

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 16 January 2020

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Annual report of the Fostering and Adoption Service 2018/19
Update on developments for Looked After Children and
Fostering Service

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report presents the 12th annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering and Adoption Service.
 - 1.2. The Annual report sets out the work undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Fostering and Adoption Service in the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 and is set in the context of the broader issues pertaining to Looked After and Accommodated Children.
 - 1.3. The report contains information on the recruitment of foster carers and adopters for Renfrewshire's children. In addition, the report provides information on the arrangement of permanent alternative care for a number of Renfrewshire's children.
 - 1.4. The report considers the future work of the panel, the continued work of the fostering and adoption service and the continuation of the BeST Services Trial.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Education and Children's Services Policy Board is asked to note:
 - a) the contents of the Fostering and Adoption Annual Report for the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019;
 - b) the continuing effort to secure foster carers and adoptive parents for Renfrewshire's children who require to an alternative family placement; and
 - c) the continued progress of the BeST Services Trial in Renfrewshire.

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 regarding the suitability of people to adopt or foster Renfrewshire's children. 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 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. Since August 2016 the role of the chair of the panel and the senior manager of the fostering and adoption service are undertaken by different officers. This allows for appropriate scrutiny by the panel chair, separate from the management of the team.
- 3.3. There are currently 25 panel members including 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 period covered by this annual report.
- 3.4. The panel has a unique overview of the work being undertaken to assess and approve foster carers and adopters alongside the work being undertaken by social workers to progress plans for children who cannot be cared for within their own family. The annual report has been produced as a means of sharing this work with a wider audience and to assist in the process of service planning.
- 3.5. Between 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2019, 12 households attended preparation groups and 5 household subsequently applied to be assessed as foster carers. Renfrewshire had 83 active households of foster carers at 30th September 2019. In the period covered in the annual report an additional 5 households were registered as foster carers, and 6 foster care households left the service.

- 3.6. The annual 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 annual report for the period 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018 it was noted that a high-profile recruitment campaign during fostering fortnight resulted in a significantly higher number of initial enquiries than in other years (35). In the end this resulted has resulted in 5 additional fostering households, only 1 or 2 more than previous years. Work is being undertaken to review the low numbers of conversions from enquiry to approval.
- 3.7. In the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 a total of 5 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 will take place in 2020.
- 3.9. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 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 be supported carers wherever this is appropriate.
- 3.10. We currently have 25 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 this age and briefed them on the trial and the GIFT model. We have referred 16 children to the trial.

Implications of this report

1. **Financial**
None.
2. **HR and Organisational Development**
None.

3. Community/Council Planning

None.

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 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

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



THE FOSTERING PANEL
AND
THE ADOPTION PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT 2018/2019

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Foreword

Welcome to the 2018/19 annual report of The Renfrewshire Fostering and Adoption Service. The report has been compiled by the Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Social Work Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service and takes both a retrospective look at the work of the service in the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 as well as looking forward to the future.

As at 30 September 2019 there were 649 'Looked After' Children in Renfrewshire. Of these 207 were looked after at home, 193 were looked after by friends/relatives, 190 accommodated with foster carers, 10 with prospective adopters and 49 in residential accommodation.

A significant number of the 249 children looked after in foster care and 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 these children are placed appropriately and safely and those who require permanent placements out with their families are moved to an appropriate household at the earliest opportunity.

The Fostering and Adoption Panels provide 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 make recommendations to me as the Agency Decision Maker on children's permanence plans and on households applying to adopt or become foster carers.

The Panels continue to be busy. During the period covered by this annual report the Panels made recommendations in relation to permanence plans for 24 children. I was pleased to approve these plans as in the best interests of the individual child. The number of permanence plans considered in 2018/19 was higher than for the same period in 2017/ 2018 when 19 permanence plans were approved

In recent years the fostering service has made progress in recruiting foster carers and we have successfully shifted the balance of placements from external to internal foster placements. On 30 September 2019 there were 127 children being cared for by Renfrewshire foster carers compared to 121 on 30 September 2018. The number of Renfrewshire children being cared for by foster carers in the independent sector on 30 September 2019 was 63 compared to 61 on 30 September 2018. Although the external placements are slightly up on the previous year there continues to be a trend over the past ten years of children who require alternative family care being placed with Renfrewshire foster carers.

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

Introduction

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

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

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 continues to be a primary objective, and this is reflected in the amount of permanence planning work within the social work locality teams. For many of the children involved in the permanency planning process their journey will have started with child protection procedures which resulted in them becoming accommodated.

The Fostering Service and the Adoption Service are registered with the Care Inspectorate and subject to regular inspection. The last Inspection took place in May 2017 where all aspects of service delivery in both the Fostering and Adoption Service remained assessed as Grade 5 which is 'very good' across all domains inspected. It is expected that the Care Inspectorate will conduct an inspection of the service in the next twelve months.

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

Context

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

Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People

On 30 September 2019, Renfrewshire Council had 649 Looked After Children/Young People, compared to 645 as at 30th September 2018. The number of children looked after at home with their birth parent(s) has reduced with the number of children in kinship care and foster care showing a slight increase.

The increase in the number of looked after children is considered a short term rise with the longer term pattern being on a downward trend.

Table 1 provides information on the number of looked after children in Renfrewshire.

Table 1

	30.9.18	30.9.19
Independent Sector-Children - Foster Care	61	63
Local Authority-Children - Foster Care	121	127
Local Authority-Children – Houses	28	29
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Schools	11	9
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Special Needs	2	2
Pre-adoption	10	10
Independent Sector-Children - Secure School	1	3
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Unit	6	6
Children looked after by kinship carers/friends/relatives	178	193
Children looked after at home	227	207
Total	645	649

Cases Considered by the Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel

Table 2 contains information on the activity of the Panels between 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2019.

Table 2

Business Item	Number	Comments
Child adoption plans and links	14	This figure included 2 sibling groups of 2
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	5	5 domestic adopters
Review of Registration (adoption) Request for adoption allowance	2 1	
Permanent fostering plan- Legal routes Links with permanent foster carers	10 4	This figure includes 1 sibling group of 2
Approval of Renfrewshire foster carers (households)	6	6 interim fostering households
Deregistration of foster carer	6	3 fostering households resigned due to personal circumstances 1 fostering household resigned with the recommendation to deregister 2 fostering households converted to supported carers status
Approval of supported carers (households)	10	This figure includes 1 support carer for a foster carer with specific circumstances
Initial review of foster carer after their 1 st year Foster care review 4 years plus Foster care review 7 years plus Foster carer review 10 years plus Foster carer review for Inverclyde Council	3 2 6 6 1	
Review of foster carers registration – due to change in registration/circumstances	7	This figure includes one Renfrewshire foster carer who converted from interim foster carer to permanent foster carer
Total number of agenda items	83	Last year this figure was 61.

Panel Membership

Whilst we are fortunate to have a consistent and committed panel membership over the past year, we recruited 4 new panel members. Panel membership continues to reflect a good range of experience and expertise, from social work, education, health and voluntary sector. The Panel continues to be well supported by adopters, foster carers and elected members. The Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland continues to provide an independent panel member, who is one of the Chairs of the Panel.

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.

Renfrewshire Council Legal Service provides written legal advice to the Panel in relation to adoption and permanence work, as well as attending the Panel to provide legal advice as required.

Renfrewshire Council Fostering and Adoption Panel held their AGM on 07.05.19. Panel members were given an update on panel activity from the previous year, an input on post adoption contact with siblings, an input from the medical advisor and an input on over registration requests for foster placements. Panel members also attended training on 19.9.19 in relation to permanency planning.

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

Over the next year it is hoped to develop the Fostering and Adoption Panel by:

- continuing to Increase Panel members confidence and performance on Panel;
- providing ongoing training to Panel members;
- meetings to be offered to birth parents with Panel Advisor and member of the adoption team; and
- review current arrangements for recruitment of panel members.

Staffing

The Fostering and Adoption Service is led by a Social Work Manager (Operations) (who also has responsibility for the kinship care service and the pre and post birth team).

A Service Manager is responsible for operational management of the fostering and adoption service. Two senior social workers are based in the team, one with responsibility for adoption and permanence service and one with responsibility for the fostering service. Both senior social workers have responsibility to manage staff in the service.

There are 8 full time social workers, 2 job-share social workers and 2 part-time social work assistants in the Fostering and Adoption Service.

The Fostering and Adoption Service was restructured in 2016. The Service now has a separate fostering team and an adoption and permanence team. This change was made to allow the development of more specialist skills and knowledge regarding fostering and adoption.

Commitment to permanence planning

During the period 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2019, adoption and permanence plans for 24 children (compared to 19 last year) were progressed for Renfrewshire Children. Renfrewshire Council recognises the importance of progressing plans for children within appropriate time scales. There are several initiatives being implemented by senior management to support and enable social work staff involved in permanence work to undertake both the direct work with the child and family and the necessary reports. These initiatives include training for social workers and carers on issues specifically relevant to permanence and working closely with social work staff with regards to the needs of the child and planning for adoption or permanency.

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

Children Social Work statistics in Scotland 2017/2018

On 31 July each year the Scottish Government carries out a census on the number of looked after children in Scotland. The following information is taken from the Children's Social Work statistics in Scotland 2017/2018 (i.e. as at 31 July 2018).

More detailed information on these statistics can be found at - <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/PubChildrenSocialWork>

At 31 July 2018, there were 14,738 looked after children in Scotland- a decrease of 159 (1%) from 31 July 2017. This is the sixth consecutive year the numbers have decreased at a national level following a peak of 16,248 in 2012.

The highest number in Renfrewshire was on 31 July 2010 when 795 children were looked after. Since that time there has been a general downward trend in Renfrewshire. Renfrewshire has also seen a decrease in the number of looked after children each year for the past six years.

There are several types of care setting in which looked after children or young people could be looked after, including at home (where a child is subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order and continues to live in their normal place of residence), foster care, residential unit or school, a secure unit, with prospective adopters, or in kinship care (where they are placed with friends or relatives).

National figures show the proportion of children being looked after at home has decreased over the last decade by 40%. In Renfrewshire the decrease has been 14% over the same period.

Increasing numbers of children are being looked after away from their parents in community settings. There has been an increase of 71% of children in kinship care arrangements over the past 10 years and an increase of 19% of children being cared for in foster care.

In Renfrewshire the number of children cared for in kinship arrangements has increased from 108 ten year ago to 190 in 2018 (an increase of 76%). This increase is slightly higher than the national picture. Whilst nationally there has been an increase in children being cared for in foster care arrangements in Renfrewshire there has been a reduction of 15% over the past ten years (from 217 in 2008 to 184 in 2018).

REPORT ON THE FOSTERING SERVICE

On 30 September 2019 we had 83 fostering households, this included permanent foster carers, long term foster carers, interim foster carers and short break foster carers.

Developments within the Fostering Service 2018 – 2019

- Fostering service participation with Fostering Fortnight in May 2019, where the 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 programmes so that both carers in a household can attend, given some carers work.
- 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 have made use of questions from young people in foster care when interviewing for
- a social worker for the fostering team.
- A review of the partnership agreement took place. This is the agreement signed by Renfrewshire Council and the foster carers, once they have been approved as Renfrewshire Council foster carers.
- Participation in the Best Services Trial with Glasgow University.

Inspection

The Fostering and Adoption Service has not been inspected since May 2017, the grades at that time, were 5's (very good) across all domains. The service is awaiting an inspection date.

Recruitment activity 1.10.18 – 30.9.19

During Fostering Fortnight in May 2019, our service was visible through Renfo, social media and the local media. The fostering service had an information table within the atrium at Renfrewshire Council HQ.

During the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 we received 58 initial enquiries in relation to fostering, however, many of the enquiries could not proceed due to health issues, police involvement, lack of a spare bedroom or other issues.

Should the enquiry go further 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. Enquirers would then be advised of the date for next preparation group. (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 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 we held 2 sets of preparation groups for fostering, one in February 2019 and the second one in May 2019 12 households attended. This resulted in 5 fostering applications, 1 application is still to be completed by the applicants, 5 households were counselled out and 1 household was from Inverclyde Council.

Preparation groups run for 6 sessions, either 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.

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

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

New foster carers and carer de-registrations

During the period covered by this report an additional 5 interim fostering households were approved.

6 fostering households were deregistered in the period covered by the report. One fostering household resigned with the recommendation to deregister due to issues which raised concerns; 3 fostering household resigned due to a change in their personal circumstances and 2 fostering households converted to support carers (young people now 18 years).

The Fostering Network believes that within Scotland an estimated additional 580 foster families are required in the next 12 months. The recruitment of foster carers within Renfrewshire has continued to increase gradually, however due to retirement and other issues resulting in deregistration the number of foster carers at any time has remained fairly static.

Within Renfrewshire we have become less dependent on the independent and voluntary fostering agencies. On 30 September 2019 there were 127 children/young people living with Renfrewshire foster carers and 63 children/young people in external fostering agency placements. These figures demonstrate the continuing commitment of placing children with

Renfrewshire Council foster carers. There is also a commitment across the service to keep siblings together.

On 30 September 2019 within Renfrewshire Council's fostering service we had 6 sets of sibling groups living together.

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 is to be reviewed with regards to a change in registration. Between 1 October 2018 and 230 September 2019 the Fostering and Adoption Panel reviewed 3 fostering household after their first year, 2 after their fourth year, 6 after their seventh year and 6 ten years plus. This is an opportunity for foster carers to talk about their experience, training and support etc. Most Renfrewshire Council's foster carers expressed satisfaction with their experiences of fostering and their learning, with most remaining enthusiastic and committed. They have found the support provided by their social worker to be beneficial and available as required, as well as finding the training offered informative and beneficial to the fostering task.

Foster carers are also internally reviewed on an annual basis, by Social Work Managers. The foster carers provide written as well as verbal contribution to the review process, as well as written reports by their birth children. Reports by their supervising social worker 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. We are continuing to address the use of my view, electronic review form, for children who are fostered to complete for foster carers reviews.

Social Workers from the fostering team visit carers on a regular basis to carry out supervision as well as performing a range of duties including ensuring health and safety checks are carried out annually, annual medical information is received and PVG checks are up to date. Safer caring policies are in place for each fostering household which ensure a minimum of two unannounced visits are carried out 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.

Foster carer training

The National Foster Care Review (2013) highlighted the importance of ensuring foster carers receive opportunities to learn about different ways to support children and young people and to develop their awareness, knowledge and understanding about the foster carer role. In response the Scottish Government asked the SSSC to develop a framework for learning, the Standard describes learning expectations for foster carers at different stages.

The Fostering Network provided submissions to the Independent Care Review in January 2018, in relation to training needs of foster carers. The Fostering Network felt that children and young people coming into the care system have an increasingly complex set of needs, due to their diverse experiences, for example child sexual exploitation, trafficking gangs or arriving as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There is a corresponding increased demand for foster carers to meet these needs. The recently published Learning and Development Standard for Foster Care has yet to be implemented. The Fostering Network is concerned that no resource has been allocated to assist fostering services to ensure the development and delivery of the training and support required to ensure the standards are met.

The fostering Network submissions in relation to training: -

“A standardised and accredited framework for training for foster care would set out the areas in which foster carers must demonstrate or develop knowledge and skills and would provide the framework for services to develop their foster carer training programme. However, standardisation does not need to lead to a lack of flexibility in training. There will always be a need for foster carers to undertake specialised training relating to the demands of their specific situation and the needs of the children they are caring for. Personal development plans should be able to address both the standard and the specialised training.

However, it is not just about training for foster carers: other professionals should have knowledge of foster care woven into their own training and development processes. This is because, as already argued, foster carers are part of the team around the child but are often not treated in that way. They are viewed as the junior partner, and unduly pressurised to take placements that don't correspond to their skills, knowledge, experience, family circumstances and where they themselves feel most committed.

Children's social workers (CSWs) need to understand fostering and foster carers much better, so that they can develop realistic expectations and the skills to support them, as well as being a voice and advocate for the child. Supervising social workers (SSWs) have a split role – support and supervision – and there is no reason why CSWs cannot have one as well. The best children's services already do this. CSW need to build relationships with foster carers and view them as a tool through which to meet the needs of the child. This allows for intervention before a crisis, and not at too late a stage. There is also a need to ensure that all stakeholders in the team around the child understand fostering and the role of foster carers, including birth families, education and health professionals, corporate parents and commissioners.

The learning and development framework for foster carers should be implemented covering accredited and standardised pre- and post-approval training. Within this national standard there must be flexibility for training to be tailored to allow foster carers to meet the individual needs of children and promote their own personal development. It is essential that knowledge of fostering is included in training for social workers to enable them to work more effectively with the primary carers of the vast majority of looked after children. Other professionals working with looked after children should also be given training to understand the role of foster carers. The young champions group have been very effective in delivering training on fostering to different professional groups.”

Within Renfrewshire the post of training and development officer for the Fostering and Adoption Service has continued to be very beneficial in the development of our foster carers learning while acknowledging foster carers individual learning needs and experience. This includes a programme of training approved foster carers which is directed at developing foster carers skills and appropriate to their age range of approval. The training programme for Autumn 2019 – Spring 2020 is attached (see appendix 2). Renfrewshire Council foster carers have been encouraged to attend briefing given by Barnardo's around children/young people who have been victims of sexual exploitation. We also have 3 fostering households who are caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as well as being supported by the fostering service they received support from unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people's team

We also continue to provide mandatory training on fire safety, first aid and safer caring. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service provides training on fire safety and the West of Scotland College, Paisley campus, provides first aid training. Foster Carers must update their Mandatory training every three years.

Foster carers are encouraged to discuss with their supervising social worker any specific training needs, as well as the supervising social worker identifying gaps in the carer's development. Over the past year the Fostering Team has developed evening training for the support carers of foster carers and foster carers who find it difficult to attend training during the day.

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

Foster Carers Support Group

Our foster carers continue to organise a support group which meets fortnightly. This has now been up and running for over six years. The group is an informal support group where foster carers can drop in as they wish; issues raised within the group are fed back to the fostering team via the carers supervising social worker or the foster carers consultation group.

Consultation Group

The service consults regularly with foster carers on a range of issues. All Foster Carers are invited to attend the Carers Consultation Group which now meets every four months. This 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. When we reviewed the Partnership Agreement, we discussed it at the Consultation Group.

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

Breakthrough Group

The Breakthrough group is now in its 4th year, having been set up in November 2015. This is a participation group set up for children and young people in foster care. The purpose is to give children/young people a safe space with other children who live in foster care, and therefore have similar experiences to each other, and to produce a newsletter that is then sent out to all Renfrewshire children, 8 years and over, who are in foster care. The group is run and facilitated by Renfrewshire Fostering Team and Who Cares? Scotland. We have around 10 children/young people who attend the group on a monthly basis. Their age ranges from 9 -15 years.

We meet on a monthly basis at St. James Centre in Paisley. The newsletters are completed overall by the children and young people themselves. They decide upon the content of the newsletter and are responsible for writing their own stories, jokes and research into the subject topics. Some are also developing computer skills and are responsible for collating the stories and arranging them in a newsletter format.

The children/young people this year have chosen to discuss and write about subjects such as reception into care, sibling contact, and changes of placement.

At least twice per year, or after the completion of a newsletter, we incorporate an activity or outing for the children and young people.

Newsletter

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 or experiences.

The Best Services Trial

Renfrewshire Children's Services have joined the University of Glasgow and the Glasgow Infant and Family Team (GIFT) in their Best Services Trial.

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. The trial will start in December 2018 and run until 2021.

In the service we have identified foster carers who are registered to take children of this age and those that are likely to have a child in the trial and Professor Helen Minnis has briefed these carers.

As of the 30.9.19 Renfrewshire Council referred 9 children to the Best trial.

Future developments of the fostering service 2019 - 2020

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 – to encourage and support young people with the use of my view in relation to foster carers reviews.
4. 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.
5. To continue to work with neighboring authorities regarding shared services and development days.
6. To support the Breakthrough Group in relation to increasing their membership.
7. To consult with children/young people of foster carers in relation to future support, groups etc.
8. Welcome packs to be redesigned for children/young people being received into the care of foster carers.
9. To continue to participate with the Best Trial.

REPORT ON SUPPORTED CARERS SERVICE

Supported carers

Support carer are carers who look after young adults who have left care. Frequently they are the previous foster carer of the child. Supported carer assessments are completed by Renfrewshire's Throughcare Service and are presented to Renfrewshire Council's Fostering Panel. During the period 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2019 the Fostering Panel has approved 9 supported carers, 6 of whom were foster carers from independent agencies and 3 were foster carers 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.

There are 23 young adults in supported carer placements at present. All are in positive destinations. 15 young people are studying full time and the remaining 8 are all working.

REPORT ON THE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SERVICE

Developments within the adoption service 2018- 2019

1. Continued development of training for adopters, and consultation with adopters regarding appropriate training.
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. Development of a training programme regarding adoption support plans for social work staff with regards to ensuring all adopted children have a support plan in place and a later life letter.
6. Continued referrals to 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. This has included involvement with research programmes such as Moving Images (the use of DVD presentation on children where plans have been agreed for adoption).
8. Continued partnership work with our neighboring authorities, including practice forums.

Inspection

The Adoption Service has not been inspected since the last Annual Report. The last inspection in 2017 graded us at 5's (very good) across all domains. The service is awaiting a date for inspection.

Recruitment of Adoptive Parents

There continues to be a need for both adoptive carers and permanent foster carers for children of all ages who meet our adoption criteria (appendix 3). Nationally there is recognition that more adopters are also required for sibling groups and older children.

During the period covered by the report there were 33 initial enquiries with regards to adoption, initial enquiries do not always result in attendance at preparation groups, and some are counselled out due to health reasons, no spare bedroom or other reasons.

Within the above dates there have been 2 adoption preparation groups within Renfrewshire, a total of 9 households attended from which we received 6 applications for adoption. Of the 6 applications 1 was received from a current Renfrewshire fostering household who wish to adopt the child in their care. Of the others, 2 households started the assessment and after a short period, the couple were not able to continue with the adoption assessment, 1 couple

attended from another authority and we are still awaiting 1 application to be returned. The other assessment is in process.

Renfrewshire Council's adoption service has made good use of the Scottish Adoption Register/Link maker. During the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 we referred 4 adopter households to the adoption register/link maker, while several of our adopters also attended adoption exchange days.

Statistics from the Adoption Register Annual Report indicated that 152 adopters were referred to the Register in 2018-19, a slight decrease from 178 the previous year.

93% of the 152 adopters referred in 2018/2019 were of Caucasian ethnicity with 13 adopters from an Asian background; 3 from a mixed or multi ethnic background, 1 from a Black African background and 2 from a Middle Eastern ethnicity.

The adoption service was involved in different recruitment activities during Adoption Week, 20 to 26 November 2018, an information table at the atrium within Renfrewshire House, Renfrewshire Council's HQ and a drop-in event for adopters and their children was held at Johnstone Town Hall, with an adopter speaking about her experience of telling her children that they were adopted, her teenage daughter also talked about her own experience.

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

Adopters/Permanent Foster Carers

In the period between covered by this report, 5 households were recommended for approval as adopters.

In the same period there were 4 children linked with permanent foster carers, 3 children with Renfrewshire Council permanent foster carers (1 sibling group of 2 and 1 single child), and 1 child with a permanent fostering household from an independent agency.

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

Family Finding

During the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019, 14 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.

During this period 10 children's plans for Permanence Orders were presented to the Adoption Panel, this included 2 sibling groups of 2.

Renfrewshire Council make good use of the Scottish Adoption Register by way of Linkmaker 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.

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

Several children's profiles were at presented adoption exchange days, and through the adoption exchange days a profile is being considered for a sibling group of 2 children 4 and 6 years. Adoption activity days have not been held as often as in the past years due to the fall in the number of adopters attending, this is felt to be related to Linkmaker where adopters have direct access to profiles of the children seeking adoption.

Statistics from the Adoption Register Annual Report indicated that 173 children were referred to Scotland's Adoption Register/Link maker 2018/2019. Of the 173 children referred this year 65% were boys and 35% girls continuing the pattern established in the previous years of more boys than girls being referred – 64% were boys in 2017-2018.

Of the 178 children referred 93% were of White Scottish ethnicity. 5% were of multi ethnic origin and 2% were of Black African ethnicity background.

30% of referrals to the Adoption Register were for sibling groups. 2 sets of sibling groups of 3 were referred in this period.

Within Renfrewshire we approved adoption plans and linked 1 sibling group of 2 with prospective adopters through the Scottish Adoption Register and 1 sibling group of 2 with Renfrewshire adopters.

Renfrewshire Council Adoption service continues to work closely with Inverclyde Council, East Renfrewshire Council, West Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire. Meetings are held every three months to look at working together in sharing resources such as planning adoption preparation groups together, linking children with each other's adopters, recruitment and training. We have jointly provided 3 practice forums to staff groups this year, these sessions were well attended.

Adoption Support Group

The adoption support group has continued to develop over the past year. The group 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.

For most adopters who attend the group the main benefits are meeting other adopters in similar situations and hearing about strategies and tips for managing different situations. The group has also been the starting point for the development of friendships and informal supports. The drop-in evenings were established after consultation with adopters who felt an evening to discuss issues, without the children, would be beneficial.

There are approximately 15 adoptive families who have attended the Support Group regularly over the past year and their feedback has been 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

Throughout the year the adoption team have provided adoption support on an individual basis to adoptive families who have approached the service for support. The service has worked with 9 families. We have also provided origins counselling to 5 individual adult adoptees, at their request rather than being referred to Barnardo's.

Within Renfrewshire we have 92 adoptive families on our mailing list who receive our quarterly newsletter and notification of all support groups and training events.

Over the past year we have provided training to adopters, including Thera play, a “telling a child about their adoption” workshop and life work. All training events were received positively.

Birth parent support

We aim to offer support to birth families once the plan is made for their child/children to be adopted. We will offer support to birth parents to reflect on why adoption has been recommended and to understand the legal process. We will 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 will 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 October 2018 and 30 September 2019 we offered/provided support to 9 birth parents with regards to birth parent support. We have had 1 birth parent who was able to put together a book which included baby photographs, family photographs and a letter for the child explaining why the birth parent was not able to look after the child. We also support birth parents asking for assistance with their letter box contact, not knowing what to write in their letter for their annual exchange of information and birth parents wanting to talk about their children being adopted and looking at making changes in their life styles to improve their own lives.

This will continue to be a key area of development over the next year.

Future developments of the adoption service – 2019 -2020

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

1. Continuing the recruitment of new adopters
2. Continue to recruit new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members
3. To continue to develop our adoption support provided to adoptive families, our adoption support group and work with birth families.
4. Continue to develop extended family member’s participation in the adoption assessment process.
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 development work with our linking process using the Adoption register
7. Support Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Activity Days as appropriate
8. To continue our development of joint work with neighboring local authorities.

Conclusion

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

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

The Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services are all committed to safeguarding children's lives in Renfrewshire and there is a real drive from these services in continuing to develop further.

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

Joyce Gartshore
Chairperson of the Adoption Panel and the Fostering Panel

Clare Cuning
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.

Foster Carer Training Programme, Autumn 2019 – Spring 2020

All courses and workshops are stand-alone and open to all carers

Mandatory Workshops all Carers Should Complete

Attendance as Appropriate

Safer Care:
Internet Safety

Child Protection:
“Trading Places”

Safe Talk:
Self-harm and Suicide Support

Caring for Children with Sexually Harmful Behaviour

Caring for Children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Child Sexual Exploitation

Bringing up Baby

Sexual Health and Relationships for Fostered Children

Promoting Positive Behaviour

**Renfrewshire Council
Adoption Criteria**

Age

All applicants must be over 21 years of age.

Status

Enquires 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.