



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 DECEMBER 2017

ANNUAL REPORT – FOSTERING SERVICE

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Summary

The Fostering Service Annual Report 2016-17, set out at Appendix 1 to this report details the work completed by the Medway Council Fostering Service over the last year. It also describes how the in-house Fostering Service has met the needs of Medway's looked after children and establishes the work planned for the following year.

The report is presented to the Committee for consideration and comment, any comments from this Committee will be presented to the Cabinet on 19 December 2017.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This report is consistent with national policy, legislation and guidance. It is underpinned by key local policy documents, in particular the Medway Council Looked After Children Strategy and the Council Plan priority "to develop Children's Services to be a good service."
- 1.2 The cost of the Service is currently met within existing Council budgets. The Medway Fostering Service Transformation Programme details the projected savings and budgetary implications between 2017 and 2021.

2. Background

- 2.1 The work of Medway Council Fostering Service is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, The National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (amended) and associated amended regulations and guidance.
- 2.2 The annual report, set out at Appendix 1 gathers performance data on the Service, its development in the preceding year and sets goals and targets for the coming year.

- 2.3 The report considers recruitment activity, direction and advertising for the coming year and what other work is being undertaken to increase the number of Medway Council foster carers.
- 2.4 The functions of Overview and Scrutiny Committees are contained within Chapter 2, Article 6 of the Constitution. The Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees follow in Chapter 4, in particular the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility to scrutinise Children's Social Care including fostering as set out in Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 21.2(b) (ii).
- 2.5 The Department for Education Fostering Services: national minimum standards, paragraph 27.5 requires that the executive side of the local authority or the independent foster service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service.
- 2.6 They should satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with conditions of registration and that they monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children.
- 2.7 This annual report, including comments from the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be presented to the Cabinet on the 19 December 2017.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 The report covers fully the service and its development in 2016/17, however listed below are key highlights.
- The Fostering Service is now staffed with permanent staff, and stability has increased across the service;
 - A new fostering website has been introduced, with associated branding and materials;
 - Since the introduction of recruitment posts and advertising there has been a large increase in fostering applications, and this is leading to an increase overall in carer numbers;
 - Training and development has been a key focus, with consultation with carers and significant development of the existing programme;
 - A payment review has been conducted to simplify the payment structure and to ensure parity between carers;
 - Specialisms and lead areas are being developed across the service. This will entail support, training and other opportunities for carers particularly in areas such as Parent and Child, teenagers and therapeutic parenting;
 - Support services have increased to carers, with the introduction of a family support worker and fostering mentors; and
 - The Service has delivered projects alongside key partners such as CAMHS, NSPCC and the University of Oxford and the Service continues to grow links with other partner agencies.

4. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk Rating
Insufficient in-house fostering placements available	There is a risk that there is insufficient accommodation to ensure that placements are right for the child and that this could lead to utilising more expensive external foster placements.	There is a recruitment strategy in place to recruit more Medway foster carers. Development of a recruitment service to ensure assessments are timely and applicants are well supported.	C2
Insufficient resources available to support placements	There is a risk that if not enough support and resources are available to children and carers, placements may break down leading to more moves for children and young people.	Placement stability meetings are now called as soon as any issues arise. Family support worker and fostering mentors are in place to support vulnerable placements.	C2

5. Consultation

5.1 Sections 5 and 9 of the report, set out at Appendix 1 detail consultation work undertaken with foster carers throughout the year in developing and improving the Fostering Service.

6. Implications for Looked After Children

6.1 The report at Appendix 1 considers all Medway Council foster carers, and the support and care they provide to Looked After Children.

6.2 The development and growth of the Service is designed to better meet the needs of this population now and in the coming year.

7. Financial implications

7.1 Financial agreement was agreed previously through the Medway Fostering Service Transformation Programme. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8. Legal implications

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 The Committee is asked to consider the Fostering Service Annual Report 2016-17 as set out at Appendix 1 of the report and forward any comments to the Cabinet for consideration.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Medway Council Fostering Service Annual Report 2016 – 17

Background papers

None



Fostering Service Annual Report 2016-17

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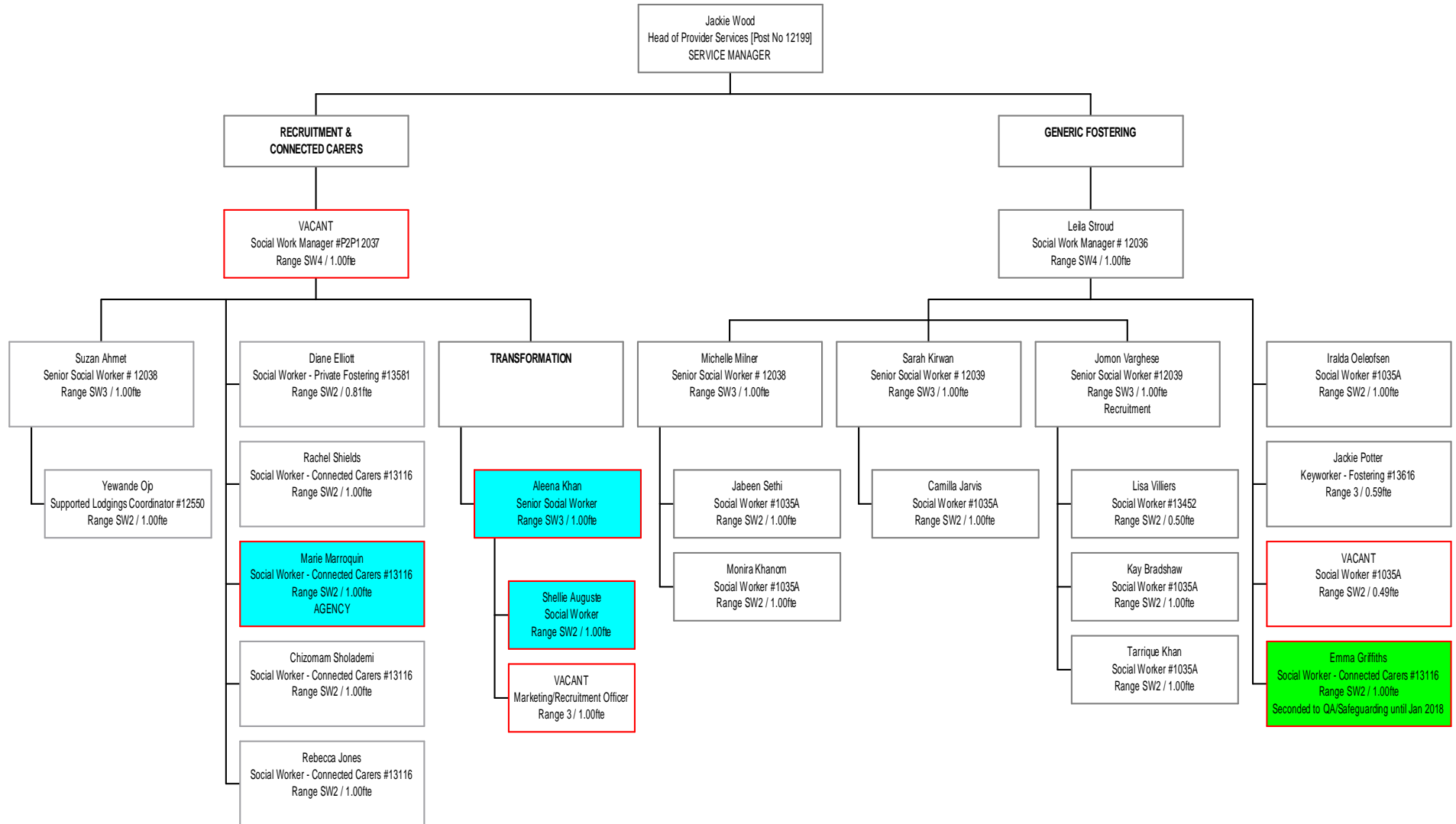
Fostering Service Annual Report 2016 - 2017

Section 1: Background Information

- 1.1 This is a report on the performance of the Medway Council Fostering Service in line with Department for Education National Minimum Standards and other Statutory Guidance.
- 1.2 It provides details of the Medway Council Fostering Service activity between October 2016 and October 2017. This Annual Report also sets out plans for future service development.
- 1.3 The Annual Report is for a wide audience of stakeholders and other interested parties including Elected Members, service users, staff and colleagues from other agencies. It gives details of activity, performance and developments in the Fostering Service over a 12 month period. This report is to be read with the Statement of Purpose that is updated on an annual basis, set out in Appendix A.
- 1.4 Introduction
 - 1.4.1 The work of Medway Council Fostering Service is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, The National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (amended) and associated amended regulations and guidance.
 - 1.4.2 Medway Council's Looked After Children Strategy 2015 – 18 lists the following objectives:
 - Ensure that permanency is at the heart of all our planning and that we will work in partnership with colleagues across Children's Social Care to secure positive outcomes for children involved in care proceedings within the required timescales.
 - Ensure that young people in care achieve their potential academically and they have access to a range of opportunities for employment, training or further education.
 - Ensure young people leaving care make a successful transition to adulthood.
 - Ensure that children looked after and care leavers' views and experiences inform current and future service delivery.
 - Improve the health and well-being of looked after young people and care leavers.
 - Provide timely and high quality interventions with partner agencies to help children remain living or return to their families.
 - Ensure all looked after young people and care leavers are safeguarded through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time.
 - These objectives are central to the development and growth of the Fostering Service and will be considered throughout the report.

- 1.4.3 Medway Council Fostering Service provides safe, regulated foster care placements for children looked after and contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the county. The key priority for the service is to ensure that all children looked after by Medway, whether the arrangement is short or long term are cared for in in loving, secure and stable families.
- 1.4.4 The Fostering Network reports [March 2016] that there is a national shortage of foster carers. It estimates that 7,600 more foster carers are required to meet the needs of children coming into care.
- 1.4.5 Medway Fostering Service is actively responding to this challenge with the development of a recruitment team, digital transformation and the use of targeted marketing and advertising.

Section 2: Service Structure



2.1 The Fostering Service

- 2.1.1 Medway Council Fostering Service has several component parts which includes recruitment and approval of foster carers, a generic fostering team which offers practical and emotional support to approved carers as per statutory requirements, supported lodgings providers and connected carers.
- 2.1.2 Connected Carers team within the Fostering Service assesses carers who are connected to the child placed and operates under the same regulations. This annual report does not report on the performance of this specific service.
- 2.1.3 The Generic Fostering Team is staffed by experienced permanent practitioners. There is currently a 0.49fte vacancy, and the team are currently advertising for a Supervising Social Worker in line with the service's Transformation Programme due to new carers joining the service.
- 2.1.4 A fostering duty system operates daily to support the finding, matching and placing of children with Medway Council foster carers. The system operates between 8.45am and 5.15pm Monday to Friday. Carers, professionals and the public are able to contact through the Medway Council switchboard.
- 2.1.5 The Fostering Service works closely with teams across Children's Services to ensure that the child's care plan is progressed without any delay and best outcomes for vulnerable children are met.
- 2.1.6 The support level for both the child and the foster carer is considered at the point of matching, as part of the placement plan, and subject to regular placement support meetings as required.
- 2.1.7 Since January 2017, a social worker from the fostering team has been seconded to the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team as a Fostering Reviewing Officer. When a foster carer is due a statutory annual review, the review meeting is undertaken independently to ensure impartiality and offer a mechanism of safeguarding for the child and carer.
- 2.1.8 The Fostering Review Officer also completes Standards of Care Review meetings, where concerns have been identified regarding carers. This again allows a level of independence from the Fostering Service, and the officer will then take these cases to Fostering Panel where appropriate for fuller discussion and recommendations on continued approval.

Section 3: Recruitment

- 3.1 Fostering recruitment remains the key priority across the Fostering Service for both foster carers and Supported Lodgings providers.
- 3.2 Recruitment is particularly targeted for the following groups:
- Foster carers for older children and teenagers;
 - Foster carers for sibling groups;
 - Foster carers for children with more challenging needs; and
 - Foster carers for Parent and Child placements.
- 3.3 The Skills to Foster training has been renewed and is now delivered across 3 days. Six Skills to Foster courses have been run in 2016/17.

3.4 Advertising activity

3.4.1 There has been investment in recruitment to include marketing and advertising. There is a new website and the Fostering Service has been rebranded to help create a much clearer identity for the service.

3.4.2 The service has taken the lead in developing the service's identity and worked in conjunction Communications and Digital Transformation to ensure the service reaches as far ranging an audience as possible. An extensive advertising campaign has been undertaken which has included adverts on buses, on radio and adverts on the large screen next to the bus station. Regular articles and advertising has been placed in Medway Matters, in libraries and on Facebook.

3.4.3 Leaflets have been produced, and will be distributed to 19,000 homes in target areas in Medway in the second week of November. The timing of distribution has taken into account school term times, fluctuations in applications and other marketing and advertising work currently being undertaken by the service.

3.5 Recruitment activity

3.5.1 There have been 19 families approved between October 2016 and October 2017. There are currently 8 households in assessment, with their cases being presented to panel by January 2018. 7 families are due to attend Skills to Foster in November. Additional Skills to Foster courses are scheduled for the new year to allow any further applicants to be approved.

Section 4: Fostering Panel

4.1 Membership of Fostering Panels and their functions in respect of approving, reviewing and terminating approvals are now set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Children Act Guidance Volume 4 Fostering Services 2011. Fostering panels have a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster care for children.

4.2 The Fostering Panel has various functions, including responsibility for approving foster carers and the numbers and ages of children for whom they are approved. Approval can be as follows: Short Term, Long Term/Specific Respite, Relief Care, Short Breaks Care, Parent and Child Placements, Supported Lodging, Emergency Placements as well as Temporary Approvals. The Panel oversees the foster carers' first reviews and any subsequent reviews that may need Panel's consideration. The Panel also has a role in permanency planning where long term fostering is considered the best option.

4.3 Fostering Panels are now held twice a month, previously being once a month, to accommodate all panel business.

Number of panels held 2016/17	21
New Panel members	4
Resignation from Panel	2
Cancelled panels due to not being quorate	0

4.4 Panel membership includes a Chair, Vice-Chair, Independent Members, Social Workers, Health and Education representatives. We have recruited new Panel members, including a care experienced young person, to ensure quoracy and also to provide alternative perspectives on the cases being heard at Panel. The Panel has recently been joined by Councillor Stuart Tranter, nominated by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services Councillor Andrew Mackness.

Summary of panel business, cases heard and categories

Approvals (Form F)	19
De-registrations	12
Approvals (Form C)	4
Extensions to Temporary Approval	8
Change of Approval	28
Annual Reviews (1 st and 3 rd)	41
Standards of Care	4
Permanent Match	10
Retrospective Exemptions	7
Exemptions	3
Nominated Carers	2

4.5 In the year 2016/17 we have had 12 carers leave Medway. 4 carers retired, 3 were connected carers whose children reached 18, 4 carers had their approval terminated due to concerns around their practice, 1 carer left Medway to transfer to an agency.

4.6 Effective Fostering Panel training was delivered to all Panel Members in July 2017, and further topic based training will be delivered to Panel in February 2018.

Section 5: Fostering Payments

5.1 New payment scheme

5.1.1 As part of the Fostering Service Transformation Programme, a new and simplified payment scheme was developed. Foster carers were offered both face to face and written consultation during this process. An 'all inclusive' fostering payment will be in place for all carers from September 2018.

5.1.2 The process for claiming mileage has also been streamlined, with carers expected to drive the first 700 miles per month for children before being able to claim. There continues to be a transport element in the all inclusive allowance. This expectation puts Medway alongside neighbouring authorities and independent providers.

5.1.3 Any transport or mileage associated with carer development is able to be claimed for, such as attending training or support groups.

5.2 Enhanced payments

- 5.2.1 To support all of Medway's children and young people in care, there is an ability for carers to receive an enhanced payment which is related to the child's need. This enables us to support Medway carers with more complex children and young people.
- 5.2.2 Enhanced payments are reviewed regularly, by the Head of Service, to allow an update on the child's progress and scrutiny of how the money has been used to support the child and his/her placement.

Section 6 : Allegations/ Quality of Care/ Complaints

6.1 Allegations and Quality of Care Concerns

- 6.1.1 All allegations and quality of care concerns are fully explored and analysed to ensure safe practice going forward.
- 6.1.2 In 2016/17 there were 4 allegations made that required a LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) investigation. 1 of these investigations was found to be substantiated, 2 unsubstantiated and 1 is yet to be resolved.
- 6.1.3 Of the LADO investigations, the substantiated claim was taken to Fostering Panel. Due to the level of concern, the Panel recommended for terminating approval of the carers for Medway Council. In addition, there were a further 3 matters considered as standards of care concerns. These included inappropriate carer response to a child, carers inappropriate language towards a child and carers failing to prioritise the needs of a looked after child. All were subject to a review and recommendations regarding approval made to fostering panel. Recommendations included altering carers age range and type of approval, increased carer training and decrease in the number of possible placements. The Panel supported the suggested changes to approval and this was agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.

6.2 Fostering Complaints

- 6.2.1 For the period of 2016/17 there were 8 complaints, 6 against carers and 2 against Medway Council. Of these complaints, 7 were resolved at Stage 1.
- 6.2.2 One complaint lodged against Children's Services also included questions for the Fostering Service and the Service is awaiting the result of this complaint.

6.3 Compliments

- 6.3.1 The Fostering Service also collects data on positive feedback on foster carers and the Service as a whole. During the year, the Service received 20 items of positive feedback. These included compliments from a Judge, Independent Reviewing Officers, foster carers and colleagues across Children's Services.

Section 7: Placement and carer information

- 7.1 In the period 2016/17, the Service has received 205 referrals for placements. The Service matches foster carers, who have the relevant skills and expertise to meet the needs of individual children.

Fostering referrals received Oct 2016- Oct 2017	205
Matched but placement not needed	49 (24%)
Placed with in-house carers	90 (44%)
Supported lodgings	12 (6%)
Placed with connected carer	8 (4%)
Placed with Independent Fostering Agency or external resource	38 (18%)
Other	8 (4%)

7.2 When the number of children matched but not placed is subtracted, in-house and supported lodgings placements account for 66% of the placements made.

7.3 Supported Lodgings

During 2016/17, 24 Supported Lodgings Placements were made. Recruitment activity is increasing to be able to provide a wide range of options to young people.

7.4 Demographics of children living with Medway Carers

Placements as at 30 Sep '17		Connected care	Inhouse foster care (% of fostered)
Age	Age 0	1	14 (70%)
	Aged 1- 4	7	26 (76%)
	Aged 5- 9	7	49 (72%)
	Aged 10-15	14	82 (62%)
	Aged 16-17	8	22 (65%)
Parent & child		0	4 (36%)
Gndr	Female	17	87 (70%)
	Male	20	106 (65%)
Ethnicity	White	34	174 (67%)
	Asian/Asian British	0	0 (-%)
	Black/Black British	1	3 (50%)
	Mixed	2	14 (78%)
	Other Ethnic Groups	0	2 (33%)
	BME Total	3	19 (63%)

7.4.1 During 2016/17 there was a higher than anticipated level of requests for Parent and Child placements. Many of these referrals came as requests for a baby only placement, however the Courts did not agree to separating Parent and Child. The Service is actively recruiting Parent and Child carers, and for those applicants who show prior professional experience in the area, we are delivering Parenting and Child training pre-approval. This should enable the service to recruit sufficient carers to meet demand.

7.4.2 The Service continues to develop and recruit carers who are able to meet the often very complex and challenging needs of some of our children. These children are often subsequently placed in external provisions, and we are continuously looking to reduce the number of children in out of house placements.

Section 8: Placement stability and permanence

8.1 In 2015, Long term fostering gained legal status in England ensuring its importance as a positive permanent outcome for children. The Care planning and Fostering Regulations 2015, provides a revised definition of permanence in England:

"Permanence is the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging."

8.2 Medway Council monitors permanence for children, and long-term fostering is agreed for children through Medway's Permanence Panel. Where the child is in a current long term fostering arrangement, a Permanent Match assessment is completed. This assessment considers the carers ability to meet the child's needs now and into the future.

8.3 Permanent Match assessments for in-house placements are taken to Fostering Panel for recommendation then approved by the ADM. 10 permanent matches were taken this year, and more are scheduled into Panel business moving forward.

8.4 The number of children in long term stable placements continues to grow from 97 in December 2016 to 108 in September 2017. This is an increase of 6%.

Time in placement (as at 30 Sep 17)	0 - 3 mths	3 - 6 mths	6 - 12 mths	1 - 2 years	2+ years	Total
Friends & relatives	5	10	3	1	17	36
Foster care	33	21	25	26	91	196
Total	38	31	28	27	108	232

- 8.5 The Fostering Service aims to identify any instability in placement at the earliest opportunity. This enables the appropriate support to be put in place following a placement stability meeting.
- 8.6 During placement stability meetings, support and services are discussed which would enable the placement to continue and to help both the child and the carer. Services such as a family support worker or fostering mentor are commonly identified.
- 8.7 Placement Disruption meetings are held if placements are longer than a year, or deemed permanent, or a breakdown. This enables the professional network to understand more fully what lead to the breakdown, to ensure support is put in for the young person in their new placement, and to ensure that learning is absorbed into day to day practice to help prevent future breakdowns.

Section 9: Foster Carer Learning & Development

9.1 Consultation

- 9.1.1 Consultation on learning and development was offered to carers to encourage discussion on course content, delivery, location and timing. Foster carers requested some flexibility in regards to timing due to caring commitments and also an increase in mandatory training.
- 9.1.2 This information was incorporated into the training calendar for 2016/17 and will be included in the calendar for 2018.

9.2 Personal Development Review

- 9.2.1 From 1 November, all foster carers will complete a Personal Development Review (PDR) as a part of their annual review. This document will be used as a conversational tool to discuss what has been learned over the past year, agree training and learning needs for the coming year and to identify how any goals set will be reached. This will be reviewed and updated each year.
- 9.2.2 A review took place of all mandatory courses. With the Fostering Service developing therapeutic parenting and models across the Service, attachment, therapeutic parenting and child development have been added as mandatory courses.

9.3 Training levels and specialisms

- 9.3.1 As part of the payment review, training was separated into 3 levels. This model will be delivered from April 2018 within the new training calendar.
- 9.3.2 Carers are able to complete and maintain their mandatory training and remain as Level 1 carers.
- 9.3.3 Courses offered at Level 2 enable carers to gain a deeper understanding of the children they are looking after and begin to discuss a more therapeutic and holistic approach to caring.

9.3.4 Level 3 training is offered for carers who wish to significantly develop their knowledge, or offer specialist foster care such as Parent and Child placements, placements to teenagers or therapeutic placements.

9.3.5 Specialist foster carers will be offered the opportunity to develop their skills further by co-facilitating training with staff in their lead area. This will also further support carer engagement in training.

9.3.6 For each of the specialisms and lead areas, key partners have also been invited to deliver training and workshops to increase carers professional network and encourage joint working. Agencies invited to date are CAMHS, Open Road, the NSPCC and the Looked After Children's nurses.

9.4 Training, Standard and Development (TSD) Portfolios and Workshops

9.4.1 All approved foster carers must complete a TSD portfolio in their first year of fostering and all connected carers within 18 months.

9.4.2 The Fostering Service offers workshops to support carers in completing this portfolio, delivered by staff from within fostering.

9.4.3 Two sets of workshops are run each year, and carers can attend some or all of the sessions.

9.4.4 9 TSD workbooks have been completed this year to date, 1 of these was outside of the timescales expected.

9.5 Access to external training and opportunities

9.5.1 Medway Council offered a Foster Carers Conference in December 2016. Training was offered at this event in regards to Transitions to Adoption, Parenting, Leaving Care, Life Story Work and Foster Carer Finance.

9.5.2 All foster carers have access to training through Medway Safeguarding Children's Board.

9.5.3 Research in Practice will be delivering training to carers on adolescence and caring for young people through this time.

9.5.4 Medway's Fostering team was selected to take part in a research project facilitated by the University of Oxford aimed at improving the selection and training process of foster carers. It aimed to improve the understanding of the associations between foster carers attributes and placement success.

9.5.5 Medway Fostering Service is developing links with the University of Kent. Foster carers have been offered the opportunity to become involved with the selection of social work students, and we will be looking to develop this further over the coming year.

Section 10: Support for carers, children and placements

10.1 Support groups

10.1.1 Support groups are now offered monthly to foster carers. The current expectation is that carers attend two groups each year, but in future this will be linked with training levels and this will be the minimum expectation.

10.1.2 Support groups were refocused this year with the first half for carers to feedback and support each other using a strengths-based approach.

10.1.3 The second half of support groups is now a chance for an informal workshop on areas relevant to carers and the children they look after. This year we have been joined by Open Road, the Leaving Care team, CAMHS, the library service, Young Lives Foundation and the Looked After Children's Nurses.

10.2 Induction support groups

10.2.1 Induction support groups have been developed in relation to new carers. These groups target carers within their first year of approval, offering support and guidance in relation to the role of fostering.

10.3 Projects

10.3.1 Medway have joined in collaboration with the NSPCC and the Anna Freud Centre to deliver the Reflective Fostering Practice pilot. Weekly sessions are delivered to carers where discussion and reflection are encouraged in relation to the children they care for. The Anna Freud Centre has gathered research data from this cohort, and will be releasing findings and outcomes in the new year.

10.3.2 Feedback from carers was extremely positive from this group with carers stating " I believe the course has made me look deeper into my children's behaviours, reactions and feelings and the reasons behind these.". The NSPCC are keen to continue to offer this service to Medway, and a second group is currently taking referrals.

10.3.3 Medway Fostering Service has also been building relationships with CAMHS, and CAMHS delivered a 12 week group programme based on the Solihull Approach. This was again received well by carers and there is currently a waiting list for the second group, due to start in January.

10.4 Support

10.4.1 The Fostering Service was joined by a Family Support Worker (FSW) in June 2017. The FSW has been working closely with families where the child or young person presents some challenges, where the carer needs additional support and guidance or where the placement appears unstable.

10.4.2 Medway Fostering Service offers mentoring and support to new carers throughout their first year. Carers are matched with an experienced foster carer who offers formal and informal support in understanding the fostering role. This service has also been offered when carers outside their first year need support in managing a new task, such as moving children on to adoption.

10.4.3 Medway Council pay for all foster carers to be members of Foster Talk. After consultation, of those who expressed a preference, carers decided to remain with Foster Talk rather than Fostering Network. Carers will be consulted again in the new year about a potential move to the Fostering Network.

10.4.4 Medway Foster Carer Association was disbanded due to lack of carer interest in its current format. A new model, Medway Positive Action for Fostering, has been developed and this is the mechanism which carers can utilise to communicate any suggestions or feedback to the Fostering Service through other foster carers. Carers are also able to do this through their supervising social worker or at support groups if needed.

10.4.5.A monthly newsletter is produced for carers which contains all information relevant to the Service, ideas and suggestions, relevant research and legislation and upcoming training and opportunities.

10.5 Support for children

10.5.1 In September, the Service was joined by Fostering Mentors. The Mentors are youth workers who are trained and experienced in working with young people and carers and who will be supporting children and placement stability.

10.5.2 The Fostering Mentors are also designing and delivering support for children and young people who are out of education. Children and young people are also supported by our Family Support Worker.

10.5.3 Every half term, events are run for children, young people and their carers to encourage them to enjoy time together and also to get to know us better as a Service.

10.5.4 Medway Council has adopted the MoMo (Mind of My Own) app to support children and young people in communicating their views. The Fostering Service has two MoMo champions, and all carers are supported in utilising this to help children and young people give feedback and communicate. Supervising social workers also use this when working with children and young people.

Section 11: Children's voice, participation and the Children in Care Council

11.1 The Fostering Service has developed the following areas of involvement and participation for children and young people through 2016/17.

- A care experienced Young Person attends our Skills to Foster course.
- A care experienced Young Person attends our Fostering Panel.
- Links have been made with the Children in Care council.
- Foster Carers have attended the Children in Care council meeting to answer questions from young people around fostering.
- Work has started in developing a set of interview questions from young people when interviewing supervising social workers.
- A representative from the Children in Care Council spoke at the Foster Carer Conference.

- Every half term or school holiday, the Fostering Service delivers an event and activities for children and young people.
- Young people are actively involved in placement disruption meetings.
- Children and Young People are using the MoMo app to let the Fostering Service know about their carers and their experiences.

Section 12: Service Developments 2017/18

- 12.1 The Fostering Service continues to strive for best practice and to find creative, responsive and effective ways to support children and young people.
- 12.2 Throughout the next year the Service will focus on the following areas:
- Targeted recruitment of at least 15 standard fostering placements, 10 Supported Lodgings placements, 5 Parent and Child carers and 2 Therapeutic Fostering carers.
 - To have a clear fostering presence in Fostering Fortnight to encourage carers to join Medway Council.
 - To develop the Short Break service to be meeting the needs of disabled children and young people.
 - For the Learning and Development programme to be embedded, with carers developing their specialisms.
 - Therapeutic parenting styles to be embedded with all foster carers, with carers able to understand and utilise these techniques with the children in their care.
 - To continue to improve Placement Stability, reducing the number of breakdowns related to carer needs.
 - For children and young person voice to be a central theme across the whole service.

Appendix A – Statement of Purpose 2017-2018

Medway Fostering Service

Appendix A

Statement of Purpose 2017-2018

What is a Statement of Purpose?

The Statement of Purpose is the means of providing information about Medway Council's Fostering Service in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the Fostering Services Regulations (2011).

The Statement of Purpose is a source of information for prospective foster carers, foster carers registered with Medway Council, Fostering Services staff and all other colleagues or professionals working within Medway Council and partner agencies. A booklet entitled *A Children and Young People's Guide to Foster Care* is provided for all children and young people being cared for by the Fostering Service.

The Office for the Standards in Children's Services & Skills (Ofsted) has the responsibility to regularly inspect the Fostering Service within to ensure that we achieve the aims and objectives as set out in the Statement of Purpose. Our recent inspection report can be located at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Ofsted can be contacted directly by telephone 08456 404045 or by email at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or in writing to:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
MANCHESTER M1 2WD

Further information about the service can be obtained from:

Jackie Wood
Head of Provider Services
Medway Council
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
CHATHAM
Kent
ME4 4TR

Email: jackie.wood@medway.gov.uk

For all enquiries about becoming a foster carer call 01634 335726 or email: fostering@medway.gov.uk

Why foster for Medway?

By becoming part of the Medway Council Fostering Service carers will be contributing to the provision of high quality placements, which give best value to Medway communities. Carers are provided with support from our highly experienced team of staff, access to a wide range of training to develop knowledge and expertise and a payment scheme which reflects the complexity of the children who need placements.

Service Vision

To enable all children and young people in Medway to aspire to, and achieve their full potential, giving them the basis for a successful life as active members of their community.

The Fostering Service Mission

Medway Fostering Service mission is one of working together, creating an innovative fostering service, working towards being an outstanding fostering agency, which provides safe and nurturing family-based care for children and young people who are unable to live within their own families. The Service continually strives to be a fostering service that provides outstanding care for children and young people so they are able to achieve better outcomes in adult life.

The Aims & Objectives of the Fostering Service

Medway Council Fostering Service is part of the overarching Corporate Parenting Board, which takes the lead for all of Medway's children in care. The Fostering Service aims to achieve continuous improvements and deliver the best possible outcomes for the widest range of children looked after by our foster carers.

The Service is committed to ensuring that anti-discriminatory practice informs all aspect of our work with children, colleagues, foster carers and birth family, and that the placement resources provide equal opportunities of access to all children and young people, irrespective of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality or disability.

Key service objectives:

- Maintain, support and develop an effective and efficient community based carer resource able to flexibly respond to the needs of children and families within the Medway Towns.
- To facilitate a flexible and integrated resource structure that maximises the abilities, skills and potential of Medway Council carers.
- To establish, promote and protect an outstanding level of standards to all processes and practices associated in the services offered to children and their families.
- To optimise the opportunity for choice in placement and resources.
- To positively seek to develop services for children and young people from all background, difficulties and disabilities.
- To actively pursue a team culture that mutually supports:

- a clear focus on the needs, wishes and welfare of the child. This will involve actively listening to comments, feedback and contributions from children and young people, parents, placing social workers and any other persons involved with the care of children.
- promotion of the health of all Looked After Children and to actively help children and young people to reach their full potential within their education.
- to support the facilitation of children and young people's interests and leisure activities.
- to create the circumstances that allow a child placed in foster care to feel a part of the family environment.
- work to provide measurable outcomes that achieve, or exceed National Standards.
- anti-discriminatory practice within the Fostering Team and carer group.
- an on-going appraisal and review of all systems and procedures.
- the creativity, vision and confidence to develop new ideas and services for children.
- a team, that together, maximises individual member skills and contributions in an environment which is respectful of challenge and responsive to change.

The key service aims are:

- That all children and young people are entitled to grow up in a safe, secure, caring family environment in which they are protected from abuse and neglect and that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- Positive regard to be shown for a child/young person's racial, religious, linguistic and cultural needs. The Fostering Service will endeavour to recruit carers to reflect these needs.
- New foster carers will be carefully recruited and made subject to vigorous checks and assessments to adjudge their suitability to offer care. Once recommended by the Medway Fostering Panel, and approved by the Fostering Services Decision Maker, new carers will be allocated a named fostering social worker, a foster carer mentor and provided with an induction to Medway Foster Care.
- New foster carers will be required to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council fostering standards workbook (CWDC) within one year of their approval as a foster carer.
- All Medway Council foster carers will be supervised by a qualified social worker and supported and reviewed to ensure they fully meet the requirements that they and their family continue to be suitable to foster.

- Foster carers will be trained, supervised and supported to enable a child to maximise their opportunities towards education, health, personal care, leisure and sporting activities and employment, in order to develop their skills, confidence and self esteem and work towards addressing their past, negative experiences and promote resilience.
- The Medway Foster Carer training programme is available to all carers working within the Service, including foster carers who offer short breaks, link, parent/child and connected person's placements. Outside the general programme of events, specific courses and workshops are arranged to address the training needs of specialised placements or carer groups.
- Regular training is provided to help foster carers understand and positively address the child care behaviours, which in conjunction with fostering social worker supervision, is aimed to stabilise placements and avoid breakdowns.
- Foster carers will be regularly supervised to ensure they provide safe, caring and appropriate boundaries for the child.
- The Fostering Service will work to achieve positive outcomes by developing high quality standards of foster care which meet the safety, welfare and social needs of all children appropriately.
- The Fostering Service is committed to maintaining and raising the standards for its provision of care by listening to feedback from children and young people, parents, foster carers, social workers and other professionals and persons who may interact with the service.
- With the agreement of the child's parent(s) and social worker, the child's foster carer(s) will be given delegated responsibilities to make decisions on day to day matters as a means of helping them to feel more integrated into that family setting and routine. Such delegated authority will be agreed and written up in the child/young person's Placement Plan.
- The welfare and needs of children and their families will remain central to all the provisions and functions introduced or carried out by the Fostering Service.
- To work in close partnership with the Leaving Care Service for Medway Council to ensure that foster carers are able to support fully the young people in their care as they make the transition to further or higher education or employment and independent living where appropriate.
- To work alongside partner agencies to ensure Medway's Looked After Children are prepared for independent living and have access to a wide range of accommodation to meet their individual needs.

Foster Carer Charter

Medway Council have drawn up an agreed Medway Foster Carer Charter that sets out the expectations and responsibilities of foster carers, the Fostering Team, social workers and other persons involved with looking after the care of children. A copy of the Charter is available on the Fostering Website.

(See Appendix A1)

The Fostering Service –Structure

(See Appendix A2)

Management Structure

(See Appendix A3)

How we monitor and evaluate our services

Medway Fostering Service strives to constantly improve and develop, with the key aim to improve outcomes for children and families. Priority is placed on monitoring and evaluation of the service and gaining service user feedback to use in service development.

- All existing foster carers have completed or are working towards the CWDC Foster Carer Standards workbook (new carers are required to complete this within a year or 18 months if they are Connected Carers).
- Foster carers are provided with a comprehensive training programme and qualified social worker supervision to enable them to understand and meet the needs of children and young people placed in their care.
- The needs of fostered children are closely monitored by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) at all Looked After Child (LAC) Reviews, which are attended by foster carers and fostering social workers.
- The Fostering Service monitors and supervises the child care plan with each individual carer during their home visits. Both the carer supervision recording format and Carer Annual Review reflect the child focussed elements contained in the Child's Plan as determined by the National Minimum Standards 2011.
- The performance of the service is monitored and analysed in the Annual Report.
- An Annual Private Fostering Report is produced.
- Staff at all levels are provided with regular supervision by their line manager and consultation is also available for complex cases.
- The Corporate Parenting Board receives reports on the performance of the Fostering Service.
- Analysis of disruptions, which take place through a disruption meeting.

- A member of the Fostering Service monitors the performance tracker and planning for all children in care.
- The child's statutory review along with the function of the Independent Reviewing Officer has a quality assurance role.
- An Independent Fostering Household Reviewing Officer appointed in January 2017, undertakes all Foster Carer Reviews and Standards of Care Reviews.

Feedback from service users

Medway Fostering Service aims to gain feedback from applicants throughout their approval process and from carers and children during their fostering career. This includes:

- Feedback requested by fostering panel on the views of applicants on the assessment process.
- Questionnaires following the preparation course for prospective carers.
- The statutory looked after child review ensures that the child and birth parent's views are fully explored.
- The Agency places a high priority on direct work with children and provides the opportunity for them to explore their feelings and give their views.
- Feedback relating to the experience of coming to panel for all attendees.
- Feedback from child's social worker, child, IRO and carers at least annually for each carers review.
- Feedback collated from carers attending training courses and shared through joint meetings with workforce development/training providers to develop training programmes and individual courses.
- Online questionnaires sent out, and forums held with foster carers to consult on service developments and general carer satisfaction.
- The views of foster carers are gathered during regular supervisions with an allocated Fostering Social Worker, and fed through to Team Managers.
- We are improving the foster carers feedback sheet on the initial stages of placement so that managers can identify shortfalls and address this promptly.
- We have strengthened our consultation with the recently formed Medway Positive Action Group
- We actively consult with and involve the Participation Apprentice and CIC Council to help develop the service.

Principles and Standards of Care

The Fostering Service seeks to deliver an outstanding service for the children, young people, foster carers and their families that complies with the relevant legislation, regulations and good practice guidance regarding children in foster care. The Fostering Service is committed to the best outcomes for children in care and the service works in close partnership with all Medway Council services with responsibility for children in care.

Numbers of Children/Young People in Care and Details of Carer Approval (March 2017)

No of LAC	Residential	IFA's	In house
390	31	90	215

Total No of carers	Connected Households	Generic Households
164	20	144 (incl. 1 Foster to Adopt)

The table below compares the performance of the Medway Council's Fostering Agency to the National Picture.

All figures are % of Total LAC (as at 31 March 2016)	Medway	England
Fostered (including connected care)	79%	74%
Fostered with a connected carer (all in house provision)	11%	12%
Own provision (all types of placement)	59%	55%
In own provision fostering (including connected care)	56%	49%
In own provision fostering (excluding connected care)	45%	37%
Placed within 20 miles of home (all types of placement)	77%	75%
Foster placements (including connected carer) within 20 miles of home	70%	59%

Placed within LA boundary (all types of placement)	49%	60%
Foster placements (including connected care) within LA boundary	43%	44%
Own provision foster placements within LA boundary	36%	37%
External provision foster placements within LA boundary	7%	7%

Foster Care Placements

The Fostering Service provides for children in the care of Medway Council, a range of fostering options that meet a diverse range of needs, circumstances, and backgrounds of children who are not able to live with their own families. There are circumstances where a relative or a friend of the child in care may also be assessed as a foster carer and this service is referred to as Connected Carers.

1. Short Term / Short Breaks Time Limited Placements

Short term or short break placements are provided in a variety of different situations, in an emergency where an acute crisis may have occurred in a family, in a more planned way to provide regular short breaks for a parent or carer, or where an assessment of the child or young person and their family situation is required before longer term decisions are made. Foster carers involved in such placements often have to consider children being cared for by them at short notice. Foster carers providing short term placements often care for children who may be moving on to live with new families through adoption or permanent fostering.

2. Permanent Foster Placements

Permanent placements are for children or young people who need an alternative family to provide them with care, stability and support throughout the time they are in care. The matching of children to such families is undertaken in a careful and planned way.

3. Foster to Adopt

When we know it is highly likely that a child will need an adoptive family but the court proceedings are still in progress, we sometimes place the child on a fostering basis with a family who have been approved to both foster and adopt. This avoids a potentially upsetting move for the child and can be helpful in forming attachment but it may initially be a less certain situation for the carers.

4. Connected Person Foster Carers

Family and Friends care is where a child or young person in care lives with a relative or another adult known to them. In Medway, Connected Person foster carers are assessed and presented to Fostering Panel for approval they received the same allowances and have access to the range of post approval training and learning opportunities.

These foster carers provide both short term care and permanent foster care. Connected Foster Carers often consider making an application for a Special Guardianship Order once the child in their care is settled.

Once approved, the Fostering Service works alongside the child's social worker to provide Connected Carers with ongoing supervision and support. As with generic foster carers, they are subject to an Annual Foster Carer Review and are encouraged to attend specific and general training courses to enhance the care and welfare of their child or young person.

5. **Fostering Plus**

The Fostering Plus Scheme is an in house provision that matches carers with children and young people who are more complex and have challenging needs. The carers within this scheme are provided with extra supervision, support and training and a dedicated out of hours telephone contact to help and enable to care for their placements.

Child Care Support Services

Medway has a range of services available for the care, support and guidance of children and their families. These include:

The Old Vicarage:	An eight bedded residual unit for young people aged 14 to 18 years The unit is developing a service that will provide an outreach service to foster carers.
Wayfield Contact Centre:	Day centre for children and family contact etc.
Sunlight Centre:	Centre that provides community based assessment for parents and children living within their own homes. The Centre also incorporates a doctors' surgery, pharmacy, voluntary projects, community café and computers for general use.
Parklands:	A respite day care centre for children with a disability.
Aut Even:	A residential multi-agency respite centre for children with a disability.
Canada House:	A joint Health and Social Services centre that provides a range of therapeutic services for children and young people.
Children in Care Council:	A voice for young people in and leaving care. A group of young people in and leaving the care of Medway Children's Services who work to ensure that the services being offered are as good as they should be and whose views are shared with Medway Council.
Medway Challengers:	A group for, and run with, looked after young people and care leavers to provide them with an active voice in the policies and practices affecting all aspects of the care system.
Education:	The Fostering Team have close links with the Education Department and looked after children's virtual head.
Health:	The Fostering Team have very close links with the looked after children's health team

Children's Team:

The Fostering Team works closely with the 4 Children's Area Teams.

Each area is made up of up to 4 pods each with it's own Practice Manager and a maximum of 5 social workers each and one Area manager overall

Foster Carer Support

Medway offers the following terms and conditions for foster carers:

- Weekly allowance and, where applicable, a fee payment
- Loan of essential equipment
- Regular high quality support and supervision with a fostering social worker through a local support team
- Access to specialist advice via CAMHS
- Membership of the Medway Positive Action for Fostering
- 24 hour support via an out of hours service
- Free membership of Fostertalk
- Support to achieve permanent placements
- Training and development opportunities from short one-day courses to Diplomas
- Access to a comprehensive training programme through Medway Council's Children Workforce Development Team
- Extra allowance each year to cover birthdays, holidays and religious festivals
- Part of wider professional multi-agency team

Key Principles in the Recruitment and Assessment Process

- The Fostering Service welcomes all applicants regardless of their ethnicity, background, faith, sexual orientation or marital status. Applicants may be disabled, responsible for dependents, working full-time, part-time or unemployed.
- The Fostering Service has a no smoking household policy, and will not place children under the age of 5 where any members of the household smoke. (This may be reviewed in the case of connected person foster carers, but there would still be an expectation that these carers do not smoke in the home and take steps to stop smoking as soon as possible).
- The Fostering Service is committed to working in a way that does not discriminate.
- The Fostering Service aims to work transparently and openly with applicants at every stage of the process.
- The Fostering Service makes information regarding the formal complaints procedure available to all applicants.
- The process is designed to ensure enquirers have sufficient time and information to make an informed decision about whether fostering is right for them and their family at this time.

Stages of Fostering Approval Process

The process of approving a foster carer usually takes up to 6 months from application to approval or up to 4 months for applicants who have previously fostered or are transferring from another fostering provider.

Following the initial enquiry, the process is divided into 2 stages, initial checks followed by assessment and Stage 2. Where appropriate, parts of these stages may be completed in parallel.

Home Assessment (Form F)

In summary, this assessment is completed with the applicants and the assessing social worker during visits to the applicants' home. This assessment is presented to Fostering Panel for a recommendation, from which the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) will make a final decision on whether to approve the applicants as Foster Carers. This part of the process will generally take about 4 months.

The Fostering Panel

Once the assessment is complete, applicants and the assessing social worker are invited to attend a fostering panel meeting. The Fostering Panel has a statutory role and responsibility to formally recommend approval of foster carer applicants to the Agency Decision Maker following the assessment. Panel also considers assessments from applicants to become connected carers.

The Fostering Panel is made up of social workers, foster carers, a councillor, professionals involved in child health or education services and independent panel members. All panels are chaired by an Independent Chair.

Unfortunately, sometimes foster placements do break down. Where there is a disruption of a permanent placement the Service convenes a *Disruption Meeting* in order to try to understand the factors that led to the breakdown of the placement which helps in planning future placements. The meetings are chaired by a Manager who does not have case responsibility for the foster carers.

A summary of the conclusions of the meeting are sent to the Fostering Management Team and the relevant fostering panel to inform future practice.

Procedures for the investigation of allegations or complaints made against foster carers

Medway Council has the responsibility for ensuring that children are protected from significant harm as defined by the Children Act 1989 and for the investigation of any allegation or report of harm in accordance with the current safeguarding procedures. Children who are fostered are also vulnerable children and where allegations are made regarding foster carers, these are investigated in line with the Working Together procedures.

The Fostering Service in partnership with the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service has established procedures for the speedy and thorough investigation of concerns. For more information visit the Medway Safeguarding site <http://www.msccb.org.uk/> and independent support, as well as advice and guidance from Fostertalk is available to all carers.

Learning and Development

The training programme for approved foster carers in Medway offers an ever-increasing and comprehensive range of courses, ensuring that foster carers have the very best opportunity to be trained in the skills required to provide high quality care for children and young people. All foster carers including connected carers are required to achieve the training, support and development standards (TSD) within the first 12 months of placement (18 months for connected foster carers). All foster carers will receive support and guidance to achieve this from their supervising worker and support groups. Learning and development opportunities are offered at introductory and intermediate levels allowing for the ongoing development of foster carers' skills and knowledge base. Core course subject areas include Diversity, Attachment, Safeguarding, First Aid, Behaviour Management and Recording.

The Fostering Service wishes to “know itself”, to understand what it does well and what aspects could be improved. It actively seeks the views of its foster carers in a variety of ways. For example, via assessment and annual review processes, with surveys, and direct feedback at supervision visits.

Complaints

When things go wrong it is really important to us that we respond quickly and fairly to put them right. We will always try to resolve any areas of disagreement or concerns informally in the first instance. We will also respond promptly to formal complaints about the fostering service through Medway Council’s Complaints Procedure.

This can be found at:

By email: sccm@medway.gov.uk - or by telephoning: 01634 333036

Our complaints procedure plays an important role in improving our service and Medway Council Complaints Policy commits us to:

- Give a full and clear response to a complaint within 20 working days. If this is not possible, we advise complainants when an answer will be given.
- Look into complaints thoroughly and fairly.
- Be honest and polite, and keep information confidential.
- Apologise if we have made a mistake.
- Tell complainants about what we are doing to put things right.

Concerns, complaints and allegations about registered services including fostering agencies can be directed to Ofsted particularly where it is not possible for them to be resolved directly with the agency.

For advice and information on how Ofsted can help, they can be contacted at:

OFSTED

National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St. Ann’s Square
Manchester, M2 7LA
Tel: 08456 404040
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or via the website at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Details of the Children's Commissioner for England are:

Maggie Atkinson
Children's Commissioner for England
The Office of the Children's Commission
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7783 8330 Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Our Children's Safeguarding Service always deals with complaints that involve concerns for the safety or welfare of children in foster care. Information on this service can be found at the Medway Safeguarding Children Board website: <http://www.mscb.org.uk>

Children

Medway has developed a children's Pledge to Looked After Children, which can be found here.

(See Appendix A4)

Advocacy



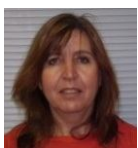



Looked after children and young people are entitled to the support of an advocate if they wish to make representations or complain about the service they receive. Child and young people are able to access an independent advocate via the Young Lives Foundation.





Participation

Children and young people are kept safest when their voice is heard and services are most effectively provided when they have had a say in their development and delivery. Using the principles of "You said...We did" children and young people are invited to participate in activities across the country.

During 2017-18 children and young people will continue to be involved in talking about their experiences of foster care and how well Medway is delivering its Pledge to children in care.

Fostering Staff

	Name	Professional Qualification and date received	HCPC Reg No:	Role in Team	Length of Service
	Suzan Ahmet (Djouma)	Diploma in SW - 2000	SW76646	Senior Supervising Social Worker - Connected	7 Years
	Michelle Louise Milner	BA (Hons) in Social Work – Nov 2008	SW60148	Senior Supervising Social Worker - Generic	Appointed Nov 2016
	Yewande Ojo	Post Graduate Diploma in SW - June 2010	SW57876	Supported Lodgings Coordinator	1 Year, 2 months
	Isabella (Lisa) Villiers	Degree in Social Work 2006	SW64648	Supervising Social Worker	6 Years
	Diane Elliot	Studies CQSW - 1982	SW76577	Social Worker for Private Fostering	10 years
	Jabeen Sethi	Diploma in SW/MSc Social Work	SW65697	Social Worker for Fostering	28 years
	Monira Khanom	Social Worker MA - Masters Degree Nov 2016	SW108488	Supervising Social Worker	1 Year, 2 months
	Camilla Jarvis	Bachelors of Science in Social Work and Applied Social Sciences - June 2014	SW102247	Supervising Social Worker	Newly appointed 2017

	Marie Marroquin	Bachelors of Science in Social Work Eastern Michigan University - June 2002	SW81586	Connected Carers Assessor	Appointed Nov 2016
	Rachel Shields	BA (Hons) in Social Work - July 2015	SW106282	Connected Carers Social Worker	1 Year, 7 months
	Aleena Nasreen Khan	BA (Hons) in Social Work - 2005	SW51994	Senior Social Worker	5 Years, 5 months
	Jomon Varghese	Masters in Social Work - April 2011	SW98470	Senior Social Worker	2 Years, 8 Months

FOSTERING LOCATION

Medway Council
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham
Kent
ME4 4TR

Contact Number: 01634 335600

Signed: Date:
(Head of Provider Services)

Signed: Date:
(Interim Deputy Director, Children & Adults)

Signed: Date:
(Lead Member for Children's Services)

- Appendix A1 - Medway Foster Carer Charter
- Appendix A2 - The Fostering Service Structure
- Appendix A3 - Management Structure
- Appendix A4 - Pledge to Looked After Children

At Medway Council we aim to provide first-rate foster care provision for children and young people. Key to this are the great relationships we have with our foster carers, which are based on the commitments we make to each other.

Medway Council's commitment.**We will:****1 Working in partnership**

- Value your skills and expertise and respect that you are an important member of the professional team.
- Recognise that you live with the children you foster everyday and know them better.
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children in your care. If it is not appropriate for you to attend, we will inform you of the reason and let you know the outcomes.
- Ensure that the Fostering Service meets the standards set out in the fostering regulations and guidance.
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a fellow professional.
- Work in partnership with you, the birth parents, wider family and people significant in the child's life, and with other agencies involved with the fostered child.
- Respect confidentiality at all times.

2 Information

- Provide you with all information held by the Fostering Service that you need to carry out your role effectively. This information will be provided prior to the placement of each child and will be in writing.
- Ensure there is a placement plan drawn up in consultation with you and in advance of the placement (except in emergencies when this will be done within five working days of the placement being made).
- Provide you with information about the financial payment you will receive in respect of caring for the child.
- Provide you with full details of departmental policies and procedures.

3 Clarity about decisions

- Ensure that wherever possible you can make everyday decisions affecting your fostered child that means that they will not be treated differently from their peers and can feel part of your family.
- Be clear at the outset about any decisions you cannot make on your own.

4 Support

- Give you honest, constructive and open feedback from all parties involved with you and your fostered child.
- Ensure that we consult and inform you in a meaningful way about matters that affect you.

- Provide you with regular supervision and telephone contact, including out of office hours.
- Provide regular, organised support meetings.
- Respond positively to requests for additional support, in the best interest of the child.
- Pay your allowances, fees and expenses in a timely manner and keep you informed if any delay, problem or change arises.
- Pay you fees that reflect the task.
- Provide you with access to 24-hour support from people with fostering expertise.
- Recognise that as professionals you are able to use allowances in a way that best meets the needs of the child.

5 Learning and development

- Provide you with relevant, high quality training and development opportunities, which make the best use of your skills and expertise.
- Offer training at times to suit you and your family needs.

6 Fair treatment

- Consult with you before making changes to your terms and conditions outlined in your foster carer agreement, and other documents affecting your practice.
- Ensure openness in our discussions and communications with you.

7 Allegations and complaints

- Recognise that, if the Fostering Service needs to investigate a complaint or allegation about you, this may be difficult for everyone involved and that it needs to be dealt with sensitively.
- Ensure that you are supported, that your personal feelings are respected and your confidentiality is protected.
- Ensure that you are kept informed should you be subject to an allegation.
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to agreed timescales.
- Duly consider the impact allegations have on your whole family unit.
- Provide counselling should you or a family member request it.
- Ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.
- Respond fairly and within the agreed timescales if you wish to make a complaint about our service - we will acknowledge your complaint within three working days and look into it and respond in 10 working days.

8 Communication and consultation

- Welcome feedback from you, when you tell us something needs improving or changing, so we can enhance the service together.
- Maintain regular communication between you and the fostering team and facilitate dialogue between you and Senior Managers within Children's Services if requested.

Foster carer's commitment.

We will:

1 Working in partnership

- Demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct, and provide our fostered children with a positive experience of family life.
- Meet the standards set out in the fostering regulations and guidance, and follow the department's policies and procedures.
- Respect confidentiality at all times.
- Attend meetings and be willing to work in partnership with birth parents, the wider family and significant people in the child's life.
- Professionally work with social workers and other agencies involved with the fostered child.

2 Respect of the child

- Listen to our fostered child(ren) and enable them to be heard and make decisions about their life.
- Offer our fostered child the same level of protection and care as we would our own child.
- Support our child to achieve their full potential.
- Respect and promote our child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage.
- Advocate on behalf of our child.

3 Information

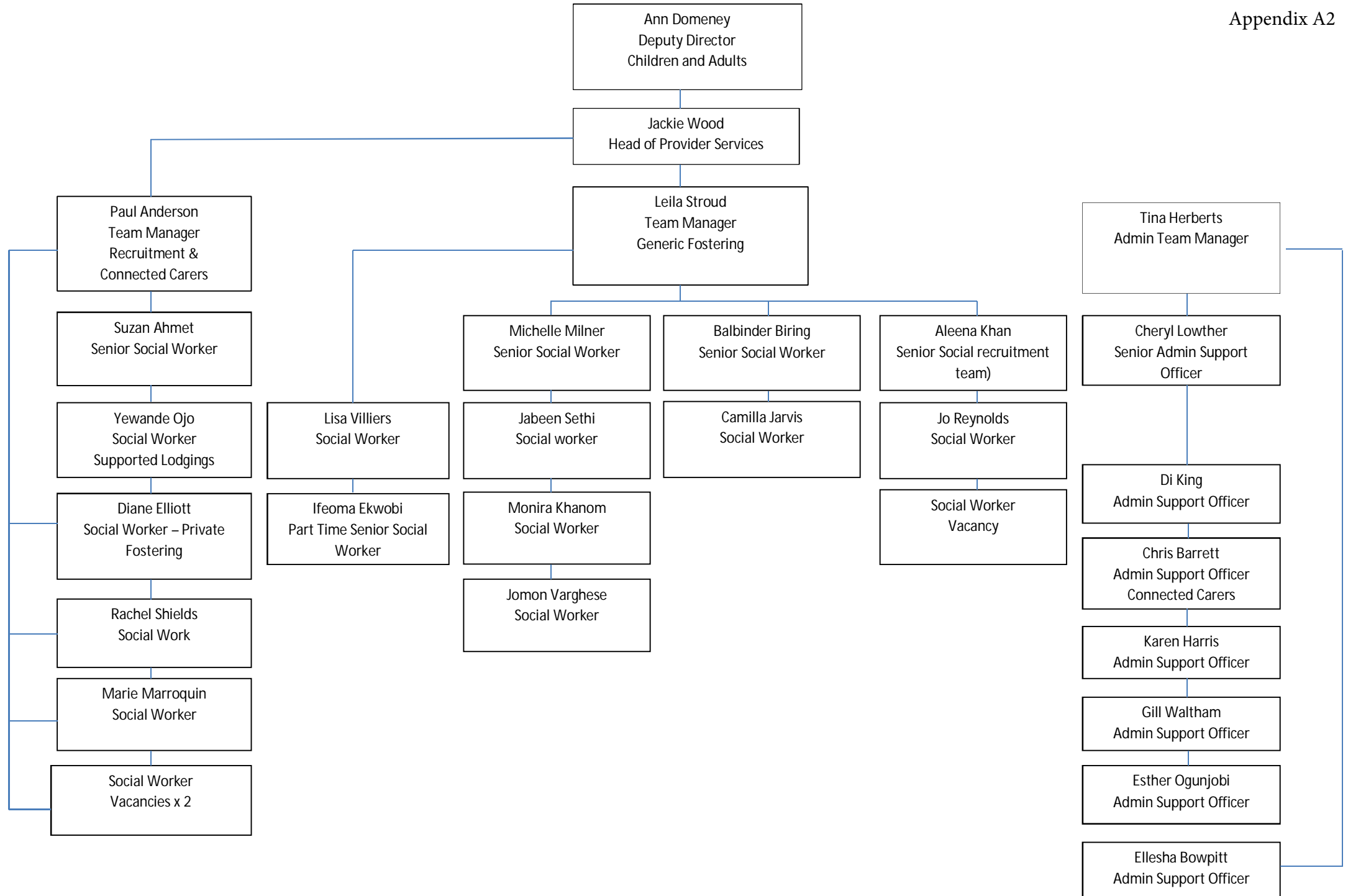
- Inform our supervising social worker about any changes in our family.
- Inform our supervising social worker when we are having difficulties and need support.
- Complete all paperwork required including care recording diaries, reports for meetings etc. to a good standard and within specified time scales.

4 Learning and development and support

- Attend and contribute to supervision meetings and support groups.
- Be willing to develop our skills throughout our fostering career, attend all relevant training on a regular basis, take up opportunities offered and complete training logs.

5 **Communication and consultation**

- Help develop the Medway Fostering Service by taking part in discussions and meetings, and providing honest and open feedback.



Ian Sutherland
Director
Children and Adults



Ann Domenev
Deputy Director
Children and Adults




Jackie Wood
Head of Provider Services



Leila Stroud
Team Manager
Generic Fostering




Tina Herberts
Admin Team Manager



Paul Anderson
Team Manager
Recruitment &
Connected Carers



Suzan Ahmet
Senior Social Worker




Michelle Milner
Senior Social Worker



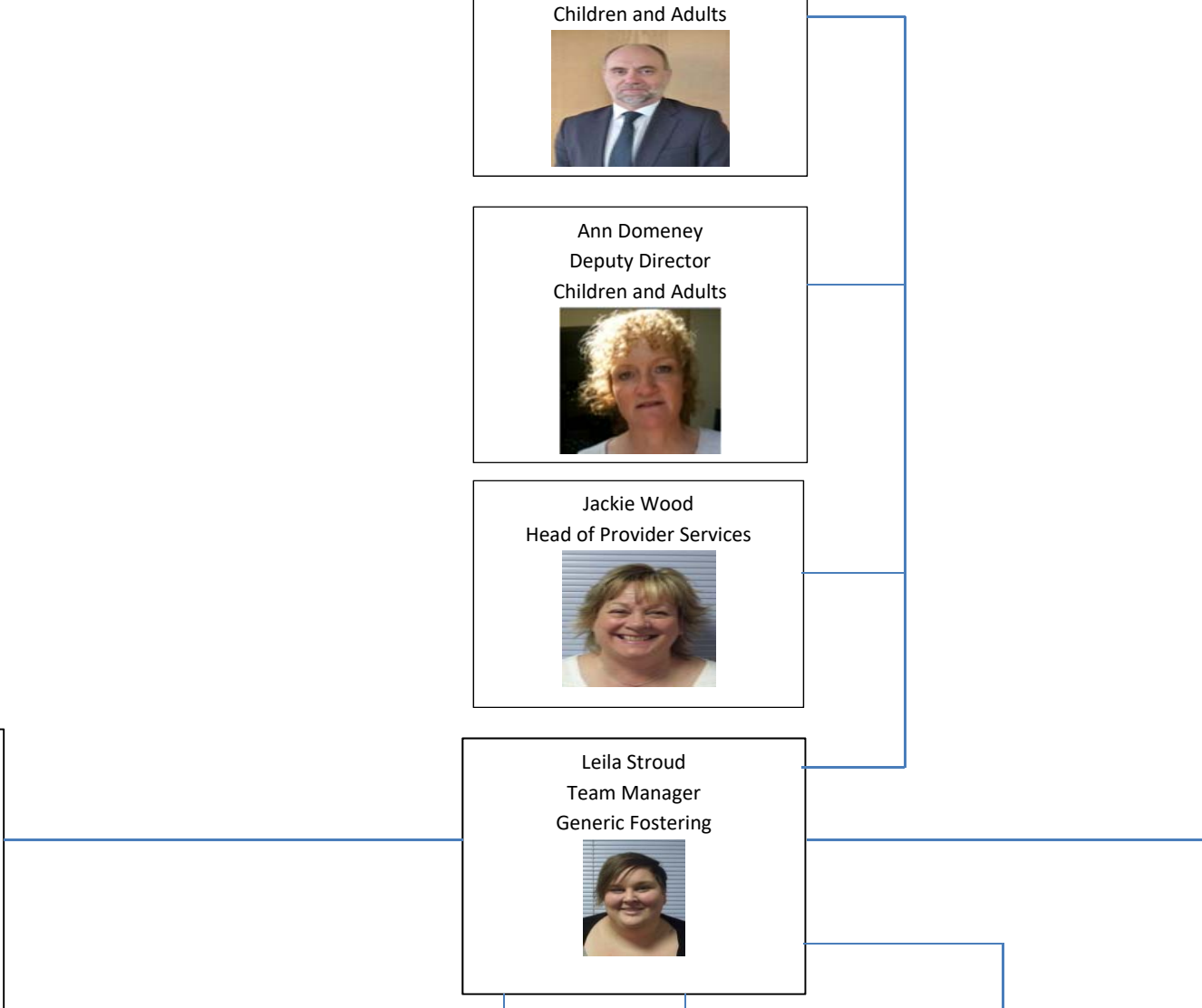
Balbinder Biring
Senior Social Worker



Aleena Khan
Senior Social Worker



Cheryl Lowther
Senior Admin Support
Officer





Children/Young People To Be Treated As Individuals – not a Number on a Caseload or Statistic

- Remember things about me
- Dates such as a birthday/exam days/Christmas – even send a card
- What do I like, and what don't I like? What is important to me?



Reduce the Number of Social Worker Changes

- Too many changes are disruptive
- You can't achieve the above point if your social worker changes every 6 months
- Agency social workers are not helpful – they are just visiting for a short time and how can that be helpful?



We have 6 Month Reviews but how can we Review our Workers?

- We would like to score our social workers as part of their annual review using the top 10 qualities
- A simple, non-time consuming method for doing this, such as a score out of 10



Get Up To Date!!

- Use more modern technology for communicating with children and young people, such as Apps, IM, Social Networks



More Choice of Accommodation for Care Leavers

- A variety of options to choose from that cater for different needs
- A planned move (where possible) with realistic timescales

