

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Children and Families Advisory Panel

<b>Panel:</b>	Children and Families Advisory Panel
<b>Date:</b>	10th October 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Fostering Annual Report 2021/2022
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Children's Services

**Contact name:** Sarah Smith, Fostering Service Manager  
Robert Wayman, Head of Fostering Recruitment

**Tel:** 03707792673      **Email:** [Sarah.smith2@hants.gov.uk](mailto:Sarah.smith2@hants.gov.uk)  
Robert.wayman@hants.gov.uk

#### Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to report on fostering activity, detailing statistical performance data, and highlighting some focus areas for 2022/2023.

#### Recommendation(s)

2. That the contents of this report are noted by the Children and Families Advisory Panel.

#### Executive Summary

3. The Fostering Annual report 2021/2022 provides an overview of fostering activity, detailing statistical performance data, and highlighting some focus areas for 2022/2023.
4. In 2021/2022 our overall foster households have increased by ten in comparison with 2021. 33 new foster carer households were approved (a 17% increase) in 2021/2022, however 36 county foster carer households also deregistered. The focus for 2022/2023 will continue to be on the recruitment and retention of foster carers in order to increase our overall foster carer household numbers and therefore to provide the best outcomes for the children of Hampshire.

5. In 2021/2022 the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team restructured and expanded. Since September 2021, the Fostering Service has been working to an updated strategy for the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team to maximise the impact of additional investment.
6. There have also been a number of service developments within fostering support over the year to improve the foster carer experience. These included embedding an online claims system, a review of the complaints and allegations against foster carer process and a review of the training offer to foster carers, investing in their personal development and increasing their ability to provide care to children with more complex needs.
7. A significant development over the last twelve months has been the introduction of a new support network for foster carers known as the Hampshire Hives. We now have twelve Hives which support 156 foster carer households and over 200 looked after children.
8. The annual foster care survey results show that the majority of foster carers are satisfied with the support they receive from the fostering service. However, whilst performance remains good overall, there have been some areas of performance where more work needs to be done. This has been affected by staff sickness, an increase in support provided to foster carers and the increasing involvement in placement searching. Plans are already in place to address these areas.

## **Introduction**

9. This report provides an update on Hampshire County Council's (HCC) fostering service in line with fostering services statutory regulations and guidance.
10. During 2021/2022 the service successfully recruited and approved 33 new fostering households, an increase of 17%, plus one home from home (specialist respite) carer.
11. At the end of March 2022 there were 480 registered foster carers in Hampshire. This compares to 470 in March 2021
12. Throughout 2021/2022, the Fostering Service has been a part of HCC's Modernising Placement Programme. The aim of the Modernising Placements Programme is to develop a continuum of care which can provide the right accommodation and support at the right time for our looked after children in Hampshire, including an increase in the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

## **The Fostering Service**

13. During 2021/2022 Hampshire fostering service comprised of three teams.
14. The Recruitment and Assessment Team has expanded and restructured with a marketing stream, a recruitment stream, and an assessment stream. The team has social workers and non-social worker roles. The marketing stream raises awareness of fostering and creates leads for recruitment, i.e., potential carers we can target for recruitment. The recruitment stream supports prospective foster carers from enquiry through assessment. The assessment stream supports prospective foster carers from assessment through to approval.
15. There are two Fostering Support teams, East, and West. The teams support approved foster carers, providing supervision and training to ensure foster carers' practice continues to meet the National Minimum Standards.
16. The Family Connections Team completes assessments for applicants who have a pre-existing relationship with a specific child. These might be fostering assessments or special guardianship assessments. This team sits outside of the fostering service to promote close working with the children's social workers who are responsible for elements of the assessment. The team maintains a close link with the fostering service to ensure consistency.

## **Recruitment and assessment of foster carers overview**

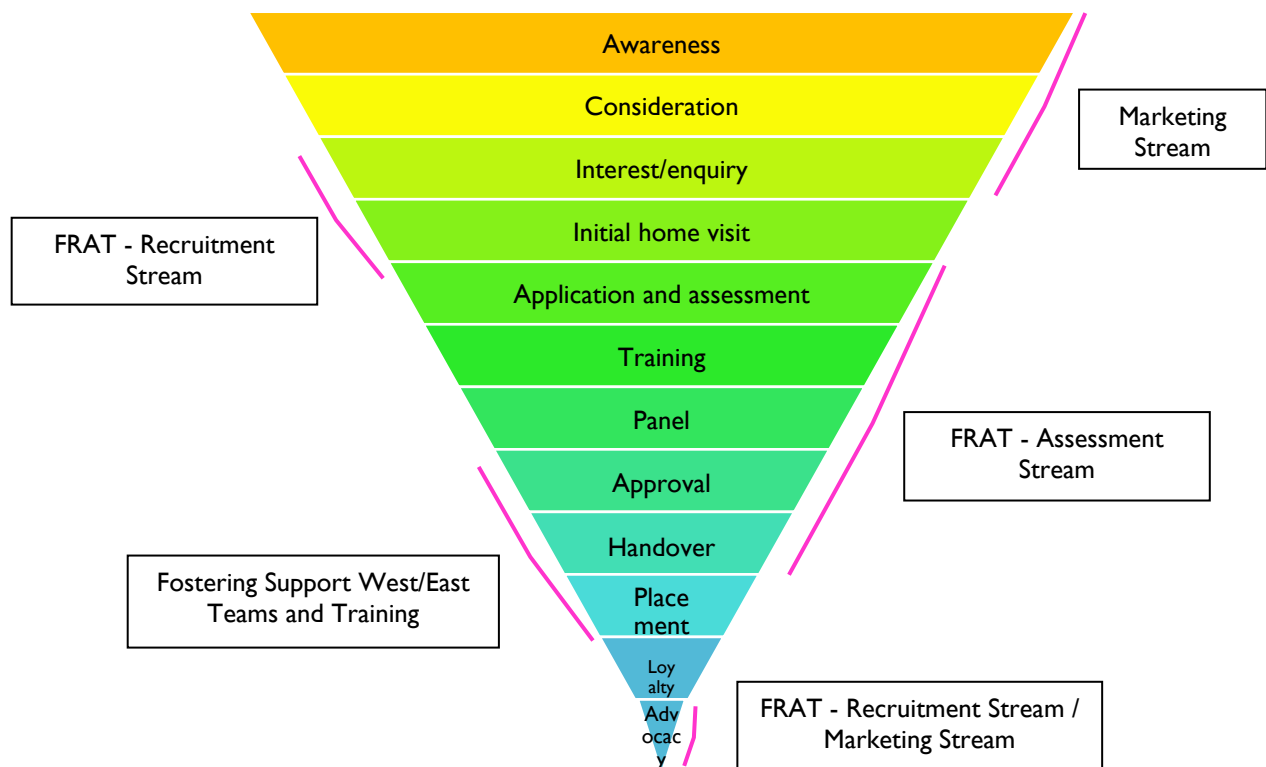
17. In August 2021, the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team (FRAT) restructured and expanded to include eight additional roles funded by the Modernising Placements Programme. The team now has a marketing, recruitment, and assessment stream with a new head of service.
18. Since September 2021, the Fostering Service has been working to an updated strategy for the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team to maximise the impact of additional investment. In delivering the teams mission to find caring, compassionate, and nurturing people within our community to

start their journey to becoming skilled and engaged foster carers for Hampshire children we will:

- a. Increase the number of quality foster carers for Hampshire’s children.
- b. Build an innovative, quality, and sustainable service – one that is the “go-to” choice in Hampshire.
- c. Grow a skilled, motivated, and proactive team underpinned with a shared mission, ownership, and values.

19. In support of our mission and goals, the team is now working to deliver over 25 areas of service development for implementation throughout 2022/23. These aim to improve the experience of prospective foster carers and the support provided through the assessment journey as well as further improving our marketing activities.

21. The recruitment funnel below outlines the journey of our prospective foster carer in 2020/21:



20. Since February 2022, the Fostering Service has a revised target agreed through the Modernising Placements Programme to provide 166 additional fostering households by 30 September 2023. In 2022 the target was to recruit 31 fostering households.

21. With the updated strategy and increased capacity across marketing, recruitment, and assessment, in 2021/2022 Fostering Hampshire Children achieved growth from awareness through to approval in line with our target and ambitions.

22. Highlights of the past year include:

- a) We have returned to in-person events across Hampshire, engaging with all communities across Hampshire.
- b) Growth in our performance on last year, including a 33% increase in firm enquires leading to a 17% increase in approvals as well as a 64% increase in the number of prospective foster carers in assessment at the end of the year.
- c) Our 2021 winter marketing campaign has been nominated for a Purpose Award. Backed by specialist industry publications PR Week, Campaign and Third Sector, this will see the County Council compete with BT, Dove, Vodafone, and others to have its campaign named the Best Public Awareness Cause Campaign in the 'Brand Led' category. Combining an informative approach with charming animation and authentic storytelling, the campaign was considered a success and made waves across both the public and charity sector. It is credited with driving a 300% increase in formal fostering enquiries in December 2021.
- d) Our recruitment phone line received the highest average mystery shopping score for a local authority in the South-East. The mystery shopping programme is undertaken by the South-East regional fostering network part of the South-East Sector Led Improvement Programme.
- e) Our prospective foster carers throughout the recruitment and assessment journey gave us a net promotor score +38, out of a possible range -100 to +100. Our net promotor score measures the willingness of our prospective foster carers to recommend us to a friend or family member interested in fostering.

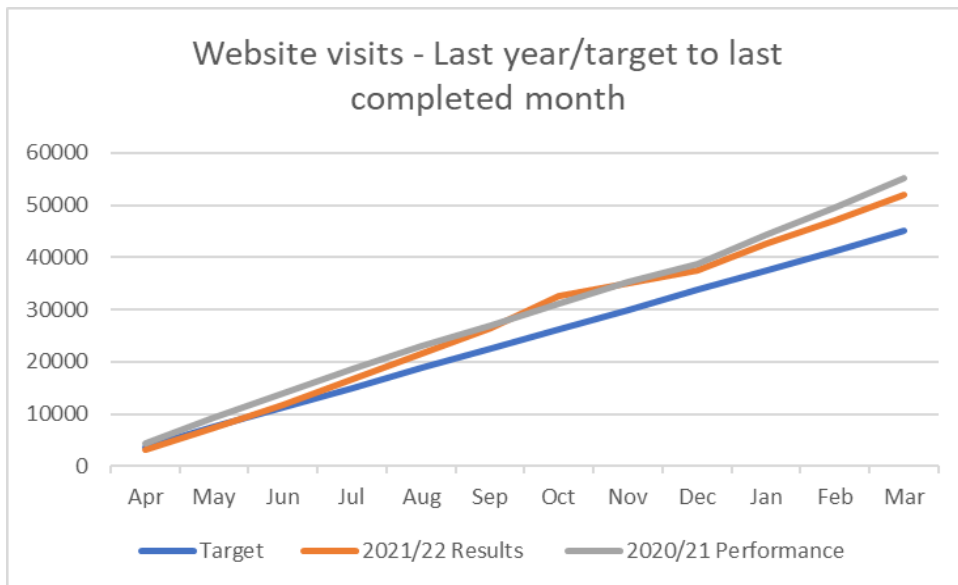
### **Foster carer marketing, recruitment and assessment performance and statistics**

#### **Marketing:**

23. In the following Graphs we discuss Firm enquiries can be defined as any lead generation undertaken across our MS-Teams embedded website forms (transferring, call-back, or direct applications), our information newsletter subscription form or direct telephone calls to our recruitment team.

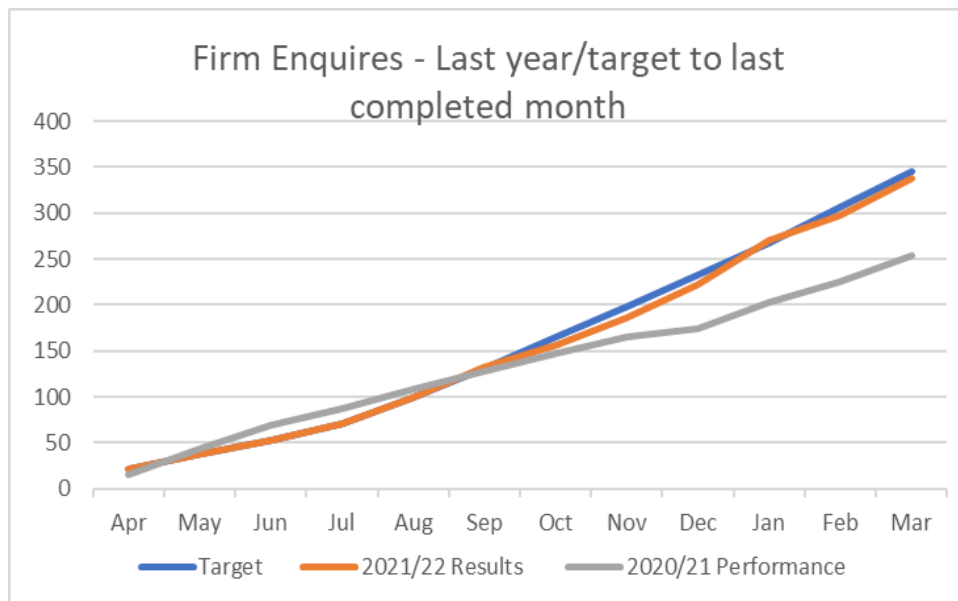
24. Soft enquiries are classified as any additional lead generation from less traditional means – these includes Facebook messenger enquiries, WhatsApp group engagement, awareness event referrals etc.

**Graph 1: Website visits for 2021/22 against 2020/21 performance and target**

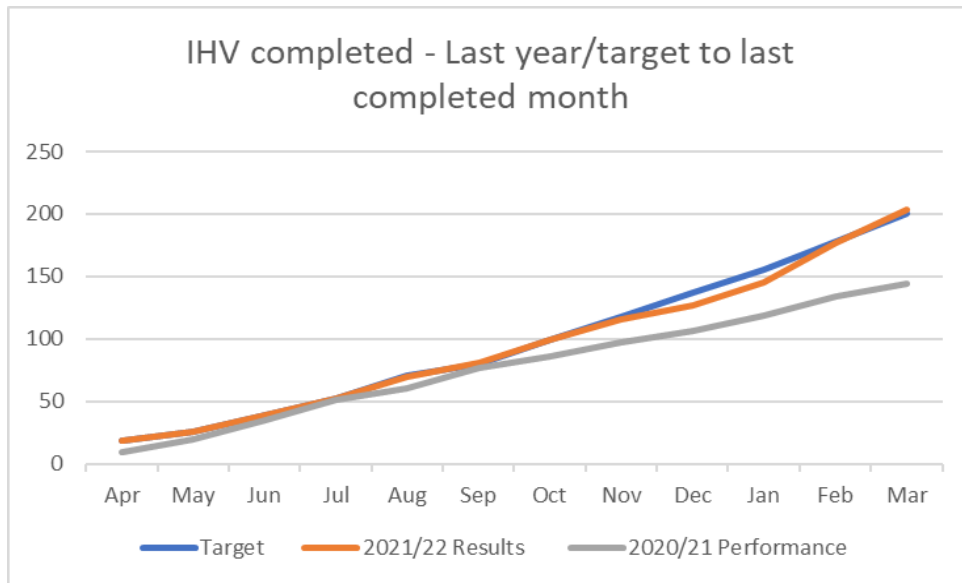


**Recruitment:**

**Graph 2: Enquires for 2021/22 against 2020/21 performance and target**

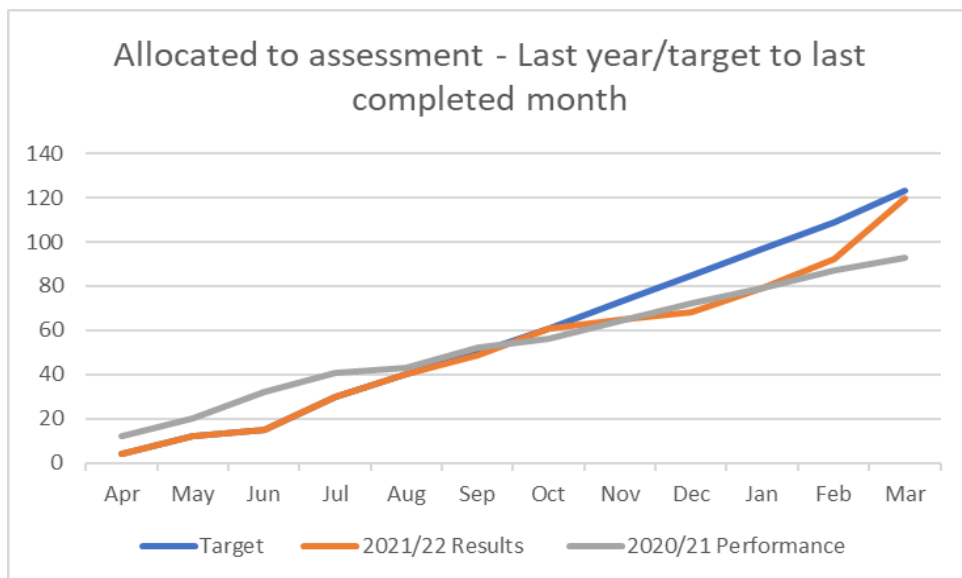


**Graph 3: Completed IHV for 2021/22 against 2020/21 performance and target**

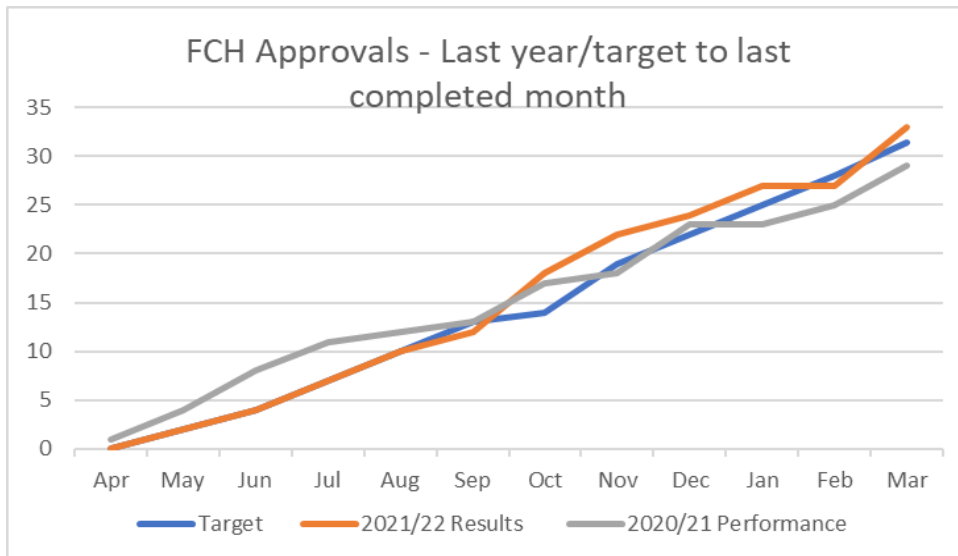


**Assessment:**

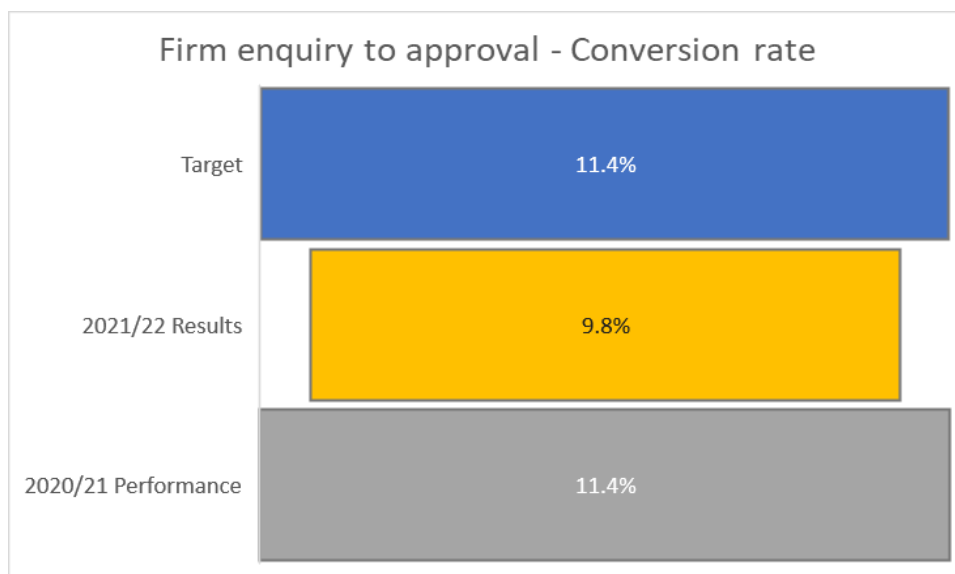
**Graph 4: Allocated to assessment for 2021/22 against 2020/21 performance and target**



**Graph 5: Approvals for 2021/22 against 2020/21 performance and target**



**Graph 6: In year conversion rate for 2021/22 against 2020/21 performance and target**



25. We had 85 more firm enquiries in 2021-2022 and approved 7 more foster carers in comparison to 2020-2021 which is very positive. Our firm enquiries were slightly under target (6) and approvals over target (2) which gave us a positive outcome.

26. The target conversion rate was set to maintain last year's achievement. This was not adapted in accordance with our new enquiry and approval



target numbers. If we had adapted our conversion rate target in accordance with new enquiry and approval targets, it should have been 9% which was achieved.

### **Fostering Support Overview**

27. The service is constantly developing to ensure that we have foster carers available to meet the needs of Hampshire children.
28. In 2021/2022 we reviewed the training pathway for foster carers including adding a Level 3 Diploma in Advanced Skills in Foster Care. Having delivered a number of training courses virtually during 2020 and 2021, we have now returned to training over a variety of mediums including self-directed online learning, facilitated online workshops and face to face learning opportunities.
29. Each year we undertake a fostering survey to gather the views and experiences of our foster carers to support and improve our service. The annual foster carer survey of May 2022 was sent directly to 243 carers, and we achieved a 47% response rate. This represents 23% of all Hampshire foster carers. We were unable to send it directly to all 480 carers due to a data protection issue, this has now been resolved and we will update our analysis when we receive the additional returns.
30. The results provided in this report represent the voices of 114 (23%) foster carers in comparison with 20% in 2021 and 29% in 2020. We engaged with foster carers about doing something differently but the majority of those we spoke to stated that a survey continues to be the best way to gain their feedback. We also introduced a chance to win a voucher, as an incentive for foster carers to complete this year's survey, this has contributed to a slight improvement on last year's returns but not yet back to the level of 2020. We will continue to explore how best to gather feedback from foster carers throughout 2022.
31. 18% of carers felt that they had a placement where they were not equipped to meet the child's care needs. This is an increase from 13.5% in 2021. Violence/aggression was reported to be the biggest factor in the carers not feeling equipped to meet the child's needs. During these difficult times, the most effective responding interventions that scored highest were support from another carer and their supervising social worker.
32. 88% of respondents felt satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the support from their supervising social worker, this is a significant increase from 62% last year. 55% of foster carers felt satisfied or very satisfied with the social workers of the children placed with them, a small decrease from 61% in 2021. This will continue to be an area of focus for the branch over the next year.

33. The Complaints and allegations against foster carers policy has been reviewed, in consultation with foster carers and in response to their feedback. The new policy takes a strength-based approach and changes how foster carers contribute to the required strategy meetings ensuring their voice is heard.

### **Fostering Support Performance and Statistics**

34. At the end of March 2022 there were 480 registered foster carers in Hampshire. This does not include those carers only offering staying put as they are no longer registered foster carers.

These households can be broken down into their different registrations.

**Table 1: Types of Household Registration**

Registration (by household)	March 2022
County foster carer	341
Connected foster carer	128
Home from Home (previously Specialist Respite Care)	11
Staying Put only (not approved foster carers so not included in the 480 figure of registered foster carer above)	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>

**Table 2: Foster Carers on Hold**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year Average
28	28	14	17	22

35. The average number of foster carer households on hold at any one time was 22, a reduction from 25 in 2020/2021. These have been for a variety of reasons including foster carers; choosing to take a break, other family or work commitments, and a small number due to a complaint or allegation.

**Table 3: Timeliness of Household Reviews**

% Of foster carers with HHR's recorded in time	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average
	91%	84%	72%	70%	79%

36. Foster carers should have a household review annually. There will always be unavoidable delays at times, however it is our target to ensure 90% of foster carers have household reviews completed within timescales. The number of foster carer households with a timely household review has decreased since 2020/2021 where it had remained above 90% for the entire year. The past year has been challenging for the teams with a number of staff absent for periods of time. Team performance has also been impacted by social workers needing to prioritise supporting the placement of children following the demands on the Placement Commissioning Team (PCT) with increasingly high numbers of referrals. The performance management framework for the services has been revised to ensure that team managers have more frequent oversight of the data and can identify issues earlier going forward.

**Table 4: Timeliness of Supervision Visits**

% Of foster carers with supervision recorded in time	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average
	89%	74%	71%	83%	80%

37. Foster carers should receive supervision from their allocated fostering worker at least every six weeks. It is our target that 90% of fostering households have six weekly supervisions recorded. There was a dip in performance in Q2 and Q3 however this has picked up and improvement was evident in Q4. This is being addresses within our performance management framework.

**Table 5: Timeliness of Unannounced Visits**

% Of foster carers with unannounced visits in time	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average
	98%	96%	84%	83%	90%

38. Foster carers are required to have annual unannounced visits from the fostering service. There was a dip in compliance in Q3 and Q4 which is being addressed within the performance management framework. The service recorded an average of 90% compliance in this area which is the service target.

**Table 6: Foster Carer Medicals**

% Of foster carers with medical	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average

rechecks in time	76%	73%	75%	79%	76%
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39. Foster carers are required to have a review medical assessment every three years. Overdue medicals are a continuing area of focus. There is a process in place to initiate these checks three months before they are due.

40. Compliance in medical rechecks has improved with most GP surgery's now able to offer this service again. We had hoped to have explored solutions to streamlining our medical recheck process with possible IT support, however progress on this halted during 2020/2021 due to the pandemic. We plan to look at this again in 2023.

**Table 7: DBS Checks**

% Of foster carers and adult household members with DBS checks in timescales	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average
	89%	91%	94%	92%	92%

41. There is a tracking spreadsheet for all DBS checks, that evidence DBS checks are being initiated in a timely way. There will always be a number of DBS checks that are outstanding due to young people turning 18 years whilst in the foster placement, we are unable to initiate a DBS check until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday which causes an outstanding check whilst we await it being returned, however this number is extremely low. The year average is within our target range.

**Table 8: Numbers of Carers Deregistered**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
County carers	5	9	14	8	36
Connected Carers	10	5	15	7	37
Specialist respite care	0	1	0	0	1
Foster to adopt	2	4	4	1	11
	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>85</b>

42. Over 2021/2022 there have been 85 fostering households that have been de-registered, this compared to 110 in 2020/2021. 37 of these households

were connected carers of which 28 were a result of positive outcomes for the children through Special Guardianship, moving on to independent living and reunification.

43. 11 of the households were Foster to Adopt approvals. This is when assessed adopters are matched to a child in the early stages of planning and are placed prior to a Placement Order under fostering regulations. They are temporarily approved for a specific child only. One home from home carer deregistered in 2020/2021.
44. Of the 36 county carers deregistered, one household deregistered after successfully being approved as an adopter and matched with a child. Four households resigned due to ill health and six due to retirement.
45. Three fostering households resigned stating that they were dissatisfied with the service. Two of these were left dissatisfied with the process and outcome of a complaint/allegation investigation and subsequent fostering panel decision. A further household felt upset following the breakdown of a long-term placed child where they felt they did not get the support they needed. Whilst the number of carers that leave Hampshire due to feeling dissatisfied are low there is learning for the department and to help capture this and make improvement, we have recently embedded a new exit interview process with all foster carers upon leaving to fully understand any concerns they had and respond to these.
46. 20 households cited a change in personal circumstances as the reason for leaving fostering, this was a mixture of employment changes, moving out of area and family changes.

### **Family Connections Service**

47. As described above, the Family Connections Team completes assessments for applicants who have a pre-existing relationship with a specific child, such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, older siblings, or close family friends. The assessments undertaken may be fostering assessments or could be special guardianship assessments. A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is a court order that confers Parental Responsibility onto the new carer. They do not require Children's Services to remain involved with the child or family.

Number of Referrals = 486

Number of Negative assessments / withdrawn = 228

Number of Positive assessments = 119

Number with final plan for SGO = 43

Number with final plan for foster care = 48

## **Achievements**

- From August 2021, a new county-wide Family Connections Team commenced.
- Strong management team established
- Introduced process changes to improve day to day working.
- Improved quality of assessments.
- Reduced numbers of withdrawn assessments – pilot of pre-screening assessment currently underway.
- Encouraged consideration of Special Guardianship Orders at earlier stage prior to court proceedings.
- Commissioned Kinship Ready to provide SGO support on a pilot basis for one year

## **Delays / Challenges**

48. We have struggled to introduce the SGO support elements within the timescale planned. The assessment function required full attention, hence now commissioned Kinship Ready as an external provider.

## **Next 12 months development**

- Increased staffing structure to be in place Kinship Ready to provide service with SGO training
- Staffing for post SGO support, to roll out this area of the service
- Review the progress of the pre-screening assessment and outcomes.
- Training to be rolled out across children's teams
- A full re-launch of the service with the new name, updated etc
- To establish partnerships with Health and Virtual school, and links with Early Help services in regard to SGO support service.

49. We continue to be on the way to developing a ground-breaking and Outstanding Family Connections service that is 'the front door out of care.'

## **Complaints and allegations against foster carers**

50. Hampshire County Council has a Complaints and Allegations against Foster Carers procedure as required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. A concern, complaint or allegation is a formal or informal written or oral expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to the care provided to a child(ren) whilst the local authority exercises its functions under Part III of the Children Act 1989. This can relate to a current or historical concern, complaint, or allegation. Hampshire's procedure provides definitions to the categories of Concern, Compliant and Allegation.

51. In total there have been 59 concerns/complaints/allegations initiated within the 2021/2022 period.

These were concluded as the following:

**Table 9: Number of Concerns, Complaints & Allegations**

Concern	Complaint	Allegation
18	21	20

52. Of these concerns, complaints and allegations, the outcomes were:

**Table 10: Outcomes of Concerns, Complaints & Allegations**

Continued fostering	58
De-registration	1

53. Whilst the numbers of concerns, complaints and allegations appear high, they are not out of the usual range. We have implemented a reviewed policy with a greater emphasis on information gathering before making decisions to progress under this process where it is safe to do so. This helps to target the use of this procedure better and ensures that we maintain our high response level to issues being raised regarding the foster care provided to children.

54. There were three applications to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) in 2021/2022. This is the process foster carers can use if they wish to appeal a de-registration decision by the department. One case was withdrawn. In both of the other cases the IRM agreed with the authority's decision.

### **Fostering Panel overview**

55. Fostering panels are meetings held to consider an applicant's request to become a foster carer or, continued approval after their first year of fostering, or where there are practice issues or, de-registration if there are concerns about their practice. The service has six fostering panels that are held each month. Each panel will hear a maximum of five cases. Each panel is made up of an independent chair and panel members. There is also a representative from Childrens Services linked to each panel.

56. Since March 2020 all fostering panels have been held virtually. Whilst initially challenging, this has worked well, and panel members have adapted well to this change. It is planned that all panels will return to meeting face to face in September 2022.

57. Each year, panel chairs have an appraisal which took place in June 2021 and included an observation of their practice. Panel chairs then complete appraisals for all panel members. The service manager meets with panel chairs on a quarterly basis to discuss any themes in panel, issues and

training and development needs. A full day panel members training was delivered in March 2022. Further training sessions have been planned for 2022.

58. We continue to recruit fostering panel members to support a diverse panel membership. We are also working with children in care, to agree some questions panel members can ask on their behalf to further enhance the quality of the panels.

**Recruiting and retaining a diverse community of foster carers to meet the required need.**

**Hampshire Picture**

59. 91.8% of Hampshire’s resident population are white British according to the results of the 2011 census ([2011 Census | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](http://2011.Census.HampshireCountyCouncil.hants.gov.uk)). Those in other ethnic minority groups account for 8.2%.

Table 10: Current Numbers of HCC Carers by Ethnicity (31 March 2022)

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of carers</b>
Black Caribbean	1
Black Other	3
Chinese	1
Mixed White & Asian	1
Not Obtained/ Unknown	6
White British	851
White Irish	3
White Other	17

60. Hampshire foster carers ethnicity is reported annually through the Ofsted dataset requirements. According to these results 96% of Hampshire’s foster carers have reported to consider themselves as White British.



**Table 11: Current Numbers of HCC children in foster care by Ethnicity (31 March 2022) excluding those placed with connected carers**

Ethnicity	Type of Placement		Grand Total
	HCC In House	IFA	
Arab	8	16	24
Asian British Chinese	0	1	1
Asian British Other	0	2	2
Asian Other	0	13	13
Asian Pakistani	0	2	2
Black African	5	11	16
Black British African	4	2	6
Black British Other	1	0	1
Black Other	0	5	5
Gypsy/Romany	2	1	3
Mixed: Other	5	5	10
Mixed: White & Arab	0	1	1
Mixed: White & Black African	5	4	9
Mixed: White & Black Caribbean	4	5	9
Mixed: White and Asian	12	8	20
Other Ethnic Group	6	17	23
Persian	0	2	2
Refused Information	1	1	2
Traveller of Irish Heritage	3	0	3
Was Not Asked - temporary option	1	2	3
White British	437	373	810
White East European	0	5	5
White Other	12	5	17
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>987</b>

**Table 12: Number of New UASC by Type of Placement at LAC Episode Start Between 01-Apr-2021 to 31- Mar-2022**

Placed In/Out HCC	Type of Placement		Grand Total
	HCC In House	IFA	
IN	3	4	7
OUT	0	62	62
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>69</b>

61. Ethnicity data for all Hampshire children in foster care (excluding those placed with connected carers) on 31 March 2022. Of the 987 in foster care, 810 children 82% were reported as White British which is lower than our in-house carer population (96%).
62. We do not experience problems in finding appropriate placements for children due to their culture or ethnicity, our challenges predominantly relate to behaviours and or specific risks related to an individual child.
63. Table 11 illustrates that over 50% of Hampshire's children in care in Hampshire are placed with in house foster carers. There are some ethnic groups that have been placed largely with independent fostering agencies, however the numbers are relatively small. This data includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children which you will see from Table 12 have predominantly been placed with independent fostering agencies outside of Hampshire.

### **Our approach**

64. Our marketing and recruitment activity has not been targeted to specific communities based on a protected characteristic. We ensure we market and recruit from all of Hampshire's residents. We ensure all of our advertising within foster carer recruitment uses a variety of imagery to show a diverse range of ethnicity to support our inclusive approach to fostering recruitment. As a team, we have embraced the councils new Inclusion Strategy and will continue to make fostering accessible to all while ensuring the safeguarding of Hampshire's children.

### **Meeting need**

65. Our recruitment and retention of foster carers with a diverse range of ethnicity is limited, however it is proportionate to the ethnicity range of children requiring foster placements and therefore meets our need. We are working to increase our foster carer recruitment generally and within our recruitment strategies look to engage with people from a range of backgrounds that might not have previously considered themselves as potential foster carers.

### **Modernising Placements Programme (MPP ) overview**

66. The Modernising Placements Programme is a substantial transformation programme that commenced in November 2019 with the aim of ensuring that Hampshire's children in care are provided with the right support at the right time. The complexity of the needs of our children have increased over recent years, and with the success of our Transforming Social Care programme ensuring that children can remain at home wherever it is safe to do so, those children who are in our care have the most complex needs.

67. A significant part of the programme's focus is the recruitment and retention of foster carers to provide increased foster care capacity, leading to better choice and matching, ultimately improving placement stability for children in care.
68. The fostering element of the programme is focussed on all aspects of the journey for a foster carer, from enquiry right through to approval and support, to ensure that our foster carers have the skills, support, and capability to respond to our children's needs.

The key developments within this programme in 2021/2022 are:

### **The Hampshire Hive**

69. MPP has developed a local community for HCC fostering families, that is based around an extended family model for children in care. The aim of the fostering network is to increase the support available to foster carers resulting in increased placement stability, and an increase in foster carers' confidence to support children. This model has been developed with the support of Hampshire foster carers and brings together 10-15 fostering households offering mutual support in a natural extended family environment. Each Hive of fostering families will be supported by a Hive Carer support worker (an experienced foster carer) who in conjunction with support from the fostering service social workers, will provide coaching, training, social events, flexible telephone support and sleepovers.
70. There are now twelve Hives across Hampshire which supports 156 foster carer households and over 200 looked after children. The Hives have just celebrated the first year with the first 'Hive Fest' event which was highly successful with 120 foster carers, children and young people coming together for an afternoon of fun, food, and games.

### **Paying Foster Carers**

71. The processes we use to pay foster carers have been reviewed following foster carer feedback. Foster carers now have access to an online form which they can submit reducing delay that was sometimes experienced through the previous paper-based system.

### **Training Pathway**

72. With the addition of the MPP funded dedicated trainer roles the service has been able to refresh and develop our training and support offer to foster carers.

73. Pre-approval training has been refreshed and is now more robust and in depth, giving our foster carers those fundamental skills ready to be approved & enter the world of fostering. We have included more practical tips and strategies for managing tough situations and holding difficult conversations. The new Pre-approval training pathway also includes GDPR & Prevent training, as well as Paediatric first aid.
74. Our post approval training pathway has been reviewed and offers joint training with residential staff to support peer learning and sharing of experiences. Course slides have been redesigned to support those with visual impairments or additional processing needs such as dyslexia.
75. There are a new set of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion courses available, aimed at supporting carers on topics such as race, gender identity and belief systems in relation to our children and young people.
76. We have also invested in a Level 3 Diploma in Advanced Skills in Foster Care for foster carers and are looking at further training developments including reporting and recording and parent and child training.

### **Foster Carer Approvals**

77. The marketing strategy has been updated and developed using the learning from the discovery phase of the MPP programme. New recruitment strategies were trialled including using Sky TV Ad smart which targets specific household demographics in our chosen areas and will play our ad in place of a national advert.
78. Significant work has been carried out by the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team to streamline their processes and ensure that the customer experience they offer is high quality and engaging. A recent mystery shopper survey which was undertaken as part of the South-East Sector Led Improvement Partnership (SESLIP) with a group of South-East local authority fostering services, judged Hampshire to be the top performing authority in this regard.
79. Investment has also brought additional roles and skills to the team including a dedicated Head of Service for two years to establish new approaches and developments to support the required increased recruitment of new foster carers.

### **Hampshire Fostering Network (HFN)**

80. The service continues to work closely with the Hampshire Fostering Network. The service attends the monthly committee meetings and facilitates monthly operational meetings with the Fostering Service Manager, the CIC lead and HFN chair and vice chair. The service

continues to communicate information to HFN and work closely with members when reviewing practice and policies.

## **Conclusions**

81. The Fostering Service has continued in its efforts to find new foster carers and provide a high level of support and supervision to current Hampshire foster carers.
  
82. 33 new foster carer households were approved in 2021/2022 (a 17% increase), however 36 county foster carer households also deregistered. The focus for 2022/2023 will continue to be on the recruitment and retention of foster carers in order to increase our overall foster carer household numbers and therefore to provide the best outcomes for the children of Hampshire.
  
83. Work within the Modernising Placements Programme has supported the service to introduce a new focus to the Recruitment and Assessment teams with additional roles to oversee and drive this work forward. The foster carer training pathway has been reviewed to support foster carers to meet the changing needs of our looked after children. Further training courses are being explored, with an aim to provide some learning opportunities for carers who are looking after children with higher needs and more complex behaviours.
  
84. There remains a need to improve and sustain the performance in the fostering teams, ensuring that all foster carers have timely reviews supervision visits and unannounced visits. A revised performance management framework is in place to support this objective.
  
85. The foster carers survey returned results that showed a substantial increase in foster carers satisfaction with their supervising social workers, however also showed a small decrease in satisfaction with Childrens social workers. Further analysis of the results will take place to inform service development. The feedback from the foster carers survey represented 23% of all carers but we are expecting further returns now that all carers have received the survey, we will continue to work with foster carers to review how we gather feedback in the future.
  
86. This has been a challenging year to maintain a high level of support and service delivery. The service has adapted very quickly to provide additional support to find appropriate placements to the high number of children needing care or a change of placement. There have been a number of successful developments including a new foster carer training pathway, embedding the new online foster carers claims form and the implementation of our new support system for foster carers, the Hampshire

Hives. There are many new developments planned that seek to ensure our looked after children have the right support at the right time, with foster carers that are equipped to meet their needs and further work is planned to continue to improve foster carers satisfaction, recruitment, and retention through 2022/2023.

### **Recommendations**

87. That the Children and Families Advisory Panel note the Fostering Annual Report

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	no
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

### **Equality Duty**

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment:**

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-Impact-Assessments.aspx?web=1>

This report is considered low in relation to equalities impact due to not differentiating or segmenting based on protected characteristics.