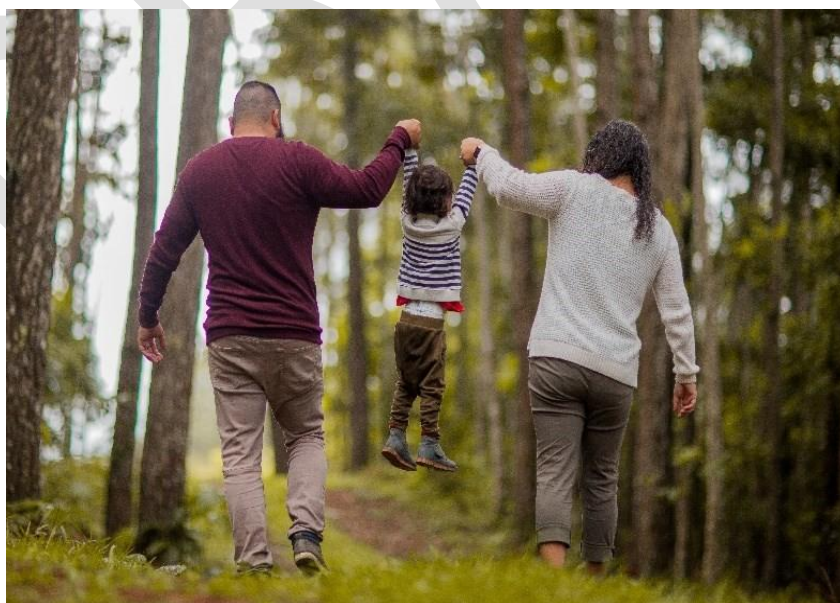


Fostering Service

Annual Report

2024/2025



Team Managers: Karen Scardifield, Sarah Hood & Scott Chapman

Service Manager: Erika Ower

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1. Introduction

The **Annual Report Fostering 2024/25** provides a comprehensive overview of the activities, achievements, and challenges faced by the Fostering Service over the past year. This report highlights the dedication and hard work of our skilled foster carers and social workers, who continue to provide excellent outcomes for the children in our care.

This document covers several key areas:

Overview of Activity of CPS: Details the purpose and aims of the Children's Placement Service (CPS), including the recruitment, assessment, training, support, and supervision of foster carers.

In House Foster Carer Assessments & Recruitment: Discusses the developments in the fostering recruitment process, including the digital approach and partnership with a digital marketing agency.

Approval Data: Provides data on foster carer approvals, highlighting the successes and challenges in recruiting and assessing both mainstream and connected person foster carers.

Resignations: Explores the reasons behind foster carer resignations and de-registrations.

Foster Carer Annual Review: Reviews the annual performance of foster carers, including the completion rates and reasons for overdue reviews.

Training and Development: Outlines the training programs available for foster carers, including preapproval, induction, core, and enhanced training.

Special Guardianship: Describes the support provided for special guardianship orders (SGOs) and the assessments conducted.

Private Fostering: Details the arrangements and assessments for private fostering, including the impact of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

This report aims to provide a clear and detailed account of the fostering service's performance, highlighting areas of success and identifying opportunities for improvement. We hope this document serves as a valuable resource for understanding the current position of our fostering service and guiding future developments.

The Shropshire Fostering Service remains busy, supported by dedicated and skilled Social Workers, Support Practitioners and Foster Carers. This collaboration results in positive outcomes for children with internal foster carers. Development of the Fostering Service is a key focus to ensure that we can meet the needs of the children of Shropshire who require a foster family.

2. Overview of Activity of CPS

The purpose of the service is to offer a range of safe and stable fostering arrangements with approved foster carers to meet the needs of children looked after by the local authority.

The pool of Shropshire foster carers includes placements for children and young people of different ages, from babies to teenagers requiring more intensive support, respite carers, and placements specifically for children with disabilities known as Family Based Shared Care.

The service assesses and supports mainstream Foster Carers, Connected Person Foster Carers. The service receives private fostering referrals and completes the assessment. Potential Special Guardians are assessed and supported to achieve permanence for Children who are looked after by the local authority and for those who are not.

The Fostering Service have been supported by a project manager since October 2023 to review the foster carers journey and enhance service delivery. Through the project further resource has been identified to support

Marketing and recruitment functions, data and insight and further development of the foster carers support offer.

3. In House Foster Carer assessments & Recruitment

Over the past year, the fostering recruitment process has evolved with the appointment of a full-time Marketing & Events Manager and increased focus on a digital approach to recruitment.

Monthly webinars have become fortnightly, with a reduction in face-to-face sessions. People were not engaging in particular drop in events being held and stronger participation has been seen with online events. The webinar sign-up process has been streamlined, including the timing within which they are held to capitalise on people's busier lives, making them more appealing to market. The goal has been to support people to access our webinars, leading onto a conversation and EOI then leading to an Initial Home Visit. People who registered but did not attend our webinars do receive follow up communications and contact inline with our strategy.

Plans were submitted internally to move to the Mailchimp communications system to allow for easier, more automated ongoing communications with both carers and enquirers.

We initiated closer contact with our digital ads agency, to ensure they are clear on what is expected to optimise our Facebook Ads and Google Ads. Ad copy was produced in-house and, overall, **enquiries for 24/25 increased to 508 from 352 in 23/24**. Our website and advertising was successfully rebranded and relaunched with a proposed website upgrade for 25/26.

The rebrand to 'More Rewarding Than Ever' involved the design and production of marketing collateral for councillor meetings and public visibility, including banners, leaflets, postcards, note pads, pens, stress balls and tote bags. Banners are now on display at numerous high footfall county venues; for example, Theatre Severn, Whitchurch Leisure Centre and Oswestry Leisure Centre.

Contacts have been made with partnering organisations, who can support our goals as a fostering service for the benefit of our Shropshire children.

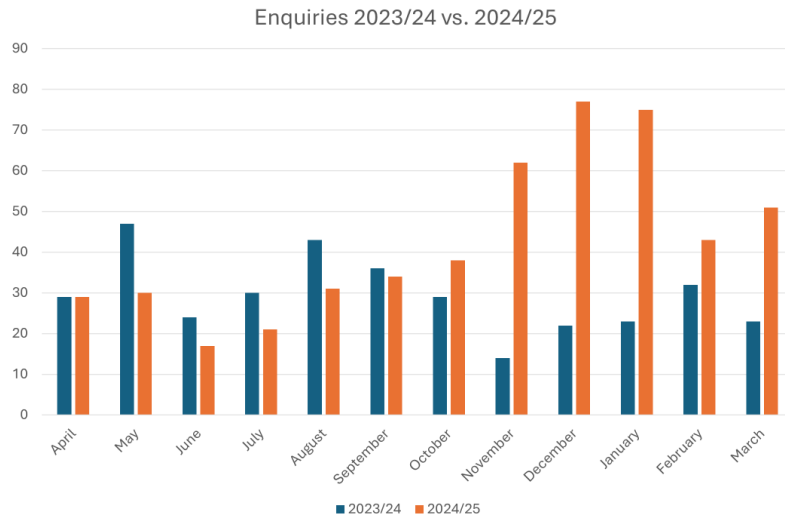
A referral scheme was also launched for Shropshire Council employees and Shropshire Fostering Carers, promoted through internal webinars and newsletters.

Digital

Digital marketing remained our primary activity. SEO work on the website enhanced our Google rankings, allowing us to give Facebook Ads more priority over paid-for Google Ads as they were delivering the most measurable enquiries. There are traffic ad campaigns running for the website and event bookings.

Facebook Ads were also enhanced by the setting up of an Instagram account for Shropshire Fostering. Further digital work saw the start of a six-month mobile banner campaign, again ran through our ads agency. These put the Shropshire Fostering name in front of c.38,000 people per month, generating c.900 clicks per month through to the website.

Increased digital exposure also started via Shropshire Live, who have a high traffic news website and online radio station. Shropshire Fostering has website banners and radio ads, with the offer to feature radio interviews regularly.



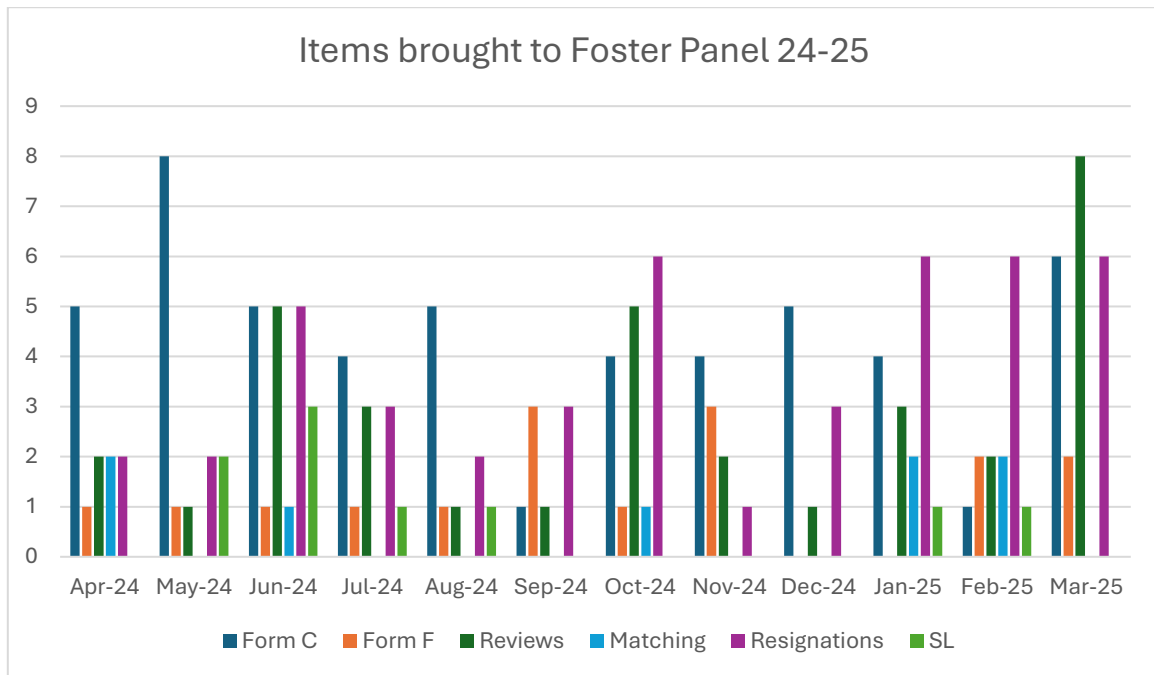
4. Approval Data

During this period, 16 mainstream Foster Carer households were presented to panel and approved.

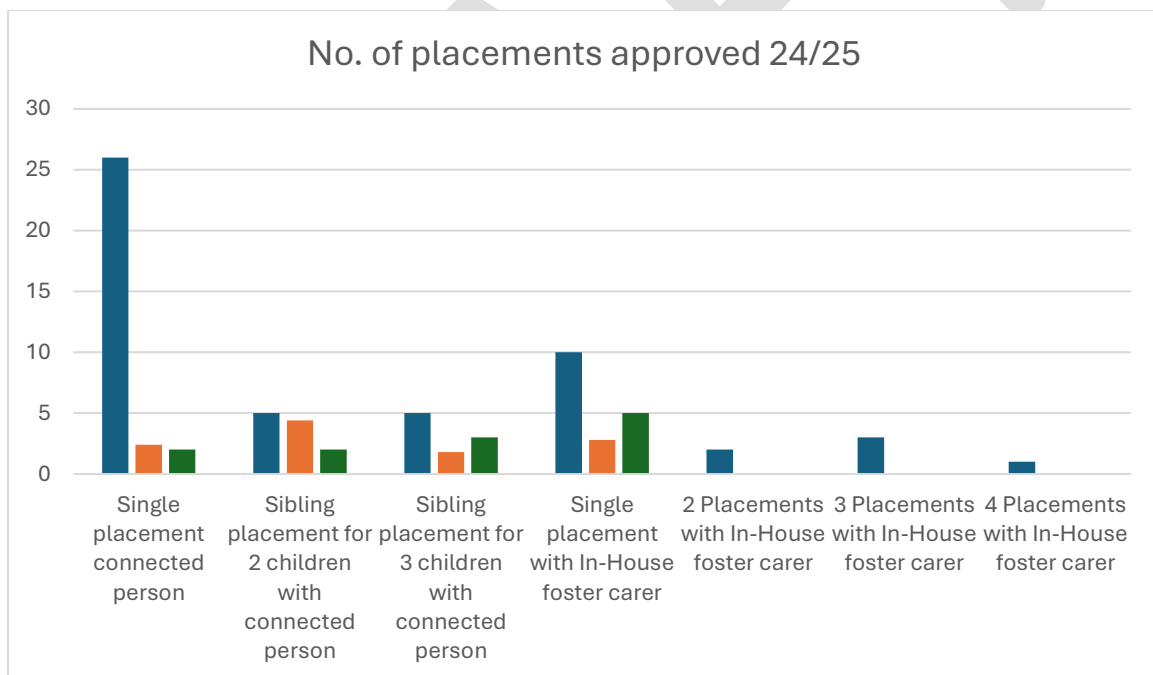
51 Connected Person Foster Carer households were presented at the Fostering Panel resulting in 38 Connected Person Foster Carer approvals. Under regulations, negative fostering assessments in stage 2 must be presented to the panel. In this period, 13 assessments had negative outcomes due to concerns about meeting national minimum standards, lack of risk insight, and inability to meet the child's needs.

Recruitment of Mainstream Foster Carers is integral to ensuring that more of our children who are looked after are cared for within loving family environments within Shropshire. In turn, increasing sufficiency and decreasing the number of children placed in IFA and residential placements. Nationally foster carer recruitment is a challenge with less people coming forward to foster. In Shropshire, through transformation and more resource we are starting to see an improving picture this year. This year we have been successful in doubling our mainstream foster carer household approvals. With developments in marketing, streamlining of processes, increased support offer, successful recruitment to key posts we aim to continue to increase these numbers.

Connected Person Foster Carer assessments have supported more children to remain living within their family network, enabling children to sustain important relationships and supporting their identity. The high demand for connected person assessments challenges the use of resources to recruit and assess mainstream foster carers. These assessments are complex and time-sensitive, often taking up most of the social worker's time. The capacity within the service is managed; the independent social worker assessments are utilised where required. The service has given due consideration to the model for the service to ensure this continues to develop and meet need.



In this period placement availability in fostering households was as follows:



This chart shows us the high number of children looked after that have been able to be placed within the wider connected family due to the assessment of connected person foster carers. This has been in line with the children's care plans. In total, 51 children who are looked after by the local authority were eligible to be placed with Connected Person Foster Carers.

The service continues to review all recruitment activity and ensure required developments are implemented to increase sufficiency within mainstream fostering. There is a continued need for Foster Carers for teenagers, sibling groups, and disabled children. Our recruitment and marketing efforts focus on these priorities, whilst aligning with our Stepping Stones project.

The Shropshire Foster Carer Association (SFCA) actively promotes foster care by organising events for peer support and interaction. They regularly meet with management to advocate for carers and contribute to service developments. SFCA representatives also participate in new projects, ensuring foster carers' voices are heard.

As of March 31, 2025, there were **179** fostering households, including in-house and Connected Person Foster Carers. This comprised of 71 mainstream and 108 Connected Person fostering households. Additionally, 16 Connected Person households under Reg 24 temporary approval currently were not included in this total.

5. Connected Person Foster Carer Viability Assessments

Before presenting a Connected Person foster carer household to the panel, a viability assessment ensures they meet basic requirements of the fostering regulations. If positive, a full assessment follows, lasting 12 to 16 weeks. During this time, a child may be placed with the applicants under Temporary Approval for up to 16 weeks, extendable by 8 weeks in positive cases, but not exceeding 24 weeks.

There were 201 new Connected Person viability requests this period, which is similar to the number of 205 from last financial year. Requests for out-of-county families and court directed multiple viabilities for the same child continue to place a demand on resources and the regional protocol is advised upon. There are on going challenges with the timescales set by the court, including demands for emergency viabilities. Working alongside our legal colleagues seeks to address issues that arise.

6. Supported Lodgings

This type of provision is not encompassed by either children's or adult's regulatory frameworks, primarily due to the focus on "accommodation-based support" rather than "care." It serves as a transitional step towards independence and is only employed when it aligns with the child's best interests. For certain children, such as those who prefer not to reside with a foster family or in a residential home, this can be an appropriate choice. Additionally, it may be suitable for some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, though not universally applicable.

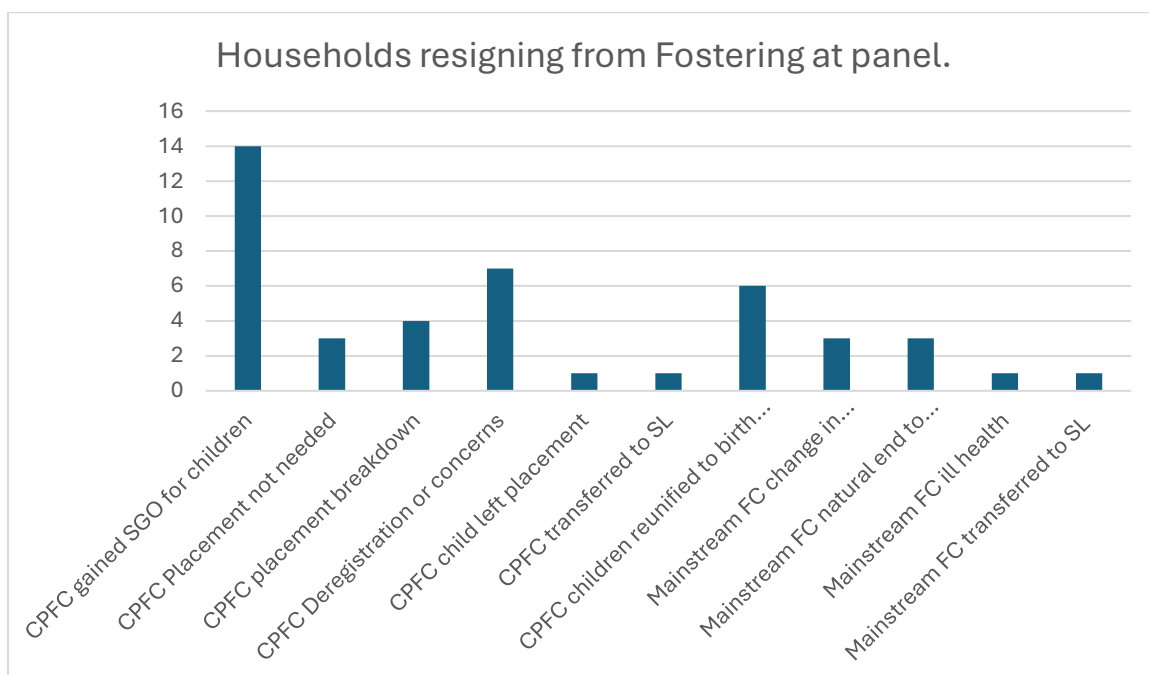
Ofsted now regulates Supported Lodging (SL) provisions as part of the government's review of unregulated care for young people.

During this period, 10 households were approved as SL providers. Supported Lodgings Social workers in the Leaving Care Team complete SL assessments, which are then presented to the Leaving Care Team Manager prior to the fostering panel. This number is made up of new applicants and also foster carers who are wanting to care for the child post 18 but not continue to offer additional fostering placements.

7. Resignations

Resignations from fostering are submitted by both Mainstream Foster Carers and Connected Person / Kinship Foster Carers for various reasons.

From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, Shropshire had 45 foster carer resignations: 38 from Kinship Fostering Households and 7 from Mainstream Foster Carer Households and 1 Mainstream Foster Carer transferred to Supported Lodgings.



8. Foster Carer Annual Reviews

The purpose of an annual foster carer review is to evaluate the performance and progress of foster carers over the past year. This review ensures that foster carers continue to meet the required standards and provides an opportunity to address any issues or concerns. The review process includes assessing the carers' competencies in various areas, such as caring for children, providing a safe environment, working as part of a team, and their own development.

The annual foster carer review is a comprehensive evaluation that involves several key components. It includes ensuring compliance, confirming the details of the carers, such as their DBS checks and medical records, and assessing their competencies in areas like caring for children, providing a safe environment, and working as part of a team. The review also considers the views of the carers' own children and identifies any specific health issues that may have arisen over the past year. Additionally, the review process helps in identifying the future support needs of the carers and planning for their ongoing development.

Annual Reviews Between 01/04/2024 - 31/03/2025

The Fostering Service conducted 191 Annual Foster Carer Reviews, up from 152 last year. At the end of 31st March 2025, there were 179 fostering households (mainstream and Connected Person Foster Carers) who legally require an annual review every 12 months. 94 of those fostering households had their previous annual review completed within timescales, 34 households did not have their previous review completed within timescales.

Changes in staffing and the availability of the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer led to some delays with annual reviews being completed within timescale and first annual reviews being presented to fostering panel in the first quarters of the year. During the 12 months the service experienced changes within the operational delivery and staffing of the Business Support functioning that impacted the review process. The Fostering Service has had one full time Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers (FIRO) supporting the service from December 2024. This has had a positive impact on timeliness, quality assurance and practice for fostering reviews.

The Fostering Service data dashboard is monitored and alerts all professionals when annual reviews are due. The Fostering Service are exploring how IT and digital platforms can support the annual review process and feedback received.

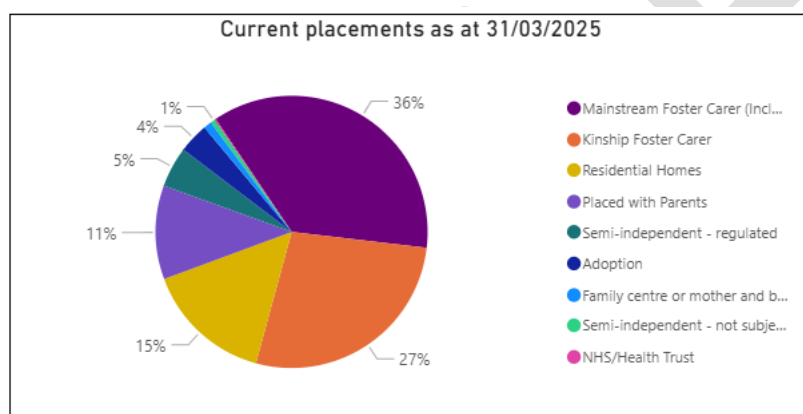
9. Matching

The process of matching in fostering involves multiple steps to ensure that children are placed with foster carers who can meet their long term needs and support permanence. Matching report is completed by the child's social worker and the fostering social worker and submitted to the fostering panel for recommendations. The matching assessment matrix considers various criteria such as the child's age, physical description, ethnicity, language, religious and cultural background, health, educational needs, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, and the quality of attachments.

During this period, 8 Fostering households (3 internal foster carers) were matched to the children in their care, totalling 13 children being offered long term permanency. This reflects the commitment to permanency for children in local authority care, as per the Permanence policy.

10. Placement Data and Placement moves

As of 31st March 2025, there were 727 children under the care of Shropshire Children's Services. Below is a breakdown of the placements and living arrangements for these children and young people.



Placement Type	Total
Adoption	26
Family centre or mother and baby unit & ...	7
Kinship Foster Carer	199
Mainstream Foster Carer (Including External Agency)	264
NHS/Health Trust	1
Placed with Parents	81
Residential Homes	110
Semi-independent - not subject to regulations	4
Semi-independent - regulated	35
Total	727

During this period, 12 children experienced more than 2 placement moves. These moves could include transitioning from emergency to short/long-term placements, foster care to family, or short-term to permanent options. This data focuses on children with more than 2 moves.

The data from this period do not provide any definitive conclusions regarding age and placement disruption, and there is minimal evidence to suggest that gender influences placement disruption.

11. Private Fostering

Private fostering involves a child under 16, or under 18 if disabled, being cared for by someone who is not a close relative for over 28 days. If the care lasts less than 28 days with no intention to extend, it does not qualify as private fostering. Privately fostered children are not classified as 'looked after' or in need, but Shropshire Children's Services considers them Section 17 Children In Need and assigns them a Children's Social Worker.

The Homes for Ukraine Scheme also classifies Ukrainian children up to 18 years old as privately fostered, resulting in Shropshire Children's Services involvement.

From July 2022, children under 18 traveling alone to the UK were included in the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Sponsors wanting to support a child not accompanied by a parent or guardian must have known the child's parents or guardians before February 24, 2022, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Sponsors must commit to three years of sponsorship or until the child turns 18, leading to a private fostering assessment.

Between April 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, there were 5 referrals for Private Fostering Assessments.

Between April 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, there were 6 Private Fostering Assessments completed. This is a decrease of 2 assessment compared to the previous year.

As of 31/03/25, there were 5 ongoing private fostering arrangements

Referrals for private fostering arrangements remain low. The number of foreign exchange students in Shropshire private schools has significantly decreased since Covid.

Shropshire Council is committed to promoting awareness of private fostering arrangements. Action is taken to ensure that the community is informed about the requirements and responsibilities associated with private fostering. These strategies include developing a programme of communication activities for local authority staff, other professionals, and agencies, as well as creating a range of publicity materials. Additionally, Shropshire Council provides advice to parents, persons with parental responsibility, those proposing to privately foster a child, existing private foster carers, and any other person concerned with a privately fostered child.

Shropshire Council actively raises awareness of private fostering through various initiatives. For example, events such as the Private Fostering Awareness Day is used to educate professionals and the public about private fostering. Social media and other communication channels are used to promote awareness and direct people to relevant resources on the website. Furthermore, Shropshire Council collaborates with organisations like CoramBAAF to host webinars and training sessions for social workers and other professionals to enhance their understanding of private fostering.

12. Special Guardianship

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is one legal route to enable children to achieve stability and permanence without ongoing social work intervention into family life. The service undertakes SGO assessments in respect of both children who are looked after and children who are not looked after but have been residing with family or connected persons within Shropshire.

Shropshire Council has a dedicated Special Guardianship Support Team trained and experienced in the challenges kinship carers can face. This team provides pre-order advice calls to assist potential applicants to understand the SGO assessment process and the Council's post-order SGO support offer. Annual contact is made with special guardians to offer a review of the SGO Support Plan following the granting on an SGO. Types of post-order SGO support can include advice and signposting, training, mediation, and networking opportunities. In addition, an SGO assessment of need can be requested to explore accessing additional support or services, which may include an application to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) to fund a therapeutic intervention for eligible children who were looked after pre-order.

Details of all Shropshire Council SGO support is available on the Council website <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/childrens-social-care-and-health/special-guardianship-support/>.

From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, 23 SGOs were granted, all of these were in respect of children who had been looked after at the time of the SGO.

13. Foster carer training April 2024 – March 2025

Pre-approval Training

As part of the assessment process, all prospective foster carers are mandated to complete a preparation course titled "Skills to Foster."

During the last period 22 delegates attended pre-approval Skills to Foster training, of which 13 were approved as Mainstream Foster Carers

The activities and exercises that are completed during the Skills to Foster programme, along with the home practice activities, account for 40% of carer's Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS). These must be completed by foster carers within their first year of fostering.

Skills to Care training has been delivered for all pre-approval connected carers. This training has been well received, with 68 delegates attending on either a face-to-face or virtual basis in the last period with individuals being approved.

Delegates found the training helpful and supportive, providing them with the knowledge and skills to carry out their role as a connected carer. They also shared it was a positive way to connect with others in similar situations.

Mandatory Induction Training

Induction training for both mainstream and kinship carers comprise of 12 mandatory courses, which must be completed within the first 12 months following panel approval.

To support the Training, Support and Development Standards, the following induction courses have been matched to both sets of TSDS requirements.

- Raising Awareness of Safeguarding and Protecting Children (to be renewed every three years)
- First Aid (to be renewed every three years)
- Safer Caring and Allegations (to be renewed every three years)
- Domestic Abuse Briefing
- Exploitation and Vulnerability

The remaining areas of mandatory training are:

- Family Time
- Health Journey for Looked-After Children
- Solihull Approach – Understanding Your Child (online via Solihull Approach)
- Trauma-Informed Practice and Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Internet Safety (online via The Training Hub)
- Medication (online via The Training Hub)
- Reporting and Recording (online via The Training Hub)

*Whilst this remains a mandatory area of training, kinship foster carers can achieve their TSDS without the completion of Safer Caring and Allegations.

Core Mandatory Training

There are 5 'core' mandatory training courses within our training and development strategy:

- Cultural Humility
- Emotion Coaching
- Making a Difference at PEPs
- Trauma and Loss
- Understanding Special Educational Needs

Core training sessions, both face-to-face and virtual, have been well attended over the past year. Feedback shows that carers find these courses useful and informative, developing their skills and knowledge around our core offer.

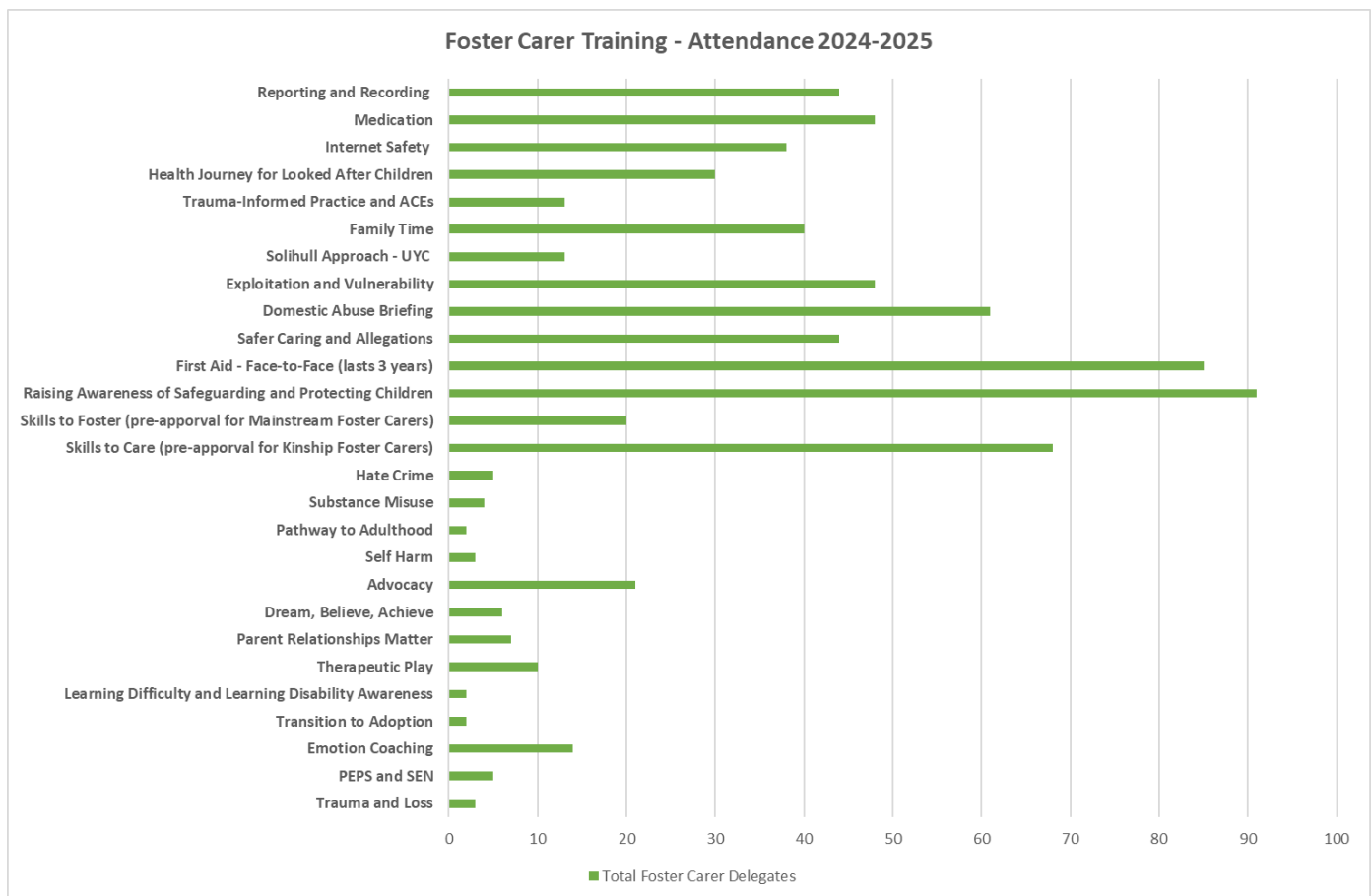
Enhanced Training

Our enhanced training is available to all carers, and covers more specialist areas of delivery:

- Advocacy
- Dream, Believe, Achieve
- Hate Crime
- Learning Difficulty and Learning Disability Awareness
- Parent Relationships Matter
- Self-Harm
- Substance Misuse
- Supporting Young People Who Identify as LGBTQI+
- Therapeutic Play
- Transition to Adoption

Evaluations indicate that carers find the enhanced training very useful and supportive in understanding their roles.

The bar chart below illustrates the attendance figures for our training programs over the past period.



Developments

The Fostering Service offers a hybrid training approach, with face-to-face, virtual (via MS Teams) and online training opportunities. We have seen the value of virtual training and will continue to use this moving forward – particularly when supporting our out-of-county foster carers and those with travel or work constraints. However, we continue to encourage face-to-face training wherever possible, as it remains the most effective learning method.

Skills to Care (pre-approval) training for kinship foster carers has been developed to include additional information and learning around family time, safer caring and allegations, recording, Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS), and post-approval training expectations.

Skills to Foster (pre-approval) training has been successfully condensed into a one-day training session, which is proving effective.

Further development is planned with the use of Leap into Learning to be used as a platform for accessing training information and providing a self-serve booking facility. We will be supporting foster carers in the transition to using this platform, whilst continuing to offer support and guidance around their training expectations and needs and ensuring compliance.

The 2024/2025 Training and Development Programme began in April, including new workshops on:

- Advocacy
- Hate Crime
- Parent Relationships Matter
- Trauma-Informed Practice and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Plans for 2025/2026

Over the next year there will be a focus on key priority areas, that we believe will support Carers to further develop their skills and knowledge to best support our children:

- Further roll out of Nurturing Attachments
- EDI / Cultural Humility
- CPI Verbal Intervention, de-escalation strategies
- Talk Boost, raising awareness of importance of reading to children.
- Supporting Young People Who Identify as LGBTQ+

Through the learning and development team, we will explore how we can offer an enriched training and support programme that gives carers and those who support them the right tools to do the job:

- Exploring opportunities for collaborative training initiatives with the wider Learning and Development Team, creating resilience and sustainability in the team.
- Implement the LEAP learning management system and support the roll out of Carer Connect and the Portals through training.
- Attendance – explore methods for improving attendance rates for kinship foster carers (non-mandatory training).
- Review how our training data is captured and shared, to provide up to date data for Managers to track compliance in one place.

14. Participation with children living within Fostering Families April 2024 – March 2025

Participation with children ensures that their voices are heard and considered in decisions that affect their lives. Shropshire Council is committed to promoting an 'open door' culture that encourages children to express their views, wishes, and feelings. The council takes steps to ensure that these views are taken into account when making decisions about children.

Shropshire Council organizes various activities and events to engage with children and gather their feedback. Monthly social group meetings support young people in providing feedback on their experiences, gathers suggestions for the next newsletters.

Children's views contribute towards foster carers annual reviews to support the service in understanding their lived experiences and support needs of the household. Further work will continue to be completed within the service to ensure different forms of communication are encouraged, supporting every child to share their views.

Newsletter: Members of the Saturday Social Group sent out quarterly newsletters. Newsletters are created by Young People for Young People. The content includes a quote for the month, interesting or humorous facts, a simple recipe, useful tips, artwork and an invitation for other young people to submit ideas. The content encourages participation and content from peers.

Monthly Social Group Meetings: During this period 11 social group meetings have been held, with 10 children participating. The group provides young people the opportunity to come together, socialise and encourages peer support and relationship building. We provide games/activities and refreshments for our young people.

Peer Support & activities: During this period 5 peer support sessions and 3 additional activities have been held including an Easter Egg Hunt, Nature Trail Walk and River Walk with 11 children participating in at least one of the activities. These activities support children to have fun whilst also aiding positive communication, build confidence, self-esteem, maintain positive relationships and address barriers to accessing support

In January 2024 two new young people joined the training programme to be peer supporters; these young people lead the Nature Trail Walk and supported some of the quieter young people attending the Saturday Social Group. Peer Supporters attended the Family Fun Day, one supporter helped with Name the Teddie, How

Many Sweets in the Jar, and the dance/music/Name that Tune... the other supporter encouraged children to play games with a football.

Links are maintained with The Hive and information about ongoing projects for all young people are passed on to foster carers.

In April 2024 the two new peer supporters attended the Cultural Investigators Launch at the Hive. The investigators had compiled information about the History of Belmont as a youth project and, the Hive in more recent years. There were photographs of the many young people, staff and musicians who had attended events, there was information about the workshops the Hive has delivered over the years; before leaving we joined in a participatory story telling session; these two young people previously attended the 2nd Podcast Group

In August 2024 NHS Community Mental Health funded an art project, to produce artwork on boards to decorate spaces for young people in two of their buildings, Stirchley Medical Practice & Coral House, Shrewsbury. A professional artist from the Hive lead 4 x day sessions, 5 of our young people attended along with 2 young people from the Mental Health Project.

15. Permanence

Children need a safe, stable and loving home environment that can support them throughout their childhood and beyond. They need carers who are able to support them developing secure attachments and strong foundations from which they can thrive. They need the commitment from their carers to provide them with opportunities that grow their confidence, self esteem and resilience to navigate life. Children need their identity to be supported and life-long links to be maintained, ensuring a network of support that will last through to adulthood. They need to be involved in plans about themselves.

Planning for permanence needs to be a feature of all our interventions with children we work with, in order to avoid delay and ensure all options are considered.

We have a duty to prioritise the welfare of the child while collaborating with both children and their parents, considering their wishes and feelings.

All legal options must be explored on the basis of the 'least' state intervention required to safeguard the child and meet their assessed permanence needs.

For most children, all of these needs will best be met by being enabled to remain with or return to live within their birth family, and with their brothers and sisters. Where this is not possible other permanence options must be progressed without delay.

The Permanence Forum consists of the Strategic Lead for Permanence, the Permanence Coordinator, Principal IRO and representatives from Stepping Stones, Fostering, Adoption, and SGO support services.

All children under the age of 16 who started to be looked after in 2024-2025 had their permanence plan discussed at Permanence Forum. The majority of children did not have 1 single plan at this point and social workers were following a number of parallel permanence plans. Permanence Forum assisted in prioritising tasks to pursue each plan and identifying the pathways and who could assist.

Permanency Forum has been up and running in Shropshire since April 2018 to support social workers in their permanency planning for children.

Newly looked after children are booked onto Permanency Forum agenda as soon as they become looked after and prior to their second CLA review.

In 2024 - 2025 there has been a total of 102 children who have attended Permanency Forum, 76 attended prior to their 2nd review and within timescales to have their plans ratified. 26 attended but were out of timescales for their review but their plans were overseen by their IRO.

16. Mockingbird Project

Shropshire continuing to support and hold one constellation within the county. This is well established since 2022.

Mockingbird is a way of supporting foster carers and empowering them to support each other through the development of constellations with 8 families in the constellation, including one hub carer. Our hub carer is an extremely experienced foster carer who is well known amongst carers and staff. The constellation continues to have a positive impact on development and support for carers, social activities for children and supports stability of childrens placements through the offer of peer to peer consultation and respite.

The role of the Liaison Senior Social Worker has been vacant, and we are currently recruiting to this position following the success of the previous liaison worker. This person is tasked with supporting the constellation and looking at creating further constellations within Shropshire.

Feedback has been extremely positive with children and carers enjoying developing new relationships, opportunities to strengthen peer support, attending social events and coffee mornings/ training. We have continued to see very good results regarding the support of foster carers and do anticipate the continued improvement and development of Mockingbird within Shropshire.

17. Conclusion

Children in Shropshire benefit from the dedication and hard work of our skilled foster carers. Social Workers have been instrumental in achieving positive outcomes for the children in our care. The service has adapted in the last 12 months, engaging with project management support to review service needs and delivery. The service has implemented changes that have supported marketing and recruitment whilst raising the profile of Shropshire Fostering both internally and externally.

As we move forward, our focus will remain on enhancing recruitment and assessment processes, expanding training and development programs, and providing robust support for carers. We will focus on supporting more children to achieve stable homes that are safe and built on love, enabling more children to achieve permanence through SGO's and maintain a strong support offer for carers and Special Guardians. Additionally, we will continue to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements.

We will engage with our Foster Carers and provide opportunities for participation that supports service development for our children and carers. The service will continue to work with the SFCA to support our fostering community in Shropshire.

We are committed to building on our successes and addressing areas for improvement to provide the best possible care for the children and young people we serve. Practitioners have worked hard to ensure children's placements remain stable and provide strong offer of support. Trauma informed intervention for carers will continue to aid understanding of the impact of trauma on children and development of carers skills to meet childrens needs. The service is committed developing our therapeutic offer for carers and children.

We will work to ensure we address learning behind foster carer resignations and deregistration's. Improving the annual review process and feedback, we aim to ensure that our fostering service remains responsive, effective, and child centred.

The service will continue to address the demand of multiple court ordered assessments for connected persons and timescales, working closely with our legal colleagues. These factors continue to impact mainstream fostering recruitment and assessment. Managing these demand ensures a balanced and effective fostering service that meets the needs of all children in our care. Reviewing the model for the service and structure will continue to aid growth of the fostering service to meet the needs of the children in our care.

Next Steps 2025-2026

Our priorities in the coming year will be:

Fostering Transformation

Implement, review and progress Marketing Strategy to increase fostering sufficiency and support retention. Development of Marketing and Communications functions, assessment and recruitment journey, support and development offer and insights. To enhance opportunities for our Foster Carers and raise the profile of fostering for councils we will engage with local businesses and networks in support of Fostering Friendly employees in Shropshire.

Fostering Teams

Maintain a stable workforce that ensures Foster Carers receive consistent support, advise and feel valued. Support carers in ensuring children receive quality care, stable and safe home environments where their voice is heard and their identity is promoted.

Efforts will focus on supporting children in achieving permanence, aiding transitions to birth family and connected persons, support long term matching and helping more families to progress Special Guardianship Orders with dedicated workers aiding the process where this is the plan for the child.

Developing support services including the Mockingbird model to benefit a greater number of carers.

Teams will focus on quality of practice with managers ensuring quality assurance measures and regular performance monitoring; ensuring children receive quality care within our fostering households.

In House Fostering - Recruitment and Assessment

We will develop and deliver on our Marketing and Communication strategy to increase fostering sufficiency and ensure we are able to support more children coming into our care to live with fostering families.

To enhance recruitment, we will utilise digital marketing, increase automation and host informational events virtually. Our partnership with a digital marketing agency will be strengthened, and social media strategies will be reviewed to increase foster carer enquiries and referrals. Additionally, there will be a focus on developing in-house foster carers to support children transitioning from residential care.

Dedicated social workers and recruitment staff to streamline the assessment process for new foster carers and develop peer support opportunities from the start of a foster carers journey.

The teams will implement and the new Form F and Form K template. Working inline with good practice guidance.

Social Workers will provide robust induction, ensuring Foster Carers are well prepared and supported in their role.

Assessing Social Workers will promote a range of caring options and work with Stepping Stones in identifying opportunities for children in residential placements to be matched with fostering families.

Fostering Panels

We will continue to ensure delivery of an effective and efficient panel. We will seek to increase diversity within the panel representation and membership to support this being reflective of society, experiences and knowledge. Increasing feedback from carers and children will aid service delivery. Training and development will reflect learning and development needs for the service.

Retention and Recognition of Existing Carers

Retaining and recognising existing carers is essential for maintaining a stable and experienced pool of foster carers. Efforts will be made to gain further understanding of the support needs of carers, provide wider range of

support, and acknowledge their contributions. This includes offering opportunities for professional development, recognising their achievements, and ensuring they feel valued and supported within our fostering community.

Addressing Resignations and deregistration's:

Understand and address the reasons behind foster carer resignations and deregistration's. This will help in retaining foster carers and ensuring that they feel supported and valued.

Training and Development:

The Fostering Training and Support Review 2025 examines the current training offer and proposed therapeutic fostering models and their associated training frameworks. The review highlights the importance of trauma-informed approaches in fostering, with emphasis on adapting parenting strategies to meet the individual needs of children who may have experienced trauma. Key findings emphasise the widespread availability of training modules focusing on trauma and attachment, the value of ongoing support groups, and the necessity of evidence-based trauma informed training programmes. This comprehensive approach is critical for improving therapeutic fostering outcomes and marketability.

Improving Annual Reviews:

Enhance the process of annual foster carer reviews to ensure they are completed on time, receive quality feedback and meet the required standards. This includes quality assurance, compliance, performance monitoring and ensuring that carers receive the necessary support and development opportunities.

Support for Special Guardianship:

The service will maintain the strong support offered to Special Guardians. This includes conducting thorough assessments and providing post-order support to ensure that children achieve permanence with minimal social work intervention and families continue to have access to specialist support services post order where required.

Private Fostering Awareness and Support

Increase awareness and understanding of private fostering arrangements within the community. This involves organizing events, using social media, and collaborating with organizations to educate professionals and the public.

These priorities aim to improve the overall performance of the fostering service and ensure that children in care receive the best possible outcomes.



For more information, please visit

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END OF REPORT