

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 18 January 2018

Report by: Director of Children's Services

**Heading: Annual Report of the Adoption and Fostering Panel 2016/17
Update on developments for Looked After Children**

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report refers to the tenth 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 2016/2017 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 2 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's Services Policy Board is asked to;

- a) note the contents of the Fostering and Adoption Annual Report 2016/17.
 - b) note the continuing partnership with Who Cares Scotland on issues relating to care experienced young people.
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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 one of the agency decision makers (currently the Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice Services, and the Head of Early Years & Inclusion) 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 on the same day; 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 2016 we have had separate Social Work managers to chair the panel and manage the Service. This separation of roles allows for more arm's length scrutiny by the panel chair.
- 3.3 There are currently 26 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. There are typically 6 to 8 members sitting on the panel at each meeting. The Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel considered 73 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 October 2016 and 30 September 2017, 10 households attended preparation groups and 8 household subsequently applied to be assessed as foster carers. Renfrewshire had 85 active households of foster carers at 30 September 2017. In the period 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017, an additional 2 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. However there is a national picture of a shortage of foster carers.
- 3.7 In the period 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017, a total of 5 Renfrewshire households were approved as adopters at the Renfrewshire panel. A further 5 interim (short term) foster carers were approved as permanent carers. This is a positive outcome for the children involved.
- 3.8 The Fostering and Adoption services are subject to regulation and were inspected by the Care Inspectorate in May 2017. The Care Inspectorate reports were positive with gradings of 5 (very good) being applied to all domains inspected.
- 3.9 The Adoption Service has been working in partnership with the Scottish Government's 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.
- 3.10 The Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 increases the responsibility/ duty of local authorities to provide Throughcare 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.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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.

- 3.13 Three 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 to consider being the partner authority if their application for funding was successful and this was agreed.
- 3.14 The STV Children's appeal awarded Who Cares? Scotland just under £1 million over a 5 year period.
- 3.15 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 the Report

1. **Financial**
None.
2. **HR & Organisational Development**
None.
3. **Community/Council Planning –**
 - *Our Renfrewshire is safe* – 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**
None.
5. **Property/Assets**
None.
6. **Information Technology**
None.

7. **Equality & Human Rights**

- (a) 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 for example it is for noting only.

8. **Health & Safety**

None.

9. **Procurement**

None.

10. **Risk**

None.

11. **Privacy Impact**

None.

12. **Cosla Policy Position**

None.

List of Background Papers

None.

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THE FOSTERING PANEL

AND

THE ADOPTION PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT 2016/2017

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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 2017 Renfrewshire Council had 666 'Looked After' Children. Of these 230 were looked after at home, 173 were looked after by friends/relatives and 263 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 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017, 22 children's permanence plans were approved by the Agency Decision Maker. This is a decrease from the same period in 2015/ 2016 where 32 children's permanence plans were approved. This decrease is reflective of the fact that in the previous 2 years there was a particular focus on moving on children's permanence plans where there had been delay. There has been significant improvement in the timescales now being achieved.

In recent years the fostering service has made progress in recruiting foster carers and we have successfully shifted the balance of placements from external to internal foster placements. On 30 September 2017 there were 132 children with Renfrewshire foster carers and 76 children in external fostering agency placements. These figures demonstrate the continuing upward trend of children living with Renfrewshire foster carers.

Peter Macleod
Director of Children's Services

Introduction

This is the annual report of Renfrewshire Council's Fostering Panel and the 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 area 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.

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 May 2017 where all aspects of service delivery in both the Fostering and Adoption Service's remained 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 2017, Renfrewshire Council had 662 Looked After Children/Young People, compared to 695 as at 30th September 2016.

30.9.16 30.9.17

Independent Sector-Children - Foster Care	84	76
Local Authority-Children - Foster Care	134	132
Local Authority-Children - Houses	31	26
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Schools	7	6
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Special Needs	4	4
Pre-adoption	16	13
Independent Sector-Children - Secure School	1	1
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Unit	5	5
Children cared for by related carers/friends/relatives	177	173
Children looked after at home	235	230
Total	695	666

Cases Considered by the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel

Below is a breakdown of the items considered by the Panels between 1.10.16 – 30.9.17

Business Item	Number	Comments
Child adoption plans & links	10	
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	5	4 – domestic adopters 1 fostering family – adoption of child in their care
Review of Registration (adoption)	2	
Permanent fostering plans – link with current foster carer	12	12 children/young people (including 2 sibling groups of 2) were linked at the Fostering and Adoption Panel to their current foster carers. 7 children/young people with Renfrewshire Foster Carers and 5 with foster carers from independent fostering agencies
Permanent fostering plan- Legal routes	15	
Approval of Renfrewshire foster carers (households)	2	2 interim fostering households
Approval of Renfrewshire interim foster carers as permanent foster carers	5	
Deregistration of foster carer	2	1 fostering household retired 1 fostering household converted to support carer status
Approval of supported carers (households)	9	
Foster carer reviews	11	

Panel Membership

We are fortunate to have a consistent and committed panel membership over the past year; we have recruited 7 new panel members, 6 of whom are new elected members with 5 panel members (previously elected 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 Scotland also continue to provide an independent panel member. AFA Scotland continues to offer vital support, training and consultancy to practitioners. A list of panel members can be found at the end of this report (appendix 1)

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 Council's Legal Service who provide 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 a very informative session on Life Story Work with Looked After Children. This was formally presented by our Training Officer and gave panel members insight to the quality of training provided to our foster carers and adopters. This also reinforced the need for Life Story Work to be considered at the Fostering and Adoption Panel where permanence for children is being considered.

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.

Staffing

The Fostering and Adoption team was restructured in 2016. The Service now has a separate Fostering team and Adoption team and permanence team. This was in order to develop more specialist skills regarding fostering and adoption.

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

A Senior Social Work Manager (also has responsibility for the kinship care service, the pre and post birth service and the Women and Children First Service).

Service Manager (responsible for operational management of the fostering and adoption service).

1 senior social worker (responsible for adoption and permanence service, and management of staff)

1 senior social worker (responsible for the fostering service and management of staff)

8 full time social workers

2 job share social workers

1 part time social work assistant.

Commitment to permanence planning

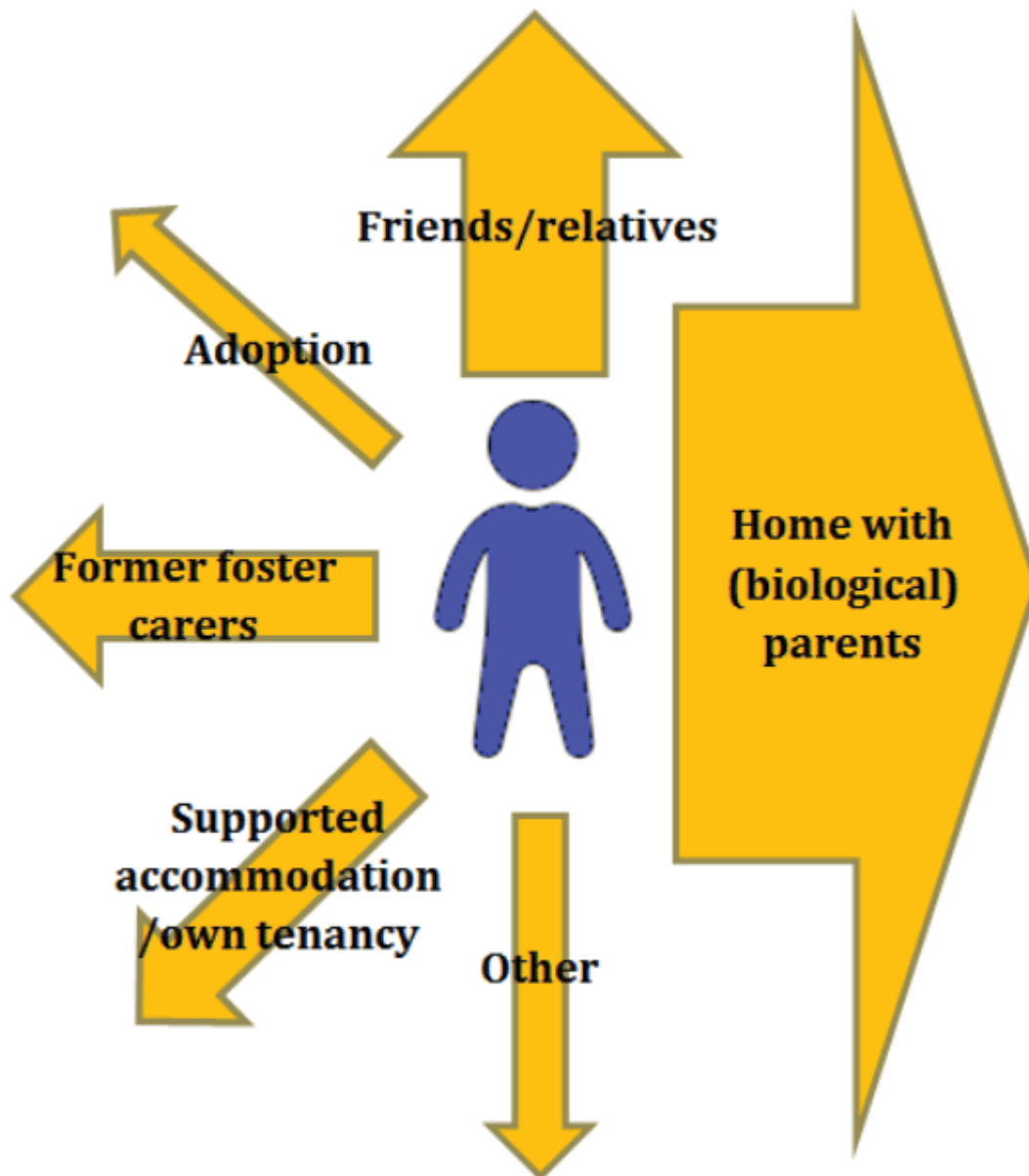
Between 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017 Renfrewshire has progressed adoption and permanence plans for 25 children. Renfrewshire Council recognises the importance in progressing plans for children within appropriate time scales. There are a number of initiatives being implemented by senior management to support and enable social work staff involved in permanence work to undertake both the direct work with the child and family and complete 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.

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 following is taken from the most up to date Children's Social Work statistics in Scotland 2015/2016:

When a child ceases being looked after, a destination category is recorded. Most children (61% in 2016) go home to their biological parents and 16% go to live in kinship care with friends or relatives. The percentage leaving care that return home has fallen consistently over the last four years. There is a long term increase in the number of adoptions when leaving care, and although they decreased slightly between 2014 and 2015, they increased to their highest level of 8% in 2016. The majority of adoptions (70%) are of children aged under five years old. There is a much more even spread of ages of young people leaving care to go home or to live with friends and relatives.

Proportional representation of post-care destinations (based on above statistics)



Report on the Fostering Service

As of 30 September 2017, Renfrewshire Council had 85 fostering households; this included permanent foster carers, interim foster carers and short break foster carers.

Developments within the Fostering Service 2016 – 2017

- To continue to address the recruitment of foster carers in conjunction with the council's communication team.
- To improve participation with foster carers on their own training needs
- To develop children's participation in foster carers' reviews by using 'My View' to represent their views.
- Service manager continues to audit the forms used to assessment foster carers (Form F) and the forms used to match the children (Form E).
- children in foster care continue to be involved in participation strategies through our own Break Through group, Who Cares? Scotland, Care2create and the Champions Board.
- Continued support Renfrewshire foster carers who wish to become permanent foster carers of the children in their care, where this in line with the child's plan.
- The Managers within the Fostering Service continue to attend Social Work Scotland meetings and liaise with neighbouring authorities.
- Continue to ensure foster carers are reviewed at the fostering panel 3 years after approval.
- Continue to raise the profile of the fostering team to ensure locality teams have a clear and understanding of the work undertaken to develop the service and to ensure better outcomes for the children referred and placed in foster care.

Inspection

The Fostering and Adoption Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in May 2017. The areas that were inspected were Quality of Care and Support and Quality of Management and Leadership. The Fostering service was awarded grade 5 (very good) for each of these areas. There was one recommendation from this inspection and the service will be inspected again in 2019. The recommendation is that "The service must ensure that all foster carers including respite carers understand the terms of approval, their role and responsibilities as foster carers and the role and responsibilities of the agency." In order to ensure that this is done each supervising social worker will go over the partnership agreement with their registered foster carer.

During the inspection the majority of feedback from foster carers was very positive, which included:-

"I get regular supervision and training, the support groups are very helpful, any opportunity to get together with other foster carers is helpful".

"The training programme is varied and I feel the courses are both interesting and helpful topics to help me in my job as a foster carer. Our supervising social worker does an excellent job".

Recruitment activity October 2016-September 2017

During Fostering Week, May 2017, our service was visible through Renfo and we had a information table within the atrium at Renfrewshire Council HQ.

There has been a recent meeting with Renfrewshire Council's Communication team and a recruitment strategy is being drawn up in order to drive recruitment of foster carers early in 2018.

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 one week of the enquiry, giving the enquirer time to receive and read our information pack.

There are on average 2 enquiries a week in relation to fostering, however, a large number of the enquiries do not proceed due to lack of a spare bedroom, health issues, police involvement or other issues.

Should the enquiry go further an initial visit will be completed by a social worker from the fostering team. After the initial visit a discussion takes place between the visiting social worker and the senior social worker to consider whether the enquirers should be invited to preparation groups. Enquirers would then be advised of the date for next preparation group.

Preparation groups

Between 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017 we held 2 sets of preparation groups for fostering, one in October 2016 and the second one in May 2017. 10 households attended and this resulted in 8 fostering applications. 5 assessments are currently ongoing.

Preparation groups run for two day sessions, plus one 2 hour session. The facilitators from the fostering team make use of the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' materials, as well as up to date research and our own recently developed training materials. Our social workers are skilled at leading these groups and there is also input by the senior social worker/service manager at the last session.

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 preparation groups 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.

New foster carers and carer de-registrations

In the period 1 October 2016 – 30 September 2017 an additional 2 interim fostering households were registered, 5 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 October 2016 and 30 September 2017. One fostering household was deregistered following an investigation; 1 fostering household retired and 1 fostering household converted to supported carers status due to the 2 young people in her care becoming 18 years.

The approval of foster carers within Renfrewshire has slowed down over recent years and this appears to be a UK wide issue. A recent poll (September 2017) by Action for Children revealed over 85% of UK adults surveyed showed little or no interest in fostering raising the concern over the future of foster care in the UK. The shortage has also been made worse, according to Action for Children's findings, by demographic shifts as more foster carers, over 50, are being lost to retirement.

Within Renfrewshire we are becoming less dependent on the independent and voluntary foster care sector. On 30 September 2017 there were 132 children/young people with Renfrewshire foster carers and 76 children/young people in external fostering agency placements compared to 30 September 2016 when we had 134 children/young people with Renfrewshire foster carers and 84 children/young people in external fostering agency placements. These figures demonstrate the continuing commitment 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 October 2016 and 30 September 2017 the Fostering and Adoption Panel reviewed 4 fostering households after their first year. This is an opportunity for foster carers to talk about their experience, training and support etc. The majority of new foster carers expressed satisfaction with their first year with most remaining enthusiastic and committed. They have found the support provided by their social worker to be beneficial and available as required, as well as finding the training offered informative and beneficial to the fostering task.

A development from last year, which has now been taken forward, was for the Fostering Panel to review foster carers three years following approval. Between 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017, 1 fostering household had a three year review.

Experienced foster carers are also reviewed on an annual basis, by managers in Social Work. 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 the foster 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. We are also looking at the use of my view, electronic review form, for foster children to complete for foster carers reviews.

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 reviews, 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 place when a new placement is established and routinely thereafter.

Foster carer training

The National Foster Care Review (2013) highlighted the importance of ensuring foster carers receive opportunities to learn about different ways to support children and young people and to develop their awareness, knowledge and understanding about the foster carer role. In response, the Scottish Government asked the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) to develop a framework for learning, the Standard for Foster Carers (April 2017), which applies to all foster carers and foster care organisations in Scotland. The Standard describes learning expectations for foster carers at different learning stages. The Standard has been developed to establish a framework for the learning foster carers need to undertake for the foster carer role, and to support a realistic level of standardisation and consistency in the ways learning is provided and used.

The post of Training and Development Officer for the Fostering and Adoption Service has continued to be very beneficial in the development of our foster carers learning while acknowledging foster carers individual learning needs and experience. This includes a programme of training approved 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, transitions etc. The core programme for training is divided into 3 different pathways depending on the foster carers experience and learning from previous pathways, as well as standalone modules (see appendix 2).

Foster carers are encouraged to discuss with their supervising social worker any specific training needs, as well as the supervising social worker identifying gaps in the carers' development. Plans are now in place for the fostering team to deliver evening training on a monthly basis to ensure flexibility and opportunity for carers unable to attend weekday training to meet their training requirements.

Social workers and foster carers 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.

Foster Carers Support Group

Our foster carers continue to organise a support group which meets fortnightly. This has now been up and running for over four years. It was initially held on a monthly basis; however foster carers felt that a fortnightly group provided a further opportunity for support. The group 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.

Consultation Group

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. This also provides an opportunity for foster carers to be kept updated with any changes within the service and discuss any issue that has arisen for them or other carers. A development from the consultation group was for the senior social worker for fostering to meet with a member of the support group on a monthly basis in order to have contact regarding any issues on a regular basis.

The Registered Manager and Service Manager invite foster carers to meet with them twice a year, through the consultation group. Again this is forum for foster carers to raises issues and for the Registered Manager to consult with foster carers.

Breakthrough Group

The Breakthrough group is now in its second year. This is a participation group set up for children and young people in foster carer. The group is run and facilitated by Renfrewshire Fostering Team and Who Cares? Scotland. This is a semi-structured group that meets on a monthly basis. We produce a newsletter which is then sent out to all Renfrewshire children over 8 years of age who are in foster care.

We have 8 young people who regularly attend this group and are looking to increase this number in 2018. The young people themselves are advertising for new members through a welcome letter within the newsletter.

There have been some significant changes made to the group over the past year in that the children and young people are now responsible for the content, structure and editing of the newsletter. We previously had a target of producing quarterly newsletters, however as the young people are still honing their interviewing, writing and editing skills we have reduced the target to 3 newsletters a year. Our recent edition focused on Children's Hearings and the next edition is looking at children's rights.

As well as producing our newsletter we also factor in activity days with the young people.

Our target for next year is to increase participation by welcoming new members, setting up our own email address to allow young people to submit articles even if they are unable to attend the group and include other children and young people in discussions by including questionnaires within the newsletter.

Newsletter

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.

Neuro-sequential model of Therapeutics

Some of our foster carers were involved last year in an academic study to evaluate the impact of the Neuro-sequential model of Therapeutics (NMT) on children who have experienced trauma or neglect in their early years. The NMT model of treatment is something that has gained prominence in the United States in recent years and is promoted through the research of Dr. Bruce Perry who is an acknowledged worldwide authority on the impact of maltreatment on child development. The approach is a move away from 'thinking' or verbal therapies focused on the child alone, recognising that the impact of maltreatment on the pre-five brain is more severe and more related to pre-verbal, sensory aspects of the brain. The only way to move from these super high anxiety states, to calmer more cognitive states, is rhythm: patterned, repetitive rhythmic activity: walking, running, dancing, singing, repetitive meditative breathing – you use brain stem-related somatosensory networks which make your brain accessible to relational (limbic brain) reward and cortical thinking.

The study considered 14 accommodated children within Renfrewshire and North Lanarkshire Councils and within the age range of 3.5 to 7 years. The children had a diverse range of trauma/neglect backgrounds and for the purposes of the study were divided into 'treatment' and 'control' (non-treatment) groups. An important component of NMT is a training stage with carers so that an understanding is established from the outset. This was provided to our foster carers before they undertook daily sessions of rhythmic play with the child. Progress was measured over time using established questionnaires and checklists. These produced the data which was used to compare the progress of the 'treatment' and 'control' groups.

After the completion of the data gathering the researchers returned to the office in June to meet with participants in the study and give some preliminary findings. Feedback from carers during the study suggested that the training had been useful in enhancing understanding of

the impact of stress on the cognitive development of children. Carers also understood though that developmental damage can be reversed. Carer feedback also suggested that the playful rhythmic interventions took a bit of getting used to but were easy to accommodate and became habitual and part of daily routine. In terms of the impact on the child some of the changes the carers reported were less anxiety, better mood and concentration, fewer tantrums and better sleep. In terms of the impact on the carers themselves some of the changes reported were feeling calmer when dealing with the child, better understanding and increased feelings of hope.

In terms of an early analysis of the data provided by the questionnaires and checklists there is a significant suggestion that the NMT model can lead to a decrease in hyperactivity, emotional symptoms of maltreatment and a decrease in carer's perception of how difficult a child is to manage. The data had not been fully analysed at the last meeting with the researchers in June, a more exact measure of the impact of the study is awaited.

Staff Development Day

A staff development day is currently being planned for next year.

Future developments of the fostering service 2017 -2018

1. To continue to address the recruitment of foster carers for children aged 10 – 18 years and children with disabilities
2. Ensure that foster carers have the capacity to care for children 10 – 18 and children with disabilities through training and development.
3. To continue to review foster carers individual learning needs.
4. To continue to develop participation of young people in foster carers reviews – to look at an appropriate use of a social media site and encourage and support young people with the use of myview in relation to foster carers reviews.
5. To continue to work with neighboring authorities regarding shared services.
6. To review participation policy for foster carers
7. To support the Breakthrough group in relation to increasing their membership.
8. To consult with children/young people of foster carers in relation to future support, groups etc.
9. To review the partnership agreement which is the agreement signed by Renfrewshire Council and the foster carers once they have been registered with us.

Report on Supported Carers Service

Supported carers

The Supported Carers service moved back to the Throughcare service, in August 2016, and is no longer be part of the Fostering and Adoption Service. However support carer assessments

are presented to Renfrewshire Council's Fostering Panel. Within the period 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017 the Fostering Panel has approved 9 fostering households as supported carers, 4 of whom were foster carers from independent agencies and 5 who were foster carers for Renfrewshire Council.

All young people whose plan is presented at the Fostering Panel have Pathway Plans completed and a Throughcare Worker allocated to them. The outcome for young people involved in the Supported Carers Service is reported to the Scottish Government twice a year. The following information highlights that this is a successful service for young people.

There are 22 young people in supported care.

20 are in positive destinations:

5 young people are at University.

4 young people are attending College.

10 young people are in employment.

1 young person attends a training course.

2 young people are being supported in employability.

Report on the Adoption and Permanence Service

Developments within the adoption service 2016- 2017

1. Ongoing development of training for adopters, and consultation with adopters regarding appropriate training.
2. Continued review of adoption support.
3. Training programme in relation to adoption support plans being developed within the adoption team and to be rolled out to locality team social worker.
4. Continued referrals to Scottish Adoption Support Services (SAAS - Barnados) for young people, birth parents and adopters requiring additional support.
5. Development of electronic method of recording the completion of later life letters in order to ensure all children being placed with adopted families have a later life letter.
6. Developed feedback from Panel Members in relation quality of reports and presentation of social workers as part of the quality assurance process.
7. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Register.
8. Continued partnership work with our neighboring authorities.

Inspection

The Adoption Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in June 2015. The areas that were inspected were – Quality of Care and Support and Quality of Management and

Leadership. The Adoption 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 2019.

During the inspection feedback was very positive, including the following comments:-

“One couple told us that the assessment process took place at the right pace which helped them to fully understand the challenges and rewards of adopting, and there was also no unnecessary delay.”

“All the adoptive parents/carers we spoke with commented that they felt they had good support from a knowledgeable staff group, both during and after the adoption process.”

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 3). Nationally there is recognition that more adopters are also required for sibling groups and older children.

From 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017 there has been 1 adoption preparation group within Renfrewshire. A total of 5 households attended from which we received 4 applications for adoption. A preparation groups for adoption is presently running.

Renfrewshire Council's adoption service has made good use of the Scottish Adoption Register and resulted in positive matches for our children. Between 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017 we referred 6 adopter households, and referred adopters to the adoption exchange days.

Statistics from the Adoption Register Annual Report indicated that 175 adopters were referred to the Register in 2016-17. This figure was made of 54% from 21 local authorities within Scotland, 39% from 4 Scottish Voluntary Agencies and 7% from the English Adoption Register.

The adoption service was involved in different recruitment activities during Adoption Week, which was held during the week beginning 20 November 2017, an information table was present at the atrium within Renfrewshire House, Renfrewshire Council's HQ and an information session for adopters was facilitated by Adoption UK and AFA in Glasgow on 22 November 2017. We had a celebration of adoption on 25 November 2017 in Johnstone Town Hall.

Recruitment of permanent foster carers has over the years stemmed from interim foster carers claiming the child in their care.

Adopters/Permanent Foster Carers

In the period between 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017, 5 households were recommended for approval as adopters.

Also within this period 5 short term foster carers were approved as permanent foster carers for the children/young people in their care.

Family Finding

During the period 1 October 2016 and 30 September 2017, 10 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 adoption plan and links.

Also during this period 15 plans for Permanence Orders were presented to the Adoption Panel and 12 children/young people were linked with permanent foster carers. This figure includes foster carers from independent fostering agencies being linked with Renfrewshire young people.

Renfrewshire Council Adoption service continues to work closely with Inverclyde Council, East Renfrewshire Council, West Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire. Meetings are held every three months to look at working together in sharing resources such as planning adoption preparation groups together, linking children with each other's adopters, recruitment and training. We have jointly provided 2 practice forums to our staff groups this year: - letter box contact and Form F assessments, both these sessions were well attended.

The Scottish's Government's 'Strategy for Looked After Children and Young People' (November 2015) reinforced the role of the Adoption Register for family finding. Renfrewshire Council has made use of the Adoption Register and referred 18 children's profiles for adoption, which included 3 sibling groups of 2 and 1 sibling group of 3.

The statistic produced by Scotland's Adoption Register, Annual Report 2016 -2017, indicates that of the 182 children referred this year to the register, 58% were boys. This continues a long standing pattern of more boys being referred for adoption than girls (57% boys in 2015-16). 93% of the children were of White Scottish ethnicity; however there was a significant increase in referrals of children from a different ethnic background. 13 children were referred in 2016/17 compared to 4 children in 2015/16.

The children who wait longest for an adoptive family – or who find no match – tend to be those who are older, 6 plus, are part of a sibling group, or have significant and enduring developmental difficulties.

34% of referrals to the Adoption Register were for sibling groups. An adoptive placement was found for a sibling group of 3, however overall siblings were less likely to be placed than individual children.

We have participated in two Adoption Exchange days between 1.10.16 to 30.9.17 and have presented 9 children which included 3 sibling groups. From both these activity days we have had 5 possible links, including 2 of the sibling groups of 2. There has a further exchange day in November 2017 where children were considered for matching. The outcome of this day would be presented to the Adoption panel within the next reporting period.

Adoption Support Group

The adoption support group has continued to develop over the past year. 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 to a training event for adopters only.

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.

There are at least 20 adoptive families who have attended the Support Group over the past year and their feedback has been very positive.

Future developments of the adoption service – 2017 -2018

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

1. Continuing the recruitment of new adopters
2. Recruitment of new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members
3. Review of the assessment process in relation to family members participation in the process.
4. Continue to develop our Adoption Support plans and ensure all adopted children have a later life letter.
5. Continue development work with our linking process using the Adoption register
6. Support Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Activity Days as appropriate
7. Continue our development of joint work with neighboring local authorities.
8. 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 and the Supported Carer Service have recently been inspected by the Care Inspectorate and again received positive reports. All three services used self assessment methods to identify areas for improvement and development of each service. 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.

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 Cunning, Social Work Manager and registered manager of both services.

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

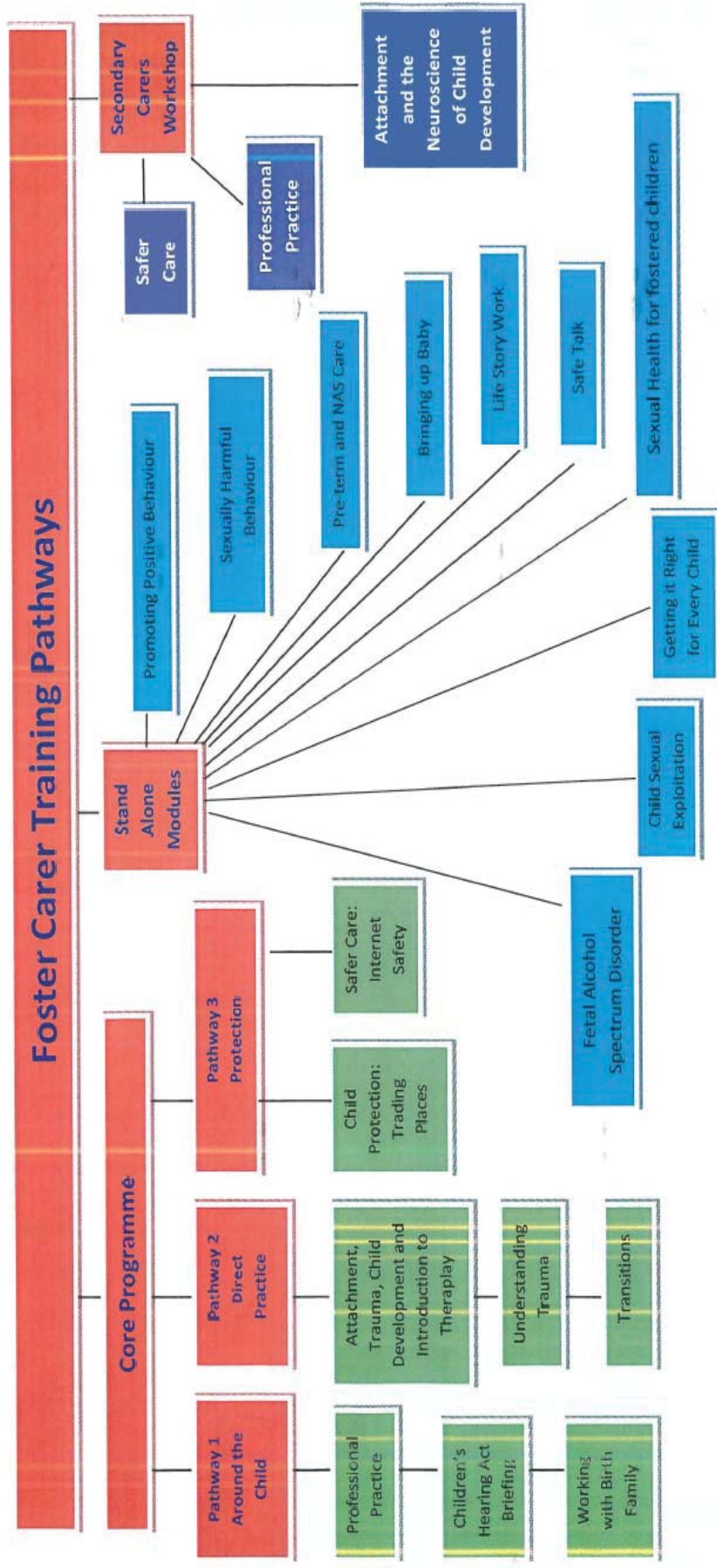
Preparation Groups

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.



Key: Orange = pathway Titles Green = Core Programme Workshops Blue = Stand Alone Purple = Secondary Carers

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 or unmarried. 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.