

## **Fostering Questionnaire Analysis September 2017**

### **Part 1 – What type of carer are you? How long have you been fostering?**

Of the one hundred and eighteen carers who completed the survey, 65% had been fostering for 6 years or more; nearly a third for over 11 years with the majority of responses from carers who undertake Mainstream placements, either long or short term (60%).

This survey attempted to go into greater depth, as to what motivated someone to become a foster carer and how they became aware of Derbyshire County Council's Fostering Service. The Fostering Network suggested that it takes up to two years for a candidate, considering becoming a carer, to take the first step in contacting their fostering provider. The 2017 survey shows that the vast majority of Derbyshire County Council foster carers took one year, or less, before deciding to contact the service – 81% and although a wide range of contact sources are cited, the most common is Word of Mouth (34%), and of these, 11% of recommendations came directly from our own foster carers.

Where prompted, carers' responses can be defined by four categories;

Promotion - after seeing an advert or article

Family/Carer – knowing family members who have fostered or having been fostered themselves

Career – fostering after working with social care or education

Vocation – possessing a deep seated belief, in the need to care and nurture children and young people

One hundred and two foster carers responded – twelve applied to foster because of experiences in and around their work; 'Already a nurse, wanted to work with children more', 'through my work as a training officer...I met many teenagers who lived in care', 'retired from my full time career had experience of working with troubled families', 'working with LAC as a teacher made me want to offer support to similar children'

Eight carers had been made aware of fostering through family who fostered; 'Parent was a foster carer, we became guardians to a child she adopted', 'other members of family were carers so had idea of what was involved'.

Only one carer said that the primary reason to foster was because of seeing an advert; 'We saw an article in the Derby Evening Telegraph about placements for unaccompanied refugee children'.

The overwhelming majority of responses (N.B. this section had the highest number of comments made throughout the entire survey – over 80% of carers responded) can all be classed as Vocational, whereby the carer finds fulfilment within the fostering role, meeting a long standing need in looking after children; 'Always wanted to make a difference and after having our own children there was still plenty of love to give', 'love of children and a need to put them on the right path', 'to give these lovely children a better life and a happy safe home/family', 'wanting to make a difference...and do the best I can for them', 'I missed children in my own life', 'children had left home and we felt we had something to offer', 'feel it is a calling', 'not really sure. Love having children around me and

hoped that I could make a difference’, ‘nice to have the sound of children in the house...hopefully change someones life for the better’.

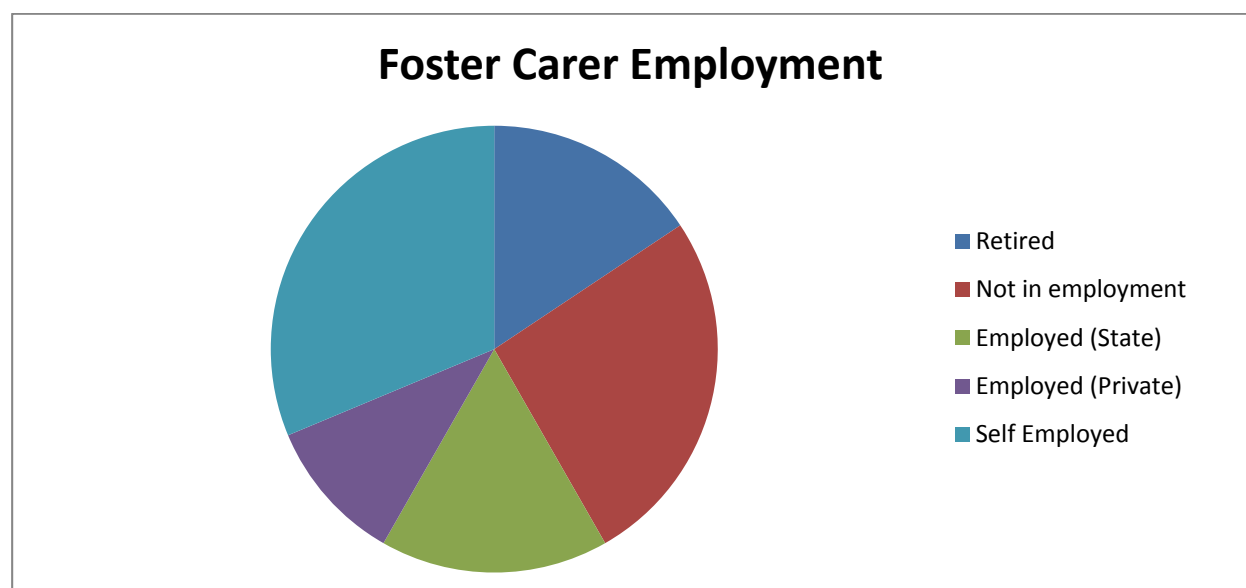
Twenty three carers stated, specifically, that they fostered because they loved children, loved the company of children or they ‘had love to give’.

Thirteen carers stated they ‘wanted to make a difference’.

It is interesting to note that a number of the comments made illustrate a degree of circumspection on the part of the carers, before committing to apply – fourteen carers said that they had waited until the time was right before they thought about fostering; ‘ We had considered when our children were young but in the end we waited until they were grown up’, ‘it was something we had been considering for a number of years’, ‘when two of my children went off to university I talked my husband into giving it a go’. These responses tend to correlate to a need to fill a space left by a carer’s own children leaving home; ‘empty nest syndrome’, ‘...had empty bedrooms’, ‘our own children were leaving home...still wanted children around the house’. Whilst carers all cited concerns about finding space when their own children left home, work commitments or agreement from spouses/partners and other family members before contacting the service, nearly half (46%) felt that they could only begin fostering ‘when the time was right’.

Derbyshire County Council’s Fostering Recruitment Team relies on promotional activity to ‘trigger’ interested candidates to apply to ourselves, rather than a competing provider. Whilst over a third of carers who responded, applied as a result of a word of mouth recommendation, there was an even distribution between radio/television adverts, newspaper promotions, internet and live event enquiries. From additional comments received, eleven came from DCC staff members or carers working for partnership agencies – one carer stated that, ‘...our local authority (for fostering) was the obvious choice’. Another that, ‘Once we had decided to foster we looked up both Derbyshire and Derby City. Derbyshire were more proactive about following up our application’.

## Part 2 – Employment



In the previous return, carers who worked within the state sector formed the largest single element of the fostering community – 43%. This has now shrunk to 17%. The second largest group came from those who are either not in employment or self-employed (26 and 31%) and the remainder being engaged in the private sector (10%) or retired (16%). Where our carers are currently in employment, the split between part time and full time is 55% to 45%.

Although the number of carers who worked in the public sector has dropped significantly, they are performing very similar jobs to those surveyed two years previously; teaching, teaching assistant, social care, local government officer, school catering. (A decline in public sector foster carers may be a result of pay freezes/job insecurity?)

Of those carers who are employed in the private sector or are self-employed, there are no discernible trends or patterns amongst those who responded; retail assistant, property management, financial services, accountancy, cleaner, driving instructor.

The rise in responses where a carer stated they were self-employed can be seen as a response to the need for carers to register as such with HMRC. It is worth noting that eleven carers made a point of replying that they were 'full time foster carers' – 'I gave up 'paid' employment to be a foster carer due to the placement in our cares needs'.

### **Part 3 – Satisfaction and Value**

Carers were asked how they felt about the service they received from Derbyshire County Council, from the assessment process, through to approval and beyond.

One hundred and seven carers, 94% in total, felt the assessment process, from point of enquiry through to their panel decision, was either good or very good. 76% of the carers who responded were either 'fairly satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service they were receiving from Derbyshire County Council – a slight drop from the previous survey, where 80% of carers expressed satisfaction with the service. However, when asked if they felt valued by the authority, only 52% of carers responded positively; 20% didn't know and 28% felt they were not valued.

When expanded, as to whether carers felt their views were being listened to by the authority as a whole, only 38% of carers who responded said yes – when this question was applied to the fostering service at a local level, the proportion of positive responses increases significantly; 74% of carers thought their views were being listened to by their area teams and 91% thought the same, regards their supervising social workers. However, only 60% of carers could say the same about their child's social worker. Whilst this level of satisfaction in supervising social workers and area teams exceeds that of the previous return, the proportion of carers who felt they were not being listened to by their child's worker is at the same level as 2014/15.

Only four carers had not signed their Foster Carer Charter.

When asked, eighty six carers (79%) would recommend fostering to Derbyshire County Council to friends and family. Where carers had stated that they would not recommend fostering for the authority, the main reasons as to why not fall into three categories; financial ('I think the pay is quite

poor', 'I'm in band B and don't feel valued', 'The whole system is in a shake up and I'm not confident it's fair on carers'), support ('Lack of support, we have had 9 social workers in 4 years', 'lack of staff...makes it a leap of faith') and perceptions as to how they are valued ('Our views as carers are not acted upon', '...foster carers are not listened to, even when their opinion is in the child's interest').

When asked, of one hundred and fifteen carers who responded, 50% said they had considered fostering for another agency. In the previous return, that figure was 38%.

#### **Part 4 – Fostering For Derbyshire**

71% of carers had a child in placement – 29% did not. This is the same ratio of placements to vacancies as in the previous return (2014/15). Where a carer had a child placed, 67% of those carers received sufficient information regards the child's history, level of need and support available.

Carers were asked what they considered the most significant elements, that the authority provides, in supporting and enabling the fostering task;

- 96% of carers 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that training was important. Of these, 63% strongly agreed.
- 93% of carers 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that a dedicated support package was important. Of those, 74% strongly agreed.
- 86% of carers 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that local service delivery was important. Of these, 48% strongly agreed
- 84% of carers 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that fees and allowances were important. Of these, however, only 51% strongly agreed.

The majority of carers all responded positively when asked about their experiences of working with supervising social workers and area teams. Nearly ¾'s of carers 'strongly agreed' that their worker was responsive, professional, understanding and supportive. There were thirty eight positive comments; 'We couldn't ask for more', 'our SSW is superb', 'She's always available when we need advice', '...she is amazing, she even supports us on a non-working day', 'always available to contact with any matter however small it may seem', 'I look forward to seeing my SSW...listens to what I have to say and is really easy to talk to'. Where praise is given, one of the key aspects of that praise is the ability for the worker to make themselves available. Carers seem to value highly a supervising social worker who is easy to contact and responds quickly to concerns. However, overall levels of satisfaction have dropped from the previous survey; 74% (2017/18) compared to 84% (2014/15)

A small number of carers were less enthusiastic. However, whilst there was some criticism aimed directly at the workers themselves, most carers were unhappy at perceived gaps in service or poor handovers between new starters; 'we have had 9 social workers, sick of saying the same thing every few months. Repeat, repeat, repeat', 'my social worker only works part time and seems to be very busy with others', 'each time asked for help just got a visit for 5 mins, to do things already done, goes chatting to other carers about you', 'I've had several social workers and it is frustrating to have to change...I have had several months with no SSW', 'seems afraid of child's SW'.

Children's social workers have, in both local and national studies, for some time been seen to be less effective, by carers, than their own supervising social workers – a trend which has continued into 2017. Only 38% of carers 'strongly agreed' that their child's social worker was responsive, professional, understanding and supportive – however, this is an increase of 9% from the previous return; 38% (2017/18) compared to 29% (2014/15). Nineteen carers commented negatively on their experiences with the child's worker – in some cases, comments made could be considered personal, although the majority highlight frustrations around the frequency of visits, a failure to communicate and staffing concerns; 'Too many CSW to mention...in double figures', 'our child's SW is on long term sick leave so support has been almost non-existent...the child will get a duty worker visit. I feel that this is just a tick box', 'having a worker that is part time is extremely disadvantageous, they are excellent at their job but the time frame for getting back in touch is long', 'Child's social worker can be a bit unrealistic with demands on foster carers', 'problems by putting us at risk by doing contact when they knew background', 'the majority of social workers we have been in contact with do not return calls, visit when expected and are vague about details concerning children in care. We have only had one decent one', 'No consistency...had at least 7 CSW (in four years) and at times none!'

However, given the opportunity, a number of carers have praised the work done by the child's social worker or else acknowledge some of the complexities facing staff, in trying to balance their obligations to the child whilst working with the carers; 'I have worked for six and a half years with a very good child's social worker', 'As we have 3 children, there could be a few workers, and all workers are different. Some are great and treat carers as they should do, others are the complete opposite', 'Unfortunately, although she is fabulous she is far too thinly spread...her workload is too much and thought is not given to where her charges are, so some are out of county and this has an impact', 'we have a very good relationship with here but I feel social workers should make a little more time to take children away from home to have a chat and get to know them when carers not around'.

#### **Part 4 – Training and Additional Support**

Of the one hundred and eighteen carers who completed the survey, on three had not undertaken any training in the last year; 47% had attended between one and three courses, the remaining 50% had attended up to six courses in the year.

Overwhelmingly (80%), carers thought that training was well promoted and they knew what was available and nearly half (46%) had completed the Fostering Changes course, of whom 88% found it either 'good' or 'excellent'.

When asked what barriers there were towards accessing training, carers commented that the main concerns were workload; 'Commitments with the foster child in place', '...does not fit in with school drop off and pick up and I have three children and nobody to help with the school', 'child in placement', 'I do not enjoy training...I would rather stay home and actually care for the children', 'with contact and hospital visits, we had very little spare time'.

There were further concerns with capacity or cancellations; '...getting hold of training events is a nightmare and many of them are already full', 'I tried to attend this course but it was cancelled after 4/5 sessions', 'there wasn't space on the last one I was offered'.

However, the main issue, which was noted in the 2014/15 return, was the conflict between training times against working hours and distance; 'I work full time – the course is during the day and this is not possible for either of us to attend', 'time and distance', 'working full time and timing of training makes it difficult', 'there has not been a course delivered at a time when I could attend'.

Half of carers surveyed thought training delivery could be improved; 'have facilities for foster children whilst doing training', 'transport for carers that cannot drive for training', 'more venues across the county...', 'on line courses', 'offer more courses at weekends with childcare facilities provided', 'training in school hours so courses end no later than 2.30 pm', 'access to e-learning or arrange for more evening or weekend courses', 'put all (training) information in one place. Offer course on different days of the week and at different times...diversity always on a Thursday! No good if you work!'

There was a common thread that carers at the edge of the county found training very hard to access ('more courses in Glossop', 'more in the south of county'), a need to have a central repository of training dates and details, which would incorporate a means of accessing courses directly, more training on allegations and work with CAMHS and an end to what may be considered 'tick box' courses with, instead, an emphasis on depth of learning ('Lots of training is repetitive and boring. Would like more interactive training', '...not having to repeat 'basic' training on an annual basis', 'training more appropriate to the (challenging) children in my care').

Carers were asked to rate different, additional support elements;

- 86% of carers found the Leisure Pass to be 'good' or 'very good'. Of these, 42% felt it was 'very good'.
- 74% of carers found the LAC Nurses to be 'good' or 'very good'. Of these, 30% felt they were 'very good'.
- 73% of carers found Horizons to be 'good' or 'very good'. Of these, 32% felt it was 'very good'.
- 71% of carers found the Virtual School to be 'good' or 'very good'. Of these, 31% felt it was 'very good'. 13% of carers found the Virtual School to be 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- 64% of carers found the Out of Hours Service to be 'good' or 'very good'. Of these, 21% felt it was 'very good'. 13% of carers found the Out of Hours Service to be 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- 63% of carers found CAMHS to be 'good' or 'very good'. Of these, only 14% felt it was 'very good'. 12% of carers found CAMHS to be 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Of those carers who had contacted the Out of Hours Service, two thirds were positive and happy with the response they received; 'very supportive', 'the service was excellent...we were very impressed – all question and concerns dealt with and we were kept well informed', 'great response', 'sometimes takes a while to get through but feel supported when you do', 'very good and efficient', 'we really appreciated the support'.

Those that were not satisfied with the service commented that; ‘...Out of Hours very unreliable and unhelpful’, ‘not at all good’, ‘very hit and miss. Difficult to get a call back in an expected time’, ‘very, very poor, took far too long to ring through to duty social care. Foster carers should be given a direct line upon receipt of a child, especially if emergency placement’, ‘(support) sometimes non-existent’.

It is noteworthy that, in the 2014/15 survey, opinions on how effectively OOH delivered a service were almost exactly 50/50 – there is a marked increase in client satisfaction in the 2017/18 survey.

Over half the carers surveyed had been contacted by the Central Placements Team in the last twelve months with over 90% of those carers finding the team to be well informed, supportive, understanding and professional.

## **Part 6 – Area Meetings**

The issues raised in accessing training are reflected, to a certain extent, in the area team meetings for staff and carers in that attendance is dependent upon time (and a potential conflict with working hours) and locality – 39% of carers had not attended an area team meeting in the last year.

Where carers have been unable to attend, the main reasons, as with training are due to work or care commitments; ‘I work full time, most meetings are coffee mornings’, ‘we have such limited free time that we have to carefully choose what we need to attend and what would be nice to attend’, ‘we work full time’, ‘more accessible times’, ‘if we had not got a placement at the time we would probably attend’.

The other reason, again, being location; ‘(more) closer meetings’, ‘make them local and at a reasonable time. As a single carer, it’s difficult to get baby sitters and I personally don’t agree to placing children with foster carers that they don’t know for a couple of hours’, ‘closer to home...all of them seem to be north of Derby’, ‘closer location, more relevant topics to the age I care for but often it’s simply time constraints stopping me’, ‘struggle what to do with children whilst at the meeting – distance also an issue’.

In some cases, there is a lack of awareness; ‘Not aware of when and where they are’, ‘more notice of when and where they are. We only received the list well after most of the sessions had taken place’, ‘Did not know about them or I would have attended’.

## **Part 7 – Fostering Talk**

Derbyshire County Council provides membership, for all its foster carers, to Foster Talk. This replaces an earlier arrangement, with the Fostering Network, but provides a number of similar services. These services cover a wide range of carer focussed benefits, from discounts, to financial advice to independent support and insurance liability, in the event of an allegation or incident taking place.

26% of carers had accessed the service to 'keep up to date on things', finding it 'informative and supportive' and offering 'good, good advice...helpful to the next level'.

Foster Talk has drafted a summary of all activity over the first six months from the start of our contract (please see attached).

## **Part 8 – Communication**

This year, we added an additional category, to explore how well carers thought the service communicated with them at both an area level, but also across the county;

- 88% of carers felt email contact with their area teams, was 'good' or 'very good'; of these, 61% felt it was very good.
- 85% of carers felt face to face contact with their worker or team, was 'good' or 'very good'; of these, 66% felt it was very good.
- 80% of carers felt telephone contact with their area teams, was 'good' or 'very good'; of these, 50% felt it was very good.
- 69% of carers felt that the Foster Carer newsletter, was 'good' or 'very good'; of these, 31% felt it was very good.
- 65% of carers felt Derbyshire County Council's fostering events were 'good' or 'very good'; of these, 28% felt they were very good.
- 64% of carers felt Derbyshire County Council's fostering web page were 'good' or 'very good'; of these, 23% felt it was very good.
- 50% of carers felt feedback from Derbyshire County Council's Foster Carer Council was 'good' or 'very good'; of these, 16% felt it was good but 18% felt it was 'poor' or 'very poor'.

## **Part 9 – Carer's Own Children**

Derbyshire County Council has worked hard to consider, and acknowledge, the role played by the children of our foster carers, whether through the gift of vouchers or school certificates, as part of their PSHE portfolio. This year's survey has shown that nearly half our carers (46%) undertake fostering whilst their children are still at home.

The vast majority of carers, with children, stated that their needs had been taken into account throughout the matching process – 89% and, of these households, 77% felt the whole family, including their children, were fully supported by their supervising social worker.

The level of satisfaction drops slightly when carers were asked if there was anything else the authority could do to support children in a fostering household (34%). Of the answers received, responses fall into two distinct concerns; that the child has to sacrifice time and attention, because of the needs of the child in placement and that they can become isolated;

'A lot more support when a child moves on...', 'include them in more things that are available to foster children...more recognition for what they do and put up with', 'a little better matching',



‘respect the fact that they are entitled to have their needs met and not be overlooked for the needs of the foster child’, ‘make them feel valued’, ‘birth children are pushed aside for meetings, parents going to training...’, ‘help them meet other children in the same position, make them feel special as much as the foster children’, ‘the role that older children (18+) play isn’t acknowledged well’.

## **Part 10 – How can we improve our Fostering Service?**

54% of carers surveyed felt we could improve the service and a little over half of those who completed the return, fifty eight in total, offered an additional comment as to what they thought would make the service better.

Responses broadly fell into three categories; support (including training and communication), feeling valued and financial.

Support; ‘better communication between the child’s social worker and the foster carer...there often seems to be little desire to enter into meaningful dialogue with the carer’, ‘more opportunities for link carers to meet with other link carers for support and to share concerns with DCC as a united group. It sometimes feels like we’re an afterthought to mainstream carers’, ‘recruit more social workers...’, ‘try to keep your social workers and give them support and encouragement. It would be nice to have a social worker on a long time basis to be able to build a good relationship for both the foster child and the foster carer’, ‘invest in training’, ‘support for when children move on...when it’s time for them to move on, we become the least important person in the process’, ‘more social events, loved the recent off of tickets for Chatsworth’, ‘keeping us up to date with changes...seen many changes, some we have found by chance’, ‘improve communication regards training events...foster carers and the foster carer council, as we only hear anything about this at the annual fostering conference’, ‘Improve communications between children’s social workers and foster carers so work better as a team’, ‘During allegations made against us, stand by us, talk to us, don’t judge before you have all the facts, deal with things in context...we have had 9 social workers, how do you know us and what we stand for? Support the social workers, hire people that are committed to looking after us’

Feeling valued; ‘Look after carers and stop leading us to believe one thing then let us down’, ‘take more notice so that I could provide better, consistent care’, ‘look at other local authorities and how they recognise their carers experience/expertise...Derbyshire have introduced a system that is substandard to other areas and leaves experienced and therapeutic carers under-valued and unable to financially the high level of care required for the children they look after’, ‘listen to us, we work with these children and get to know them, do you?’, ‘Derbyshire County Council (not supporting workers), as a whole should appreciate the work that foster carers do’, ‘treat all foster carers the same whether they are mainstream, contract or part time – make carers feel valued’, ‘500 words not enough to express my concerns and how low and devalued a lot of foster carers are feeling at the moment...we get support from family placement but they seem to be stuck between a rock and a hard placed with the support they can provide’, ‘make foster carers feel far more valued for our experience and FEELINGS to be considered by children’s social workers’, ‘the service would be much improved if there was an institution wide understanding of the real nature and value of foster

placements...for example, paid employees are differentiated from foster carers by the word 'professional': foster carers are regarded as amateurs and so their views are not valued'.

Financial; 'foster carers deserve to be paid a lot more for the job they do 24 hours a day', 'we were very disappointed to discover that decisions which fundamentally affected our lives were taken without consultation. A more considered approach would have been helpful', '(pay a) retainer', 'forever struggling to provide clothing and footwear, toys, paying for extra fuel bills, the bonus is missed for replacing big items e.g. carpets, washing machine, decorating...fuel bills go up with babies in placement with heating, washing machine etc. mine doubles...being a single carer, I cannot work and I struggle to pay bills', 'look at banding, I am on same banding as some what have been fostering for maybe only 2 years, how can that be justified? I've got 30 year's experience with a good record looking after children with complex needs', 'restore link carers annual bonus', 'basic fees structure would be very useful as some social workers themselves do not know how it works', 'by recognising the service we provide by better payments to cover costs', 'the pay system needs simplifying! Our pay is given then subtracted weeks later, even support workers struggle to explain it', 'actually pay us so I could do so much more, but I have to earn a living', 'don't think this banding works, if the system was working, why change it?', 'dump the banding! Or at least revisit it. I understand about the distribution of payments but the carers receiving the higher payments were also dealing with more 'complex' children. Basing payments on courses you have attended is nonsense, the best carers are busy doing a good to attend a course. We have been fostering 6 years but are only band B because we haven't attended one of the required courses, putting us on a par with carers who have done 2 years. Base payments on the child again'.

More specific suggestions include;

'As an employee of the council who offers respite/emergency care, it would be nice to have additional leave to take for emergencies, i.e. in the past, I have had to take my own leave when an emergency placement could not be secured...'

'Ensure young people are matched well' – a view shared by other carers, 'there needs to be a proper matching process and less criticism of carers when the matching is completely inadequate...', 'ensure social workers follow procedure when it comes to placing a child in a home, exit strategies set up when signs of it braking down'

## **Appendix – Fostering Skills Allowance**

On April 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, Derbyshire County Council changed the way it paid additional fees to its carers, moving away from the single, annual payment of the Review Bonus to acknowledge completion of mandatory training and also length of service, and the Children First/Fostering Plus schemes, to a tiered system, which recognised the ongoing skills acquired by carers alongside their experience against the amount the care they could offer.

Ninety carers (78%) stated that they had been kept fully informed of the changes – of the 22% of carers who felt they hadn't, this lack of information came not so much from workers or their team, but from HQ – 63% thought there was a gap in information disseminated centrally.

Two thirds of carers had seen no significant changes to the fees they have received, from April to September 2017.

With regards carer satisfaction, the overall response has been relatively even; 48% of carers felt the changes had been handled 'well' or 'very well' and, of these, 14% thought it was progressed very well. Conversely, 21% of carers thought it been handled 'poorly' or 'very poorly' and 30% of carers were of no opinion.

Of comments received, two carers have been positive and, of the newly approved carers, who have not known any other means of additional fee payment, views have been neutral;

'it has not really affected me', 'I feel our experience is being recognised and the new banding has enabled us to do more activities with the children', 'overall very satisfied and appreciative of the effort Derbyshire goes to in the support of its carers, thank you!'

Where criticism has been raised, it falls into three categories; a loss of money, a lack of communication and/or a feeling of being undervalued.

Loss of money; 'I understand there are budget constraints but it makes sense to pay your carers more then you would get more people interested in fostering and you wouldn't need to pay so much to IFAs', 'we are foster plus carers and I feel that we may not accept difficult placements in future as we wouldn't have the extra financial support we feel is required in caring for these young people', '...I will receive £55 a week less in allowances than I get at the moment for the same children. How is that fair?', 'I think that the £16 week cut by half when no children in placement (no fault of my own) is an insult to the skills and commitment given to children in my care', 'I liked the annual bonus rather than the dribs and drabs', 'I am a Link carer, I have had my yearly bonus removed. Why? We haven't been informed of anything about our pay, just taken away', 'I would rather have the payment as an annual lump sum...', 'I would still prefer the yearly sum of money and I do not think the tiered level of payments is equally shared...slightly patronising for what we do', 'we used to get an incentive bonus...you took that off us and (unless) you are in Band D the extra payment is rubbish',

Lack of communication; 'I only managed to understand the changes at the fostering conference last year. Very poor implementation', 'the meeting we went to, we came out more confused than we went in', 'there were delays in getting the information and it's been put forward as very positive, neglecting to recognise the areas that have had a negative impact. As a carer it has been frustrating', 'it needs to be basic for all to understand...not user friendly', '...it took too long and really does not reflect the work most of us do', 'I'm a Link carer, I have no idea what the payments are I'm getting now or how they work them out. My social worker didn't know either...'

Feeling undervalued; 'Feel like we are going to have to jump through hoops to get full allowance when we've been on lots of training without being pushed to do it...', 'I find it frustrating I have to wait a year to be assessed and possibly move from foundation to band A', 'Link carers have been treated with an appalling lack of professionalism by higher management who have been patronising in the extreme', 'it seems quite vague. It isn't very clear but it seems that foster carers will be worse off which could make carers feel under-valued', 'skills allowance makes me feel very undervalued',

'it seems to us foster carers that it's a money saving object and the only people that suffer are the foster carers. We have to fight for everything where money is concerned, no one listens to us',

## Summary

This questionnaire represents the largest single response from foster carers since our previous survey, in 2014, and prior to that, the work we commissioned for York University fostering study, in 2002

Outstanding points are;

- The majority of carers 'want' to care – fostering fulfils a long standing need and many of them will have been thinking about becoming carers for at least a year; this is slightly less than the previous return, which suggested a waiting period close to the Fostering Network national average of 2 years. What triggers them to foster is either a change in circumstances (children leaving home) or a raised awareness in fostering (usually through 'word of mouth' recommendations).
- Fewer carers are in work, and the ones that are evenly split between full and part time – whilst the ratio of self-employed foster carers is similar to the 2014/15 return, the number of carers who work in the public and private sectors has dropped noticeably. This may well reflect Fostering Network's recent findings, following the national shortfall in carer enquiries that people may be less likely to consider fostering whilst they have concerns over living costs and job security. The majority of carers felt their assessment though was processed very well.
- In 2014/15, most carers (over 80%) were satisfied with Derbyshire's fostering service and a similar percentage would have recommended that a friend fostered for us. The level of satisfaction remains at approximately the same level in 2017 (76%), but the fewer carers feel valued (52%) – nevertheless, a similar proportion of carers, as previously, would still recommend that a friend foster for Derbyshire County Council.
- Carers feel their views are listened to most by their worker, then by their team, then by the authority. They feel that the child's social worker and other professionals listen to them the least – the same as when asked in 2014/15.
- This is reflected in how they see their workers – the carer's support workers are (on average) 91% likely to be responsive, professional, understanding and supportive. This drops (on average) to 60% when considering the child's social worker. Carers are happier with their workers than in the previous return but their level of satisfaction regards the child's worker is the same as it was 2014/15.
- One third of carers who responded currently are without a placement – this proportion is almost unchanged from the last survey.
- In 2014/15, 38% of carers had considered moving to another agency – the number of carers surveyed, in 2017, who would consider moving to another agency now has risen by 12%.

- Nearly all our carers have attended at least one training course this year – Fostering Changes is, despite its length, extremely well received. There is still an ongoing issue of accessing training due to distance and working time.
- A quarter of carers have accessed services supplied by our new independent support provider, Foster Talk.
- Of the additional services available to support and maintain foster placements, the most popular is the Leisure Card scheme.
- Supervising social workers and area teams communicate better with carers than HQ does.
- Regular recognition of the role played by carer's children should be continued, not just through vouchers, but dedicated support especially around issues such as the end of a placement.
- Over half our carers felt the service could be improved, through both being supported and valuing more highly the work they and their families do. However, there has been a noticeable increase, in the number of carers who feel that fees and allowances are now a significant element in moving the service forward.
- Most carers felt the changes around the Fostering Skills Allowance had been made clear to them (78%) and 2/3's were, presently, unaffected by the changes. Where there were concerns, they were focussed mainly on the loss of the review bonus, a lack of clarity regards implementation and for some carers (Link or mainstream carers who had seen long service), a feeling that the new scheme had 'left them behind' or they were less valued than some of their peers.

It is important to note that issues which were raised in the York Study (<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/swrdu/Publications/foster-care-research.pdf>) continue to be a concern – issues which have been reiterated in the 2017 Fostering System in England; Evidence Review, especially around the role of children's workers and the way authorities acknowledge the work of carers, that meets the need to feel valued. There is an increase in concerns around fees and allowances, which, whilst observed in the previous summary, is much more noticeable now.