

To: Education and Children Policy Board

On: 19 January 2017

Report by: Director of Children's Services

**Heading: Annual Report of the Adoption and Fostering Panel 2015/16
Update on developments for Looked After Children**

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report refers to the ninth annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering and Adoption Service.
 - 1.2. The Annual report sets out the work undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Service in the year 2015/2016 and is set in the context of the broader issues pertaining to Looked After and Accommodated Children.
 - 1.3. The report also makes reference to the continuing progress being made with the recruitment of Renfrewshire's own foster carers. During the year an additional 5 foster care households were approved.
 - 1.4. The report also considers the future work of the panel, the continued work on improving timescales for adoptive placements and the outcome of the inspection of the Fostering and Adoption Service by the Care Inspectorate.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Education and Children Policy Board is asked to
 - a) note the contents of the Fostering and Adoption Annual Report 2015/16
 - b) note the continuing partnership with Who Cares Scotland on issues relating to care experienced young people

3. Background

- 3.1. The Regulations supporting the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 require Social Work in its role as a Fostering and Adoption agency to operate a Fostering Panel and an Adoption Panel. These panels have the responsibility for putting forward recommendations to the agency decision maker (currently the Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice Services) regarding the suitability of people to adopt or foster children. Furthermore, the Adoption Panel considers and approves plans for children to be adopted or for the Council to apply for Permanence Orders. The Panel also considers and approves the matching of a particular child with a particular family where the plan is for the child to live there permanently.
- 3.2. Renfrewshire operates a Fostering Panel and an Adoption Panel; each with separate constitutions. The panels will often meet at the same time however each meeting separates out the Fostering panel business from the Adoption panel business to ensure that the appropriate regulations are met regarding a quorum, and for the attendance of the legal and medical adviser. From August this year we have separate Social Work managers both to chair the panel and manage the Service. This separation of roles allows for more arms length scrutiny by the panel chair.
- 3.3. There are currently 20 panel members comprising elected members, social work and education staff, a legal adviser, a medical adviser, carers, independent panel members, and an independent member from the Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland. The panel is chaired by a Social Work Manager-Operations, from Children's Services and meets twice monthly. The vice chair of the panel is the independent representative from the Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland which came into being when the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) ended in the summer of 2015. There are typically 6 to 8 members sitting on the panel at each meeting. The Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel met 22 times and considered 72 agenda items over the course of the year. This is a high level of activity and has been consistently so over the past few years.
- 3.4. The panel has a unique overview of the work being undertaken to assess and approve foster carers and adopters alongside the work being undertaken by social workers to progress plans for children who cannot be cared for within their own family. The annual report has been produced as a means of sharing this work with a wider audience and to assist in the process of service planning.
- 3.5. Between 1/10/15 and 30/9/16 9 households attended preparation groups and 6 household subsequently applied to be assessed as foster carers. Renfrewshire had 87 active households of foster carers at 30th September 2016. In the period 1/10/15 and 30/9/16, an additional 5 households were registered as foster carers, and 3 foster care households left the service.
- 3.6. The report notes the ongoing need to recruit foster carers and adopters in light of the fact that numbers of children being accommodated and in need of permanent care continues to rise. We are in the process of discussing our marketing and recruitment plan for next year with the Council communications team.
- 3.7. In the period 1/10/15 and 30/9/16 a total of 9 Renfrewshire households were approved as adopters at the Renfrewshire panel. A further 3 interim (short term) foster carers were approved as permanent carers. This is a positive outcome for the children involved.

- 3.8. During the last year, the descriptors used for foster placements have changed in keeping with national guidance. Respite carers are now known as short break carers. Short term carers are now called interim carers and permanent carers remain the same.
- 3.9. The Fostering and Adoption services are subject to regulation and were inspected by the Care Inspectorate in August 2105. The Care Inspectorate reports were positive with gradings of 5 (very good) being applied to all domains inspected.
- 3.10. The Adoption Service has been working in partnership with the Scottish Governments Permanence and Care Excellence programme (PaCE) which has resulted in a significant decrease in the time taken to move young children on to adoptive placements. The success of this programme has meant that it is being rolled out nationally.
- 3.11. The Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 increases the responsibility/ duty of Local Authorities to provide Through care and Aftercare placements up to the age of 21. This means that more young people are remaining in the same placement after they are 18. The service continues to assess foster carers to be supported carers wherever this is appropriate.
- 3.12. Who Cares? Scotland is a voluntary organisation which works directly with and for children and young people who are looked after and accommodated. It provides individual advocacy but also ensures that the voices of children and young people who are care experienced are heard nationally. Influencing decision makers is one of the most critical functions it fulfils on behalf of Looked After Children in Scotland.
- 3.13. There is a long established and very positive working relationship between Renfrewshire Council and Who Cares? Scotland. The Council commissions an advocacy service from Who Cares? and they have also supported care experienced young people to participate in the work of the Council's Champion's Board. Who Cares? have delivered extensive Corporate Parenting training within our schools and Renfrewshire co-hosted their 2015 conference.
- 3.14. Two years ago Who Cares? approached Children's Services to advise that they were applying to the STV Children's Appeal for funding to undertake work within a local authority area to raise awareness of the issues faced by children in the care of the local authority and to promote understanding and acceptance of looked after children by their communities. They asked Renfrewshire if we would consider being the partner authority if their application for funding was successful and we agreed.
- 3.15. The STV Children's appeal awarded Who Cares? Scotland just under £1 million over a 5 year period.
- 3.16. The project focuses on two neighbourhoods defined by the catchment area of two Secondary Schools in Renfrewshire and the work will focus on relationship building with young people looked after in all types of care before starting to engage with the wider school community, pupils, teachers, and parents to begin the awareness raising work. This project presents Renfrewshire with the opportunity to be involved at a local community level to build on the achievements of the anti-stigma work previously undertaken nationally by Who Cares? Scotland.

Implications of this report

1. **Financial Implications**
None.
2. **HR and Organisational Development Implications**
None.
3. **Community Plan/Council Plan Implications**
Children and Young People - The work of the adoption and fostering Service means our most vulnerable children and young people who require to be looked after away from home or permanent care are protected and safe
4. **Legal Implications**
None.
5. **Property/Assets Implications**
None.
6. **Information Technology Implications**
None.
7. **Equality and Human Rights Implications**
The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health and Safety Implications**
None.
9. **Procurement Implications**
None.
10. **Risk Implications**
None.
11. **Privacy Impact**
None.

List of Background Papers

None



**THE FOSTERING
AND
ADOPTION SERVICE**

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/2016

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Foreword

Welcome to the annual report of The Fostering and Adoption Service. This report has been jointly compiled by the Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Social Work Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service and takes both a retrospective look at the previous year as well as looking to the future.

As at the 30th September 2016 Renfrewshire Council had 695 'Looked After' Children. Of these 235 were looked after at home, 177 were looked after by friends/relatives and related carers and 282 were accommodated with foster carers or within different residential placements.

A significant number of these children will be unable to return home to live with birth parents or relatives. The work of the Fostering and Adoption Service is vital in ensuring that children are placed appropriately and safely and that children who require permanent placements out with their families are moved to an appropriate household at the earliest opportunity.

The Panel provides an important quality assurance role in ensuring that the work undertaken to assess children's long term care needs and the assessment of their potential carers is carried out to the highest standards. Their role is to make recommendations to the agency decision maker who ultimately approves children's permanence plans or confirms that a household can adopt or become foster carers.

The Panel continues to be busy. From the 1st October 2015 to the 30th September 2016 32 children's permanence plans were approved by the Agency Decision Maker. This is a slight rise from the same period in 2014 / 2015 where 30 children's permanence plans were approved.

In recent years the fostering service has made great progress in recruiting foster carers and we have successfully shifted the balance of placements from external to internal. On 30.9.16 there were 134 children with Renfrewshire foster carers and 84 children in external fostering agency placements. These figures demonstrate the continuing upward trend of placing children with Renfrewshire foster carers.

We have also forged strong collaborative working arrangements with the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children (CELCIS), jointly delivering training to social work staff and agreeing to be part the PACE (Permanence and Care Excellence) pilot in 2014. This has now been rolled out across our service which has ensured a whole systems approach to permanence for children who require this.

Peter Macleod
Director of Children's Services

Introduction

This is the annual report of Renfrewshire Council's Fostering and Adoption Service and the fostering and adoption panel.

The purpose of the Panel is to consider applicants who wish to be foster carers, adopters or supported carers and to consider individual children's needs for alternative permanent carers (i.e. where the care plan for the child is that they do not return home to their birth family), this includes considering the most appropriate legal action to secure this. The Panel also consider the matching of a child with specific foster carers or adoptive carers to ensure that these are of a consistently high standard. The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.

With increasing numbers of children unable to return to their birth families activity within the fostering and adoption team continues to be high and the recruitment of foster carers and adopters continues to be a prime objective. The number of children unable to return home to live with birth families continues to increase and this is reflected in the amount of permanence planning work within the social work locality teams. For many of the children involved in the permanency planning process their journey will have started with child protection procedures which resulted in them becoming accommodated.

During the last year we have separated the structure of the panels so that we now hold a fostering panel and a permanence and adoption panel. We have also separated the management of the service from the chairing of the panel, and have a separate social work manager in each role.

The descriptors used for foster placements have changed in keeping with national guidance. Respite carers are now known as short break carers. Short term carers are now called interim carers and permanent carers remain the same.

The fostering service and the adoption service continue to be inspected by the regulatory body, the Care Inspectorate. Their most recent Inspection took place in August 2015 where all aspects of service delivery in both the Fostering and Adoption Service were assessed as Grade 5 which is very good across all domains inspected.

Included in the annual report are some of the business aspects of the panel and the types of cases considered by the Panel. It is intended that by producing an Annual report the work of the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel will be transparent and that this accountability will lead to improved services.

Context

The work of the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel needs to be viewed in the context of the numbers of Looked After and Accommodated children.

Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People

As of 30th September 2016 Renfrewshire Council had 695 Looked After Children/Young People.

Independent Sector Foster Care	84
Local Authority Foster Care	134
Local Authority Children Houses	31
Independent Sector Residential Schools	7
Independent Sector Residential Special Needs	4
Pre-adoption	16
Independent Sector – Secure	1
Independent Sector – Residential Unit	5
Children cared for by related carers/friends/relatives	177
Children looked after at home	235
Total	695

Cases Considered by the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel

Below is a breakdown of the items considered by the Panels between 1.10.15 – 30.9.16

Business Item	Number	Comments
Child adoption plans & links	14	
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	9	8 – domestic adopters 1 fostering family – adoption of child in their care
Review of Registration (adoption)	1	
Permanent fostering plans – link with current foster carer	10	The 10 children/young people were linked through the Fostering and Adoption Panel to their current foster carers. 5 children/young people with Renfrewshire Foster Carers and 5 with foster carers from independent fostering agencies
Permanent fostering plans - legal routes	18	
Approval of Renfrewshire foster carers (households)	5	3 interim fostering households and 2 short break households
Approval of Renfrewshire short-term foster carers to permanent foster carers	3	
Approval of supported carers (households)	12	
Initial review of foster carer after their 1 st year	3	
Other review of foster carers at fostering panel	7	

Panel Membership

We are fortunate to have a consistent and committed panel membership over the past year; we have recruited three new panel members with three panel members resigning. Panel membership continues to reflect a good range of experience and expertise, from social work, education, health and voluntary sector. The Panel continues to be well supported by adopters, foster carers and elected members. The Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland also continue to provide an independent panel member who also chairs panels. AFA Scotland continues to offer vital support, training and consultancy to practitioners.

Our medical advisers continue to offer a valuable service and support to the panel in respect of provision of information in relation to the children and adults being presented to panel.

We also have ongoing representation from Renfrewshire Councils Legal Service who provides written legal advice to the Panel in relation to adoption and permanence work, as well as attending the Panel to provide legal advice as required.

In the past year training for Panel members has included an input in relation to the new terminology regarding placement descriptors: - permanent fostering remains permanent fostering; short term fostering is now described as interim fostering; and respite is now described as short break fostering. There was also input on the work of the Panel over the last year.

Staffing

We have recruited three new social workers, and a new senior social worker to the Fostering and Adoption Team following other staff leaving.

At this time the structure of the Fostering and Adoption Team is: -

A Social Work Manager – who also has responsibility for kinship care, the pre and post birth team and Women and Children First service

Service Manager – responsible for the day to day management of the service

2 senior social workers– 1 for adoption/permanence, 1 for fostering.

9 full time equivalent social workers posts.

1 social work assistant.

Commitment to permanence planning

Between 1.10.15 and 30.9.16 Renfrewshire has progressed adoption and permanence plans for 32 children. Renfrewshire Council recognises the importance in progressing plans for children within appropriate time scales. There are a number of initiatives being implemented by senior management to support and enable social work staff involved in permanence work to undertake both the direct work with the child and family and the necessary reports. These initiatives include training for social workers and carers on issues specifically relevant to permanence and also working closely with fieldwork staff with regards to the needs of the child and planning for adoption or permanency.

The FACT (Family Assessment and Contact Team) assist with intensive parenting assessments for families who have already experienced permanence with previous children. These assessments are completed within appropriate time scales and, if permanence is the assessed plan for the child, a Form E (this is the report used to link the child with adopters or carers) is completed.

Making the decision to place a child permanently out with their birth family involves a high level of assessment and scrutiny. Throughout the process checks and balances are in place to ensure the best possible outcome for the child. Permanence planning work is complex, however it is also highly rewarding when children find new families to care for them for life.

The timeframe for adoption is crucial to a child's attachment security, development and longer term stability. Recent national statistics show that the average time (for all ages) between a child becoming looked after and the decision to pursue permanence is 11 months. It then takes an average of 10 months (again all ages) before a child is matched and placed with an adoptive family. Therefore there is an average period of 21 months between the child initially being placed into Local Authority Care to being then placed with their adoptive family. The work between Renfrewshire Council, the Scottish Government and CELCIS (PACE) initiative continues to reduce timescales for a child being matched and placed with an adoptive family. The benefits of this have been evidenced at the Fostering and Adoption Panel over the year 2015 – 2016 where plans for adoption are being approved.

FOSTERING SERVICE

As of the 30.9.16 we had 87 fostering households, this included permanent foster carers, interim foster carers and short break foster carers.

Development of the Fostering Service 2015 - 2016

- Our 'young people in foster care' forum has developed significantly over the last year. The group meets on a monthly basis and they have developed their own newsletter which is circulated to all children/young people in foster care.
- The development of separate Fostering and Adoption Panels and business meetings to make this more efficient and effective for panel members.
- The development of weekend training to foster carers and respite foster carers unable to attend training during the week due to work commitments to ensure all carer's training needs are supported.
- Continuing to be pro active in recruiting more carers specifically for older children and children with disabilities.
- A number of our own foster carers have claimed the children/young people that they care for, converting them to permanent foster carer status.
- Separation of the management of the Service and the chairing of the fostering and adoption panels.
- The fostering team contributed to the Scottish Government's consultation on the new proposed standards for foster carers.

Inspection

The Fostering Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in August 2015. The areas that were inspected were – Quality of Care and Support; Quality of Staffing; Quality of Management and Leadership. The Fostering service was awarded grade 5 (very good) for each of these areas. As there were no recommendations or requirements from this inspection we will not be inspected again until April 2017.

Recruitment activity 1.10.15 – 30.9.16

During the week of 26.11.15 we ran a recruitment campaign. We had two open afternoons and 1 open evening in the three main towns in Renfrewshire. We also made use of a local newspaper to run an article in relation to fostering. Unfortunately we did not get a positive

response; however, we are looking at future campaigns differently and plan to make more use of digital recruitment methods, for example using face book and twitter.

The introduction of an electronic facility for initial enquiries via e mail has proved effective. All enquires are followed up by our duty worker within 10 working days of being received, giving the enquirer time to receive and read our information pack. We have included the criteria for fostering within the report (see appendix 1).

Should the enquirer wish further information an initial visit will be completed by a social worker from the fostering and adoption team.

Discussion between the visiting social worker and the senior social worker takes place to consider whether the enquirers should be invited to preparation groups. Enquirers would then be advised of the date for next preparation group.

Where there are health issues, the enquirer has a criminal conviction or has had previous involvement with social work, an early medical or PVG check may be requested. Advice is sought from the Renfrewshire Fostering Panel medical adviser in relation to health issues and where enquirers have disclosed criminal convictions a report is submitted to the Head of Childcare and Criminal Justice before deciding to take the enquiry further.

Preparation groups

The next step after the initial enquiry, and screening, is for potential applicants to attend preparation groups. They must do this before submitting an application to be assessed to foster. Between 1.10.15 – 30.9.16 we held 2 sets of preparation groups for fostering, one in October and the second one in April. In total 9 households attended and this resulted in 6 fostering applications for assessment.

Preparation groups run for six sessions using the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' materials, the material used for the preparation groups has been reviewed in order to make use of up to date research and our own recently developed training materials. Our social workers team are skilled at leading these groups and there is also input by the senior social workers at the last session. Two workers lead all six sessions thus providing continuity for the participants.

The groups are the start of the assessment process and an opportunity for the participants to receive more in depth information and discussion about the implications of fostering; as such it is important that all enquirers attend. Experienced foster carers come along to talk to the group about their different experiences of caring for foster children.

The preparation groups cover a range of topics including managing challenging behaviour, brain development, attachment issues, safer care and working with birth parents. Participants are asked to give written feedback on each of the sessions and on any issues that the discussions may have raised for them. At the end of the six week period the workers leading the group will also complete written reports on each of the participants and their contributions over the previous weeks. They will also highlight areas of concern or where further consideration may be necessary regarding the participants suitability to proceed to the formal application and assessment stage.

Within this period of time we have assessed 3 interim fostering households for permanent fostering for the young people in their care.

New foster carers and carer de-registrations

In the period 1.10.15 – 30.9.16 an additional 3 interim fostering households were registered, plus 2 short break fostering households. 3 interim fostering households were approved as permanent fostering households for a child/young person in their care and 1 interim fostering household was approved as an adopter for a specific child in their care. Three households were deregistered between 1.10.15 – 30.9.16.

Over the last number of years a steady increase in the number of Renfrewshire fostering households has allowed us to be less dependent on the Independent and Voluntary foster care sector. On 30.9.16 there were 134 children/young people with Renfrewshire foster carers and 84 children/young people in external fostering agency placements. These figures demonstrate the continuing upward trend of placing children with Renfrewshire Council foster carers.

Foster Carer Reviews

New foster carers are reviewed by the Fostering Panel at the end of their first year as foster carers. Between 1.10.15 and 30.9.16 the Fostering and Adoption Panel reviewed 3 foster carers after their first year. This is an opportunity for carers to talk about their experience and whether their expectations of the fostering task had been met. The majority of new foster carers expressed satisfaction with their first year with most remaining enthusiastic and committed. They have all provided a high level of care to children and have found the support provided by their social worker to be beneficial as well as finding the training offered informative and beneficial to the fostering task.

Social Workers from the fostering team visit carers on a regular basis to carry out supervision as well as performing a range of duties including ensuring health and safety checks are carried out annually, annual medical information is received and PVG checks are up to date. Safer caring policies are in place for each fostering household which ensure a minimum of at least two unannounced visits are carried out annually. Supervising Social Workers will also attend children's review meetings and Children's Hearings with the carers. Joint visits by the child's social worker and the social worker from the fostering and adoption team takes places when a new placement is established and routinely thereafter.

Experienced foster carers are also reviewed on an annual basis, by the senior social work managers. The foster carers provide written as well as verbal contribution to the review process, as well as written reports by their birth children. Reports by their supervising social worker, child's social worker and child are also completed for the review process. We are currently reviewing the foster care review process regarding the paper work and its suitability for purpose.

Foster Carer Training

The post of training and development officer for Accommodated Children's Services has continued to be very beneficial in the development of our foster carers learning. This includes a programme of training for newly approved foster carers as well as more specialised training for experienced foster carers which is directed at developing foster carers skills and appropriate to their age range of approval. This includes child protection, children affected by parental substance misuse, attachment and trauma, safer caring, theraplay, internet safety, blood borne viruses and permanence. The core programme for training is divided into 4 different pathways depending on the foster carers experience and learning from previous pathways, (see appendix 3). A survey of Renfrewshire Councils foster carers was undertaken

in July 2016 and it was found that, of the 23 foster carers who responded, 82.61% of them found the current training programme was meeting their learning needs

To compliment this internal training joint training with our neighbouring authorities has taken place with foster carers and social workers. In February 2016 joint training focused on Social Media Safety with a presentation by Police Scotland.

This year we have also developed training for secondary carers, support carers and adopters. Three training sessions took place - January, March and April on attachment, trauma and Theraplay. It covered brain development, how trauma affects behaviour and gave strategies to help recovery by using theraplay games. On each occasion we had around 15 participants and feedback was positive.

Social workers, foster carers and adopters also have the opportunity to attend external training courses. The Fostering Network and AFA has provided training to new social workers within the Fostering and Adoption Team including such training as Skills to Foster, the Role of the Supervising Social Worker and assessment of foster carers and adopters. Foster carers, adopters and supervising social workers have also attended external conferences such as the role of men in Fostering, and workshops provided by AFA on relevant topics.

As part of the Scottish Government consultation on the new proposed standards for foster carers, views on foster carer training pre approval, post approval and continuing professional development were sought. The Fostering Service contributed to this consultation in relation to our experience of foster carer training and development.

Carers Support Groups

Our foster carers continue to organise a monthly support group, this has now been up and running for over three years, there is a current proposal to increase this group to every two weeks. This is an informal support group where foster carers can drop in as they wish; issues raised within the group are fed back to the fostering team via the carers supervising social worker or the foster carers consultation group

Consultations

The service consults regularly with foster carers on a range of issues. All Foster Carers are invited to attend the Carers Consultation Group which now meets every four months. The most recent carer consultation group met on 22.6.16. Discussions focused on staff changes, new placement descriptors, placement agreements, the Neurosequential Model of Therapy (NMT) study (see below) and support group. This also provides an opportunity for foster carers to discuss any issue that has arisen for them or other carers.

The Senior Manager invites foster carers to meet with her twice a year. Again this is forum for foster carers to raises issues and for the Senior Manager to consult with foster carers.

Feedback from those attending the Adoption and Fostering Panel is also sought via the use of questionnaires; this includes prospective adopters and foster carers. These are regularly reviewed by the Panel Advisor and Panel Chair.

Panel members are invited to attend annual appraisal meetings with the panel chair and panel advisor. Feedback from panel members is gathered from this meeting and ideas generated are incorporated into the business meeting agenda for consideration.

The fostering service has developed a young person's forum for children residing in foster care. They meet 4 weekly and are currently devising a young person's newsletter. This group is currently supported by Who Cares? Scotland who attend the group along with staff from the fostering and adoption service.

This year two formal consultations were held with our foster carers with regards to their experience of using Glasgow and Partners Emergency Social Work Service and training needs for foster carers. Of the 33 foster carers who responded 36.6% have had to make use of the service and 54.55% felt that they received an appropriate response. Of the 23 foster carers who responded 82.61% felt that their learning needs were being met and 83.33% felt there were no gaps in their training needs.

The quarterly newsletter continues to go out to all fostering households. Foster carers are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter in relation to their learning or experiences.

Neurosequential model of therapy (NMT)

Renfrewshire Council was one of the Local Authorities, within Scotland, who participated in a research study undertaken by Edinburgh University to look at the benefits of NMT for children in a foster placement. The study is aimed at young children in foster care between age of 3.5 years to 7 years. The children selected have all been exposed to early neglect or adversity which then impacted on their early development and functioning. The NMT study proposes that therapeutic experiences can change the brain activities to allow healing and restoration of healthy functioning by way of repetitive play, interaction with the carers and emotional support. The principal suggests that exercises and activities that provide patterned and repetitive neural input to the lower brain region helps to diminish trauma and related symptoms (anxiety, impulsivity etc.)

Specific children were identified, with parental consent, as part of the study, based on the length of time they have been in foster care. Carers of these children were asked to participate two training sessions and record their observations of the children over time. This study is ongoing.

Children's Group (We Care Too)

We have developed a group for foster carers birth children who meet at different times throughout the year. This is an activity based group where young people can meet up with other young people whose family foster to discuss what this means for them. The group is run by our fostering staff team. The group held a competition to name their group with the name chosen being 'We Care Too'.

Break Through Group

The Break Through group is for children in foster carer, 8 years plus, and has now been up and running for nearly a year. This group meets on a monthly basis and has an average of 10 children/young people attending. The group was set up to produce a quarterly newsletter by the children/young people in foster care for the children/young people in foster care.

Future developments of the fostering service 2016 -2017

- To increase foster placements for children aged 10 – 18 years and children with disabilities
- Ensure that foster carers have the capacity to care for children 10 – 18 and children with disabilities through training and development.
- To improve participation with foster carers on their own training needs

- Raise profile of the fostering and adoption team so that all social work staff have an understanding of the work undertaken to develop the service leading to better outcomes for the children referred and placed
- To promote the use of foster carers annual review forms by field work staff and young people to improve the outcomes for children using the service.
- The development of foster carers reviews returning to the Fostering and Adoption Panel after the first three years.
- To develop a self evaluation audit relating to the completion of the forms used to assessment foster carers (Form F) and the forms used to match the children (Form E).

SUPPORTED CARERS SERVICE

Support Carers

The Supported Carers service moved back to be located within the Through and Aftercare service in August, and are no longer be part of the Fostering and Adoption Service.

Within the period 1.10.15 to 30.9.16 the Fostering and Adoption Panel has approved 12 fostering households as supported carers. Nine of whom were foster carers from independent agencies, 2 were foster carers for Renfrewshire Council and 1 new support carer. We now have 20 supported carers.

Inspection

The Supported Carers service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in November 2014 and the next inspection is due imminently.

ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SERVICE

Developments within the adoption service 2015- 2016

- Approved adopters and prospective adopters have been invited to attend training in relation to attachment, trauma and neglect.
- The structure of the adoption support group has been changed after consultation with adopters.
- Review of later life letters and adoption support plans.
- Recruitment of new panel members
- Continued participation in adoption activity and exchange days.
- Continue to develop work undertaken with PACE and CELCIS to reduce length of time and ages of children whose permanence plans are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel
- Continued to make referrals to Scottish Adoption Support Services (SAAS - Barnados) for young people, birth parents and adopters requiring additional support.
- The continued development of separated Fostering and Adoption Panels and business meetings to make this more efficient and effective for panel members.

Inspection

The Adoption Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in August 2015. The areas that were inspected were – Quality of Care and Support; Quality of Staffing; Quality of Management and Leadership. The Adoption Service was awarded grade 5 (very good) for each of these areas. There were two recommendation and no requirements from this inspection.

The recommendations were:

1. The service should ensure that they have effective system in place to enable accurate information to be recorded and verified. Action to ensure that this happens in our development plan.
2. The Service should ensure that where possible all adopted children have later life letters. A process for ensuring this has been set up.

We will not be inspected again until April 2017.

Recruitment of Adoptive Parents

There continues to be a need for both adoptive carers and permanent foster carers for children of all ages who meet our adoption criteria (appendix 4). Nationally there is recognition that more carers are also required for sibling groups and older children.

From 1.10.15 to 30.9.16 there have been two adoption preparation groups both of which included prospective adopters from 3 of our neighbouring authorities. A total of 9 households attended (3 households from neighbouring authorities) from which we received 5 application for adoption.

Renfrewshire Council's adoption service has made good use of the Scottish Adoption Register and resulted in positive matches for our children. Between 1.10.15 and 30.9.16 we referred 11 adopter households and 7 children's profiles for adoption.

We have participated in two Adoption Exchange days between 1.10.15 to 30.9.16 and have presented 13 children. This has proven to be very successful as we have linked 5 children with adoptive families with 4 further links having been identified, 3 of whom are a sibling group. (see appendix 4)

Renfrewshire Council attended an adoption activity day in Perth in July. Two approved adoptive families, from Renfrewshire, attended. This was only the second such event held in Scotland and it included the children, whom authorities are seeking families for, coming along for a play day with prospective adopters.

Adopters

In the period between 1.10.15 to 30.9.16 nine households were recommended for approval as adopters.

Also within this period three short term foster carers were approved as permanent foster carers for the children/young people in their care.

Family Finding

During the period 1.10.15 – 30.9.16 fourteen children were presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration of their adoption plans and links. In all cases the Agency Decision Maker accepted the panel's recommendations to approve the plans and links.

Scotland's Adoption Register

Scotland's Adoption Register is a project funded by the Scottish Government and is currently operated by register staff located in St Andrew's Adoption Agency and became operational in 2011.

The Register is a computer database that collects and stores data on both children who have a plan for adoption and approved adopters throughout Scotland. The purpose of the register gathering this information is to improve the chances of finding families for children. Our Adoption Service routinely uses the register for family finding.

Renfrewshire Council Adoption service continues to work closely with Inverclyde Council, East Renfrewshire Council, West Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire. Meetings are held bi-monthly to look at working together in sharing resources such as planning adoption preparation groups together, linking children with each other's adopters and recruitment.

Adoption Support Group

The adoption support group continues and has developed over the past year. Adopters were consulted on what type of support group they saw as beneficial and what was the best time to run a support group. In response to feedback received from adopters these meetings now take place on a Saturday morning, on a quarterly basis. The group varies between a drop in facility to which the children can also attend and there are play activities available to the children, while their parents talk with other adopters and staff. The group can also be of a more formal construction with a speaker being invited along after suggestions from the group. The last support group had a speaker on social media safety.

For the majority of people who attend the group the main benefits are meeting other people in similar situations and hearing about strategies and tips for dealing with difficult situations. The group has also been the starting point for the development of friendships and informal supports.

Future developments of the adoption service – 2016 -2017

Over the next year we intend to strengthen our adoption service by looking at;

- Continuing the recruitment of new adopters
- Recruitment of new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members
- Develop feedback from Panel Members in relation quality of reports and presentation of social workers as part of the quality assurance process.
- To develop a self evaluation audit relating to the completion of assessment forms (E and F) .
- Ensuring all adopted children have a later life letter
- Continue to develop our Adoption Support plans and ensure all adopted children have a support plan in place. While developing the support available to adopters through training and follow up visits after a year of the adoption order being granted.
- Development of an adoption newsletter.
- Continued development work with our linking process using the Adoption register
- Support Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Activity Days.
- To review adoption support via SASS in relation to origins counselling.
- Create a formal link and make use of Scotland's Birthlink Service to support family origin searches for children and families who have experienced adoption with Renfrewshire.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted the work of the Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services and the work of the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel. It is evident from the activity of the Fostering and Adoption Panels that the number of children unable to return to live with their birth families remains high within Renfrewshire.

The Fostering Service and Adoption Service been inspected by the Care Inspectorate in 2015 and received positive reports, the service will be inspected again in 2017. All three services continue to use self assessment methods to identify areas for improvement and development of the services and consult with children and young people in service to inform practice. Recommendations made by the Care Inspectorate are also acted on. Renfrewshire continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to children who require alternative families because they are unable to live with their birth families.

We are delighted to report the growing number of supported carers which enables us to offer continued support to our care experienced young people as they move to adulthood and independent living.

This report forms part of the quality control system that monitors the practice of the Panel and the quality of the work being undertaken on behalf of Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children.

As Chair of the Adoption and Fostering Panel, and the Social Work Manager responsible for the Service we would like to take this opportunity to thank Panel members for their hard work and commitment to Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children. Also our Foster Carers dedication to children means that we can provide the best outcomes to them both now and in the future. We look forward to the coming year and to continuing our work with all agencies to improve the outcomes and secure the future of Renfrewshire children who require both temporary and permanent care.

Joyce Gartshore.

Chairperson of the Adoption Panel and the Fostering Panel

Clare Cuning

Social Work Manager

Renfrewshire Council Fostering Criteria

Who Can Foster?

At Renfrewshire Council we accept applications from different backgrounds as everyone has their own individual experience to offer.

Requirements to foster:

1. Are over 21 years
2. Have a spare bedroom
3. Are currently in good health

You can be:

1. Single, married, cohabiting or in a civil partnership
2. Own or rent the property you live in
3. Be employed or unemployed
4. Be of any religious background or sexual orientation

Preparation Groups

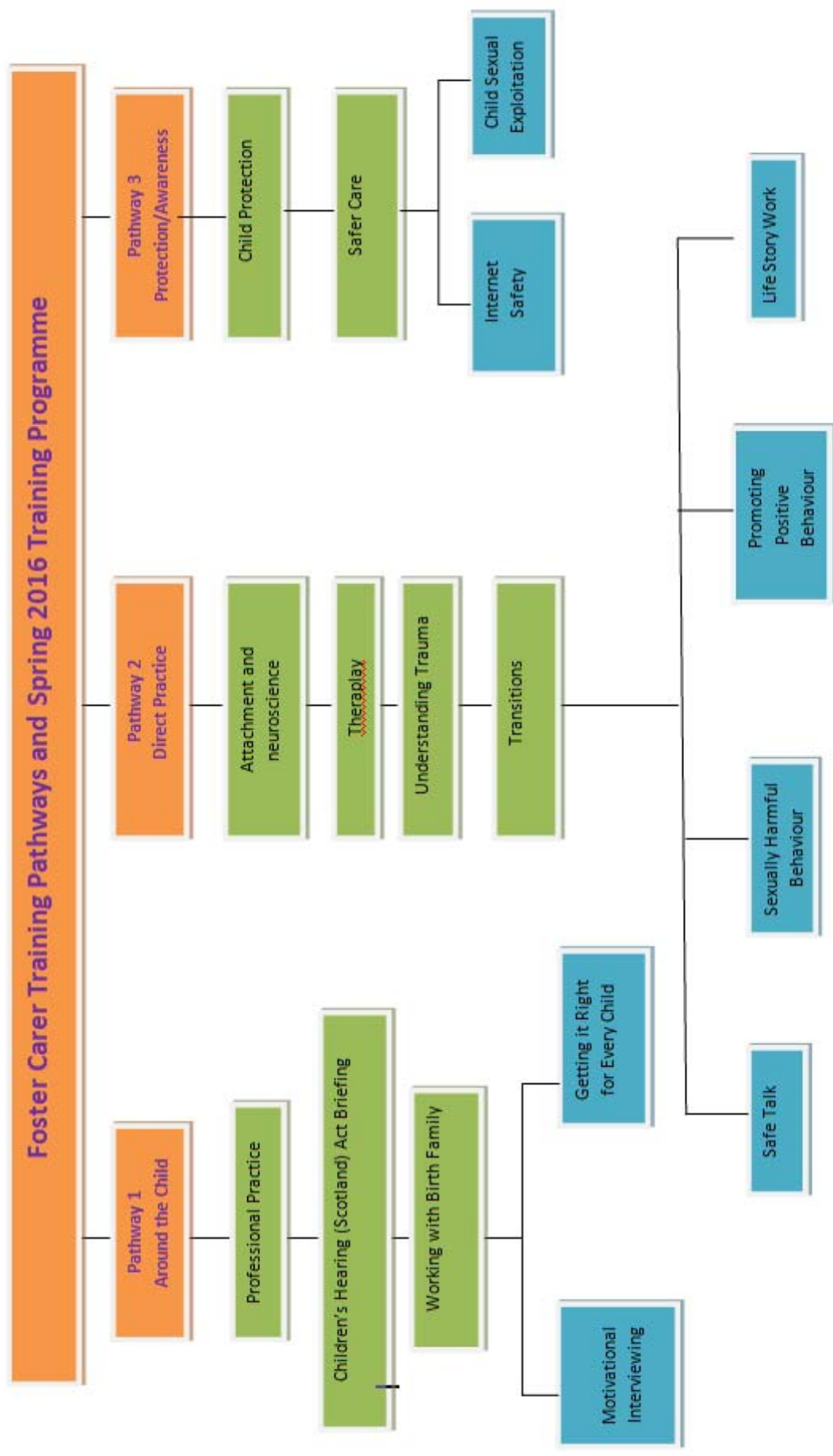
Enquiries will be required to attend preparation groups before making a formal application. The purpose of these groups is to provide the opportunity to learn more about fostering, and the children who require to be in a foster placement.

If preparation groups are not available other means will be considered to provide and share information with enquiries.

Local Authority, Health and Police Checks

All applicants will be subject to stringent local authority, health and police checks. These will extend to any other resident in the household over 16 years of age and to anyone who will have care of the child.

Appendix 2



Key: Orange = pathway Titles

Green = Core Programme Workshops

Blue = Next Step Programme

Renfrewshire Council

Adoption Criteria

Age

All applicants must be over 21 years of age.

Status

Enquiries will be considered from couples or single applicants.

A couple may be the same sex and couples do not need to be married. Same sex couples are not required to be in a Civil Partnership.

Joint applicants must be in an enduring family relationship.

Preparation Groups

Enquiries will be required to attend preparation groups, if groups are available, prior to making a formal application. The purpose of these groups is to provide enquiries with the opportunity to learn more about the children available for adoption, their backgrounds and the genetic factors adopters may have to consider when parenting adopted children.

If preparation groups are not available other means will be considered to provide and share information with enquiries.

Infertility

Prospective adopters should have completed infertility investigations at least 6 months prior to application.

Local Authority Health and Police Checks

All applicants will be subject to stringent local authority health and police checks. These will extend to any other resident in the household over 16 years of age and to anyone who will have care of the child.