
To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 21 January 2021

Report by: Director of Children's Services

**Heading: Annual report of the Fostering and Adoption Service 2019/20
Update on developments for Looked After Children and
Fostering Service**

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report presents to elected members the 13th 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 year 2019/20 and is set in the context of the broader issues pertaining to Looked After and Accommodated Children.
 - 1.3. The report references how the service managed during this pandemic.
 - 1.4. The report considers the future work of the fostering and adoption service.
 - 1.5. A review of the constitution of the fostering and adoption panels has been carried out and updated. The draft updated constitution is attached at appendix 2.
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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 2019/20 and the changed reporting period;
 - b) note the continuing effort to secure foster carers and adoptive parents for Renfrewshire's children who require an alternative family placement;
 - c) note how the service continued during the pandemic; and
 - d) agree the updated constitution for the Fostering and Adoption panel.

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 (Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice Services) or Michelle McCargo, (Children's Services Manager) 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 25 members of the panel 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 (AFA). The panel is chaired by either a Social Work Manager or the independent representative from Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland. It meets twice monthly. There are typically 3 panel members at each meeting along with appropriate advisors. The Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel considered 83 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. Between 1/10/19 and 31/07/2020 we held 1 set of preparation groups and 2 households subsequently applied to be assessed as foster carers. Renfrewshire had 81 active households of foster carers at 31st July 2020. In the period 1/10/19 and 31/7/2020 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 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 2017/18 we had a high-profile recruitment campaign during fostering fortnight which resulted in a significantly higher number of initial enquiries from other years (35). In the end this resulted has resulted in 5 additional fostering households, only 1 or 2 more than previous years. The high-profile activity does not seem to have produced the outcome we envisaged. Most of our fostering application come from people who already have foster carers as friends or family.
- 3.7. In the period 1/10/19 and 31/07/2020 a total of 3 Renfrewshire households were approved as adopters at the Renfrewshire panel.
- 3.8. The Fostering and Adoption services are subject to regulation and were last 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. The next Inspection was due to take place in 2020 however has been postponed due to the pandemic. We meet regularly with our inspector about our current practice and developments.
- 3.9. 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.
- 3.10. We currently have 15 young adults living with supported carers. Many of these carers were previously the young adults' foster carers.
- 3.11. A report was presented to Board on the 1st November 2018 detailing the BeST service trial. This has now started. The aim of the trial is to learn how to best support the development and wellbeing of young children (under 60 months) who come into local authority care. The trial will compare two approaches: service as usual (i.e. usual parenting capacity assessment undertaken by our social work teams); and an evidence-based infant mental health intervention called 'GIFT'. The GIFT approach originated at the University of Tullane in New Orleans USA and uses a multi-disciplinary team of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and social workers to assess and treat infants and their birth families. GIFT is delivered by the NSPCC.
- 3.12. Foster carers of children (who are selected at random for the GIFT assessment) will require to be heavily involved in this assessment and treatment programme. As such we have identified foster carers who are registered to take children of his age and briefed them on the trial and the GIFT model. We have referred 24 children to the trial.
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4. Constitution

- 4.1. The fostering and adoption panel require to have a constitution. The previous constitution was dated 2006.

- 4.2. The constitution required to be updated to take account of Fostering and Adoption legislation that had been enacted after the 2006 constitution was approved.
- 4.3. The changes relate to specific duties of the Fostering and Adopting panel when they sit as each.

Implications of this report

1. Financial

None.

2. HR and Organisational Development

None.

3. Community/Council Planning

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| Our Renfrewshire is thriving | - | <i>Providing safe care for children and young people will contribute the Renfrewshire economy.</i> |
| Our Renfrewshire is well | - | <i>Providing a quality fostering and adoption service makes a positive contribution to the well-being of children and young people and to the overall well-being of the community.</i> |
| Our Renfrewshire is fair | - | <i>The fostering and adoption service ensures that children who can't be looked after in their own family have an alternative family to provide that care.</i> |
| Our Renfrewshire is safe | - | <i>The fostering and adoption service contributes to the safety of children in Renfrewshire.</i> |
| Building strong, safe and resilient communities | - | <i>The fostering and adoption services ensures that children who need a family placement have their needs met.</i> |
| Tackling inequality, ensuring opportunities for all | - | <i>The fostering and adoption services ensures that children who need a family placement have their needs met.</i> |
| Working together to improve outcomes | - | <i>The fostering and adoption services ensures that children who need a family placement have their needs met.</i> |

4. Legal

None.

5. Property/Assets

None.

6. Information Technology

None.

7. Equality and Human Rights

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only.

8. Health and Safety

None.

9. Procurement

None.

10. Risk

None.

11. Privacy Impact

None.

12. Cosla Policy Position

None.

13. Climate Risk

None.

List of Background Papers

(a) Background Paper 1: Fostering and Adoption Annual Report

(b) The Fostering and Adoption Panel constitution.

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 Clare Cuning 0141 618 6650

Children's Services

JT/CC

30 November 2020

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THE FOSTERING AND ADOPTION PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

Foreword

Introduction

Context

- Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People
- Overview of the work presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel 1.10.19 – 31.7.20
- Panel membership
- Staffing
- Commitment to permanency planning
- Children Social Work statistics in Scotland – 2018-2019

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- New foster carers and carers deregistration
- Foster carers reviews
- Foster carers training
- Foster carers support group
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- Break Through group
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Report of Supported Carers Service

- Overview of Supported Carers Service
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Report on the Adoption and Permanence Service

- Development within the adoption service 2019 – 2020
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- Adoption support
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Foreword

Welcome to the annual report of The Fostering and Adoption Service. This report is jointly compiled by the Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Registered Social Work Manager, Fostering and Adoption Services and takes a retrospective look at the previous year as well as looking to the future developments.

We have been living in very different times in 2020 and coronavirus has impacted on all of our services. The introduction of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 demonstrates the unique times we are working through. The Act allowed us, during the emergency period caused by the virus, to place more than the currently allowed 3 children in a fostering household, and other measures where we didn't have to review a child placed in a kinship arrangement for 3 months instead of the usual 6 weeks. The Social Work Advisor to the Scottish Government, stated that these provisions were introduced in order that all looked after children and young people could be safely cared for, and to allow local authorities to prioritise their resources effectively to help the most vulnerable children. In Renfrewshire we have not required to use the measures possible in the above Act.

Within Renfrewshire Children's Services we have continued to ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are met consistently and responded to as required. Services within Renfrewshire have continued to work and adapt throughout the pandemic to support children.

We have changed the reporting period of the figures in this annual report so that it aligns with the national reporting period for all children's social work statistics. The reporting period is 1st August -31st July each year. This means that we are comparing the last 10 months figures to the previous 12 months figures for this year's report only.

As at the 31.7.20, Renfrewshire Council had 642 'Looked After' Children. Of these 200 children/young people were looked after at home, 213 were looked after by Kinship carers/friends/relatives and 229 were accommodated with foster carers, pre-adoption or within different residential placements.

A significant number of the children looked after in foster care/residential care will be unable to return home to birth parents or to live with 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 family 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. The Panels role are to make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who ultimately approves children's permanence plans or confirms that a household can adopt or become foster carers.

The Panels continue to be busy. Between 1.10.19 to 31.7.20, 13 children's permanence plans were approved by the Agency Decision Maker. This is an increase from the same period in 2018/ 2019 when 10 children's permanence plans were approved.

The Fostering Service has continued to shift the balance of children's placements being with external fostering providers to our own internal foster placements. On 31.7.20 there were 60 children/young people in external placements as opposed to 63 on 30.9.19.

I hope that you enjoy reading this year's annual report.

John Trainer
Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice
Chief Social Work Officer

Introduction

This is the 13th annual report of Renfrewshire Council's Fostering and the Adoption Panel.

The purpose of the Panel is to consider prospective foster carers, prospective adopters and supported carers. In addition, they 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 outcome. The Panel also consider the matching of a child with specific foster carers or adoptive parents to ensure that these are of a consistently high standard. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Makers for the Fostering and Adoption Panel are John Trainer, Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice/Chief Social Work Officer and Michelle McCargo, Children's Services Manager.

For children unable to return to their birth family, activity within the fostering and adoption team continues to be high and the recruitment of foster carers and adopters is a prime objective, and this is reflected in the amount of permanence planning work within the social work locality teams.

The Fostering Service and Adoption Service continue to be inspected by the regulatory body, the Care Inspectorate. The last inspection took place in May 2017 where all aspects of service delivery in both the Fostering and Adoption Service remained Grade 5 which is 'very good' across all domains inspected.

COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on how Renfrewshire Council has managed Panel business. In March 2020 we had to cancel our fostering and adoption panels as these all took place face to face. However, by June 2020 we reconvened the panel virtually using Microsoft teams, and although they now take a bit longer than the face to face panels, we are able to continue having the usual meetings. This few month's delay caused the plans of a small number of children to be paused, however we have now caught up with this.

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 and the Adoption Panel will be transparent and that this accountability will lead to improved services.

Context

The work of the Fostering and Adoption Panel should be viewed in the context of the numbers of Renfrewshire Council's Looked After and Accommodated children.

Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People

As of 31st July 2020, Renfrewshire Council had 642 Looked After Children/Young People.

30.9.19 31.7.20

	30.9.19	31.7.20
Independent Sector-Children - Foster Care	63	60
Local Authority-Children - Foster Care	127	125
Local Authority-Children – Houses	29	14
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Schools	9	7
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Special Needs	2	3
Pre-adoption	10	11
Independent Sector-Children - Secure School	3	3
Independent Sector-Children - Residential House	6	6
Children looked after by kinship carers/friends/relatives	193	213
Children looked after at home	207	200
Total	649	642

We have changed the reporting period to match that used nationally when reporting looked after children statistics.

Overview of the work presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel 1.10.19 – 31.7.20

Business Item	Number	Comments
Child adoption plans and links	6	This figure included 1 sibling group of 2
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	3	3 domestic adopters
Approval of Foster Carers (households)	2	1 interim fostering households and 1 short break household
Review of Registration (adoption)	1	
Request/review of adoption allowance	2	
Children's Permanence plans- Legal routes	13	The figure is in relation to the legal route and includes 1 sibling group of 2 and 1 sibling group of 5
Links with permanent foster carers	9	
Approval of Renfrewshire interim foster carers as permanent foster carers (households)	5	
Deregistration of foster carer	3	1 fostering household retired. 1 fostering household converted to supported carers status 1 fostering household resigned due to personal circumstances.
Approval of supported carers (households)	1	
Initial review of foster carer after their 1 st year	2	
Foster care review 7 years plus	3	
Foster carer review 10 years plus	2	
Review of foster carers registration – due to change in registration/circumstances	4	This figure represents 1 fostering household who increased their age range, and 3 fostering households who had a change in personal circumstances
Total number of agenda items	56	

Panel Membership

We are fortunate to have a consistent and committed panel membership over the past year. We currently have 25 members of the panel.

Panel membership continues to reflect a wide range of experience and expertise, from social work, education, health and the police. The Panel continues to be well supported by adopters, foster carers and elected members. The Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland also continue to provide an independent panel member who acts as a substitute chairperson.

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. The medical advisor provides up to date written information regarding any health issues in relation to a child or a prospective foster carer or adopter.

We also have ongoing representation from Legal Services who provide written legal advice to the Panel in relation to adoption and permanence work, as well as attendance at the Panel as required.

Panel members 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.

Over the next year it is hoped to develop the Fostering and Adoption Panel by providing training to Panel members in order to continue to increase Panel members confidence and performance on Panel.

Staffing

The structure of the Fostering and Adoption Service is: -

Social Work Manager (Operations) Registered manager of the service. (also has responsibility for the kinship care service and the pre and post birth team).

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

2 job share social work assistants.

The fostering and adoption service now have a separate fostering team and an adoption and permanence team, this has allowed the development of more specialist skills regarding fostering and adoption. Both teams work closely together and share expertise and learning.

Commitment to permanence planning 1.10.19 to 31.07.20

Between 01.10.19 and 31.7.20 Renfrewshire has progressed adoption and permanence plans for 19 children. Renfrewshire Council recognises the importance in progressing plans for children within appropriate time scales. There are different 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 social work staff with regards to the needs of the child and planning for adoption or permanency.

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 throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

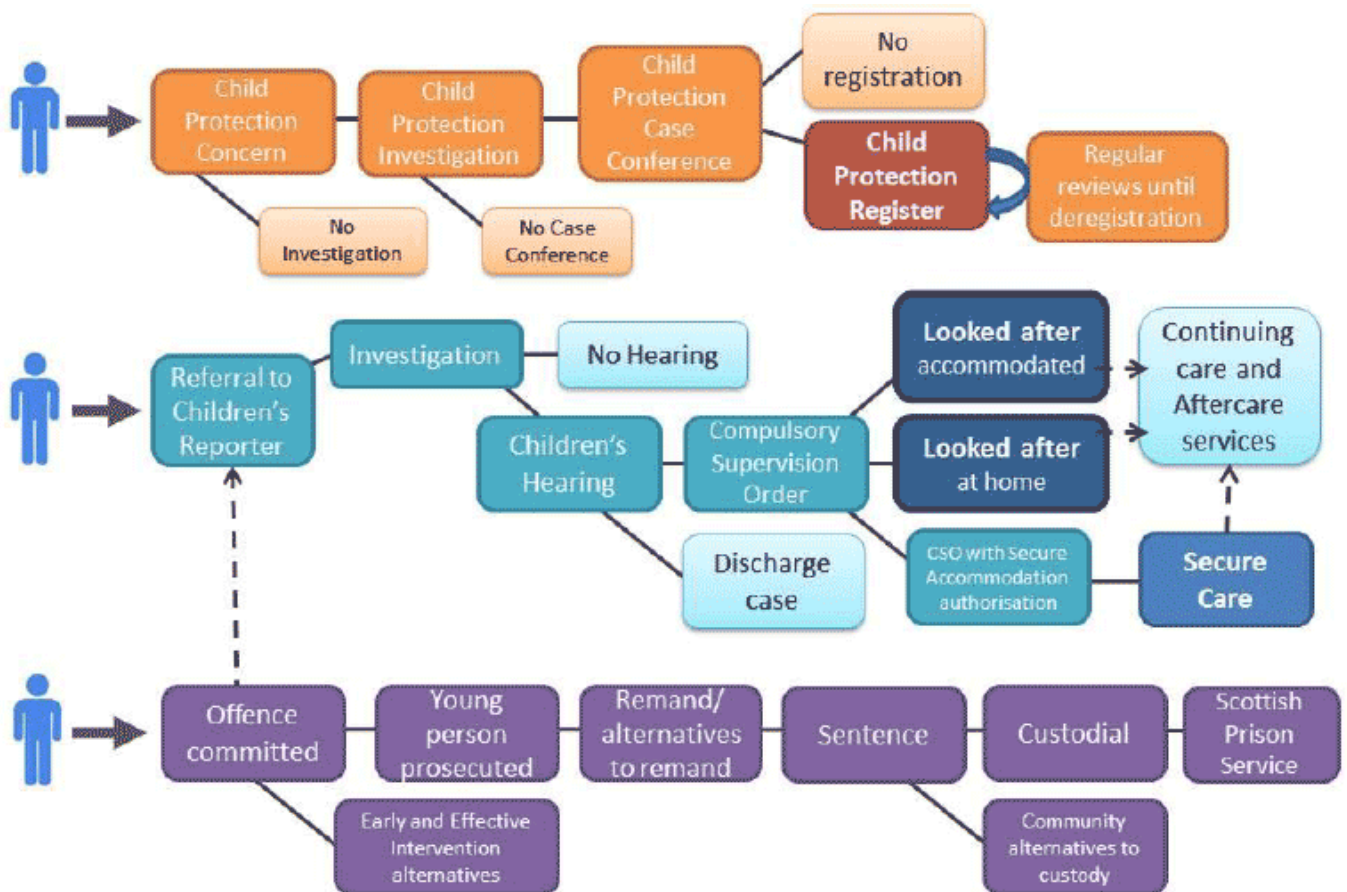
Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland, 2018-19

The following statistics are taken from childrens.statistics@gov.scot (March 2020)

The Scottish Government collects statistics annually from local authorities and secure units on children and young people, who were formally looked after; under child protection measures; or in secure care at some point between 1 August 2018 and 31 July 2019.

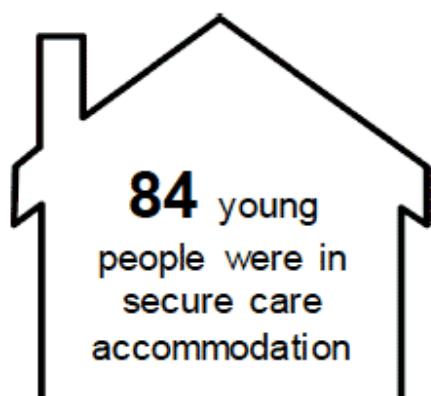
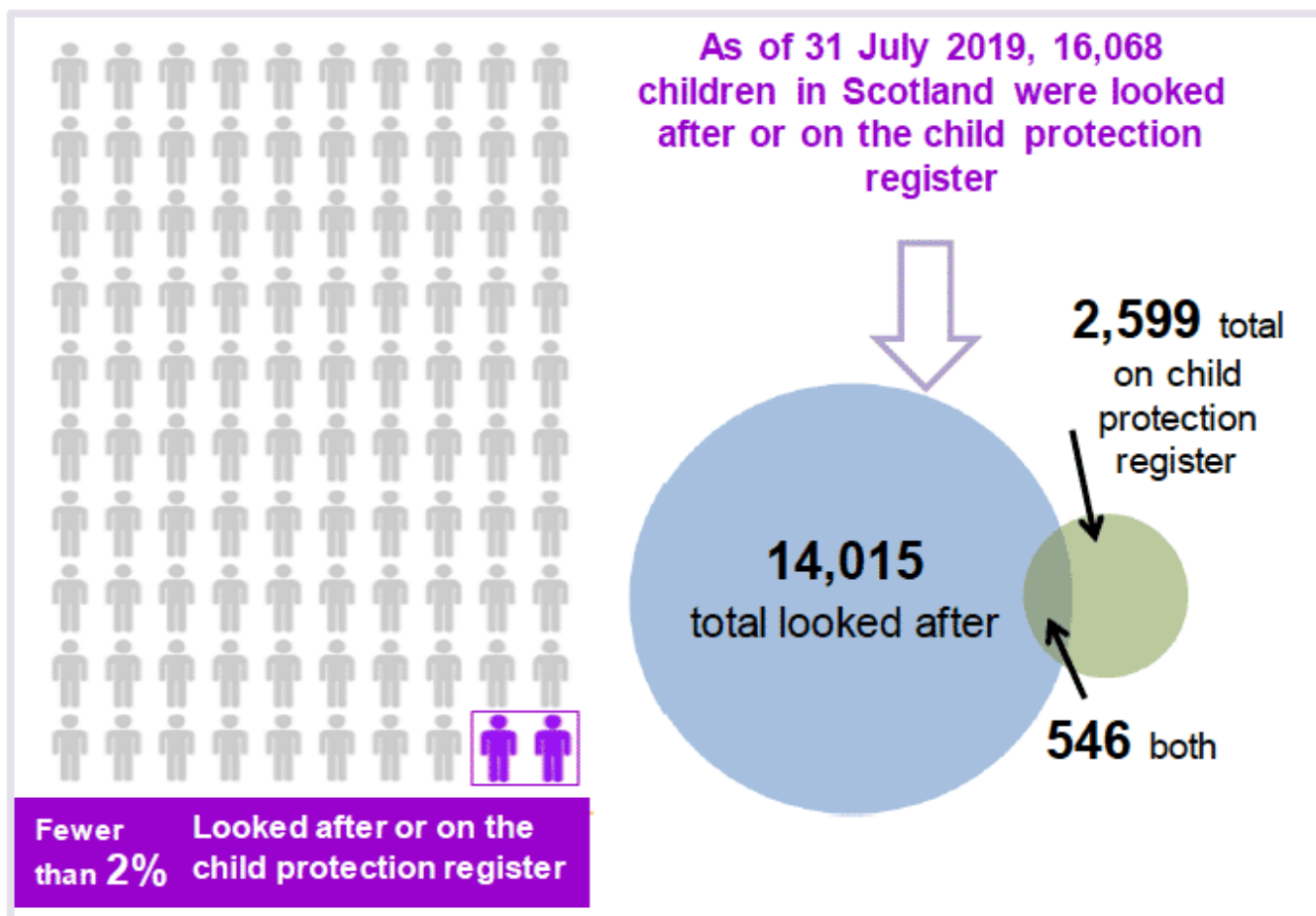
How do children come to be counted in these figures?

There are, several ways that a child may become looked after, on the child protection register or in secure care. Children can be referred to the Children's Reporter, become voluntarily looked after or come via the criminal justice system. The diagram below gives a high-level illustration of the main routes by which children would be included.






Coverage

Data for Children Looked after, Child Protection and Eligibility for Aftercare was collected for the period 1 August 2018 to 31 July 2019 from all local authorities in Scotland. Data for Glasgow City was not provided for the period 1 August 2017 to 31 July 2018. To estimate national figures for 2017-18, the 2016-17 figures for Glasgow City were used along with the 2017-18 figures for all other local authorities (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-2017-2018/>).



Comparisons with 2017-18:

-  **5%** decrease in the number of children looked after
-  **3%** decrease in the number of children on child protection register
-  **1** fewer young person, on average, during the year in secure care accommodation

The table and chart below show the National figures of the proportion of children being looked after at home which has decreased over the last decade, with 25% of the total in this group in 2019 compared to 39% in 2009. Increasing proportions of children are being looked after away from home in community settings, in particular foster carer (34% of the total in 2019 compared with 29% in 2009). Kinship care (29% of 2019 placements) was the second most common setting type for looked after children in 2019. Children looked after in residential care settings remain static at around 10% of the overall total.

Nationally the number of children looked after at 31 July, in each type of accommodation –

	2009	2018	2019
In the community	13,707	13,042	12,814
At home with parents	5,924	3,789	3,569
With Kinship Carers: friends/relatives	2,993	4,073	4,175
With Foster Carers provided by LA	3,594	3,453	3,335
With Foster Carers purchased by LA	905	1,491	1,463
With prospective adopters	242	186	212
In other community	49	50	60
Residential Accommodation	1,580	1,512	1,448
In local authority children's house	611	599	581
In voluntary agency children's house	138	122	127
In residential school	598	383	344
In secure accommodation	102	57	63
Crisis care	18	0	0
In other residential (1)	113	351	333
Total looked after children	15,287	14,554	14,262

(1) 'In other community' is a category that captures those people in community placements outside those listed, such as supported accommodation.

(2) The bulk of the 'other residential' placements are private/independent residential placements for young people with complex needs.

Children looked after per 1,000 children under 18 by type of accommodation, 1988-2019

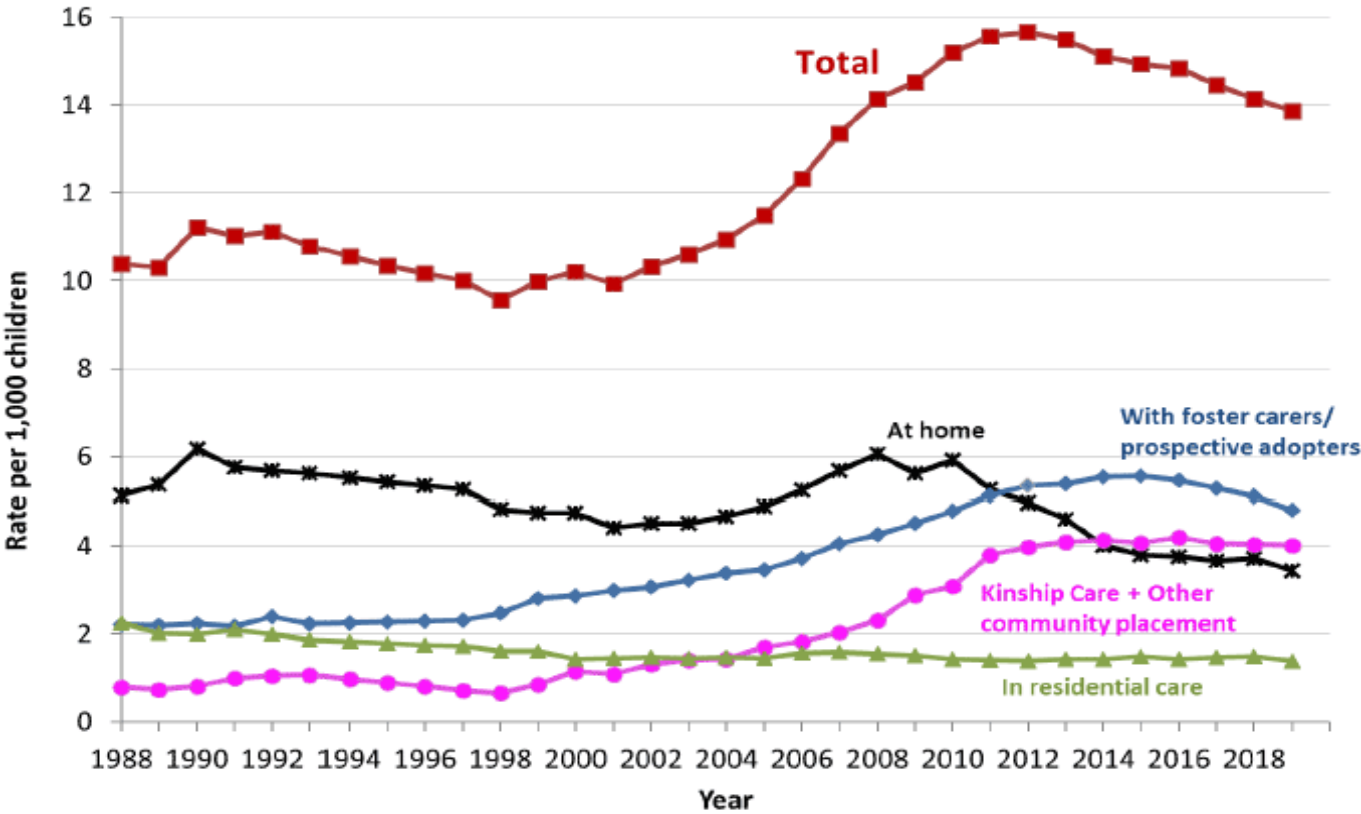


Table below - number of children starting to be looked after, by age

	Number			Percentage		
	2009	2018	2019	2009	2018	2019
Under 1	641	626	565	12%	16%	15%
1-4	1,138	852	891	22%	21%	23%
5-11	1,563	1,275	1,137	30%	32%	30%
12-15	1,800	1,149	1,128	35%	29%	29%
16-17	55	73	102	1%	2%	3%
18-21(2)	4	2	1	0%	0%	0%
Not known	0	2	0	0%	0%	0%
Total	5,201	3,979	3,824	100%	100%	100%

- (1) Data for 2018 is estimated by using the 2017 figures for Glasgow City and 2018 for all other authorities.
- (2) A child may start to be looked after more than once in a year and so may be counted more than once.
- (3) The 18-21 category in this table may include a small number of looked after children who were over 21 years.

The above table also shows that over the last 10 years children have started episodes of care at younger ages. In 2009, 34% of children starting episodes of care were under five years of age. By 2019 this had risen to 38%, although this is a decline from a peak of 41% in 2014. Fifteen percent of children starting episodes of care were less than one year old, increasing from 12% in 2009.

There were slightly more boys than girls starting episodes of care in 2019 - 52% boys compared with 48% girls, (the Scotland-wide population of under 18s was 51% male in 2019).[1] The gender split of those starting episodes of care has remained stable over the last 10 years.

The table below shows the number of episodes of care which ceased by length of time looked after. There were 4,068 episodes of care which ceased between 1 August 2018 and 31 July 2019, a decrease of 6% from the previous year.

The length of time for which children ceasing to be looked after had been looked after remained similar between 2018 and 2019. However, when compared with 2009, there are a higher proportion of children who had been looked after for more than five years, and a lower proportion who had been looked after for under six months.

Table below - Number of children ceasing to be looked after, by length of time looked after

Length of time looked after	Number			Percentage		
	2009	2018	2019	2009	2018	2019
Under 6 weeks	409	219	259	9	5	6
6 weeks to under 6 months	333	326	321	8	8	8
6 months to under 1 year	767	594	543	17	14	13
1 year to under 3 years	1,718	1,545	1,474	39	36	36
3 years to under 5 years	652	675	643	15	16	16
5 years and over	515	968	828	12	22	20
Not known	-	-	-	0	0	0
Total	4,394	4,327	4,068	100	100	100

(1) A child may cease to be looked after more than once during the year and will be counted once for each episode of care ending.

Most children (58% in 2019) go home to their biological parents and 16% go to live in kinship care with friends or relatives or leave care through a Kinship Care Order when they cease to be looked after. The proportion of children leaving care due to being adopted was 7% in 2019, the same level as in 2018. The majority of adoptions (63%) are of children aged under five years old. There is a much more even spread ages of young people leaving care to go home or to live with friends and relatives.

Cross-UK looked after comparisons

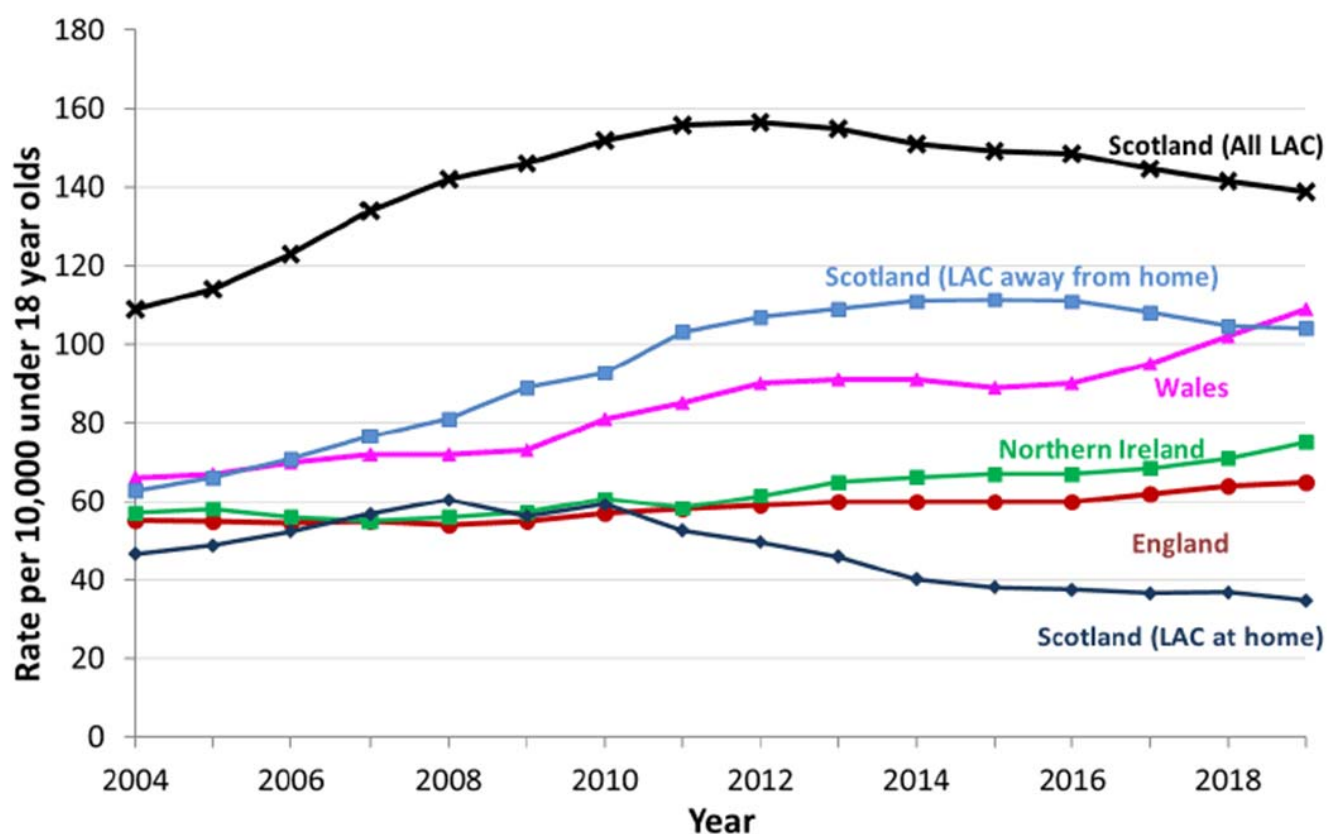
The definition of "looked after children" varies across the countries within the UK, which makes cross-UK comparisons difficult. To improve comparability, the Scotland figure at 31 March has been used, rather than the published 31 July figure, as the other nations publish on this date.

The chart below gives Scottish figures including a breakdown for children looked after at home and away from home for comparability with the other nations. Scotland has a much higher number of children looked after at home than the rest of the UK, a placement which in Scotland requires a supervision order from the Children's Panel. Overall, Scotland had the highest rate of looked after children in 2019 at 139 children per 10,000 under 18 population. The rate for only children looked after away from home in Scotland is no longer the highest in the UK at 104 per 10,000 under 18 population. This is slightly lower than the rate of looked after children in Wales (109 per 10,000). The rates in Northern Ireland (75 per 10,000) and England (65 per 10,000) are much lower.

Chart 2: Cross- UK comparison of rate of looked after children per 10,000 children, 2004-2019

There is more information on the comparability of looked after children data across the UK at the following link:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/socialservicestats>



REPORT ON THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Dr John Simmonds, Coram BAAF Director of Policy, Research and Development and Dr Louise Sims, Kinship Care and Fostering Consultant wrote in August 2020:-

Covid-19/coronavirus has created a major health crisis that impacts on every individual and families across the UK. Many of the immediate priorities focused on adults, as those most at risk from the virus and as those responsible for complying with the public health measures. However, there also needs to be a specific focus on the impact on children when their parents or other members of their family, foster carers or adopters are having to respond to the crisis by making major adjustments to their lives. The impact that this has on the children cannot be underestimated. When it comes to children and young people in care or who have previously been looked after, these issues will be significantly amplified.

Within Renfrewshire Council's Fostering Service our foster carers managed and cared for the children and young people exceptionally well. They were imaginative in relation to keeping children in touch with their birth parents and with children's learning. We ensured that children who were old enough were supported by their foster carers to use electronic means of keeping in touch with their families. Foster carers sent videos of the babies in their care to their birth parents and video-called their birth parents at times such as bath time and bed time so they could be involved in reading bedtime stories so that the babies could hear their parents' voices. Our foster carers were incredible with the amount of time and effort that they took to keep families, separated by the lockdown restrictions, in touch with each other. Our birth families while many were understandably frustrated, were all equally concerned that they didn't risk the health of our foster carers and their families. The joint effort by birth parents, foster carers and staff to support each other through the first few months of lockdown was incredible to see.

As of the 31.7.20 we had 81 fostering households, this included permanent foster carers, long term foster carers, interim foster carers and short break foster carers.

Developments within the Fostering Service 2019 – 2020

- Fostering service participation with Fostering Fortnight in May 2020, where the service made use of local media, social media and articles from our foster carers
- We have continued to encourage participation with foster carers on their training needs
- We have developed evening training program in order supported carers can attend
- We have continued to develop foster children's participation in foster carers reviews by encouraging the use of "my view" to represent their views
- Children in foster care continue to be involved in participation strategies through our own Break Through group, Who Cares? Scotland and the Champions Board
- The Managers within the Fostering Service continue to attend Social Work Scotland meetings and liaise with neighboring authorities
- We have raised 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

- We continue to participate in the BEST trial (this is explained below)
- To continue to develop the use of exit questionnaires with regards to gathering information around the standard of care provided by Renfrewshire Council foster carers.
- We have held consultations with Foster carers using Microsoft teams.
- We have help foster carer reviews and Fostering and Adoption panels using Microsoft teams.

Inspection

As we have already explained The Fostering and Adoption Service has not been inspected since May 2017. The service was expected to have been inspected in May 2020, however, due to current pandemic this did not go ahead. We are in regular liaison with our Inspector who is aware of our practice generally and our adaptations during the pandemic.

Recruitment activity 1.10.19 – 30.9.20

During Fostering Fortnight, May 2020, our service was visible through Renfo and social media.

From 1.10.19 to 31.7.20 we have continued to receive enquiries in relation to fostering.

If the person who has enquired wishes to take the next step, an initial visit is 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. (see appendix 1 for fostering criteria). Applications to be assessed as a foster carer are not completed by applicants until after they have completed the preparation groups.

Preparation groups

Between 1.10.19 – 31.7.20 we held 1 set of preparation groups for fostering, in January 2020, with another group planned for the Autumn. This resulted in 2 fostering applications from the January group.

This is 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.

Our 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.

Preparation groups run for 6 sessions, normally at the weekend or evening sessions. 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 current foster carers provide input regarding their experiences. There is also input by the senior social worker/service manager at the final session.

Planning for the Autumn group was different in relation to the groups being help virtually, with adaptations to the presentations having to be thought through. This group has just finished.

New foster carers and carers deregistered

In the period 1.10.19 – 31.7.20 an additional 2 fostering households were approved. 1 household was approved as interim foster carers and 1 household as a short break foster carer.

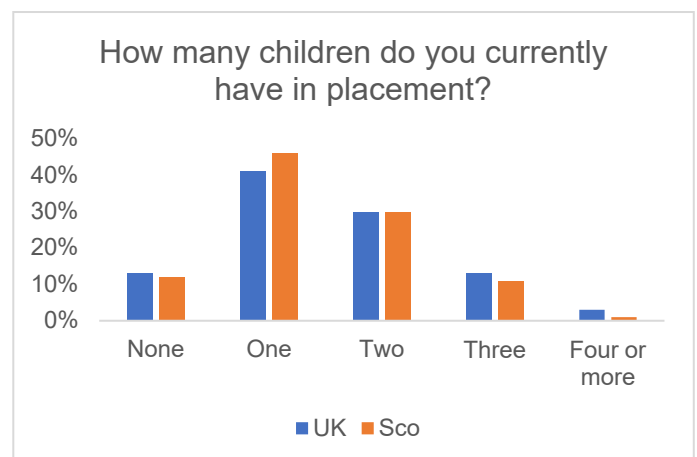
Between 1.10.19 – 31.7.20 3 fostering households were deregistered for the following reasons:

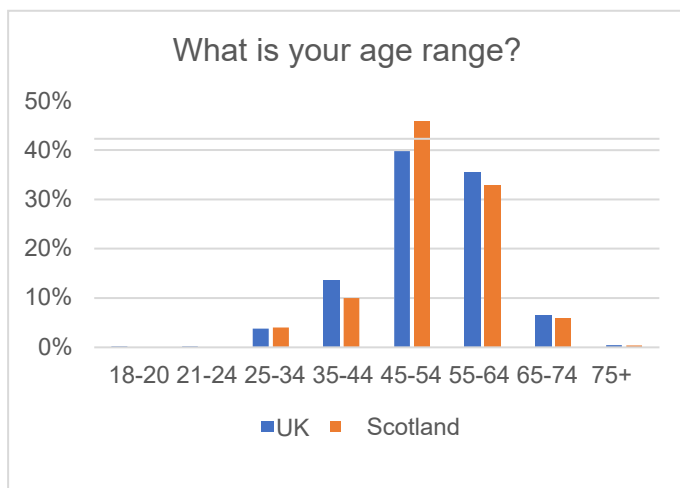
1 fostering household resigned due to a change in their personal circumstances, 1 fostering household converted to support carers (young people now 18 years), and 1 fostering household retired after being a fostering household for over 20 years.

The Fostering Network have published the State of the Nations report (State of the Nations Foster Carers Full Report Kate Lawson and Robert Cann February 2019) which has become recognised as the most comprehensive insight into foster carers' views of fostering in the UK. Sara Lundie, from The Fostering Network, stated that she was delighted that The Fostering Network were able to extract the data specifically for Scotland.

500 foster carers from Scotland responded to the 2018 State of the Nations survey, published June 2019.

- 64 per cent foster for a local authority and 36 per cent for an independent/voluntary provider.
- The number of fostered children currently in placement: none - 12 per cent, one - 46 per cent, two - 30 per cent, three - 11 per cent, and four or more - 1 per cent.
- 19 per cent of respondents were male and 81 per cent were female.
- Nine out of ten (89 per cent) foster carers who responded were between the ages of 35 and 64, with the most common age range being 45- 54 (46 per cent of the total)?





The typical foster carer in Scotland, based on survey respondents:

- is aged between 45 and 64
- is female
- is fostering with their partner
- currently has one or two children in placement
- has no birth children currently at home.

Foster carer reviews

New Foster Carers are reviewed by the Fostering Panel at the end of their first year and every three years thereafter. Foster carers will also return to Panel if their registration has to be reviewed with regards to a change in registration.

Between 1.10.19 and 31.7.20 the Fostering and Adoption Panel reviewed:

2 fostering household after their first year,

3 after their seventh year and

2 ten years plus.

1 fostering household also retired,

1 fostering household converted from fostering to supported care and

1 fostering household resigned due to a change in circumstances.

4 fostering households were reviewed at Panel in relation to their registration, 3 due to a change in their circumstances and 1 due to their age range being increases.

Foster carer reviews are an opportunity for foster carers to talk about their experience, training and support etc. Renfrewshire Council's foster carers expressed satisfaction with their experiences of fostering and their learning and remain enthusiastic and committed. They have found the support provided by their social worker during covid times to be beneficial and available as required, as well as finding the training offered informative and beneficial to the fostering task.

Foster carers are internally reviewed on an annual basis, by Social Work Managers (Operations). The foster carers provide written as well as verbal contribution to the review process, as well as written reports from their birth children. Reports by their supervising social worker and child's social worker are all part of the review process. Foster children are encouraged to contribute to the review process and this year there has been a development with regards to birth parents being encouraged to submit a report for the Foster Care Review regarding the care their child/children is receiving. To date we have had 1 birth parent report returned.

Between 1.10.19 to 31.7.20 23 Foster carer Reviews took place.

Since the lock down we have developed the use of virtual foster care reviews and continue to do so at this time.

The duties of the supervising social workers from the fostering team is to keep regular contact with the foster carers, this includes home visits and telephone contact. Visits would normally take place on a 4 to 6-week basis, depending on the placements and any issues arising. Home visits consist of supervision, training and development, 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 include a minimum of two unannounced visits annually. Supervising Social Workers will also attend Looked After Children review meetings and Children's Hearings with the carers. Joint visits by the child's social worker and the social worker from the fostering team takes places when a new placement is established and routinely thereafter.

This year has seen some changes to home visits and unannounced visits by the social worker for the foster carer. At the point of the first lockdown we stopped visits to our fostering households unless it was critical. We began regular monthly visiting again in June 2020 and have again halted this during the November 3 weeks of tier 4 lockdown. At this time unannounced visits have not taken place due to the pandemic as we need to phone beforehand to check there are no signs of covid in the home. Unannounced visits are planned to start again after the November period of lockdown has ended.

Foster carer training

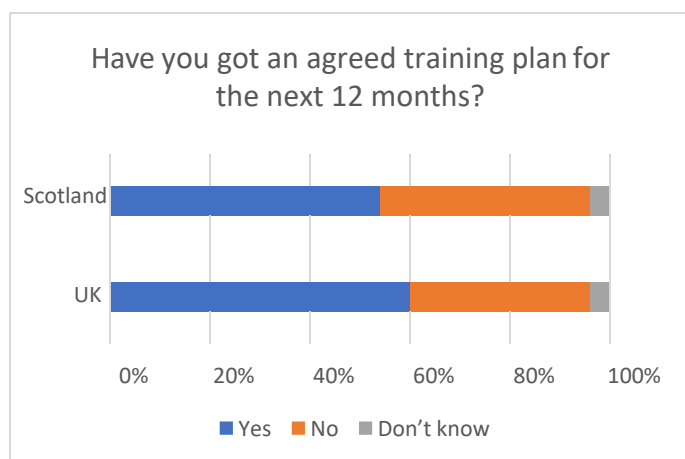
In 2018 Fostering Network State of the Nations report covered key practice and workforce issues such as placement stability, training and support for carers, and status and authority of the workforce. They received a record 4,037 responses from across the UK, with 500 from Scotland, which has given us a unique insight into the issues currently facing foster carers.

In relation to foster carer training foster carers tell us that the children and young people they foster require additional support, and children need carers who have an understanding of the impact of early trauma and aware of the needs of the children they care for. There is a corresponding increased demand for foster carers to meet these needs. The Scotland learning and development standard for foster care was written in 2017, however, implementation of this standard is on hold pending the outcome of the care review.

The training gaps highlighted below are a clear indication of the specialised role of foster carers and highlight the challenges faced by today's carers.

Key findings

- 45 per cent of carers who are supporting a child with mental health needs say they have been unable to access the relevant specialised support.
- When asked about the issues and challenges faced in the past 24 months, 50 per cent of respondents said they had looked after a fostered child who had either:
 - caused violence in their home
 - self-harmed
 - gone missing from the home; or
 - been involved with the police.
- The top five training gaps identified by carers are therapeutic parenting, behaviour management, mental health, specialised first aid and attachment.



- Since 2016 there has been a marked increase, from 36 per cent to 54 per cent, in the proportion of carers reporting that they have an agreed training plan in place for the next 12 months. This is still very low and *lags the rest of the UK*, which is 59 per cent.
- There is an improvement since 2016 (from 83 per cent to 89 per cent) in the proportion of carers feeling the training provided had helped with their fostering role.

Changes to training provided to Renfrewshire Council foster carers had to be addressed due to the pandemic. The support provided to foster carers by their supervising social worker continued to address training needs and the development of skills etc.

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

The fostering service also provided mandatory training on fire safety, first aid and safer caring. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are looking to *provides* training on fire safety, online at this time, however, have offered home visit to provide advice, to foster carers. West of Scotland College, provides first aid training, however this has been on hold due to the pandemic. Mandatory training should be updated every three years.

Our fostering training officer provided 3 courses from the Autumn/Winter programme, before lockdown – “Child Sexual Exploitation” (10 participants) “Sexual Health and Relationships for Looked After Children” (9 participants) and “Child Protection: Trading Places” (4 participants)

The following 90-minute online webinars ran between 4th June and 4th November 2020, *held like this due to the pandemic*.

Webinar Title	Content	No of Dates Ran	Total No of participants
“Can you keep a promise?”	Briefing on the Independent Care Review	2	12
Children’s Hearing (Scotland) Act Briefing	The legislation protecting children, the workings of the Children’s Hearing and the implications for carers	1	2
Getting it Right for Every Child	The principles and practice of GIRFEC	2	8
Better Transitions for Better Futures	The new protocol and practice of children’s transitions from foster care to adoption	1	4
Safer Care: Internet Safety	Keeping children safe online	2	9
Totals		8	35

The table below shows webinars pending between 5th November 2020 and 16th February 2021

Webinar Title	Content	No of Dates	Total No of Registrations
Safer Care: Internet Safety	Keeping children safe online	2	11
Can you keep a promise?	Briefing on the Independent Care Review	1	3
Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act	The legislation protecting children, the workings of the Children's Hearing and the implications for carers	1	3
HRT for Kids	Stimulating helpful hormone production for wellbeing	1	6
Ask, Tell	Promoting good mental health and wellbeing	1	7
Autism Awareness	What autism is, how it might present and what carers can do to support children on the spectrum	4	22
Life Story Work	Helping children develop a coherent narrative	1	3
Totals		11	55

Carers were slow to embrace the webinar format when first piloted in the summer. Reasons given for this included:
being too stressed by the pandemic to concentrate on learning,
being too busy with home schooling and
not feeling comfortable/competent in using the technology.

Interest and engagement have since improved and the overall feedback has been very good. Several carers have stated said that the format is more convenient for them than face to face training. Another advantage has been that several carers who would not normally be able to attend face to face training have engaged with the webinars. The format has been especially useful for newly registered carers who have been able to meet other carers. The training programme is constantly under review and additional dates will be arranged in line with demand.

Foster Carers Support Group

Our foster carers have their own support group which is an informal support group where foster carers can drop in as they wish and issues raised within the group are fed back to the fostering team via the carers supervising social worker or the foster carers consultation group. At this time the group is a *foster carers* WhatsApp group.

Consultation Group

The Carers Consultation Group has met three times, - December 2019 and June 2020 and November 2020. All Foster Carers are invited to attend this group. This 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.

Breakthrough Group (group of children who live in foster care who create a newsletter, taking up issues and campaigns on matters that affect them)

The breakthrough group changed significantly during the lockdown months. They set aside their normal tasks and activities and became an online group supporting each other through the pandemic. They created new ways to keep the focus online, scavenger hunts, arts and crafts. The Easter newsletter was not able to be published. The group will continue to meet monthly online for the foreseeable future.

Newsletter for foster carers

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

The Best Services Trial

Renfrewshire Children's Services joined the University of Glasgow and the Glasgow Infant and Family Team (GIFT) in their Best Services Trial, this trial is on-going, although had to go on hold due to the lock down.

Best services trial is a randomised controlled trial comparing an infant mental health service (GIFT) based on the New Orleans Intervention Model (NIM), with social work "services as usual". It aims to find out what is the best service for young abused or neglected pre-school children coming into foster care and which approach is the most cost-effective. The trial is being led by Glasgow University and the principal investigator is Professor Helen Minnis, a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

All children selected for either group will be assessed, to recommend whether being at home safely with their family can be supported or whether alternative permanence options require to be considered. Parental consent will be sought for every child considered for the trial.

Future developments of the fostering service 2020 – 2021

1. To continue to recruit foster carers on an annual basis.
2. To continue to develop specific training for foster carers and peer led workshops.
3. To continue to develop participation of young people in foster carers reviews.
4. to encourage and support young people with the use of my view in relation to foster carers reviews.
5. To continue to develop the use of exit questionnaires with regards to gathering information around the standard of care provided by Renfrewshire Council foster carers.
6. To continue to work with neighboring authorities regarding shared services and development days.
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. Welcome packs to be redesigned for children/young people being received into the care of foster carers.

REPORT ON SUPPORTED CARERS SERVICE

Supported carers

Supported carers are carers who look after young adults (aged 18-21) who have remained in a continuing care placement. The majority of our supported carers were the foster carers for the child and transitioned to Supported Carers when the young person reached the age of 18.

Supported carer assessments are completed in advance of the young person turning 18 and are presented to Renfrewshire Council's Fostering Panel. Within the period 1.10.19 to 31.7.20 the Fostering Panel has approved 1 supported carer, who had been a foster carer for Renfrewshire Council.

All young adults whose plan is presented at the Fostering Panel have Pathway Plans completed and a Throughcare Worker allocated to them. The outcome for young adults 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.

At present there are 15 young adults in supported carer placements with a further 3 expected to be presented to panel before the year end. All are in positive destinations. Including university, College and Employment. Some examples include a 4th year Law degree student at West of Scotland University, 3rd year nursing degree student at Caledonian University, 3rd year Geography Student at Glasgow University, 2nd year joiner apprentice and an early year's support worker.

Covid-19 Support. Home visits have continued in line with government guidelines, in addition the use of video technologies' such as Microsoft Teams and Skype have been utilised. In addition, we have developed a newsletter which is sent to carers approximately every 6 weeks and includes Q&A's with staff and information which would be useful for supported carers and the young people they support. A virtual forum has been trialled and will continue to be developed to allow carers to seek peer support and be actively involved in service development, this is again using video technology.

REPORT ON THE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SERVICE

Developments within the adoption service 2019- 2020

1. Continued development of training for adopters, and consultation with adopters regarding appropriate training, through the quarterly newsletter
2. Continued development of the adoption support group.
3. Develop extended family member's participation in the adoption assessment process.
4. Development of support to birth parents with regards to understanding the plan for their child and supporting a birth parent with letter box contact.
5. To work with foster carers and adopters with Thera play strategies to assist a child with the transition from foster carer to an adoptive family.
6. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Support Services (SAAS - Barnardos) for young people, birth parents and adopters requiring additional support, were appropriate
7. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Register/Link maker.
8. Continue to work with colleagues in locality teams to raise the profile of the adoption service and to provide a clear understanding of the work being undertaken to ensure positive outcomes for children.
9. Develop specialist practice in the adoption service by working with our neighboring authorities and SWS.

Inspection

As stated previously the Adoption Service has not been inspected since the last Annual Report. The service was due to be inspected around May of this year, however, due to the pandemic this did not take place. We are in regular liaison with our Inspector who is aware of our practice generally and our adaptations during the pandemic.

Recruitment of Adoptive Parents

There continues to be a need for both adoptive parents and permanent foster carers for children of all ages who meet our adoption criteria (appendix 2). Nationally there is recognition that more adopters are also required for sibling groups and older children.

The continuing pandemic has meant that there has been a significant drop in enquiries relating to adoption within Renfrewshire.

One preparation group for adoption took place in September/Oct 2019, which 4 households attended, 1 household being an overseas adoption and 1 foster care household for a specific child. There was one other application from this group.

We have provided an adapted preparation group to 1 household, due to the lack of enquiries and the importance of enquiries moving on.

As part of the adoption assessment process the service looked at family meetings. We held one meeting and feedback was positive. Family members and close supports were invited, and the adoption process was discussed, questions answered, and the participants felt that by the end of the meeting they had a clearer understanding of what adoption would mean to them as a family and support network. This is an area we will continue to develop.

Renfrewshire Council's adoption service has continued to use the Scottish Adoption Register/Link maker. Once people are approved as adopters their information and what age of child, they have been approved for is added to this register. Adoption Social workers across Scotland are able to access this information should they be trying to place a child for adoption. Between 1.10.19 and 31.7.20 we referred 1 adoptive household to the adoption register/link maker.

Statistics from the Adoption Register indicated that 147 adopters were referred to the Register between 1.7.19 to 30.6.20, a slight decrease from 152 the previous year. From the 147 adopters 74 were matched with children within the same period.

The adoption service were involved in different recruitment activities during Adoption Week, 16.11.19 to 20.11.19, the adoption service had a presence on Renfo and a drop-in event for adopters and their children was held at Johnstone Town Hall, an adopter spoke about her experience of managing challenging behaviours and access the appropriate support.

Permanent Foster Carers

In the period between 1.10.19 to 31.7.20 there have been 9 children linked with permanent foster carers, 8 of the children were linked with Renfrewshire Council foster carers (1 sibling group of 2 and 6 single children), and 1 child with an independent foster carer.

Often our permanent foster carers have been previous interim foster carers for us. When a child is placed with them for a short time and then that child is remaining in foster care permanently their interim foster carer will ask to be assessed as a permanent carer for that child.

Family Finding

During the period 1.10.19– 31.7.20 6 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 between the child and their prospective adopters.

13 children's plans for Permanence Orders were presented to the Adoption Panel, this included 1 sibling groups of 2 and 1 sibling group of 5.

Renfrewshire Council make good use of the Scottish Adoption Register by way of Link maker and Adoption Exchange days. The Scottish Government's GIRFEC strategy for Looked After Children and Young People (November 2015) identifies the achievement of 'early permanence' as one of its key strategic priorities. Legislation and guidance introduced in 2016 support that goal and reinforced the role of the Adoption Register for the relatively small number of children who are unable to stay with their own family and require an adoptive placement.

7 children were also referred to the Scottish Adoption Register /Link maker, this included 1 sibling groups of 2.

In September 2020 the Adoption Register completed a webinar, due to the pandemic they were unable to provide adoption exchange days or adoption activity days. Renfrewshire Adoption Service presented three children at this event, 1 single child and 1 sibling group of 2. This resulted in enquires being taken forward for the children.

Statistics received from the Adoption Register indicated that 166 children were referred to Scotland's Adoption Register/Link maker between 1.7.19 to 30.6.20

Within Renfrewshire we approved adoption plans and linked 3 children with prospective adopters through the Scottish Adoption Register and 3 children with 3 Renfrewshire prospective adopters.

6 adoption orders were granted for Renfrewshire children between 1.10.19 to 31.7.20, 1 being a sibling group of 2. 2 of the children were 2 or under, and 4 were 3 or under.

The adoption service has looked at the transitions for children from foster care to adoption. We have made use of the training foster carers attend in relation to moving children on and included Thera play in the transition plan. To move children's plans on during the pandemic we have focussed on reducing the risk of spreading the virus, while allowing children to move to their adopted family. Transition plans including safety issues and Thera play games and songs meant that the children moved on well. We have also made use of face time etc., in order for the adopters to develop a relationship with the foster carers and observe the child's routines, this has reduced the time adopters and foster carers have to spend in each-others homes.

Renfrewshire Council Adoption service continues to work closely with Inverclyde Council, East Renfrewshire Council, West Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire.

Adoption Support Group

Our adoption support group had developed over the past few years and varies between a drop-in facility which the children can also attend with play activities available to the children, while their parents talk with other adopters and staff, drop in evenings for adopters only, to training events for adopters only. We adoption support groups in November and December 2019, which were well attended by adopters and their children. The next support group was planned for March 2020, this group was cancelled due to the pandemic.

In February 2020 the adoption service provided Thera play training to adopters, this was well attended, and feedback was positive.

Unfortunately, due to the on-going pandemic the service was unable to provide a face to face support groups or training. However, in September 2020 we provided a virtual support group which looked at Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), at which a member of the FASD hub, through Adoption UK, provided an input and answered questions which 5 households attended. Virtual coffee mornings have also been planned, with 1 taking place.

Most adopters who attend the group meet other adopters in similar situations and hear about strategies and tips for managing different situations. The group has also been the starting point for the development of friendships and informal supports. Unfortunately, virtual groups do not always allow for the development of friendships in the same way as face to face groups.

There are approximately 18 adoptive families who have attended the Support Group in November and December 2020, and the feedback was very positive. The number attending the group can vary as it is a drop in, with some families choosing to attend at different times.

Adoption Support to individual families

Throughout the year the adoption team have provided adoption support on an individual basis to 24 adoptive families who have approached the service for support. This figure includes 3 adoptees requesting origins counselling.

Within Renfrewshire we have 100 adoptive families on our mailing list who receive our quarterly newsletter and notification of all support groups and training events.

Birth parent support

We offer support to birth families once the plan is made for their child/children to be adopted. We offer support to birth parents to reflect on why adoption has been recommended and to understand the legal process. We provide support to birth families to contribute information about the child's birth family in order to assist the child with accurate information as the child grows and develops.

We also provide advice and support to birth families where their child has been adopted and they now feel that they are at a place in their own lives where they would like to contribute information to the child's life work. We understand that support to birth parents may be required at different stages of the adoption process.

Throughout this year we have developed this work with birth parents of children where the plan is adoption should be pursued or where the adoption order has been granted. Between 1.10.19 and 31.7.20 we had offered/provided support to 11 birth parents with regards to birth parent support. We support birth parents who ask for assistance with their letter box contact (see below) for their annual exchange of information. This provides birth parents space to talk about their children being adopted and looks at making changes in their lifestyle, to improve their lives.

The Adoption Service provided an input, along with Inverclyde Council, on the work with birth parents during an Adoption UK event, November 2019.

Letter Box Contact

Within the adoption service we provide a letter box contact service continues between birth families and adopters/adoptees. We have 98 letter box contacts recorded with us, of this 58 are operational and exchanges of letters take place once or twice a year as agreed. The 30 that are non-operational are due to birth parents changing address and not notifying the service, or birth parent being unable to sustain this contact

Future developments of the adoption service – 2019 -2020

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

1. The recruitment of new adopters.

2. Recruitment of new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members as required.
3. Development of our adoption support provided to adoptive families, our adoption support group and work with birth families.
4. Development of extended family member's participation in the adoption assessment process.
5. Development of Thera play strategies to assist a child with the transition from foster carer to an adoptive family.
6. Development of work with our linking process using the Adoption register
7. Support for Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Activity Days as appropriate
8. Development of joint work with neighboring local authorities.
9. Development of a training program regarding adoption support plans for social work staff to ensure all adopted children have a support plan in place and a later life letter.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted the work of the Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services and the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panels. The activity of the Fostering and Adoption Panel reflects the high number of children unable to return to live with their birth families within Renfrewshire.

The Report highlights the adaptations that have taken place during the pandemic, to ensure that children's plans are progressed by the Fostering and Adoption Panels and that children's needs have been met.

The Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services are committed to safeguarding children's lives in Renfrewshire and to continual improvement.

As Chair of the Adoption and Fostering Panel and the Registered Manager for the we would like to take this opportunity to thank our Panel members for their commitment to Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children.

Our Foster Carers dedication to the children in their care means that we can ensure the best outcomes for them to a consistently high standard .We look forward to the coming year and to progressing our work with all partner agencies to continue to improve the outcomes and secure the future of Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children.

Joyce Gartshore
Chairperson of the Adoption Panel and Fostering Panel.

Clare Cunning
Social Work Manager (Registered Manager of both services).

Appendix 1 Renfrewshire Council Fostering Criteria

Who Can Foster?

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

Requirements to foster:

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

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

Enquirers 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 enquirers.

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.

Renfrewshire Council Adoption Criteria

Age

All applicants must be over 21 years of age.

Status

Applications will be considered from couples or single applicants irrespective of their sexuality.

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

Enquirers 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.



RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL
FOSTERING AND ADOPTION PANEL

CONSTITUTION
January 2021

1. Title

The Panel shall be known as the Fostering and Adoption Panel.

2. Remit

The Panel is generic and will deal with both fostering and adoption. Whilst both may be dealt with within the same sitting of the Panel the business will be clearly defined, and separate minutes produced.

3. Composition

The panel shall consist of no less than six persons, including at least one man and at least one woman, representing the local community it serves. The Panel shall include a qualified Medical Practitioner, preferably a Paediatrician, who will act as a Medical Adviser; and a Solicitor or Advocate who will act as Legal Adviser. Other members should, where possible, include a permanent foster carer or adopter, a current or previous child care manager from Children's Services, an education officer such as a head teacher, a psychologist, an independent representative from a relevant child care agency and a manager of the fostering and adoption team who will act as Panel adviser and who will be a non-voting member.

4. Chair

The panel shall be chaired by a senior manager from Children's Services, or an identified independent chairperson.

5. Term of Office

Apart from the Medical and Legal Advisers and the managers of the Fostering and Adoption team, panel members shall serve for a period of three years with an option of renewing for a period of a further three years thereafter. The need to ensure continuity and stability is balanced against the need to safeguard against complacency and to provide fresh perspectives. However, if natural wastage does not provide sufficient turnover of membership the membership of the panel will be reviewed in consultation with the Chief Social Work Officer.

6. Duties of Panel Members

Panel members shall be expected to read all reports in advance of panel meetings and prepare questions they wish to have answered, with an indication of the information / evidence which would address this question.

Panel members are expected to give a clear view of their recommendation.

Panel members shall have a duty of confidentiality and security of all panel papers sent to them.

Panel members are required to produce an enhanced Disclosure check prior to their initial term of office, and any subsequent period in office.

Panel members will be expected to attend at least 50% of panel meetings in any one calendar year and to participate in training provided to assist them in carrying out their duties.

Panel members will be expected to attend the annual business meeting where issues arising over the previous period will be discussed along with submission of an annual report to the Chief Social Work Officer.

Where the adoption agency is of the opinion that any member of the adoption and fostering panel is unsuitable or unable to remain as a member, it may terminate membership at any time by giving notice in writing with reasons.

7. Frequency of Meetings

The Panel should meet at least once monthly. If necessary extra meetings may be convened as required. At least once per annum the panel shall hold a business meeting to review performance and debate general issues. An annual report will be provided for the Chief Social Work Officer and the appropriate Council Policy Board.

8. Reports

All reports must be sent electronically to panel members at least five working days before the meeting date. All reports must be treated confidentially.

Reports on children or young people where permanence is being considered will be presented to the panel, providing the information required by statutory regulations. A photograph of the child may also be made available to the panel. Reports on applicants will also be presented, providing the information required by statutory regulations. A 'Linking Report' will accompany these reports together with the original minute approving the applicants when a proposed placement is to be considered.

9. Decision Making

Every effort will be made to reach a consensus on all recommendations. In the case of unresolved differences of view a decision on the recommendation may be reached by vote. The medical adviser, legal adviser and panel adviser will not have a vote. In the event of there not being a majority vote the chair will have a casting vote. The recommendation will then be passed to the Agency Decision Maker who has four options:

- a) To accept the recommendation
- b) To reject the recommendation
- c) To vary the recommendation
- d) To defer a decision for further work to be undertaken

10. Feedback

A questionnaire will be issued to all those who attend the Panel. Feedback from questionnaires will be reported to the Annual Business meeting.

Fostering Panel

Where the panel sits as a fostering panel, the following conditions will apply; -

1. Quorum

In relation to fostering a quorum shall consist of three people, excluding the legal, medical and panel advisors

Where the panel is considering a permanence order for a child, it is recommended that a legal adviser be present at the meeting where the recommendation is made, or that written legal advice is provided to the fostering panel.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the panel is to carry out the functions set out in the Looked after Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

The fostering panel must make recommendations on the following matters: –

- (a) whether a prospective foster carer is suitable to be a foster carer;
- (b) whether a foster carer continues to be suitable to be a foster carer. Such reviews should be carried out at a frequency no less than that provided for in the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009
On such a review of the approval of the foster carer the local authority may –
 - (i) vary the terms of the approval;
 - (ii) terminate the approval; or
 - (iii) confirm the decision to approve a person as a foster carer
- (c) whether a prospective foster carer would be a suitable foster carer for
 - (i) a particular child or children
 - (ii) any child
- (d) the maximum number of children a particular foster carer may have in their care at any one time
- (e) whether an application for a permanence order should be made in respect of a particular child
- (f) whether a particular child should be linked with a particular foster carer or carers for the purposes of permanent fostering
- (g) whether a particular person is suitable to be a supported carer;

- (h) whether a particular person is suitable to be a supported carer for a particular young person or persons;
- (i) any other matter on which it is asked to give a recommendation

In carrying out its functions the fostering panel must have regard to—

- (a) the duties imposed on the local authority by section 17(1) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995;
- (b) all the information and reports passed to it.

3. Attendance

- (a) Where applicants are being considered as foster carers or supported carers, or where the registration of existing foster carers or supported carers is being reviewed, their Social Worker will present their applications. The applicants will be invited to the latter part of the discussion to provide clarification, answer questions and give their views of the process. An opportunity for applicants to ask questions will also be provided. The Social Worker and the applicants may then be asked to leave the room while panel members discuss the application.
- (b) Where a permanence order for a child is being considered, the presenting Social Worker for the child shall attend the Panel to present the case for permanence. When it is proposed that a child be linked with particular foster carers, for the purposes of permanent fostering, the Social Worker for the foster carers will also attend the discussion. The foster carers will be invited to the latter part of the discussion to provide clarification, answer members' questions and give their view of the process. An opportunity for the foster carers to ask questions will also be provided. Social Workers and the foster carers may then be asked to leave the room while panel members discuss the application.
- (c) Where the panel is considering de-registering foster carers, the foster carers will receive a copy of the social worker's written report at least two weeks before the hearing. They will have the opportunity to provide their own written submissions, which should be received by the panel chair at least one week before the hearing. The format of the hearing will be agreed beforehand by the chair and panel members. The foster carers will have the opportunity to be present to hear the report of the social worker and will then have the opportunity to present their own case to the panel. The procedure will ensure that all parties have a fair hearing and that the process is seen to be transparent and fair to all parties.
- (d) Children or young people may attend the panel with their social worker if this is considered by the worker and their supervisor to be beneficial to the child / young person.

In such cases the child / young person will join the meeting after the initial discussion between panel members and the social worker and will leave while the panel reaches its decision on the final recommendation.

In other situations, the child / young person may wish to submit their views in writing or by other means for example, meeting with the panel chair and a panel member out with the panel meeting.

- (e) Birth parents may be invited to attend the panel if it is considered as beneficial to the decision-making process. In such cases parents will join the meeting after the initial discussion between panel members and the social worker for the child and leave whilst the panel reaches its decision on the final recommendation. In other situations, the birth parents may wish to submit their views in writing.
- (f) Observers may attend the panel subject to prior agreement with the Panel Chair.

4. Minutes

A minute taker shall be provided to take minutes of the meeting which will be typed and forwarded to the chair within five working days. The chair will return the minutes with any amendments within four working days in order that the agency decision maker can consider the panel recommendations, make a decision and appropriate notification can be sent out within the required time scales. The agency decision maker must make a decision within fourteen days of the panel recommendations

5. Review

Where a local authority makes a decision–

- (a) not to approve a person as a foster carer or supported carer;
- (b) to vary the terms of approval of a foster carer or supported carer; or
- (c) to terminate the approval of a foster carer or supported carer,
- (d) that person may request a review of the decision in terms of the Looked after Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009

- 1) A request for a review must be made within 28 days of receiving the decision of the agency decision maker.
- 2) Where the local authority receive a request for a review, the matter must be referred to a differently constituted panel.
- 3) Where a review is requested, the local authority must provide the differently constituted fostering panel with–
 - (a) a copy of the original decision and reasons made;
 - (b) the information provided to the fostering panel who made the original recommendation;
 - (c) any further representations received by the local authority from the foster carer, supported carer, prospective foster carer or prospective supported carer; and
 - (d) any other relevant information.
- 4) The fostering panel shall consider the case referred to it and make a fresh recommendation to the local authority.
- 5) In making a recommendation, the panel may recommend that the local authority–
 - (a) vary the terms of the approval;
 - (b) terminate the approval; or
 - (c) approve a person as a foster carer.
 - (d) approve a person as a supported carer

Adoption Panel

Where the panel sits as an adoption panel, the following conditions shall apply

1. Quorum

When the panel is sitting as an adoption panel, a quorum shall consist of no less than three persons, excluding the medical, legal and panel advisers.

Where the panel is considering the adoption of a child the panel must obtain a written assessment of the child's health from the doctor who carried out a medical examination of the child.

Where the panel is considering the adoption of a child, there must be a legal adviser present at the panel when the recommendation is made; or written legal advice has been provided to the panel by the legal adviser.

2. Functions

The purpose of the Panel is to carry out the functions set out in the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009. The panel should ensure that the quality of assessment in relation to the case of every child being considered and the case of every prospective adopter being **considered** is of the highest quality.

- 1) The adoption panel must consider–
 - (a) the case of every child
 - (b) every proposed placement; and
 - (c) the case of every prospective adopter, referred to it by the adoption agency
- 2) The adoption panel must make recommendations on the following matters:–
 - (a) whether adoption is in the best interests of the child;
 - (b) whether an application for a permanence order granting authority for the child to be adopted should be made
 - (c) whether a prospective adopter is suitable or continues to be suitable to be an adoptive parent
 - (d) whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent for a particular child;
 - (e) whether adoption allowances or other financial assistance should be made available to adopters;
 - (f) the circumstances of all children in respect of whom a permanence order with authority to adopt has been granted, but who have not been placed for adoption within 6 months from the making of the order;
 - (g) The review of approved adoptive carers who have not had a child placed with them 24 months after approval; and
 - (h) any other matter referred to the adoption panel which is relevant to the adoption agency's functions under the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007.
- 3) Where an adoption panel recommends that adoption is in the best interests of the child it must consider the alternatives to adoption and provide a written report on this.

- 4) Where an adoption panel makes a recommendation that there should be continued contact between the child and the child's parent or parents, it must provide a written report of the reasons why continued contact is in the best interests of the child.
- 5) Before making a recommendation whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent for a particular child, the adoption panel must—
 - (a) at the meeting of the panel at which the recommendation is to be made, be satisfied that adoption is in the best interests of the child; or
 - (b) be satisfied that an adoption agency decision has been made that adoption is in the best interests of the child; and
 - (c) in either case—
 - (i) at the meeting of the panel at which the recommendation is to be made, make a recommendation that the prospective adopter is suitable to be an adoptive parent; or
 - (ii) be satisfied that an adoption agency decision has been made that the prospective adopter is suitable to be an adoptive parent
- 6) In carrying out its functions the adoption panel must have regard to—
 - (a) the duties imposed on the adoption agency by section 14 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007;
 - (b) all the information and reports passed to it;
 - (c) any other information which may be provided to it on request; and
 - (d) where appropriate, any legal advice in relation to each case.

3. Attendance at Panels

- 1) Where applicants are being considered as adopters; or their approval as adopters is being reviewed where no placement has been made within 24 months of being approved, their Social Worker will present their applications. The applicants will be invited to the latter part of the discussion to provide clarification, answer questions and give their views of the process. An opportunity for applicants to ask questions will also be provided. The Social Worker and the applicants may then be asked to leave the room while panel members discuss the application.
- 2) Where adoption for a child is being considered, the presenting Social Worker for the child will attend the Panel to present the case for permanence. When a proposed adoptive placement is being considered, the Social Worker for the prospective adopter (s) will also attend the discussion. The prospective adopter(s) will be invited to the latter part of the discussion to provide clarification, answer members' questions and give their view of the process. An opportunity for the prospective adopters to ask questions will also be provided. Social Workers and the prospective adopters may then be asked to leave the room while panel members discuss the application.
- 3) Children or young people may attend the panel with their social worker if this is considered by the worker and their supervisor to be beneficial to the child / young person.

In such cases the child / young person will join the meeting after the initial discussion between panel members and the social worker and will leave while the panel reaches its decision on the final recommendation.

In other situations, the child / young person may wish to submit their views in writing or by other means for example, meeting with the panel chair and a panel member out with the panel meeting.

- 4) Birth parents may be invited to attend the panel if it is considered as beneficial to the decision-making progress. In such cases parents will join the meeting after the initial discussion between panel members and the social worker for the child and leave whilst the panel reaches its decision on the final recommendation. In other situations, the birth parents may wish to submit their views in writing.
- 5) Observers may attend the panel subject to prior agreement with the Panel Chair.

4. Minutes

A Minute taker shall be provided to take minutes of the meeting which will be typed and forwarded to the chair within five working days. The chair will return the minutes with any amendments within four working days in order that the agency decision maker can consider the panel recommendations, make a decision and appropriate notifications can be sent out within the required time scales. The Agency Decision maker must make a decision within fourteen days of the panel recommendation; and must give notification of that decision within seven days to the individuals specified in the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009,

5. Review

- 1) Where a prospective adopter has, within 28 days of receiving the decision from the Agency Decision maker, requested a review of the decision, the matter must be referred to the adoption panel for a recommendation.
- 2) The referral must be made to a differently constituted adoption panel
- 3) Where a referral for a review is made the adoption panel must be provided with-
 - (a) a copy of the original decision and reasons for it
 - (b) the report provided to the adoption panel who made the initial recommendation;
 - (c) any representations received by the adoption agency from the prospective adopter; and
 - (d) any other relevant information.
- 4) The adoption panel must consider the case referred to it and make a fresh recommendation to the adoption agency as to whether the prospective adopter is suitable to be an adoptive parent.
- 5) The adoption agency must–
 - (a) make a decision (the “reviewed decision”) within 14 days of the date the fresh recommendation was made; and

- (b) notify the prospective adopter of its reviewed decision within 7 days of making the reviewed decision
- 6) Where the reviewed decision is that the prospective adopter is not suitable to be an adoptive parent the notification must–
- (a) state the reasons for the reviewed decision; and
 - (b) where the adoption panel's fresh recommendation was that the prospective adopter was suitable to be an adoptive parent, include a copy of the adoption panel's fresh recommendation.
- 7) For the avoidance of doubt, a review panel may be a panel from another local authority