



**To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board**

**On: 15 January 2026**

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**Report by: Director of Children's Services**

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**Heading: Annual report of the Fostering and Adoption Service**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides elected members with the opportunity to review the 18<sup>th</sup> annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering and Adoption Service (appendix 1).
  - 1.2 The annual report sets out the work undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Fostering and Adoption Service in the period 1 August year 2024 to 31 July 2025. The annual report notes that on 31 July 2025 there were 68 fostering households approved by Renfrewshire. During the period covered by this report, 12 children and young people had a permanence plan considered by the panel and approved.
  - 1.3 The report considers the work of the panel and the continued work of the fostering and adoption service.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The Education and Children's Services Policy Board is asked to:
    - a) note the contents of the Fostering and Adoption Annual Report 2024/25 attached as appendix 1.
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## **3. Background**

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

regarding the suitability of people to adopt or foster children. Furthermore, the Panel considers and approves plans for children to be adopted or for the Council to apply for Permanence Order for a child. The Panel considers and approves the matching of a particular child with a particular family where the plan is for the child to live there permanently. The Panel is also responsible for reviewing Renfrewshire foster carers.

- 3.2 Renfrewshire operates a Fostering Panel and Adoption Panel with one constitution. The panel separates out the fostering business from the adoption business to ensure that the appropriate regulations are met regarding a quorum, and for the attendance of the legal and medical advisers. The panel has two chairpersons who are independent from the work of the service: One is a senior manager in social work, and the other is from the Association for Fostering Adoption and Kinship Scotland (AFKA).
- 3.3 There are currently 23, members of the panel comprising elected members, social work, health and education staff, legal advisers, a medical adviser, carers, independent panel members, and an independent member from AFKA. The panel sits at least monthly- there were 18 panels in the reporting period. There are typically 3 panel members at each meeting along with appropriate advisors. The panel considered 55 agenda items over the course of the year.
- 3.4 The panel has a unique overview of the work being undertaken to assess and approve foster carers and adopters alongside the work being undertaken by social workers to progress plans for children who cannot be cared for within their own family. The annual report has been produced as a means of sharing this work with a wider audience and to assist in the process of service planning.
- 3.5 Renfrewshire had 68 active households of foster carers on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025. In the period 1/08/24 and 31/7/2025 there were no new registered foster carers, however three assessments are ongoing. Four foster care households left the service: one household was deregistered following a foster care investigation that concluded the care offered did not meet the standards of being a Renfrewshire carer. One household retired and two households converted from fostering to continuing care households.
- 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. This year Renfrewshire was part of the Scottish Government national foster carer recruitment campaign which ran over 6 weeks in the Spring of 2025. During this period there was no expressions of interest in fostering to our service, and this response was reflected nationally. Most of our fostering applications continue to come from people who already have foster carers as friends or family. The service continue to work with communication and marketing to consider how best to promote fostering recruitment.
- 3.7 In the period 1/08/24 and 31/07/2025 a total of 3 Renfrewshire households were approved as adopters at the Renfrewshire panel.
- 3.8 The Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 increases the responsibility/ duty of Local Authorities to provide continuing care placements

for young adults up to the age of 21. This means that more young people are remaining in the same placement after they are 18. The service continues to assess foster carers to become continuing carer/supported carers wherever this is appropriate.

- 3.9 We currently have 10 young adults living with supported carers, 8 of these carers were previously the young adults foster carer, while two supported carers look after children previously known to them.
- 3.10 The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 became law in 2021 and places new duties on local authorities to place brothers and sisters together in placements and place a new duty on local authorities to promote contact between brothers and sisters who are looked after. This is in keeping with the independent care review report, The Promise.
- 3.11 Renfrewshire approved the “Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy” in May 2021. The policy contains the following pledge “When children come into care Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together”. The policy recognises that there will be times that brothers, and sisters can’t be placed together but requires us to report on this. The annual report on the application of the policy is being considered elsewhere on the agenda for this Board today.
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## Implications of this report

### 1. Financial

The Council supports foster carers through the payment of a fee and maintenance allowance for each child. The Council provides adoption allowances for some adoptive carers where this is considered to be in the best interest of the child.

### 2. HR and Organisational Development

None.

### 3. Community/Council Planning

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

### 4. Legal

There are no new legal duties as a consequence of this report. The report satisfies the statutory duties of the local authority to have in place a fostering and adoption panel.

### 5. Property/Assets

None.

### 6. Information Technology

None.

**7. Equality and Human Rights**

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

**8. Health and Safety**

None.

**9. Procurement**

None.

**10. Risk**

None.

**11. Privacy Impact**

None.

**12. Climate Risk**

None.

**13. Children's Rights**

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

**14. Cosla Policy Position**

None.

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**List of Background Papers**

- (a) None

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**Children's Services**  
FD 24/11

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**THE FOSTERING AND  
ADOPTION  
PANEL AND SERVICE**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025**

## **Foreword**

## **Introduction**

### **Context**

- Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People
- Overview of the work presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel 01/08/24 – 31/07/25
- Panel Membership
- Staffing
- Commitment to permanency planning

### **Introduction of Senior practitioner role**

- Panel development
- Permanence drop-in

### **Report on the Fostering Service**

- Development of the Fostering Service 2024 – 2025
- Recruitment Activity
- Preparation Groups
- New Foster Carers and deregistration
- Foster Carers Reviews
- Permanent Foster Carers
- Foster Carers Training
- Foster Carers Support Group
- Consultation Group
- Fostering Events
- Break Through Group
- Newsletter
- Future Development of Fostering Service 2024 -2025

### **Report on the Continuing and Supported Carers Service**

- Overview of Continuing and Supported Carers Service
- Development of the continuing and supported care service 2024 - 2025
- Future Development of the continuing and supported carer Service

### **Report on the Adoption and Permanence Service**

- Development within the Adoption Service 2024 – 2025
- Recruitment, Preparation and Assessment of Adoptive Parents
- Family Finding
- The Adoption Register Scotland
- Adoption Plans and Links
- Adoption Support Groups / Individual Families
- Birth Connections
- Adoption Newsletter
- Letterbox Contact
- Training
- Future Development of the Adoption Service 2024 – 2025

## Conclusion

### Foreword

Welcome to the annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering, Adoption and Supported Care Service and The Fostering and Adoption Panel. This report reviews the previous year and looks to future developments.

On 31 July 2025, Renfrewshire Council had 548 Looked After Children. Of these, 134 children and young people were looked after at home, 242 were looked after by kinship carers or friends/relatives and 161 were accommodated with foster carers, in pre-adoption arrangements or within residential placements. Renfrewshire Council had 68 Fostering households at this time.

Children who are looked after in foster care, can either be with Renfrewshire foster carers or with foster carers approved by an external agency or charity. Wherever possible we try to have children live with Renfrewshire foster carers and only look to external agencies when a suitable match cannot be made with Renfrewshire carers. On 31 July 2025 there were 25 children/young people living with external providers, an increase of one from the previous year.

The work of the Fostering and Adoption Service continues to ensure that children are living in the best and safest environments to meet their individual needs, and that children who require to live permanently in foster care or to be adopted are matched with an appropriate foster or adoptive family at the earliest opportunity.

The Fostering and Adoption Service remains committed to ensuring that the principles of Renfrewshire's 'Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together' policy are embedded in all aspects of its practice. Where we cannot place brothers and sisters together, the service supports natural family time between brothers and sisters out with formal arrangements wherever possible.

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 Panel's role is to make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who ultimately approves children's permanence plans or confirms that a household can adopt or become foster carers.

Panels continue to deal with a range of complex issues and to progress children's plans in a timeous, focussed manner. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025, 12 children's permanence plans were approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

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

John Trainer  
Head of Children and Justice Social Work  
Chief Social Work Officer

Michelle McCargo  
Strategic Manager for Children and Justice  
Depute Chief Social Work Officer

## Introduction

This is the 18<sup>th</sup> annual report of Renfrewshire Council's Fostering and Adoption Panel and Service and covers the period 1 August 2024 - 31 July 2025.

Renfrewshire Council has a statutory duty to operate Fostering and Adoption Panels. In Renfrewshire we have one Panel which carries out both functions.

The Adoption and Fostering Panel operates within the statutory framework of the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009 (Part II) (AAS Regulations) and the Looked After (Scotland) Regulations 2009 (Part VI) (the LAC Regulations).

These regulations set the basis for the membership of the Panel, the frequency of meetings, the appointment of advisors and the different functions of the Panel.

There is a Business Meeting at the start of each Panel to review overall functioning. The quorum for individual meetings of the Panel is three members, and it is ensured that this number includes people with relevant experience and a range of backgrounds to provide robust and independent scrutiny of the business presented.

Responsibility for the functions and decisions of the Panel rests with the Chief Social Work Officer. Authority is delegated to a Senior Manager in Children's Services to chair the Panel. We have a second chair from the Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland (AFKA). The Head of Children and Justice Social Work, and the Strategic Manager for Children and Justice act as Agency Decision Makers for the Panel. This is to ensure compliance with the recommendation of the Guidance on Looked After Children Regulations (Scotland) 2009, to appoint more than one Agency Decision Maker, to cover, holidays, illness, alternatives for review (appeal) panels and other circumstances.

The Panel has several purposes. This includes considering prospective foster carers, prospective adopters, and supported/continuing carers. It also involves reviewing existing registrations for foster carers, prospective adopters and supported/continuing carers. In addition, the Panel considers individual children's needs for alternative permanent carers (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 route to secure this outcome. The Panel also considers the matching of a child with specific foster carers or adoptive parents within permanence plans.

The fostering and adoption team is responsible for the recruitment, training, supervision and support of suitable foster carers and prospective adopters. There is also a significant role in tracking permanence and providing post adoption support to adopted families once Adoption Orders are granted. Ensuring we have sufficient carers with the skills and experience necessary to meet the needs of the diverse range of babies, children and young people who need care away from their birth families is the over-arching objective of the team.

## Context

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

### Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People

As of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025, Renfrewshire Council had 548 Looked After Children/Young People. The number of children living in Kinship arrangements has slightly reduced from the previous year, from 264 to 242. The number of children living with Renfrewshire Council's foster carers has reduced by 14 from the previous year, whilst those residing with independent/charity sector foster carers also increasing by 1.

	31/07/2024	31/07/2025
Local Authority – Children in Children's Houses	21	20
Local Authority – Children in Foster Carer	115	101
Independent Sector Children in Foster Care	24	25
Independent Sector Children in External Residential Resource	37	18
Pre – Adoption	5	8
Children Looked After by Kinship carers/friends/relatives	264	242
Children Looked After at home	153	134
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>548</b>

<b>Cases presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel</b>		
Business Item	Aug 23 -July 24	Aug 24 - July 25
Child adoption plans and links	5	9
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	2	3
Approval of adopters to increase registration	0	0
Conversion of Foster carers to Adopters	0	0
Approval of Adopters for children from overseas.	0	0
De registration of adopters	0	2
Review of Registration (Adoption)	1	1
Children's Permanence Order plans	1	3
Links with Permanent Foster Carer	1	3
Approval of new Foster Carer	1	0
Approval of Foster Carer – change from interim to permanent status	0	2
De registration of foster carers	5	4
Approval of Supported Carers	5	4
Initial review of Foster Carers after 1 year	6	0
Foster Carer Reviews (after year 3)	24	24
<b>Total Number of Agenda Items</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>55</b>

There were a total of 18 Fostering and Adoption Panels held between 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025.

## **Panel Membership**

There has continued to be a committed Panel membership over the past year. Very positively, the number of panel members has significantly increased in the past 2 years from 12 to 23. This overall number includes Panel Chairs. The majority of Panels are chaired by the delegated Senior Manager from social work and the other is independent and commissioned from the Association of Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland. The Panel membership reflects a wide range of experience from including colleagues from social work, education, health, independent panel member, and those with lived experience of fostering and adoption and elected officials. The focus now is on building experience of the panel membership in place.

As part of the Panel member appraisal process, members provided feedback in respect of their role which will inform future training, to ensure panel members feel confident to make legally competent recommendations.

The Medical Advisers continue to offer a valuable service and support to the Panel in respect of provision and interpretation of medical information in relation to the children and adults being presented to Panel. The Medical Adviser provides up-to-date written information regarding any health issues in relation to a child or a prospective foster carer or adoptive parent. The medical advisor will attend Panel if this is required where health needs are more complex.

The Panel has a representative from the council's legal services who act as Legal Advisor and provides written legal advice to the Panel in relation to adoption and permanence work. The Legal Advisor attends the Panel whenever permanence is being considered, and on other occasions where the chairperson feels their advice is required.

At present, it is the role of the Senior Practitioner to act as Panel Advisor and assume responsibility for all Panel business. The Team Managers for Fostering and Adoption act as Panel Advisor when required, providing a supporting role. The Medical, Legal and Panel Advisors are non-voting members.

## **Staffing**

Following an internal social work service redesign implemented in November 2024 the structure of the Fostering, Adoption and Continuing Care/Supported Care Service is as follows:

Senior Social Work Manager - Registered manager of the services

1 Team Manager Adoption (responsible for adoption and permanence service)

1 Team Manager Fostering (responsible for the fostering, continuing and supported care service)

1 Senior Practitioner (Responsible for all panel business)

5 full time fostering social Workers

1 part time fostering social worker

1 full time continuing care/ supported care social worker

3 full time adoption social workers

1 part time adoption social Worker

1 Adoption Support and Development Worker

1 Birth Connections co-ordinator

Both teams work closely together and share expertise and learning.

### **Commitment to permanence planning – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025**

During this period, Renfrewshire has progressed adoption and permanence plans for 12 children. This is a significant increase from last year. Renfrewshire Council continues to recognise the importance in progressing plans for children within appropriate timescales. The service re-design has now been implemented, and this has enabled greater focus on permanence work. This work has also been supported with the introduction of a monthly permanence drop-in service.

Renfrewshire social work service is committed to keeping children with their birth families where it is safe to do so and is working to improve identification of potential alternative care arrangements within parents' wider family network at the earliest possible stage. This important work with parents occurs before presentation to the Fostering and Adoption Panel. Following this, even where permanence out with the family becomes necessary, it can provide the child with important life-long links with their birth family and contribute to more positive long-term outcomes for children.

The decision to place a child permanently out with their birth family rightly involves a high level of assessment to ensure the plan is in the best interests of the child and will meet their needs throughout their childhood. During the permanence 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 and have the opportunity to thrive into adulthood.

### **Introduction of Senior practitioner role**

In November 2024, the Senior Practitioner role was introduced to the fostering and adoption team as part of the service redesign. The Senior Practitioner fulfils the role of panel advisor and is responsible for the delivery of key operational priorities within the fostering and adoption panel. The senior practitioner works closely with the Team Managers to ensure that practice and knowledge opportunities within the team are maximised and leads on complex cases where appropriate.

### **Panel development**

A permanence drop-in service was created by the fostering and adoption service in February 2025. This takes place monthly with a rotation of different office locations to support the attendance of the children and families workforce. The aim of the permanence drop in is to offer advice, guidance and support with any permanence related matter to achieve robust and timeous outcomes. The permanence drop in has been well attended by social workers, social work managers and Independent Decision Makers. Feedback is collated at the end of each session for the purpose of service improvement and to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the workers who attend. Since its roll out in February, the drop in has been solely facilitated by the management team for the purpose of offering continuity of information however over the next 3 months the plan is to expand this to social workers from the fostering and adoption service who will co-facilitate the drop in and act as mentors to workers who attend and need support. Feedback has been very positive with workers attending sharing feelings of increased confidence and understanding in permanence work and more robust assessments are being presented to Panel which has supported Panel members in their recommendations. Based on the feedback received checklists have been created and shared in respect of permanence processes which will further support workers in their role with permanence work.

## Report on Fostering Service

The fostering service continues to offer a high standard of care to children in the care of Renfrewshire Council. The number of foster carers has reduced over the period, as has the number of children being cared for in foster care. At times carers have gone out with their registration to care for children needing care. The most common reason for this has been to keep brothers and sisters together. When carers go out with their registration this must be approved by the Agency Decision Maker. It is a testament to the commitment of Renfrewshire carers that there are fewer foster carers caring for more children.

### Developments within the Fostering Service 2024 – 2025

- Embedding the principles of the Promise by encouraging all staff and carers to become Promise Keepers.
- Implemented bi-monthly service improvement meetings
- Social Events for Foster Carers
- Specific social event for short break carers
- Specific training event for short break carers
- Reviewed and implemented a new approach around Preparation Groups
- Introduced Tures (Online) Training pathway for all foster carers which includes child protection and adult support and protection modules
- Implemented an Annual (in person) training calendar for all foster carers
- Offered new training e.g. wee minds matter/ Understanding Neurodiversity in children and young people and sudden infant death syndrome training
- Reviewed and implemented a new looked after review process
- Reviewed and implemented a new Safer Carer Process and Safer care templates in line with new guidance
- Reviewed and implemented a new assessment and review process for babysitters
- Reviewed and implemented a new assessment and review process for Nominated carers
- Reviewed and implemented a new approach to Fostering & Adoption duty
- Introduced matching templates
- Reviewed and implemented a new Individual placement agreement template
- Regular engagement with neighbouring authorities and Social Work Scotland
- Participation in AFKA West of Scotland Consortia managers forum.
- Participation in the Community of practice practitioners' group
- 2 social workers were trained in Seasons for growth (supporting adults with Grief and loss)
- Non-violence Resistance groups were facilitated by education Psychology and a fostering social worker
- 2 social fostering social workers were trained in Non-violence Resistance
- Collaboration with Educational Psychology to offer specific support to foster carers to help support the child in their care

### Recruitment activity/ Preparation groups

The Fostering Team manager works with Renfrewshire Council's Communication team to continue to develop and refine a recruitment strategy making use of social media. The Fostering Network have estimated that 400 additional fostering households are required to meet demand in Scotland. It is recognised nationally that there is a shortage of foster carers and in May 2025

the Scottish Government in partnership with the Fostering Network and Scotland's 32 local authorities launched a national recruitment campaign

"The ordinary can be extraordinary for a child in foster care".

The fostering service embraced this partnership and two carers represented Renfrewshire at the event launch in Edinburgh with the First Minister, John Swinney.

Results thus far have been disappointing nationally and during this campaign, the service did not receive and uptake in enquiries to become foster carers, although since then there has been 5 households who have contacted the service and may progress through the process.

When a person makes a fostering enquiry, an initial visit is carried out by a social worker from the fostering service. Following this there is discussion between the social worker and the team manager, and they consider whether to progress the enquiry based on the fostering criteria. Ideally at this stage the enquirer would be invited to attend preparation groups, and it would not be until they had completed the preparation groups and with the agreement of the service, they would then submit their application, and the home study part of the assessment process would begin.

We have adapted our approach to managing enquiries by streamlining the process and ensuring that the same worker will oversee the enquiry from the initial telephone call, home visit and decision to progress the carers to preparation group stage.

The preparation groups are facilitated by social workers from the fostering team, and they use the materials produced by the Fostering Network "Skills to Foster". The preparation groups provide the opportunity for the participants to receive more in-depth information and to discuss the implications of fostering. The preparation groups tend to run over 5 evening (or weekend) sessions and cover topics such as why children come into care, what a foster carer does, identity and life chances, working with others including birth parents, attachment and brain development and creating a secure environment.

Experienced foster carers come along to talk to the group about their different experiences of caring for foster children, financial issues and support.

Preparation groups were held between October and November 2024 and from these 3 households are continuing with process and have scheduled dates for Panel.

### **New foster carers and carers deregistered**

In the period August 2024 – July 2025, no new foster carers were approved. During this period there were four fostering households deregistered. One household was deregistered following a foster carer investigation, one household retired, and two converted to continuing care households.

### **Foster Carer Reviews**

A Review of Foster Carers Registration takes place at the Fostering Panel at the end of their first year of fostering and every three years thereafter. Out with this timescale, foster carers will also return to Panel if their registration requires a review due to a change in registration, consideration of a complaint or allegation, breakdown, or a significant change in circumstances. In Renfrewshire, Foster Carer Reviews take place annually, so when not reviewed by the Fostering Panel, the review is conducted by a Social Work Senior

Manager.

Between 1 August 2024 and 31 July 2025, the Fostering Panel reviewed 24 foster care households, and 41 internal foster care reviews took place.

Foster Carer Reviews are an opportunity for foster carers to talk about their experience, training, and support etc. Renfrewshire Council's foster carers, in the main 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 to be beneficial and available as required.

The foster carers provide written and 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 birth parents are encouraged to submit a report for the Foster Carer Review regarding the care their child/children is receiving.

The duties of the supervising social workers from the fostering team are to keep regular contact with the foster carers, this includes home visits and telephone contact. Supervision between carers and their worker generally takes place four weekly. This is dedicated time that allows discussion and reflection about caring for the children, 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 conduct joint visits with the child's social worker as necessary.

### **Permanent Foster Carers**

Three children had their plan for a Permanence Order approved between 1 August 2024– 31 July 2025. The children's carers were also assessed and matched within this time

### **Foster Carer Training**

The fostering service take pride in our ability to take on board feedback and use this to improve and develop the service offered to our foster carers. One thing foster carers tell us regularly is that they want training that is accessible, tailored to their individual needs and something they can access in their own time. Therefore, in August 2024, the fostering service launched an online training pathway (TURAS) for all foster carers. This has been received well, and the service has recorded a significant uptake in foster carer training since this training pathway was implemented.

Additionally, foster carers have told us that they value in person training as this can be a helpful way to network with other carers however, they would like dates in advance so that they can plan their diary to suit their other commitments. Therefore, the fostering service launched an annual (in person) training calendar in January this year. Foster carers have the opportunity to attend training designed specifically for them which is provided by the Social Work Training team, social workers and other professionals from wider services and members of the fostering and adoption team. The latter have also provided evening sessions to capture carers who work. The range of training offered, covers dealing with health emergencies, Fire safety training, child protection, safer care, life story work, promoting positive behaviour, understanding neurodiversity, children with disabilities and contextualizing safeguarding which is delivered using Virtual Reality headsets.

Social workers and foster carers can also attend external training courses. The Fostering Network and Association of Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland have provided training and network lunches to foster carers, the fostering and adoption team staff, who have also attended network lunches and practitioners' forums.

### **Foster Carers' Support Group**

The foster carers have their own informal support group where they can share information/experiences, and any issues raised within the group are fed back to the fostering team via the carers supervising social worker or the foster carers consultation group. The group meets monthly and is supplemented by a "WhatsApp" group that the carers use for communication.

### **Consultation Group**

The Carers Consultation Group met four times between August 2024 and July 2025. All foster carers are invited to this group, and it is attended by the Fostering Team manager and the Senior Practitioner and the Senior Manager has attended two. This provides an opportunity for foster carers to be kept updated with any changes within the service and discuss any issues that have arisen for them or other carers. There is usually a group of between 10-12 carers who regularly attend but actions from the meeting are circulated to all carers. It is also the opportunity for more informal discussion.

### **Future of foster care consultation event**

A Scottish Government public consultation on the Future of Foster Care ran between 24 October 2024 and 6 February 2025. The consultation set out a vision for the future of foster care in Scotland that prioritises children's experiences, and meets their many and varied needs, in a changing sector and society. It proposed a flexible approach to fostering, that builds on the unique skills and qualities of foster carers, good practice and innovation and is underpinned by comprehensive ongoing support for foster carers. The proposals were developed in partnership with stakeholders, including the voices of children, young people, families and foster carers. The Scottish Government seeks to ensure fostering is fully aligned to the national approach to supporting children, young people and their families in Scotland - Getting It Right for Every Child. In other words, it is intended that fostering be child-centred, providing a strengths-based, holistic approach to supporting children, young people and families when it is needed, for as long as it is needed.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2025, Renfrewshire fostering service partnered with the Fostering Network and the Scottish Government to offer a Renfrewshire exclusive engagement event to all Renfrewshire foster carers where they were encouraged and supported to share their views in relation to the Future of Foster care consultation. MSP Natalie Don-McInnes minister for Children, Young People and the Promise, also attended this event and carers had the opportunity to share their views directly with Natalie.

A particular highlight of the session was when the carers were asked if they feel supported by Renfrewshire Council's fostering service and there was an overwhelming positive response.

### **Foster Carer Events**

The Fostering Service has facilitated 2 Foster Carer Coffee Mornings over the last year, these have been an informal opportunity, where all fostering households are invited along as well as all the fostering and adoption staff and managers. Attendance at these events has been high,

the foster carers come along, tea/coffee and cakes are provided people can have a chat in a very informal setting, it is also an opportunity for foster carers to put a face to the names of staff members whom they may not have met in other circumstances.

The Fostering Service organised a Fostering Day Out at Barnhill Farm in May 2025 to coincide with “Fostering Fortnight”, a national campaign organised by Fostering Network to raise the profile of fostering. Foster carers were invited along with the children they care for including birth and foster children. This event was enjoyed by 38 children along with 32 foster carers and staff and managers from the fostering service including the Head of Service.

There are 9 short break carers who provide an invaluable service mostly to families in the community by offering short breaks to children to allow parents/carers respite. Undoubtedly, this support has prevented some children being accommodated. Carers in this group also offer short break/holiday cover for our foster carers. This role has many similarities to our foster carers but also there are some differences. Many of this group continue in paid employment and offer support at weekends and so do not have the same opportunities to network. The fostering service held a short break carers coffee evening in April this year. 6 out of 9 households attended. Social Workers from the fostering service facilitated discussion and delivered a presentation on “Letter to the child”. This was a successful event which allowed the opportunities to meet other carers and staff within the service.

### **Breakthrough Group**

Aileen Byrne, fostering social worker continues to facilitate the Breakthrough Group who have enjoyed two outings over the course of this reporting period. In April' 25 they had a fun day out at Skyline Xscape and then at the end of the summer they enjoyed a trip to an outdoor water park based in the East coast of Scotland. These outings are always very well attended by the children and young people.

The Breakthrough Group are delighted to be celebrating 10-year anniversary this year. Starting in 2015 the group has been facilitated by Renfrewshire Council Children’s Services and Who Cares? Scotland.

The young people who attend the group are, or have been, in foster care. This semi-structured group meets monthly for 1½ hours, giving the young people an opportunity to meet others who may be experiencing similar issues or who may simply understand what it’s like to grow up outside of their birth family home. The focus of the group has been to support and amplify the voices of young people on issues important to them. Originally, these voices and stories were gathered and published in a quarterly newsletter, which was then posted to all of Renfrewshire’s young people in foster care.

Over the years, the group has naturally evolved, and the young people have found more creative ways to tell their stories and raise issues that matter to them. Their focus has shifted from completing individual pieces of work to collaborating on creative projects designed to share their messages through different mediums.

Over the past year, they have been working on a project titled *We ~~Are in~~ Care*. With the help and guidance of group volunteers, the young people have created an iMovie featuring spoken word, highlighting what is important to them and what they care about—for themselves and for other young people. As part of the planning and completion of the iMovie, each young person has logged their time and efforts over the past 10 months and submitted applications for a Youth Dynamic Award to recognise the challenge they set for themselves last year.

With the iMovie now complete, the group is looking to showcase it as part of a larger event that is planned to celebrate the 10th anniversary later in the year.

## **Newsletter for Foster Carers**

The fostering newsletter is produced by Robin Lawson, fostering social worker in Spring, Summer and Winter and distributed to all foster carers by e-mail. The focus of the newsletter is providing foster carers with updates on legal or practice changes that affect them or the children they care for and providing some thought-provoking articles about fostering issues. The newsletters seek to keep foster carers informed of changes within the social work service or procedures and also advertise training opportunities specific to fostering. The hope is that foster carers will become more involved in the content and focus of the newsletters. Carers are contacted regularly to solicit contributions or ideas for contributions. These editions covered topics including the Children's Services social work redesign and feedback from our carer's participation in the government sponsored consultation about the Future of Fostering. The carers were informed about recent changes to our Individual Placement Agreement, nominated carer and safer caring processes. There were also reflections on recent foster carer social events and edited articles from recent media publications about how to encourage young people to have a balanced approach to the use of their phones and the experiences of foster carers in Italy looking after the children of Mafia bosses. The newsletter provides the carers with links to explore more information on the topics covered and provides encouragement for carers to record any additional learning.

## **Future developments of the fostering service 2025 – 2026**

- Increase the number of carers producing "Letter to the Child"
- Develop and produce Permanence Training for social workers
- Deliver training to social workers using the Staying Connected Toolkit
- Deliver Seasons for growth training to foster carers and continuing/ supported carers
- Implement a "caring for babies" support group
- Set up a regular support group for short break carers
- Review core training for foster carers
- Implement "Adolescents matters" training in partnership with the Children's Health Scotland
- Foster carers will pilot a Lifestory App (My Story App)
- Introduce quarterly groups supervision/ reflective discussion opportunities

## **Report on Supported & Continuing Care Service 2024-2025**

### **Current carers and outcomes for young people**

At present the service consists of 8 continuing carers and 2 supported carers supporting 10 of Renfrewshire's young adults. Of the 10 young adults, 3 attend college placements fulltime, 2 attend university, 2 have an apprenticeship and 2 are in fulltime employment and 1 is in part-time employment.

Many of our young adults have had the opportunity to go on holiday either with their carers or as independent adults both domestically and internationally.

Several young adults are undertaking driving lessons with some having secured their driving licence over the past 12 months.

### **Developments within the supported & Continuing care service 2024 – 2025**

- Implemented annual reviews for all continuing and supported carers
- Carers have been actively encouraged to engage in the training and enhance their knowledge to support them to be more informed carers.
- Introduced Turas (Online) Training pathway for all continuing and supported carers which includes child protection and adult support and protection modules
- Implemented an Annual (in person) training calendar for all continuing and supported carers
- Offered new training e.g. Understanding Neurodiversity in children and young people and Letter to the Child
  
- Regular engagement with neighbouring authorities and Social Work Scotland
- Participation in AFKA West of Scotland Consortia managers forum.
- Participation in the Community of practice practitioners' group
- 2 social workers were trained in Seasons for growth (Understanding and supporting Loss and grief in adults)
- NVR training and level 3 groups were facilitated by education Psychology and a fostering social worker
- 2 fostering social workers were trained in NVR level 1 and 2
- Collaboration with Educational Psychology to offer specific support to continuing and supported carers to help support the young person in their care

### **Future Developments within the supported & Continuing care service**

- Discussion with Care Inspectorate regarding registration as Continuing Care Service
- Review Practice and paperwork templates for the continuing and supported care service
- Review core training for continuing and supported carers
- Implement “Adolescents matters” training in partnership with the Children’s Health Scotland
- Implement bi-monthly service improvement meetings with a focus on continuing and supported care
- Introduce quarterly groups supervision/ reflective discussion opportunities

### **Report on the Adoption Service**

#### **Developments within the Adoption Service in Renfrewshire 1 August 2024 - 31 July 2025**

1. Secured a further year of funding from The Promise, allowing the Birth Connections service, which supports birth family members affected by adoption, to continue until the end of March 2026.

2. Significantly developed opportunities for the voices of lived experience to be heard. Birth parents involved with Birth Connections helped create a video of their views, which has been shared in various forums to promote wider understanding.
3. Further developed practice by promoting empathy for birth parents amongst prospective adopters from early stage – the Birth Connections’ video has been shared at Adoption Preparation Groups as part of this.
4. Secured adoption plans and moves to prospective adoptive families for nine children, a considerable increase on equivalent numbers from recent years, and against the national trend of the numbers of adoption matches decreasing.
5. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Register/Link maker. This year, this included matching through Link Maker, and attending Exchange Days and an Adoption Activity Day.
6. Highlighted the importance of Listening to and Supporting the Experience of Adoption during Adoption Week Scotland.
7. Contributed to AFKA’s Permanence Guides (Adoption Subgroup), to develop best practice nationally.
8. Worked with colleagues in Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy to offer training opportunities for adopters.
9. Established a monthly peer support drop in for adopters and adopted children. This is run at weekends, and staff members are available for additional support.

### **Recruitment, Preparation & Assessment of Adoptive Parents**

Within the reporting period the Adoption Service received 26 initial enquiries which is three more than the figure from the previous year. Some of these did not progress due to a range of issues, and others continue to progress with their adoption journey. Two preparation groups were held, in September-October 2024 and May-June 2025. We continued to have contributions from adoptive parents at these groups, to support the learning of those attending. This year, we also expanded the contributions of those with lived experience by showing our Birth Connections video. This allowed prospective adopters to hear from the outset how birth parents feel about issues such as their children being outwith their care, what they hope for their children’s futures, and the importance of letterbox contact. Overall, the feedback we received from participants was extremely positive, particularly in relation to the contributions that came from lived experience.

The Adoption Service progressed 3 adoption applications (households) to the Adoption panel during the reporting period, and all were approved. Feedback received about the adoption assessment noted that prospective adopters recognised the need for thorough assessment, and on many occasions participants found the experience useful and therapeutic.

Renfrewshire Council’s Adoption Service will continue to use Scotland’s Adoption Register as required. Once applicants have been approved as adopters for a brief period, their information and what age of child they have been approved for is added to the Register. Adoption social workers across Scotland can then access this information should they be trying to place a child

for adoption. However, this has not been necessary for households approved in this reporting period, as they have been considered for linking through other methods within short time periods.

## Family Finding

There continued to be a need in this reporting period for adoptive parents for Renfrewshire children of all ages; particularly for brother and sister groups, older children, and children with additional support needs. Nationally, there was an increase in the number of children requiring adoption, and a decrease in the numbers of approved adopters available to meet their needs. This led to fewer matches being achieved nationally through Link Maker over the last year. However, the number of matches in Renfrewshire increased in that time.

Scotland's Adoption Register introduced a new process for Exchange days, featuring video presentations as well as opportunities for face to face connection between prospective adopters and workers. Renfrewshire engaged in this and also attended an Activity Day to seek families for our children.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025, the Adoption Service was actively family finding for 17 children in Renfrewshire, a slight increase on 15 from last year. Of these children, 9 had adoptive family links formally agreed through the Fostering and Adoption Panel, and all of those were then placed with their prospective adoptive family. Of the 17 children mentioned, a further 4 had adoptive family links potentially identified, but not formally agreed during this reporting period. Of these 17 children, a further 3 had decisions made to pause their adoption plans (1 due to new health information requiring exploration to ensure clarity on their needs, and 2 as new birth family potential options were discovered), and the service continued to search for an adoptive family for the remaining 1 child.

## The Adoption Register (Scotland) - National Position

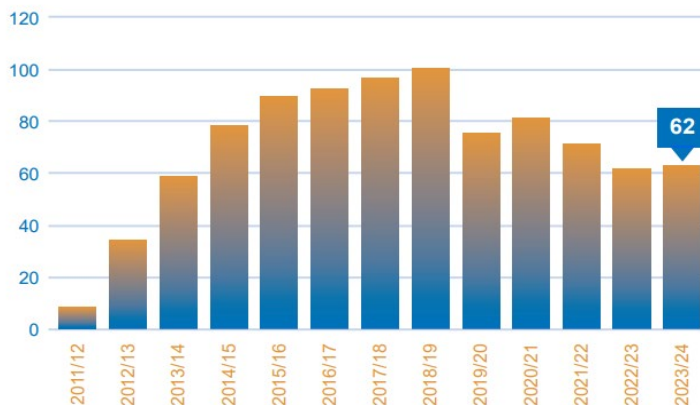
Scotland's Adoption Register continued to be a statutory service fully funded by the Scottish Government which provides a free service to support local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies with family finding activity. The Register is committed to facilitating social workers' overall goal of securing children's futures through moves to and links with permanent families who provide safe, loving, and stable homes.

A total of 61 children were matched with adoptive families through the Scottish Adoption Register in 2024/25.

The Register played an active role alongside AFKA Scotland and AUK Scotland in the delivery of Adoption Week Scotland 2024 with a focus on the needs of children, young people and their families throughout the lifetime of adoption.

The Register received a higher number of referrals for children requiring family finding services during 2024/25 than in previous years. At the same time, they noted a steady decline in the number of prospective adopters being referred to the service. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 there were 175 children on the Register compared to 113 the previous year and 125 prospective adopters on the Register compared to 169 the previous year. This may have accounted for the reduction in matches for Scottish children via the Register for the past year, down from 62 to 35. It should be noted that the trend for fewer adoptions in Scotland continued to reflect the UK wide experience of lower numbers of children moving to adoptive families, as the UK nations experienced greater numbers of children waiting than available families. As noted, however, Renfrewshire's Adoption Service performed against this trend.

MATCHES MADE VIA THE REGISTER 2011-2024



The end of year total of matches is a very small increase on the previous year, up from 61 to 62 despite the continued increase in numbers of children being referred throughout the year. On 31st March 2024 there were 113 children on the Register compared to 134 the previous year, and 169 adopters on the Register compared to 209 the previous year.

**GENDER**

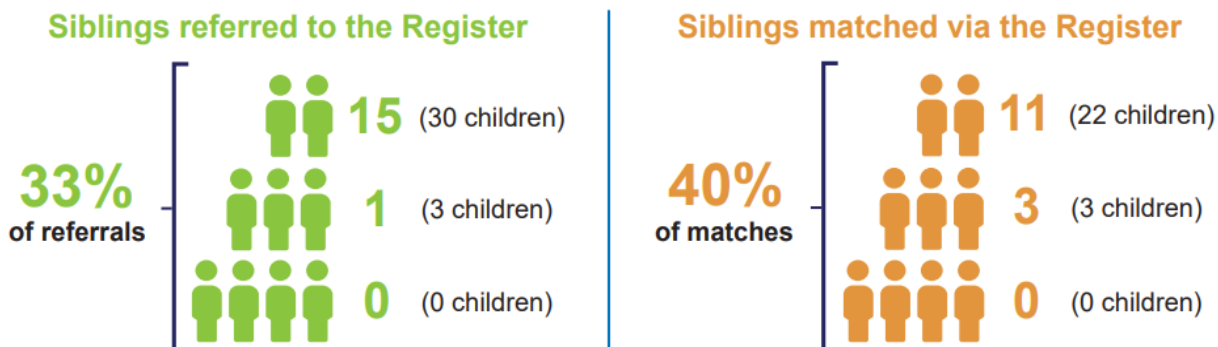
Of the 137 children referred to the Register in 24/25, 65 (47%) were girls and 72 (53%) were boys. This sees a return to the previous recordings of more boys than girls following a change in 21/22 where more girls than boys were referred to the Register since its inception in 2011.

**ETHNICITY**

124 (90%) White British 4 (3%) Other White 2 (0.9%) Black African heritage 1 (0.7%) Asian heritage 3 (2%) Irish Traveller heritage 6 (4%) Mixed heritage

**SIBLINGS**

38% of the children referred to the Register in 2024/25 were part of a sibling group. This is an increase from 33% last year. 11% (4) of the total number of matches made in this period were for sibling groups. No sibling groups of three have been matched this quarter. The continuation of sibling groups being matched with adopters is a positive outcome for those brothers and sisters who will benefit greatly from remaining together. It is a strength of the Register that it offers a wider range of prospective adoptive families to meet the needs of brothers and sisters.



During the reporting period, 9 children were presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration of their adoption plans and links. This is a significant increase on the 5 adoption plans considered in the previous year (and more than double the 4 in the year before that). In all these cases, the Agency Decision Maker accepted the panel's recommendations to approve the adoption plan and links between the child and their prospective adopters.

### **Adoption Support Group**

The Adoption Service continued to engage positively with families through our Adoption Support Events facilitated by the team. Our Summer Adoption Support Event took place in Barshaw Park in August 2024, and on this occasion we had some support from Renfrewshire's Active Communities, who provided us with some games to play, including archery, golf, and hoola hoops. There was a total of 37 adoptive family members in attendance. It was great to see the children and Adopters interact with each other and there was ample opportunity for Adopters to speak with the team if they wished to do so. Following this, our Christmas 2024 Event was held in Station Seven, where we had 7 adults and 10 children in attendance. This year, we decided not to see a pantomime, but provided time for families to more easily speak and connect with one another. A range of activities were available, including Christmas crafts and a 'Silent Disco'. The Silent Disco was a huge success, and we received lots of requests for Christmas songs. The biscuits were Christmas themed, with mince pies on offer, the children danced, and the adults mingled and chatted. Finally, in April 2025, we held our Easter Event at Barshaw Park. The 2 adults and 6 children who attended took part in an Easter Hunt in the park, searching for laminated letters attached to benches, fences and play equipment which spelled out 'The Easter Bunny'. These were then presented to the 'Easter Bunny' who had an Easter Egg for everyone, before playing football and tig with the children.

Having run such Events (with varying content) for several years, the Adoption Service was aware that adoptive parents used this as a positive opportunity to connect with other adopters, and we observed that some of the children recognised one another and were excited to come together. Adoptive families consistently fed back that they valued the opportunity to come together, to form connections with other families, and for their children to be with other adopted children with shared lived experience.

Therefore, this year, the Adoption Service significantly expanded our group based support to adoptive families. A monthly Adoption Peer Support Drop-In started on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and ran every second weekend of the month thereafter, sometimes on a Saturday, and sometimes a Sunday. The group took place at 'The Shed' at Station 7. This provided a large space for lots of different activities, ensuring families could find something they were keen to do. A board games table was available, and a pool or table tennis table. There was also a reading corner, boxes of LEGO to be enjoyed, and arts and craft materials to use. Everyone could have a hot or cold drink, a chat, and if the weather allowed we had outdoor games like hopsctotch and hula hooping. The drop-in was set up to run on a regular, consistent basis, every month. That way families could rely on its availability, increasing the likelihood of attendance, and overall support. The group provided an opportunity for adoptive parents to gain support from others with the same lived experience, and afforded children the chance to meet other adopted children, promoting their positive sense of identity and wellbeing. Moreover, staff members attended each session. This ensured adoptive families could ask questions, have a general chat, or discuss any difficulties they experienced with a worker from the Adoption Service in a relaxed, face to face environment. Equally, families who did not need additional support at that time will potentially be more comfortable with asking for this in the future where they have maintained positive, informal links with the Adoption Service in the meantime. In the Adoption Service, we fully appreciate that adoptive families are all likely to experience challenges at some stage. We strive to reassure families that this is very common and that anyone seeking support will be

welcomed rather than judged. Our drop-in - which is informal, fun, and routinely available – has been one way of conveying this approach.

### **Adoption Support to Individual Families**

Throughout the year the adoption team have provided adoption support on an individual basis to 24 adoptive families. Barnardo's Scottish Adoption Advice Service (SAAS) also continues to offer support, including counselling, to Renfrewshire families. A total of 42 children in 33 families received an adoption allowance during the reporting period.

Post Adoption Support Planning meetings are held for all families at key stages on their adoption journey, including six weeks after a child is placed, and when an adoption order is granted to consider their support needs. An adoption social worker is allocated to Renfrewshire adoptive parents for 1 year following the granting of an adoption order at which point the adoptive family are invited to a review meeting to consider any further adoption supports required.

Within Renfrewshire there were 87 adoptive households on our mailing list in this reporting period. All receive the quarterly newsletter and notification of support groups and training events.

### **Birth Connections**

Birth Connections continued to support birth family members affected by adoption. Kirstin Harvey, Birth Connections Co-ordinator began providing a direct service since March 2023 and continued to do so during this reporting period. Birth Connections' aim has always been to provide lifelong support so that birth family members can access support at the time when they feel best able to, and can choose when they do or do not wish to engage. The support offered through Birth Connections has been both individual - tailored to the birth family member's specific needs - and group based. Kirstin was seconded to this post, initially for a year (2022-23) as the CORRA Foundation provided 12 months of funding to start up a Birth Family Support service. We were fortunate to receive a further 3 funding rounds (one in this reporting period) to allow us to maintain and grow the support offered through Birth Connections. This continued Scottish Government funding was an indication of the success of the service to date, which has comprehensively supported birth family members affected by adoption. Our current funding runs until 30th March 2026.

The individual support provided over the reporting period involved a huge range of activities, some of which are noted, as follows:

- assisting people to understand the Adoption process and terminology surrounding this
- helping birth family members engage in life story activities for children (such as photo albums, memory boxes and letters)
- practical input with completing forms (including housing and counselling referrals, and accessing bus passes and passports)
- supporting birth parents to attend final family times with children, and promoting life story assisting work there
- accompanying birth parents to meetings and appointments (such as Looked After Reviews, Children's Hearings, GP, Addiction support, and Justice requirements),
- social support to help build confidence in the community and linking in with community led groups and organisations
- letterbox exchange; helping birth family members to write letters to children and offering emotional support on receiving letters from adoptive families.

Our core Group support launched in May 2023, providing a fortnightly Group run at The Shed at Station 7 (Active Communities). During this reporting period, the Group continued to provide a therapeutic environment for birth parents to meet with others with similar lived experience. Each session provided opportunity for arts and crafts, cooking, playing games, discussion and eating together. This was in a relaxed atmosphere and work was opportunity led; discussion was guided by those who attended on each occasion. A worker cooked and each attendee had the option to support this or not (many did). This allowed attendees to learn new skills, or to share their existing skills with their peers. It also meant we had the nurturing activity of sharing a meal on each occasion. This Group was instrumental in creating our Birth Parents' Voices video (along with other Birth Connections service users who did not attend the Group), and the attendees were then keen to consider additional ways they could share their views in the future. The feedback from Group attendees during this reporting period was consistently positive, with people valuing the support of staff and their peers. Our Birth Connections Co-ordinator also liaised closely with Active Communities and the community opportunities they provided. This allowed us to provide an additional Cooking/Baking group, run quarterly, and other classes such as Barista Training.

Birth Connections also organised a group activity to Edinburgh Zoo, a destination chosen by our service users, in September 2024. This activity combined those who received individual support with those who attended the Group. Those who did not attend the Group had opportunity, therefore, to meet others with similar experiences and to access peer support. The trip was a huge success with many of the birth family members stating they were looking forward to writing about this in their next letterbox letter, as going to the Zoo was something that they may have in common with their children now. Many of the birth family members who attended had never seen some of the zoo animals in real life before, and nor had they been to Edinburgh. They spoke about opportunities their children have had since being adopted and felt they could then relate a little more to these.

Birth Connections offered a Christmas meal again, in December 2024 to our Group attendees, in partnership with Station 7 (Active Communities). This was the second year we were able to offer this, and it was great to see the birth family members get into the Christmas spirit, dressing up and enjoying a full Christmas dinner. Again, attendees discussed how the Birth Connections Christmas dinner was the only way they celebrated Christmas, as this could be an extremely difficult time of year for them. To be able to share a Christmas dinner with others who shared their Christmas experience validated their feeling of loss, whilst still allowing them to celebrate together in a safe and inclusive environment.

Birth Connections received 33 referrals between 1st August 2024 and 31st July 2025. Of these 13 engaged in support, 12 did not respond to the offer of support, 3 said no to support, and the remaining 5 said they were interested but did not feel ready for the support at that time. In total, Birth Connections supported 42 birth family members with individual support in this reporting period, with 6 birth family members actively involved in the Group Support. These numbers continued to grow, and we anticipate this will remain the case.

"Birth Connections ensures we meet our legal duties under s 1 (3) (c) (d) and (f) of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 to provide an adoption service to birth parents, siblings and grandparents. The support provided can focus on directly adoption related issues, such as helping birth parents understand adoption processes, facilitating final family time sessions, or promoting engagement with letterbox connection. This promotes better outcomes for children as birth parents are more likely to engage with processes they understand and feel included in. Moreover, children benefit from final family times which are calm and affirming, and from knowing as they grow older that those experiences were as favourable as possible. This promotes a positive sense of identity, through feelings of being valued by birth parents. Equally,

children benefit from ongoing letterbox connection, as part of understanding their life stories and navigating their adopted identity. Equally, our support can relate to wider issues, such as birth parents' mental health, addiction or social isolation. We understand that those issues may have contributed to the need for a child to be adopted, so are still adoption related. In addition, it is impossible for many birth parents to engage with issues directly related to adoption until they have a foundation of safety and stability, so dealing with these wider issues can be a precursor to this. Through this wider support, birth parents can achieve more stable lifestyles which are hugely beneficial for them. Some birth parents we support have even told us they have chosen not to have more children at this time, as a result of our support. Birth Connections' support is in no way conditional on our service users not having further children; we support service users to achieve any safe outcomes they identify for themselves. However, we do see it as positive that some birth parents have recognised when they are not in circumstances that are conducive to raising children, as it is beneficial for them to not experience further loss, and beneficial for future children to have parents who wait until they can manage parenting before re-embarking on this. Moreover, this wider support is also beneficial for adopted children. They are more likely to receive ongoing letterbox exchanges from birth parents who have support and are stable enough to engage with this. In addition, where adopted children make attempts to trace birth parents as they grow older, this is more likely to be a safe and positive experience where the birth parents they encounter are living more stable lives. As such, Birth Connections supports birth family members, as a valuable objective in itself, and as means of significantly supporting adopted children.

### **Adoption Newsletter**

The Adoption Newsletter continued to be compiled quarterly by Emma Mackie Johnstone, Adoption Social Worker, and was sent out to all families on our Adoption Support mailing list. The Newsletter contained updates on the Adoption Team within Renfrewshire, event dates for Adopters' diaries, current affairs within the UK relating to adoption or care experienced children, dates for Renfrewshire Council's training courses for adopters and also dates for training courses with other agencies. The Newsletter also provided activities based on that Newsletter's theme, ranging from ideas for outings with children during the holidays to recipes for baking Halloween cakes. Emma collected children's artwork, which was displayed in the Newsletter, to showcase the talent we had among the families we supported. The Newsletter also contained information about our Adoption Support events and the monthly Adoption Peer Support Groups and always noted contact details for the individual workers with the Adoption Team. In addition, the Newsletter contained a QR code which Adopters could scan with their phone, to complete a survey about the Newsletter, and general Adoption Support. This allowed us to more formally seek feedback on our service. The verbal feedback received about the Newsletter was positive, with some adopters really appreciating the fact that they could show their child their artwork in it, and others finding this very informative.

### **Letter Box Contact**

The Letterbox Contact Service continued to facilitate indirect communication between birth families, adoptive parents, sister and brother groups, and permanent foster carers. Kayleigh Wilson, Adoption Support and Development Worker, alongside other team members, supported participants in both composing and responding to letters this year, helping maintain meaningful connections in a safe and structured manner.

During the current reporting period, the service held a caseload of 134, with 87 cases actively operational (an increase from 125 and 79 in the year before). The frequency of contact was determined on a case-by-case basis. While most contacts occurred annually, some were scheduled biannually, quarterly, or more frequently depending on individual needs.

This year, to improve accessibility and engagement, the service introduced personalised support and digital communication options for some families. These included email correspondence and supported video calls via platforms such as Microsoft Teams. The introduction of these methods resulted in a notable increase in participant engagement.

In addition to facilitating written contact, this year the service expanded its support to include follow-on interventions. For example, sister and brother groups who initially engaged through letterbox contact progressed to face-to-face meetings. Furthermore, some young people who maintained letterbox contact with birth parents were supported in making direct contact with them as they transitioned into adulthood.

## **Training**

This year, we highlighted the importance of Listening to and Supporting the Experience of Adoption during Adoption Week Scotland. Utilising the resources provided by Adoption UK, we shared training events for workers in our own service and the wider Children's Social Work Service, and used our mailing list to advertise events for adopted families. We also shared the voice of lived experience by outlining the story of an adopted family, and the support they received from our service on both social and general media.

The Adoption Service also contributed to future national practice learning as our Adoption Team Manager contributed to AFKA's Good Practice in Permanence Guides by meeting with the Adoption Subgroup for this. This ensured Renfrewshire practice was available for others' learning, and provided an opportunity to learn from the good practice of others. The initial drafts of these were completed during this reporting period, with a plan to pilot them subsequently. The final versions of the guides will be created and disseminated across Scotland in March 2026.

Finally, this year, we built on our existing links with colleagues in Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy to offer training opportunities for adopters. Colleagues from these three disciplines worked collaboratively to provide a training session entitled 'Neurodiversity: What does this mean and how can you support your young person?'. This was provided both in person - in an evening slot – solely for adopters, and online. The online session was provided during the day and was available for adopters, foster carers and workers. This was video'd so it is now available for other adopters who were unable to make the live sessions to view as a recording.

## **Future developments of the adoption service**

Over the next year the service intends to strengthen the adoption service by developing the following:

1. Increase representation of birth family members' voices through the production of a written document outlining advice to future birth family members and future social workers.
2. Consider how the post adoption support process for newly established adoptive families could be standardised to improve consistency and predictability.
3. Highlight the importance of Growing Your Family during Adoption Week Scotland.
4. Formally gather feedback from the Peer Support Drop-In, to ensure this provision is responsive to need, using a QR code.

## Conclusion

This report has highlighted the work of the Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services and the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panel during August 2024 - July 2025. The activity of the Fostering and Adoption Panel reflects the number of children unable to live with their birth families within Renfrewshire.

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

As the Registered Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our panel members for their commitment to Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children.

I would also like to express my thanks to Renfrewshire Foster Carers, Continuing Carers, Supported Carers and Adopters who have continued to show their commitment and love to the children they look after, and adopt. They help us to ensure that the children receive the best outcomes that they can.

As always, 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.

Fiona Duncan  
Social Work Senior Manager  
(Registered Manager of Fostering and Adoption Service)

## 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 and
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 not employed.
4. Be of any religious background or sexuality.

### 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 needing 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.