

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	11 October 2023
Title:	Fostering Annual Report 2022/2023
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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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 2023/24.

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 2022/2023 provides an overview of fostering activity, detailing statistical performance data, and highlighting some focus areas for 2023/2024.
4. In 2022/2023 our overall county foster households have increased by 11 from March 2022. 49 new county foster carer households were approved compared to 33 in 2021/2022, however 34 county foster carer households also deregistered. This has been in the face of many neighbouring authorities approving fewer foster carers than the previous year. The focus for 2023/2024 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. Recruitment and Retention developments in the service have continued. The Hampshire Hives have grown and are a strong recruitment tool. We held a Fostering Family Day and a long service celebration for foster carers which were well received.

6. The annual foster care survey results show that the majority of foster carers are satisfied with the support they receive from the fostering service.
7. Performance in terms of compliance has been a challenge to maintain with a greater need to support placement searching and matching. This has been recognised and agreement has been given to recruit a second assistant team manager in both the East and West support teams.
8. On 4 April 2023 there were 499 registered foster carers in Hampshire. This compares to 480 in March 2022.
9. Throughout 2022/2023, the Fostering Service has continued to work with 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 most significant area of development in 2022/2023 under this programme has been the continued growth and development of the Hampshire Hives.

The Fostering Service

10. Hampshire fostering service is comprised of four teams.
11. The **Recruitment and Assessment Team** expanded in 2021/2022, many of these new roles have become permanent. Whilst one team, there is a dedicated team manager and assistant team manager to the two work streams, recruitment and assessment. Marketing colleagues raise awareness of fostering to create 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.
12. 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.
13. The **Hampshire Hive Team** cover Hive Carer Support Workers where the focus in 2022/2023 has been the development and growth of this fostering network support model.

Recruitment and assessment of foster carers overview

14. In August 2022, the fostering service launched a new public recruitment campaign #OpenYourDoor to find 150 new fostering households for children in Hampshire by the end of 2023. Foster families and guests joined us for the launch which included announcing our [campaign partners](#) who committed to

helping us reach communities across Hampshire by working together towards a shared goal.

Image 1: Open your door campaign creative.



15. Understanding that word of mouth is a significant recruitment activity, we also launched an enhanced refer a friend scheme which we promoted to foster carers through the newsletters and events.
16. 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 2023 the target was to recruit 61 fostering households; we achieved 49 new county carer approvals against this target.
17. Through 2022/2023, we continued to see below target information pack requests and firm enquiries with them staying similar to that of the previous year. We did however maintain a higher than target conversion rate from enquiry to approval which indicates that the right people are being targeted through our marketing.
18. Timeframes through stage one and stage two continued to be challenging through 2022/23. We are trying to support foster carers that are ready through their assessment journey as quickly as possible whilst balancing the need to work with prospective foster carers at their own pace. This is a continued area of focus for 2023/24.

Fostering Support Overview

19. The service is constantly developing to ensure that we have foster carers available to meet the needs of Hampshire children.
20. In 2022/2023 we have continued to develop our training offer to foster carers. We saw our first cohort of foster carers complete the Level 3 Diploma in Advanced Skills in Foster Care. We also ran a pilot training, The Great Behaviour Breakdown which received positive feedback.
21. 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 2023 was sent directly to all our foster carer households. We had 127 responses compared to 114 in 2022 which is positive.

22. 84% of respondents felt satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the support from their supervising social worker, this is a slight decrease from 88% in 2022. 56.6% of foster carers felt satisfied or very satisfied with the social workers of the children placed with them, a small increase from 55% in 2022. This will continue to be an area of focus for the branch over the next year.
23. 17% of carers felt that they had a placement where they were not equipped to meet the child's care needs. This is a very slight decrease from 18% in 2022. During these difficult times, the most effective responding interventions that scored highest were support from another carer and their supervising social worker, this is consistent with the results from 2022.

Fostering Support Performance and Statistics

24. On the 4 April 2023 there were 499 registered foster carers in Hampshire.

These households can be broken down into their different registrations.

Table 1: Types of Household Registration

Registration (by household)	4 April 2023
County foster carer	355
Connected foster carer	132
Home from Home (previously Specialist Respite Care)	12
Total	499

Table 2: Foster Carers on Hold

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year Average
18	24	21	22	21.25

25. The average number of foster carer households on hold at any one time was 21.25, a slight reduction from 22 in 2021/2022. 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
	61%	61%	63%	60%	61.25%

26. 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.
27. The number of foster carer households with a timely household review has decreased since 2021/2022 where the average was 79%. We recognised that the demand on the manager's time to oversee these reviews has increased over the past year which can introduce some delay. The agreed second assistant team manager in the teams will be valuable in improving this data by adding additional manager capacity.
28. Team performance has been impacted by staff turnover and 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. As a service we now hold monthly performance meetings to monitor performance against targets.

Table 4: Timeliness of Supervision Visits

% Of foster carers with supervision recorded in time	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average
	83%	66%	77%	83%	77.25%

29. 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
	83%	74%	68%	78%	75.75%

30. Foster carers are required to have annual unannounced visits from the fostering service. There was a dip in compliance in Q2 and Q3 with improvement shown in Q4.

Table 6: Foster Carer Medicals

% Of foster carers with medical rechecks in time	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average
	79%	80%	79%	79%	79.25%

31. 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.

32. Compliance in medical rechecks has remained stable. There are still a number of GP surgeries who had not picked up this work again after the impact of COVID. We are looking to utilise private medicals for those where surgeries continue to refuse. There are strategic discussions with Health partners regarding increasing their capacity so that we can receive timely Medical Advisor comments for foster carer medicals.

Table 7: DBS Checks

% Of foster carers and adult household members with DBS checks in timescales	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year average
	92%	89%	88%	89%	89.5%

33. 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 18th 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.

Deregistration

34. Over 2022/2023 there have been 98 fostering households that have been de-registered, this compared to 85 in 2021/2022. However only 34 of these households were county carers. The remaining deregistrations were connected carers or foster to adopt where the majority were positive outcomes for the child including adoption, reunification and special guardianship orders being granted.

35. Of the 34 county carers deregistered, most deregistered due to a change in their personal circumstances including ill health, retirement, changes in employment and moving out of area.
36. There were however 2 households that transferred to another agency, citing that they didn't get the support they felt they needed and did not want to undertake the diploma. One household deregistered after citing dissatisfaction with the service, this followed the service raising concern regarding the care being provided. Two households de-registered following a complaint or allegation.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers

37. 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.
38. In total there have been 46 concerns/complaints/allegations initiated within the 2022/2023 period.

These were concluded as the following:

Table 8: Number of Concerns, Complaints & Allegations

Concern	Complaint	Allegation
18	9	19

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

Table 9: Outcomes of Concerns, Complaints & Allegations

Continued fostering	43
De-registration	3

39. 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 care provided to children by foster carers.
40. There were no applications to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) in 2022/2023. This is the process foster carers can use if they wish to appeal a de-registration decision by the department.

Fostering Panel overview

41. 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 Children's Services linked to each panel.
42. Since September 2022, we returned to face to face fostering panels. Each year, panel chairs have an appraisal which all took place over 2022/2023 and included an observation of their practice. Panel chairs then complete appraisals for all panel members.
43. The service manager meets with panel chairs on a quarterly basis to discuss any themes in panel, issues and training and development needs.
44. During 2022/2023 a full panel training day was delivered in April 2023 alongside virtual sessions on subjects; Gender and Sexuality, Faith Based Literacy Training, the Complaint Process, and Diversity. Further training sessions have been planned for 2023. All foster panel members have access to the HCC Learning Zone to enable them to access training relevant to foster carers and HCC employees such as Prevent Awareness.
45. 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.

The Hampshire Hive

46. MPP has continued to grow and develop 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.
47. This model has been developed with the support of Hampshire foster carers and brings together 15-20 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.
48. In March 2023, there were 16 Hives across Hampshire with a further seven planned to launch in April 2023.
 - There are **350** Looked after children across the 12 hives.

- There are **132** birth children across the 12 hives.
- A total of **482** children.

49. **16%** of families in the Hives are Family Connections Carers. Family Connections Carers make up approximately **26%** of all approved Hampshire Foster Carers.

50. The overall aim of the Hampshire Hive is to recruit and retain Hampshire foster carers reducing the need to place children with independent fostering agencies by:

- Improving the satisfaction of current Hampshire Foster carers.
- Attracting more foster carers to foster with HCC both those new to fostering and increasing transfers from IFA.
- Increasing localised peer support.
- Providing opportunities for children looked after to build positive peer relationships.

Hampshire Fostering Network (HFN)

51. The service continues to work closely with the Hampshire Fostering Network which is a charity operated by Hampshire foster carers to provide informal advice and support to their peers. Representatives from the Fostering service attend the monthly committee meetings and facilitate 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

52. 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.

53. Forty nine new foster carer households were approved in 2022/2023, however 34 county foster carer households also deregistered. This has resulted in a gain of 15 new foster carer households in a very difficult year where many authorities have struggled to recruit foster carers and, in a cost,-of-living crisis that has impacted fostering recruitment and retention nationally. The focus for 2023/2024 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.

54. 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.

55. The foster carers survey returned results that showed similar satisfaction levels to those from 2022. Further analysis of the results will take place to inform further service development.
56. The service has continued to work hard 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 a number of children needing care or a change of placement. There have been several successful placement moves for children within the Hive networks where they might have initially been cared for on an emergency basis, which has allowed them to move on to carers they know.
57. We are now looking forward to developing closer relationships with Hampshire residential homes in order that Hives can support children stepping across from residential to foster care. There are many new developments planned keeping focus on recruitment and retention and a new focus on foster carer utilisation, to ensure children are placed with the most appropriate carers and that they have the right support at the right time to enable them to meet the needs for our children. Further work is planned to continue to improve foster carers satisfaction, recruitment, and retention through 2023/2024.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	Yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. 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.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

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

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions*