
To: Social Work, Health and Well-being Policy Board

On: 13 January 2015

Report by: Director of Social Work

Heading: Fostering and Adoption Annual Report 2013/2014

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report refers to the 7th annual report of Renfrewshire Council's Fostering and Adoption Panel.
- 1.2. The annual report sets out the work that has been dealt with by the Panel over the year 1/10/13 to 31/9/14 and sets it in the context of the broader issues pertaining to Looked After and Accommodated children.
- 1.3. The report also makes reference to the progress being made regarding Renfrewshire's own foster carers. During 2013/14 8 new carer households have been registered. Four short term households have been approved as permanent carers for a child in their care and four households have been approved as adopters for a specific child in their care.
- 1.4. The report considers the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, and also considers the outcome of the inspection of the Fostering and Adoption services by the Care Inspectorate.
- 1.5. The Adoption Service has progressed the plans for 19 children during 2013/14 who have been linked and successfully placed with adoptive families. This area of work has been focused on through our collaboration with the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children and the Permanence and Care Excellence Team, which recognises that undue delay in achieving adoptive families for children is detrimental to their well-being.
- 1.6. The Supported Carers Service transferred from the Throughcare Team to the Fostering and Adoption team this year. Over the past year 7 supported carer families have been approved who continue to care for the young person whom they have fostered, post 18. This outcome ensures continuity of care and the best outcomes for young people as they grow into adulthood.
- 1.7. Plans for Permanence in Care for 8 young people have been approved which links children and young people to their current carers and also removes them from the Children's Hearing System.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Social Work, Health and Well-being Policy Board is asked to:
- a) Note the contents of the Fostering and Adoption Annual report 2013/2014.
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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 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 Parental Responsibilities 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 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.
- 3.3. There are currently 25 panel members comprising elected members, social work and education staff, a legal adviser, a medical adviser, carers and an independent member from British Association of Fostering and Adoption. The panel is chaired by the Principal Officer for Child Care from Social Work and meets for a half day every two weeks. The vice chair of the panel is the independent representative from the British Association of Fostering and Adoption. There are typically 6 to 8 members sitting on the panel at each meeting. The combined panels met 24 times and considered 100 agenda items over the course of the year.
- 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. The report notes the ongoing need to recruit Foster carers and Adopters for older children and those with additional support needs. The report acknowledges that the increased numbers of accommodated children along with the increased numbers of assessments has required additional Panels with an increased time commitment from panel members being a consequence of this.
- 3.6. Between 1/10/13 and 30/9/14 13 households were invited to attend preparation groups and 9 households have gone on to assessment.

Renfrewshire had 86 active households of foster carers at March 31st 2014 compared with 77 at the same time last year. In the period 1/10/13 and 30/9/14, an additional 8 households were registered however 1 foster carer passed away.

- 3.7. In the period 1/10/13 to 30/9/14, 7 Renfrewshire households were approved as adopters at the Renfrewshire panel.
- 3.8. The fostering and adoption services operated by Social Work are subject to regulation and were inspected by the Care Commission for the sixth time in March 2014. The Care Commission's reports were positive with gradings of 5's (very good) being applied to all domains inspected.

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

- Fostering and Adoption services work with members of the Renfrewshire community who are interested in providing care and support to children in need of family based care. This work contributes to supporting vulnerable children in need to achieve their potential and to develop into productive citizens.

Safer and Stronger

- The work of the Fostering and Adoption Panels is central to the process of ensuring that the most vulnerable children in Renfrewshire are provided with an opportunity to be cared for in a safe and nurturing family for both short and longer term periods or on a permanent basis.

4. Legal Implications

None.

5. Property/Assets Implications

None.

6. Information Technology Implications

None.

7. Equality and Human Rights Implications

- (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. 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

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Author: *enter details - an appropriate name and telephone number/e-mail address should be included so that the officer specified will be able to be contacted in relation to the report and to receive a copy of the action note following the meeting*



**THE FOSTERING PANEL
AND
THE ADOPTION PANEL**

ANNUAL REPORT 2013/2014

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Foreword

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

As at the 31st March 2014 Renfrewshire Council had 715 'Looked After' Children. Of these 242 were looked after at home, 174 were looked after by friends/relatives and related carers and 299 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 Fostering and Adoption 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.

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 31.3.14 there were 129 children with Renfrewshire foster carers and 99 children in external fostering agency placements. These figures demonstrate the continuing upward trend of placing children with in house foster carers.

We have also forged strong collaborative working arrangements with the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS), and the Scottish Government Permanence and Care Excellence Team (PaCE) in embarking on a whole systems approach in managing plans for children who require permanence.

Peter Macleod
Director of Social Work

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 take to secure this. The Panel also consider the matching of a child with specific foster carers or adoptive carers and ensures that these are of a consistently high standard. The Panel make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who then makes final decisions on the recommendations made.

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.

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 Children

At the 30th September 2014, Renfrewshire had 715 Looked After children.

Independent Sector-Children - Foster Care	99
Local Authority-Children - Foster Care	129
Local Authority-Children - Houses	32
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Schools	13
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Special Needs	5
Pre-adoption	13
Independent Sector-Children - Secure School	2
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Unit	6
Children cared for by related carers	129
Children looked after by friends/relatives	45
Children looked after at home	242
Total	715

Cases Considered by the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel

Below is a breakdown of the items considered by the Panel between 1.10.13 – 30.9.14

Business Item	Number	Comments
Child adoption plans & links	19	1 sibling group of 2 17 solo children
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	7	2 couples – domestic adopters 1 couple – for a specific child 4 fostering families – adoption of child in their care
Withdrawal of link for adoption	1	Adopters withdrew during introductions
Review of Registration (adoption)	2	Domestic adopters
Permanent fostering plans - links and legal route		
Links	8	The 8 children/young people were linked through the Fostering and Adoption Panel to their current foster carers.
Legal routes	25	Of the 25 children/young people where the plan for permanent fostering was approved there were 4 sibling groups of 3 and 3 sibling groups of 2.
Approval of Renfrewshire foster carers (households)	8	This figure includes 1 respite foster carer and 1 respite foster carer for MDTFC
Approval of Renfrewshire Short-term foster carers to permanent foster carers	4	
Deregistration of foster carer	4	
Approval of supported carers (households)	7	
Initial review of foster carer after their 1 st year	13	
Appeal of foster carers registration for East Renfrewshire	1	

Overall Service Developments

Panel Membership

We are fortunate to have a consistent and committed panel membership over the past year. Panel membership continues to reflect a good range of experience and expertise, from social work, education and health. The Panel continues to be well supported by adopter and foster carer members and elected members. BAAF also continue to provide an independent panel member. A list of panel members can be found at the end of this report (Appendix 1)

We are currently actively recruiting new Panel Members due to the increase in Panel business and to allow us to spread the work load over a larger amount of Panel members. This is however a slow process due to statutory checks being completed and training for Panel members.

In the past year training for Panel members has included an input from CELCIS and from representatives from the Scottish Government to inform Panel Members of the work Renfrewshire Council has been involved in rolling out the PACE (Permanence and Care Excellence) programme.

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.

Commitment to Permanence Planning

Between 1.10.13 and 30.9.14 Renfrewshire has progressed adoption and permanence plans for 44 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, 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 parenting assessments for families who have already experienced permanence with previous children. These assessments are completed within appropriate time scales and Form E's are completed by the team.

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.

Training

Internal joint training has taken place with foster carers and social workers covering a range of topics relevant to accommodated children. This included child protection, children affected by parental substance misuse, attachment and trauma, safer caring, therapy and permanence.

Social workers, foster carers and adopters have the opportunity to attend external training courses. The Fostering Network has provided training to new social workers within the Fostering and Adoption Team including such training as Skills to Foster and the Role of the Supervising Social Worker. Foster carers, adopters and supervising social workers have also attended external conferences run by The Fostering Network and Foster Plus

A number of our male foster carers have attended Men in Fostering through The Fostering Network.

The post of training and development officer has proved to be beneficial within the fostering and adoption team resulting in a comprehensive training programme being developed. This includes a rolling year's training programme for newly approved foster carers as well as more specialised training for experienced trainers which is directed at developing foster carers skills and appropriate to their age range of approval (appendix 2).

Consultation with Service Users

The services consult regularly with foster carers and adopters on a range of issues. Carers are invited to attend a Carers Consultation Meeting now on a four monthly basis as opposed to six monthly last year. All Foster Carers are invited to attend. Recent discussion included issues in relation to ongoing training for carers; carers support group, carer's newsletter, foster carers vacancies, proposed changes to respite and developments in the child care services. This was also an opportunity for foster carers to discuss any issue that has arisen for them or other carers.

The Carers Consultation Group was also used as a means to consult with foster carers on the Smoking Policy being developed by Renfrewshire Council.

The foster carers continue to have a monthly support group. 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 carer's consultation group

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

Feedback from those attending Panel, social workers, prospective adopters and foster carers, is also sought via the use of questionnaires.

In June 2013 Who Cares? Scotland was asked to consult with children and young people placed within Renfrewshire's own fostering service. The consultation was conducted in order to understand how young people feel about their foster care placements and assist us to shape and improve the service. The consultation concluded in March 2014 and reported that that the majority of children and young people living within foster care feel loved, cared for and safe.

A leaving foster care questionnaire has been developed for children over 6 years leaving or moving on to another foster placement. This has been sent to social workers for children who have moved on from a foster placement.

Prospective adopters and others who attend the Fostering and Adoption are given questionnaires at the end of each Panel. These are sent to the Panel Advisor who collates this feedback.

FOSTERING SERVICE

As of the 30.9.14 we had 86 fostering households, this included permanent foster carers, short term foster carers and respite foster carers.

New Developments 2013/14

- The roll out of Viewpoint (an online consultation tool) to all children and young people, of the appropriate age, in foster care.
- Implementation of the Leaving Care Questionnaire – see above.
- Consult with foster carers with regards to their views on the support that should be offered to their own children.
- Introduction of the Welcome Pack for children/young people being accommodated with a Renfrewshire Council Foster Carers. The pack consists of an information leaflet about fostering, appropriate to the child/young people age and developmental stage, information about Who Cares? And how to contact Who Cares?
- Update of the format of the foster carers newsletter. (appendix 3)
- Continuing development of the foster carers training programme.
- Updating of the fostering and adoption procedures
- Appointment of a Service Manager

Inspection

The Fostering service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in March 2014. The areas that were inspected were – Quality of Care and Support; Quality of Staffing; Quality of Management and Leadership. The Fostering service was awarded 5's (very good) for each of these areas.

Recruitment Activity 2013/14

We have continued recruitment activity over the last year mainly through newspaper advertisements, an article in Renfrewshire Council's magazine which is distributed to all households in Renfrewshire and radio advertising through Renfrewshire Leisure Services.

When an enquirer contacts the team interested in fostering or adoption, our business support team initially respond with a telephone discussion and send out an information pack to give more detailed information about the task.

All enquiries are followed up within 10 working days and those still interested after reading the pack will have an initial home visit from the team. During this visit fostering or adoption will be discussed in much greater depth. An enquiry initial visit pro forma will also be completed at this time and the information will also be entered on the Social Work Information System.

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. In some cases the enquirer may be asked to take a further period of time to consider their enquiry.

Preparation Groups

Between 1.10.13 – 30.9.14 we have ran 2 preparation groups for fostering. 13 households attended and this resulted in 9 fostering assessments being allocated.

Preparation groups run for six sessions using the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' materials, the material used for the preparation groups is currently being reviewed in order to make use of up to date research and our own recently developed training materials. The social workers and social work assistant within the Fostering and Adoption team are skilled at leading these groups and there is also input by the senior social workers for 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 to have 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 being foster carers.

The preparation group covers a range of topics including managing challenging behaviour, attachment issues, safer care and working with birth parents. Participants are asked to give written feedback on each of the sessions and 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 Form F assessment stage.

Following the group the senior social worker and the social workers meet to discuss the group participants and the senior makes a decision as to who will be invited to make an application to be assessed as a foster carer. The participants will be visited at home and given feedback on whether or not they are invited to make an application. Some reasons for withdrawal or counselling out during the assessment process include accommodation problems, health issues and family crisis.

Within this period of time we have been assessing 2 short term fostering households for permanent fostering for 3 young people.

New Foster Carers and Carer De-registrations

In the period 1.10.13 – 30.9.14 an additional 8 short term foster carer households were registered, this included 1 respite foster carers and 1 respite foster carer for MDTFC. Four short term fostering households were approved as permanent fostering households for a child in their care. Four short term fostering household were approved as adopters for a specific child in their care.

Four carer households were deregistered between 1.10.13 – 30.9.14 and 1 foster carer unfortunately died.

Over the last few years the increase in the number of Renfrewshire fostering households has allowed Renfrewshire to be less dependent on the Independent and Voluntary foster care sector. On 30.9.14 there were 129 children/young people with Renfrewshire foster carers and 99 children/young people in external fostering agency placements. These figures demonstrate the continuing upward trend of placing children with Renfrewshire Council foster carers.

Foster carers have their own allocated social worker but also have access to the wider team, including the senior social workers, in crisis situations. 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, safer caring policies are in place for each fostering household, ensure a minimum of one unannounced visit is carried out annually, while also attending reviews, meetings and Children's Hearings with the carers.

Foster Carer Reviews

New Foster carers are reviewed by the Fostering Panel at the end of their first year as foster carers. Between 1.10.13 and 30.9.14 the Fostering and Adoption Panel reviewed 13 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 found the support provided by their social worker to be beneficial and support is always at the end of a telephone if required as well as finding the training offered informative and beneficial to the fostering task.

Experienced foster carers are also reviewed on an annual basis, by the field 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. In the year ending 30.9.14, 100% of foster carers requiring a review received one.

Foster Carer Training

As part of foster carers ongoing development and training an extensive training programme is offered throughout the year for both new and experienced carers. As previously stated a induction training programme is now in place. Training for more experienced foster carers has included Child Protection Training, Theraplay, Trauma and Attachment etc. Foster carers are now being directed to training related to their skills and development; they are also being encouraged to make use of a training record sheet.

Joint training for foster carers took place on 24.10.13 between Inverclyde, East Renfrewshire, West and East Dunbartonshire Councils and Renfrewshire Council on Internet Safety.

A practice discussion, for members of the Fostering and Adoption Team, has also taken place with the 5 local authorities on 17.9.14 to look at developing internet safety guidance for foster carers.

The social work training section continue to provide the opportunity and support for foster carers to complete an SVQ level 3 in Children's Care Learning and Development.

Carers Support Groups

The carers support group has been running for over two years. The group meets monthly and through the foster carers newsletter all foster carers are encouraged to attend. Any issues are fed back to the foster carer's social worker and the support group is part of the agenda for the Carers Consultation Group.

Foster Carers Consultation Group

This group now meets on a four monthly basis as opposed to a six monthly basis; this was at the request of the foster carers.

Children's Group

A group for the children of foster carers met on 3 occasions between 1.10.13 and 30.9.14. Each group has a different theme: - the first group got a tour around St Mirren Park; the second group had a visit to behind the scenes at Paisley Museum; and the third group had an art and crafts morning. The group allows the children of foster carers to meet up, get to know each other and other members of the fostering and adoption team.

Staff Development Day

A staff development day took place in October at which time the team look at a service plan for the development of the service, both for fostering and adoption.

Foster Carers Recognition Day

A Recognition Day was held on 22.10.14, at the Lyndhurst Hotel, in order to thank all Renfrewshire Council's foster carers for their work and commitment to fostering. 16 foster carers received a presentation for over 10 years service to fostering with Renfrewshire Council.

Development of the Fostering Service – 2014/15

Over the next year we hope to –

- Develop a newsletter for children of foster carers
- Develop a newsletter for locality teams
- Promote the work of the fostering and adoption team within the locality teams by having a social worker based within the locality team once a week.
- Appointment of a graduate intern to develop recruitment for foster carers and adopters
- Review of foster carer review paper work for the child's social workers and the children/young people in foster care to make it more appropriate and user friendly.

SUPPORTED CARERS

The Supported Carers' service moved from the Throughcare service to be part of the Fostering and Adoption Service at the end of 2013.

Within the period 1.10.13 to 30.9.14 the Fostering and Adoption Panel has approved 7 fostering households as supported carers. Six of whom were foster carers from independent agencies and 1 was a foster carer for Renfrewshire Council. We now have 13 supported carers, 10 of whom are Renfrewshire Council supported carers, 2 supported carers placements provided by other local authorities and 1 supported carer provided by an independent fostering agency.

Inspection

The supported carers service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in March 2014. The areas that were inspected were – Quality of Care and Support; Quality of Staffing; Quality of Management and Leadership. The supported carers service was awarded 5 for Quality of Care and Support and 4 for quality of staffing/management and leadership. The inspector recognised that this was a new service to the Fostering and Adoption Team and still in transition.

Development of the Supported Carer's service – 2014/15

Over the next year we hope to develop –

- A support group for supported carers
- Address the specific training needs of support carers

The Adoption and Permanence service

Inspection

The adoption service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in March 2014. The areas that were inspected were – Quality of Care and Support; Quality of Staffing; Quality of

Management and Leadership. The Adoption service was awarded 5's (very good) for each of these areas.

Recruitment of adoptive parents

There continues to be a need for adoptive carers and permanent foster carers for children of all ages. Carers are also urgently required for sibling groups and older children.

From 1.10.13 to 30.9.14 there has been 1 adoption preparation group that was ran jointly with Inverclyde Council. Eleven participants attended (5 couples and 1 single person), this included 2 foster carers from Renfrewshire who wished to adopt.

Renfrewshire Council's adoption service has made good use of the Adoption Register and resulted in positive matches for our children.

Renfrew shire Council has presented 11 children at Adoption Exchange days since 1.10.13 to 30.9.14. From these events 6 children have been linked with families with 4 further links being planned.

Adopters

When an adoption order is granted the parental rights and responsibilities of birth parents are transferred to the adoptive parent who becomes the child's legal representative.

In the period 1.10.13 to 30.9.14 7 households were recommended for approval as adopters by the panel and subsequently approved by the agency decision maker. Also within this period 4 short term foster carers where approved as permanent foster carers for the children/young people in their care.

Family Finding

During the period 1.10.13 – 30.9.14 19 children (1 sibling group of 2 and 17 solo children) were presented to the panel for consideration of 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 operated by BAAF Scotland. The Register is a computer database that collects and stores data on children who have a plan for adoption and approved adopters in Scotland. The purpose of the register gathering this information is to improve the chances of finding families for children. The Register became operational in 2011 and whilst not all local authorities in Scotland have yet signed up the aim is for all local authorities to use the Register. This will increase the potential to match adopters with children who need to be adopted.

National Adoption Week

National Adoption Week takes place in November and is organised by BAAF Scotland. Renfrewshire Council supports National Adoption Week and highlights the need for adoptive families in a variety of ways including publicity and advertising campaigns. It may not always be possible to link Renfrewshire children with Renfrewshire adopters because of geographical

considerations however through the Adoption Register the pool of possible adopters is expanded thus improving the prospect of appropriate links.

Renfrewshire Council works closely with Inverclyde Council and East Renfrewshire Council and meetings are held bimonthly 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 to meet four times a year. The attendance at the group varies depending on the topic being presented and what is going on in the adopter's lives at the time. A range of topics have been discussed and guest speakers have attended over the past year.

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.

Development of the Adoption Service – 2014/15

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

- Recruitment of new adopters
- Recruitment of new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members
- 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 development work with our linking process using the Adoption register
- Support Adoption Exchange days and Scotland's first Adoption Activity Day in May 2015
- Development of Post Adoption Support Plans

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 Panel that the number of children unable to return to live with their birth families remains high.

The Fostering Service, the Adoption Service and the Supported Carers Service have all been inspected by the Care Inspectorate and again received positive reports. All three services continue to use self assessment methods to identify areas for improvement and development of the services. 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.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Panel members for their hard work and commitment to Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children. The Panel 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 substitute care and those families who provide homes for them.

Joyce Gartshore

Chairperson of the Adoption Panel and the Fostering Panel

Adoption & Fostering Panel Members

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**Renfrewshire Council
Adoption Criteria****Age**

All applicants must be over 21 years of age.

Status

Enquiries will be considered from couples who wish to make joint application to adopt a child.

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.

Single applicants will also be considered.

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.