



Rutland County Council

Fostering Service

Annual Report

April 2014 – March 2015

1. STAFFING

1.1 The team consists of two full-time, one part-time and one sessional staff who are all overseen by a Team Manager (see Appendix 1).

- **1 full-time, permanent Principal Supervising Social Worker (PSSW)** – the PSSW is responsible for the day-to-day management of the service, including the recruitment, training, and supervising of foster carers (carrying a restricted caseload); service developments and the supervision of other team members (see below).
- **1 full-time, permanent Supervising Social Worker** – responsible for the supervision and development of the fostering service, supervising foster carers, placement finding and completing small projects such as researching supported lodgings and 18+ sufficiency package and developing and delivering training.
- **1 part-time (3 days per week) Social Worker Family Support** – who is currently responsible for assessing and supervising all Connected People Carers. There have been one connected person's assessment completed this year and another temporary connected person's agreement, this is for grandparents who are currently subject to a Special Guardianship Assessment with regard to their two grandchildren.

This worker also undertakes assessments for permanency related to Connected People foster carers, Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders. This member of staff is responsible for raising the awareness of Private Fostering, ensuring that the Local Authority meets the requirements of the National Standards for all Private Fostering arrangements, and assessing and providing statutory visits to carers and children in placement.

- **1 sessional Social Worker** – who provides up to eight hours per week and can work more hours to meet the needs of the service. His role is to concentrate on the recruitment process to increase the current pool of available carers and placements. During initial visits to enquirers the SSW discusses with the applicants the need to foster carers for older children. Crucially he provides a speedy and efficient service at the point of enquiry, by visiting people in their homes. This ensures that people receive appropriate information on a one-to-one basis where they feel able to ask any questions that are specific to their circumstances. In addition this worker undertakes assessments of prospective foster carers on our behalf and supplements any training requirements for them.
- **1 full-time team assistant** – providing a wide range of administrative support including foster carer finance, budgetary support and general office duties.

The PSSW and Team Assistant are supervised by the Team Manager. The PSSW supervises the other staff members.

2. FOSTER CARERS

- 2.1 There are currently 15 mainstream foster carers: 7 Connected Persons (friends and family) carers.
- 2.2 Rutland has recruited 2 sets of mainstream carers and 2 sets of connected people/friends and family carers over the period April 2014 to March 2015. One set of connected people carers subsequently gained a Special Guardianship Order. This has met our stated objective of recruiting 2 mainstream carers in the period.
- 2.3 We have advertised throughout the year mainly using the local radio, the Internet and mail drops to public venues. During Fostering Fortnight we ran a campaign on the local radio which involved one of our foster carers talking about the positive impact fostering has had on their family and alongside this we also ran our own recruitment advertisement on radio this was targeted towards carers for the staying put service in Rutland. Our recruitment priority based on needs this year is for carers for adolescents and children with significant needs. The fostering team plan to focus their advertising campaign to reflect the need for foster carers for adolescents and children with significant needs.
- 2.4 We are intending to run a month long campaign on local radio before during and after fostering fortnight which takes place the first two weeks in June. Rutland are looking at their current advertising and looking to change this to reflect the need for foster carers for older children and children with complex needs. We have also placed an advert in the programme of the local theatrical group's production of Oliver Twist to highlight fostering to people who may not have considered fostering in the past.
- 2.5 The *Skills to Foster* training course in September 2014 was undertaken by 3 couples and one single carer. However one of the couples was considered unsuitable for further assessment. One couple was presented to panel in March 2015 and recommended for approval and one couple are currently at Stage Two of the assessment, and we hope to present this couple at panel in June 2015. The single carer has recently progressed to Stage Two. This has increased the number of available foster carers for children within the Rutland area who may need to be care for outside of their family home.
- 2.6 We utilise the skills and knowledge of an existing foster carer to co-deliver our Skills to Foster course. This carer gained a lot from the experience and the feedback from the attendees was very positive. This is as part of Rutland's improvement programme.
- 2.7 Further Skills to Foster Courses are arranged for 13th/14th/and 15th April 2015. We have 5 couples and two single carers committed to attending this course.. In recognition that there is a lack of foster carers for older children and children with complex needs a worker from the youth team will talk to the potential foster carers about his work with young people. Also during the

Skills to Foster programme the participants are reminded that the service's need lies with placements for older children and children with complex needs.

2.8 The Table below shows the level of Enquiry and Approval Rates

Table 1

Recruitment (excluding Connected Persons)	April 2012/March 2013	April 2013/March 2014	April 2014/March 2015
Enquiries	20	32	27
Applications	5	6	6
Assessments	2	3	5
Approvals	2	2	3
% Enquiry to Approval	10%	6.25%	11.11%

2.9 We have only had two de-registrations over the period 2014/15. This was for the following reasons

- Carers moved to live out of the area and there was no child in placement.
- 1 Connected person resigned following making of a SGO

3. FOSTERING PANEL

3.1 The Fostering Panel consists of a small group of suitably skilled and experienced people. Membership meets the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2011 and consists of an Independent Chair, an Independent Panel Manager, the Manager of the Fostering Team and a pool of suitably experienced people; we also have access to a Medical Advisor and Legal Advice.

3.2 The Panel's functions are to:-

- consider new applications and recommend appropriate approval limits
- review the progress and terms of approval of new carers within a year subject to their fostering experience
- make recommendations regarding residence orders and allowances
- make recommendations regarding the approval of Independent Visitors for Looked After children
- consider complaints about foster carers
- consider de-registrations
- act in an advisory capacity for all aspects of fostering
- consider matching for permanency
- provide some quality assurance

3.3 The Panel makes a recommendation, which is then ratified by the Agency's Decision Maker. This role is currently undertaken by Rutland's Head of Service Safeguarding and Improvement.

3.4 The table below shows the level of activity of the Panel:

Table 2

Rutland Fostering Panel	April 2012/March 2013	April 2013/March 2014	April 2014/March 2015
Registrations	5	5	4
Reviews (initial)	5	6	2
Independent Visitor	0	0	0
De-registration	4	7	2
Permanency	3	0	0
Change of approval		2	3

4. CONNECTED PEOPLE CARERS

- 4.1 'Connected People' refers to foster carers who have been approved to care for specific children who are friends and relatives of the child.
- 4.2 In 2014/15 we have had 6 families approved in Rutland looking after 7 young people. We also had 1 couple who were approved and then gained a Special Guardianship Order for the child.
- 4.3 Connected Persons carers in Rutland are subject to the same assessment and approval process and receive the same training opportunities and support as mainstream carers. They receive the same fostering allowances and fostering fees as other Rutland carers and are expected to attend the same training. At this present time there are only a few connected carers that attend the support group. This is due to the distance; the majority of connected persons live away from Rutland and cannot get to the support group. The carers do attend the training offered by Rutland when they can.
- 4.4 There are currently 3 Child Arrangement Orders (formerly known as Residence Orders) open to the Fostering Service. These placements receive financial support. The financial support is reviewed every year. This figure will then be presented at legal review panel for ratification and agreement. The placements also have access to practical support if needed. The carers can contact the fostering worker who holds their case and discusses with them any difficulties they are having with the child/ren in their care.
- 4.5 There are 11 Special Guardianship Orders open with financial support packages. They have access to practical support if necessary and are also reviewed on an annual basis which includes a review of their financial circumstances by a Social Worker in the team. Work has been completed in the last year on a SGO package, and it is anticipated that with a strong support plan and financial support, where appropriate, more carers may come forward to be considered as SGO carers.

5. REFERRALS TO THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Table 3

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Connected People	3	6	2
SGOs	1	5	2
Private Fostering	1	0	0
Residence Orders no known as Child Arrangement Order	0	0	1
Family Group Meetings	5	15	8
Foster Care	12	12	6
Foster Care (Respite)	2	2	10
Foster Day Care	0	6	7
Residential (Respite)	2	4	0
Residential Long Term	2	1	0
Outreach Foster Care	0	13	2
Parent & Baby assessment centre	1	1	0
Total *	29	61	38

* This denotes number of children referred to each service area.

There have been no mother and baby assessments in Rutland since September 2013. This placement was sought by Rutland and commissioned by them. A few of the foster carers within Rutland offer mother and baby assessment places and therefore should there be a need highlighted in a specific case these placements would be utilised wherever possible.

5.2 PRIVATE FOSTERING

At this present time there is one private fostering assessment being undertaken. Rutland has in the past undertaken leaflet drops in public places to raise the awareness of Private Fostering. There is also a plan to redistribute leaflets within the Education and Health Service as well as looking to place leaflets in libraries within the area.

There is an army base within the Rutland area and there is also a plan to leaflet drop at this base to raise awareness amongst the service families at the base.

6. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Table 4 (below indicates the number of Looked After Children for whom the fostering team provide a service).

6.1 Rutland Placements

Table 4

	April 2012/March 2013	April 2013/March 2014	April2014/March 2015
Foster Care	18	17	23
Friends & Family Care	10	9	8
Respite (Special Needs)	2	0	1
Respite (foster care)	0	0	0
Total	30	26	32

Although Rutland does not have designated respite carers, we have foster carers that also offer respite and overnight respite to other foster carers. Rutland's strength here is that the foster carers establish good relationships with each other and the children usually have respite with the same carers. This ensures that the children have continuity of care with recognised people.

6.2 Out-of-County Placements

Table 5

	April 2012/March 2013	April 2013/March 2014	April 2014/March 2015
Foster Care	4	5	5
Connected Persons		6	5
Residential	2	3	0
Residential (Respite)	4	0	0
Foster Care (Respite)	1	0	0
Hostel		4	0
Total	11	18	10

6.1 Unmet need

We were unable to accommodate two young people in 2014/15. Rutland's carers are currently approved for children 0-18 years of age, with carers specifying an age range that they feel they would like to care for. There are fewer foster carers whose preference is to take adolescents with specific needs. The two young people the service was unable to place were adolescents and had challenging behaviours and needs.

Rutland recognise that this is an area of challenge weakness and a specific advertising campaign to recruit foster carers for adolescents and children with complex needs is being developed.

Rutland used a combination of Independent Fostering Agency placements and Residential placements for the 2 young people who we couldn't find placements for.

7. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 7.1 All prospective foster carers attend a 3 day course "The Skills to Foster" prior to approval. They have an opportunity to meet with existing foster carers and children with similar family circumstances as well as the mother of three children who have been Looked After by Rutland County Council. The carers who have attended the Skills to Foster training have found this part of the course very enlightening and value this. They feel they get a good insight in to working with the children's birth families and how it feels for a birth family to have a child placed in to foster care.

For the prospective foster carers it gave them a 'human' face to the families that they will be having contact with. A message given to the prospective foster carers during the Skills to Foster training, was that whatever happens to a child within their family they still love their family and they need to be 'allowed' to love their family and talk about their family. Prospective foster carers were encouraged to be 'non-judgemental' about what happens within these children's homes and to support the child/ren to talk openly about their experiences within their birth family.

- 7.2 There is an induction programme following approval and carers also undertake basic core training; this being Paediatric First Aid, Safeguarding, Record Keeping and Safer Caring. Individual training needs are considered separately. The fostering team are currently looking at their training schedules and looking in to training with regard to Child Sexual Exploitation, Internet safety etc. The team are aware of the need for this to be part of the core training for foster carers. Training on this important area is planned for June. There has been training on these issues for foster carers in the past.
- 7.3 Foster carers continue to have the opportunity to train with social workers and other disciplines where appropriate. There has recently been some training undertaken with regard to supervised contact that carers who attended found useful. This was undertaken by an independent social worker. Training opportunities for foster carers this year have included attachment training, identity and diversity and Winston's Wish training. Rutland County Council training department in conjunction with Leicestershire provides a list of training opportunities that are fed back to the foster carers via their supervising social worker. We recognise the importance of training for the workforce and foster carers and they are regularly provided with training opportunities open to them.
- 7.4 We have been able to access support from CAMHS specifically for foster carers. CAMHS workers travel to Rutland and provide a satellite clinic for foster carers. To enable them to discuss challenging behaviour, they are provided with strategies on behaviour managements. The carers access this service by SSW making a referral to the service. Only the foster carers attend this clinic not the child/ren. The purpose of this is to help the carers with strategies and management of the difficulties that are being displayed in the placements. Carers report that they find this service useful and it has helped them with managing and helping the children in their placements.

- 7.5 Some foster carers have been keen to develop further skills in outreach work which involves supervising contacts for children in care. A training day was provided in May 2014 and a further training day has been arranged for 23rd April 2015. Other outreach work such as family support work over weekends and bank holidays has supported parents to have their children at home and help manage the risks around this. In one case in particular a set of foster carers are working with a young child who has a care plan to return home to her mother. The carers have worked closely with the mother to offer her support with her daughter. They have stated they are also happy to continue to offer support once the child has gone home and will support within the community when needed. There has been excellent communication between the carers and the mother and a great use of a contact book being used at each contact session. The foster carers have also met with mother and child when contact takes place within the community. This has seen the carers build on their fostering skills and aided their ability to work with the families of children in care. Foster carers within Rutland also enable sibling groups to have contact wherever possible within their homes where there has had to be a sibling separation. Foster carers try to keep the contact as 'normal' as possible for the children so that contact is meaningful for all involved.
- 7.6 All foster carers are paid £15 a month to enable them to access the internet. We use electronic mail to communicate with some of the carers, including sending information (e.g. minutes of meetings and new referrals) where a secure site is available. Carers record information about the children they look after, either long hand or on their computer using a template. This information is checked on a monthly basis during supervision. This information is held on the foster carers file. SSWs bring to the SWs attention with regard to these recordings and where they are kept. In the past SSWs have not completed written reports for LAC reviews and have instead given verbal updates at the reviews. However, given that sometimes the children behaviours are discussed at the reviews in front of the children it has been agreed that from now on a written report will be requested from the SSWs for the carer and points within the written report can be discussed at the reviews. Foster children are encouraged to attend the child care council and the importance of this is discussed with the children and the foster carers are also encouraged to raise the importance of this to the children in their care. Foster carers are also expected to support the child in attending the councils if they wish to and this is something that carers are happy to do on the whole.
- 7.7 The majority of our carers have completed the fostering induction standards. The only exceptions are newly approved carers and it is anticipated that they will complete these standards within their first year of approval.

8. SUPPORT TO CARERS

- 8.1 Carers are supervised at least monthly when children are in placement unless agreed otherwise. In some cases foster carers are having more regular visits than monthly due to the level of support needed due to challenging and/or difficult behaviour being displayed by the child. The level of these visits can change due to the changing needs of the child. Also some visits can have longer periods between them in stable long term placements where the need for support is less.
- 8.2 Support groups meet every other month at the council offices or at foster carers' homes or alternative venue. Support Groups during the day are usually well supported and attendance has also increased during evening sessions. It has been highlighted to them that they need to attend at least 3 support groups a year. The carers have been reminded that this addresses part of their competency framework and if they fail to attend at least 3 support groups this could have implications on the fee that is paid to the carers.
- 8.3 All carers are provided with membership of The Fostering Network and the Leicestershire Foster Care Association, both of which provide advice, information and support to carers including a Helpline both in office hours and outside of office hours.
- 8.4 Foster carers have a list of other carers' telephone numbers and use this to provide informal support to each other. The foster carers are now an established and cohesive group and they find mutual support invaluable. New foster carers are informed of the dates and venues for the support group. They can also be buddied up with established foster carer so that they feel supported when attending the groups for the first few sessions whilst they build relationships with other carers at the group.
- 8.5 As reported in paragraph 7.4, foster carers have access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for Looked After Children through monthly satellite clinics held at RCC offices. Carers are given a time slot to attend supported by their SSW. Foster carers are given feedback sheets after they have attended the clinics. The feedback has been very positive about this new service. The Fostering service offers advice to carers for specific children when there are management problems and carers are able to access the 24 hour helpline. .
- 8.6 Foster Carers in Rutland also have access to out of hours support. How this is delivered is currently being reviewed.

9. DEVELOPMENTS TO THE FOSTERING SERVICE

- 9.1 Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').
- 9.2 The local analysis of the number of children in care, trends over time, and the needs of Rutland's care population has identified the following priorities:
- Developing a range of placements to support care leavers into adulthood – in particular supportive lodgings and staying put placements.
 - Placements for adolescents
 - Carers for hard to place children such as children with disabilities, sibling groups and challenging behaviours
- 9.3 A Staying Put Scheme in Rutland has been developed and is open to all current foster carers including friends and family carers. It enables young people in a placement where a familiar/pre-existing relationship exists to continue in this placement from them being 18-21 years old. The local authority fund these placements and practically support them as required. This is generally used by children who have been in placement with a carer for long periods. We have over the last 12 months had 2 carers provide staying put opportunities for the young people they have looked after.
- 9.4 The Supported Lodgings Scheme is open for former LAC who do not want to remain in foster care post 16 and Southwark children who need support. The requirement is for low to medium support in independent living skills prior to young people moving out. However despite a robust advertising campaign we have not attracted any specific enquiries about joining / providing care.
- 9.5 The Fostering Service is also aware of the new changes and requirements in respect of remand fostering placements, should this be needed within Rutland we would work closely with Leicestershire County Council in respect of provision of placement.

10. COMPLAINTS

- 10.1 There have been two complaints since the last report written. One from a carer who has a child under the auspices of the Special Guardianship Order, and one from foster carers who has recently had a child removed from their care.

Both of these complaints are still being investigated.

11. UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES FROM CARE

- 11.1 There have been two young people who have been reported missing from care. This has occurred recently and they were reported missing by their carers. The young people are currently receiving support and advice in an effort to prevent this happening again.

12. SCHEDULE 8 NOTIFICATIONS

- 12.1 There have been no notifications to Ofsted this year

13. OFSTED

- 13.1 Rutland Children's Services were subject to an unannounced inspection in January 2013, using the new inspection regime. The outcome for this was an ADEQUATE grading.

15. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 15.1 There were 32 Looked After Children in 2012/13, 51 Looked After Children in 2013/14 and 42 Looked After Children in 2014/15. We have managed to place the majority of children within our own fostering service, although we have had to use Independent Fostering Agencies for some, particularly teenagers. During this period there has also been changes within the staff team with a new Team Manager being appointed in June 2013 who subsequently left in September 2014, an agency manager who was in place from September 2014 until January 2015. We now have another Interim Manager in place. The team is now fully staffed and is an established cohesive group.

- 15.3 We have continued to attract people's interest in fostering and are able to respond quickly due to the systems in place. We have been able to hold one Skills to Foster course in September 2014 and another one has taken place in April 2015. We feel we are attracting a high standard of applicants to these courses although we recognise that we are not assessing high numbers. We currently have just approved 1 mainstream foster carer with two others at stage 2 of the process and we have also approved 1 Connected Persons (Family and Friends) carers. We expect to exceed our stated target to recruit two sets of carers this year. However, Rutland are aware that is a need to approve foster carers for older young people rather than a need to recruit

more foster carers for younger children when we already have vacant foster placements.

15.4 We have had 2 de-registrations during this period 2014/15, one moved out of our area and one obtained a Special Guardianship Order.

15.5 The Fostering Service is operating under the National Minimum Standards 2011 and Regulations, some of the impact of these are outlined below:

- We are aware that the standards place a greater emphasis upon Connected Persons (Friends and Family) Carers and that they are eligible for the same type of services and support as mainstream carers. In Rutland we have always provided the same level of access to support and training. Rutland has noted a significant increase in Connected Persons assessments and recognises that these assessments are often very complex. There has also been an increase in the request for temporary approvals of Connected Persons which has also had an impact on work within the team.
- There is a greater duty of sufficiency for the Fostering Service in that we need to have a wide range and choice of foster carers in county to meet the needs of children and young people from Rutland. We now have 16+ sufficiency strategy and are actively recruiting for carers for supported lodgings and have a Staying Put scheme in place for existing carers. This has proved difficult in terms of generating interest and enquiries. We have had two separate months of advertising on Rutland Radio but have had no response to date.
- Panel membership has changed and is no longer so prescriptive in respect of its constitution. There have been no difficulties in respect of ensuring attendance at panel. Panel have recruited two new members this year.
- We support the view that foster carers are given more delegated responsibility and are able to make day to day decisions about children in their care. We have developed a delegated authority form and are in the process of rolling this out within the Social Care Teams.

15.6 We are aware of the budgetary constraints on services and understand the need to try to achieve more with less. We are going to have to be flexible in the way that we use our resources and continue to focus on outcomes for the children that we work with and work together with our partner agencies and colleagues to provide the best possible services. We recognise that we need to further develop our own group of foster carers in order that we can have

sufficient choice for the children and young people of Rutland. The People's Directorate in Rutland is currently undergoing a full review with the outcome not yet available. This will impact on recruitment of any new staff over the coming months and also means the budgets are being scrutinised much more closely to offer savings.

PRIORITIES FOR 2015/16

- 1) To increase local placement choice in respect of mainstream foster care. To recruit foster carers specifically targeted to care for teenage looked after children. To recruit carers specifically for young people with complex and challenging needs. To recruit carers specifically able to meet the needs of disabled children, both respite and longer term placements.
- 2) To embed the Staying Put scheme within our current cohort of foster carers and looked after children.
- 3) The Supported Lodgings scheme has yet to be established and this is proving extremely challenging in the current climate. We would wish to provide Rutland young people with positive and realistic choices over accommodation in Rutland. The Local Authority is looking at using one of its own houses to provide accommodation and support to 16+ young people.
- 4) To ensure the Delegated Authority training and forms is embedded in the organisation and all carers are aware of their responsibilities and actions around this. Foster carers are also regularly reminded of this during their supervision sessions and their annual reviews.
- 5) To continue to deliver a robust training plan for the foster carers and fostering team this is available and easily accessible, and ensures continuous professional development.
- 6) To continue to work on a Foster Carer database that is able to run reports on training, support groups, vacancies and matching criteria to help aid the making of placements and provision of training needed for our carers.
- 7) To provide information on private fostering within the local community. Leaflets have already been distributed to local schools. Additionally we hope to attend the local army base to highlight the importance of making the local authority aware of any situations where private fostering may be taking place. We may also consider an infomercial on the local radio to highlight this issue.

.....
Tracey Masi
Interim Team Manager

.....
Linda Duff
Principal Supervising Social Worker