

**DONCASTER CHILDREN'S SERVICES TRUST  
FOSTERING SERVICE  
2016/2017 Annual Report**

**Purpose of the Report**

The annual Fostering Service Report meets the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35) and Fostering Services: National Minimum standard 25.7

Regulation requires that the 'executive side of the agency' receive written reports on a quarterly basis on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service. That these reports assist the board to monitor the management and outcomes of the service and to satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with conditions of registration.

The report will inform Elected Members, Senior Managers and decision makers about key outcomes in service provision, identify any issues of concern and outline plans for improvement to the quality of service provision. The report may also be of interest to service users, staff and colleagues from other agencies. The report provides information about the activity and outcomes achieved in 2016-17 by the service and plans for the year 2017-18.

Alongside receiving the Annual Report, the Board and Elected Members are also asked to give executive approval to the Statement of Purpose for Fostering Services, which is updated each year. The Statement of Purpose is attached.

The annual report informs Elected Members about:

- National developments in fostering
- Activity, performance and developments in the Fostering Service in 2015-16.
- Future plans for the Fostering Service in 2016-17.

**National developments and historical context**

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (CYPA 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. Our sufficiency plan for 2016/18 was published in 2016. The 2008 Act recognises that outcomes for children are profoundly affected by a lack of stability in placement provision. Stability for looked after children is improved through positive placement matching to meet the child's individual assessed needs.

In 2010 new Guidance and Regulations for Care Planning, Placement and Case Review were introduced, which has a number of implications for Fostering Agencies, notably greater expectations around placement stability for children and a strengthened role for Independent Reviewing Officers.

In 2011 new Fostering Service Regulations came into force in response to the consultations undertaken with children and young people. These regulations revoked and replaced the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

In addition, new National Minimum standards were introduced in April 2011, which built upon the original standards introduced in 2009 and which underpin Ofsted inspections of fostering services. The new standards reflect key amendments to practices as a result of changes running through the new guidance and regulations.

Fostering recruitment and retention are a key government priority area and the DfE are administering an innovation fund to support creative partnership working between the public and private sector. The fostering service successfully bid for innovation funding in 2014 and completed a partnership research project in May 2015. As a result of this work we were invited to join a DfE funded 'Mockingbird' pilot. Phase One was successful and led to the recruitment of two Hub Carers and satellite families. We have now started to work on developing Phase 2 of the innovative partnership which will focus on recruiting and developing a further three hub foster carers and constellations.

In October 2014 as highlighted in last year's report; children's social work services were migrated to the Doncaster Children's Services Trust. The Trust is a company limited by guarantee and reports to an executive board with an independent chair and representation from the Local Authority.

As the fostering service was no longer a Local Authority service the service was required to register as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). In February 2017 the Fostering Service was re-branded as 'Trust Fostering' delivered by Doncaster Children's Services Trust and although this new and exciting 're-brand' is in its early stages it is anticipated the launch of the 'brand' alongside the new website and ongoing development of the Mockingbird Project will provide real interest in terms of recruitment of new foster carers moving forward.

## **Inspection**

The Fostering Service is required by regulation to be inspected by Ofsted. As the fostering service is now registered as an IFA the service was independently inspected as such in 2015 and should be re-inspected within three years.

Under the new Single Inspection Framework (SIF), The Children's social work service commissioned by the Local Authority and delivered by the Doncaster Children's Services Trust will be inspected within a single inspection for children's services. Children's cases will be tracked through all services and at least three children will be identified who are fostered by Doncaster Children's Services Trust foster carers. Judgements will be made based on how well all work together to promote positive outcomes for our children. There will be no separate judgement for the fostering service.

Doncaster Children's Services Trust last fostering service inspection was in August 2015 and we received an overall rating of 'Good' with an individual rating of 'good' for

'Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people', 'Quality of service', 'Safeguarding children and young people', and 'Leadership and management', the outcome of the inspection and the report was published by Ofsted on their website.

The inspection identified 3 recommendations, these have been acted upon and significant progress has been made in all three areas with development work ongoing.

## **Agency Activity**

### **Recruitment**

As at 31 March 2017 there were 137 in-house foster carers which included 10 fully approved connected persons foster carers and 7 approved on a temporary basis under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services (England) Act 2011, which allows children to be placed for a short period of time with people with whom they have a connection whilst the foster carer is fully assessed.

Despite the current climate and against national trends, Doncaster Children's' Services Trust continues to be moving forward in the recruitment of foster carers with 16 new households being approved to foster in 2016/17, 9 mainstream foster carers and 7 connected persons foster carer households. In addition 5 assessments were commenced on connected person's foster carers 2 of which were granted Child arrangement Orders, 1 ended due to child moving to care of Grandparents, 1 ending as a result of the child moving back to the care of birth family, and one assessment ending as a result of unsuitable home conditions.

A number of actions remain in place in 2016-17 to support the higher level of recruitment activity and further increase capacity:

- Three experienced Supervising Social Workers within the Fostering Team continue to have a specific role in recruitment, assessment and training of foster carers.
- We have retained a number of independent assessors to support a flexible and speedy response to assessments, increasing the workforce at times of high demand.
- The Fostering Service has now fully embedded the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' assessment tool and this has improved analysis in assessment, with panel and Ofsted having positively commented on this at the last inspection.
- Assessments continue to be quality assured by the workers respective line manager, and further scrutinised by the Agency Advisor to Panel prior to submission to panel.
- Feedback from the Fostering Panel chair (and panel members) has also been facilitated via a joint Fostering Service: supervising social workers and panel member's development day. This continues to increase overall standards.

These actions will continue to be further consolidated in 2017/2018. The Advanced Practitioner role has taken a direct lead on the recruitment service and continues to drive improvement.

Recruitment of good quality foster carers will continue to be a service priority. A [www.trustfostering.co.uk](http://www.trustfostering.co.uk) website has been developed and will continue to need ongoing updates to showcase new initiatives and both facebook and twitter are used to maximise internet publicity.

A targeted recruitment strategy is in development for 2017/18. The strategy will focus upon foster carers who can support sibling groups and older children.

### **De-registration of foster carers**

As in the previous year, carers who no longer met quality standards were deregistered from the service.

During 2016/2017: 21 foster carer households were de-registered. Ofsted 'Fostering in England 2015 to 2016: Key Findings' paper indicates de-registrations decreased during this time period but believe the decrease in figures could be as a result of agencies not actively reporting them. The national average annual de-registration rate is 13% and this figure equates to 12.3%.

Although in line with national averages this figure is worthy of further analysis:

- 1 was a connected person's foster carer who had approval for a specific child and subsequently the carer resigned after taking out a Special Guardianship Order.
- 1 was connected person's foster carers who had approval for a specific child and subsequently the carer resigned following the Young Person having left their care.
- 2 fostering households were de-registered as a result of safeguarding concerns.
- 1 fostering household was de-registered as a result of concerns around their practice.
- 14 fostering households resigned following lifestyle changes which meant they were no longer available to foster these included health concerns, no capacity to foster, changes in personal circumstances, retirement and a move out of the Doncaster area.
- 2 mainstream foster carers resigned following being granted a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the children in their care.

Despite the ongoing challenge to recruit and retain the number of foster carers required to care for Doncaster children there are, at the end of May 2017 thirty three more children placed with in-house foster carers than at the same date in 2016 and seventeen fewer independent foster carer placements.

### **Placement statistics and analysis**

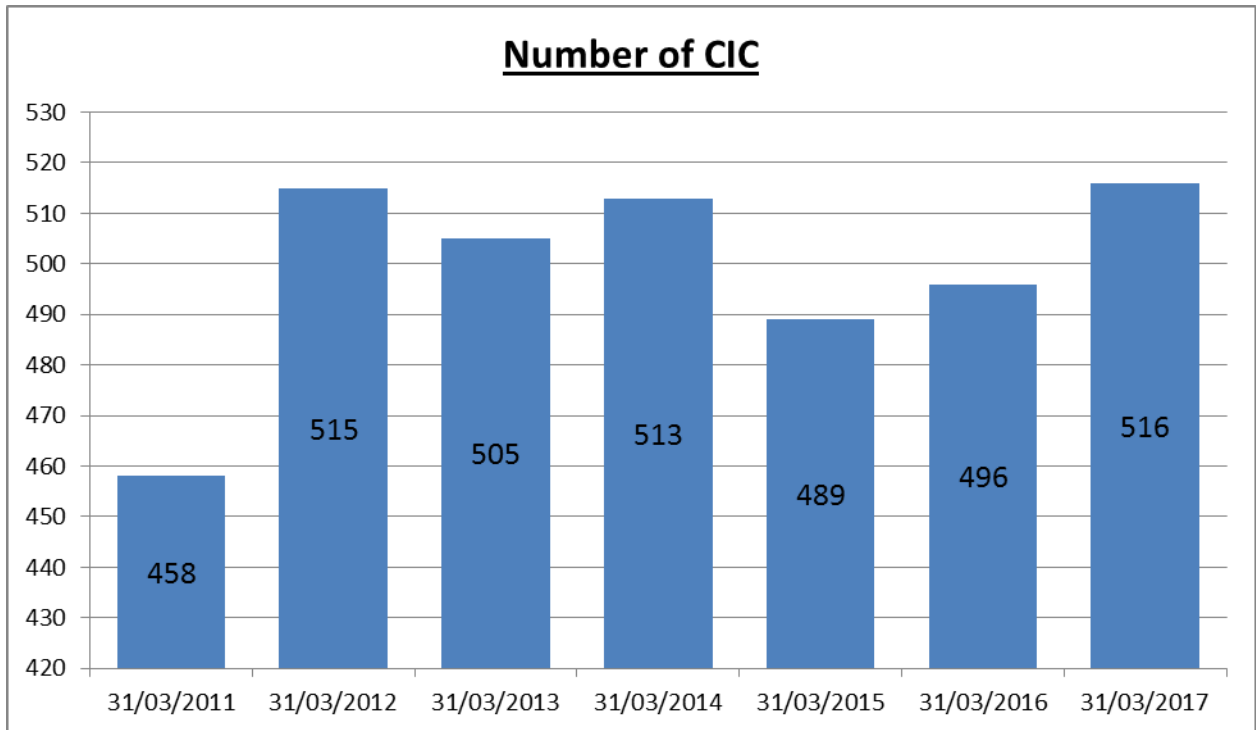
The number of children in care had increased over recent years from 458 on 31st March 2011 513 on 31st March 2014. In 2017 the numbers of children in care had further increased to 516 on the 31<sup>st</sup> March. As a proportion of all children in care, the number of children in foster placements has consistently increased from 60.26% in March 2011 to 76.6% in April 2017.

	31/03/2011	31/03/2012	31/03/2013	31/03/2014	31/03/2015	31/03/2016	31/03/2017
Number of CIC	458	515	505	513	489	496	516

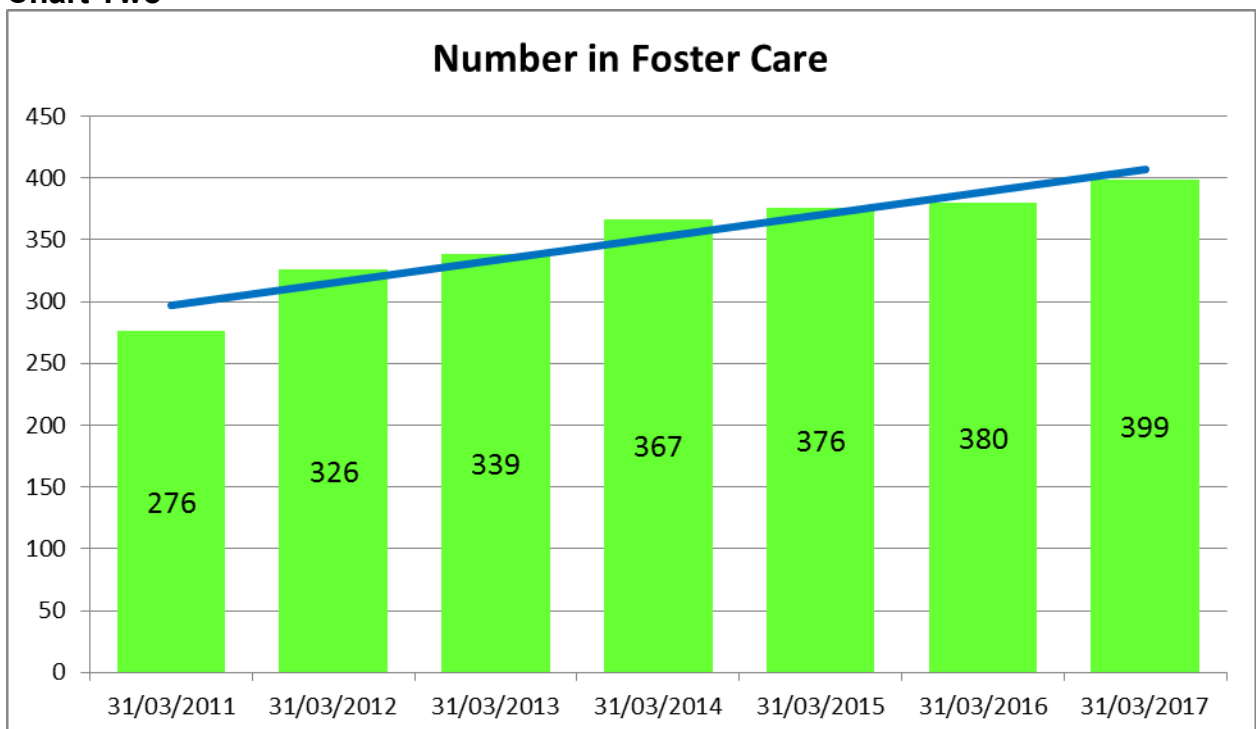
<b>Number in Foster Care</b>	276	326	339	367	376	380	399
<b>% in Foster Care</b>	60%	63%	67%	72%	77%	77%	77%

## Data and Statistics

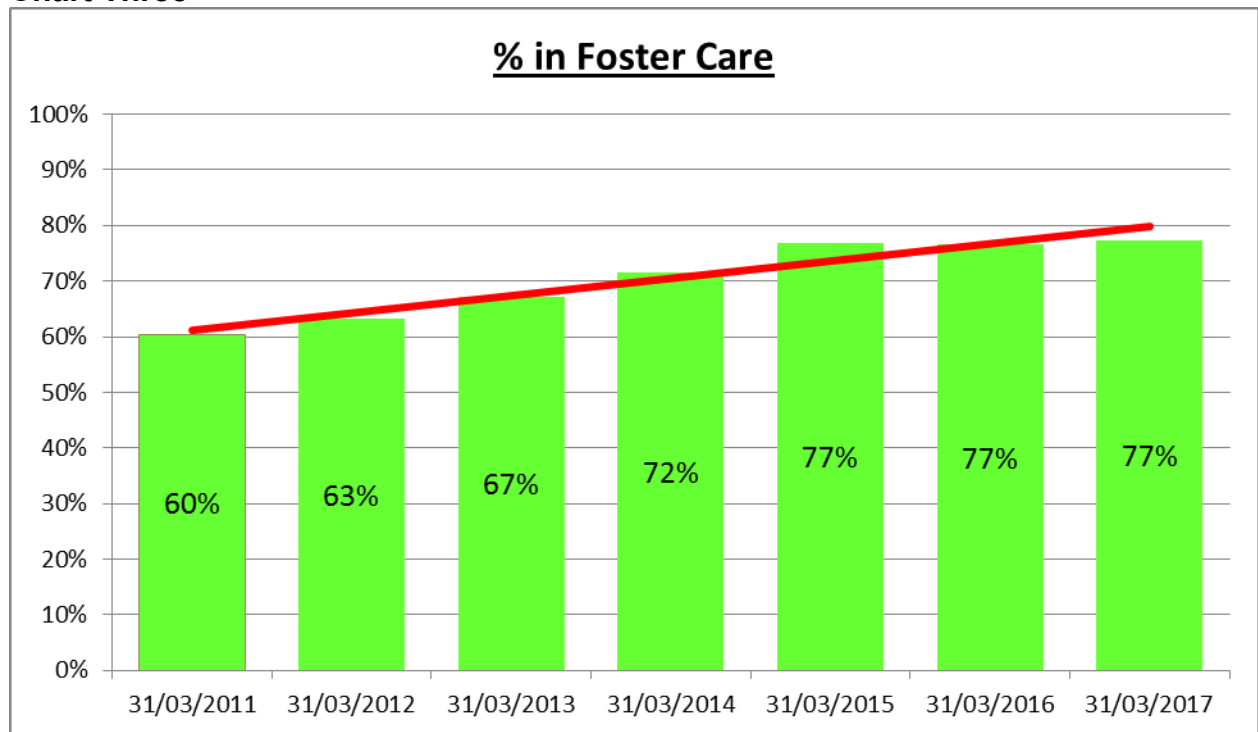
**Chart One**



**Chart Two**



**Chart Three**



### **Resource Maximisation**

Due to the high volume of children coming into care, independent providers continue to provide a key resource. In addition, the needs of some children dictate the need to access solo or specialised placements. Wherever possible, placements are sought within or nearby to Doncaster Council district and links with school, leisure activities and contact with family and friends maintained.

A weekly resource panel oversees and considers all requests for a placement. The Fostering Team liaises with the placement service daily. All resource requests for foster care placements are sent to the placements service. The placement service forwards all to the Trust fostering service as a preferred provider, only forwarding to other providers within the White Rose Framework if no suitable in house placement is available. Placement matching is taken seriously and children are not matched simply to a vacancy, however, this approach ensures appropriate maximisation of in-house placement opportunities.

A full review of the sufficiency plan and needs analysis has been completed and this will ensure recruitment is effectively targeted to meet identified need.

### **Fostering panel**

Fostering Panel Meetings continue to take place with the Fostering Panel Chair, Panel Advisors, Agency Decision Maker, Service Managers and Team Managers to facilitate an overview of both panel and service activities and improvements.

The Panel chair is annually appraised by the Agency Decision Maker. Panel members are also appraised by the panel chair and panel advisor.

A newly appointed Independent Chair was appointed following the retirement of the last post holder. Fred Lilly has a wealth of experience from his employment within the independent sector and more recent chair of Rotherham Councils fostering panel, Fred took up his role with DCST in September. He has been able to reflect on practice and has been consulted and involved with discussions around current practice improvement. The central list has remained quite settled although there is not a current elected member, as Panel Adviser meetings have been held with DMBC Children's portfolio holder to discuss this shortfall. A former Looked After young person has expressed interest in joining panel, the process for this person joining panel is well underway.

Fostering panels continue to be held twice per month, discussions are lively, thorough and well balanced, The Agency Decision Maker undertakes a thorough analysis of all panel decisions and the supporting documents prior to making a decision. There were, however no examples of the Agency Decision Maker changing the recommendation made at panel.

## **Service Developments**

### **Staffing**

In 2016/17 all social work vacancies have been filled. The Fostering Team currently has no vacancies for supervising social workers or recruitment and assessment social workers.

The team has experienced fostering social workers who are enthusiastic. They have risen well to the challenges of service improvement and remain positive and committed to the task.

There is a considerable level of expertise within the team and recruitment to both the team manager and advanced case practitioner roles have become well established within the team. This ensures continued stability and consistency for the service whilst new developments are being driven forwards.

The Fostering Team continues to support service improvement and development which has included integrating Signs of Safety in to practice and developing a process for Regulation 24 assessments.

The Operational working groups which were established in 2015 to drive service improvement are continuing; with a clear focus on embedding the suite of documents which were developed to promote SMART working, Signs of Safety and best practice. The service is now running a weekly rota for duty.

Team meetings and development days provide further opportunities to develop and refine working practice.

The Fostering Team also has two dedicated supervising social workers whose focus is to work with the wider service to support and promote best practice around foster carers approved under Regulation 24 and advise whether the identified placements will meet fostering regulations.

## **Foster Carer Reviews**

The fostering IRO function remains in the Safeguarding & Standards Service to ensure independence.

Currently two staff members undertake this role in conjunction with regulation 44 visits. The staff ratio equates to 1 full time member of staff shared between two staff members.

The business support function has now moved to the fostering and adoption service.

Review paperwork and systems have been constantly reviewed to ensure a smooth timely process from foster care review to panel, and there have been regular meetings between the IRO's, fostering service and the panel advisor. The development of the quality assurance process has enabled the service to have a reflective overview of various elements of the review process. The analysis of this information will be provided in the 2017/18 service report.

### **Consultation with foster carers, children who foster and fostered children**

A very active foster carer representatives group (Doncaster Foster Carers Association DFCA) has met with the service on a monthly basis for over 3 years. The group known as the DFCA is an independent foster carer association which has recently been granted registered charitable status. This will enable the association to have even greater degree of independence and further scope to attract funding to support events and activities for fostering families and the children in their care.

The committee currently has 9 enthusiastic and committed members which are a mix of carers and professionals from The Trust to ensure balance. The committee is supported by members of the fostering community to fundraise and organise events and activities.

During this reporting year a consultation was conducted with foster carers around The Trusts offer of carer groups and their function.

As a result of the information gathered the groups are now focused on the needs of the carers and also to ensure they do not repeat the other groups/activities available through Mockingbird and DFCA. From this consultation all foster carers are invited to attend one of the three foster carer groups, which meet on a monthly basis.

These groups allow foster carers to meet the service, share their views and also hear about new developments in service provision. Foster Carer Groups now comprise of a 'Specialist Group', 'Denaby Main Carer Group', and a nurture group.

The Fostering Service continues to have structures in place for involving children and young people in service delivery. There is evidence of the Service holding numerous events and activities for children and young people throughout the year. The Service continues to work in partnership with the Participation Officer, Children in Care Council and the Young Advisors. The Mockingbird Family Model also provides its own support group, activities and events where consultation with the children and young people around service delivery and issues that are important to them take place.

The Fostering Service hold quarterly Foster Carer forums to capture the views of, and to share information with the carers. Monthly 'drop in' sessions where carers have had the opportunity to meet with the Head of Service have also been a feature throughout this reporting year.



The service will continue to improve foster care consultation through development of formal exit interviews in 2016/17; however during this reporting period there have not been any carers who have left as a result of dissatisfaction.

## Financial report

The reason for the overspend in 2016/17 is mainly due to the continuation of the Mockingbird Family Model service from October 2016 to March 2017 after the DfE funding was fully utilised to ensure continuation of the project ready for the next phase of funding to become available.

	Budget for 16/17	Spend for 16/17	Variance
VU000 – Fostering business support	57,415	56,745	-670
VU001 – Fostering Team	840,510	976,781	136,271
VV001 – Payments to Foster Carers	2,247,800	2,289,454	41,654
	<b>3,145,725</b>	<b>3,322,980</b>	<b>177,255</b>

## DfE funded projects

**Mockingbird Family Model (MFM)** is an alternative method of delivering fostering with the potential to improve placement stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and to improve support for, and retention of foster carers.

MFM has been delivered in the USA since 2004 and is based on the idea of an extended family.

It uses the concept of a ‘constellation’ which is where 6 to 10 fostering families live in close proximity to a dedicated hub home of specially recruited and trained carers offering respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities.

The Fostering Network, with funding from the Department for Education, has introduced, and supporting the delivery of, the pioneering Mockingbird Family Model to foster care in the UK.

Relationships are central to the MFM, with hub carers and foster carers providing frontline care and social workers able to concentrate on successful relationship building. The hub empowers families to support each other, overcome problems before they escalate and offer children a more positive experience of care. The hub also builds links with other families important to the children’s care plans and to a wider community of stakeholders who can provide them with enhanced opportunities to learn, develop and succeed.

Doncaster Children’s Service Trust was one of 8 fostering provider service to pilot this pioneering programme. We were granted one year’s funding in the first instance (March 15 to March 16) which was then extended to September 2016. After the success of the first two constellations DCST have committed to continue to fund and sustain these going forward.

Doncaster committed to the development of 2 hub carer groups and to continuing with the model should it prove effective.

The model is seen to be extremely cost effective in America and to have a radical effect on stability of placements.

The trust has met with the Mockingbird external evaluation team to discuss need, impact and outcomes.

Work has commenced on the social return and investment measures for the Trust. This includes:

- Foster carers retention in the first months
- Cost of training including staff time
- Placement changes and breakdowns before and after MFM
- Emotional costs effects for children/young people, staff and carers,
- Education attendance and attainment before MFM and after,
- Emotional wellbeing of carers,
- Calls to out of hours, police and other services,
- Cost, engagement and outcomes of constellation activities
- Sibling contact
- Parental contact

Our other expected outcomes are:

- Foster carers receive support in their roles as care givers through readily available respite care, peer support, training and information;
- Children and young people experience significantly fewer placement moves;
- Siblings remain together and near each other in placement;
- Children and young people remain connected to their culture, heritage, faith and spiritual links;
- Children and young people will thrive socially, emotionally and academically with support from an extended family network of care providers and see respite as having 'a sleepover' at a friends or aunties house rather than because they are looked after.
- Children with a history of multiple placements have the opportunity to re-enter foster care through the hub home which can offer structure and stability after a crisis or missing from care absence;
- Permanency will be prioritised and supported;
- Where appropriate, birth families participate in the MFM constellation community;
- Children and young people will build lasting relationships and community connections supported by activities and services provided by or coordinated through the Doncaster children's Service Trust.

We know from records, data and by listening to our carers that there is a need to improve the retention and support of our foster carers. We have built the project on successful activities that even though not Mockingbird, echo the ethos and principles of the model.

Both of our constellations were launched in November 2015, and continue to support 10 satellite families in each, with over 40 children aged between 1 and 17 benefiting from

the positive outcomes of the model. The hub carers meet on a one to one with each satellite family, and both Supervising Social Worker and the Children's Social Worker agree a plan of support individual to each Foster carer and child/young person's needs.

Both constellations hold Monthly support meetings and events. The events have included, a trip to Doncaster Wildlife Park, a build a bear workshop, and Sleeping Beauty and Fireside Tales with Granddad performance journey's with Doncaster CAST and a residential weekend in Castleton.

The constellation meetings are held in the Hub carers homes. The activities are planned to strengthen the forming of relationships within the constellations and opportunity is given for the satellite families to complete the evaluation forms and discuss the process. Foster carers must attend at least 9 out of 12 meetings and activities to demonstrate they are committed to the model.

As of 1 April 2017, the Department of Education has invested a further 3 years funding for the model to be extending across the UK, which includes 7 of the original pilots and 11 new organizations'. For Doncaster the funding will enable us to implement three new constellations supporting up to another 30 fostering families.

Through the new constellations we will support fostering families where there is a plan for children to return home or be adopted, carers that are taking Special Guardianship orders and sibling groups where children have been placed with Trust and out of house carers.

**South Yorkshire Empower and Protect (SYEP)** was a sub-regional programme delivered as part of the wave 1 DfE Innovation funding over a two-year period, delivering intensive support and specialist fostering provision to young people with multiple vulnerabilities. The work delivered new learning and practice models and was positively evaluated by external evaluators. The approach was very positively received by the young people, families, carers and staff involved.

The programme intended to undertake some direct work with families, carers, children and young people while at the same time skilling up other professionals to do this work, through modelling, supervision, training and Action Learning Sets. This workforce development element of SYEP was intended to help increase reflective social work practice based upon relationships rather than process.

The delivery of these twin aims was underpinned by a unique approach:

- **Taking a whole team approach** – treating everyone as part of the professional team, including foster carers and parents
- **Taking mental health support to the frontline** – Our clinicians meet young people, foster carers and families where they are, in their homes, and provide out of hours therapeutic phone support
- **Sharing our knowledge** - delivering training in low level therapeutic techniques to foster carers and workers; providing space to reflect, supported by clinicians, and time with peers as part of South Yorkshire-wide Action Learning Sets

- **Listening to young people and families** – co-producing and co designing all elements of SYEP

Supporting young people enabled the review and identification of a suitable evidence-based therapeutic model that had sufficient flexibility to be implemented in a bespoke way, embedding the SYEP philosophy. This initiated the move from INTEGRATE to adopting Adolescent Mentalization-based Integrative Treatment (AMBIT), which takes the 'mentalization' approach and applies it to the needs of chaotic, complex and multiply comorbid youth; a decision approved by the SYEP Programme Board in January 2016.

### **Service Plans 2017/2018**

A full action plan is attached at Appendix 2.

#### **Foster carer recruitment and retention**

The challenge to recruit foster carers continues to remain a high priority on the service agenda. We have conducted a number of innovative recruitment campaigns and have now launched Trust Fostering; which includes a vibrant window display presenting our new colours and name on The Blue Building. Numbers of enquiries have continued to fall but this is consistent with local and national trends and we continue to strive to increase numbers of applications.

A progression scheme has now been agreed. This will allow the service to pay level 3 foster carers a higher allowance and to be able to compete in a highly competitive market for professional experienced carers. As we currently pay enhanced payments at the proposed level 3 rate, provided the number of level 3 carers are capped, this development will be cost neutral to The Trust.

We currently have a need to recruit foster carers to meet the needs of children of all ages although providing placements for older children and sibling groups continues to be a challenge. Fostering campaigns therefore focus on placements of sibling groups and older children/teenagers.

Early campaigns on these themes have shown some success. We continue to work with local churches on a 'Home for Good' scheme although interest is limited.

Last year 2016/17 16 foster carers were approved of which 7 were mainstream fostering households and 5 connected persons fostering households.

The service also places an importance on the 'retention' of foster carers. With this in mind two innovative schemes continue to be developed , one of which includes the 'Mockingbird Family Model' which has been detailed earlier within this Service Report which focuses on stabilising placements and providing child centred support to fostering households. The other scheme is 'Foster Carer Ambassadors'.

Foster Carers went through a formal interview, selection and training process for the Ambassador roles in 2016. The Ambassador role primarily focuses on supporting prospective foster carers through all stages of the recruitment process and assists the

service with promotion, training, completing call backs with enquiries to improve conversion rates at stage one of the process.

The service is looking to recruit additional ambassadors to support the three currently in place, it is anticipated this will be at no additional cost to The Trust.

### **Improvement to the quality of foster care**

Outcomes for children who live in foster care continue to be highly dependent on the quality of care offered by the foster carer. Improvements to the quality of foster care offered by Doncaster Trust continue to be a service priority.

Supervision and support of foster carers remains a priority, with a clear emphasis on both outcomes for children and ensuring the voice of the child is central to everything we do; as well as on training and development of the foster carer. However there has been a period of instability for foster carers as a result of cases having to be re-allocated to manage long term sickness and also the designation of two supervising social workers whose focus is to manage both family carers and foster carers approved through regulation 24.

The training and development of foster carers continues to be a high priority for the service. It is seen as an integral link to placement stability and positive outcome for looked after children. All foster carers sign a learning agreement which sets out the training and learning requirements of the service; and is formalised in their personal development plan, which sets out their individual needs. The drive to ensure Personal Development Plans are tailored to meet the individual needs of each carer remains a priority.

The training offer for 2017-18 has an extensive combination of in house and external training. The fostering service plans to continue to develop a more bespoke and needs led training programme to target the developmental needs of foster carers. In order to achieve this plan a coordinated approach is needed with workforce development and local partner agencies. Last year following the successful uptake of courses purchased from an on-line training provider the Service renewed the contract. Its usage has been extended to include Residential, Contact workers, and those carers who have been granted Special Guardianship Orders. Carers can choose from over 60 on-line courses all of which require completion of a short exam and are certificated. These courses allow carers who work to partake in training as well as adding to the range of courses on offer, some of which are held on an evening to capture those carers who are in full time employment.

The service has also purchased specialist therapeutic training from New Hope Therapy Services who provide a range of therapeutic courses initially to those carers who are caring for children with additional complexities i.e. attachment issues.

Foster carers who do not meet required standards are subject to scrutiny via supervision and foster carer review.

All efforts are made to improve the quality of their work with children and professionals. This may include specific contracts of agreement and enhanced Personal Development Plans.

Should the quality of foster care not improve, consideration is given to de-registration. A report will be prepared for panel and Agency Decision Maker deliberation.

### **Fostering service staffing**

The service structure continues to be enhanced in 2016/2017 by two 'Advanced Practitioner' social worker posts. The remit of these roles is to supervise staff in the Supervision and Support Team and to continue to develop the Recruitment and Assessment Team. By having two Advanced Practitioners, the Team Manager has a greater capacity to manage and develop the service.

### **Conclusion**

The ability to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of foster carers for Doncaster children continues to be a challenge for the Trust given a local and national reduction in the number of people who are willing to become foster carers. However, during 2017 the Trust has launched a new branded service with improved terms and conditions for carers that is beginning to impact positively on the numbers of carers and placements available. Further work will be undertaken during the next twelve months to ensure good quality support and supervision is available to carers and that the Trust is able to build upon the success of its innovation projects. This should ensure that "Trust Fostering" is able to provide the highest quality placements for Doncaster children and ensure they are able to remain within the borough.

**Sue May**  
**Head of Service Looked After Children**  
**June 2017**