breaks is a service provided by 'fee paid' carers who are paid an allowance to offer 200 nights care per year to a number of different children, not at the same time. These carers are usually matched with children who have a substantial care plan, managed by social workers from one of the two Children with Disabilities Teams. There are currently 3 approved fee paid carers who offer overnight care to 10 children.

Fostering for Disabled Children

Two part time supervising social workers with additional knowledge and understanding of disability work specifically with carers offering long and/or short term foster care to children with disabilities. Their role is to liaise with the team around the child, including medical professionals, occupational health and social workers who are usually within one of the Children with Disabilities Teams. They support carers to access to necessary equipment and services in order to meet the needs of the children they care for. These workers also take the lead in family finding for children with disabilities

Emergency Duty Fostering

This scheme is provided to ensure the Emergency Duty Team has access to a crisis foster home for a child or young person out of hours. There is a limit of five days that a child can stay, after which time the child or young person has to move to ensuring that there is always at least one carer available to the emergency duty team.

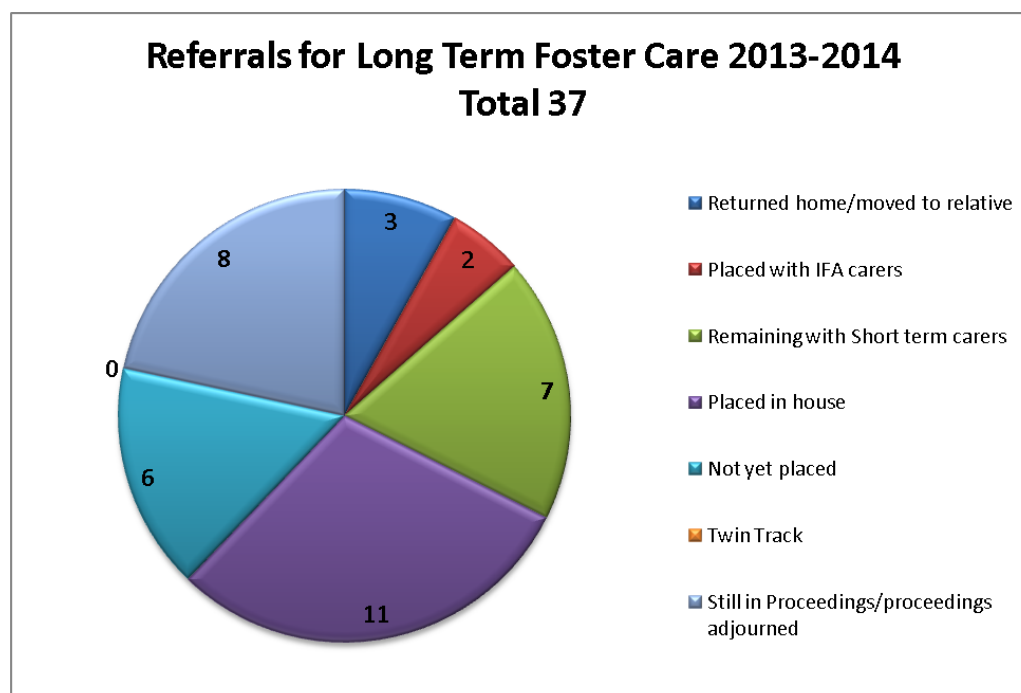
The expectation is that foster carers on call will take a young person but due to the need for the child or young person to be placed in an emergency, there is likely to be very little information known; therefore foster carers do have the right to refuse if they think it would put any members of the household at risk. Very young children who are likely to need a foster placement for longer than a few days are placed with general carer to minimise the disruption to forming positive attachments.

The Fostering Service pays each carer a retainer in addition to an allowance paid if a child or young person is placed with them. The carers on the rota are flexible and support each other by covering when needed.

Long Term Fostering

Surrey's Fostering Service seeks to achieve permanency for children and young people when the care plan is fostering on a long-term basis. Children and young people needing permanent foster care are referred by their allocated social workers. Profiles are created by supervising social workers with input from children's social workers and the child if appropriate. Social workers meet regularly to minimize drift, monitor progress, and ensure that the most suitable foster family is found.

Surrey's Fostering Service is committed to working towards increasing the number of in-house foster families available for children needing long-term foster care, thereby reducing the number of children placed outside of Surrey on a long-term basis.



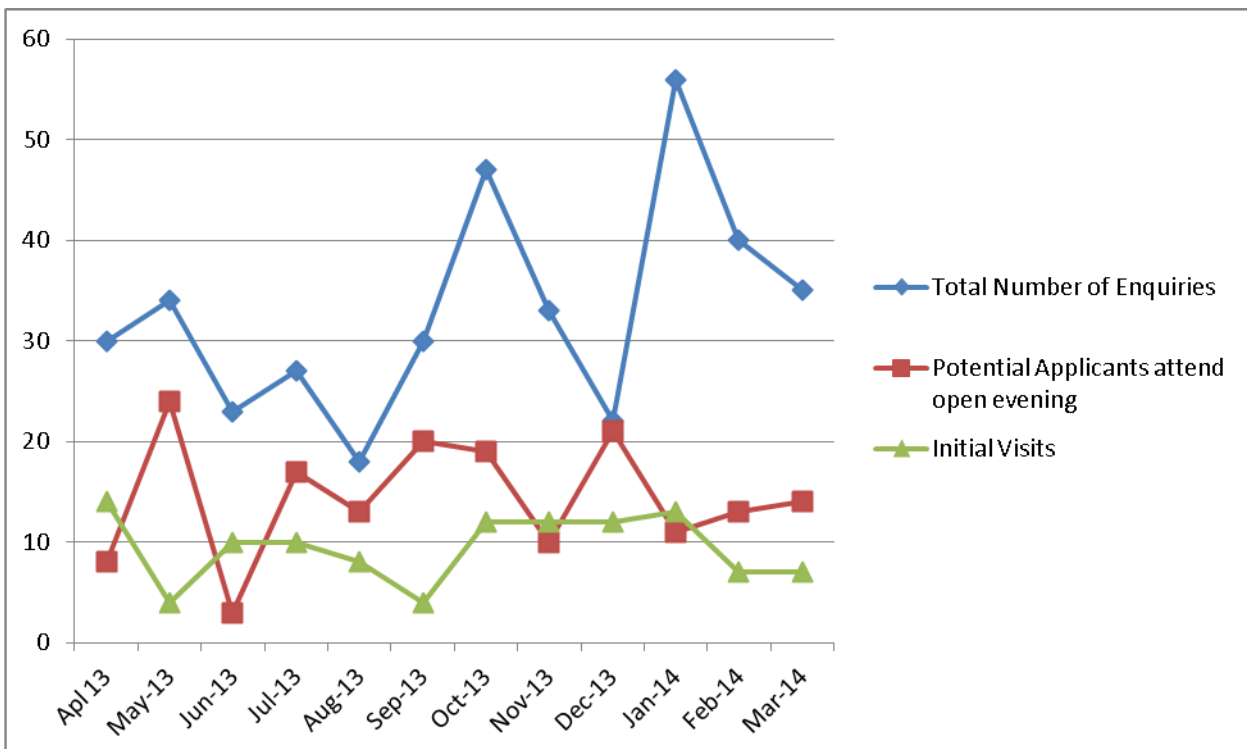
RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

Through a comprehensive recruitment strategy that works creatively with our community to provide increased numbers of foster carers. The Fostering Service is committed to increasing the number of foster carers for all ages of children and young people.

The number of children Looked After in Surrey has increased significantly over the last 2 years and therefore the need to recruit more foster carers has become increasingly important. As with other local authorities in the South East, recruiting carers has become an increasing challenge. The economic climate is a major factor, as is the housing market; with house prices rising, salaries not increasing with inflation and people generally struggling financially, resulting in people being more likely to try to find a job rather than be at home and available to foster. There has been a steady trickle of carers transferring to Surrey from independent fostering agencies, which has been positive as they are generally experienced carers. It is also noticeable that the proportion of people taking their enquiry through to approval as foster carers has increased. The Recruitment Manager works closely with Surrey’s Communications team to maximum resources when advertising for foster carers.

In the autumn of this year Surrey was chosen to participate in the Department for education initiative to improve recruitment of foster carers. Working with Impower over the next 6 months, the fostering service will benefit from specialist advice and creative ideas to increase our pool of foster carers

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION: RECRUITMENT ACTIVITY

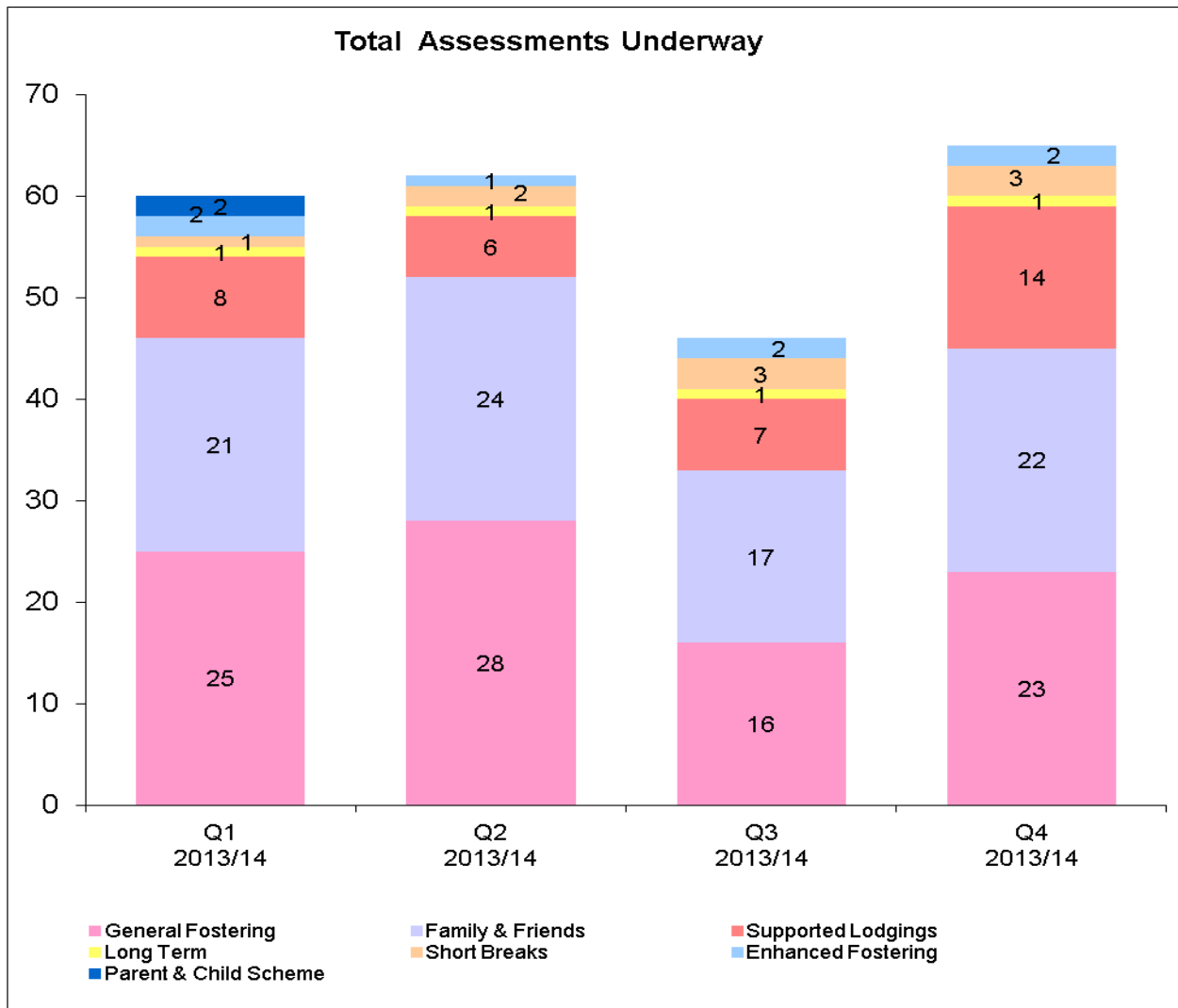


ASSESSMENTS AND REVIEWS

Evidence based and analytical assessments are completed on all prospective foster carers to understand their motivation and ability to care for children. Caring for children that have experienced trauma, loss and that have disrupted attachments requires people with understanding, patience and an intuitive ability to understand and accept behaviours that are not necessarily the norm. In addition to collecting factual information, assessments focus on people's own experiences of being parented, parenting, their understanding of safeguarding children and their ability to create a warm and nurturing home for children.

Assessments are part of the core work of the fostering teams, which enable the supervising social worker to build a comprehensive picture of the applicants. The assessment process is transparent, and prospective carers read the report and attend panel.

References are sought from a variety of relevant organizations, in addition to three personal references supplied by the prospective carers



FOSTER PANELS

Surrey has four foster panels sitting every month, two in the east and two in the west of the county. They are held on different days of the week to give maximum flexibility. To ensure consistency there is the same independent chair for all the panels, although each panel has its own vice-chair.

In accordance with the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards, there is a central list of panel members that include social workers with a minimum of 3 years childcare experience, service users/young people, county councilors and independent members. Panel business includes all assessments of prospective foster carers, temporarily approved Family & Friends carers, 1st household reviews of all foster carers and household reviews of carers wishing to increase their range of approval. In accordance with the National Minimum Standards foster panels make recommendations with ratification given by Agency Decision Makers who are senior managers within Surrey. Applicants are encouraged to attend panel in addition to giving feedback following attendance.

Care services team managers serve as panel advisors and as such do not have a vote. They advise the chair and panel members on Standards, Guidance, Regulations and legislation relevant to their remit

	EAST A	WEST	EAST	WEST A	Total
New Approvals	6	15	7	11	39
Reg 24 Connected Person assessments - initial	3	15	3	9	30
Reg 24 Connected Person assessments - final	6	21	6	11	44
Approval as permanent carers (as part of review and counted in review figures)	3	2	3	1	9
New approvals - deferred or not approved (not counted in placement stats)	0	1	0	0	1
Review of Foster Carers	25	24	25	22	96
Reviews - outcome deferred (not counted in placement stats)	0	1	1	1	3
Changes of approval	0	1	0	0	1
Exemptions	0	5	0	3	8
Variations	1	7	3	12	23
Terminations	23	10	12	27	72
Other	0	0	1	2	3
Total activity	64	100	58	98	320

The high number of terminations partly reflects the number of Family & Friends carers that are approved for the duration of care proceedings, with an SGO being granted at the end of the legal process.

Training is offered to panel members on a regular basis to ensure that they understand their responsibility as panel members and also are up to date with the legal requirements and regulations relevant to children in care

Learning & Development for Foster Carers

Surrey provides a comprehensive programme of learning and development to foster carers. Beginning before they are approved, prospective foster carers attend the Skills to Foster course and training on safeguarding and recording. A specialist Skills to Foster course is available to Family & Friends carers. Foster carers are encouraged to attend classroom training in addition to making use of a wide range of resources for alternative methods of learning including on-line training. The two fostering teams has a library of books and resources for foster carers to borrow

Fostering Changes:

Fostering Changes is a 12 week interactive learning experience for foster carers designed by the Maudsley Hospital and Kings College. The training aims to equip carers with a variety of practical skills for caring/parenting. There are two courses, one for carers of 2-12 year old children and the other for carers of young people aged 12+. The courses provide carers with a framework for understanding behaviour and developing skills to strengthen the relationship with the children placed with them, and enhance their self-esteem using praise, positive attention and tangible rewards. Through the course foster carers develop their problem solving skills, and explore strategies for working through conflict developing more positive patterns of thinking for both carer and child. The programme makes an invaluable contribution to the support and retention of foster carers and will help them to meet children's needs leading to greater security and stability for children in foster homes. All foster carers have access to this training and to date in excess of 50 have participated in it. It will continue to be offered as the evidence is that foster carers benefit from the learning, thereby improving the quality of their relationships with children and young people they foster

Financial Packages for Foster Carers

Allowances:

Foster carers receive a weekly allowance to cover all living costs relating to the child they care for. There are two bands, linked to the age of the child, and in addition a birthday and annual festival allowance is paid. Guidance is given regarding the amount to be spent on clothing, activities and given as pocket money. Foster carers are expected to open a bank account and encourage young people to save some of their money.

Skills payments:

Learning and development is closely linked to the skills payments paid to foster carers. Foster carers build credits by engaging in a variety of learning or development activities and the skills payment is linked to the number of credits accumulated on an annual basis

Summer Payment:

The summer payment is equivalent to 21 days at the Level 3 Skills payment for one young person and is paid in June each year. All foster carers who have had a child living with them for more than 2 months placements in the 12 months preceding 1st June each year is entitled to receive it in recognition of the additional costs incurred during the school holidays

Savings Scheme:

All children and young people looked after are eligible to have an ISA. Surrey CC matches the amount saved up to a maximum of £250 annually

Loans for extensions and cars:

Loans, secured on their properties are available for foster carers to extend their homes to take additional children. In addition loans are available for vehicles in recognition of the mileage incurred.

Local Initiatives

Foster Carer Website:

Surrey has a dedicated and comprehensive secure website for foster carers. A range of important information including contains the Handbook, information on training courses, links to useful websites, profiles of children needing long term foster families can be accessed by all foster carers with the use of a unique log-in password.

Fostering OK:

A monthly news sheet highlighting relevant important information for foster carers including training events, support groups and other activities is available to all carers.

Foster Carer Handbook:

Comprehensive information on all aspects of fostering to guide foster carers is displayed on the secure foster carer website and updated on a regular basis.

Support to Children and Young People from Minority Ethnic Groups:

In recognition that Surrey's population is overwhelmingly White British a new initiative has been started to recruit appropriate people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, cultures, religions and languages to offer informal support to children and young people. In addition there is a specific focus on recruiting foster carers unaccompanied asylum seeking children; this is an ongoing area of development.

One-to-one work with Children & Carers:

The Fostering Service has Fostering Support Workers that work intensively on a one-to-one basis with foster carers and children during particularly unsettled times

Computer Project:

Computers are available to young people to support them with their education

Support Groups:

There are a wide range of support groups to ensure that foster carers are well supported and ensure that they do not feel isolated. In addition to general groups there are groups for the specialist schemes and also a Men's group in recognition that there are areas of care that raise specific issues for men

MIM assessments and Theraplay:

Three team members have completed training enabling them to do assessments to understand a child's attachment and then to work with foster carers on enhancing the attachment through play and daily activities

CAMHS 3Cs:

A multi-professional team, dedicated to working with looked after children and young people that display complex emotional issues and behaviours, and their foster carers. They also run support groups for foster carers

Educational Psychologists:

Foster carers have access to educational psychologists on a consultative basis to help with education-based difficulties

FosterTalk:

Surrey pays the membership for all foster carers to FosterTalk. Benefits range from specialist legal advice for the foster family, educational tools for children and support through allegations, as well as financial benefits for a wide range of goods and activities

Winter Event:

Surrey holds an annual dinner for foster carers hosted by the Lead Member and senior managers in recognition of all they do for Surrey's Looked After children

FEEDBACK/SERVICE USER PARTICIPATION:

The Fostering Services encourages feedback from foster carers to promote ongoing development and learning for staff and managers. On an annual basis for their household review foster carers are asked to comment on the quality of support they receive. In addition foster carers have the opportunity to comment at support groups and a variety of other meetings, including Foster Panel. As foster carers have a named social worker and access to their line manager, Care Services Team Manager and senior managers the feedback loops are varied and plentiful.

Complaints have been very low; in the year 2012-13 there have been 2 complaints, both of which have been resolved satisfactorily.

This year a survey was sent to all foster carers to ascertain their views on a wide range of issues, including the service they receive from the Fostering Teams. To ensure anonymity,

Survey Monkey was used and the results are being analysed to inform about future developments

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Social Pedagogy (Head, Heart, Hands)

Last year Surrey successfully bid to become one of six national demonstration sites for a three year Social Pedagogy programme in Britain. The programme, supported by the Government, is jointly funded by a consortium, including KPMG, Comic Relief and the Thomas Coram Foundation. The programme is headed by Fostering Network, and evaluated by Loughborough University.

Social Pedagogy promotes working with all aspects of the child; it draws together the physical, social, emotional, creative and spiritual needs in the relationship between the primary carers and the child. There is a strong emphasis on relationships and less on the procedural led care that has been more traditional in Britain. Two qualified social pedagogues, trained abroad, started in January this year on a three year contract. They are primarily focusing on working with forty foster carers involved in the programme and the children they foster, although they will ensure that pedagogic learning and practice is not just confined to that small group as it is important not to create an 'elite' group of foster carers caring for children in a different way to other foster carers. From knowledge of the impact of social pedagogy on the Continent, it is anticipated that this programme will clearly demonstrate that through the use of social pedagogic theory and practice outcomes for children in foster care will significantly improve.

Delegated Authority

Delegated Authority will empower foster carers to take a more active role in care planning and day to day care of the children who they often know best. It recognises the importance of carer/child relationship and the importance of the people that children are living with being an integral part of the care planning process. Foster carers will feel more empowered to provide a more effective parenting approach, and that disagreements amongst carers, parents and professionals about who can make day to day decisions will be reduced.

Children and young people in care often report feeling different from their peers and when there are problems obtaining appropriate consent for activities and sleepovers. For these children and young people, Delegated Authority will provide more clarity for children and young people about who can give permission for school trips, sleepovers and other day to day decisions affecting their lives, and therefore should make it easier for them to participate in every-day activities.

PLANS FOR THE NEXT TWELVE MONTHS

Recruitment:

In May 2013 the Children's minister Edward Timpson announced a £250,000 contract for the Fostering Network to take foster carer recruitment to the next level in England. Working with the consultancy firm, iMPower to further develop its expertise, and to

improve the sector's knowledge and understanding of how to recruit and retain foster carers, Fostering Network selected Surrey to be part of the project with the aim of boosting local recruitment of foster carers to meet the diverse needs of children needing foster care and to help fostering services share good practice.

Through a benchmarking survey of fostering services, Surrey will contribute towards the painting of a national and regional picture of foster carer recruitment activity and results, and will allow fostering services to compare their performance with national benchmarks, and identify areas for improvement.

Social Pedagogy:

The forty foster carers on the programme will continue to develop tools and skills based on pedagogic thinking and theory. Regular evaluation by questionnaire and interview with the foster carers will monitor progress. One of Surrey's apprentices has been trained to interview the children and young people living with the forty carers and this will also feed into the evaluation. The programme will be funded to continue until the end of 2015

These are two examples of Surrey being at the forefront of national initiatives to improve the lives of Looked After children in foster care



In March 2014 Surrey held its first Social Pedagogy conference, aimed at increasing awareness of pedagogic practice and ideology amongst a wide range of professionals that work with Looked After children. It was attended by over 100 social workers from a range of teams across Surrey, other professionals and foster carers.

Permanence for Children:

The Family Justice Review in 2011 has focused on time scales for Care Proceedings being too long, reducing the time from 40 to 26 weeks. This has had an impact on Family & Friends fostering, necessitating the reduction of time to assess carers to achieve permanence for children through Special Guardianship Orders. In November the decision was made to move the SGO element of the work from the Adoption & Permanency Team to Fostering. This will stream line the process, enabling permanency plans to thread through the assessment from the outset, with one supervising social worker assessing the family from the beginning through to SGO. The two main benefits are that time scales will be reduced and families will have continuity of worker throughout the process.

This year the Government has held a consultation with a view to enhancing the status of Long Term Fostering. If this is adopted as an option for achieving permanence for children, the intention is that foster carers would have greater decision making authority, and the state less involved. Children placed long term would still be in the care of the local

authority but Looked After reviews would only take place once a year and visits from social workers could be greatly reduced. This is in direct response to Looked After children saying that they would like the people involved in the day-to-day lives and care of children to be able to make day-to-day decisions about them and for them to have less involvement from social workers.

Meeting the Needs of Children from Minority Groups:

The population of Surrey is predominantly white British; consequently so are the overwhelming majority of foster carers. To ensure that the needs of Looked After children from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds are met, a working group has been set up to develop a resource to support foster carers in this area. Local people matching the wide range of backgrounds that Looked After children come from are being recruited to work on a sessional basis to support children and young people, and their carers.

CONCLUSION

This year has been a positive, busy and challenging one for the Fostering Service. The service has diversified due to a wide range of initiatives and policy changes at local and national level, all of which will improve the way we meet the needs of children and young people living in foster homes and lead to more positive outcomes for them in adult life. Plans for next year will ensure that the service continues to move forward in line with Government agendas and also in order that the needs of children and young people in foster care are met

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