



## ***Notice of a Meeting***

### **Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Friday, 21 November 2025 at 10.00 am  
Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND**

**These proceedings are open to the public**

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#).  
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

#### **Membership**

**Chair:** Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE

**Deputy Chair:** Councillor Andy Graham

<b>Councillors:</b>	Dr Izzy Creed	Johnny Hope-Smith	James Plumb
	Rebekah Fletcher	Emma Markham	
	Georgina Heritage	Toyah Overton	

<b>Co-Optees:</b>	Hana G	Toby Long	Peace Nnaji
	Fraser Long	Katie N	

**Date of Next Meeting:** 27 February 2026

**For more information about this Committee please contact:**

Committee Officer:

Email:

Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

November 2025

## **What does this Committee review or scrutinise?**

The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee focuses on the following key areas a) All services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to children, young people, education (including Home to School Transport and Special Educational Needs and Disability but excluding adult education), and support of families; b) The Council's statutory functions in relation to children's social care and safeguarding. This includes public health as they relate to children and young people where they are not covered by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; c) Matters relating to care leavers and the transition between children's and adult services d) The welfare of unaccompanied young asylum seekers e) Services for Young Carers

## **How can I have my say?**

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at.

## **About the County Council**

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 69 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 678,000 residents.

These include:

schools	social & health care	libraries and museums
the fire service	roads	trading standards
land use	transport planning	waste management

Each year the Council manages £0.9 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 9 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

## **About Scrutiny**

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

## **What does this Committee do?**

The Committee meets at least 5 times a year. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session.

**If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting**

**A hearing loop is available at County Hall.**

## **AGENDA**

## 1. **Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**

To receive any apologies for absence and temporary appointments.

## 2. **Declaration of Interests**

See guidance note on the back page.

## 3. **Minutes (Pages 1 - 10)**

The Committee is recommended to **APPROVE** the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2025 and to receive information arising from them.

## 4. **Petitions and Public Addresses**

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9 a.m. three working days before the meeting, i.e., 18 November 2025

Requests should be submitted to the Scrutiny Officer at [scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

Where there are a number of requests from persons wishing to present similar views on the same issue, the Chair may require that the views be put by a single spokesperson. It is expected that only in exceptional circumstances will a person (or organisation) be allowed to address more than one meeting on a particular issue in any period of six months.

The public is reminded that the Committee is not a decision-making body and that it cannot investigate individual complaints. The Committee requests that no individual children are named when addressing the Committee.

## 5. **Attainment Including Attainment Gaps**

The Committee has requested a report on attainment including attainment gaps.

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, and Kim Wilson, Assistant Director: Schools and Settings – Standards, Effectiveness, and Performance, have been invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

*Report to follow*

## 6. **Virtual School Annual Report**

The Committee has requested a report on the Virtual School.

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, and Clare Pike, Head of the Virtual School, have been invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

*Report to follow*

## **7. Fostering (Pages 11 - 64)**

The Committee has requested a report on the fostering service.

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Delia Mann, Deputy Director of Children's Social Care, Charlotte Davey, Assistant Director, and Julie McNally, Service Manager: Fostering, have been invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

## **8. Co-optee recruitment update (Pages 65 - 70)**

The Committee has received a report updating it on co-opted membership. The Committee is recommended to: -

- 1.1 **NOTE** the update on activity undertaken to fill the Committee's vacant co-optee post for a parent governor;
- 1.2 **AGREE** to terminate Hana G's appointed as a co-opted young person members; and, if agreed,
- 1.3 **AGREE** to begin a recruitment process for the subsequently vacant post.

## **9. Committee Forward Work Plan (Pages 71 - 74)**

The Committee is recommended to **AGREE** its work programme for forthcoming meetings, having heard any changes from previous iterations, and taking account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and of the Budget Management Monitoring Report.

## **10. Committee Action and Recommendation Tracker (Pages 75 - 80)**

The Committee is recommended to **NOTE** the progress of previous recommendations and actions arising from previous meetings, having raised any questions on the contents.

## **11. Responses to Scrutiny Recommendations (Pages 81 - 84)**

Attached are the Cabinet responses to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports on School Catering Services and Corporate Cleaning Services, and the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report. The Committee is asked to **NOTE** the responses.

## **Councillors declaring interests**

### **General duty**

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

### **What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?**

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

### **Declaring an interest**

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

### **Members' Code of Conduct and public perception**

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

### **Members Code – Other registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships
- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.

- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

### **Members Code – Non-registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- a) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

## **EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Friday, 26 September 2025 commencing at 10.03 am and finishing at 12.43 pm.

**Present:**

**Voting Members:**

Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE - in the Chair  
Councillor Andy Graham (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor Rebekah Fletcher  
Councillor Georgina Heritage  
Councillor Johnny Hope-Smith  
Councillor Emma Markham  
Councillor Toyah Overton  
Councillor James Plumb

**Co-Optee Members:**

Fraser Long (Virtual)

**Other Members in  
Attendance:**

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People

**Officers:**

Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services  
Carol Douch, Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement  
Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education  
Jessie Dobson, Service Manager: Adolescence and Prevention  
Delia Mann, Deputy Director Children's Social Care  
Jaswinder Disially, Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency)  
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

*The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.*

### **43/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS** (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from co-optees Katie N and Peace Nnaji.

Apologies were also received from Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, who was expected to arrive late.

### **44/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS** (Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

## **45/25 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2025 as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments:

- Duplication Error: It was noted that two paragraphs in the minutes were duplicated due to a copy and paste error.
- Unclear Paragraph: The first non-italicised paragraph on page 3 was described as unclear regarding who invited whom and clarification was requested.

## **46/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

## **47/25 OXFORDSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT**

(Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Carol Douch, Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, Jessie Dobson, Service Manager: Adolescence and Prevention, and Delia Mann, Deputy Director Children's Social Care, were invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Cabinet Member introduced the annual report emphasising safeguarding's complexity and the Partnership's commitment to supporting all children, especially those at risk, with oversight from the Independent Scrutineer. The Partnership's focus on driving meaningful action was highlighted. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement presented the finalised report, detailing the 'working together' arrangement, recent leadership changes for improved accountability, and strengthening governance. Priority actions included multi-agency work on exploitation and neglect, and preparing for Families First changes.

The Committee raised the following questions and comments:

- New screening tools for identifying neglect had only recently been introduced, so evidence of improved outcomes was not yet available. The tools were more concise and covered a broader range of neglect indicators, including emotional, educational, and medical needs. Practitioners across social care, health visiting, and schools were trained in using the Graded Care Profile 2, with usage tracked through performance reports. A home conditions tool was also introduced to standardise assessments. Development involved input from paediatricians and schools, and effectiveness would be monitored over the next year using key performance indicators across agencies and referral points.



- How the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements were being embedded consistently across all organisations within the partnership, with a particular focus on how the partnership was addressing the issue of child-on-child exploitation. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement stated that arrangements aligned with national guidance, prioritising performance and quality assurance through multi-agency audits. Schools also played a crucial role, with positive engagement across the system and a commitment to scrutinising concerns and good practice. The Partnership worked with community safety groups, reviewed national research, and had a structured approach to early identification of vulnerability, particularly for children missing education. While child-on-child exploitation was not a major issue in Oxfordshire, vigilance remained, with specialist teams and ongoing initiatives supporting a wider group of children.
- Members raised concerns about online exploitation and mobile phone use among children. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding highlighted strong collaboration with schools, including data sharing on missing children and multi-agency panels involving school safeguarding leads. The vulnerability of children not attending school was discussed, with emphasis on early identification and graduated support. Concerns about parental awareness led to calls for a county-wide campaign to educate and empower families. The complexity of digital safeguarding was acknowledged, with rapid technological change requiring support for both parents and children.

On mobile phone bans, it was noted that some authorities had introduced restrictions in schools, which improved safeguarding on-site. However, children not in school remained more vulnerable. National evidence suggested smartphones should not be unsupervised before age 14, yet very young children were often seen with them. The Committee concluded that, while banning phones could help, broader strategies were needed to address digital risks effectively.

*The Director of Children's Services joined the meeting at this stage*

- How the strategic voice of children, families, and communities was incorporated into safeguarding, with particular interest in how the voice of the child was heard in practice. The Director of Children's Services emphasised the importance of the child's voice in safeguarding, starting with early intervention and extending to social care. Tools such as the "Mind of My Own" app enabled children to communicate directly with professionals, and children were encouraged to take part in meetings and reviews. Experiences of children in care were used to improve practice and resources. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement noted that a dedicated role ensured children's voices influenced strategic decisions.
- The Oxford University Hospitals Trust (OUH) was no longer a direct member of the Partnership following the transition from a board to a partnership. The Director of Children's Services explained that the former safeguarding board had been replaced by a strategic safeguarding partnership, as required by law. This Partnership was led by three strategic safeguarding leads: the Chief Executive of the County Council, the Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board, and the

Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. OUH continued to participate through involvement in subgroups and provided assurance through the health system.

- Whether youth groups and churches were involved in safeguarding and youth hubs. The Director of Children's Services explained that the reorganised adolescent service now integrated youth support and exploitation response, improving local partnerships. Community organisations and youth voice were central to this work. For example, Blackbird Leys Youth Hub offered universal access and targeted programmes on exploitation and decision-making. The hub model acted as a one-stop shop, shaped by young people's input, aiming to deliver meaningful impact through integrated services and community engagement.
- Whether the reported decrease in the number of children subject to child protection plans was necessarily a positive outcome, or if it could indicate that some children were being missed. Officers explained that decisions around child protection interventions were made on a multi-agency basis and that Oxfordshire operated a family safeguarding model, which typically resulted in lower numbers of child protection plans due to greater early intervention and support for families. It was stated that, while the lower numbers were viewed as positive, there was no complacency, and regular audits and reviews were conducted to ensure the right children were being supported at the right level.
- The Chair supported presenting Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews to the scrutiny committee, in public or private as needed, for transparency and learning. Previous cases like Bullfinch and Jacobs had shaped local practice, notably with excluded children. Officers agreed to present future reviews, noting timing depends on ongoing legal issues, and highlighted that committee scrutiny supports accountability.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following actions:

- Members to be provided with a list of safeguarding resources.
- Data related to self-harm to be included in the next annual report.
- The new safeguarding strategy to be brought to the committee once written.
- The effectiveness of new screening tools should be specifically addressed in the next annual report.

The Committee **AGREED** to an observation about the importance of public accountability and the visibility of safeguarding and to a recommendation under the following heading:

- That the Council should consider how best to deploy a sustained, smart educational campaign to support parents, particularly regarding online threats.

## **48/25 YOUTH JUSTICE ANNUAL PLAN 2025-26**

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee invited Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Carol Douch, Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, Jessie Dobson, Service Manager: Adolescence and Prevention, and Delia Mann, Deputy Director Children's Social Care, to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Cabinet member presented the annual youth justice plan discussing challenges for youth at risk, and emphasising prevention and restorative justice, supported by a young person's account. The Deputy Director of Children's Social Care described the plan as a multi-agency initiative, highlighted issues like first-time entrants, disproportionality, and education, explained the inspection framework's increased emphasis on victims, and stressed targeted interventions, partnership work, and data analysis.

The Committee raised the following questions and comments:

- Regarding the increase in SEND numbers, the correlation with mental health concerns, and the role of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in supporting young people with these needs. The Deputy Director Children's Social Care explained that early identification of needs was key to ensuring appropriate support, and that a speech and language officer had recently been recruited as part of a preventative approach. It was noted that previously there had not always been preventative support before children entered the criminal justice system, and that this approach now extended to mental health. Additionally, it was confirmed that a CAMHS clinician sat on the Youth Justice Board, providing both consultation and direct work with families, ensuring a strong connection between CAMHS and youth justice services.
- How mental health concerns and difficulties were recognised and addressed for children at risk of entering the youth justice system. Officers outlined that Oxfordshire had developed a multi-agency early help and prevention strategy, involving CAMHS, health services, and youth support teams, to identify and support children early. It was highlighted that there was a continuum of prevention, including parenting groups, targeted youth support, and clinical psychological input, ensuring that mental health needs were addressed from early help through to more intensive interventions, with close collaboration between services to support children at each stage.
- What the role of Oxford Health and other mental health organisations was in supporting children and young people, particularly those who might not be known to social care but were in the health system due to mental health concerns. It was explained that Oxfordshire was developing a network of family hubs, which would provide universal and targeted provision, including mental health support, through multidisciplinary teams and closer links with schools and community services. It was acknowledged that while the ideal system was not yet fully in place, there was ongoing work to design integrated early help and prevention strategies in

partnership with health colleagues, aiming to expand capacity and ensure equitable input from mental health partners.

- What factors contributed to historically elevated crime rates among individuals aged 18-21, the identified trend of criminal behaviour emerging at increasingly younger ages, and relevant prevention strategies and indicators of deprivation. The Service Manager described that recent analysis had shown a shift, with some offences now more common among 13–15-year-olds. This trend was linked to specific pockets of deprivation, children not attending school, and challenging upbringings. It was noted that while the issue was not widespread across Oxfordshire, these factors were significant predictors. Prevention strategies included early identification, targeted youth support, detached youth work in hotspot areas, and new intervention programmes funded by the police and crime commissioner, all aiming to address risk factors and support young people before they became entrenched in criminal behaviour.
- Whether factors such as boredom or a lack of youth resources contributed, and whether interventions like school-based classes on conflict resolution and negotiation skills were in place. Officers confirmed that positive activities and youth provision were essential for prevention, making families aware of resources and ensuring free activities are accessible, particularly via holiday programmes. The youth service collaborated with schools and communities to coordinate provision, supported by recent government funding aimed at rebuilding local youth services. The importance of adapting strategies to Oxfordshire's diverse geography was also highlighted, with rural isolation and local challenges informing the design of targeted interventions alongside those for urban areas.
- The SEND quality mark process and the role of the SEND representative on the youth justice panel were discussed. It was clarified that the SEND quality mark was a recent initiative in Oxfordshire, intended to ensure the diverse needs of children are appropriately recognised and addressed. The process included self-assessment, supplemented by independent audits and external validation, thereby preventing potential bias. The SEND representative served as an advocate on the youth justice panel, contributing specialist knowledge to help address areas identified for improvement and was tasked with reporting on SEND-related activities between board meetings.
- White children were most likely to have committed a serious offence, while children of mixed heritage were 1.4 times more likely to be cautioned or sentenced. Members were concerned by the apparent inequality displayed here. Officers confirmed that the data indicated a significant inequality, with non-white children more likely to be referred to the youth offending team and to receive formal orders. Work was underway with Thames Valley Police and the Youth Justice Board to better understand and address these disparities, including examining stop and search practices and the adoption of restorative approaches such as Outcome 22, which aimed to divert children from the criminal justice system.
- A challenge was raised about the need for increased youth service funding, stressing youth development should be essential and widely accessible, with

professional officers and greater government investment. The Cabinet Member agreed that there was now less universal youth provision in Oxfordshire than there had been in the past but confirmed expanding and coordinating provision was a strategic priority, with plans to support teenagers' well-being and introduce adolescent and prevention services.

## **49/25 ATTENDANCE**

(Agenda No. 7)

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, and Jaswinder Disialy, Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency), were invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Cabinet Member invited the Committee to provide advice or recommendations that could be supported with political backing.

The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) summarised the attendance team's structure, main functions, and operations. She outlined four focus areas: attendance improvement, licensing and compliance, elective home education support, and children missing education. The Assistant Director described their responsibilities, noted recent policy updates, and discussed monitoring strategies and collaboration with schools and parents.

The Committee raised the following questions and comments:

- Availability of data comparing urban and rural attendance in Oxfordshire, and development of targeted strategies to improve attendance in each area. The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) agreed that presenting such data would be useful and stated that this matter would be included in future presentations, highlighting consideration of the distinct challenges found in urban and rural areas.
- The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) explained that she was particularly interested in the transition period for parents and acknowledged the value of collecting parental feedback. The Assistant Director agreed it would be beneficial to capture this information and consider expanding the approach if it proved effective.
- The discussion included whether there were any schools with notably good attendance and what practices contributed to their results for possible implementation elsewhere. The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) responded that current efforts had focused primarily on schools with low attendance but acknowledged the importance of also identifying and learning from schools with high attendance. It was noted that some schools, within and outside the county, were recognised for strong attendance, and that hubs were being established to facilitate sharing of best practices.
- The Interim Deputy Director: Education explained that attendance related to wider issues like exploitation, exclusion, and youth justice involvement. She noted that

new post-pandemic guidance emphasised multi-agency work and increased local authority responsibility for tracking attendance. Improved data helped to identify students with persistent absences, but challenges remained, especially regarding mental health and parental choices.

## **50/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN**

(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee **AGREED** to the forward work plan.

The Director of Children's Services suggested including the virtual school annual report and a provisional attainment update in the November forward plan, as final exam data will not be available until February.

The SEND Area inspection monitoring visit was taking place from 15 September 2025-2 October 2025. The resulting report was unlikely to be available before Christmas, but the Director would discuss with the Scrutiny Officer when it would be possible to report to the Committee.

A "lessons learned review" of Woodeaton Manor School was proposed and agreed to by the Committee. The terms of reference for the review group would be drafted and presented for the Committee's approval at its November meeting.

## **51/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee **NOTED** the action and recommendation tracker.

## **52/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny recommendations on:

- The Children's Homes Update
- The Education Other Than At School policy
- S.19 of the Education Act: Response to The Report Of The Local Government And Social Care Ombudsman
- Home to School Transport Policy

The timing of the EOTAS guidance briefing would be coordinated between the Director of Children's Services and Scrutiny Officer.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing .....



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## **EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**21 November 2025**

### **Fostering**

#### **Report by Director of Children's Services**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to note and provide any comments and recommendations on Oxfordshire's Fostering Annual report 24/25 and consider the fostering action plan for the year ahead.

### **Executive Summary**

2. The Fostering Service operates under a robust framework of national legislation and standards including:
  - Children Act 1989 – Establishes the paramountcy principle: the child's welfare is the primary consideration in all decisions.
  - Care Standards Act 2000 – Provides the legal basis for regulating fostering services.
  - Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 – Sets out the operational requirements for fostering services.
  - National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering Services – Defines the expected quality of care and service delivery.
3. The Fostering Services is responsible for recruiting, assessing, training and supervising Foster Carers ensuring they meet the national minimum standards and demonstrate the required childcare competencies. The fostering service undertakes a range of assessments including Initial Viability Assessments (IVAs), kinship assessments, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments, and private fostering assessments. Fostering panels are convened in accordance with statutory regulations to review applications across all carer types. Practice is guided by Oxfordshire County Council's internal Children's Social Care Practice Standards and aligned with the Oxfordshire Children's Services Procedures Manual and Safeguarding Children Board guidance, ensuring consistency, quality assurance, and child-centred decision-making.
4. As part of our development plan in the last financial year, we introduced two new teams:

- The Kinship Matters Team; this team is a specialist team and was established to assess and support those family members or close friends who step up to care for children when parents are unable too. Every Kinship carer has a named Supervising Social Worker, has access to our Fostering Community Hub, that includes support groups and has access to the same training mainstream foster carers have access too.
  - The Placements Team, this team streamlines placement referrals and operates as a centralised unit responsible for, managing emergency and relief placements, matching children with the right foster carer, co-ordinating duty and crisis intervention; and being the conduit between Brokerage, Fostering and the Children's Teams.
5. These additions reflect our ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for children and enhancing support for carers across Oxfordshire.

## Annual Report Overview

6. The Fostering Annual Report 2024–25 outlines the significant recruitment challenges facing Oxfordshire, reflecting a wider national crisis in attracting foster carers. It also sets out the planned actions for 2025–26, the service's core development priorities, and key achievements completed during the reporting period.
7. The Fostering Service set a target to increase the net number of foster carers households by 20 in the last financial year, as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, the service was supporting 238 households, comprising of:
- **91 kinship households**, including 18 with temporary approval
  - **105 mainstream households** (short-term, long-term, parent & child, Oxfordshire Therapeutic Foster Care, Supported Lodgings, Mockingbird)
  - **42 households** approved for relief, short break, or emergency care
8. A total of **19 new foster carers** were approved in 2024/25, offering **27 beds** across various placement types:
- Short-term/long-term: 4 carers, 6 beds
  - Relief/Short Break: 8 carers, 12 beds
  - Supported Lodgings: 3 carers, 3 beds
  - Foster to Adopt: 4 carers, 6 beds

## Challenges and Implications for Fostering

9. The challenges for fostering in the last financial year are as detailed below:
- Placement Losses were higher than the approvals, seeing 34 deregistration's in 2024/25.

- Recruitment shortfall, new approvals have not kept pace with the losses, resulting in a net decrease in placements for the last two financial years.
10. The Annual report highlights insufficient in-house provision for the following group of children and young people:
    - Adolescents
    - Sibling Groups
    - Parent and child
    - Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
    - Children with disabilities (including short breaks)
  11. Oxfordshire requires 33 additional carers to meet the national average, this could enable 52 more in-house placements, that could serve to address the current shortfalls in point 9.
  12. To address the above the fostering service has set the following actions for 2025/26:
    - **Targeted Recruitment:** Focus on carers who can take single placements or older children to balance the profile.
    - **Flexible Approvals:** Fit to Foster approval for ALL foster carers, meaning all foster carers will be approved 0-18 year, short-term, emergency and relief.
    - **Utilisation Review:** Conduct a placement-matching audit to identify underused capacity.
    - **Retention Support:** Offer tailored support to carers on hold to encourage reactivation for those carers on hold.
  13. The fostering service is considering new approaches to improve recruitment and retention, including incentives such as council tax relief, which has been successfully introduced by other local authorities. Any potential loss in council tax revenue would be balanced by reduced reliance on costly external providers, such as Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), and is expected to encourage more households to become foster carers.

## **Fostering Development Plan for 2025/26**

14. The core development priorities for the fostering service this financial year are set out below and detailed in the annual report:
  - Policy and incentives
  - Placement matching and support
  - Kinship and Special Guardianship
  - Data and Digital Tools
  - Training for Foster Carers

15. This financial year the Fostering Service has moved from the Mockingbird model and developed the Fostering Community Hubs. The transition from the Mockingbird model was prompted by financial and structural concerns. The Fostering Community Hub was launched on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2025 as a more sustainable, inclusive and integrated support network for Oxfordshire foster carers. All OCC foster carers are automatically included in the Hub from the point of assessment, unless they opt out. The Fostering Community Hubs have nine experienced foster carers serving as Community Hub Leads supporting North, City, and South areas. A Key Performance Indicator (KPI) framework tracks engagement, retention, and recruitment, as detailed below:
  - 1-1 peer support
  - Monthly support groups
  - Arrange and facilitate 6 social events a year.
  - Buddying with foster carers prior to approval.
16. This year the Fostering Service has developed a Carer Home Loan Policy with a proposed annual waiver to support retention of foster carers and increase placement sufficiency. This has been signed off by the Capital Programme Board. It is important to note that this is an invest to save; and the investment is protected by a legal charge placed on the properties.
17. We have two current foster carers moving through the new home loans policy, they are an in-house foster carer and a kinship carer. We have completed a cost benefit for the two applications currently in progress with building works. See indicative details below:
 

Mainstream foster carers

  - Loan amounts up to £110k (Capital)
  - Increase in placement sufficiency: minimum of 2 placements
  - Annual revenue savings: £72k
  - Savings after 5 years of fostering: £360k
  - Savings after 10 years of fostering: £720k
  - Payback period (when amount of loan is recouped via savings): 2 years

Kinship carers

  - Loan amounts up to £60k (Capital)
  - Increase in placement sufficiency: sibling group of 4 (placement would not be possible without the building works being completed, meaning the children could be separated from family)
  - Annual cost avoidance (revenue): £144k
  - Cost avoidance upon all 4 siblings having turned 18 years old: £720k
  - Payback period (when amount of loan is recouped via cost avoidance): 1 year
18. A Fostering Friendly HR policy has been completed; and has been signed off by OCC SLT and Unison. The next step for the fostering service is to engage

local partners to become Fostering Friendly, this will be looked at as part of the child's first initiative.

19. The Fostering handbook has now moved to Tri-X which means that all foster carers have access to the handbook via a digital app, this means that all legislative updates will be automatic, and foster carers will receive notifications of such.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

20. Oxfordshire's fostering service plan aligns with the delivery of the council's corporate strategic priorities to:
- Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
  - Support carers and the social care system
  - Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.
  - Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

## **Financial Implications**

21. There are no financial implications arising directly from the Fostering Annual Report. Indicative savings / cost avoidance for home loan applications referenced above have been validated. There is no requirement for the council to commit any further financial resources towards fostering beyond what is currently committed.

Comments checked by:

Lewis Gosling, Assistant Finance Business Partner,  
[lewis.gosling@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:lewis.gosling@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Legal Implications**

22. There are no legal implications for the Local Authority.

Comments checked by:

Craig Cochrane, Principal Solicitor, Child Care Legal Team,  
[craig.cochrane@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:craig.cochrane@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Staff Implications**

23. There are no additional staff resources being requested by way of this report for the work outlined in the Annual Report.

Checked by:

Michelle Higgs, Strategic People Partner Children's and Education,  
[michelle.higgs@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.higgs@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

24. There are no additional equality and inclusion implications.

## **Sustainability Implications**

25. There is no current sustainability implications associated with the contents of this report.

## **Risk Management**

26. The Fostering Improvement Programme Board provides strategic oversight and operational direction for the fostering service.

Lisa Lyons  
Director of Children's services

Annex: Fostering Annual Report.

Contact Officer: Julie McNally  
Service Manager  
[Julie.mcnally@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Julie.mcnally@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

October 2025

# Fostering Service Annual Report

1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

**Fostering** in  
**oxfordshire**



**Author: Julie McNally**

**April 2025**

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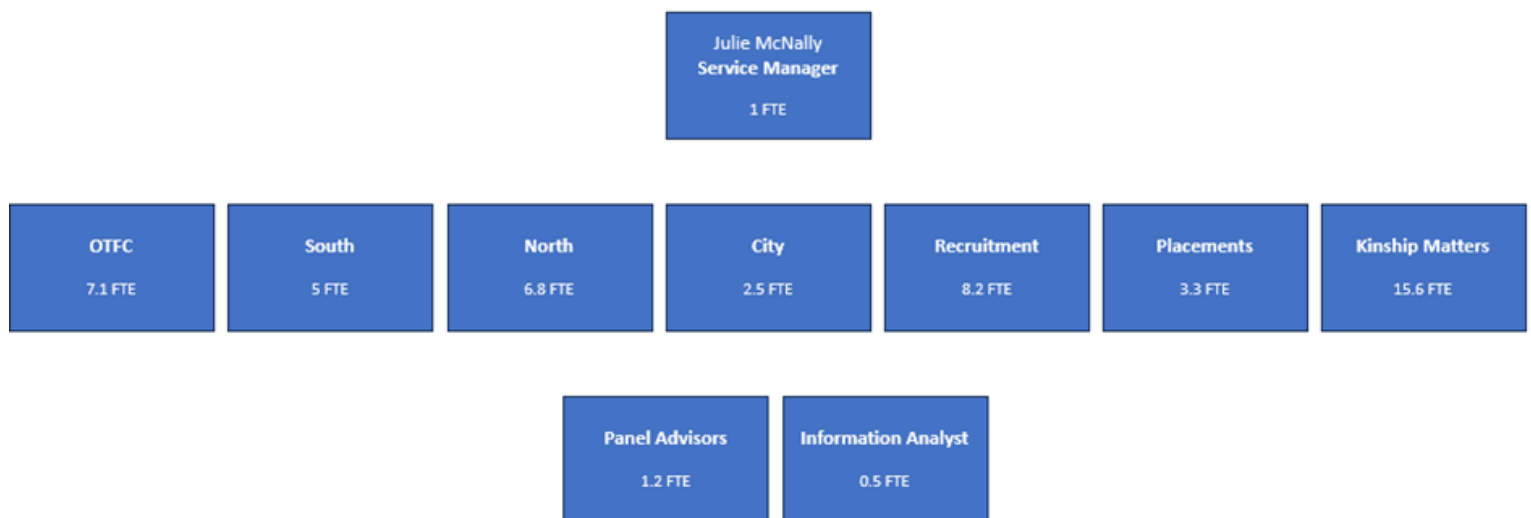
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## Introduction

This report will detail the work undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council Fostering Service from April 2024 to March 2025.

## Fostering Service Structure

The Fostering Service is managed under County Services. The Service Manager is Julie McNally.



## Fostering Service Overview

The Fostering Service provides and oversees fostering arrangements for Children We Care For across Oxfordshire. Our central commitment is to ensure that every child in our care experiences the same love, stability, and guidance that a good parent would offer their own child.

We deliver a county-wide service encompassing the recruitment, assessment, training, and supervision of foster carers. We are dedicated to ensuring that all carers meet national minimum standards and demonstrate the required childcare competencies. Alongside mainstream fostering, the service also undertakes Initial Viability Assessments (IVAs), kinship assessments, and special guardianship assessments.

As part of our development plan in the last financial year, we introduced two new teams: the Kinship Matters Team and the Placements Team. These additions reflect our ongoing commitment to strengthening support for children and carers across the county.

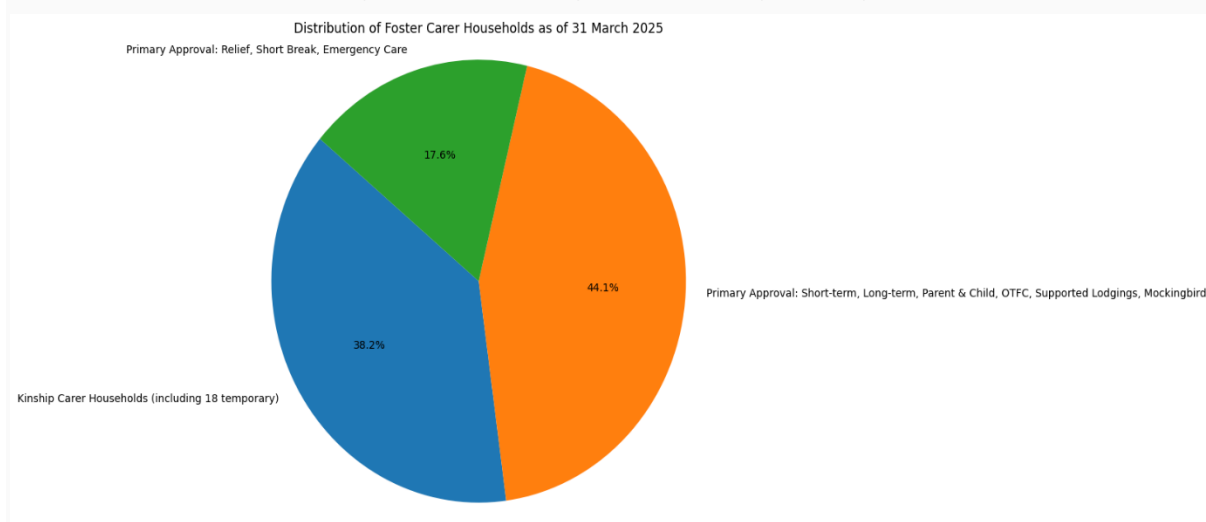
## Fostering Statistics (24/25)

The Fostering Service set an ambitious target to increase the net number of foster carer households by **20**.

As of **31 March 2025**, the Fostering Service was supporting a total of **238 foster carer households**, comprising:

- **91 kinship carer households**, including **18 with temporary approval**
- **105 households** with a primary approval type of **short-term, long-term, parent & child, OTFC, Supported Lodgings, or Mockingbird**
- **42 households** with a primary approval of **relief, short break, or emergency care**

These figures reflect the breadth of provision across the service and the continued commitment to supporting a diverse range of fostering arrangements.

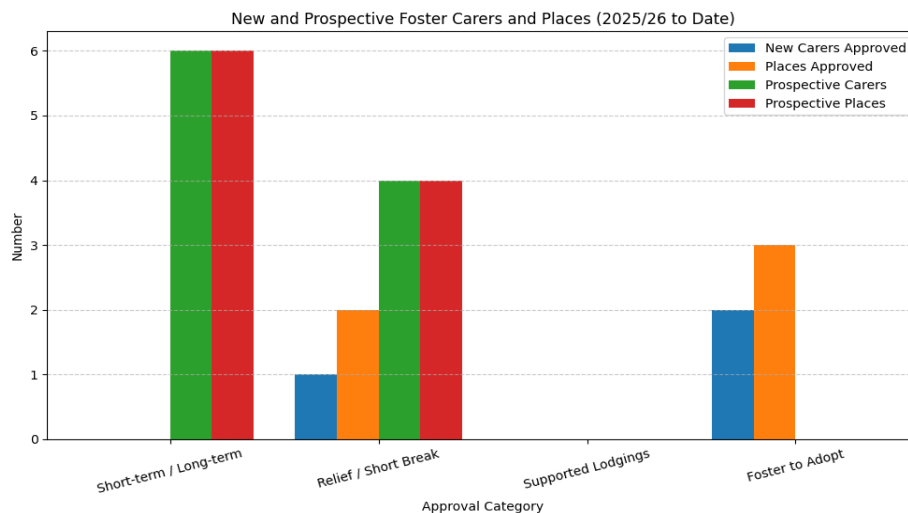


## Foster Carers approved 2024/25:

	No of Carers	No of beds Approved for
Short-term / long-term	4	6
Relief / Short Break	8	12
Supported Lodgings	3	3
Foster to Adopt	4	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>

## New Foster Carers approved to date 2025/26

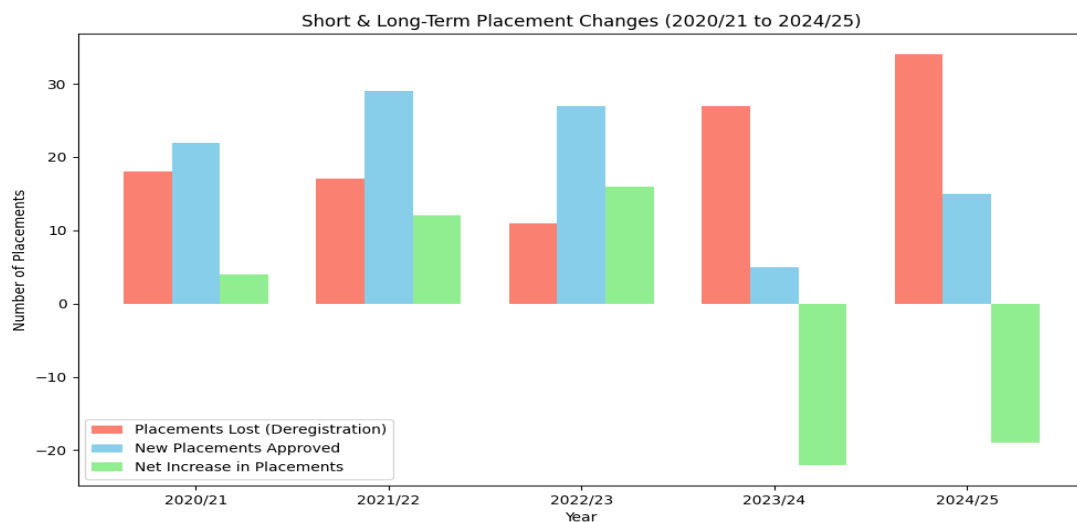
Since 1 April 2025 we have recruited the following new Foster Carers:



The visual highlights:

- **3 new carers** approved so far, providing **5 beds**
- **10 prospective carers** under assessment, potentially offering **10 additional beds**
- Most current and prospective approvals are in **short-term/long-term** and **relief/short break** categories.

## Short & Long-term placements (excludes relief and short break)



\*Carers actively offering short term placements post Jan 2020

\*\* Includes new placements from existing foster carers

## Summary of Challenges and Implications

### Challenges

- **Placement Losses:** The number of placements lost due to carer deregistration has increased significantly, peaking at **34 in 2024/25**.
- **Recruitment Shortfall:** New placements approved have not kept pace with losses in recent years, resulting in a **net decrease** of placements in both 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- **Placement Gaps:** There are insufficient in-house placements for:
  - Adolescents
  - Sibling groups
  - Parent and child arrangements
  - Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
  - Children with disabilities (including short breaks)

### Strategic Focus Areas

- **Targeted Recruitment:** Prioritise recruitment of carers for underrepresented placement types.
- **Retention Initiatives:** Strengthen support and retention strategies to reduce deregistration rates.
- **Placement Matching:** Improve matching processes to optimise use of existing carers.
- **Specialist Programmes:** Expand training and support for carers willing to take on complex placements.

Here is a summary of the **reasons for deregistration** among carers offering short or long-term placements:

Reason	Percentage
Personal circumstances	41%
Standards of care	23%

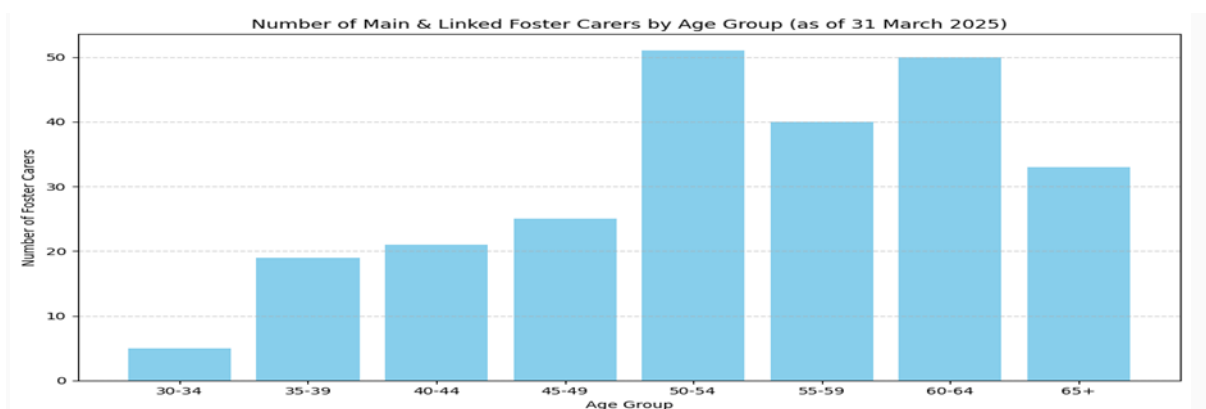
Reason	Percentage
Retirement	9%
Moved out of county	9%
Became Shared Lives carers for foster child	9%
Placement breakdown	5%
Health circumstances	4%

The most common reason was **personal circumstances**, accounting for **41%** of deregistration's, followed by **standards of care** at **23%**.

- **33 additional carers** are needed to meet the national average.
- The aim would be to provide **52 more in-house placements**, helping to address current shortfalls in areas such as adolescent care, sibling groups, parent and child placements, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and children with disabilities.

### Foster Carer Age Profile

As of 31 March 2025, there were **244 main and linked foster carers** actively supporting children and young people. The age distribution reflects a mature and experienced workforce, with most carers aged **50 and above**:



- The largest age group is **50–54 years**, representing **51 carers**.
- This is closely followed by the **60–64** age group with **50 carers**, and the **55–59** group with **40 carers**.
- Carers aged **65 and over** account for **33 individuals**, highlighting the continued contribution of older carers.
- In contrast, younger age groups are less represented, with only **5 carers aged 30–34** and **19 aged 35–39**.

This age profile underscores the importance of **targeted recruitment strategies** to attract younger carers and ensure long-term sustainability of the fostering workforce. It also highlights the value of retaining experienced carers while planning for future succession.

## Kinship Carer Age Profile

As of 31 March 2025, there were **114 main and linked kinship foster carers**. The age distribution shows a broad range, with a notable concentration in older age groups:

- The largest group is carers aged **65 and over**, totalling **25**.
- This is followed by:
  - **55–59 years**: 20 carers
  - **50–54 years**: 16 carers
  - **60–64 years**: 15 carers
- Younger age groups are less represented, with only **1 carer aged 20–24** and **3 aged 25–29**.

## Analysis & Implications for kinship

- **Older Age Profile**: Over half of kinship carers (76 out of 114) are aged 50 or older. This reflects the common pattern of grandparents or older relatives stepping in to care for children within their extended family.
- **Sustainability Concerns**: The high proportion of older carers may present future challenges in terms of:
  - **Placement stability** as carers age
  - **Health-related support needs**
  - **Succession planning** for long-term care

- **Underrepresentation of Younger Carers:** The low number of kinship carers under 35 suggests a need to explore:
  - Barriers to younger family members taking on kinship roles
  - Targeted support or incentives for younger kinship carers
- **Support Planning:** Tailored support packages may be needed for older carers, including:
  - Respite care
  - Health and mobility adaptations
  - Financial planning and legal support

## Ageing Workforce Analysis

As of 31 March 2025, **34% of both mainstream and kinship foster carers are aged 60 or over**. This includes:

- **83 carers** aged 60+ across both groups
  - **Mainstream carers:** 50 aged 60–64, 33 aged 65+
  - **Kinship carers:** 15 aged 60–64, 25 aged 65+

This demographic trend presents a **significant strategic risk** to the stability and sustainability of the fostering service.

## Implications

- **Imminent Retirements:** A substantial portion of the carer base may retire within the next 5–10 years, leading to a potential loss of experience and placement capacity.
- **Placement Vulnerability:** Long-term and complex placements may be disrupted if older carers exit the service without sufficient replacements.
- **Increased Support Needs:** Older carers may require additional health, mobility, or respite support to continue fostering safely and effectively.

## Strategic Response

- **Prioritise Recruitment:** Focus on attracting younger carers (ages 30–50) through targeted campaigns, flexible fostering models, and employer partnerships.
- **Succession Planning:** Identify placements at risk due to carer age and develop contingency plans, including step-down roles or mentoring opportunities for older carers.
- **Retention Support:** Offer tailored support to older carers to extend their fostering journey, such as health checks, home adaptations, and recognition schemes.
- **Data Monitoring:** Regularly review age profiles and retirement trends to inform recruitment targets and workforce planning.



## Comparison ages of children placed in-house and IFA

Here's a comparison of the **ages of children placed in In-House Foster Placements vs. Agency Foster Placements** as of 31 March 2025:

Age Group	In-House Placement	Foster	Independent Agency	Foster
Aged under 1	12		5	
Aged 1–4 years	20		33	
Aged 5–9 years	24		52	
Aged 10–15 years	58		113	
Aged 16+	22		43	
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>		<b>246</b>	

### Key Observations:

- **Agency Foster Placements** have higher numbers across all age groups, especially in the **10–15 years** and **5–9 years** categories.
- **In-House Placements** have more infants (under 1) than Agency Placements (12 vs. 5).
- The largest group in both placement types is **children aged 10–15 years**.

### Placement Distribution Overview

Date	In-House (Mainstream + Kinship)	IFA (Independent Fostering Agencies)
31 March 2024	56%	44%
<b>Target</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>30%</b>

As of the end of March 2025 we were **14 percentage points below** the in-house placement target

### Carer Availability Snapshot

Date	Carers on Hold	Notes
31 March 2024	10	Personal circumstances
31 March 2023	15	↓ Improvement from previous year

Additionally, some carers are **underutilised** due to:

- Approval for sibling groups only
- Specific child needs
- Changes in family circumstances
- "Staying Put" arrangements
- Offering only relief or short break care

## Implications:

- **Cost Pressure:** IFA placements are typically more expensive than in-house options, so the current distribution may be increasing financial strain.
- **Strategic Misalignment:** The current figures indicate a need to accelerate recruitment, retention, and utilisation of in-house carers to meet the 70% target.

## Actions for 25/26

1. **Targeted Recruitment:** Focus on carers who can take single placements or older children to balance the profile.
2. **Flexible Approvals:** Fit to Foster approval for ALL foster carers, meaning all foster carers will be approved 0-18 year, short-term, emergency and relief.
3. **Utilisation Review:** Conduct a placement-matching audit to identify underused capacity.
4. **Retention Support:** Offer tailored support to carers on hold to encourage reactivation for those carers on hold.

## Placement Stability

Children in Oxfordshire are experiencing **more frequent placement changes** and **less long-term continuity** than in previous years.

This trend may impact emotional wellbeing, educational progress, and overall outcomes.

## Short-Term Placement Stability

**Indicator:** % of children with **3 or more placements** during the year.

Area/Year	% with 3+ Placements
Oxfordshire 2023/24	13%
Oxfordshire 2024/25 (provisional)	<b>15% ▲</b>
Statistical Neighbours	11%
South East	12%

Area/Year	% with 3+ Placements
England	10%

- **Trend:** Oxfordshire's short-term stability has **worsened**, rising from 13% to 15%.
- **Context:** The 2024/25 figure is **5 percentage points higher** than the national average.

### Long-Term Placement Stability

**Indicator:** % of children in care for  $\geq 2.5$  years who have been in the same placement for  $\geq 2$  years.

Area/Year	% Stable Placements
Oxfordshire 2023/24	68%
Oxfordshire 2024/25 (provisional)	<b>49% ▼</b>
Statistical Neighbours	67%
South East	66%
England	68%

- **Trend:** A **significant decline** in long-term stability—**down 19 percentage points** from the previous year.
- **Context:** Oxfordshire now falls **well below** all comparator groups.
-

## Summary

- **Short-term stability** is deteriorating, with more children experiencing multiple placements.
- **Long-term stability** has seen a sharp drop, suggesting challenges in sustaining placements over time.
- Oxfordshire at the end of March 2024 was **underperforming** compared to statistical neighbours, the Southeast, and national averages in both indicators.
- 

### What This Means for Children in Oxfordshire

- **Increased instability** can negatively impact children's emotional wellbeing, educational outcomes, and sense of security.
- The drop in long-term stability may reflect:
  - A mismatch between children's needs and available carers.
  - Pressures on placement sufficiency and carer retention.
  - Disruptions due to carers being on hold or underutilised.

## Strategic Actions to Improve Placement Stability

### 1. Enhance Placement Matching and Planning

- Introduce a centralised matching process for complex placements with key stakeholders.
- Embed child voice and carer feedback into matching decisions.

### 2. Strengthen Carer Retention and Support

- Build on the recruitment, retention and reflection meetings.
- Introduction of Fostering Community Hubs
- Expand trauma-informed training and therapeutic support for carers.
- Introduce a recognition scheme for carers maintaining long-term placements.

### 3. Maximise Carer Capacity and Flexibility

- The introduction of 'Fit to Foster' will increase capacity and flexibility.
- Audit and re-engage carers currently on hold or underutilised.

### 4. Improve Monitoring and Early Intervention

- The introduction of Power BI will support fostering to see the real-time placement stability for children we care for; providing for operational oversight.
- Require disruption meetings for all placement moves and track themes.
- Use data to inform targeted support and training for carers and staff.
-

## **5. Invest in Edge-of-Care and Step-Down Services**

- Work closely with Family Bridges and develop a model that utilises foster carers to prevent young people becoming care experienced.
- Develop step-down fostering models from residential care to family-based placements.
- Strengthen partnerships with health and education to support placement resilience.

## **6. Embed Co-Production and Lived Experience**

- Link in with the PSW and young person forums to co-design support and placement strategies.
- Use quarterly feedback loops to adapt services based on real-time experience

### **New Teams Overview**

#### **Kinship Matters Team**

The Kinship Matters Team, established on 1 April 2025, brings together all Supervising Social Workers (SSWs) responsible for kinship assessments into a single, cohesive county-wide service. This strategic realignment strengthens our focus on the evolving legislative landscape and reinforces Oxfordshire's commitment to recognising and supporting the vital role of kinship care in achieving permanence for children.

The team undertakes a broad range of statutory and court-directed assessments, including:

- Regulation 24 assessments,
- Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments (including private law applications),
- Additional family member assessments as directed by the court.

SSWs also work in close partnership with children's social workers to complete Initial Viability Assessments (IVAs), ensuring early identification and robust consideration of family networks.

A key strategic priority is the development of a comprehensive support offer for Special Guardians. We have already implemented a no-detriment policy, ensuring that foster carers transitioning to Special Guardianship receive the matched national minimum allowance. This policy reflects our commitment to equity and stability for children remaining within their extended families.

Looking ahead, we are actively exploring opportunities to engage with the national kinship allowance pilot and working groups. Our ambition is to localise and enhance support for kinship carers, ensuring they are equipped and valued as core partners in our permanence strategy.

To embed a culture of kinship-first thinking, we continue to deliver regular training across the workforce, raising awareness of the importance of identifying and supporting kinship carers for Children We Care For.

In 2025–26, we will undertake a scoping exercise to identify existing carers who may be considering permanency via an SGO. A two-year funding agreement has enabled us to dedicate an SSW to proactively support these cases, with the aim of progressing them to legal permanence where appropriate.

Finally, we have made a strategic decision to cease the use of Independent Social Workers (ISWs) for private SGO assessments. This ensures greater oversight, consistency, and quality assurance across all kinship work undertaken by the local authority.

### Performance and Activity Data (2024/25)

Assessment Type	2023/24	2024/25	Change
<b>Total Kinship Carers Assessed</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>↑ +19</b>
<b>Temporarily Approved Kinship Carers (Reg 24)</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>↓ -8</b>
<b>% Completed Within 24-Week Timescale</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>↓ -3%</b>

- The increase in total assessments reflects growing demand and the team's capacity to respond.
- The slight dip in timeliness is attributed to delays in DBS and medical checks, which are being actively escalated with partner agencies.
- The target remains 90% of assessments completed within timescales.

### Strategic Developments and Priorities

- **No-Detriment Policy:** Ensures foster carers transitioning to SGOs receive the matched national minimum allowance, promoting stability and equity.
- **Private SGO Assessments:** In 2024/25, 4 assessments were completed by Independent Social Workers (ISWs) due to capacity constraints. From 2025/26, all private SGO assessments will be completed by SSWs within the Kinship Matters team or area teams, enhancing consistency and oversight.
- **Workforce Development:** Regular training is delivered across the workforce to embed kinship-first thinking and improve early identification of family networks.

- **Permanency Pipeline:** A two-year funding agreement has enabled the allocation of a dedicated SSW to scope and support existing carers considering SGOs, with the aim of progressing these to legal permanence.
- **National Engagement:** Oxfordshire is exploring participation in the **national kinship allowance pilot** and related working groups to enhance local support offers.

## Placements Team

The **Placements Team** was launched in **June 2025** as a strategic response to operational pressures identified within the area teams. Comprising a **Team Manager (TM)** and **three Senior Social Workers (SSWs)**, the team was established to centralise the management of **foster placement referrals**, particularly those requiring **emergency responses**. The Fostering Service and a high focus of the Placements Team is to continue to work closely with the **Brokerage Team**, whose role is to identify placements with **Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)** or **residential providers** but only after all in-house placement options have been explored.

## Purpose and Structure

Previously, placement referrals were managed by senior practitioners within area teams as part of their duty systems. This model had become increasingly unsustainable, impacting the teams' ability to meet their own statutory responsibilities. The introduction of the Placements Team has significantly alleviated this burden, allowing area teams to focus on their core duties while ensuring that placement referrals are handled swiftly and consistently.

To maintain a balance between duty coverage and statutory casework, the team operates a **rotational duty system**, with each SSW covering placement duty **once every three weeks**. This ensures continuity of service while safeguarding the capacity of each practitioner to manage their own caseloads effectively.

## Key Developments and Impact

Area	Summary
<b>Same-Day and Short-Term Placements</b>	The Fostering Service has increasingly taken the lead in identifying in-house carers for urgent or short-term placements, reducing reliance on external providers.



Area	Summary
<b>Relief Care Coordination</b>	The Fostering Service now manages the identification and coordination of <b>relief care periods</b> , offering direct support to in-house carers.
<b>Improved placement matching</b>	By enabling dedicated oversight and quicker identification of suitable carers.
<b>Reduced pressure on area teams</b>	Leading to improved morale and better focus on statutory casework.
<b>New Strategic Role</b>	A dedicated Placements Team that sits within Fostering has been introduced to act as a <b>liaison between Brokerage, Fostering, and Children's Teams</b> , improving communication and placement planning.
<b>Emergency Placement Outcomes</b>	This integrated approach has enabled better use of <b>emergency and relief carers</b> , resulting in a <b>reduction in emergency IFA and residential placements</b> .

### Strategic Ambition

The team's overarching goal is to **prioritise in-house placements** wherever possible. The new Placements Team has strengthened this ambition by ensuring that all internal options are fully explored before external placements are considered.

The team has also begun to **collate and analyse referral data**, which will provide valuable insights into:

- The volume and nature of placement requests
- Patterns in emergency versus planned placements
- The fostering service's capacity to meet demand
- Gaps in provision that may inform future recruitment or training priorities

This data-driven approach will support evidence-based planning and continuous improvement across the service.

### Private Fostering

**Private Fostering is overseen within the Fostering Service and currently staffed by 1 FTE Senior Practitioner, with a 0.5 FTE.** A separate annual report is produced for Private Fostering and should be read in conjunction with this report to provide a full overview of service activity and performance.

The Private Fostering team holds responsibility for ensuring that the welfare of children placed with Private Foster Carers is safeguarded and promoted. This statutory duty is fulfilled by the Private Fostering team and by the child's allocated social worker (where one is in place).

### Supported Lodgings

**The Supported Lodgings scheme provides accommodation within a family setting for young people aged 16 to 21, offering 10 hours of support per week from carers to help prepare them for independent living.**

Following the introduction of new supported housing regulations in October 2023, all existing Supported Lodgings carers have undergone Form F assessments and have been presented to the Fostering Panel to ensure compliance with fostering regulations. These carers are now required to complete mandatory training, have access to the full foster carer training programme, and receive supervision every six weeks. In addition, they are subject to one unannounced visit per year and an annual review, in line with foster carer standards.

As of 31 March 2025, five young people were placed with Supported Lodgings carers. During 2024/25, five new carers were approved, bringing the total to seven. Of these, three are dually approved to provide both Supported Lodgings and relief care. The service continues to promote dual approval of carers for Supported Lodgings and mainstream fostering to maximise placement flexibility and placement sufficiency.

## Fostering Panel Overview

The Fostering Panel is supported by two employed Panel Advisors and comprises a total of 16 panel members, including an independent Chair and Vice Chair. Of the 16 members, 10 are independent and 6 are qualified social workers. The panel convenes at least three times per month to ensure timely decision-making and oversight.

A separate **Fostering Panel Annual Report** is produced and should be read alongside this report for a comprehensive view of panel activity and quality assurance. (see appendix 2)

## Panel Activity Summary (2024/25)

- **Mainstream Approvals:** 28 cases were presented for mainstream foster carer approval, 17 of these were new approvals, 11 where following household reviews.
- **Kinship Assessments:** 45 full kinship assessments were heard (up from 41 the previous year).
- **Regulation 24 (Temporary Approvals):** 70 cases were presented (compared to 64 last year).
- **Regulation 25 (Extensions to Temporary Approvals):** 38 requests were made to extend temporary approval up to 24 weeks, primarily due to delays in receiving medical advice.
- **Brief Reports:** 9 brief reports were presented to panel recommending cessation of assessments; 5 of these were approved by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- **Household Reviews:** 41 reviews were presented, including:
  - 32 first-year reviews
  - 2 standards of care reviews
  - Remaining cases related to changes in approval terms.
- **Long-Term Matches:** 17 children were formally matched with their long-term foster carers at panel (compared to 20 in the previous year).
- **Unlawful Placements:** 10 instances occurred where children were placed without panel approval during the year.
- **Independent Review Mechanism (IRM):** 3 applications were submitted to the IRM; however, no recommendations were made to alter the original decisions.

## Insights and Considerations

- **Increased Kinship and Reg 24 activity** indicates growing pressure on kinship services and the need for timely assessments.
- **Delays in medical advice** are a recurring theme, impacting the ability to meet statutory timescales—this may require escalation or partnership work with health colleagues.
- **Unlawful placements (10)** highlight a risk area that should be monitored closely to ensure regulatory compliance.

- The **IRM outcomes** reinforce confidence in the panel's decision-making integrity.

## Oxfordshire Therapeutic Foster Care (OTFC)

A specialist, trauma-informed programme supporting children and foster carers.

### Programme Overview

- OTFC is a **locally implemented, multidisciplinary model** that brings together a dedicated team to support both the child and their foster carer.
- The approach includes:
  - **Direct therapeutic intervention** with the child
  - **Group supervision and specialist training** for carers
  - **Close coordination with education providers**
- The model is grounded in attachment theory, child development, neuroscience, social learning and systemic theory enabling a bespoke package of support tailored to each child's needs.

### 2024/25 Activity Summary

- **Total children supported: 16**
  - **10 aged 12+**
  - **6 aged 3–11**
  - Includes **3 wraparound placements** (children not placed with OTFC carers but supported by the team)

### Placement Trends & Outcomes

- **Adolescents (12+):**
  - 7 placed with OTFC carers, 3 in existing placements
  - Exceeds the projected target of 6 by 2026/27
  - Outcomes:
    - 3 remained with foster carers
    - 1 returned to birth family
    - 2 transitioned to residential care
- **Younger children (3–11):**
  - Placements remained stable
  - 1 child preparing for adoption
  - 1 child likely to remain long-term with current carers
- **Complex Needs:**
  - 1 child with disabilities transitioned to residential care after a year with OTFC, which provided critical evidence of need for specialist provision

### Strategic Developments

- **Wraparound Support:** Provided to 3 additional placements to prevent breakdown—this area will be expanded in 2025.

- **Recruitment:** Active campaign underway to recruit new OTFC carers, both externally and from within the existing carer pool.
- **Marketing:** OTFC to be featured in Oxfordshire's broader fostering promotion strategy

### Mockingbird: 2024/2025 Summary

**Purpose:** A peer-support model designed to strengthen relationships and stability within fostering by creating extended family-style networks called "hubs."

**Structure:** Each hub is led by a **Hub Home Carer** and supports a group of foster, kinship, adoption, and birth families.

**2024/25 Reach:** Supported **33 families** and **50 children** across **4 hubs**.

**Activities:** Delivered a mix of **social events** and **1:1 support**, with increased engagement over the year.

### Challenges

- **Stagnation in participation** was observed among long-standing hub members (some since 2018)
- **High cost per family** raised concerns about value for money
- **Fidelity constraints** of the Fostering Network model limited the ability to expand hubs without compromising programme integrity

### Strategic Review and Transition

- **Challenges:** Participation plateaued among long-standing members (some since 2018), and the **cost per family** was high.
- **Fidelity Constraints:** Expanding hubs would have compromised the model's integrity as defined by the Fostering Network.
- **Decision:** In early 2025, Oxfordshire decided to **cease the Mockingbird programme**.
- **Next Steps:** Resources are being redirected to develop a **bespoke, inclusive Fostering Community Hub model** that will reach a broader range of foster families, co-designed with carers and staff.

### Carer Coordinator Model

#### Role and Function

- Oxfordshire employs **four Carer Coordinators** who:
  - Speak with prospective carers to offer reassurance and real-life insight.
  - Participate in **Skills to Foster** training.
  - Provide feedback to support the quality of assessments.

#### Impact

- Feedback from prospective carers is **consistently excellent**, highlighting the value of hearing directly from experienced carers.
- The model enhances **engagement, trust, and confidence** in the fostering process.

## Regional Recognition

- The **LAFSE pilot** has recognised the strength of this model.
- One Oxfordshire Carer Coordinator has been appointed as a **Carer Ambassador** for the region.
- The model is now being **adopted across the South East** showcasing Oxfordshire as a leader in carer-led recruitment and support.

## Strategic Action: Launching Fostering Communities Hub

### Purpose

The Fostering Service has transitioned away from the Mockingbird model, which was a siloed model and financially unsustainable for the local authority. In its place, we are reinvesting in a more inclusive and cost-effective approach that supports the entire fostering community. As part of this shift, we have integrated the previously duplicated Care Coordinator role into a more cohesive and visible support structure, ensuring foster carers receive consistent and accessible support across the service.

### Implementation Steps

1. **Define Roles Within Hubs**
  - Clarify responsibilities for peer support, recruitment engagement, and retention activities.
  - Include coordinators in hub planning and decision-making.
2. **Create Localised Support Networks**
  - Assign coordinators to geographic or thematic clusters (e.g. sibling placements, emergency care).
  - Facilitate regular drop-in sessions and peer forums.
3. **Enhance Visibility**
  - Promote coordinators through hub communications, events, and digital platforms.
  - Include coordinator profiles and contact points on the fostering website.
4. **Measure Impact**
  - Track conversion rates and retention linked to coordinator interactions.
  - Collect feedback from carers and applicants on hub engagement.
5. **Sustain and Expand**
  - Secure funding to maintain and grow the Fostering Community Hubs.
  - Explore opportunities for Fostering Community Hub Leads to support post-approval development and stability

## Fostering Toolkit Programme

### Summary

The Fostering Toolkit remains the cornerstone of our training offer for all foster carers, including kinship carers and Special Guardians. Developed collaboratively by Oxfordshire County Council and Suffolk County Council in 2019, the programme promotes a strengths-based, flexible learning environment that builds confidence, encourages peer support, and addresses everyday fostering challenges.

Since its launch in October 2019, 192 carers have completed the full programme, including the Tots Toolkit. Between April 2024 and March 2025, we delivered:

- 5 full Toolkit programmes (3 in-person, 2 virtual, including an evening course)
- 1 virtual Tots Toolkit (6 participants)
- A standalone Emotional Regulation module

The programme is coordinated by a part-time Toolkit Coordinator (18 hours/week), supported by the Team Manager and Family Support Workers. Each group is co-facilitated by two staff members. The main Toolkit includes 12 sessions, while the Tots Toolkit (for carers of children under 3) includes 10. Additional modules cover Emotional Regulation, Sensory Integration, ADD/ASD, and Risk-Taking.

### Challenges

- Ensuring consistent attendance and engagement across modules
- Reaching foster carers who have not yet accessed the Toolkit
- Balancing delivery formats (virtual vs. in-person) to meet diverse needs
- Maintaining capacity with limited coordination hours

### Strategy and Future Plans

- Proactively target carers who have not yet attended the Toolkit
- Review attendance data and refine marketing approaches
- Launch a new module focused on limit setting and boundaries
- Pilot a 12-session Teenage Toolkit programme
- Expand the model to families through a new “Toolkit for Families” pilot in 2025, developed in partnership with Early Help colleagues

### Commercial Development

As part of our ongoing fostering development plan and in collaboration with Suffolk County Council we will be exploring opportunities to offer the Fostering Toolkit as a marketable resource to other local authorities. This initiative aims to share best practice while generating income to support further innovation and sustainability within our service.

### OTFC Staff Training Offer

To support continuous professional development across the fostering service, a monthly **Bitesize Training** session is offered to all staff.

These sessions provide a reflective and collaborative space to:

- Share resources and best practice
- Deepen understanding of trauma and its impact
- Strengthen our ability to support foster and kinship carers through empathetic, therapeutic approaches

Topics delivered over the past year have included:

- **Sensory Integration**
- **Therapeutic Parenting** with a focus on safety
- **Developmental Trauma**

This training offer reinforces our commitment to trauma-informed practice and equips staff with the tools to better support carers and children alike.

### **Specialist Family Support Worker**

The Specialist Family Support Worker (FSW) role is a full-time post within the fostering service, currently delivered by two part-time staff members working 15 and 22.5 hours per week respectively.

### **Support Provided**

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the FSWs supported **28 fostering placements**, including:

- **7 foster carers**
- **19 kinship carers**

The role provides **flexible, tailored support** to carers, particularly:

- New carers developing their skills
- Placements under pressure or at risk of breakdown

Support includes emotional guidance, problem-solving, behaviour management strategies, and an offer of a reflective space, drawing on the fostering toolkit and PACE approaches.

### **Additional Contributions**

- Co-facilitation of a **weekly virtual support group** for a small cohort of carers
- Active involvement in delivering the **Fostering Toolkit Programme**

### **Referral and Review Process**

- Referrals are straightforward, enabling timely support setup
- The nature and duration of involvement are reviewed regularly through supervision and the **CWCF review process**



- Referrals can be general, but it is essential to **clearly define the FSW's role** in collaboration with the referrer and carer to avoid overlap with other services
- **Regular review meetings** with referrers have been introduced to improve information sharing and role clarity

### Big Brother Big Sisters (BBBS) Mentoring Programme

The **Big Brother Big Sisters (BBBS)** programme is a community-based mentoring initiative delivered by the **Oxford Hub** in partnership with **Oxfordshire County Council's Children's Services**. The OTFC Manager acts as the departmental link, working closely with the Oxford Hub Coordinator to support the recruitment, training, and supervision of volunteers.

### Programme Reach and Impact (April 2024 – March 2025)

- **Total active volunteers (as of March 2025):** 56
- **Mentoring pairs:** 47 within Oxfordshire, 9 out-of-county
- Volunteers maintain **weekly or fortnightly contact** with their matched child, engaging in positive, community-based activities.

### Activity Overview

A total of **567 outings** took place this year, broadly categorised as:

- **Just for fun:** 296
- **Active and healthy lifestyle:** 180
- **Arts and culture:** 73
- **Academic support:** 18

This programme continues to provide meaningful, consistent relationships for children and young people, helping to build confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging.

### Recruitment and retention of Foster Carers

Fostering recruitment remains a national crisis, presenting significant challenges in both attracting new foster carers and retaining current ones. Fewer people are stepping forward to foster, while more are deciding to leave.

In March 2024, the following government research was published, to capture the challenging landscape: Recruitment and retention in mainstream fostering - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)) In 2018, the number of national approvals was 4,985 compared to just 3,680 in 2023.

### Enquiry Activity Summary (2024/25)

Below details the enquiry activity for the last financial year.

Metric	Total
Contacts Received	135
Enquiries Completed	86
Initial Home Visits (IHVs)	38
Applications Given	33
Applications Received	25
Prep Training Completed	18
Panels Attended	17
Enquiries Closed	48

### Key Insights

- **Conversion Rate:** 63.7% of contacts progressed to completed enquiries (86 out of 135).
- **Engagement:** 38 IHVs indicate strong follow-up on viable enquiries.
- **Progression:** 25 applicants submitted applications, and 17 reached panel stage.
- **Closures:** 48 enquiries were closed, mostly due to safeguarding concerns, applicant withdrawal, timing, health, or non-response.

### Recruitment Progress:

- **2023/24:** 5 foster carers approved.
- **2024/25:** 17 foster carers approved this is a **significant improvement**, attributed to the team's focused marketing and recruitment efforts.
- Many new carers begin as **relief carers**, which, while not immediately increasing long-term capacity, plays a vital role in emergency and short-term placements.

### Retention and Conversion:

- **3 carers** transitioned from relief to short/long-term approvals in 2024/25.
- Retention is recognised as the **most critical strategy**, supported by:
  - Listening and responding to carers' feedback.
  - Promoting through word of mouth.
  - Strengthening support services.

### National Context:

- National approvals dropped from **4,985 in 2018** to **3,680 in 2023**, highlighting the scale of the recruitment challenge.
- Government and sector research (e.g., from the **Fostering Network**, May 2023) underscores the importance of **retention-focused strategies**.

### Implications

#### Rising Demand, Limited Supply:

- In **2024/25**, **1,113 children** were in care in Oxfordshire this is a number that continues to rise annually.
- Demand for foster placements **consistently exceeds** the availability of carers, reflecting a **national crisis** in fostering recruitment

Oxfordshire's increase in approvals is encouraging, but **sustained effort** is needed to:

- Expand capacity for short- and long-term placements.
- Support and retain existing carers.
- Embrace flexible entry points like relief care to build long-term commitment.

### Fostering Approvals Timeliness

- In **2023/24**, the average Form F assessment took **8 months**, aligning with national guidelines.
- In **2024/25**, **65%** of assessments were completed within **6 months**, showing strong performance.

- **35%** experienced delays due to:
  - Applicant circumstances
  - DBS/medical delays
  - Staff absences
  - Applicant pacing preferences
- Oxfordshire is actively piloting the **CORAM BAAF condensed Form F**, with **excellent panel feedback** on report quality and presentation.

## Strategic Actions to Improve Timeliness

### 1. Embed the Condensed Form F Model

- Fully adopt the CORAM BAAF condensed Form F for mainstream assessments.
- Provide training and templates to streamline usage across the team.

### 2. Strengthen Process Monitoring

- Utilise the Power BI dashboard to track all assessments with key milestones and alerts.
- Flag assessments at risk of delay and assign support or escalation.

### 3. Improve Inter-agency Coordination

- Work with health and DBS services to expedite medical and background checks.
- Establish escalation protocols for delayed external inputs.

### 4. Flexible Assessment Pathways

- Offer tailored timelines for applicants with personal constraints (e.g. phased assessments).
- Maintain engagement with applicants preferring slower pace to avoid drop-off.

### 5. Staffing and Resilience Planning

- Build contingency capacity to cover staff absences (e.g. floating assessors or relief support from within the fostering service).
- Monitor workload distribution to avoid bottlenecks.

### 6. Panel Feedback Integration

- Continue gathering fostering panel feedback on assessment quality and timeliness.
- Use feedback to refine training and support for assessing social workers.

## Regionalisation

### Strategic Summary: LAFSE Pilot Participation

- **Pilot Launch:** July 8, 2024, with the goal of increasing foster carer recruitment across the South East.
- **Funding:** Oxfordshire received **£39,000** (half of the £80,000 initially agreed), used to appoint a **part-time Assistant Team Manager** and an **Enquiry Officer** on temporary contracts.
- **Impact:** Despite efforts, there has been **no significant increase** in enquiries or recruitment across the region.
- **Extension:** The **DfE has extended the pilot to March 2026** for further data collection and impact assessment.
- **Local Insight:** Most enquiries in Oxfordshire are still driven by **local campaigns**, not the regional LAFSE platform.
- **Operational Challenge:** Redirecting the website and phone number to LAFSE has created confusion about referral sources.
- **Positive Note:** Oxfordshire's active participation in **sub-cluster meetings** has supported shared learning and good practice exchange.

### Strategic Recommendations

#### 1. Clarify Local Identity Within the Regional Model

- Reinststate or dual-brand Oxfordshire's local website and contact number to maintain visibility and track local engagement.
- Ensure all marketing materials clearly identify Oxfordshire's fostering service.

#### 2. Strengthen Data Collection and Attribution

- Standardise enquiry tracking questions to accurately capture source of contact.
- Use this data to assess the true impact of LAFSE vs. local campaigns.

#### 3. Maximise Return on Investment

- Focus remaining pilot participation on **learning and collaboration**, not just recruitment numbers.
- Share Oxfordshire's successful local campaign strategies with the LAFSE network.

#### 4. Plan for Post-Pilot Sustainability

- Prepare for the end of temporary contracts by identifying how key functions (e.g. enquiry handling) will be absorbed or transitioned.
- Evaluate whether continued participation in LAFSE beyond March 2026 aligns with Oxfordshire's strategic goals.

## 5. Advocate for Local Flexibility

- Engage with DfE and LAFSE leadership to advocate for models that allow local authorities to retain autonomy in branding and engagement while contributing to regional collaboration.

### Skills to Foster Training

#### Purpose

To prepare prospective **mainstream and kinship carers** with the knowledge, confidence, and insight needed to begin their fostering journey.

#### Delivery Model

- Offered as a **2-day course**.
- Delivered on **alternate months** and **on demand** to ensure flexibility and responsiveness to applicant needs.

#### Continuous Improvement

- The **Recruitment Team** regularly **reviews and updates** the training content.
- Feedback from participants and Carer Coordinators is used to refine delivery and ensure relevance.

### Fostering Community Hub Leads Involvement

- Approved carers speak during sessions to share lived experience.
- Their involvement consistently receives **excellent feedback** from prospective carers, enhancing engagement and realism.

### Foster carer engagement and retention

#### Recruitment and Retention Meetings

##### Purpose

- Provide a **focused space** to update foster carers on service developments.
- Address **specific concerns** raised by carers in a collaborative setting.
- Strengthen **two-way communication** between carers and the fostering service.

##### Format & Frequency

- Held **bi-monthly** in person.
- Followed by a **virtual session** to ensure inclusivity for those unable to attend.
- Virtual sessions were introduced in direct response to **carer feedback**.

## Reflective Sessions

### Purpose

- Bring together **foster carers, children's social workers, and supervising social workers**.
- Promote **professional collaboration**, shared learning, and open dialogue.
- Encourage **positive reflection** and strengthen working relationships.

### Frequency

- Held approximately **every three months**.

### Impact

- Fostered a **dynamic and respectful space** for joint working.
- Reinforced the **professionalism of foster carers** and the value of their insight.

## One-Off & Celebration Events

- **Special sessions** have focused on:
  - Celebrating fostering successes.
  - Deep-diving into the **foster carer-supervising social worker relationship**.
- A **festive thank-you event** in December 2024 brought carers and staff together in a relaxed, appreciative setting.

## Forward Strategy

- Continue to **listen and adapt** to foster carer needs.
- Expand and evolve retention events to ensure they remain **effective, inclusive, and meaningful**.
- Use feedback from these sessions to inform **service improvements** and **policy development**.

## Relief Support for Foster Carers

### Eligibility & Access

- All foster carers can request **relief care** if it is agreed as part of the child's care plan.
- Relief care allows carers to take **planned time out** while ensuring continuity of care for the child.

## Tier-Based Entitlement

Tier Level	Relief Nights per Month	Notes
Tier 1	Up to 2 nights	No impact on weekly allowance
Tier 3+	Up to 3 nights	Additional relief can be arranged to support placement stability

- Relief care is **flexible** and can be increased where needed to maintain placement stability.

## Out-of-Hours Support

All foster carers have access to:

- The **Duty Desk** during working hours
- The **Emergency Duty Team (EDT)** for out-of-hours support

## On-Call Access for all Foster Carers

**Current story:** Oxfordshire County Council do not provide an on-call service for carers. Historically, carers did have access to the Residential On-Call Service, however, this was not utilised by carers due to the Residential staff not having an insight or knowledge around fostering. Fostering was subsequently moved from this service provision. The Supervising Social Workers provide a 'soft touch' support to carers outside of office hours, especially in emergency placement situations. However, this is not a sustainable long-term option.

**Proposal:** The foster service to have a dedicated On-Call service for all foster carers.

### Benefits:

- Enhances **placement stability** by providing timely support.
- Reduces reliance on EDT for non-emergency queries.



- Improves **carer confidence and retention**, especially for newer or solo carers.
- Aligns with the service's commitment to **valuing and supporting carers**

## Options to Explore

### 1. Fostering-Specific On-Call Line

- Staffed by experienced fostering professionals (e.g. senior SSWs on rotation)
- Available during key out-of-hours periods (e.g. 5–11 PM weekdays, weekends)

### 2. Regional Collaboration

- Explore shared on-call models with neighbouring authorities or through LAFSE
- Pool resources to ensure sustainability and coverage

### 3. Tiered Support Model

- Offer enhanced on-call access to carers supporting complex placements or new carers

## Foster Carer Support Groups – Current & Future Model

### Current Support Group Structure

- **Monthly support groups** are held across three geographic areas:
  - **City**
  - **North Oxfordshire**
  - **South Oxfordshire**
- Facilitated by **Carer Coordinators**, sometimes alongside **Supervising Social Workers**.
- A **weekly support group** is also provided by **OTFC** for carers where placements are at risk and additional support is needed.
- A **dedicated support group for carers under assessment** has been introduced to support preparation and induction.

### Transition to Fostering Community Hubs

When the **Fostering Community Hubs** launch, support groups will become part of a broader, more structured support offer led by **Hub Leads**. This will include:

Component	Description
<b>Monthly Support Groups</b>	Continued delivery across the county, coordinated by Hub Leads

Component	Description
<b>1:1 Support</b>	Direct peer or professional support for carers through the hub
<b>Buddying</b>	Pairing new or prospective carers with experienced carers for informal guidance
<b>6 Annual Events</b>	Community-building events for carers and families

### Strategic Benefits

- Creates a **consistent and localised support structure** for all carers.
- Enhances **peer-to-peer learning and retention** through buddying and group reflection.
- Strengthens the **professional identity and community** of foster carers.
- Aligns with the service's broader goals of **retention, stability, and carer wellbeing**.

## Oxfordshire Foster Care Association (OFCa) – Strategic Summary

### Overview

- OFCA is a **charity run by Oxfordshire foster carers**, providing valued support to carers and children.
- It receives **partial funding from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)** and raises its own funds.
- OFCA plays a key role in:
  - Offering **free and discounted access to events** (e.g. football matches, pantomimes)
  - Providing **Christmas gifts** for children in emergency placements
  - Supporting **recruitment** by attending community events
  - Hosting the **annual foster carer forum** and **children's Christmas party**

### Current Funding

- OCC has provided:

- **£12,000 annually** for the past two years
- Previously, a **£7,000 annual grant**
- However, **OFCA has not submitted financial reporting** on how the grant has been spent.
- OFCA is now requesting **additional financial contributions** from OCC for events

## Proposal: Strengthen Partnership with Accountability

### 1. Introduce a Grant Agreement with KPIs

To ensure transparency and value for money, future funding should be tied to a formal agreement that includes:

KPI Area	Example Metrics
Engagement	Number of carers and children supported through events
Recruitment Support	Number of events attended in partnership with OCC
Wellbeing Impact	Feedback from carers on OFCA-led activities
Financial Transparency	Submission of annual financial report and event breakdowns

### 2. Tiered Funding Model

- Maintain the **£12,000 grant** for 2025/26 **conditional on KPI delivery**.
- Consider a **tiered model** in future years:
  - Base grant (e.g. £7,000)
  - Additional funding tied to specific deliverables (e.g. events, recruitment support)

### 3. Joint Planning and Visibility

- Align OFCA's calendar of events with OCC's fostering strategy and community hub activities.

- Promote OFCA's contributions more visibly through OCC channels to increase awareness and recognition.

#### 4. Annual Review

- Conduct an annual joint review of OFCA's impact and funding use.
- Use this to inform future funding decisions and partnership development.

### Marketing Performance Overview (2024/25)

#### Campaign Reach

- **Local campaigns** delivered in 7 key areas: Bicester, Abingdon & Witney, Banbury, Oxford & Kidlington, Thame & Wallingford, Didcot, and Chipping Norton.
- Activities included:
  - Leaflet drops to homes, businesses, and community centres
  - Posters and physical events
  - **8 online events**
  - Digital advertising (e.g. Google AdWords, social media)
  - Radio, bus backs, community magazines, libraries, schools, and conferences

#### Spend

- **£74K** was spent on marketing, including radio advertising and coverage for localised campaigns, digital advertising, leaflet and posters for locality campaigns, posters, banners, gazebo, booking on to events, social media, advertising in local magazines.

#### Outcomes

- **Correlated increase in enquiries** in areas with targeted campaigns.
- **3 additional enquiries** directly attributed to automated email nudges.
- Website improvements led to better user journeys and engagement.

#### Importance of Word of Mouth

#### Carer Voice as a Strategic Asset

- Foster carers are central to the campaign's tone and messaging.
- Real stories and peer-to-peer messaging are used across all channels.
- Carer Coordinators and Carer Ambassadors play a key role in:
  - Speaking at events and training
  - Engaging with prospective carers
  - Sharing lived experience

## Strategic Direction

- Word of mouth is recognised as the **most powerful recruitment tool**.
- Future campaigns will:
  - Focus on **localised, carer-led content**
  - Promote **staff and carer takeovers** on social media
  - Build **community trust** through authentic storytelling

## Recommendations Moving Forward

### 1. Consolidate All Fostering Communications

- Align Foster Care Fortnight, local events, and regional campaigns under one strategy.

### 2. Clarify Role of Fostering South East (FSE)

- Seek clear commitments from FSE on their 2025/26 activity in Oxfordshire to avoid brand confusion.

### 3. Phase 2 Strategy

- Specific Fostering Marketing Officer to sit within COMMS
- Build on local awareness with deeper engagement.
- Continue using carer voices to personalise the message.
- Optimise all touchpoints in the enquiry journey for consistency and clarity.

### 4. Website and Content Review

- The website is not fit for purpose, an audit and update of content to align with the campaign tone and user needs is required.
- The website update will be the responsibility of the Marketing Officer and content will be agreed by the Fostering Service.



## Community Engagement & Promotional Strategy

### Physical Presence Across the County

The Recruitment Team actively participates in a wide range of events to ensure visibility and inclusivity:

- **Community & Cultural Events:** Pride, Eid, SEN events, Virtual School conferences
- **Local Outreach:** Cafés, council buildings, libraries, schools
- **Partnerships:** Collaborative promotion with OFCA to amplify reach

### Promotional Materials

A strong visual identity is supported by:

- Gazebo, banners, t-shirts, pens, bears, car stickers
- Proposed additions: lanyards and broader SLT (Senior Leadership Team) involvement at events

These materials help create a welcoming and professional presence, reinforcing brand recognition and trust.

### Importance of Staff & Carer Visibility

- Plans are in place to **capture wider staff support** and promote the work of the fostering service and foster carers.
- The presence of **approved carers** at events and training continues to be one of the most **effective engagement tools**, offering authenticity and reassurance to prospective carers.

### Strategic Recommendations

1. **Expand SLT Participation:** Increase leadership visibility at public events to reinforce organisational commitment.
2. **Diversify Event Portfolio:** Continue attending culturally diverse and inclusive events to reach underrepresented communities.
3. **Track Engagement Impact:** Monitor enquiry spikes following events to assess ROI and refine targeting.
4. **Enhance Promotional Toolkit:** Introduce new branded items (e.g. lanyards, digital QR cards) and refresh existing materials regularly.
5. **Integrate Messaging:** Ensure all promotional efforts align with the broader fostering campaign tone and objectives.

### Allegations Against Foster Carers

- **Allegations:**15  
(Down from 29 in 2023/24)

- **From Foster Children:** 6
- **From Other Sources:** 9

#### **Outcomes:**

- 7 – Resolved with no further action
- 5 – Continued monitoring for an agreed period
- 3 – Referred to the fostering panel for review of approval

#### **Complaints About the Fostering Service**

- **Complaints:**3  
(Down from 8 in 2023/24)
  - 2 were **partly or fully upheld**

#### **Support for Foster Carers**

Complaints and allegations can be distressing and may lead some carers to consider leaving fostering. To support them:

- Carers can access help from the Fostering Community Hub Leads.
- An **independent support service** is available through the **Foster Talk**

#### **In-House Support for Foster Carers and Staff**

##### **Therapeutic and Clinical Support**

- **Attach Service:** Clinical psychologists offer therapeutic consultations and direct support, which is highly valued by carers and contributes to placement stability.
- **Attach Consultations:** Ongoing access to therapeutic input for carers and staff.

##### **Specialist and Peer Support**

- **Fostering Community Hubs:** Provide peer-led support and community-based connections.
- **Therapeutic Foster Care Team (OTFC):** Offers additional therapeutic sessions and tailored support.

##### **Educational Support**

- **Virtual School:** Supports the educational progress and wellbeing of children in care.

##### **Resources and Benefits**

- **Regular Newsletters:** Keep carers informed and connected.

- **Foster Carer Handbook:** A comprehensive guide to policies, procedures, and support.
- **Fostering Talk Membership:** Includes access to advice, mediation, and independent support.
- **Max Card:** Offers a range of discounts for foster families.

## 24 to 25 Fostering Development plan update:

### Recruitment & Retention

- **Recruitment Strategy Review:** Aiming to recruit at least **20 new foster carers annually** to reach a **70% in-house placement rate by 2026/27**.
- **Triple R Model for Retention:**
  - **Retention:** Deep dives with foster carers to identify and resolve issues.
  - **Reflection:** Themed reflective practice sessions to build relationships.
  - **Revelation:** Celebrating carers and sharing success stories.

**Outcome:** we recruited 17 new foster carers last year; however, we had 34 deregistration's, of which 2 adopted the children they were caring for and 1 was granted an SGO. The other reasons were due to a variety of reasons with the highest reason due to the carer retiring.

### Team Structure & Support

- **Fostering Service Restructure:**
  - Proposed creation of a **dedicated Kinship/SGO team** with Family Support Workers (FSWs) to support carers and align with the 'no detriment' policy.
- **Placement & Retention Team:**
  - Plan to establish a **dedicated team** to relieve pressure on area teams and improve placement coordination.
- **On-Call System:**
  - Ambition to implement an **out-of-hours support line** for foster carers to enhance retention.

### Outcome:

- The dedicated Kinship/SGO team and placements team went live in June 2025.
- The fostering service do not yet have an On-Call system for carers.

### Placement Stability & Innovation

- **Home from Home Project:**
  - Matching emergency/respice carers to children for stability.
  - Goal: Employ **3 salaried carers** for emergency bridging placements.
  - Collaboration with **Family Bridges** to support families under assessment or S17 intervention.



## Outcome:

- the home from home project to match and utilise emergency/respite carers is operating and successful.
- With regards to the 3 salaried carers, the DfE is starting an pilot project for a salaried carer as part of the regionalisation, however, this is still being discussed.
- The fostering service and family bridges are working together to look at data of need for such a service.

## Policy Development

- **‘No Detriment’ Policy:**
  - Supports kinship carers transitioning to SGO.
  - Policy and business case prepared for **Star Chamber**.
- **‘Home Loans’ Policy:**
  - In development to fund **home extensions** for foster carers, increasing placement sufficiency.

## Outcome:

- The SGO ‘no detriment’ policy was launched in August 2024, and this has seen a significant shift to kinship carers progressing to SGO, the number of children who exited care via SGO was 42.
- The home loans policy has been through governance and heard at Capital Programmes Board on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2025, this was agreed. The next steps are to design the process for the home loans applications.

## Systems & Processes

- **Exploring CHARMS:**
  - Evaluating CHARMS as a replacement for LCS to better meet fostering needs and data tracking.
- **Policy & Procedure Review:**
  - Reviewing standards of care and other policies to ensure **consistent** practice across the service.

## Outcome:

- Oxfordshire County Council are committed to modifying LCS and ensuring it is fit for purpose for carer use and the fostering needs – this is in process and part of the fostering service development plan (see appendix 3).
- We are continually reviewing our policies and procedures; this will remain ongoing.

## Fostering Development Plan 2025–26 (read in conjunction with appendix 4)

### Policy & Incentives

Initiative	Status	Next Steps
<b>Carer Home Loan Policy</b>	✓ Completed with proposed annual waiver	Capital Programme Board (July) – next steps to design the application process etc.
<b>Fostering Friendly HR Policy</b>	✓ Completed with improved leave	Final sign-off by OCC SLT & Unison → Launch via internal comms and link with external partnerships.
<b>Foster Carer Payment Review</b>	✓ Analysis completed (no business case for mileage)	Hold KPI workshop for new child-based payment model → Assess feasibility of relief care roll-over pilot

### Placement Matching & Support

Initiative	Status	Next Steps
<b>Fostering Panel Improvements</b>	✓ Implemented (all carers approved as 'Fit to foster for 0-18 and for ST/LT/Relief, all ages)	Apply to new carers immediately and existing carers at next household reviews

Initiative	Status	Next Steps
<b>Fostering Communities Hub</b> (Mockingbird replacement)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Business case completed – submitted to CSMT and DLT – agreed.	Launch August 2025
<b>Short Breaks Project</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning	Hold scoping meeting to define project scope and challenges

### Kinship & Special Guardianship

Initiative	Status	Next Steps
<b>SGO Conversion Support</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 SSW recruited using targeted funding	Set 2025/26 targets via SGO Monitoring Board
<b>Kinship Allowance Pilot</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning	Continue DfE bid planning using data insights
<b>Kinship Offer</b> <b>Local</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> In development	Produce and publish brochure

### Data & Digital Tools

Initiative	Status	Next Steps
<b>Fostering Dashboard</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Launched	Mock up improvements to KPI dashboard for placement sufficiency
<b>LCS Portal Relaunch</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning	Begin project planning for relaunch of digital portals for carers

#### Policy & Training

Initiative	Status	Next Steps
<b>Fostering Handbook</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tri.x contract signed	Begin implementation planning with supplier

## Appendix 1

### Ethnicity of all approved carers 31 March 2025

<b>Foster &amp; Kinship Carer Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total Main &amp; Linked Carers</b>
Any Other Asian Background	7
Any Other Black Background	4
Any Other Ethnic Group	4
Any Other Mixed Background	4
Any Other White Background	29
Black African	4
Black Caribbean	4
Indian	2
Pakistani	2
White and Asian	1
White and Black African	2
White and Black Caribbean	1
White British	286
White Irish	1
Not obtained	7
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>358</b>

## Appendix 2

 [Panel annual report 24-25.docx](#)

## Appendix 3

[Fostering Improvement Programme Plan on a Page - Nov 24.pptx](#)

[Fostering Improvement Highlight report - June 2025.pptx](#)

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## Divisions Affected – All

### **EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 21 NOVEMBER 2025**

#### **Co-optee Recruitment Update**

**Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to: -**

- 1.1 **NOTE** the update on activity undertaken to fill the Committee's vacant co-optee post for a parent governor;
- 1.2 **AGREE** to terminate Hana G's appointed as a co-opted young person members; and, if agreed,
- 1.3 **AGREE** to begin a recruitment process for the subsequently vacant post.

#### **Executive Summary**

- 2. Co-opted members have a dual function to the operation of a Scrutiny committee. Not only do they bring specific, relevant expertise but, coming from outside both the Council and the party-political system they provide greater public assurance of the independence and non-political output of the Scrutiny function. This report seeks to update the Committee on efforts made to date to identify nominees for co-option onto the Committee, and to recommend that one of the co-opted young people should be replaced.

#### **Background**

- 3. Within the Council's constitution it is outlined that the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership includes space for six co-opted members, four of whom relate to education, and two to young people.
- 4. When the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee was established by Council in December 2023, its terms of reference included the following in relation to co-opted members:

“In addition to the county councillors the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee shall include in its membership the following voting representatives:

- (a) one Church of England representative appointed by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education;
  - (b) one Roman Catholic representative appointed jointly by the Archbishop of Birmingham and the Bishop of Portsmouth to represent the Roman Catholic Church;
  - (c) two persons who shall be parent governors of maintained schools elected in accordance with a procedure approved by the Council.
  - (d) two persons who, at the time of their original appointment, shall be aged 25 or under and either living in Oxfordshire or working for an organisation in Oxfordshire supporting or representing children and young people.”
5. The committee currently has filled the co-optee positions for the Church of England and Roman Catholic representatives, and has one vacancy for a parent governor.
6. The use of the word ‘shall’ in reference to the membership of the Committee means that the Committee does not have discretion to do otherwise, and must seek to fill these vacancies. Officers have been seeking to do so.

## **Progress Updates**

### **Parent Governor Nominees**

7. The need to include co-opted members from parent governors is set out in legislation. Under s. 3 of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001 it is a requirement that ‘a local education authority shall appoint at least two but not more than five parent governor representatives to each of their education overview and scrutiny committees and sub-committees.’ Since its inception, the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has become the scrutiny committee responsible for education and therefore must include opportunity for at least two parent governor representatives.
8. The 2001 Regulations prescribe the process for selecting these representatives, which is to hold an election amongst parent governors between those who are eligible and have put themselves forward for nomination.
9. Peace Nnaji was co-opted to sit as a co-opted member of the Committee from the February 2025 meeting. There remains a vacancy with periodic advertising attempting to fill it. Most recently, in November 2025, all parent governors were contacted using the Council’s communication tool, Governor Hub, and also Schools News to publicise the opportunity. Parent governors have been invited to apply by 18 December 2025 in order to be part of the election. If only one parent governor were to apply then, in the absence of further applicants, it would not be necessary under the 2001 Regulations to run an election. Subject to formally establishing their eligibility and completing formalities around becoming



a co-opted member, this individual would become a co-opted member of the committee.

10. It is unlikely, given the historic and national challenges in securing parent governor co-opted members, but if more governor representatives come forward before the deadline than there are vacancies, an election will have to be run amongst parent governors to establish the nominees.
11. Under the 2001 Regulations, if no or insufficient numbers of nominees are received, the Council must attempt to fill the vacant position(s) every six months.

## **Young People**

12. Two candidates were interviewed by a panel in November 2024 and the Committee agreed to their appointment from February 2025. Those appointments were for two years
13. Both co-opted young members have made strong contributions but a change of circumstances has meant that Hana G is no longer able to attend the Committee's meetings. As a result, it is recommended that her appointment be terminated and recruitment be undertaken to appoint another co-opted young person to membership of the Committee whose term of office would also be two years.

## **Next Steps**

14. In addition to the recruitment of a parent governor, a recruitment process to seek expressions of interest from eligible young people will be undertaken. This will be undertaken taking into account advice from Oxfordshire Youth. An interview panel would be likely to consist of the Chair of the Committee, the Scrutiny Manager, and a representative of Oxfordshire Youth.
15. The Committee should remember that a co-optee is not merely an external advisor to the Committee, but a full member of it. This means they have access to the same information provided to other committee members, and can participate on equal terms. The only difference is that, in the rare instances that the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee wishes to vote on an issue, unless that topic relates to education provided by the Council, the Constitution determines they will be unable to do so. As a consequence of this status, it is necessary that co-opted members are bound by the Members' Code of Conduct, and sign a Declaration of Interest form.
16. The agreed terms of reference for the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee state that 'Co-opted Members shall normally serve for a period of 2 years. Co-opted members may serve for one further consecutive period of 2 years with the agreement of the Committee. After this, the Committee must run an open recruitment process for any further two-year extensions. No co-opted member may serve for longer than eight years in

total.' Any appointment made, therefore, should be for 2 years in the first instance.

17. As referenced above, the specific inclusion of younger people on a committee is relatively novel, and it is not without risks. This is particularly the case if those younger people are members. A full schedule of safeguarding measures has been developed as part of the support package provided by Oxfordshire Youth.
18. In addition to the issues of safeguarding, support to understand and fully participate in the formal and rule-based environment of a committee has also been established. Oxfordshire Youth, who have provided support to young people involved in the Youth Parliament, provides a support package to cover: co-optee and member training on working with one another; support in understanding the papers, drawing up lines of enquiry and ways to express those views safely in a public environment; attendance at pre-meetings in support of the co-optees, attendance at committee meetings as a source of support, and support in helping the co-optees reach out to groups of young people to understand their views better. The scope of this was put together with the input of the Consultation and Engagement team, who have experience of working with young people through youth engagement.

## **Corporate Priorities**

19. The primary corporate priority served by the appointment of co-optees to the committee is 'Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy'. However, in strengthening the quality of Scrutiny provided towards the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee's remit it is expected that there will be positive impacts on 'Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents', 'Support carers and the social care system' and 'Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential'.

## **Financial Implications**

20. The role of co-optee is not a paid position, but co-optees do qualify for the same rights to travel and subsistence as Councillors, as detailed in Part 10.1 Sch 1 of the Constitution.
21. Any decision to appoint a young person to be a co-opted member of the committee will require services to help them understand, navigate and be safe in a public environment, as detailed above. This funding is drawn from the Council's provision for Future Generations and, barring the additional costs of seeking Oxfordshire Youth's support to identify suitable candidates, carry no additional costs.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson  
Strategic Finance Business Partner – Resources, FRCS and TDCE

## **Legal Implications**

22. The legal implications are detailed within the body of this report. There are no further implications to highlight.

Comments checked by:  
Jay Akbar  
Head of Legal & Governance Services

## **Staff Implications**

23. Support for co-opted members will create additional demands around understanding, navigating and remaining safe. However, as referenced, additional, specialist support has been brought in to support this work. There is also limited coordination work involving the Scrutiny team. However, the level of additional work can be absorbed.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

24. As younger people, potentially with additional support needs, it is incumbent on the Council to ensure that adequate support is provided. The package of support and work coming out of it, training for members for instance, is designed to provide such support.

## **Risk Management**

25. As alluded to elsewhere in the report, co-opting young and potentially vulnerable young people onto the committee is not without risk. The primary risk being safeguarding and support of their welfare. The primary steps being taken to mitigate these risks are the provision of an external support package (as detailed above) and the development of specific safeguarding protocols for the delivery of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
26. The final details of the protocols include:
- DBS checks for all Scrutiny staff
  - Enhanced training for all Scrutiny staff on safeguarding
  - A named safeguarding lead (the Scrutiny Manager) and an escalation point (their line manager)
  - Training for members on working with vulnerable young people in a committee environment
  - A 'no phone call' policy for staff and members with young people

- Only staff holding co-optee e mail addresses and all communications going through them. For minors, e mails to copy in a parent or other nominated person.
  - No one to one engagement with members and the co-optees
27. Failure to fill the co-optee vacancies on Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee would not only reduce the experience and knowledge available to the Committee and impair the public's confidence in the apolitical nature of Scrutiny, but it would also mean the Committee would be operating outside the membership determined by Council in the Constitution.

## **Consultations**

28. None arising from this report.

Anita Bradley  
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: None

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

Contact Officer: Richard Doney  
Scrutiny Officer,  
November 2025

## Work Programme 2025/26

### Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Liz Brighthouse, OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

#### **COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

Topic	Relevant strategic priorities	Purpose	Type	Report Leads
		<b>26 November 2025</b>		
Attainment including attainment gaps	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system; tackle inequalities	To receive data and to identify performance	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Annette Perrington; Kim Wilson
Virtual School Annual Report	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system; tackle inequalities	To report on the Virtual School data for 2024/25.	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Annette Perrington; Claire Pike



Fostering	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system; tackle inequalities	Annual report, current position, recruitment.	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Delia Mann, Charlotte Davey
		<b>27 February 2026</b>		
Early Years	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system; tackle inequalities	<i>Scope to be confirmed</i>	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, tbc
Educational Data (validated)	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system; tackle inequalities	<i>Scope to be confirmed</i>	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Annette Perrington, Kim Wilson
s.19 Monitoring Report	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.	To ensure accountability and improvement	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Annette Perrington
		<b>27 March 2026</b>		

Harm Outside the Home	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system; tackle inequalities	<i>Scope to be confirmed</i>	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Delia Mann
EOTAS Policy Review	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.	To review progress of policy implementation	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Annette Perrington

**SUB GROUP / WORKING GROUP**

<b>SUB GROUPS / WORKING GROUPS</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Relevant strategic priorities</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Members</b>
Lessons Learned from Woodeaton	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential	Tbc – but to reflect on communications, particularly with parents. How does the Council exercise its oversight?		tbc

**BRIEFINGS FOR MEMBER INFORMATION**

<b>BRIEFINGS</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Relevant strategic priorities</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Members</b>



## Recommendation Tracker

### Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

The recommendation update tracker enables the Committee to monitor progress accepted recommendations. The tracker is updated with recommendations accepted by Cabinet. Once a recommendation has been updated, it will be shaded green and reported into the next meeting of the Committee, after which it will be removed from the tracker. If the recommendation will be update in the form of a separate item, it will be shaded yellow.

<b>KEY</b>	<b>Due to Cabinet</b>	<b>With Cabinet</b>	<b>Complete</b>
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#### Recommendations:

Meeting Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update/response
11-Jul-25	School Catering Services and Corporate Cleaning Services	1. That the Council should outline the specific measures it has taken to ensure that rural schools are protected and that all schools will receive high quality catering services.	Lorna Baxter; Vic Kurzeja	<b>Accepted</b>  See agenda item 10
		2. That the Council should set out the specific steps it will take to ensure that the rights and interests of existing staff members will be protected, and that trade unions will be consulted and engaged throughout the process.		<b>Accepted</b>  See agenda item 10

Agenda Item 10

KEY	Due to Cabinet	With Cabinet	Complete
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Meeting date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update/response
26-Sep-25	Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report	1. That the Council should deploy a sustained, smart educational campaign to support parents and carers, particularly regarding online threats and should consider how best to do this.	Lisa Lyons	<b>Accepted</b>  See agenda item 10

## Action Tracker

### Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Liz Brighthouse, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

The recommendation update tracker enables the Committee to monitor progress accepted recommendations. The tracker is updated with recommendations accepted by Cabinet. Once a recommendation has been updated, it will be shaded green and reported into the next meeting of the Committee, after which it will be removed from the tracker. If the recommendation will be update in the form of a separate item, it will be shaded yellow.

<b>KEY</b>	<b>Delayed</b>	<b>In progress</b>	<b>Complete</b>
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**Actions:**

Meeting date	Item	Action	Lead	Update/response
There are no outstanding action items				

## Recommendation Update Tracker

### Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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Page 1 of 1

KEY	Update Pending	Update in Item	Updated
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Cabinet Response Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update
17-Jun-25	Local Area Partnership SEND Update	<p>The Council will publish the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as well as the RAG Rated Priority Action Plan Tracker and ensure they are accessible to the public.</p> <p>The Council will set out how the views of the SEND Youth Forum, and its members, will be taken into account and how they will be presented, including any consultation prior to the publication of any reports about the Forum.</p>	Lisa Lyons; Kate Reynolds; Matthew Tait	Progress update to be provided
16-Sep-25	Update of Children's Homes	That the Council should encourage Ofsted to ensure the registration period for children's homes is as short as possible and thereby expedite the process of placing children in registered settings.	Lisa Lyons; Jean Kelly; Charlotte Davey	Progress update to be provided
16-Sep-25	EOTAS Policy	That the Council, if the draft EOTAS Policy is approved by Cabinet, should commit to co-producing the parent carer	Lisa Lyons	Progress update to be provided

KEY	Update Pending	Update in Item	Updated
-----	----------------	----------------	---------

Cabinet Response Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update
		guidance relating to the policy in a timely fashion with it being reviewed by the Committee before it is submitted to Cabinet.		
16-Sep-25	s.19 of Education Act	That, notwithstanding the complexity of the processes being set out, the Council should ensure that the process chart at Annexe B is re-designed to make it clearer and easier to follow.	Lisa Lyons	Progress update to be provided
		That the Council should highlight how there will be sufficient resource – both financial and practical – to ensure the s.19 approach and Pathway of Action can function adequately.		
16-Sep-25	Home to School Transport	1. That the Council should work at pace to organise personal transport budgets with appropriate flexibility to take account of individual circumstances.	Lisa Lyons; Paul Fermer; Vic Kurzeja	Progress update to be provided
		2. That the Council should ensure regular review of the policy is to mean ‘annual’, subject to legislative changes.		

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## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

*This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.*

**Issue:** School Catering Services and Corporate Cleaning Contract

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet member for Finance, Property, and Transformation

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** 16 September 2025

**Response to report:**

*Enter optional text here*

**Response to recommendations:**

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
1. That the Council should outline the specific measures it has taken to ensure that rural schools are protected and that all schools will receive high quality catering services.	Accepted	The Council will be sourcing providers with our values and a proven track record of supporting diverse school communities and has included requirements for contingency planning to ensure continuity of service. These measures align with sector best practice, <u>which recommends clustering schools for procurement to increase purchasing power and ensure that smaller</u>

<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

		<u>schools are not left behind when local authority provision changes.</u> Support and a monitoring program regarding progress will be provided through the school forum.
2. That the Council should set out the specific steps it will take to ensure that the rights and interests of existing staff members will be protected, and that trade unions will be consulted and engaged throughout the process.	Accepted	The Council will protect staff rights by ensuring all affected employees transfer under TUPE regulations, maintaining their pay and conditions. Trade unions will be consulted from the outset and throughout the process, with regular meetings to address concerns and ensure staff voices are heard. These commitments will be built into provider contracts and monitored by the Council.



# Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

*This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.*

**Issue:** **Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report**

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People**

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** **21 October 2025**

## Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
That the Council should deploy a sustained, smart educational campaign to support parents and carers, particularly regarding online threats and should consider how best to do this.	Accepted	We will progress this work through the Child Exploitation/Harm Outside the Home subgroup, within the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, as part of the revised strategy and action plan. The plan will include an educational campaign to support

<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

		carers in understanding online threats and adopting best practices to keep children safe. This will ensure the action is fully aligned with the Partnership's priorities and integrated into its workstreams.
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