

# Annual Report 2024/25

## East Sussex County Council Fostering Service

# Our Service values

The East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Fostering Service aims to provide a range of safe and stable placements for children who cannot be cared for in their own families, and to ensure that our carers have the dedication, knowledge and skills to help children in the care of the local authority to realise their full potential.

We are committed to working with our professional partners to achieve good outcomes for children and young people who are looked after by East Sussex County Council.

We maintain a consistent dialogue with our staff teams, our carers and care-experienced young people so that our decision-making is relevant and informed across four functions:

Recruitment  
&  
Assessment

Supervision  
&  
Retention

Placement  
Support  
Service

Training  
&  
Development

## Ambitions

- Offer our children and young people safe, stable and caring places to live with as many family-based placements as possible.
- Maintain a strong and respectful partnership with our dedicated foster carers, enabling them to support our young people within a network of enduring and loving relationships and secure attachments.
- Support our children and young people to thrive and achieve their full potential.
- Increased work towards reunification.

## Objectives

- To secure sufficient and relevant accommodation for our children's needs within a whole system approach - locally when appropriate and for the right price.
- To increase placement capacity and diversity of carers across the whole county to meet the diverse needs of our children and young people, matching children culturally where possible and always supporting individual identities.
- To recruit, train and retain our foster carers to provide the highest quality of care.
- To increase the number of in-house placements.
- To fully engage in the Local Authority Fostering South East Regional Hub (LAFSE) 12 month pilot scheme.

## Outcomes

- Continued respect and support for our foster carers' rights to a family life, ensuring positive long-term working relationships with fewer placement breakdowns.
- More East Sussex children placed in ESCC family environments in their local community, maintaining local connections to improve outcomes and when relevant reunification, reducing time in care.
- Improved collaborative operational working with neighbouring local authority fostering services.



# National Trends

The number of mainstream foster care households in England has fallen by 10% over the past three years, despite a rising care population

As of 31 March 2024, there were 33,745 approved non-kinship foster households, down by 1,260 (3.6%) on the year before and by 3,580 (9.6%) since 2021

The number of family-and-friends households (who are approved to care only for specific children) grew for a second consecutive year in 2023-24, from 8,400 to 8,865

However this growth has been far exceeded by the decline in the number of mainstream households, meaning total fostering capacity has fallen from 45,370 to 42,615 from 2021-24, a drop of 6.1% (2,755)

The fall in the number of mainstream fostering households translated into a drop in the number of approved fostering places in 2023-24, from 72,770 to 70,465. This figure has fallen year on year since 2020, when it stood at 78,830.

Meanwhile, the number of filled approved mainstream places, which was stable from 2021-23, fell in 2023-24, from 44,580 to 42,870. This is despite the number of children in care in England having grown by 3,070, to 83,840, from 2021-23, a period during which the children's home sector has grown significantly.

Sector charity the Fostering Network said the declining number of carers was the result of a lack of remuneration, inadequate support from their council or fostering agency and [www.seslip.co.uk](http://www.seslip.co.uk) insufficient respect for their role.

The Department for Education (DfE) pointed to increased investment since 2023 in foster care recruitment through the rollout of regional hubs to support applicants through the process, which will be extended to the whole country in 2025-26.

[https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/11/13/number-of\[1\]mainstream-foster-care-households-down-by-10-over-past-three-years/](https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/11/13/number-of[1]mainstream-foster-care-households-down-by-10-over-past-three-years/) To read the Ofsted report:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in\[1\]england-1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024/fostering-in-england-1-april-2023-to-31-march\[1\]2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in[1]england-1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024/fostering-in-england-1-april-2023-to-31-march[1]2024)

# Recruitment Statistics

Recruitment	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
Enquiries	260		228		200		274		237		276	
Q&A calls	106		95		69		79		70		23*	
Home visits (IV)	68		50		33		43		45		90*	
Approvals H/holds > places	22	39	20	30	14	21	24	40	26	38	30	47
<b>Targets</b>	30	44	30	44	30	44	25	44	26	44	36	50
<b>Conversion</b>												
Enquiry to IV	26%		21%		17%		16%		19%		33%*	
Enquiry to approval	8%		9%		7%		9%		11%		11%	
IV to approval	32%		42%		42%		56%		58%		33%*	

\* New 2024/25 ESCC system of removing the Q&A call from the recruitment process to improve response to assessment speed when relevant. This is reflected in Q&A call volume reduction and increase in home visits.

Foster Carers	2023/24	2024/25
Approved households/places	26/38	30/47
Deregistrations households/places	18/39	13/22
Loss/ households/places	+8/-1	+17/+25

# Our Successes Included:

- Highest number of enquiries in five years has led to a strong conversion rate of 33% from home visit to approval
- Net increase of 17 households & 25 places  
(Compared to 23/24 net of 8 households but -1 place)
- Maintained strength of in-house carer utilisation at 76% on 31/3/25 against national average of 60% for 23/24
- Payments uplift for ESCC foster carers in line with National Minimum Allowance (NMA) in April 2024 - supporting recruitment and retention, improved focus on fostering and wellbeing, increased transfer enquiries
- Implemented new placements and commissioning structure to continue to improve our home-finding processes for children in our care
- Launched new digital foster carer handbook and Learning Pool training platform
- Rebranded promotional collateral and website
- Continued development of Buddy scheme
- Launched first Mockingbird Constellation
- Management and recruitment collaborative events with neighbouring LA's
- Launched 'Replenish' boxes and workshops to improve our corporate parenting to black and mixed heritage children in care



# Meeting Our Targets

Our engaging and experienced Assessment and Recruitment team (ART) understand the pressure of a growing population of children in care:

- Supportive of each other in striving to be as progressive, caring and commercial as possible in their practice to achieve the best outcomes for ESCC from enquiry to approval throughout a robust assessment process
- Ambitious targets this year were almost met, surpassing recent years' recruitment achievements in a tough and financially austere marketplace
- Delivering recruitment messages via new, relevant and changing channels to ensure we appear where a diverse range of potential enquirers are searching and consuming information eg. YouTube, Google Ads, ad-hoc community recruitment pop-up opportunities
- Working with internal and external professional partnerships and groups to keep pace with upcoming opportunities, support systems and maintaining practice flexibility when possible. To encourage enquiries through to supporting carers post-approval

Advertising,  
branding,  
internal/external  
comm's & promo  
merchandise

Recruitment  
Ambassadors,  
Buddy scheme,  
information  
events

Retention events,  
Mockingbird,  
Young People Who  
Foster, support  
groups, training

Placement  
Support ongoing  
relationships and  
short breaks offer



# From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

## 276 new enquiries received

- 106 progressed to assessment
- 27 were closed by service
- 108 were closed by applicant
- 35 were open and being followed up
- Enquiry to approval conversion rate ESCC 11% (compared to LAFSE Region 6%)

## 13 households offering 22 places were deregistered. Of those:

- 1 transferred to another fostering service
- 9 ceased/retired from fostering
- 2 were connected family and friends carers and the child moved
- 1 was following an allegation and presentation to fostering panel

## Net gain

With 30 new approved households offering 47 places and 13 existing households offering 22 places deregistered this year, there was a **net gain of 17 households and 25 places**

Fostering Assessment & Recruitment Team
2 Team Managers (=1 FTE)
7 Assessing Social Workers (4 FTE, 3 P/T)*
2 P/T Caseworkers
1 P/T Marketing Officer

*\* NB 1.6 fte ASWs on secondment/maternity leave*





APPROACHABLE | INFORMATIVE | CREATIVE | RESOURCEFUL | HONEST



Sharing our message  
with the community  
face-to-face at  
targeted events with  
support from our

Councillors and Senior  
Leadership Team, as well as  
offering ongoing, online  
information sessions



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Fostering

Cost-effective recruitment campaigns developed by a specific fostering marketing professional within the service have increased engagement and following amongst the wider market of potential enquirers, as well as the existing foster carer cohort and staff teams.

We re-branded to include our location and expanded the fostering service colour palette for operational visibility and flexibility

Investment in branded merchandise, marketing collateral and trial of new digital channels has replaced expensive roundabout signage in a refreshed marketing mix including both digital, community and traditional channels eg. Posters, flyers, press releases, radio campaigns as well as organic and PPC (pay per click) campaigns on social media platforms including Facebook, Google Ads, Instagram and YouTube .

Promotional messaging includes a warm and welcoming insight into all types of fostering; its benefits, rewards, commitment and flexibility. It also uses language to prepare enquirers with an understanding of the honest, compassionate, fair and non-discriminatory role of the recruitment team who enquirers will meet at the start of their fostering journey with East Sussex County Council.



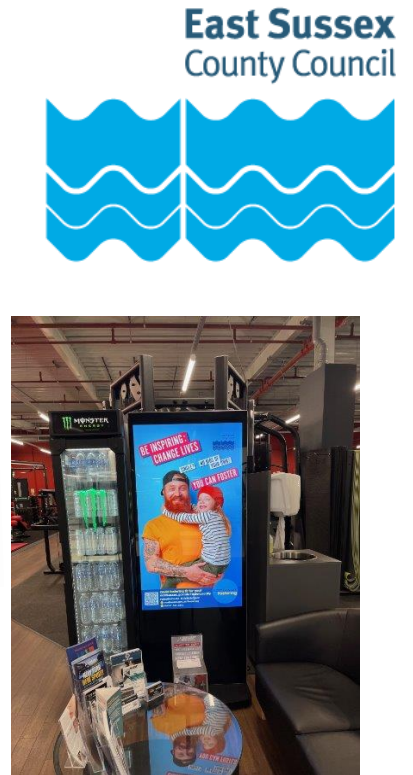
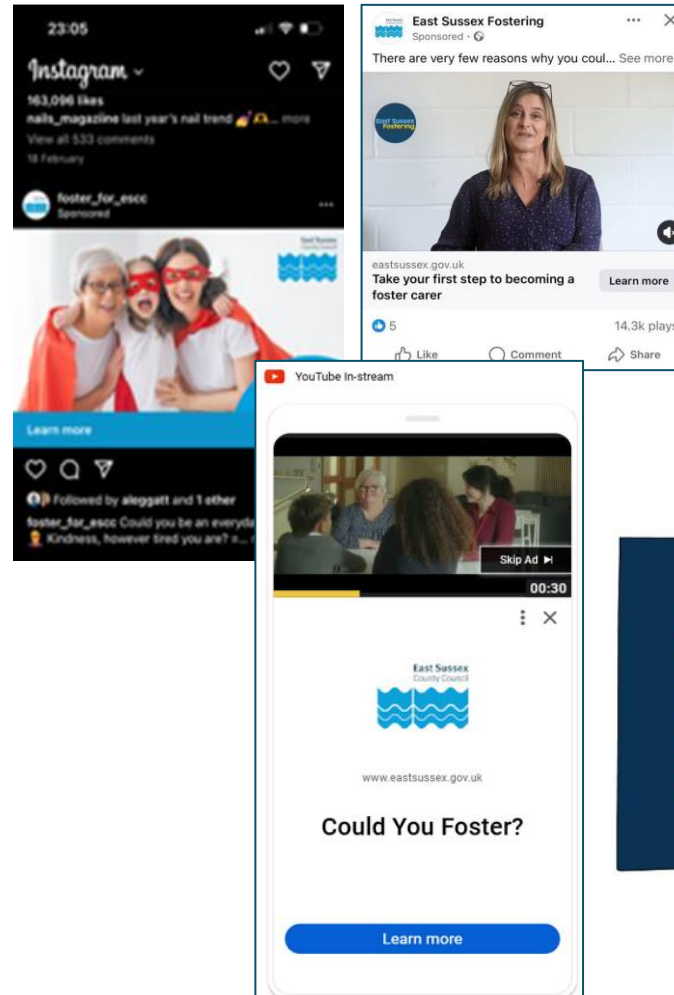
East Sussex  
Fostering



Website refresh  
with new  
branding and  
increased  
functionality



Multi-platform digital  
and traditional  
campaigns ongoing



# East Sussex Fostering

# Assessment

COMPASSIONATE | PROGRESSIVE | FLEXIBLE  
THOROUGH | REALISTIC | INNOVATIVE

- Aim from case allocation to Panel approval is 3 to 4 months; we perform strongly against statistical neighbours and IFAs where 6+ months is typical
- Moved from **Skills to Foster** pre-approval training platform to **Becoming a Fostering Family** as a pilot - more reflective with emphasis on attachments of enquirer. Similar cost to the fostering service
- Recruitment Ambassadors group of diverse and experienced foster carers are available to enquirers can talk to 'real' foster carers for an initial chat before and during the assessment process
- **Valuing Care** tool being built in to the whole fostering service from the outset at assessment stage



# Assessment Statistics

2024/25	Enquiries	Progressed to Assessment	Closed by Service	Closed by Applicant	Approvals (households)
Q1	71	27	9	35	8
Q2	65	29	4	32	4
Q3	70	28	2	30	12
Q4	70	22	12	11	6
Total	276	106	27	108	30

## Reasons applicants closed their application:

- 3 (AW1) - fostering not as expected
- 1 (AW2) - assessment not as expected
- 26 (AW3) - change in situation (non-financial)
- 78 (AW0) - did not respond to attempts to contact/follow-up enquiry\*

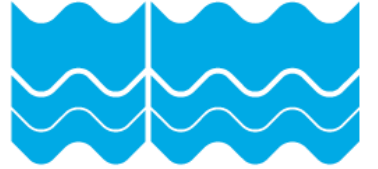
\*Applicants who progress to assessment and approval often tell us that they have thought about fostering for several years and made previous enquiries. [The Fostering Network](#) reports that 'on average it takes three years between first considering fostering and approval, with the process becoming significantly more rapid the older the foster carer was when they first thought about fostering'.



# Approvals

From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, ESCC fostering service gained approval for 30 households offering 47 places (compared with 26 households offering 38 places in 2023/24)

- Of the 30 new households, 27 were mainstream carers, 3 were connected family-and-friends foster carers and 4 were transferring from an independent fostering agency (IFA)
  - Characteristics of the 4 households transferring to ESCC:
    - 2 were approved for parent and child fostering; a recruitment target / key service need
    - 2 were already caring for ESCC children resulting in a saving for ESCC budgets
    - 2 were caring for children from other local authorities resulting in income for ESCC
- 22 allocated assessments were booked for presentation to the fostering panel but unfortunately did not progress. 1 was closed by the fostering service due to a standard of care investigation and report with a transfer application and 21 were withdrawn by applicants with the following reasons:
  - 10 - change in family circumstances
  - 4 - transfer application and decided to remain with IFA
  - 2 - impact on their own children/not right time
  - 4 - fostering not as expected
  - 1 - fostering assessment not as expected



# Assessment feedback from foster carers

“ [Our assessing social worker] has been absolutely amazing and has answered every query quickly and been there for both of us throughout the last few months ”

“ The whole experience has been extremely positive from the initial phone call... We were treated with respect throughout and was able to reflect at our own pace ”

“ We appreciated the pace of the assessment process (not rushed) and the timings of the meeting were arranged to suit our diaries ”

“ [We would have liked] more contact with other applicants and more access to foster carers ”

“ I really enjoyed the whole process and already felt like a valued member of your team ”



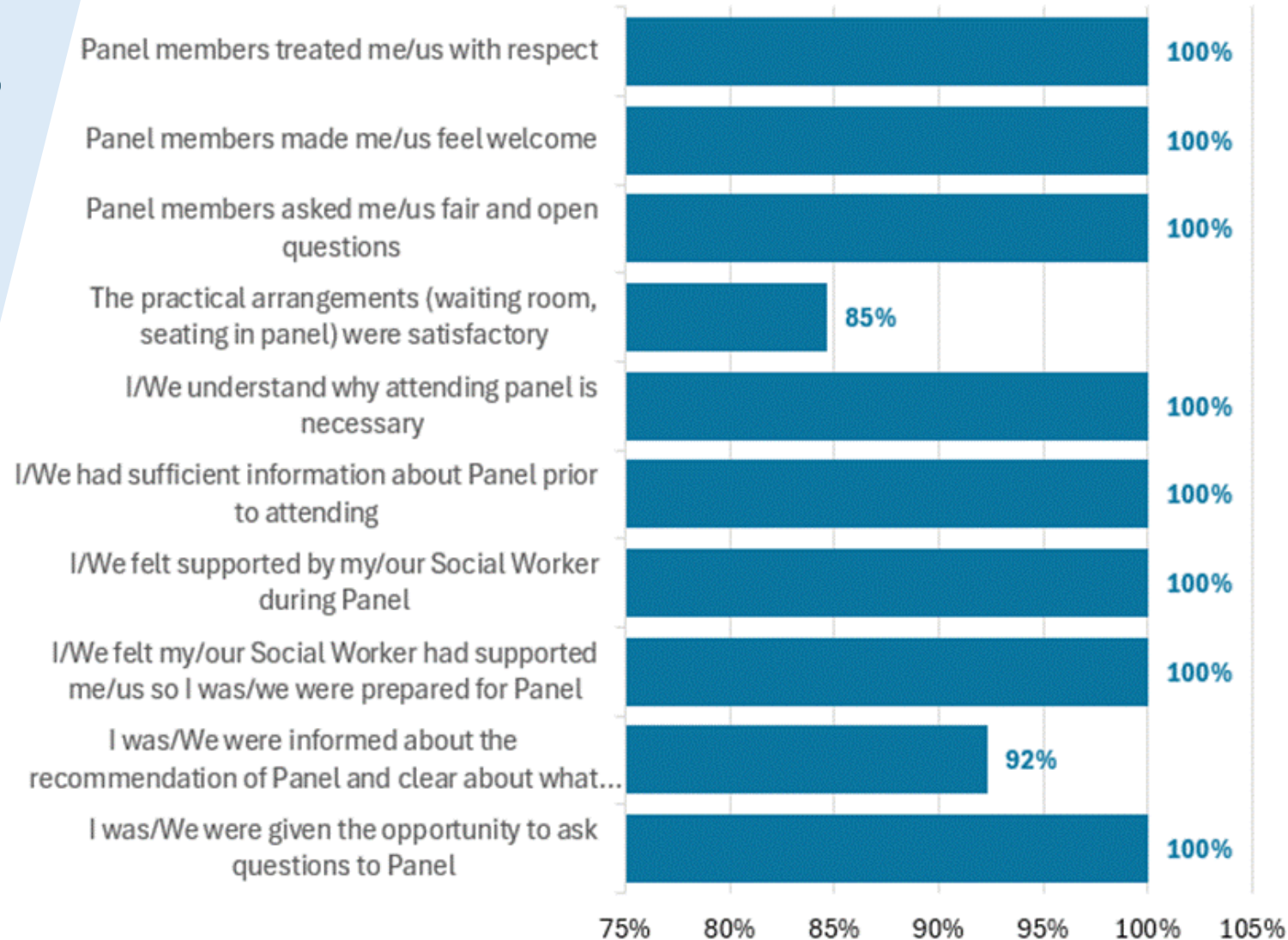
# Panel feedback from foster carers

The Assessment Team  
build positive relationships  
with prospective foster  
carers and prepare and  
support them for Panel.

13 respondents replied to our post  
panel survey



## How respondents found their fostering panel experience during 24/25 (strongly agree/agree)



# LOCAL AUTHORITY **Fostering** SOUTH EAST

ESCC joined a funded Department for Education project to promote recruitment and retention across the South East region and align local authority fostering service practice and process.

Launched July 2024, this pilot evidenced that ESCC's recruitment and retention processes and outcomes were already of a high standard and benchmarked strongly against neighbouring authorities.

The pilot highlighted the benefits of a more collaborative working relationship with neighbouring LA's from our LAFSE 'sub cluster', namely West Sussex (WSCC) and Surrey County Councils and Brighton & Hove (B&H) City Council.

There were some positives through the LAFSE pilot including some useful workshops for staff and foster carers and late into the pilot there were a couple of broad advertising campaigns promoting local authority fostering.

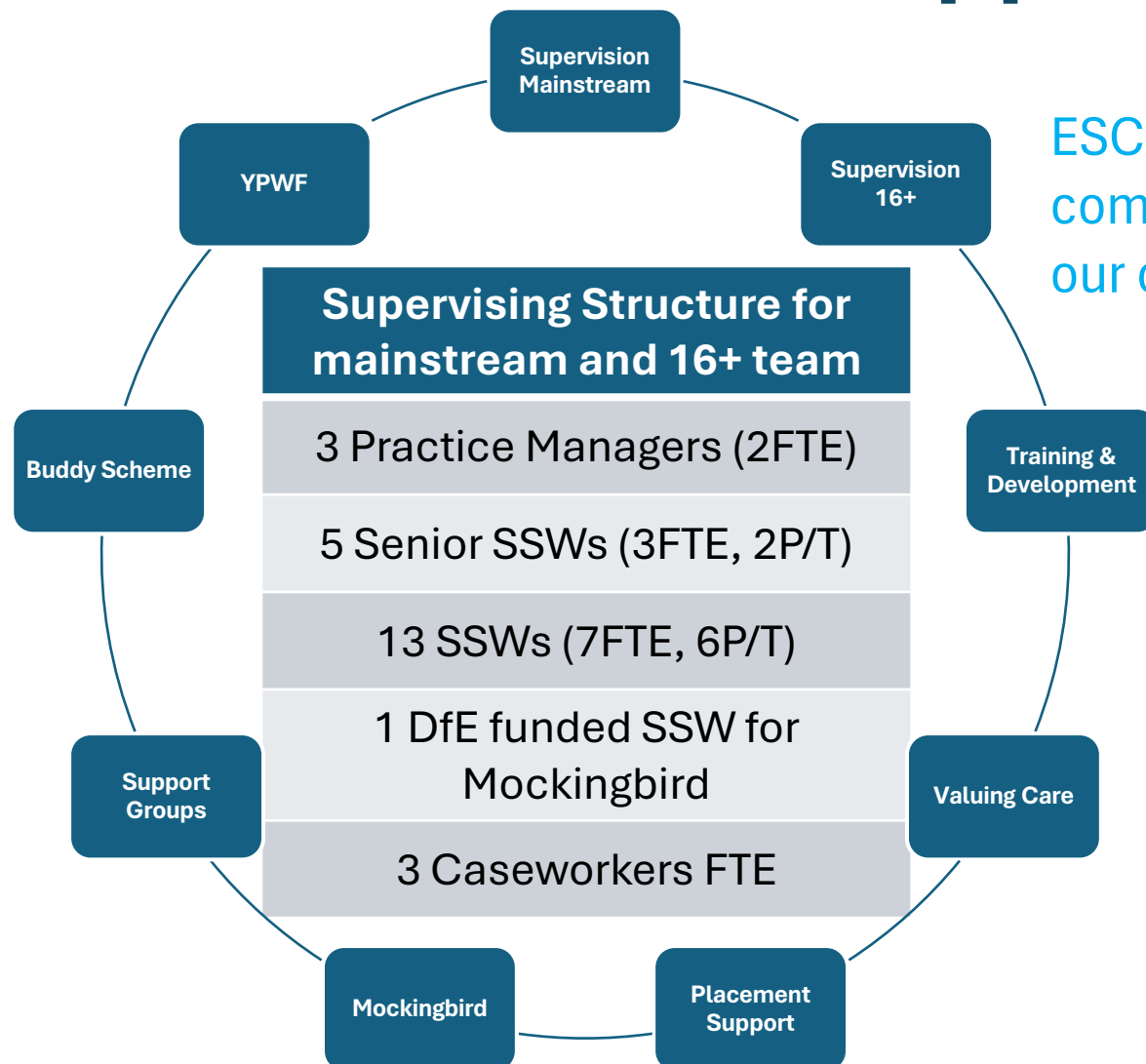
Campaigns and events did not always align with our local offer and it became clear we could achieve more effective results by combining some resources for collaborative projects with neighbouring local authority fostering services which were already working well.



**East Sussex**  
**Fostering**



# Retention and Support



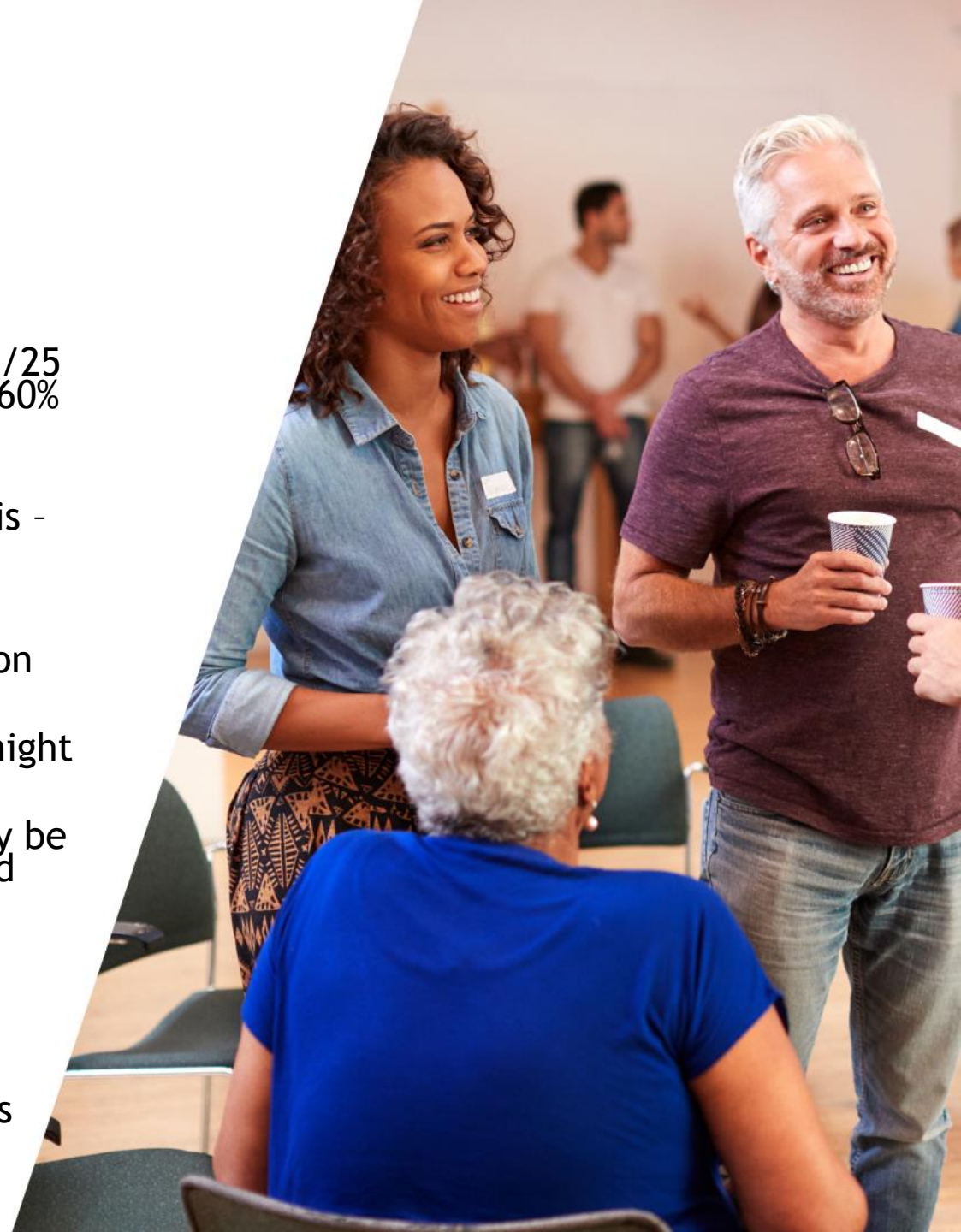
ESCC's supervision and support of its foster carer cohort combines a linked structure of several teams to enable our carers to:

- receive a consistent level of support and care through positive relationships built with their Supervising Social Worker (SSW)
- deliver excellent standards of care
- feel valued, respected and supported
- improve their professional and personal skills and outcomes via the Valuing Care approach
- recommend fostering for ESCC
- experience whole family fostering benefits such as the Young People Who Foster (YPWF) group



# Retention and Support

- We place children with both in-house and independent foster carers (IFA). Of all our children placed with foster carers as at 31/3/25, 76% were placed in-house. Benchmarking data for 24/25 is not yet available, but the national average for 23/24 sat at 60% in-house utilisation. (24/25 data will be available as part of 903 return after 30/6)
- Commitment to keep pace with National Minimum Allowance uplifts as defined by The Fostering Network on an ongoing basis - increases are agreed at senior management level
- Specialisms in 16+ and Parent & Child fostering
- 9% (22/245 households) are Connected Carers within supervision caseloads
- Regular events eg 'thank you' summer picnic, #FosterCareFortnight celebrations
- Buddy scheme offers peer support to approved carers who may be experiencing a different situation for the first time. Connected Carers can access Buddy advice and support, and we have one Connect Carer Buddy
- GEM scheme - monthly recognition and award programme for those foster carers who have 'gone the extra mile' which is highlighted in bi-monthly foster carers' newsletter
- Regular cohort newsletters sharing updates and positive stories



# 16+/Supporting Independence

The 16+/Supporting Independence Team (SIT) works within the fostering service dedicated toward working with teenagers and young people aged 16 and over, including a "Staying Put" scheme for those aged 16-21.

This specialised team focuses on supporting carers to provide placements for young people moving towards independence. The primary goal is to equip young people with the skills and knowledge needed for successful independent living, such as budgeting, cooking, and public transport usage.

260 placement referrals were received by 16+ SIT, with 139 young people finding homes through our in-house resource



# 16+/Supporting Independence

- In 2024/25, the 16+ SIT supervisor responsibility rose from 39 to 57 fostering households, made up of the following approval types:
  - 17 x Mainstream fostering households
  - 7 x Hybrid carer households (combined approval as foster carers and the previous approval as supported lodgings providers)
  - 15 x 16+ fostering households
  - 5 x Connected Fostering households
  - 11 x Staying Put only arrangements
  - 2 x New approvals & fostering assessments
  - 14 new enquiries from people interested in becoming 16+/ SIT foster carers which led to 2 new approvals. We are currently assessing a further 2 16+ fostering households and engaging with 4 prospective 16+ fostering households.

## Marketing activity to support recruitment included:

- Rebranded from Supported Lodgings to 16+/Supporting Independence Team
- New dedicated web page
- Flyers produced
- Social media awareness campaign
- Purchase of stock images
- Newsletter distribution





# Foster carers' supervision feedback

“ I was pleased I was able to be supported by [SSW], I am able to be open and honest and welcome her support. ”

“ I always really enjoy working with my SSW and find her so professional and thoughtful in her approach. She is always able to bring a clarity and perspective to situations which is so important especially as sometimes I am too emotionally involved or tired to make clear judgements or have a good overview ”

“ Although we have had a difficult year, I feel we work well with members of the department. We are lucky to have a supportive social worker ”

“ Our SSW has been a pleasure to work with over the past twelve months. She has provided very positive support, and I always look forward to supervision sessions where any concerns can be discussed in an encouraging manner. She is very approachable and has always been forthcoming in sharing any relevant information to help us in our roles as carers ”



# Improving Practice

We continue to solicit, review and act on our service user feedback. We send out surveys post panel for assessment and panel experiences in addition to annual review content to inform our direction and decision-making regularly.

- A significant piece of work to update fostering supervision and annual review forms ensures that ESCC is compliant with current legislation and strengthens our contemporary working practice.
- The Valuing Care approach continues to be embedded across the service operationally within assessments and reviews. This aims to support the matching of children with carers and identifies capacity and development needs.



# Mockingbird

The set up and launch of Mockingbird was included as part of the Department for Education LAFSE pilot

- The Mockingbird Family Model, creates a familiar network around an experienced fostering household, known as a Hub Home.
- Six to ten families come together like an extended family. Mockingbird families will share experience and understanding, celebrate successes, and support each other through challenging times.
- The Hub Home carers arrange monthly meetings and bring everyone together for social events such as lunches, picnics and fun activities. They also provide a menu of support including sleepovers at the Hub Home, peer support for the carers, and 1:1 support for children and young people in the constellation.



# Mockingbird

Working with The Fostering Network on the premise 'it takes a village to raise a child', we believe the ESCC Mockingbird scheme will:

- contribute to long term and ongoing invest-to-save benefits with an efficient use of resources within the self-sufficient Constellation(s)
- improve outcomes for our children with stronger placement stability
- increase foster carer retention, reducing 'burnout' and offer agility in 'stepping in' support
- reduce use of independent agencies and offer opportunities for residential step-down
- support family contact involvement supports reunification
- ESCC have recruited:
  - Liaison Senior Social Worker
  - 1st Hub Home Carer household and 8 Satellite fostering households - supporting 17 children



# Placement Support

The Placement Support Service (PSS) continues to work with some of our most vulnerable cared for young people, helping to stabilise their placements and preventing them from breaking down.

- We work out in the community, Knockhatch Adventure Park being a firm favourite, or across our three sites; our caravans in Newhaven, Crowhurst and at Little Dunbar in Hailsham
- We continue to work closely with our Placements and Commissioning team, offering urgent and short-term support
- PSS continues to work with the Virtual School, supporting young people, both cared for or those on the edge of care, who are excluded or on a reduced school timetable
- Our dedicated placement support workers support young adults in the Through Care Team, who may live independently, residentially (in-house) or with an external agency
- We offer activity days in each week of the school holidays, for the Juniors, Intermediates and the Seniors. These range from horse riding, water sports, forest school and rock climbing (see 'real' event photo overleaf)



# Placement Support

- 125 Placement Support Packages
- Supporting in-house Parent and Child placements
- 25 young adults supported and oversight of 3 properties
- 146 sessions, supporting 13 young people for the Virtual School
- 14 packages of support ended, several of which moved on to a residential placements, one returned home and 6 transferred to the Through Care Team



# Placement Support feedback

## FROM PROFESSIONALS

"This placement would not be sustainable without PSS\*, he has benefited so much" (CSW)

"It's not just respite, there is a real quality to their work"  
(SW LACAMHS)

\*Placement Support Service

\*\*Placement Support Worker

## FROM CARERS

"It gives them someone else in their support network who is constant and supportive, I cannot speak highly enough of our PSW"\*\*

"Our PSW's are very supportive of the boys and myself. They are brilliant at being consistent and are much valued"

"When managing challenging behaviour, knowing there is a break on the horizon, regardless of when, can really help fuel you to keep going"

"It's a wonderful service and I am extremely grateful for this"





# YPWF

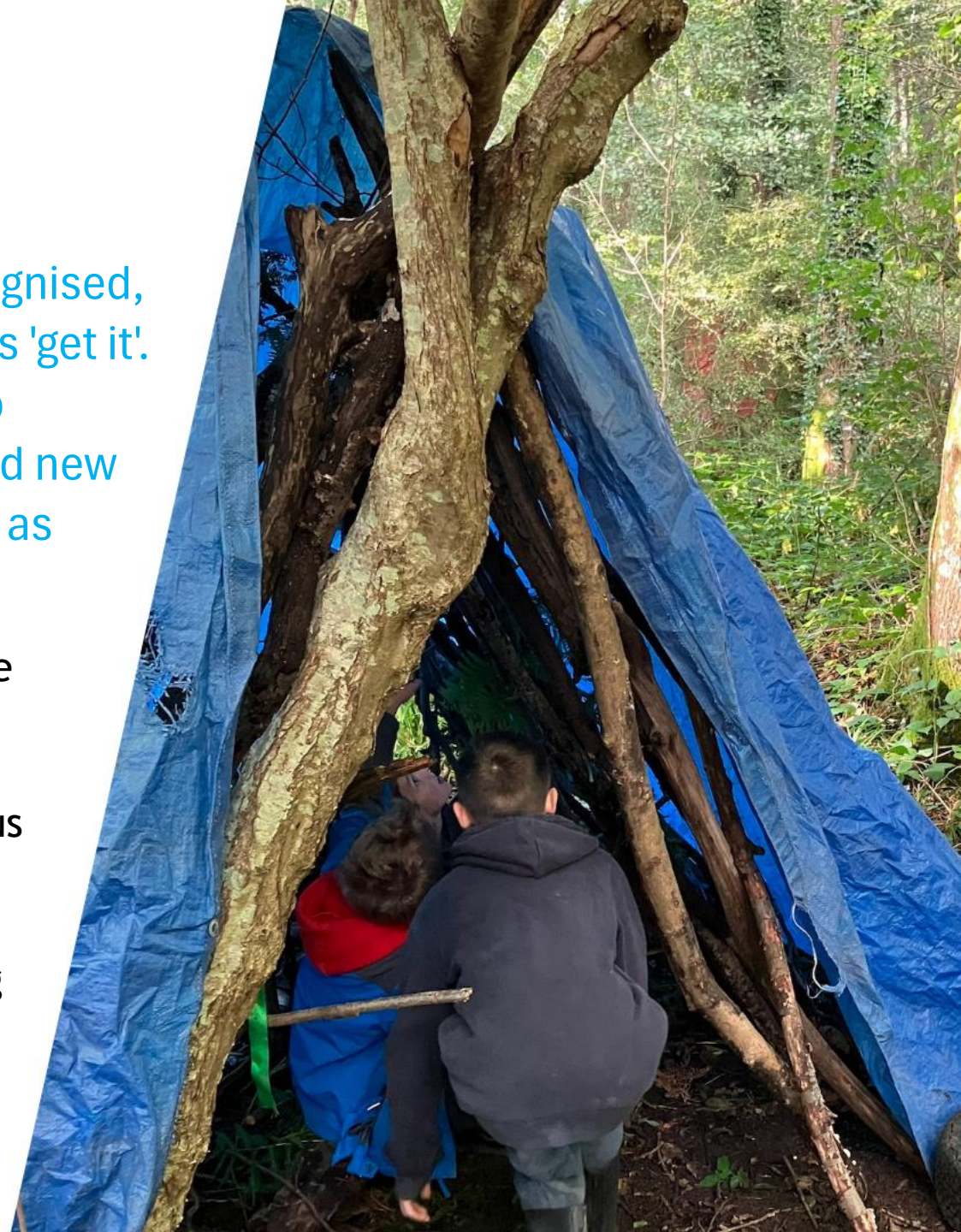
(Young People Who Foster)

We want the children in fostering households to feel recognised, valued and supported. We know not all their other friends 'get it'. The YPWF meet-ups are designed to give them a space to discuss what works well and any concerns. They can build new relationships with other young people who foster as well as with the fostered children in their homes.

Membership of YPWF is open to a wide group of young people from 7 to 16 years old. We often have 17-year-olds who continue to attend the sessions too.

Attendees include primarily the children of foster carers, plus grandchildren (4), adopted children (4) and children of SGO or connected carers

Sessions are delivered by a team of 3 or 4 officers depending on the attendance numbers. These include staff from different teams across the service including assessment, commissioning and supervision.





# YPWF

A series of events is planned for each year including social activities and learning and support sessions, the topics are often chosen and planned together with the young people.

Attendance levels doubled consistently throughout 2024/25 compared to recent years with new fostering families being encouraged to take part from the assessment stage

Learning and support sessions cover a range of topics:

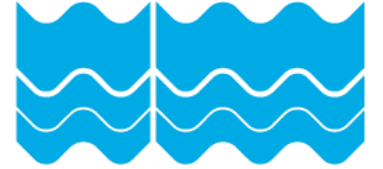
- saying goodbye, positive endings
- supporting and welcoming foster children to settle into their new home
- life lenses work, adding positive experiences to new relationships, balancing scales

Activity days/evenings 2024/25 included:

- Apr24 Learning and support session (8)
- Sept24 Lymley Wood - forest school, obstacle courses, archery (15)
- Nov24 Christmas Meal - social celebration together (20)
- Jan25 Bowling evening (19)
- Mar25 Rock climbing (16)

**Development...** We are supporting a 17-year-old girl who has been an active YPWF member to become a YPWF mentor. She wants to help plan and run some sessions and develop confidence for herself and the other attendees through her membership experience over the years.

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Fostering



# YPWF feedback

“ I just wanted to say a big thank you for letting my daughter join last night; she had such a lovely evening and really made her feel part of something special, which fostering truly is. (carer)”

“ I love YWPF because it's a place where people ask about me rather than the fostered child. It's a time when adults are not talking about the fostered child and what is best for them. I like being around other young people who also foster, not to necessarily talk about it but it's just nice to know. There is an understanding they all have. It's hard to explain to my other friends what fostering is, but I don't have to with this group. I love the activities the most - they are really fun. ”  
(YPWF)

“ Thank you for giving them all a great evening. (carer)”

# Training and Development

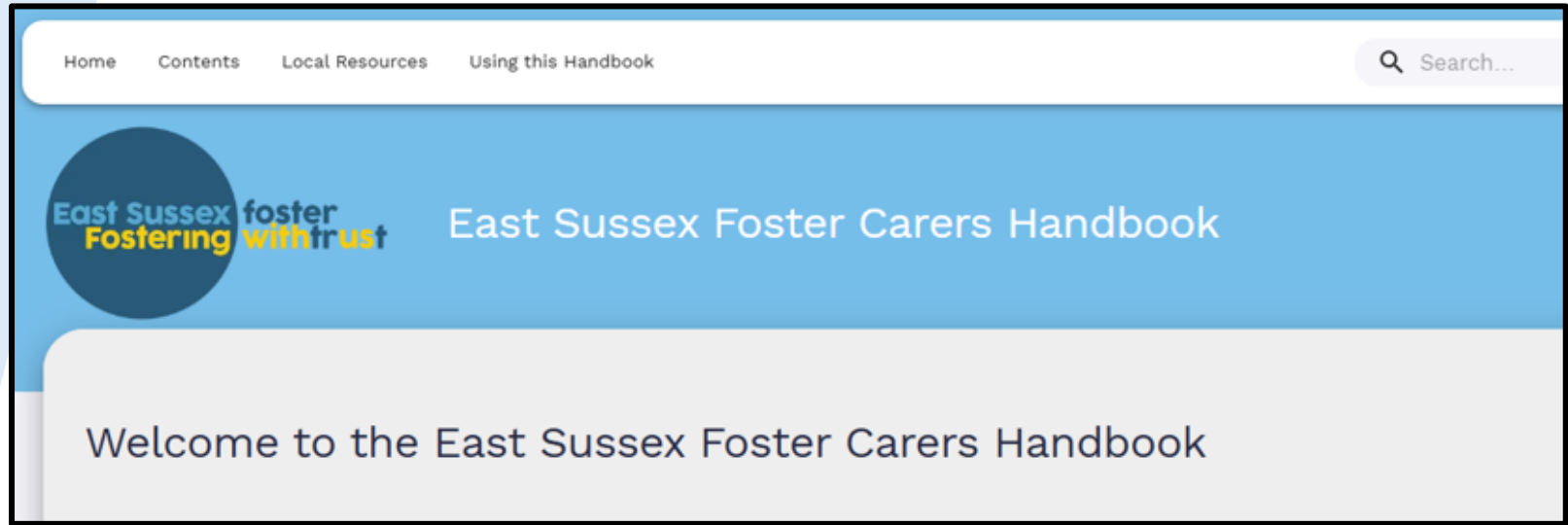
Our bespoke foster carer training is reviewed every year and managed by a dedicated senior social worker within the SSW team

- From April 2024 - March 2025, we ran 71 live training courses for approved carers with 608 places taken up compared to 456 last year - an increase of 33%
- The total number of places taken up by foster carers on all of our training courses this year was 1088 (April 2024 to March 2025)
- Total e-learning courses accessed is 480 compared to 651 last year with access to over 120 courses
- 224 mandatory courses have been completed since Learning Pool's implementation in September 2024
- Accessible lunchtime 'responsive webinars' on topics carers have requested are now 6-weekly and have been attended by 67 foster carers. Topics have included: lying, food, anxiety and self-harm



# Training and Development

A significant piece of work completed this year was ESCC's innovative new digital Foster Carer Handbook.



## New online Foster Carer Handbook

- Launched October 2024 and can be found at <https://eastsussexfch.trixonline.co.uk>
- This houses all updated policies, processes, information and guidance. It is easily accessible and fully searchable to both foster carers and staff
- Includes an 'Anytime Resource Bank' of learning resources including videos, podcasts, books and articles we can add to and update on an ongoing basis



# Training and Development

- Support groups are running monthly in 3 locations plus men who foster groups
- Buddy scheme has a growing pool of 20 carers to support peers on specific issues
- Wellbeing events in conjunction with ESFCA from art to reflexology
- Wellbeing workshops to explore the impact of fostering on carers and give language to some common fostering experiences
- Training specific monthly newsletter started January 2025
- Collaboration with neighbouring LAs including the parent and child fostering conference (over 90 attendees), TSDS workshops, and menopause demystified for foster carers



# ESCC Fostering Service

A final word  
from  
Operations  
Manager  
Ade Sewell

We have built on advice following the positive Ofsted inspection last year to inform our learning moving forwards as an agile and effective service.



This prompted a review of our supervision documentation and a push to engage with long service carers to increase attendance at contemporary and relevant training sessions. We also engaged in a placement commissioning and support restructure.

We are mindful of the national trend where stranger foster carer recruitment is dominated by short breaks/respite approvals and the need to encourage more enquiries from applicants prepared to be more flexible to meet the needs of the service. The new ESCC remuneration package reflects this need and represents an opportunity for potential carers and existing short breaks/respite carers to focus on fostering and extend their flexibility.

After holding on for us for years to stabilise post-pandemic capacity, we recently lost many loyal, long service carers to retirement. However, recruitment success has enabled us to end this year with a strong net gain and a younger average age within our carer cohort. We have increased specialist parent and child placements and seen an influx of transfers from independent private fostering agencies.

**East Sussex**  
**Fostering**

# ESCC Fostering Service

## Achievements

The commitment of our foster carers and the teams supporting them continues to deliver an outstanding level of service despite the challenge of budget restrictions in the public sector.

With the highest number of enquiries in five years, a 33% conversion rate from home visit to approval and a net gain of 17 households and 25 places, we look to build on this positive base.



The launch of our first Mockingbird constellation opens up the potential to support our children and fostering families in a new way.

Our Recruitment Ambassadors and Buddy scheme offer a further layer of support to enquirers and approved foster carers as and when they need it.

SSWs have taken over Placement Planning for all children placed with in house foster carers following a successful pilot and review of the template

The refreshed website, Digital Foster Carer Handbook and rebrand of the service ensures local people are more aware of our local offer and existing carers are taking advantage of the flexibility of new assets for training and helpful resources to support them in their unique roles

**East Sussex**  
**Fostering**

# ESCC Fostering Service

## Next steps and priorities for 2025/26

- Focus on retention of existing cohort of foster carers developing the flexibility we need as part of our team around the child. Modern fostering means we are preparing children for reunification and/or a return to their familiar networks when possible.
- The stability of our fostering resource must be echoed within our professional network. Our team retention is positive and with the exception of maternity and retirement, our people stay with us, and that continuity supports our carers and all the work we do. Targeted workforce development will further enhance practice.
- The service will continue its development plan for the Placement Support Service to work within the remit of the Placements and Commissioning Team maximising its potential to support complex foster placements.
- Building on existing relationships with WSCC and B&H to align practice, share resources and work more closely in the future whilst maintaining our distinctive identities.
- We will review the Mockingbird programme, continue to work in partnership with the ESCC Through Care team, implement a new 'Tableau' fostering dashboard tool to improve tracking and reporting as well as looking to develop new a GDPR compliant and secure two-way Provider Portal to enhance carer communications.





# Priorities 2025 /26



Focus recruitment and development of foster carer resource to deliver more flexible, substantive placement options

Focus on how the Fostering Service can work with Placements & Commissioning to achieve effective step down

Embed 1<sup>st</sup> Mockingbird constellation with ambition to open two more constellations by end of 2026/27

Ensure smooth transition of Placement Support Service to Placement and Commissioning Service and embed flexible, needs led provision

Work with WSCC and B&H to enhance Regional Fostering Recruitment, Development and Support

Work to respond to unique needs of Connected Carers

Launch Fostering Dashboard to improve performance management and analysis

Audit implementation of the new Supervision Form and digitise this to enhance oversight

Ensure that Training and Development offer remains relevant for experienced carers and addresses contemporary issues

Further develop a culture of professional responsibility, improvement and innovation across all staff levels

Work with ESFCA to ensure appropriate representation of all ESCC foster carers

