

# Southampton Fostering Service

## Annual Report 2022 to 2023

**Report completed by:**

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## Southampton City Council

### Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2020/2021

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## 1. Introduction

The Annual Report provides a summary of the performance of the Fostering Service during the past year. It includes analysis and comparative data for 2022/23, highlights achievements, challenges and progress made over the past year and identifies potential areas for service development in the year ahead.

Please note that this report is being written in retrospect and the current Service Lead did not start in post until May 2023 so information may be limited in terms of information for the period of 2022 / 2023.

This report compliments the following key documents:

- Statement of Purpose for the Southampton Fostering Service
- Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2023 - 2026

### OUR MISSION

**To provide every child that we care for with a safe, secure, nurturing family-based home in which they can thrive.**

## 2. Background:

### Legal Framework

Local authority fostering services operate within a legislative, regulatory, national minimum standards and statutory guidance framework. Key provisions are:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 2004
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 3 Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011
- Assessment & Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations
- The Care Planning, Placement & Case Review & Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017

The local authority's fostering services are further governed by a range of local policies, procedures and practice guidance, and Ofsted inspections.

### 3. Service Objectives

The main aim of our Fostering Service is to provide safe, high-quality foster care placements for our children and young people that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. We aim to ensure that children, young people and foster carers feel heard, valued and engaged in the work that we do.

**This will be achieved by:**

- Recruiting foster carers from within our diverse community and from the child's family and friends network, whichever best meets their needs.

- Offering a timely, robust and thorough recruitment and assessment service to ensure that fostering enquiries are welcomed from all parts of our community and treated fairly, regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, relationship status or culture.
- Providing a comprehensive training and development programme that is reviewed and revised regularly, looking at new and innovative ways of enhancing learning, professional and personal development of our foster carers.
- Providing a comprehensive support offer to our foster carers; including therapeutic and support groups, 24/7 support via EDT, breaks from caring and dedicated supervising social workers to work alongside each foster carer to provide high support and high challenge through regular foster carer supervision.
- Recognising the value, skill and commitments required of foster carers and treat them, their families and homes with respect. Therefore, we are committed to providing our foster carers with appropriate financial provision which reflects their skills, knowledge and dedication to the children in their care.
- Encouraging participation from our service users; listening to our children, young people and our foster carers and taking on board their feedback. Working in close partnership with the Southampton Foster Carers Association as a valuable 'critical friend' to improve and develop the Service as a whole.
- Maintaining a robust reviewing process to monitor and supervise the care afforded to children and young people by our foster carers, to ensure that all children are kept safe and free from harm, their needs are met, and their aspirations encouraged.
- Promoting multi-agency working and developing partnerships which will progress the needs of the children and young people we care for and supports the care provided by foster carers.

## 4. Inspection of the Fostering Service

Ofsted inspects local authority fostering services as part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Ofsted inspected Southampton Children's Services in November 2019 and the following extracts are from the inspection report:

*Most children who come into care are placed in suitable settings. A lack of sufficient local placements means that some matching, particularly for vulnerable adolescents, is resource-led rather than child-led, resulting in some children living in settings a long distance from Southampton.*

*Placement stability meetings are not arranged for all children when their care arrangements become unstable. This means that opportunities are missed to provide support and guidance to carers who may be struggling to manage challenging behaviours and prevent further moves for children.*

*The sufficiency of placements to meet the diverse needs of children in care remains a significant challenge, and the local authority received fewer enquires to foster in 2019 than the previous year. Foster carers are mostly well supported by supervising social workers, although the breadth of training available to carers is not comprehensive enough to provide an understanding of all their responsibilities.*

Southampton were inspected in June 2023 and the details of this inspection will be included in the 23/24 annual report.

## 5. Policies and Procedures

### **Statement of purpose**

All local authority fostering services have a Statement of Purpose which is reviewed annually. This sets out the aims and objectives of the service. The Statement of Purpose for 2023 / 2024 has been agreed.

## Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023 - 2026

Southampton City Council has a Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy. This has been completed by the Fostering Business Development Officer and has been agreed.

## Finance Policy

Southampton City Council's Foster Carers fees and Fostering Skills allowances are currently under review.

The amount a foster carer receives per child per week is a combination of the weekly skills fee and a weekly household fee which is based on which Level the carer on. They also receive the weekly child maintenance allowance.

Current Fees and Allowances can be found in the tables below:

Type	2022 / 2023 Rate
Maintenance 0 – 4 years	£161.87
Maintenance 5 – 10 years	£184.37
Maintenance 11 – 15 years	£229.53
Maintenance 16 +	£279.21
Stay Put Rate	£220.31
Level 1 Household Fee	£35.34
Level 2 Household Fee	£70.69
Level 1 Placement Fee	£78.52
Level 2 Placement Fee	£157.04
Level 3 Placement Fee	£396.95
P&B Placement	£825.85
P&B retainer	£384.77

P&B placement (if parent leaves)	£546.64
Day Care	£7

Additional allowances are paid for birthdays, holidays and festivals.

## 6. Staffing Structure

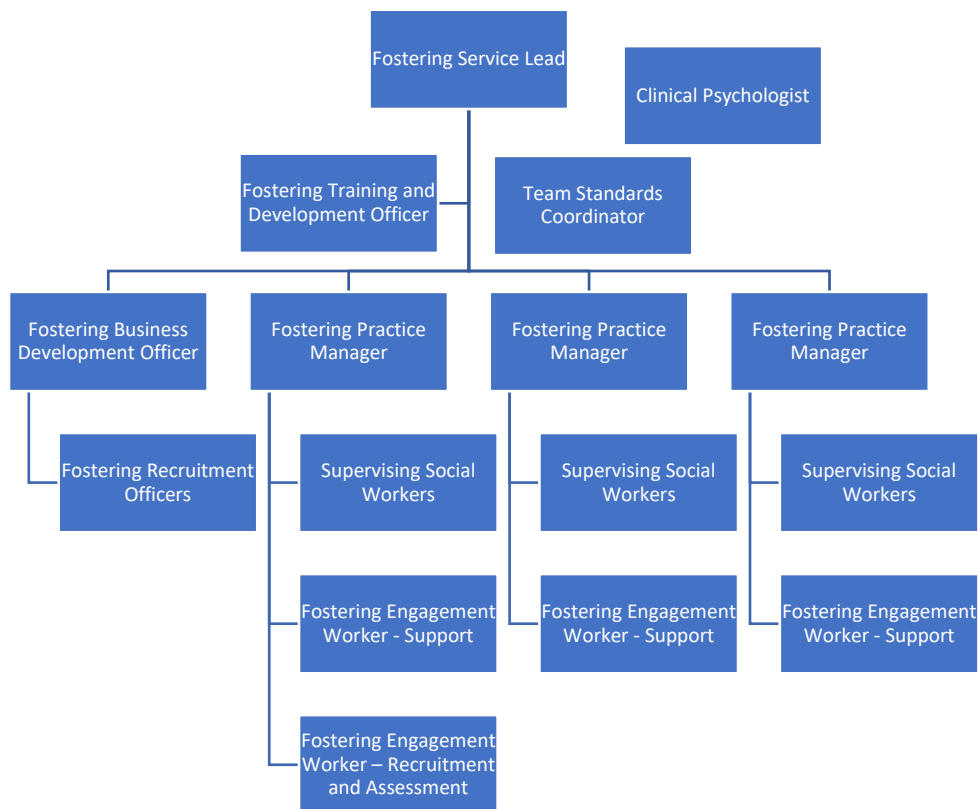
The Fostering Service sits within Southampton Children's Services Department and is under the overall leadership and direction of the Head of Service and Director of Children's Services.

During the last year there have been a number of structural changes for Children and Learning and an extended period of limited managerial structure within the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service has faced many challenges over the past year, morale has been low, and the service has felt disconnected from each other and the wider Children and Learning family.

There has also been a move to a different recording system, Care Director, which has caused some challenges in terms of accurate recording, data information and access to scorecards. Whilst there is a significant piece of work being undertaken in regard to this, it does mean some of the data analysis information in this report is limited.

Despite this the fostering service have evidenced excellent examples of support, communication, and professional working with foster carers and the children and young people being cared for by our fostering families have their voices represented in creative and meaningful ways.





## - The Recruitment Workstream

Staff working within the recruitment workstream, have the key role in promoting the need for foster carers within Southampton and the surrounding areas, who can meet the needs of children most likely to need foster care.

The Service has a Fostering Recruitment Strategy, developed in partnership with foster carers, staff and the Communications Team within Southampton City Council, which sets out the key aims, objectives and priorities.

The Service aims to ensure that all people who are interested in becoming foster carers are

welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval and support services. In addition, they will assess applicants in line with National Minimum Standards in a timely and robust manner, paying attention to safeguarding and keeping the child at the heart of the assessment.

The Fostering Business Development Officer, together with the Recruitment Officers, the Fostering Engagement Worker and the qualified social workers undertaking the Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments are responsible for:

- Marketing, advertising, communications and publicity in partnership with the Communications Team.
- Arranging regular recruitment events, information events and pop-up recruitment stands at local community events, charity events and larger regional events such as Southampton Pride and the New Forest and Hampshire Show.
- Processing initial enquiries.
- Undertaking initial home visits.
- Providing the Skills to Foster training.
- Creating partnerships with local businesses to provide outreach and sponsorship.
- Completing all Fostering assessments within six months of the application (including the pre stage checks, Stage 1 checks and references and the Stage 2 assessment), using the widely recognised Coram BAAF Form F assessment framework.

#### - Support, Supervision and Compliance Workstream

The Service offers supervision and support to all approved foster carers, both mainstream and connected foster carers. All fostering households are allocated a named Supervising Social Worker who works alongside the children's social workers and the Placements Team to help ensure that children, young people and foster carers have the best fostering experience.

Supervising Social Workers will:

- Provide regular supervision and support visits in line with the fostering task and an annual 'unannounced' visit, to ensure that foster carers continue to meet the Fostering Regulations and the National minimum Standards for fostering.

- Assist with any issues that arise from a placement, such as finances, equipment, transport, contact, education and health as well as helping to manage the impact of caring for a child that has experienced trauma and is likely to have complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- Get to know the foster carers and understand their individual learning needs and encourage them to increase their skills and knowledge and engage with their Personal Development Plan by signposting them to training and development opportunities.
- Support the foster carers in attending meetings, providing written reports or giving evidence in Court.
- Conduct the annual foster carers review and provide constructive feedback to the foster carer to encourage personal and professional development.
- Provide support to other members of the fostering household including any birth children or other relatives who are involved in the fostering task.

## 7. Mainstream Carers

As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, there were 190 approved fostering households which was 312 individual carers comprising:

- 174 Mainstream Foster Carers
- 16 Connected Foster Carers
- 13 singles carers
- 161 two carer households.

## 8. Connected Carers

The most significant change for the service was the separation of the Connected Carers Team in September 2022 and this now sits under the ICAT Service. This means all assessments are undertaken within the team and then carers transfer to Fostering Team once fully approved.

Connected Foster Carers are those people, usually from within a child's family, who become approved foster carers for that child. These foster carers play an essential role in enabling children and young people to be brought up within their own family and community.

Connected Foster Carers are supported and supervised in the same way as all Southampton Foster Carers and have access to the same support and learning opportunities.

Between 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 the connected carers team completed the following:

- Received 181 referrals
- Completed 68 Viability Assessments
- Completed 32 Regulation 24 assessments
- Completed 34 Regulation 25 assessments
- Completed 30 Connected Carer Fostering assessments
- Completed 45 SGO assessments
- Completed 54 court statements

They presented the following at Fostering Panel:

- 28 Connected Carer assessments were fully approved
- 2 Connected Carers were not approved
- 33 Reg 25's were approved
- 1 Reg 25 was not approved

Overall 27 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) were granted.

## 9. Approval of foster carers

Between March 2022 and March 2023, Southampton Fostering approved 14 mainstream foster carers.

## 10. Recruitment

This year we received 147 enquiries from potential foster carers. This is a decline from the previous year where we received 189 enquires. The average number of initial enquiries for the previous three years prior to this were 213 per year. There has been a decline in the number of enquiries over the past three years, and we have seen a further decline this year.

The data regarding the source of our enquiries continues to tell us that the highest source of enquires comes from digital media and this continued to be a focus over the year.

The refreshed recruitment strategy is welcomed by the team. The strategy is balanced and credible, containing achievable carer growth targets. Smarter digital and social media recruitment initiatives are prominent and reflected in a small growth in carer approvals in 2022/23. The conversion rate increase from initial enquiries to approvals of 14% is particularly impressive. On the retention front, more fostering support groups for carers, including a therapeutic group, indicates that their concerns are being heard and acted upon.

Key areas of activity for next year:

- The on-going use of 'virtual fostering information events' to ensure recruitment activity continues following the success of these throughout the pandemic.
- Digital media is being utilised more effectively across the city. To develop more online content; videos, animations, case studies and increased use of social media
- Utilise and embed the new Business Development Officer into the recruitment pod to raise the profile of fostering in Southampton and enhance the public facing recruitment activities with a new business/marketing approach.
- Clear and effective team work between the fostering recruitment POD and our comms service across children's social care.
- Implementation of recruitment and retention strategy 2023 - 2026
- Increase of community for pop-up and larger scale organised events for face-to-face recruitment opportunities.
- Implement the Fostering Friendly Business and Fostering Friendly Employers incentive schemes.
- To be involved in a bid with DfE to be part of the South Seat Regional Recruitment and Marketing Campaign.

## 11. Foster Carer Retention

Retaining approved foster carers is an important part of ensuring the maintenance of placement sufficiency and the ability to respond to changing demand levels and Looked After Children population's profile.

Measures aimed at retaining current carers include:

- Ensuring carers are used appropriately and always considered for suitable referrals
- Offering effective and relevant training
- Encouraging and facilitating progression through the approval levels as appropriate
- Providing regular and appropriate support
- Effective communication – personally via SSWs but also corporately via newsletters etc.
- Support the development of parent & child and specialist type placements
- Mentoring (currently only offered informally, but to be developed further)
- Providing an equitable service for connected carers in line with mainstream foster carers, including equity in ‘carers allowances’ and training opportunities.

## 12. Southampton Foster Carers Association (SFCA)

Southampton Fostering Service has continued to work closely with the SFCA over the past year.

The SFCA are also key in helping the wider service to encourage participation from our children and young people.

## 13. Consultation with Foster Carers

Foster Carer Forums are now in place and have provided carers with opportunities to express their views regarding the service that they and Children in Care receive from the authority directly to managers.

Forums have been held during the day and in the evening to ensure that carers who are not available between the hours of 9-5 can attend.

We will be looking at running the Foster Carer Forums in a hybrid way in 2024 following consultation with foster carers that showed that attendance is much greater virtually.

Foster carer feedback is collected on an individual basis at their annual reviews. This feedback is shared at the review and with management if there are issues. The Fostering Panel also hears the foster carer's feedback when foster carers attend after one year of fostering and on any other occasion their review is presented to the Fostering Panel.

All foster carer feedback is an opportunity to improve service delivery.

## 14. Training and Development

### *Our Practice Framework*

The child is central to our practice and we aim to help all foster carers to be relationship based, strength based and restorative in their practice. We support our foster carers to provide an environment which encourages 'therapeutic parenting' through trauma informed approaches, such as PACE and the Solihull approach.

National Minimum Standards for Fostering, state that each fostering service must ensure that *'foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively. A clear framework of training and development is in place.'*

The fostering training pathway in Southampton is extensive and well targeted to meet the developmental and training needs of carers across the wide spectrum of experience. Mandatory, core and specialist training is readily accessible and identifiable through a regularly updated training calendar. Face to face training is not as well attended as virtual training, particularly since the pandemic.

Mandatory training timescales and refresher updates are closely monitored, however, overall, take up of training has reduced since the pandemic.

The numbers of carers who attend core and specialist training events are modest at around five to ten per session. Some carers are not being challenged or nudged enough by their SSWs to attend training events. Others are highly motivated, skilled and professional and value the training offer.

## 15. Fostering Panel

The role of the Fostering Panel is to consider the full approval, variation of approval, and termination of approval of anyone either seeking to be approved as, or currently approved as, foster carers, who wish to care for children and young people up to the age of 18 years. They also make recommendations on the continued suitability of foster carers after their first foster carer review and every three years thereafter.

Recent feedback from a mock inspection review in March 2022 stated that the fostering panel provides rigorous scrutiny of new carers and re-approvals at the required one- and three-year intervals. Minutes are highly detailed and illustrate diligent and inquisitive questioning, led by an experienced and knowledgeable chair, supported by a very capable and professionally skilled panel adviser. Panel members are from a range of relevant professional backgrounds, including care experienced adults. Panel members attend training twice yearly and are appraised each year. The panel would benefit from a more diverse membership to represent Southampton's different communities.

## 16. Fostering Transformation 2024

As part of the national reform program Stable Homes Built on Love, the Department for Education (DfE) is investing more than £27 million via the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme over the next two years.

We have been successful in obtaining funding from the DfE to be part of the South East Region.

The Programme is made up of three parts, regional marketing campaign, regional recruitment hub and implementation of Mockingbird.

### Mockingbird

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is an approach to supporting foster carers and children and young people placed with them.

It brings together clusters of between 6 and 10 fostering households (referred to as 'satellite homes') grouped together to form a 'constellation'. The constellation is supported by a 'hub' home inhabited by experienced foster carers who provide a range of support including:



- Planned and emergency respite care including daytime care, sleepovers, and short breaks
- Regular constellation meetings and activities
- Learning and development opportunities for satellite carers
- Informal one-to-one advice and support
- Support for the maintenance of birth family relationships
- Support for transitions to permanence

### Regional Marketing Campaign

This will be a regional campaign. We are aiming to influence to ensure the campaign is targeted on three key strategies:

- Recruiting transfers from IFAs
- Focusing on key target cohorts most likely to have the values, skills and capacity needed to be a good foster carer (e.g. protective services retirees, homes for Ukraine volunteers, school governors etc.)
- Exploring the opportunity to recruit a whole new cohort - foster carer assistants (people who may not have a room, not yet be ready to be a foster carer or who have recently retired)

### Regional Recruitment Hub

- Be a centrally-run 'front door' for foster care recruitment across each local authority cluster.
- We are subclustered with Portsmouth, IOW and Hampshire.
- Cover the foster carers journey from initial enquiry through to application.
- Have a single point of contact for those enquiring to foster.
- Provide ongoing emotional and practical advice on the approval process.

This will ensure that as a Fostering Service we can achieve the following:

- Ensure we can support more South East children to be fostered in the South East for LAs,
- Increase the conversion rate from initial enquiry to approval.
- Reduce our reliance on IFA placements.
- Share and build on best practice.

- Be the place a nationally funded marketing campaign could direct people who are interested in fostering.
- Start to enable harmonisation and join up where it makes sense to do so (e.g. Skills to foster, information events) using sub-clusters to work together.
- Further build the sense of a shared fostering community in the South East, both at regional and sub-regional levels.

## 17. Summary

Southampton Fostering Service has worked hard to establish, develop and maintain partnership working, to ensure that the children who need to be looked after are provided with the highest standard of care from foster carers who have been robustly assessed, continually supervised and trained in order that they can meet the needs of every child in their care. Children and young people are at the heart of what we do.

This year has seen a difficult year in fostering with the implementation of a new record system, significant changes in structure and management, low morale and a feeling of not being heard. We are however, moving forward with resilience, commitment and motivation to reform our fostering service into a rejuvenated and vibrant team who are committed to our fostering community and to the children that we care for.

### Strengths of the Fostering Service

- Carers are seen 6 weekly for supervision
- New / recently allocated carers are visited more often to develop positive relationships with SSW.
- SSW's provide interesting and informed accounts of the work they have completed.
- The SSW's are knowledgeable about the LAC in placements.
- Strong relationships with carers enabled SSW's to have difficult conversations
- SSW's give balanced and holistic over view of impact of challenges on placement.
- Matching information being provided to carers has improved.
- Regulatory checks are mostly completed within timescales.
- Fostering training pathway is extensive
- Fostering panel provides positive oversight / scrutiny
- The refreshed recruitment strategy is welcomed by SSW's. Smarter digital and social media recruitment are prominent and reflected in small growth in carer

approvals. Conversion rate of enquiries to approvals of 14% is particularly impressive.

- More fostering support groups indicates concerns are being heard and acted upon.

### *Key priorities for 2023/24*

- Deliver on our recruitment strategy 2023 – 2026.
- Enhance our provision; step-across scheme, parent and child offer and emergency provision.
- Work with the independent reviewing service to improve the timeliness of foster carer reviews.
- Formalise our approach to retention through a retention strategy; peer mentors, review of skills fees, annual foster carer survey, develop a pledge of support to our foster carer charter, hold a celebration event.
- Embed our practice framework – through ongoing training and development programme; trauma informed, relationship-based, strength based and restorative practice.
- Develop ways to improve co-working with the wider Children’s social care teams in respect of children and young people being placed with family members and other connected people.
- To improve on feedback for foster carers reviews and ensure there is clear action plans and progress monitoring from foster carer reviews.
- To maximise the use of foster carer resources through robust oversight of their availability, minimising the length of time for which foster carers are unavailable.
- Ensuring and evidencing compliance with regulations, national minimum standards, statutory guidance, and policies, in preparation for future Ofsted inspections.
- Ensuring Foster Carer records are up to date, including supervision by SSW’s
- Improve recording of management oversight
- Review electronic recording systems, to ensure easy access to key information and documents on Care Director
- Improve practice in respect to unannounced visits
- Develop comprehensive KPI’s to monitor and review performance and data

- Uptake and monitoring of foster carer training/learning and development
- To further enhance the support offered to foster carers to achieve stable placements for children.

## OUR MISSION

To provide every child that we care for with a safe, secure, nurturing family-based home in which they can thrive.