
**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 7 November 2017

Subject: Foster Carer Report

Report of: Head of Service, Looked After Children

Summary

This report is an annual report intended to brief Scrutiny Committee Members on the business and activity within the Council's Fostering Service in 2016/17.

As well as providing data about activity in the service, and the role and business of the Fostering Panel, this report details service developments and improvements that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving through 2017/18.

Recommendations

It is recommended the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee members;

1. Note and scrutinise the content of this report;
 2. Seek an update in March 2018 as to the success of Manchester City Council's fostering service recruitment and retention activity; and
 3. Seek a progress report as to the number of children for whom Manchester City Council have secured a 'permanent' placement; reflecting a key priority of the Children and Young People's Plan to have 'stable, safe and loving homes'.
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Wards Affected: All

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report is an annual report intended to brief Scrutiny Committee Members on the business and activity within the Council's Fostering Service in 2016/17.
- 1.2 As well as providing data about activity in the service, and the role and business of the Fostering Panel, this report details service developments and improvements that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving through 2017/18.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Fostering services are regulated services. Manchester City Council Fostering Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Children Act 1989, Fostering Service Regulations 2011, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. Fostering services are inspected by Ofsted.
- 2.2 Prior to September 2013, local authority fostering services were inspected as individual services by Ofsted. Since then, inspection of local authority fostering services has been incorporated into the Single Inspection Framework which takes into account the role of the fostering service in meeting the local authority's looked after children's needs.
- 2.3 The Fostering Service in Manchester is made up of six teams providing regulated fostering services as well as a further two teams offering non fostering, non-regulated services, as follows:

The Recruitment and Assessment Team,
Fostering Supervision Team 1
Fostering Supervision Team 2
Fostering Supervision Team 3

The Therapeutic Fostering Scheme (WRAPP)
The Connected Person's Assessment Team

and

The Staying Put Fostering and Supported Lodgings Provider Team
The Special Guardianship Assessment Team

- 2.4 As per the Regulations, the Service has a fostering panel chaired by a skilled and experienced independent social work professional. The panel considers and makes 'recommendations' about the suitability of foster carer applicants and on the long term/permanent matching of children with long term/permanence foster carers.
- 2.5 The Head of Service for Looked after Children and the Fostering Service Manager perform the role of Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service. The Agency Decision Maker considers and makes decisions informed by but

not constrained by the fostering panel recommendations. The Agency Decision Maker also has responsibility to agree the continued suitability to foster following a foster carer's annual fostering review.

- 2.6 There are two distinct types of approved foster carer that the Service works with and that are referred to throughout this report. They are 'recruited' foster carers and 'connected persons' foster carers. Recruited foster carers are those individuals or couples who are actively recruited from the public to care for children who are unknown to them. These carers are approved not for a named child, but for any child that falls within the number and age category for which they are approved. For example a recruited foster carer might be approved to foster two children aged 0 to 12. A connected persons foster carer is a person who is approved to care for a child that they already know and have a relationship with (a connection). Most connected persons foster carers are relatives of the child, and very often they are grandparents.

3.0 Manchester's Looked After Children Population

- 3.1 Manchester's looked after children population totalled 1,237 children at the end of 2015/16 and had reduced to 1,170 by the end of 2016/17. From looking at the rate of children per 10,000 in the general population and comparing with statistical neighbours, other core cities, and the national average, we can see that despite our population reducing over the reporting year, we still have a high rate of looked after children.

- 3.2 For example, at the end of 2015/16 the average statistical neighbour rate of looked after children was 93 children per 10,000 of the child population, the core city rate was at 79 per 10,000, and the national average was 60 per 10,000. Manchester's rate was 105 per 10,000 at the end of 2015/16 and has reduced to 100 per 10,000 at the end of March 2017. We are aiming to reduce the population further by improving our edge of care services and increasing the number of children for whom we secure timely permanence outside of care through special guardianship and adoption.

4.0 Looked After Children by Placement Type

- 4.1 With such a large number of looked after children to accommodate, it will always be necessary to use a mixed economy of care, utilising foster placements and residential resources in the independent sector to complement our own in-house local authority foster carer and residential resources.
- 4.2 At the end of 2015/16 73.6% of our looked after children were placed in foster care, inclusive of in-house and independent provision. Positively, at the end of 2016/17 this had increased to 75.7%. The most recent data indicates that nationally at the end of March 2016 74% of looked after children were placed in foster care.

The following table shows the number of children placed with in-house foster carers and independent fostering agency carers and the changes from 2013/14 to 2016/17.

Looked After Children by Placement Type				
	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
1.Total LAC	1373	1291	1237	1170
2. IFA placements	623	614	534	489
3. In-house recruited carer placements	233	205	191	229
4. In-house connected persons placements	169	162	185	167
5. Total in-house carer placements(3 +4)	402	367	376	396

4.3 Children Placed in the MCC Fostering Service.

4.3.1 As detailed in the above table, at the end of March 2017 there were a total of 396 children placed with Manchester's in-house foster carers. Of these, 229 children were placed with mainstream 'recruited' foster carers, and 167 children were placed with 'connected persons' foster carers.

4.3.2 This compares with the previous year when at the end of March 2016 we had a total of 376 children placed with in-house foster carers, made up of 191 placed with recruited foster carers and 185 placed with connected persons foster carers. Of these children 116 have been in placement for less than 1 year, tending to be young children, or children newly subject to care proceedings, 30 children have been in placement 1 - 2 years, 36 children between 2 - 5 years and 33 children over 5 years, with permanency plans to remain.

4.3.3 Overall, we were caring for 20 additional children with in-house foster carers at the end of 2016/17 compared to the end of 2015/16. We had 38 more children placed with our recruited foster carers but 18 fewer placed with connected persons foster carers.

4.3.4 The 38 additional children placed with recruited carers is the result of recruiting new foster carers in 2016/17 who are more suitable and a better match with children who need placement compared with foster carers who have left the service in the year. The reduction in the number of connected persons foster care placements may be explained by an increase in connected persons foster carers becoming special guardians for the children they were fostering and also a reduction in admissions to care in the year. We know that the number of looked after children made subject to special guardianship increased from 49 in 2015/16 to 60 in 2016/17.

4.4 Children Placed in Independent Fostering Agency Placements

4.4.1 As detailed in the table above we have seen a decrease in the number of children placed with independent fostering agency carers from 534 at the end of 2015/16 to 489 at the end of 2016/17. This is as a result of us making more placements with in-house recruited foster carers and an increase in the number of independent fostering agency carers becoming special guardians for the children they fostered.

4.4.2 We will continue to strive to maximise the number of children we place with in-house carers and reduce our reliance on the independent sector. Independent sector placements are on average considerably more expensive than in-house placements. In addition, in-house placements are more likely to be local and as a service we have a better knowledge of our carers' skills, experience and capabilities. As detailed in the above table, in 2014/15 the balance was 614 independent fostering placements compared to 367 in-house. This has become 489 independent placements to 396 in-house at the end of 2016/17, changing the balance from a 63% to 37% split in favour of the independent sector to a split of 55% to 45% in favour of the independent sector.

5.0 New Fostering Placements Made in 2016/17

5.1 In 2016/17 there were a total of 428 new placements made with in-house recruited foster carers. This is significantly higher than the 201 new placements made with in-house recruited carers during 2015/16 and indicates the increased contribution that the in-house service is making in meeting children's placements needs.

5.2 In comparison the local authority made 236 new placements with independent agency foster carers in 2016/17. This indicates then that although we currently have fewer children placed with in-house carers than with independent carers, more new placements are being made in-house than with independent carers and this is addressing the imbalance and over reliance on the independent sector.

5.3 It should be noted that not all of these would have been new admissions to care as some will be moved from one placement to another, for example, a move from an emergency carer to a non-emergency carer, a move from a short term carer to a long term/permanence carer or less positively and less

frequently because of a placement breakdown. (The number of new admissions to care in 2016/17 was 465 in total.)

6.0 Numbers of Approved Foster Carers

6.1 At the end of 2016/17 the Service had 228 in-house recruited foster carers. This compares with 226 at the end of 2015/16. Although the Service recruited 30 new foster carers in 2016/17 although as outlined above we also lost through deregistration a total of 28 existing foster carers, therefore making a disappointing net gain of 2 carer households.

6.2 As discussed above in 4.3.4, however, the new carers recruited are more suitable and better matched with the needs of our looked after children than those we lost and as a result the foster carer pool was able to care for 38 more children at the end of 2016/17 compared to 2015/16.

6.3 At the end of 2016/17 we had a total of 120 connected persons foster carers caring for a total of 167 children. This compares with 137 approved connected persons foster carers caring for 185 children at the end of 2015/16.

7.0 Fostering Panel Functions

7.1 Manchester City Council Fostering Panel has the following primary functions:

- To consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent (including “connected persons” under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement & Care Review Regulations 2010)
- Where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given
- To recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate - (i) on the first review and (ii) on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service (e.g. following allegations or complaints against foster carers)
- To consider and recommend approval of matches of children who have a plan for long-term fostering with suitable foster carers

8.0 Fostering Panel Organisation

8.1 Manchester Council Fostering Panel meets on a weekly basis with each meeting lasting half a day. Panel can sit for additional meetings at short notice if required to meet the needs of the service.

8.2 The panel maintains a central list of panel members with a wide understanding of fostering, children’s multi-agency services, local services and the needs of the children looked after by the Council.

8.3 The panel has a key quality assurance role in relation to the work of the service.

8.4 The panel currently has a Panel Advisor who works with and supports the panel in its work. The Panel Advisor provides a pivotal bridge between practitioners and the panel, offering support in preparation and delivering constructive feedback.

9.0 Panel Membership

9.1 The panel has a committed and loyal membership who are flexible with regard to attendance.

9.2 The Panel Chair and two Deputy Chairs work together to ensure that all panels are serviced. The panel meetings are planned with 6 or 7 members in attendance.

9.3 The panel members have a wide range of professional experience, including social work, ex police officer, nursing, foster carer, adopter and an Elected Member. The panel has an over-representation of white women, although a new male member joined panel during this period. We will be looking to recruit new members from non-white backgrounds and to recruit someone who has previously been fostered.

9.4 All panel member's appraisals have been updated during the reporting year. The appraisals indicate that panel members are comfortable with their task, not afraid to challenge and have confidence in the Chair to manage the flow of the meeting.

9.5 The Panel Chair was also subject to an appraisal in the reporting year undertaken by the Fostering Agency Decision Maker.

9.6 The panel has a medical advisor to offer professional health advice and information and also has access to legal advice.

9.7 There were two panel training days during the year attended by panel members and the Chair designed to address ongoing learning needs. The Chair in particular keeps abreast of new local and national policy and practice issues and cascades her learning to panel members. We will be looking at developing a regional panel chair forum in the coming year to create an opportunity for panel chairs across the region to share learning and best practice in relation to the role.

10.0 Panel Business in 2016/17

10.1 The following table details the number of each type of case considered by the Fostering Panel in 2016/17 with the data for 2015/16 in brackets:

Agenda Item	Statistics
Recruited carer approvals	30 (22)
Connected carer approvals	20 (40)
Temporary connected persons viability assessments considered	12 (not considered at panel previous year)
Foster carer reviews	25 (56)
Long Term Matching (In House)	10 (15)
Long Term Matching (IFA)	70 (9)
Total	167 (225)

- 10.2 As detailed, there were 8 more recruited foster carers approved in 2016/17 than in the previous year. This is some progress but not as much as required and work will be ongoing to accelerate progress in 2017/18.
- 10.3 There was a significant reduction in connected persons foster carer approvals in 2016/17 with 20 compared to 40 the previous year. This may be explained by a reduction in the number of admissions to care in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16.
- 10.4 The number of foster carer reviews considered at panel reduced from 56 to 25. We are taking less reviews to panel as we previously took all reviews where a change of approval was recommended. This is not required under the regulations and we have changed practice so that changes to approval are recommended at the review and the decision is made by the Agency Decision maker without it passing through panel. Most reviews considered at panel are the first reviews of new carers as all of these by regulation have to be considered.
- 10.5 There has been a big increase in the number of children permanently matched at panel in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. This is explained by the fact the Directorate has developed a permanence policy, guidance and actively promoting and that in the previous year our process was to agree permanent matches at the child's statutory childcare review, rather than via panel. We changed our process to add rigour and an extra quality assurance layer. In addition we have strived to agree permanence in foster care for children where adoption, special guardianship, or return to family is not an option so as to provide stability and security for children.
- 10.6 Where permanent matches with independent agency carers have been approved, this is where children have been settled in placement for some time. Fee discounts are applied where placement in independent agencies are long term.

- 10.7 All recruited foster carer assessments presented to panel were recommended for approval by the panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker. There were a number of matches presented to panel which were not recommended or approved due to insufficient information being provided. However, in all cases when sufficient information was provided at a later panel meeting the match was recommended and approved.
- 10.8 There was one foster carer who had their registration/approval terminated following a recommendation from the Fostering Panel to do so.

11.0 Fostering Panel Quality Assurance

- 11.1 Panel has a key role in quality assuring the work of the Fostering Service. The Panel Advisor is a key link between the panel and the Service for communicating quality assurance matters. The Agency Decision Maker meets regularly with the Panel Chair to discuss service developments and to listen to the views of the chair in relation to the quality of work seen by panel.
- 11.2 Panel has raised a number of quality assurance issues with the Service in the reporting year. These include the timeliness of connected persons assessments getting to panel, the quality of matching reports, and the variable quality of child permanence reports.
- 11.3 The Service has been working to improve on all of these areas. In response to panel feedback we have commissioned specific training for managers and social workers on Child Permanence Report writing and quality assuring, introduced a new matching document template, and introduced connected persons viability assessments being considered by panel immediately following temporary approval and at the 16 week point where cases require an extension to the assessment timescale for full approval.
- 11.4 The new matching document appears to be improving practice. The new arrangements for connected persons assessments has led to improved timeliness of assessments coming to panel and staff feel they have benefited from the advice and challenge from panel on the temporary approved viability assessments.
- 11.5 The panel reports that the quality of recruited carer assessments is very good with a number of assessments being rated by panel as outstanding in the reporting period. Assessment reports for connected persons foster carers are more variable but improving in quality with some good but some requiring improvement. Reports provided for matching decisions, such as the matching report and the Child Permanence Report in too many cases earlier in the year have been poor, and work is ongoing to make improvements in this area. Overall quality is improving, and this has been confirmed by the Panel Chair in her latest quality assurance report for quarter four in 2016/17, January to March inclusive. The Chair states that,

'During this period, there has been an improvement in the overall quality of assessments, both Form F (recruited carer assessments) and Form C.'
(connected persons assessments)

12.0 Recruitment Activity and Outcomes

12.1 The Service worked hard through the year to attract, recruit and approve new 'recruited' foster carers. The team worked in partnership with the Council's Communications and Media Team. Marketing material and activity was targeted particularly at people who have existing skills and/or experience caring for or working with children and young people.

12.2 In addition to regular advertisements, events and information evenings, the following activity was undertaken:

- **Manchester Schools** – The Service was in touch with 46 Manchester schools to make links with their family workers. Our thinking is that they are the liaison between teachers, school staff, parents and the wider community. We ask if we can add our fostering information to their websites, newsletters and attend their parent coffee mornings. Each school is sent digital and paper posters, children's and foster carers case studies and sample tweets for future use.
- **Community Work** -The team was busy with outreach and making links in the community including in Chorlton, West Didsbury and Didsbury Village. In each area we have asked local businesses, schools, GP surgeries, hospitals, faith organisations to display our posters and business cards as well as, follow us on Facebook. This activity had the added bonus of forging strong links within the business communities for future recruitment.
- **Faith Communities** – The Service made links with Faith4Network, a Manchester City Council funded organisation. We are looking to use their contacts to spread the word about fostering amongst various faith groups.
- **Sport Clubs** – The Service made a link with the Chairman of Wythenshawe Football Club who has offered to support the Recruitment & Assessment team.
- **Ward Meetings** - The Recruitment & Assessment Team attended the following the ward meetings in 2016/17:
 - Ancoats Clayton
 - Bradford
 - Charlestown
 - Cheetham
 - Crumpsall
 - Didsbury East/West
 - Gorton South
 - Higher Blackley
 - Miles Platting Newton Heath

• **Further ward meetings** are booked in 2017/18 to:

- Baguley 13th July 2017
- Brooklands 13th July 2017
- Chorlton 6th September 2017
- Chorlton Park 13th September 2017
- Fallowfield 13th July 2017
- Hulme 28th June 2017
- Levenshulme 27th September
- Moss Side 4th July 2017
- Moston 14th September 2017
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12.3 The following table shows recruitment outcomes in 2016/17:

FOSTERING RECRUITMENT 16/17	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of enquiries regarding Fostering	27	59	32	29	28	75	43	37	31	39	79	86
Number of Initial Visits to Prospective recruited Foster Carers homes	5	7	7	4	5	17	12	7	7	9	4	8
Members of the Public contacting us due to Other Sources/Agency Transfer	4	2	6	8	7	6	3	5	6	2	7	7
Number of Skills to Fostering courses delivered (STF)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Number of People who attended training	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	9	0

Number of prospective recruited foster carer assessments allocated	1	2	2	3	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	4
Number of ongoing prospective recruited foster carer assessments	20	18	16	16	15	16	19	15	15	16	14	15
Number of applicants in assessment from other organisations	12	10	11	11	8	7	7	8	6	6	6	7
Number of recruited Assessments presented to the Fostering Panel	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	1
Number of recruited Assessments presented at Fostering Panel recommended	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
Number of recruited Assessments presented at Fostering Panel Not recommended	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

12.4 One of the key points to emerge from the table is that there were in total 555 enquiries about fostering in the year and this filtered down to 30 carer households being approved. We do not believe that we lose people as a result of any deficiencies in our response timeliness or approach. The recruitment team respond very promptly to interest and provide a warm welcoming and professional service to enquirers.

- 12.5 Of the 555 enquiries, we made home visits to discuss fostering further with 92. This clearly indicates the very large bulk of the fall off in numbers occurs between the stage of initial enquiry and initial visit. Large numbers of people making an initial enquiry know very little about fostering and the requirements and so very many rule themselves out or are ruled out by the service at this very early stage. Of those we made an initial visit to just about one third went on to be approved foster carers.
- 12.6 While the 30 carers approved is not as high as we would have liked it is 8 more than the 22 we recruited in 2015/16. This number was almost totally offset by the 28 carers who left the service in the year, leaving a net gain of 2 carer households. However, as discussed above, the new carers have been better reflected of and able to meet the needs of our looked after children which has resulted in us caring for 38 more children at the end of 2016/17 compared to the end of 2015/16.
- 12.7 Our recruitment performance compares reasonably well to other local authorities we have data for, even accounting for our size compared to other authorities. The following table details the number of foster carers recruited in other authorities that we have data for in 2016/17:
- | |
|--------------------|
| Manchester - 30 |
| Wakefield – 24 |
| Wigan – 20 |
| Sheffield – 18 |
| Stockport – 16 |
| Cheshire West – 14 |
| Oldham – 13 |
| Trafford - 12 |
| Tameside – 11 |
| Knowsley – 10 |
- 12.8 We also know from the latest Placements North West census that the number of local authority approved foster carers has not increased across the region, indicating that carer recruitment and retention is a difficult challenge for most. The census document stated:
- 'The Ofsted fostering data set indicated that in 2015/16 that internal fostering services have not responded to the opportunities afforded by a lessening in the LAC population with only eleven Local Authorities reporting an increase of 5 or more households and ten reporting a decline in numbers'. And there was 'a decline in the number of reported filled placements by 122 suggesting occupancy rates have slightly declined'. (Placements North West Census 2016)*
(Manchester had an increase of 38 filled placements between 2015/16 and 2016/17.)
- 12.9 We had success aiming recruitment activity and material at existing foster carers, as evidenced by 23 of the 30 new carers being existing carers with independent agencies. More generally appealing to people with existing skills

and experience working with children has appeared to work with more education professionals showing an interest in fostering. Community events have been positive for us, as has the improving reputation of the Fostering Service. Moving forward we know we need to more successfully appeal to people new to fostering and to continue to attract those with existing professional skills, especially to care for our most complex children.

13.0 Foster Carer De-registrations

- 13.1 We deregistered 27 existing recruited foster carers in 2016/17 and terminated the approval of one carer. At 12.34% of our total carer population at the start of the year this is higher than we would like but only just over the 12% national average as cited by the Fostering Network.
- 13.2 Of the reasons for the ceasing approval as a foster carer for Manchester City Council include;
- Carers adopting or agreeing a 'Staying Put' arrangement for children who have been placed with them
 - retirement
 - transfer to an Independent Fostering Agency (2 foster carers)
 - dissatisfaction with level of foster care
- 13.3 The 28 carers we lost was disappointingly just 2 fewer than the 30 we gained, although we did gain 2 adoptive families and 2 staying put households from among the 28 carers who were de-registered. Also, the 30 newly recruited carers were approved to care for a total of 60 children, compared to the total of 51 approved placements from the 28 carers who resigned.

14.0 Foster Carer Support and Supervision

- 14.1 There are three Fostering Supervision Teams in the Service. These teams support, supervise and manage all of our approved foster carers, both recruited carers and connected persons carers, except approximately 10 who are part of the WRAPP therapeutic service.
- 14.2 All of our foster carers have a named allocated supervising social worker. The social worker is required to maintain a minimum of six weekly supervision visits to each foster carer. Compliance with this requirement is at 73% at year-end 1016/17, a slight improvement on the previous years outturn at 71%. The service increased expected visit timeliness to 6 weekly in November 2015 as in former years the requirement was to visit each 12 weeks.
- 14.3 All carers have access to a range of training and development opportunities throughout the year and are encouraged and supported to attend monthly support groups.
- 14.4 There are 3 geographically organised support groups, south, north and central, all which meet monthly.

- 14.5 There is a range of training provided to foster carers, some of which is provided by the Manchester Foster Carer Association, some by more specialist providers, and some by social workers/trainers in the Fostering Service.
- 14.6 There has been a particular focus on rolling out Secure Base training to our foster carer pool over the reporting year. This is an attachment based training programme created and supported by Beek and Schofield at the University of East Anglia. Feedback about the training from foster carers so far has been very positive about the impact the training has had on their ability to meet children's complex needs.

15.0 Foster Carer Reviews

- 15.1 It is a legislative requirement that all foster carers have their approval as carers reviewed at least every 12 months. In Manchester carer review meetings are chaired by two dedicated reviewing officers from the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit.
- 15.2 In 2016/17 all carers were reviewed within timescale.

16.0 Allegations

- 16.1 There were in total 20 allegations made against foster carers in 2016/17; which were subject to investigation in accordance with and under the scrutiny of the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) and where appropriate consideration by the Fostering Panel/reviewing arrangements.

17.0 The WRAPP Therapeutic Service

- 17.1 The Fostering Service has developed a new therapeutic fostering scheme this reporting year, named WRAPP. The service specifically recruits and support specialists foster carers to offer therapeutic care to children aged 4 to 11 with complex needs. The service provides intensive support, including CAMHS therapeutic support, to its carers and children in placement and aims to prepare children with very complex needs and attachment difficulties to be ready to move onto to more long term permanent placements.

The service has 9 carers with 8 children in placement. One of the carers is a dedicated short break carer to provide short breaks to the other WRAPP carers. The service have moved one child back to parents in the reporting year, and moved another on to a long term foster placement. Three of the children with WRAPP carers currently will be staying long term with the same carers now that the placement has supported them to attach. The service provides a much more cost effective alternative to a high cost IFA placement or a residential placement which otherwise may have been required.

18.0 The Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Team

- 18.1 Within the Fostering Service we also operate a Staying Put and a Supported lodgings Service. The Staying Put Service promotes and supports existing foster carers to continue to offer accommodation and support to the young people they are fostering once they have turned 18. We have a total of 82 young people who are in staying put placements currently.
- 18.2 The same team also operate a Supported Lodgings Scheme. This scheme recruits members of the public to offer lodging accommodation in their home to care leavers.
- 18.3 At the end of 2016/17 we had 74 young people in staying put foster placements and 58 young people placed with supported lodging providers.
- 18.4 These two services ensure quality support for a considerable number of care leavers post age 18 and are an essential resource as identifying alternative supported housing and accommodation is a challenge in the City.

19.0 Service Developments in 2016/17

- 19.1 The following have been positive developments in the service in 2016/17:
- Regulation 24 viability assessments introduced to Fostering Panel to improve quality and oversight - this has reassured panel, increased timeliness of the full assessment coming to panel, and enabled the panel to provide helpful advice to presenting social workers at an early stage
 - Roll out of Secure Based Model to foster carers - overwhelmingly foster carers report that this training is very helpful and has helped them to understand and care for their fostered children
 - Awarding new contract for supporting carers through allegations to Foster Talk for 2017/18 - early indications are that the service is more professional, as well as being more cost effective
 - Development of new WRAPP therapeutic fostering service for children aged 4 to 11 - 8 children are being cared for in in-house foster carer who otherwise may have been placed in an IFA or a residential placement.
 - Development of new Special Guardianship Assessment Team to promote special guardianship with foster carers and undertake the necessary assessment work - we increased Special Guardianship Orders from 49 to 60 over the year.

20.0 Improved Outcomes

- 20.1 The following are areas where the Service has improved performance compared to the previous year:
- The number of recruited foster carers recruited in 2016/17 increased to 30 compared to 22 the previous year
 - Although the net gain in carers was only 2, we gained an additional 9 approved placements

- At the end of 2016/17 the Service was caring for 38 more children than at the end of 2015/16
- There were 428 new placements made with recruited foster carers in 2016/17 compared to 201 in the previous year.
- Timeliness of connected persons assessments has improved

21.0 What Children Have Told Us

21.1 The recent Bright Spots Survey of looked after children had a number of positive messages as follows:

- More children and young people (11-18yrs) in Manchester stated they felt safe in the home they lived in both in comparison to children in the general population, and to other local authorities.
- Most (90%) children always felt safe in the home they lived in and over 75% felt settled.
- Children reported that in the main they trusted their social workers and carers and the majority felt that their carers were sensitive to the way they were feeling.
- Most children liked school, especially 4-11 year olds. A larger proportion of children aged 11-18yrs reported that their carers took an interest in their education compared to the general population.
- Children aged 8-11yrs in Manchester were less likely to record that they worried about their feelings or behaviour regularly compared to children in other authorities.
- When asked if they were happy yesterday 70% of children said they were & 89% felt their lives were improving 'A lot' or 'A bit'.

21.2 The thing that children appeared least satisfied about was contact. Many children wanted more contact with parents and siblings.

22.0 Progress on Actions from Last Year

- Reviews of TOPS, Emergency Out of Hours Carers and multi link disability schemes - we changed TOPS into the WRAPP scheme which as a wider age group of children and is more cost effective and we amended the emergency carer arrangements
- Continued QA work to ensure better management knowledge and grip on the service, all reporting to the performance data group - we increased the performance management arrangements
- Review and improve the way the duty system operates to ensure that we fully utilise all Manchester carers and use less IFA's we amended the duty arrangements and are now merging the centralised placement teams with the fostering family finding staff

- Upgrade the IT system from Micare to Mosaic and utilise more accurate business reports - not completed
- Significantly increase the in-house foster placements whilst increasing the carer / placement ratio - we increased in house foster placements by 38 children
- Account for the views of looked after children and foster carers to improve the overall effectiveness of the service - we have re-established the 'Supersonics engagement group for young fostered children and will be using it to inform our work.

23.0 Improvement and Development Actions in 2017/18

- 23.1 We will be looking to accelerate carer recruitment in 2017/18 and lose fewer existing carers than we did this year. We are aiming to recruit at least 40 new foster carers and lose fewer than 20, resulting in a net gain of 20 carers.
- 23.2 We will be working at increasing our work engaging with children and young people so that they are able to influence service developments. We have established a participation group for younger fostered children and will meet monthly to gain their views, wishes and feelings and report into the Voice and Influence Group.
- 23.3 We will be looking to ensure that all our foster carers have participated in Secure Base training by the end of 2017/18.
- 23.4 We will be specifically targeting and promoting special guardianship with all our carers where children have been settled in placements for more than 1 year, unless it is not in the child's best interests, and in particular with connected persons foster carers where children are cared for by relatives. We aim to secure special guardianship for at least 50 children who are placed with our foster carers.
- 23.5 We will be aiming to increase the number of care leavers in staying put to 85 and those in supported lodgings placements to 80 by end of 2017/18.
- 23.6 We will be merging the Centralised Placement Team currently managed separately from the Fostering Service with the placement finding staff in the Fostering Service so that we have one streamlined service undertaking all placement finding activity by July 2017.