

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 16 January 2025

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Annual Report of the Fostering and Adoption Service
2023/24 Update on Developments for Fostering Service

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides elected members with the opportunity to review the 17th annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering and Adoption Service (appendix 1).
 - 1.2 The annual report sets out the work undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Fostering and Adoption Service in the period 1 August year 2023 to 31 July 2024. The annual report notes that on 31 July 2024 there were 69 fostering households approved by Renfrewshire. During the period covered by this report, 6 children and young people had a permanence plan considered by the panel and approved.
 - 1.3 The report considers the work of the panel and the continued work of the Fostering and Adoption Service.
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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 2022/23 attached as appendix 1.
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3. Background

- 3.1 The Looked After (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009 require Social Work in its role as a Fostering and Adoption agency to operate a Fostering Panel and an Adoption Panel. This panel has the responsibility for putting forward recommendations to the agency decision makers John Trainer (Head of Children and Justice Social

Work/Chief Social Work Officer) and Michelle McCargo, (Strategic Manager Children and Justice/Depute Chief Social Work Officer) regarding the suitability of people to adopt or foster children. Furthermore, the Panel considers and approves plans for children to be adopted or for the Council to apply for Permanence Orders on a child. 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 Adoption Panel with one constitution. The panel separates out the Fostering business from the Adoption business to ensure that the appropriate regulations are met regarding a quorum, and for the attendance of the legal and medical advisers. The panel has two chairpersons who are independent from the work of the service: one is a Social Work manager, and the other is from the Association for Fostering Adoption and Kinship Scotland (AFKA).
- 3.3 There are currently 24 members of the panel comprising elected members, social work, health and education staff, legal advisers, a medical adviser, carers, independent panel members, and an independent member from AFKA. The panel sits at least monthly- there were 14 panels in the reporting period. There are typically 3 panel members at each meeting along with appropriate advisors. The panel considered 51 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 Renfrewshire had 69 active households of foster carers on 31st July 2024. In the period 1/08/23 and 31/7/2024 an additional 1 household was registered as a foster carer, and 5 foster care households left the service, one household was deregistered as they adopted the child they had fostered, one household was deregistered following a period of poor health. Another household, left after many years and coming to the end of their fostering career. The last two households decided they no longer wanted to foster.
- 3.6 The report notes the ongoing need to recruit Renfrewshire foster carers and adopters because of children being accommodated and in need of permanent care, and our commitment to reducing the number of children being placed externally. In the past we have had high-profile recruitment activity which only produced 1 or 2 more applications to foster. Most of our fostering applications come from people who already have foster carers as friends or family. There is a national difficulty in recruitment of foster carers. The service continues to work with communication and marketing to consider how best to promote fostering recruitment.
- 3.7 In the period 1/08/23 and 31/07/2024, 2 Renfrewshire households were approved as adopters at the Renfrewshire panel.
- 3.8 The Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 increases the responsibility/ duty of Local Authorities to provide continuing care placements for young adults 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 become supported carers wherever this is appropriate.

- 3.9 We currently have 11 young adults living with supported carers. Many of these carers were previously the young adults' foster carers.
- 3.10 The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 became law in 2021 and places new duties on local authorities to place brothers and sisters together in placements and place a new duty on local authorities to promote contact between brothers and sisters who are looked after. This is in keeping with the independent care review report, The Promise.
- 3.11 Renfrewshire approved the "Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy" in May 2021. The policy contains the following pledge "When children come into care Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together". The policy recognises that there will be times that brothers, and sisters can't be placed together but requires us to report on this. The annual report on Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy is also presented at the Board today.

Implications of this report

1. Financial

None.

2. HR and Organisational Development

None.

3. Community/Council Planning

Our Renfrewshire is safe - *The provision of foster care provides Renfrewshire's children with safety and care*

4. Legal

None.

5. Property/Assets

None.

6. Information Technology

None.

7. Equality and 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.

8. Health and Safety

None.

9. Procurement

None.

10. Risk

None.

11. Privacy Impact

None.

12. Climate Risk

None.

13. Children's Rights

This report demonstrates compliance with Article 3 (best interest of child), Article 9 (keeping families together), Article 12 (respect for children's views), Article 19 (protection from violence), Article 22 (refugee children) and 25 (review of a child's placement) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

14. Cosla Policy Position

None.

List of Background Papers

(a) None.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within children's services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Fiona Duncan, Social Work Senior Manager on 0300 300 1199.

Children's Services

FD/KO 25/11/24

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