

Fostering Briefing Update March 2026

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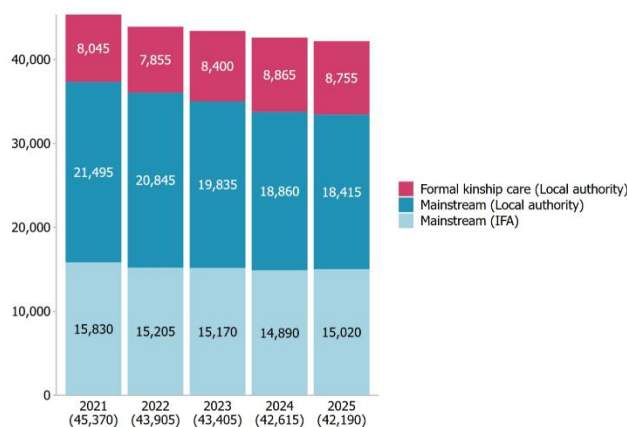
National Picture

Full information that reflects the national challenge within Fostering Recruitment has been presented to scrutiny panel in December 2025 (Please see full briefing). This picture remains the same. There continues to be a national challenge with fostering recruitment. The government has introduced the biggest national reforms of the fostering service. [Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000 more children - GOV.UK](#)

Statistics released by government November 2025 shows the following:

During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

- At the end of March 2025, there were 42,190 fostering households in England. The number of households has decreased steadily since 2021, and the make-up has changed. Formal kinship care fostering is the preferred route in many cases, and it is increasingly common for this type of foster care to be used to meet the needs of individual children. The largest subset of fostering households is mainstream local authority households (18,415). These currently account for 44% of total fostering households (Figure 1).
- **Figure 1: Number of fostering households by type and sector as at 31 March, over the last 5 years**

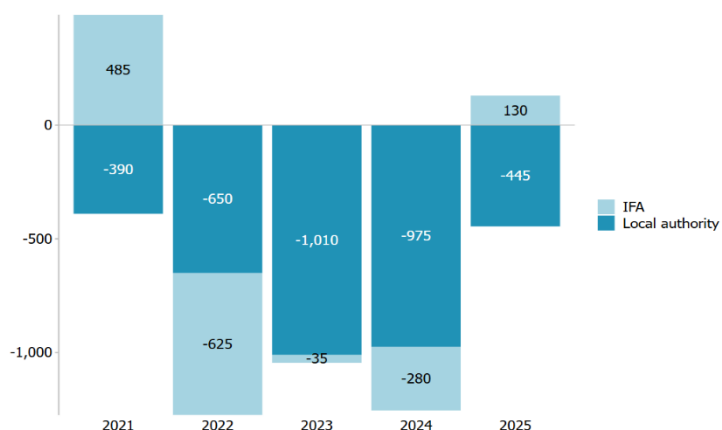


Mainstream Fostering (National Picture):

The number of local authority mainstream households nationally is still decreasing. Between 2021 and 2025, the number of approved or newly approved mainstream local authority

households has fallen by 14%. The rate of decline in the last year (2024 - 2025) is slower than in the previous 3 years. For the first time since 2021 there has been a net increase in the number of IFA households. **(Figure 2).**

Figure 2: Year-on-year net change in mainstream fostering households by sector over the last 5 years



Data for Figure 3: Percentage change in number of approved mainstream fostering households by region between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025

Region	IFA	Local authority
East Midlands	8%	-5%
East of England	0%	-2%
London	1%	0%
North East, Yorkshire and Humber	-2%	-3%
North West	-2%	-2%
South East	-2%	-1%

Region	IFA	Local authority
South West	-4%	-4%
West Midlands	8%	-2%

[Main findings: fostering in England 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

Shropshire Fostering Service update:

Overview:

The demand for foster placements remains high and far outstrips the sufficiency available.

The recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market with aggressive marketing of Independent Fostering Agencies impacting recruitment. Larger independent agencies spend a significant amount on marketing and retention events, subsequently impacting recruitment figures.

Development of the service has been required to compete with the external market and support carers to understand the value of fostering for their local authority.

The focus continues to be on strengthening the quality of enquiries, keeping warm enquirers who do not progress at the first point of contact to aid conversion at a later stage and successfully supporting potential foster carers through the training, assessment, approval and matching process.

In the last 3 years we have worked hard to increase our internal fostering recruitment.

Transformation has focused on:

- Developing marketing and recruitment, with increased focus on a digital approach to recruitment, development of the 'Shropshire Fostering' brand, greater visibility
- Refreshed website and further update in progress for 26/27
- Increased recruitment events – rise in engagement with our virtual events leading to more enquiries
- Streamlined communication channels
- Increased Quality Assurance mechanisms
- Increased support offer for foster carers with the aim to ensure foster carers feel valued, well supported and Shropshire retains foster carers

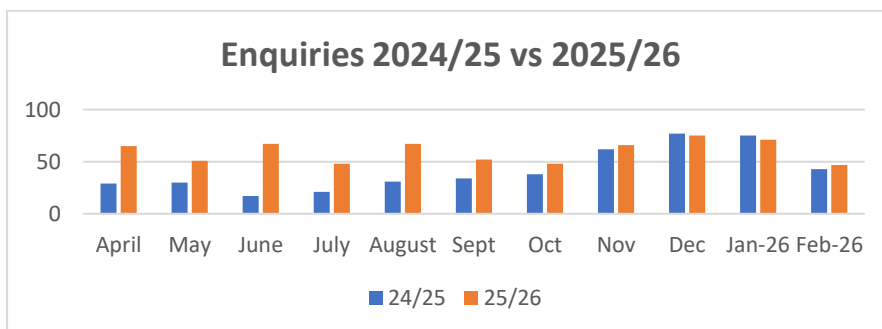
The Fostering Service has been through a recent restructure implemented from 01/01/26; this seeks to address the competing practice demands between Kinship Fostering and Mainstream Fostering recruitment.

Marketing and recruitment:

Digital Marketing: Digital marketing remains our primary activity. We maintain close contact with our digital ads agency, to ensure clear expectations to optimise our Facebook Ads and Google Ads; this digital marketing is responsible for 80% of our enquiries (combination of direct lead generation and webinar registrations with all copy produced internally). We have traffic ad campaigns running for the website and event bookings. Increased digital exposure is in place via Shropshire Live, who have a high traffic news website and online radio station. Shropshire Fostering has website banners and radio ads, with the offer to feature radio interviews regularly. This activity is positively impacting enquiry figures.

Communication channel and data insight: The service utilises Mailchimp communications system to allow for easier, more automated ongoing communications with both enquirers and existing carers. The Fostering Service have developed strong tracking of enquiry data, ensuring people who register for information but do not attend our webinars receive follow up communications and contact in line with our strategy to increase sufficiency. There are currently over 800 people in Mailchimp’s ‘enquiries’ audience and they receive communication from us once a fortnight: sharing news and encouraging prospective foster carers to get in touch. From the data held we understand that it can take an average of 10 months from someone considering Fostering to actually making a decision to progress with an agency.

Overall enquiries increased from **509** 2024/25 to **677** 2025/26, supported by increasing digital marketing and implementation of a strong communications system.



Website and Branding: Shropshire Fostering now has strong branding, this includes marketing collateral for councillor meetings and public visibility, including banners, leaflets,

postcards and branded merchandise for events. Banners are now on display at numerous high footfall county venues. Website has had an uplift and further work is being further developed to enhance the platform used. Stronger participation for recruitment events is via online engagement, leading onto more conversations from enquiry to Expression of Interest to Initial Home Visit.

A referral scheme was also launched for Shropshire Council employees and Shropshire Fostering Carers, this resulted in 2 foster carer approvals in 25/26.

Partner Organisations: Marketing Manager is working with local businesses. Partner organisations are supporting our goals as a fostering service for the benefit of our Shropshire children. Shrewsbury football club have supported the development of a weekly Wellbeing Hub and children have been invited to join their 'Kicks' program.

Foster Carer Enquiries – Approval – De-registrations

Overall enquiries and approvals over the last 3 years for Mainstream Fostering increased as follows:

The fostering service has **81 Approved Mainstream Foster Carers**. With a target to approve a further 30 Foster Carers in 26/27.

	23/24	24/25	25/26
Enquiries (personal details provided via web form)	252	509	677
EOI's (Expression Of Interest)	38	42	80
Approvals	7	16	17 (+ 1 awaiting approval on 31/03/26)
De registration	6 (+ 3 transferred to Supported Living)	7 (1 transfer to Supported Living)	8 (Foster Carer retirements / De- registrations)

Mainstream Fostering recruitment has continued to show positive progress. We saw 100% increase on mainstream recruitment figures between 23/24 and 24/25. There has been a slight increase in 25/26. Approval figures have been impacted by delays in statutory checks including DBS and Medicals that are mandatory for the recruitment process. **As of 31/03/26** there are **a further 11 Mainstream Fostering Households** in assessment who are due to be approved by August 2026.

We continue to monitor and learn from de-registrations to support retention and to ensure the right support at the right time to address instability within care arrangements. In 2025 - 2026, 8 Mainstream Foster Carers have been de-registered due to 3 retiring and 1 due to ill health, 1 no longer wishing to foster, 2 due to change in family circumstances, 1 due to safeguarding concern. Understanding of the demographic of our carers, including age and reasons for resignations supports strategic planning, learning and opportunities for development within our service plans, recruitment and retention strategy.

Context to placement demands:

Recruitment of Mainstream Foster Carers is integral to increasing sufficiency and decreasing the number of children placed in IFA and high-cost residential placements.

It is important to understand the demand for internal placements within the wider context of demand for services within children services. Children Services aims to support children to remain within their families where possible. Alternatively, where this is not possible a fostering family arrangement will be sought, and external provision will only be sought where there is no internal resources.

Work is being completed with Stepping Stones to support stability of care arrangements and prevent family breakdowns within fostering arrangements.

Increasing sufficiency of foster placements whilst also addressing early support for children to remain within their families will reduce demand. Increasing the capacity of social care practitioners to provide support to children within different care arrangements will also aid stability and drive forward permanence plans, in turn driving down both demand and cost.

Key areas of focus in the next 6 months for marketing and recruitment:

- Work with DFE and region on Fostering Reforms for 2026 / 2027
- Marketing Strategy for 2026 / 2027. Continue to increase sufficiency, recruiting more mainstream foster carers and retaining existing. Increase conversion rate of enquiries to EOI to approval

- Commissioning and procurement for medicals in assessment – increase timeliness of approvals
- DBS – HR to embed digital ID checks for DBS and streamline support and timeliness. This will have a positive impact and reduce delays within the recruitment process.
- Refreshed website to be launched, this will aim to increase the number of enquiries and reduce any barriers.
- Development of Power BI further assist data and insights that inform strategic planning.
- Networking with local business leaders to raise the profile and support for fostering and the children in our care

Key areas of focus in the next 6 months for Foster Carer retention:

- Work with DFE on National Fostering Reform, strengthen efficiencies and stronger joint service delivery.
- Development of the therapeutic training offer. Progressive approach to training and development to ensure children’s stability within care arrangements and prevent escalation to high cost placements.
- Increase participation opportunities allowing foster carers and children to shape the service they receive
- Increase benefits available to foster carers through wider council services and engagement with local businesses
- Full roll out of Foster Carer portal to increase self service functions
- The Mockingbird programme delivers the Mockingbird Family Model. This centres on a constellation where one foster home acts as a hub, offering planned and emergency respite, advice, training and support. We have a well-established Mockingbird constellation in Shropshire with 1 hub carer supporting 9 families within the constellation. Plans have been submitted to grow this model further by developing 2 more constellations with the support of the Fostering Network.