

# Annual Fostering Report



DRAFT

# Executive Summary

Manchester is a large local authority with a total of 1,340 children in our care on the 31.3.23. The Fostering Service ambition is to provide foster families for all those children who need one. We continue to strive to meet this ambition and this report sets out what we have achieved over the past year (1<sup>st</sup> April 2022-31<sup>st</sup> March 2023) and what our priorities are for the coming year.

## Successes for 2022-2023

- Our Ofsted Inspection took place in April 2022 and we were judged to be 'good' with our children in care and children in Private Fostering Arrangements judged to be living in 'safe and secure homes'.
- This year we have doubled the number of new foster carers approved within the year.
- This year we have retained more foster carers in the service. In the previous year we experienced a net loss of 19 fostering households. This year we have experienced the right carers staying with Manchester and our decrease has been 2 fostering households. Whilst we need to increase our net gain, in the current climate the improved retention is a success for the service.
- The Kinship Assessment team returned to the Fostering Service this year with the aim of improving the assessment and support offered to our kinship carers. In the initial year we have identified significant improvements in these areas. The quality of assessments presented to panel has improved, with a 25% drop in deferments at panel. We have also experienced a 20% drop in unplanned endings for children in kinship care arrangements. For our children in temporary approved fostering arrangements, we have also significantly improved the timeliness of these assessments and decisions, with a 70% decrease in assessments exceeding the 24-week timeframe.
- The quality of our practice continues to improve across the service with a 17% drop in deferments at panel. Indicating that our assessments and quality of practice are in line with requirements.
- We have been successful in our strategy to ensure that our Fostering Panel represents the community they serve. In 2021-22 our panel membership was 87% White. In 2022-23 we made considerable changes, and our panel membership is now 58% White and 42% from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds. This accurately represents the general population of Manchester as identified in the ONS Census data 2021. We also have a larger cohort of panel members from Black backgrounds, which reflects the larger cohort of Black children within our cared for population.
- In November 2022 we implemented the Fostering Networks Mockingbird Model. This new initiative is an evidenced based 'extended family model' which improves the experiences of foster families and consequently supports recruitment and retention. This will support our aim to be able to offer a foster family to every child in Manchester that needs one.
- In December 2022 Manchester City Council were awarded 'Fostering Friendly' status for our work to support existing foster carers and to promote fostering within our organisation.

## Priority actions for 2023-24

- We have not been successful in recruiting enough new Foster Carers to provide a foster family in Manchester for every child who needs one. For 2023-24 this continues to be a priority.
- We still need more carers who meet our children's cultural needs. We will be specifically targeting people who are able to care for our older children, and people who are able to meet our children's racial, cultural and identity needs.
- We need to further embed our stability offer for our carers. This will support recruitment and retention of foster carers and help them to feel more confident in caring for our older children.
- We will develop our support and training offer for Kinship Carers to meet the specific needs of these families and to support families to progress to legal permanence.
- We will launch our new training programme in Autumn 2023, we will continue to evaluate the impact of training and promote the requirement of training for our foster families.
- We will embed a 'whole system approach' working alongside our colleagues in the children's teams and wider directorate.
- Continue to build and support a stable, diverse, confident and talented workforce in the fostering service.

## Purpose of the Report

This Fostering Service Report meets the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35) and Fostering Service: National Minimum Standard 25.7 The Regulation states that the 'executive side of the local authority;'

1. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every quarter
2. Monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users;
3. Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

## Manchester City Council's Fostering Service

The Fostering Service for Manchester is a large Local Authority service located in Etrop Court, Wythenshawe, Manchester. The Agency Decision Maker is Adele Ion and the Registered Manager is Billie Walbank Service Lead.

There are now six teams within the Fostering Service as follows:

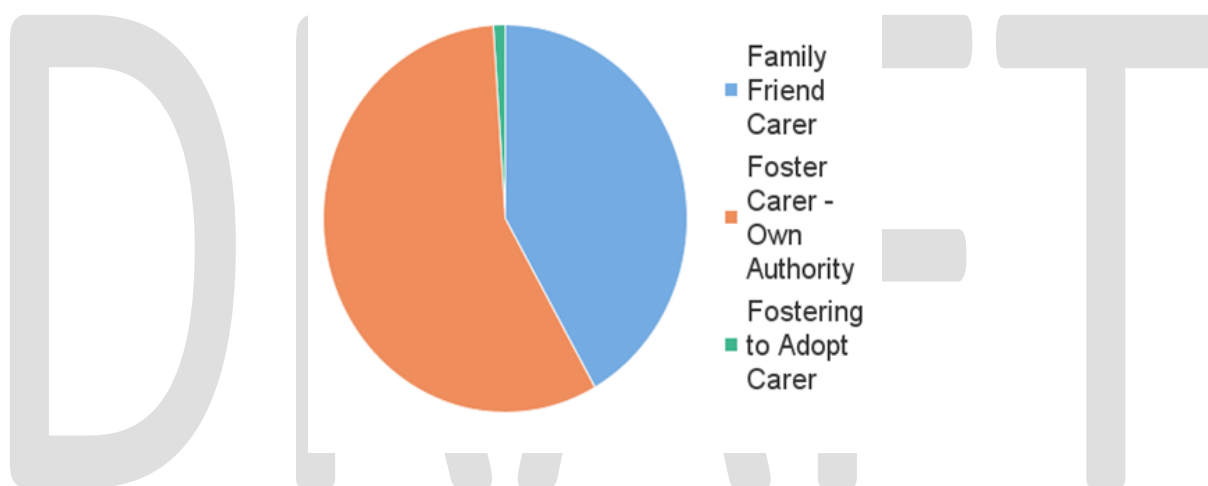
- Recruitment and Assessment Team (4 supervising social workers, A Training Officer, Recruitment Officer and Recruitment Support Officer)
- Recruited Carer Team 1 (6 supervising social workers)

- Recruited Carer Team 2 (6 supervising social workers)
- Kinship Assessment Team (9 supervising social workers)
- Kinship Support Team 1 (6 supervising social workers)
- Kinship Support Team 2 (6 supervising social workers)

To explain the distinction between kinship and recruited carers; the former are carers connected to a specific child either by family relationship or friendship. The approval of these carers relates to a specific child. The latter are foster carers who have been recruited by the service and approved to take any child within a category of approval (age, gender, number).

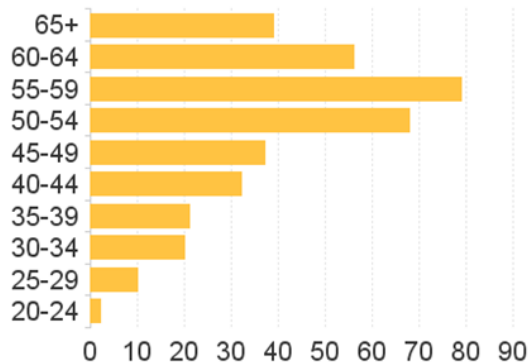
At year end we had 376 Foster Carers in Manchester. 216 were Recruited Foster Carers, 4 were Foster to Adopt carers and 158 were kinship carers. This is small decrease (6) in the number of Foster Carer's in Manchester. We have experienced a small increase in our number of Recruited Foster Carers and a slight decrease in our number of Kinship Foster Carers in the city.

Carer Type

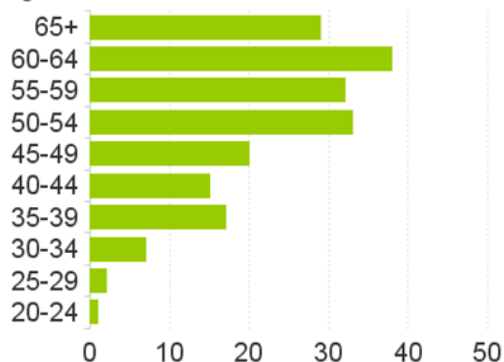


Demographics

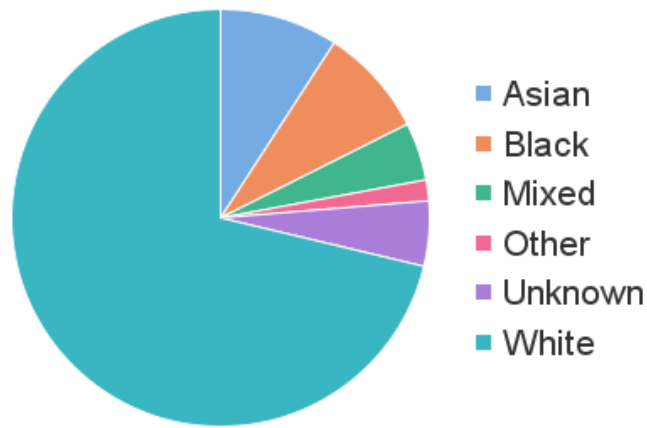
Ages of main & linked carers - Female



Age of all main & linked carers - Male



## Ethnicity of main & linked carers

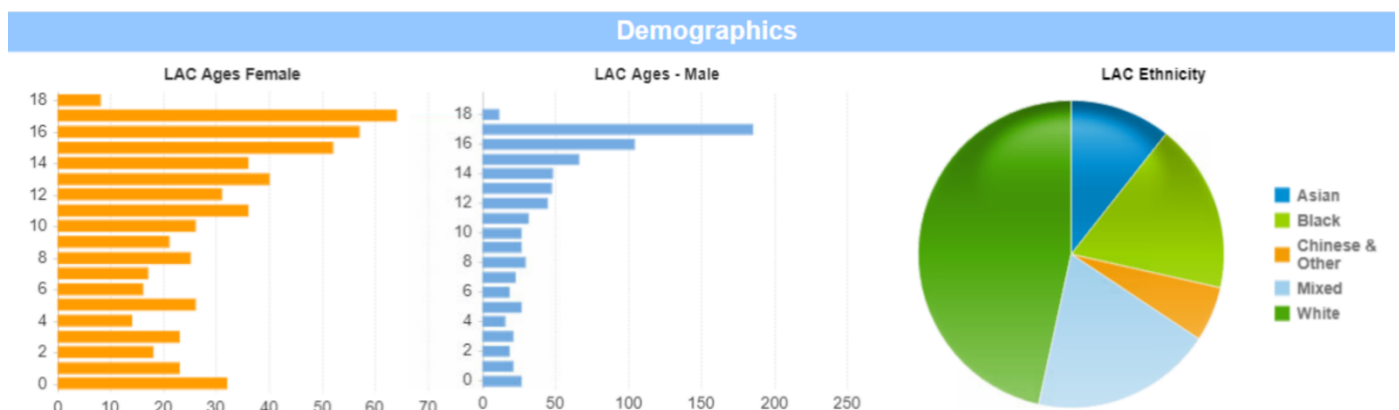


Our Carer demographic remains consistent and comparable to last year. There is a particular issue in respect of the age profile of carers. Whilst the Local Authority benefits from the maturity and skills provided by these carers, there is a need to address the fact that a significant cohort of carers are in the 60+ age range as this could cause us to lose lots of carers in a short time period and therefore impact on our ability to deliver sufficiency.

71% of all our foster carers are white, 9% Asian, 8% black, 1% other and 4% mixed heritage. This is comparable to last year but sees a very small increase in White and Asian carers. This compares to a children's foster care population where 46% are White, 17.8% are Black, 10% are Asian, 5.7% are classified as Chinese or other and 19.11% are mixed heritage. There remains a need to focus on recruiting more carers who meet our children's cultural and identity needs. Alongside supporting our children in foster families which are not a cultural match.

## Children and Young People Demographics

We had 1,340 children looked after in Manchester at the end of this year. 524 of these children were placed with foster carers in Manchester (295 with Internal Foster Carers and 229 with Kinship Foster Carers). This remains consistent since last year, with 39% of our children living in Manchester Foster Families.



There is a growing proportion of specialist looked after children's placements, which require specific talents from our recruited foster Foster Carers. Our biggest cohort of children are aged of 10+ and male. We know that our children come from a diverse range of cultures and our Foster Carer demographic is currently 71% White. Having looked at the data we continue to concentrate on recruiting from the following communities: Foster Carers who live in dual heritage/ mixed heritage households and Black Foster Carers from British, African and Caribbean backgrounds. Our recruitment strategy continues to focus on a wide range of Foster Carers to ensure we are better able to meet our children's needs.

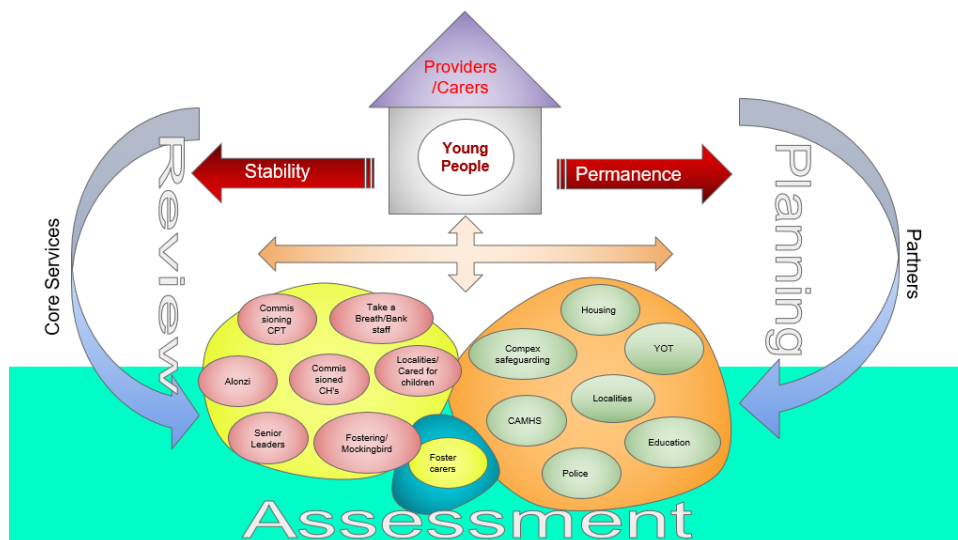
Our recruitment strategy sets out the work we aim to complete to target families who can meet our children's cultural needs. This includes working with partners such as AFRUCA and The Muslim Heritage Centre and a much greater presence in local communities. Our Recruitment and Retention Officer will start in post in October 2023 and will be instrumental in building and strengthening links with communities, to promote the need and to address any barriers that people or communities may experience when considering fostering.

We are also working with our partners across the city to strengthen our stability offer. A working group was established in January 2023. This group includes representatives from key partners and the aim is to ensure there us a clear and visible offer supporting stability for children and carers. We have new initiatives such as Mockingbird and Take a Breath that will be implemented in 2023-24 and we want to ensure that this offer is embedded and that there is a partnership response to stability and support.

To further support our Foster Carers to look after older children work with our Alonzi Hub provision to provide a stability offer to our Foster Carers. This provides access to a range of support offers including:

- Mental Health support worker
- Speech and Language therapist
- Clinical Psychologist
- Short Break
- Outreach support
- Family Group Conference

Referrals for support are discussed and agreed at a weekly stability meeting which is chaired by our Cared For Children Lead, Fostering, Virtual Schools, Health, CAMHS and the Alonzi Hub. The impact of this work has yet to be embedded however, the model and offer for children living at home is very successful and we anticipate the same to be said for children in family-based care.



Under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) there is a voluntary agreement that local authorities would accept UASC up to 7% of its total child population. Within Manchester this could amount to 98 UAS children and young people. Currently Manchester has a growing population of UASC who are ‘spontaneous’ arrivals and via the NTS. As a result, the service now cares for 175 unaccompanied children which is 13% of our cared for population. This has doubled since last year (when these children made up 6.5% of our cared for population). Approximately 11% of these children are living with foster families in Manchester. In response to this increase we are working with our partners in Manchester and across the region to increase recruitment of carers and tailor our support to the carers and children in these arrangements.

## Fostering in Manchester 2022/23

The last year has been one of continued change and development with positive feedback following an independent review and an Ofsted inspection in 2021-22.

In May 2022 the Kinship Assessment Team returned to the Fostering Service following 2 years of this work sitting within the Children’s Locality Teams. In the following 12 months significant improvements have been made in regard to quality of practice, timeliness of assessments and the support and training provided to kinship carers and their families.

An Independent Review of this area of the service, was undertaken in September 2022. This review took place 5 months after the service returned to Fostering. Whilst “noteworthy improvements in the quality of practice” were identified, it was acknowledged that “There has not been enough time for actions to be fully implemented or progress sustained.” The Independent Review did acknowledge the commitment and skill of the management team who were “committed to ensuring the welfare of children is central to its role in assessing the suitability of connected carers.”

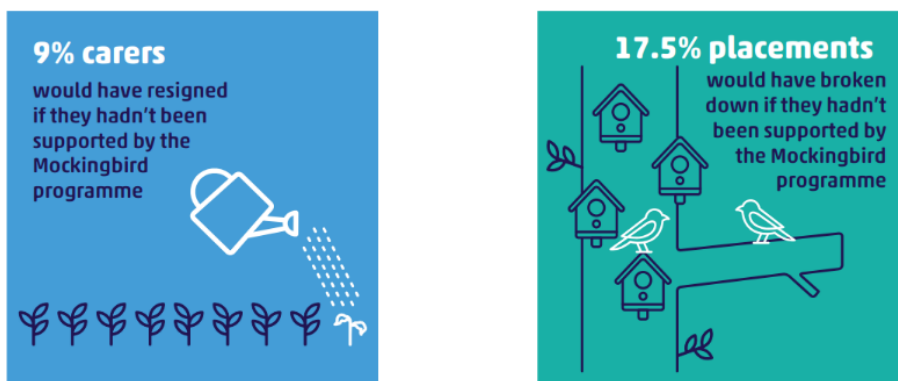
In the following 6 months further improvements were made. Unregulated arrangements reduced by 70%. Deferrals at Fostering Panel also reduced significantly, and the quality of assessments



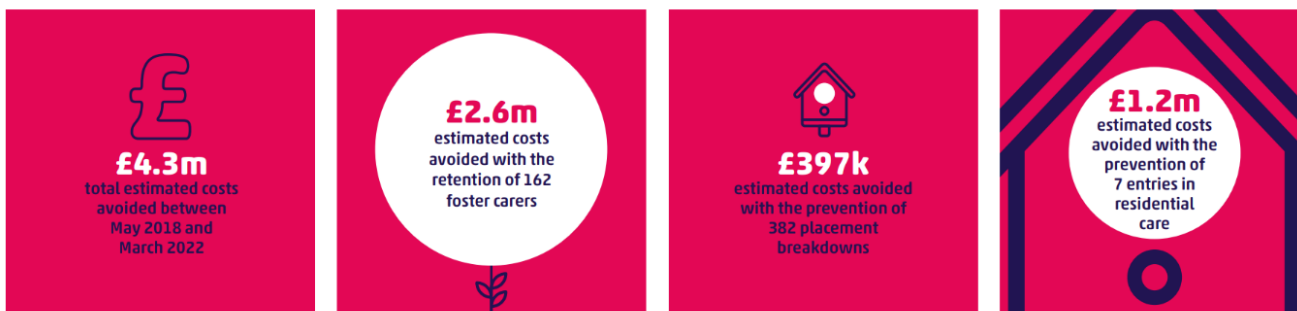
has significantly improved. The Service also implemented the first ‘Skills to Foster’ programme specifically for Kinship Carers alongside a calendar of family events and groups to provide peer support for kinship carers and opportunities for children to meet other children who were experiencing similar things. We have received positive feedback from our families about these developments to the service and consequently we are experiencing more engagement from our kinship families with a significant increase in attendance at events, training and support.

In November 2022 we implemented the Fostering Network Mockingbird Model in our service. This is an exciting step, and the Mockingbird Family Model is aligned to our vision and ethos within the service.

*“The Fostering Network’s Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of foster care using the Mockingbird Family Model. This is an extended family model that provides sleepovers and short breaks, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.” (Fostering Network)*



The Mockingbird model is an internationally recognised programme which improves stability for foster families, alongside improved recruitment and retention of foster carers.



(Mockingbird Impact Report 2022)

This programme is now being implemented with a designated Project Manager within the service. We will have our first constellation set up by July 2023 and once successfully implemented we aim for this to grow and expand within the city.

In December 2022 Manchester City Council were also awarded ‘Fostering Friendly’ status from the Fostering Network.

*“Our Fostering Friendly employers scheme offers businesses of any size a chance to make a difference for foster carers and the children they care for in their local communities and improve support for their own employees at the same time.*

*The Fostering Network’s Fostering Friendly employers’ scheme helps employers to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster and involves no direct costs. Members of the scheme agree to put in place a fostering friendly HR policy for all foster carers in their employment (regardless of their fostering service). This includes offering foster carers flexible working and paid time off for training and settling a new child into their home.” (The Fostering Network)*

With the support of this scheme, we will be targeting existing Council employees to promote fostering and recruit more foster carers for Manchester.

### What our children told us in 2022-23

Our carers and children have provided feedback for the year and a lot of this feedback has been positive. Carers have complimented the support they receive from their Supervising Social Workers and our children have achieved good outcomes. Manchester City Council held an Achievements Award and many of our children living in Foster Families won awards. These included awards for teamwork, self-belief, problem solving and being special stars. Feedback from our children told carers:

*“You let me be who I am, you love me and help me to have fun and play games”,*

*“I can talk to you about anything. I know you will tell me the truth, which is very important to me”*

*“You always show me that I’m part of your family, and I feel happy and safe”*

*“You always let me know it’s ok to show my emotions and you help me feel happy again”,*

*“You are funny, and I know you love me”,*

*“I have 2 families now”*



We are also listening and taking action when our children report anything they are unhappy about in their foster families. This year we received 1 formal complaint from a child who had lived with a foster family. This was fully investigated and the Service Lead for the service met with this child to listen to her story. Following this, learning has been disseminated throughout the service and the wider organisation. Whilst our number of complaints is low, we are aware that we need to remain curious and ensure that we are visiting children and seeking their views regularly. We have held learning sessions on 'Children's feedback' and how we gather this in a meaningful and honest way. We have several good practice examples of feedback that is creative, child led and gives us a good picture of life for that child in their foster family.

## Supervision of our carers

Supervision of foster carers continues to take place at a minimum of every 6 weeks for all of our carers.

As well as quantitative increases, there have been ongoing qualitative improvements in terms of our focus on issues and risk and oversight of the findings from Supervisions. Applying reflective supervision sessions and learning.

Supervisions now routinely capture the voice of the child and this is achieved in quite detailed ways. Some of these improvements have been positively impacted upon by the Wednesday learning sessions which have focused on the need to provide appropriate challenge to foster carers.

We can also point to more frequent and thorough manager oversight and accountability for timeliness of supervisions and a team and service focus through our audit activity.

## Allegations and Practice Concerns

The service has continued to focus on this area this year and we are confident that positive changes are now embedded. Our staff have a sound working knowledge of the allegations process and their role in safeguarding our children. Process is routinely followed and there is appropriate management oversight and grip. The Fostering Panel evaluation also shows that the quality of investigations is good and there has been a notable and sustained improvement in this area.

This year the service investigated 34 allegations against Foster Carers. This is a 22% reduction in allegations made. Last year we investigated more allegations and deregistered more carers due to concerns regarding their suitability. This has resulted in the service being more assured that the carers we support and supervise have the appropriate skills and behaviours to care for our children. When allegations are made against carers, we investigate these appropriately ensuring that the children are safeguarded and supported. Our Foster Carers are also signposted to our commissioned independent advice and support service so they are also appropriately supported through the process.

When an allegation is made against a carer, we always undertake a full investigation and return to the fostering panel and ADM for a review of the carers approval. This ensures that our investigation is robust and has appropriate oversight. This process is not followed in all fostering services across the county. In some services investigations cease if the concerns are deemed to be unsubstantiated or do not meet Lado threshold. However, we continue to follow this process to ensure that our response is robust and we can clearly demonstrate that a child's concerns have been acted upon and we can provide clear evidence of the process followed and the reasons for our final recommendations.

The type of allegations are detailed below:

Physical abuse: 21  
Sexual abuse: 4  
Neglect: 6  
Emotional abuse: 3

This breakdown remains consistent with more allegations being made regarding physical abuse. The prevalence of this is experienced nationally. *“Physical abuse continues to account for the largest number of allegations. In 2020 to 2021, 53% of all allegations were related to physical abuse; this percentage has remained very similar over the years.”* (Ofsted, Fostering in England 2020-2021 11.11.2021) There are various hypothesis for this. Often physical abuse is easier to identify, there are also instances of false allegations being made if children are unhappy in foster homes. There have been instances where carers have used inappropriate physical interventions. These allegations also relate to physical instances between carers. These have been classed as physical abuse due to the potential risk to the children. All allegations are thoroughly investigated and assessed so that appropriate recommendations can be made. Of the allegations of physical abuse made in the year, only 3 were substantiated (2 related to domestic incidents between

carers and 1 related to physical abuse perpetrated against the children). The children were moved from these homes and the carers were deregistered.

This year we have demonstrated significant strength in our immediate response to safeguarding concerns. We are clear on thresholds and when allegations are made, we take immediate steps to assess any potential risks, and to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. We are doing this alongside our partners and our managers are evidencing robust oversight at the point of allegation.

Following investigation, we deregistered 6 carers in the year. One of these carers challenged our decision via the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM). The IRM endorsed our decision and unanimously recommended that this person was unsuitable to continue fostering.

We continue to work across localities to improve the quality of joint investigations. These have improved within the year with more effective communication at the point of allegation and a clearer understanding of respective roles during joint investigations.

Our allegations management process also links closely with our training requirements and following an allegation and investigation our Foster Carers have a clear training and development plan and recommendations. We need to ensure that these actions and recommendations are followed and that impact is evaluated and monitored within the service.

## Fostering Learning

Since February 2021 the service have held weekly learning sets that are well attended. Each of these is an hour long and is used as the forum through which practice issues can be aired and new developments introduced. The following areas have been discussed this year:

- Impact on carer training for our children
- Secure Base Training
- Foster Carer Reviews
- Adoption support for carers
- Recruitment and Retention Strategy
- Recording
- Family Time
- Alonzi Offer
- Muslim children in care
- Children's Feedback for reviews
- Foster Carer Training Offer
- Coram Voice
- The Local Offer
- Staying Put
- Black History Month
- Leaving Care
- Eclipse
- Co-production with our children and carers
- Identity
- The Fostering Network membership

- Introducing Mockingbird
- Identity and Plans
- Family Group Conferencing
- Fostering Panel Requirements
- Foster Carer Supervision

In addition to the above we complete a quarterly Quality Assurance Report with a focus on learning and development across the service linked to our file audit work. We hold service Plenary sessions at the start and end of each quarter to set goals and measure our impact. This has seen a sharpened focus on the quality of our work with children and carers, and allowed us to focus on supervision and training, identity, and planning. Staff have very much welcomed this approach and see more value in feedback. As a consequence, our audits are identifying improved practice each quarter. We are now grading more of our practice as 'good.'

We have also held a staff questionnaire and Service away day, which allowed us to have space and time to reflect on our priorities and embed some of the changes we have developed through our QAF. Overall both the staff questionnaire and service day were well received, and both had very positive outcomes in terms of staff welfare, motivation and the desire to progress our learning culture.

### Recruitment, Resignations and De-registrations

Recruitment of Foster Carers continues to be a vulnerability in the service. This dip in recruitment is experienced locally and nationally. "Since 2018, the number of approved mainstream fostering places has decreased by 5% while the number of children living in care has risen by 9% over the same period." (Stable Homes, Built on Love Pg 89)

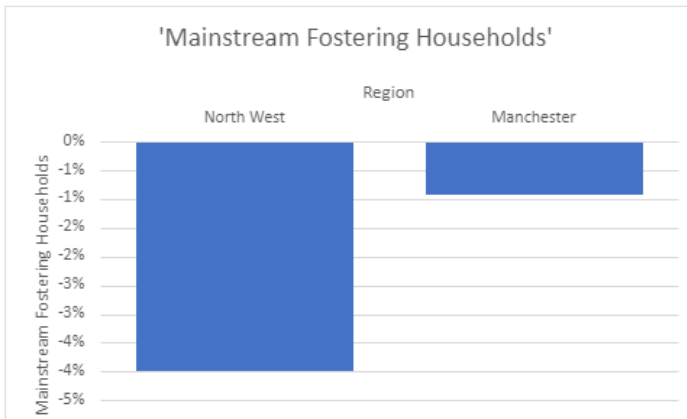
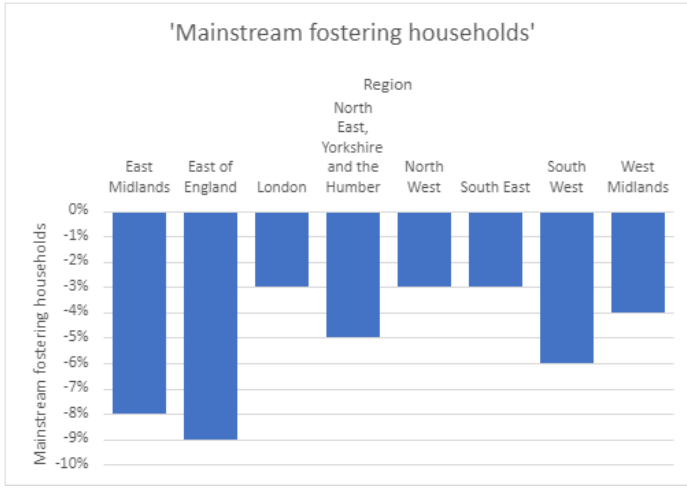
The Office for National Statistics have now published their report 'Fostering in England April 1 2022 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2023.' The findings report:

*At the end of March 2023, there were around 43,400 fostering households in England. This total has remained fairly stable over the last 5 years, but the make-up has altered. Since 2019, the number of mainstream LA households has fallen by 11%, and the number of family and friends households has increased by 21%.*

*This year, there has been a 5% decrease in the number of LA households.*

*The number of applications in 2022 to 2023 (8,010) was the lowest in several years, at 18% lower than 2018 to 2019 (9,740). In 4 of the last 5 years there has been a year-on-year decrease in applications. Over the same period, the number of deregistrations has fluctuated. This year, the number of leavers exceeded the number of joiners.*

This mirrors our experience in Manchester. However, our recruitment and retention figures do exceed the national and local figures with the number of households exiting Manchester in 2022-23 being less than 1%.



Our data within Greater Manchester demonstrates that recruitment remains a vulnerability. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) published data in March 23. This showed that across the 10 boroughs “approximately 8% of carers have been approved in the latest 12 months compared to 10% that have exited. This means fostering services are generally shrinking, with Manchester being the only exception. However, this growth is not enough to keep up with demand.” (GMCA Fostering data insights Q3 2022-23) Our recruitment and retention has greatly improved this year. However, we still do not have enough carers to offer a foster home to all our children who need one.

We have a disparity between need and enquiry, with the vast majority of interest coming from people who wish to care for babies and young children. Our older cohort of children needing foster homes remains prevalent and we are attempting to address this through promotional campaigns and awareness. We have been working with our partners in GM on a GM strategy to target and recruit new carers, given this is a local and national issue. Pooling resource and producing a strong marketing campaign should support our recruitment drive. This campaign ‘Fostering Unfiltered’ will go live in May 2023.

We have also become a ‘Fostering Friendly Organisation’ and we will be promoting this status to encourage staff within the organisation to consider fostering.

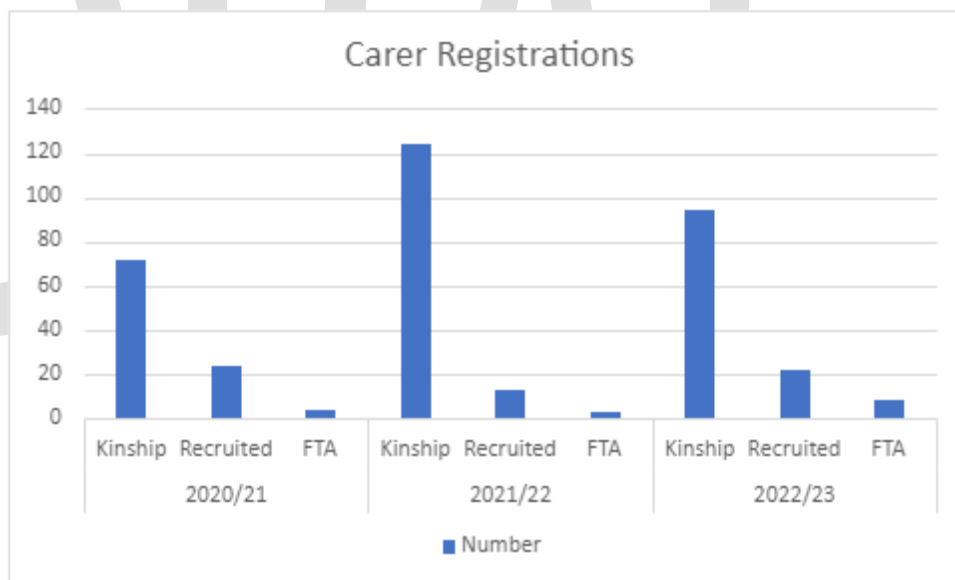
This year we approved 22 new Foster Families for Manchester. This is almost a 50% increase on last year (when we only registered 12 new families within the year)

Service Representatives meet with GM partners regularly to share best practice and to share successes

We deregistered 24 of our Recruited Carers in the year, which has resulted in a decrease of 2 fostering households. Last year we saw a decrease of 19 fostering households. Whilst this is an improved picture in relation to recruitment and retention, we have still not achieved any net gains within the year. Whilst the de registrations relate to an ageing Foster Carer cohort and changes in circumstances relating to other caring responsibilities, we have been unable to recruit enough new foster carers to replace those exiting the service.

### Registrations

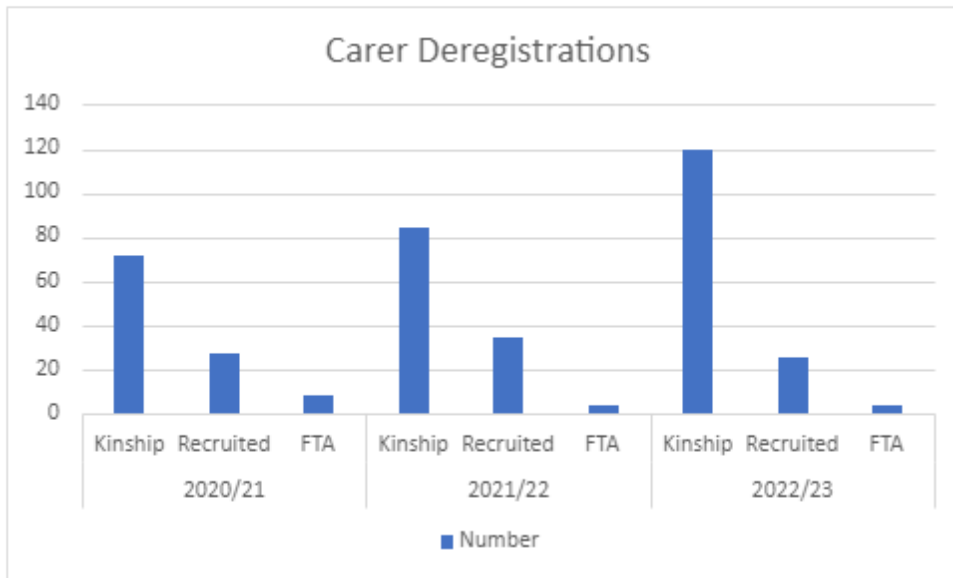
This year we registered 94 new Kinship Carers, 22 new Recruited Carers and 8 Foster To Adopt (FTA) Carers. We know we need to focus on our recruited carers and we have reviewed our sufficiently strategy and work streams to support this.



### De-Registrations

We de-registered 116 Kinship Carers, 24 Recruited Carers and 4 Foster to Adopt carers.



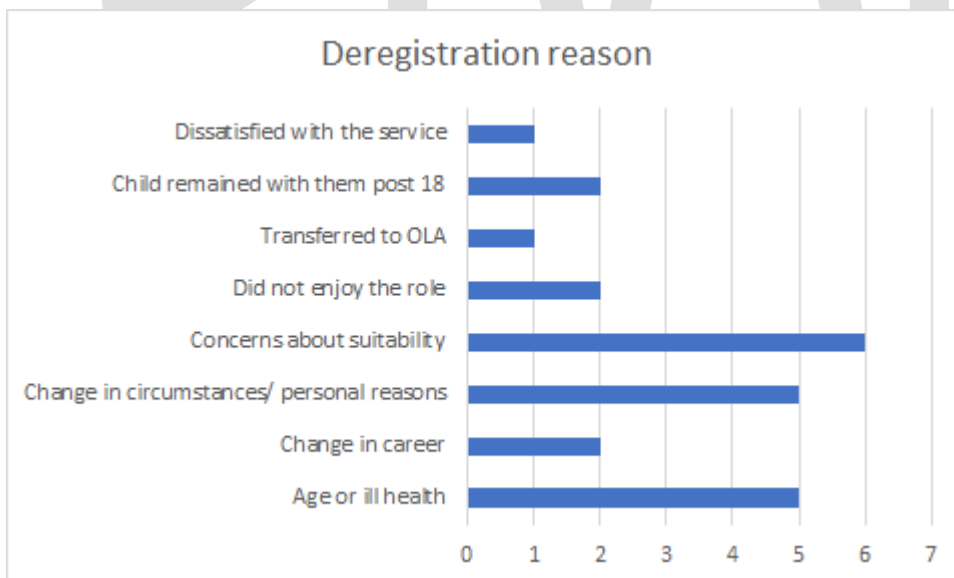


### Deregistration's in the year by reason

In regards to the deregistration's initiated by foster carers, the reasons for these are outlined below.

#### Recruited Carers

Of the 24 recruited carers who left the service in the year 50% left due to changes in their circumstances- such as ill health, a change in employment or a change in their family circumstances. 25% left following concerns about their suitability to foster. 8% left as they found the role too difficult, 8% ceased fostering as their children remained with them as adults, 1 foster carer transferred to the local authority they resided in and 1 left due to their dissatisfaction with the service.



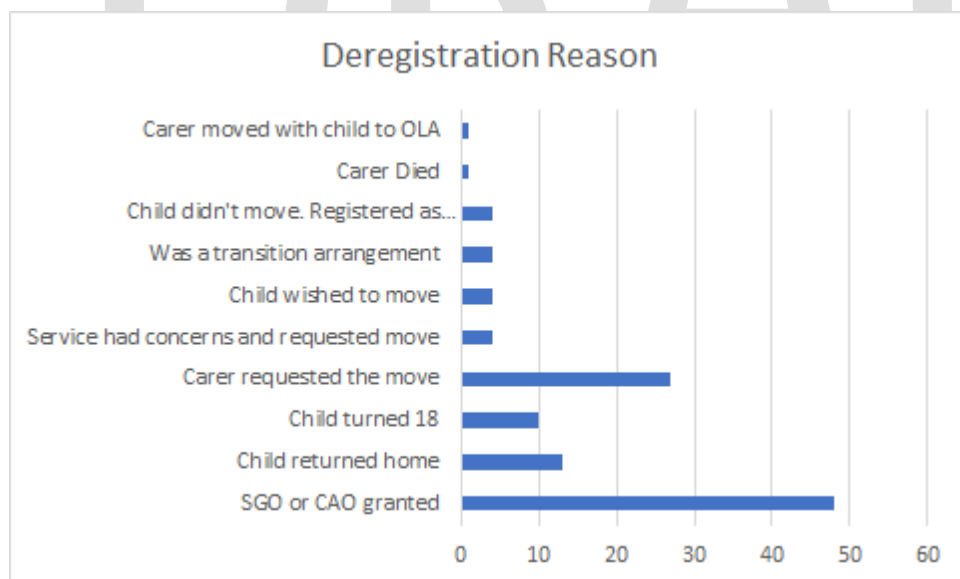
These figures demonstrate that our deregistration's are largely appropriate and predictable. 20% of our carers ceased fostering due to age and/or ill health, this is expected considering our ageing cohort of carers. We continue to support and monitor our carers effectively and we have made

appropriate decisions to deregister carers when we assess that their care falls below the expected standards. Positively only 3 carers left due to being dissatisfied with our service or with the fostering role. This is a reduction on last year (when we saw 8 carers leave for these reasons). This figure could indicate that our enhanced stability and support offer is supporting the retention of the right carers in our service

### Kinship Carers

We saw a large number of kinship carers de-registered from the service this year. The majority of these de-registrations were due to children achieving permanence within these arrangements or within their birth families. Due to this our number of Kinship Carers who are caring for family under fostering arrangements has decreased. These carers have been supported to acquire responsibility for the children in their networks with an ongoing support offer from the organisation. This is in line with our ambition and the principles set out in the governments ‘Stable Homes built on love’ Strategy 2023 which states identifies the potential of kinship arrangements but the difficulties in managing these through existing regulatory frameworks: “Kinship carers should not have to become foster carers, and children should not become looked after, in order to stay together.”(Pg 77)

Of the 116 kinship carers who left the service in the year. 62% of these arrangements ended due to the child achieving permanence, either through SGO or CAO, a return to their parent's care, or reaching the age of 18. 7% of these arrangements ended as they were transition arrangements, or they were contingency arrangements which were never required. Unfortunately, 35% of these deregistration's were unplanned. Children moved out of these households due to concerns about the care provided or the carers capacity to offer the care the child required. Whilst this number remains too high we have achieved a 20% reduction in these unplanned endings this year



The figures above can be attributed the changes in the kinship service and the return of the kinship assessment team to our service. Considerable work has been undertaken in this area of the service. Following the redesign there has been a focus on the quality of assessment and support offered to kinship families. The quality of assessment has improved considerably with consideration given to the long term needs of our children and families. We have focused on enhancing and tailoring support for kinship families this year. The figures above show that this is having a positive impact on stability in these arrangements. Kinship carers face significant challenges in respect of housing, poverty and family relationships. Our service has responded to

these needs by enhancing payments as well as offering more community-based interventions and support. In April 2023 we launched family events and additional peer support for our carers and families. Our support now extends to all members of the family, not just the carers and cared for children.

We have also refreshed our training offer for Kinship Carers. We have introduced 'Preparation Training' for our kinship carers, this focuses on their specific needs, circumstances and entry in to the service. The offer includes training on family time, managing family relationships and trauma informed care. This training is offered to all our carers at the initial stage of their assessment to ensure that they are receiving support and training as soon as they start to care for the child or children. The training offer has also been extended so that carers can access all elements of the training programme pre caring for a child, whilst caring for a child and even if they are granted Special Guardianship for a child. This ensures that Kinship Carers are supported and can access our offer at all stages of their journey and life course.

In recognition of some of the barriers Kinship Carers face we have established a computer library which enables carers to loan computers to complete online training. Our support events take place outside school hours so that children and families can also attend and our Supervising Social Workers have also supported carers to access training by completing courses or individual sessions with them.

We have also refreshed our offer to Special Guardians in the city. All Guardians now have access to ongoing 'Foster Talk' membership and access to the Foster Carer Training programme. There are also SGO Support Groups held quarterly across the city for any specific SGO support. Our SGO families can also access the family events that are taking place for kinship families. This offer has been well received with increased attendance and engagement with SGO carers across the city.

There is a need to constantly recruit new Foster Carers to grow our service and to replenish our pool of existing Foster Carers. There is a natural turnover of Foster Carers in any one year. Positively, for Manchester we have seen a decrease in Foster Carers leaving the service in the last year. We have also achieved an increase in new carers being welcomed in to the service. However, we are still not achieving net gains and the need currently exceeds capacity within the service.

Our ambition is to increase our number of new Foster Carers and families in 2023/24. Manchester's goal is to ensure that a Foster Carer is available for every child and young person in Manchester that needs one. Our Recruitment and Retention Strategy will be updated next year to support our work in this area. In the following year we want to build on the progress we have made this year.

## Training

### Training Offer

Manchester offers a range of training to our recruited and kinship foster carers.

Usually, most of this training is offered face to face, with some e-learning courses offered as a supplement to this training to meet specific trainee/training needs – for kinship carers not in Manchester, those who find it difficult to attend training in the Manchester area, work full-time, or

have a specialist interest or need which is not met within the MCC training programme. During the period of the pandemic, we had to suspend our face-to-face training but were able to offer a wide range of e-learning courses from the summer of 2020.

This has been the first year since Covid that we have fully returned to delivering our face-to-face training programme, which we reintroduced from February 2022.

We currently commission a portion of our training from a training agency, partner agencies work with us to offer some of our core courses, and we have some in-house training. The Foster Carer Training contract was renewed in November 2021, with the addition of five new courses; Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children and Young People, Positive Family Time: Supporting Children's Contact with their Birth Family, Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation Awareness, Internet Safety and Guidance, A Guide to Special Guardianship Orders (including financial support). This training contract was renewed again in November 2022 for one further year.

Our training programme is structured with several core mandatory courses which all carers are expected to complete following approval, with several further courses which cover a range of relevant subjects aimed at developing and updating foster carers' knowledge and skills to best meet the needs of the children in their care.

This year between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 we have offered:

- 3 programmes of the suite of seven Standards in Foster Care courses, one of which was delivered on weekends. 1 further programme started in March 2023.
- 10 Paediatric First Aid courses, three of which were delivered at weekends.
- 7 De-escalation and Managing Behaviour courses, 2 of which were delivered at weekends.
- 5 SIDS (Safer Sleep for Babies) courses, 1 of which was delivered virtually.
- 5 Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children and Young People
- 2 Safer Care, Complaints and Allegations
- 3 Welcoming Children and Transferring a Child's Care
- 3 Positive Family Time – Supporting Children's Contact with their Birth Family, 1 of which was delivered virtually
- 3 Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation Awareness
- 4 Internet Safety and Awareness
- 2 A Guide to Special Guardianship Orders, Including Financial Support
- 2 Missing From Home
- 4 The Health and Wellbeing of Cared for Children aged 0-11 years
- 4 The Health and Wellbeing of Cared For Children and Young People aged 11-19, including UASC
- 2 The Social and Emotional World of Cared For Children
- 1 Secure Base six-week programme

The Virtual School have delivered a range of courses again for us over this year

- Supporting Children to Recognise and Respond to their Emotions
- Transitions and Change

- Supporting Your Child's Learning and Development in the Early Years
- SEND Processes
- Post-16 Options and Preparation for Adulthood
- Voice of the Child, Role of the Foster Carer in Contributing to PEPs
- Anxiety Based School Avoidance
- Attachment and Trauma
- Supporting Early Speech and Language Development

We have also offered a new 2 day in-house course 'Best Practise in Family Time' which was devised specifically for both foster carers and Family Time Service staff.

We introduced a new course on Black Hair and Skin Care in February 2023, delivered by a professional hairdresser with a follow up session held in the hair salon for carers and their children and young people. This was an outcome on the work we have done in the service on supporting children's culture and identity when they are living apart from their birth families and communities. The training facilitator reported: *"I'm so pleased Manchester City Council have collaborated with us on this important project, and I hope that more local councils will join in the near future. My long-term aim is to educate all care providers, including foster carers and teachers, on the needs of afro and textured hair, the correct language and terminology they should use and put a stop to hair discrimination whilst creating environments that are inclusive, from homes, to schools, and salons to community spaces."*

In May 2022 we were able to offer the virtual training session 'How to Communicate with a Child Who Has a Low English Level'. This course was provided by the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership and aimed at carers of migrant children to help them to communicate better with the children in their care.

For the following year 2023-24 the Kinship Service have also produced a training and support programme that is specifically tailored to the needs of our Kinship Carers. This programme has been produced following feedback from our Kinship carers and families.

### Take-up

While some carers have been keen to re-engage with face-to-face training again, the level of take-up over this year has been disappointing. Some course subjects have greater attendance than others, however most courses have not reached full capacity and some courses have had very low attendance. Many have required considerable promotion and readvertising to foster carers and encouragement from their supervising social workers; this included courses that had been popular and well attended prior to the pandemic. We know from liaising with our partners in neighbouring local authorities, also from the Training Hub who deliver training to local authorities and IFAs across the country, that this is a common pattern and challenge since returning to face-to-face sessions post-Covid.

There has been a continued take-up of e-learning by carers both within and outside of the Manchester area. We have had 491 Training Hub e-learning courses completed between April 2022 – March 2023, with a total of 610 allocated.

The take up of our face-to-face mandatory courses was as follows:

- Standard 1. Principles in Fostering – 37 (over 4 courses)
- Standard 2. Your Role as a Foster Carer – 41 (over 4 courses)
- Standard 3. Health & Safety and Healthy Care – 32 (over 4 courses)
- Standard 4. Positive Communication – 24 (over 4 courses)
- Standard 5. Understanding Child Development – 37 (over 4 courses)
- Standard 6. Protecting Children – 33 (over 3 courses)
- Standard 7. Develop Yourself – 25 (over 3 courses)
- De-escalation and Managing Behaviours – 85 (over 7 courses)
- Paediatric First Aid – 101 (over 11 courses)
- SIDS – 39 (over 5 courses)

The take up of the e-learning versions of our mandatory courses was as follows:

- Standard 1. Principles in Fostering – 50 completed
- Standard 2. Your Role as a Foster Carer - 47 completed
- Standard 3. Health & Safety and Healthy Care – 47 completed
- Standard 4. Positive Communication – 42 completed
- Standard 5. Understanding Child Development – 45 completed
- Standard 6. Protecting Children – 40 completed
- Standard 7. Develop Yourself – 40 completed
- De-escalation and Young People - 32 completed
- Paediatric First Aid - 41 completed

The above shows that we have increased attendance on our mandatory courses this year. Last year 731 courses were completed. With the return of face-to-face courses, we had 838 courses completed this year. That is a 15% increase on last year. Whilst this increase is positive, we want to achieve a more significant take up of training which supports our foster carers in their roles.

We have continued to focus on improving our Training and Development offer for carers and developing their Personal Development Plans (PDP). The PDP form was established as a document on LCS in March 2022. Ongoing audits tell us that there have been continued improvements in our foster carer PDPs over the last year. They are more focused, there are more individual PDPs in place for foster carers within a couple, they include more SMART training plans, are more frequently updated, include more reflection and analysis and more evidence of the link to meeting the specific needs of the cared for child. We are seeing that our PDPs are more meaningful.

Our ongoing plans are to further improve upon this to get consistency across the service and to better measure the impact that training and development has on our carers and the children and young people in their care.

Our audits also measure quality and impact, and this learning is regularly communicated to the service.

We continue to work with our partners who have delivered face-to-face and some online sessions including The NHS Vulnerable Baby Prevent and Protect Service, CAMHS-LAC, The Children's

Society Missing Service, The Virtual School, One Education and NHS Specialist Nurses for Children in Care.

This year we have been giving consideration to how we might reshape and redesign our training delivery. We have been consulting with our partner services and agencies to explore the possibility of working in collaboration with them to use the expertise we have in-house to broaden our training offer, make it more relevant to our foster carers and to include new training and development opportunities to meet the changing/evolving needs of foster carers and the children and young people in their care. This includes exploring how we can offer face-to-face training for foster carers on serious youth violence and knife crime and training on autism and ADHD, both of which we want to incorporate into our training offer.

We currently offer an e-learning course Knife Crime and Serious Youth Violence and a face-to-face course on Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation which includes issues relating to youth violence and crime.

We have investigated possible training for carers on Serious Youth Violence and Knife Crime by approaching Complex Safeguarding, Strategic Lead Community Safety, YOS, training officers from other NW LAs and with some training agencies and relevant organisations. At the time of writing this report, there are plans in place to deliver a face-to-face training session on Serious Youth Violence for residential staff and foster carers, commissioning an outside agency to do this with input from Youth Justice and our Alonzi Hub. Our Complex Safeguarding Service have also recently offered training for staff in relation to Serious Youth Violence. The Foster Carer Training Contract will be going out to tender again in the summer of 2023, and the Service Specification will include a training course on Serious Youth Violence and Knife Crime.

Going forward, to link our focus on finding foster families for teenagers with our training offer, we are highlighting the package of relevant courses we have for carers of this age group as well as looking at the development of our training offer to support this need.

We offer several courses which support carers' understanding of children and young people's behaviour and aim to increase carers' empathy with children and awareness of child centred parenting responses including PACE – 1 day Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children and Young People, 3 day The Social and Emotional World of Looked After Children (CAMHS-LAC), 1 day mandatory De-escalation and Managing Behaviour.

We offer a number of courses that are particularly relevant to carers of teenagers – Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation Awareness, Missing From Home & Care, The Health and Wellbeing of Cared for Children and Young People aged 11-19, including UASC and Post-16 Options and Preparation for Adulthood.

We plan to re-introduce the in-house Secure Base 6 session course as a regular course in our training programme and for the first time since Covid we will be re-introducing the Drug Awareness and Engaging Young People in Conversations about Substance Misuse course, delivered by Eclipse. As part of our consultations with agencies to develop our training offer, we have met with the staff from Alonzi House, they will be offering drop-in sessions for carers to support them and explore any issues they may be facing, offering practical and emotional support via their own toolkit and models.

As part of the development of our training offer, we are considering putting on themed Training and Development Days for carers incorporating sessions from different relevant agencies. We are exploring the possibility of an event focussing specifically on caring for teenagers.

This year our training officer has continued to liaise with SSWs to support them individually and has attended team meetings across the service to talk about foster carer training and ensure that staff are clear on expectations of carers in relation to training and development.

In July 22, we conducted an online survey via survey monkey, to consult with foster carers and gain their views on our current training offer, any barriers to engaging with training, training they would like to see and any other ideas. The take up of the survey was fairly low with 38 responses. Interestingly only 3 of those who responded said they would prefer online training to face-to-face or a mix of both.

We promoted our foster carer training programme at our Foster Carer Forum in January 2023 this year, the first face to face Forum since the pandemic. The Forum was attended by representatives from Virtual Schools, Youth Justice, Complex Safeguarding, Resolve, Alonzi House, SEND and CAMHS. This event was a chance to network and for carers to meet people and learn more about the support on offer across the city. In the last year our training officer has attended foster carer support groups across the city as the guest speaker, to talk with carers about foster carer training.

In this coming year we will continue with our plan to reshape our training delivery and increase engagement with and take-up of training. We will continue the work with partners to broaden the training offer. Our foster carers will be consulted on this; we held a Training Forum with foster carers in May 23 to share with them our ideas and enable them to contribute their views, which will inform our plans.

Our training officer will continue to attend team meetings, offer support to SSWs to focus on training and audits of PDPs. We also plan to hold 1:1 training clinics with SSWs to look at the training record and training needs of their carers and to support with drawing up robust PDPs.

### Post-course Feedback

Post course evaluations asked foster carers to rate these statements from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree)

- *I feel I can apply the general methods, principles or skills gained from today's training*
- *I have achieved the main thing I wanted to gain out of today's session*

The vast majority of all evaluation forms returned for all courses (approximately 90%) scored 5s or 6s for both.

The evaluation forms ask attendees to rate the *Effectiveness of trainer and training methods* as Excellent, Good, Average or Poor. The majority of all evaluations for all courses (approximately 80-90%) rated this as excellent.

Post course evaluation forms also asked attendees the following questions

- *The most important thing I have gained from attending the training is –*
- *How do you think you will use what you have learned from the training?*



Some of the responses they gave are quoted below, evidencing the impact of the training:

*“A healthier outlook on social and emotional development relevant to the child I have with me”*

*“Take time out to reflect – don’t react”*

*“Different ways and actions of controlling behaviour. Also, that we are getting some things right”*

*“Looking at our own behaviours within our household”*

*“PACE – Acceptance is important in understanding some of the reasons for behaviours”*

*“Step back sometimes – rebuild relationships – reward more”*

*“You can escalate or de-escalate the behaviour with your actions”*

*“To know the signs to look for and how to deal with exploitation” (CSE & CCE)*

*“I really enjoyed this course and have learnt many different things which would give me the right tools moving forward”*

*“It was eye-opening for me, I learnt a lot for what to look out for. I will share my knowledge with others” (CSE & CCE)*

*“As a new foster carer I gained a lot of information and it was great to be with experienced carers”*

*“Reaffirmed my sense of motivation to be involved and to try and make a difference in supporting vulnerable young people”*

*“Helped me re-focus on the importance of promoting cultural identity and also the importance of using the person centred approach with children in our care”*

*“Relaxed, informal training delivered in a very professional way”*

*“Excellent training”*

*“A clearer understanding of what an SGO actually is. I understand more about our rights and the rights for P as she grows older”*

*“Clearer understanding of SGO and the processes involved. It will help me to apply for an SGO”*

*“Learned a lot about support for the child and me. Lots of information on safeguarding and policies”*

*“Take more time to understand the impacts of family time on parents”*

*“Thinking of the parents’ view. Prepare the child for family time and support them”*

*“I have really benefitted from the f2f (face to face) sessions. I learn better in the f2f than online. The opportunities for discussions and knowledge sharing are invaluable”*

## Short Break Carers

We have approved 5 new short breaks carers within the year

We currently have 1 Multi-Link Carer and 16 Short Break Carers in the service.

Multi-link foster carers are carers linked to a number of children with a disability or additional needs and provide 210 days short break placements per an annum (18 days in a month) The multi-link provision consists of five multi-link carers. Multi-link carers are paid a retainer of £16,500 per year. When they have children placed, they receive an additional daily rate.

Our Short Breaks carers offer 'short breaks' for specific children including set days and overnight stays per month. Of these carers:

- Nine carers offer 'generic' care for children with autism, which in some cases can be less complex and managed within a short break placement with one carer.
- Four carers who provide regular short breaks to specific children and young people also provide emergency care on an ongoing basis
- Two carers provide short break care for 4 children and young people with complex physical health needs and disabilities.
- One carer offers a full-time home to a profoundly disabled child and an emergency placement for young people.
- The Multi link carer provides short break placements (18 days per month). The carer is also providing a full time foster home for a child with special educational needs.

There are two main points of access to the Short Breaks Carers, these are through;

1. The Short Breaks Panel. To access this panel there needs to be a Children and Families or Needs Led Assessment identifying that the threshold is met for short Breaks provision. The threshold is not intended to gate keep but to ensure that all other possible options for support have been tried.
2. The offer of short breaks can also be to foster carers and children who may need short breaks. This can be accessed through the Centralised Placements Team and is a good opportunity for the service to develop a bespoke offer to foster carers and their children, who may need a short break as part of their care plan and placement plan. These planned short breaks can support stability and strengthen existing arrangements.

We are sufficient to accommodate the current short break requirements however the service does need to develop and recruit to enable us to be available to increase stability, support more complex children, recruitment of new and younger carers and to avoid having to place in residential or IFA's.

Specifically, we have the 2 short break carers who provide care to children with complex health needs (and have their homes adapted for this purpose). They are both coming to the end of their fostering careers over the next few years. We have established a Steering group, some members of whom are short break foster carers to review and develop the short break offer across the broad spectrum of need.

We are focusing on recruiting more Foster Carers who are able to offer short breaks and specialist placements. Our Recruitment and Retention Strategy supports this, with a focused drive in this area planned for 2023-25.

## Fostering Reviews

The fostering service employ 2 Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers (FIRO's). FIRO's are now managed from within the service and that has enabled us to adopt a different philosophy to their function. We have tried to bring the FIRO's closer to the service in terms of invitations to manager meetings and to a monthly meeting with the Service Lead to discuss themes, whilst still maintaining their independence and challenge

There was a sickness absence from November 22- April 23 which led to a dip in performance and timescales. The service has produced an action plan to distribute reviews and ensure foster care annual reviews continue during this period of absence. At the time of writing this report the FIRO has returned to work.

There has been a noticeable difference in Fostering Reviews which are providing greater challenge to carers and to Supervising Social Workers. The FIRO's have improved their monitoring and QA function, and this is having a positive impact on the quality of records and case work. However, we still need a focus on training and quality of PDP's. In order to move this forward the training officer will be providing further training across the service.

The FIRO's are supporting the performance improvement and we are seeing an improved quality of reports and greater analysis of Foster Carers meeting the required standards. We are more assured that we are holding early reviews when required for both practice concerns and allegations.

The focus on next year will be to ensure all Reviews are held within timescales and a continued focus on the quality assurance function to continue to drive performance.

## Foster Panel

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a sudden change to working practices resulted in panel adapting very quickly to virtual working. There was no disruption to panel functioning as a result of this however, many difficulties and challenges needed to be resolved along the way. From the 24.03.2020, Public Health England (PHE) advice<sup>1</sup> was followed and the Fostering Panel operated remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Name	Role
Antony Philbin	Interim Panel Chair Independent Background in Health and Multi Agency Adult and Children's Safeguarding Partnerships
Gerard Crowther	Vice Chair Independent Background in Local Authority senior management, including safeguarding. Qualified social worker – no longer registered
Vacant post	Vice Chair

Ken McDonald	Independent Panel Member Background in CAMHS and Youth Justice (Senior Management)
Councillor Susan Cooley	Elected Member Manchester City Council
Fiona Hegarty	Advanced Practitioner Supervising Social Worker (Registered) Manchester City Council
Vicky Crichton	Advanced Practitioner Connected Persons Social Worker (Registered) Manchester City Council
Ben Collier	Advanced Practitioner Connected persons Social Worker (Registered) Manchester City Council
Elisabeth Bird	Advanced Practitioner Recruited Carers Social Worker (Registered) Manchester City Council
Jo Morris	Independent Panel member Qualified and registered social worker
Cath Connor	Independent Panel Member Qualified and registered social worker
Lisa Batkin	Independent Panel Member Qualified and registered social worker
Councillor Abid Chohan	Elected Member Manchester City Council
Councillor Erinma Bell	Elected Member Manchester City Council
Michaela Macauley	Leaving Care Worker. 20 years experience as a foster carer Manchester City Council
Lisa Forrester	Accommodation Worker Manchester City Council
Lucy Ingham	Neighbourhood Officer Manchester City Council
Dawn Johnson	Youth Offending Service Team Manager Social Worker (Registered) Manchester City Council

Panel member attendance is arranged by consultation and the rota is set 3 months in advance. Most panel members have 100% attendance for the panels they have been allocated to. There have been a small number of cancellations from panel members due to emergency personal circumstances, however these rare incidents have not affected panel quoracy.

Additional Support to Panel is provided by:

Name	Role	Status
Elaine Wright	Panel Advisor	Social Worker (Registered)
Clare Connolly	Administrator/ minute taker	Specialist Business Support Officer
Kathryn Colclough	Administrator/ minute taker	Business Support Officer Level 2
Terri-Ann Fouracre	Administrator/ minute taker	Business Support Officer Level 2

Gareth Williams	Administrator/ minute taker	Business Support Officer
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In 2022-23 nine panel members have been removed from the central list. This has been for a range of reasons including retirement, resignation and moving into roles that were no-longer compatible with fostering panel membership.

Panel recruitment took place at the end of 2022 and we have successfully recruited six new panel members, who all started sitting as members from 2023. This round of recruitment was specifically targeted at people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups in order to ensure a fostering panel that more closely represent the community we serve.

The LA have successfully recruited to the Professional Advisor post with the successful applicant starting in post at the end of April 2022. There are no recruitment or retention difficulties in relation to panel.

Throughout 2022 / 23 the role of panel chair has been filled on an interim basis. It is acknowledged that this role has been filled on an interim basis for almost two years and it will be a priority in the next year to resolve this and make a substantive appointment.

Due to the volume of work completed by fostering panel we would aim to have two vice chairs appointed. At present one Vice Chair role is vacant. The current Vice Chair has also requested to step down to a regular panel member within the next 12 months. It is therefore a focus over the next 12 months to appoint two new Vice Chair's to fostering panel.

Individuals with care experience remain a gap on panel and unfortunately no applications from either the targeted recruitment in 2022 or the previous general recruitment resulted in any applications from this group. In order to address this gap we will be exploring a partnership with the Manchester City Council's Care Consultants. This is a group made up of care experienced young adults who provide consultation to different groups within the organisation.

All panel members have received an annual appraisal with the panel Chair and Panel Advisor. Panels self-evaluation identified strengths being: the panel are able to challenge each other and the service. We have experienced consistency on our panel and the panel have adapted well to the new process for considering allegations and complaints.

Areas of development were identified as: Focus and timekeeping, and panel members sometimes entering in to care planning discussions.

Panel members provided positive feedback about the functioning of panel notably that panel members feel comfortable to challenge each other and have differences of opinion. Broader development needs which emerged from panel member appraisals have been addressed by offering panel members the opportunity to access the online training offer to foster carers and to observe skills to foster training (subject to numbers).

A development session was held in February 2023 with the following presentations :

Session 1 - Strengthening Identity in Black and Minority Ethnic Children

Session 2 – Role and Responsibilities of Fostering Panel

Session 3 – Understanding differences in Fostering Standards for Connected Carers vs Recruited Carers.

Session 2 was included specifically to support the newly appointed panel members understanding of their role. It was also used to support existing panel members in understanding the difference between ensuring appropriate support to carers and care planning.

### Panel Business

Manchester has a busy Panel that meets every week (Tuesday) from 9.00 until 1.00. During the last year there have been 28 recruited carer assessments, 111 kinship carer assessments, 47 foster carer reviews and an additional 31 where the review followed allegations against the foster carer.

As from August 2021 Panel no longer considers long-term matches.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Total Presented</b>	<b>Deferments</b>	<b>QA</b>
Recruited carer assessments	28	4	Outstanding - 9 Good - 12 Requires Improvement - 3 Inadequate – 0
Kinship carer assessments	111	21	Outstanding - 6 Good - 39 Requires Improvement - 45 Inadequate – 0
Foster Carer Reviews	47	4	Outstanding – 3 Good – 23 Requires Improvement – 17 Inadequate – 0
Review following allegations	31	7	Outstanding – 2 Good – 9 Requires Improvement – 13 Inadequate – 0
Regulation 25	35	0	N/A
Representations to IRM	1	0	Decision upheld by IRM

Panel does not provide a QA rating to any deferred items and rates the full bundle on return to panel.

Business April 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 – March 31<sup>st</sup> 2023

<b>Number of panels planned</b>	<b>Number of panels held</b>
54	48

### Administration

Panel is well supported by an experienced and knowledgeable business support team who manage the panel bookings, panel agenda, and attendance for panel members, panel minutes and the distribution of paperwork.

Panel minutes are always completed within MCC timeframes and run to a consistent schedule.

## Quality Assurance

Panel actively provides feedback to all participants via a feedback form and panel advisors notes. The panel has continued to work within legislative guidance and its own terms of reference to provide an independent quality assurance function to the Fostering Service in Manchester.

To be able to measure if the panel meets this demand and its remit we will set objectives for the following year.

## Update on Objectives 2022-2023

1. Recruit to Vacant Professional Advisor Post – Completed Advisor in post from April 2022.
2. Reduce the number of deferments at panel – Panel and the Service can report significant improvement in this area:
  - a. Total number of items heard 2021-22 = 152  
Deferments 2021-22 = 51.  
This means that 33.5% of all items heard by panel in 21-22 were deferred
  - b. Total number of items heard 2022-23 = 217  
Deferments 2022-23 = 36  
This means that 16.6% of all items heard by panel in 22-23 were deferred
3. Collect, analyse and report on user feedback to panel - This remains an area of focus going forward and will be developed further over the next 12 months
4. Ensure management oversight and recommendation is available for all case presented to panel - Panel can report improved performance on this objective. All recruited care assessments and kinship carer assessments have audit sheets completed that provide comment and sign off by managers. All allegation reviews have management oversight and sign off. All Foster carer reviews have management oversight and sign off and Fostering IRO recommendations included.
5. Ensure diversity on the panel – According to ONS 2021 census data 57% of the general population in the Manchester City Council area identified as White (British, Irish or other white backgrounds). Panel membership in 2022 had 87% within this group.

In September 2022 targeted recruitment was carried out to attract new panel members who were from black and minority ethnic groups. The purpose was to ensure our fostering panel is more representative of the population we serve.

This was completed in partnership with the City Councils REACH (Race Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage) Group, whose purpose is to empower Black and minority ethnic colleagues to achieve their potential by creating positive change and cultural shift within the local authority. From this recruitment a number of new panel members were appointed and are now active members of fostering panel.

The demographic of fostering panel members is now more representative with 42% from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds and 58% identifying as White (British, Irish or other white backgrounds).

### Objectives 2023 – 2024

1. The panel chair is currently filled on an interim basis. A permanent appointment should be confirmed within the next 12 months.
2. One vice chair position is currently vacant with the other expected to become vacant within the next 12 months. Appointment to these two roles needs to be made.
3. Care experienced people are a gap on panel. Despite two rounds of recruitment in the last 18 months, no care experienced people have applied to become panel members. Alternative options are currently being explored with a potential opportunity identified. Links should be developed to enable Care Consultants to provide consultation to panel on recruited carers. It is anticipated that this would include a review of an assessment profile, a visit to the prospective carers home and feedback to panel on what it might be like to live with that prospective foster carer as a cared for young person. Full details to be developed in conjunction with the Care Consultants.
4. With the removal of COVID restrictions, panels to return to in person arrangements as this is more conducive to enabling foster carers to attend.
5. Reviews and Allegations. To work with the fostering service to ensure these are returned to panel in a timely manner.
6. Collect analyse and report back on user feedback to panel. This objective is to be carried over from 21-22 objectives. Feedback to fostering panel from participants is rarely received. This needs to be encouraged in order to help inform areas for panel learning and development.

### Summary and Priorities 2023-24 (included in our service plan)

- We have not been successful in recruiting enough new Foster Carers to provide a foster family in Manchester for every child who needs one. For 2023-24 we will be working with our partners in GMCA (Greater Manchester Combined Authority) to produce a joint marketing campaign which attracts more new applicants to fostering. The plan is for this to be launched in April 2023.
- Incorporated into this work we will be specifically targeting people who are able to care for our older children, and people who are able to meet our children's cultural and identity needs. We will be working with our Communities, Councillors and other Community Leads and Organisations to better understand any barriers to fostering and to promote Fostering within these communities.
- We know that to achieve our objectives we need to further embed our stability offer for our carers. This will support recruitment and retention of foster carers and also help them to feel more confident in caring for our older children. We will further develop our offer so that it is widely understood and easily accessible. This offer will involve our partners and will help to stabilise and strengthen foster families when they are experiencing difficulties. We



will strengthen our planning via our weekly 'Stability Panel' but will also consolidate our 'offer' with our partners and promote this with our current and potential fostering community by April 2023.

- An integral part of this 'offer' will be the implementation of the Fostering Networks 'Mockingbird Model' in Manchester. This model is an innovative programme which "nurtures the relationships between children, young people and fostering families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community of six to ten families." This model supports the stability of children in foster care and the retention of foster carers in their organisation. We aim to launch our first constellation in July 2023..
- We will launch our Training Action plan next year. This will support the service to understand any barriers to training and any themes. The plan will ensure all our carers are accessing the training and development required for their roles and that this is reflected in up-to-date Personal Development Plans for all of our carers.
- We will embed a 'whole system approach' working alongside our colleagues in the children's teams and wider directorate. This will be achieved through joint training and development and events with our colleagues to ensure that we are all working together to achieve our ambitions for the Fostering Service and our children in Manchester.

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“Our Manchester Strategy places children and young people at the heart of its vision. Our aim is to ensure that Our Children will have the right home, in the right place at the right time.”



Billie Walbank  
Service Lead Fostering  
Manchester City Council

Chart Title

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