

## **CABINET**

**4 FEBRUARY 2020**

### **ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT**

Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Mrs Josie Iles – Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services (Lead Member)
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#### **Summary**

The Annual Report for the Fostering Service sets out the work completed over the last year, how in-house fostering services have met the needs of Medway’s looked after children and establishes the work which should be undertaken in the coming year.

This report was initially considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 January 2020, details of which are set out in section 18 of the report.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 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. It provides details of the Medway Council Fostering Service activity between September 2018 and September 2019. This Annual Report also sets out plans for future service development.
- 1.2 The Fostering Regulations 25.7 states 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.
- 1.3 They should also 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.
- 1.4 This report is consistent with national policy, legislation and guidance. It is linked to key local planning documents, in particular the Medway

Council Looked After Children Strategy and the Council Plan priority that 'Children and Young People have the best start in life in Medway.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The report 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 will consider 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.

## **3. Advice**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 Medway Council's Fostering Team objectives are listed below. They are central to the development and growth of the Fostering Service.
  - 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, where appropriate.
- 3.3 Medway Council Fostering Service provides safe, regulated foster care placements for our looked after children and contributes to improving outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people. 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 loving, secure and stable families.
- 3.4 The Fostering Network (State of the Nation's Foster Care 2019) reports a continuing national shortage of foster carers. It estimates that over 7,000 more foster carers are required to meet the needs of children coming into

care. The report highlights an increase in foster carers over the age of 55 years and a decrease in younger carers. Carers are essential members of the team around the child and their role and commitment is not always recognised. The report highlighted that 50% of carers have experienced caring for a child who has been violent in the home, self-harmed, gone missing or been involved with the police. Carers are increasingly dealing with children who have highly complex needs as a result of early trauma and need additional training and support to manage these needs

- 3.5 Medway Fostering Service is actively responding to these challenges through the work of the recruitment team, with a dedicated Recruitment and Marketing Officer and a Recruitment Senior who monitors and responds to all enquiries with her team, and through the Generic and Connected Teams who support and train our carers.

#### **4. Fostering Service Structure Chart**

- 4.1 The structure of the Fostering Service is set out at Appendix 1

#### **5. The Fostering Service**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Connected Carers team within the Fostering Service assess carers who are connected to the child placed and operates under the same regulations. The work of the team is covered in Section 9.
- 5.3 The Generic Fostering Team is staffed by 13 permanent practitioners. Due to a combination of maternity leave and long term sickness, and changes of staff, the team have been under pressure during the last year. The fostering IRO is seconded from the fostering team and funded from the fostering budget.
- 5.4 In January 2017, a social worker from the fostering team was seconded to the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team as a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer. This post has now been secured permanently within the IRO team. 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.
- 5.5 The Fostering Independent Reviewing 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.
- 5.6 The Connected Carers team is also staffed by permanent workers, although the team have been carrying several vacancies recently because of resignations and maternity leave.

- 5.7 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 Thursday, 8.45 and 4.45 on Fridays and is also available for support to carers if their own Supervising Social Worker is not available.
- 5.8 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.
- 5.9 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.

## **6. Recruitment**

- 6.1 Fostering recruitment remains the key priority across the Fostering Service for both foster carers and Supported Lodgings providers.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 The Skills to Foster Training is undertaken at regular intervals to ensure there is no delay in progressing potential new foster carers through the assessment process.
- 6.4 **Advertising activity**
- 6.4.1 There has been investment in recruitment to include marketing and advertising. There has been a new mobile optimised website launched and the Fostering Service has been rebranded to help create a much clearer identity for the service. We now have a logo and theme for all advertising going forward.
- 6.4.2 Recruitment team have taken the lead in developing the service's identity and raising brand awareness. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer's post has proven to be imperative and assistive in reaching a targeted audience that matches the needs of the service. The Recruitment and Marketing post is currently vacant and the post has been advertised.
- 6.4.3 An extensive advertising campaign has been undertaken which has included updating the pages on the Council website and Facebook page and rebranding the visual aspects of the campaign. This has reached over 73,000 people within the Kent area. Also, we have commissioned adverts on radio, and Google AdWords have been used to help optimise the higher ranking on search engines. Advertising in local theatres was completed for a period of 26 weeks covering Dec 2018- May 2019, and 400 branded items are used at events to promote fostering in Medway.

## 6.5 Recruitment activity

6.5.1 There have been 25 approvals since April 2018 and to date, and a further 88 initial enquiries since April 2019. Many enquirers did not meet Medway criteria. There are 6 applicants (single and couples) in stage 1 of the assessment process, and 3 couples in stage two of the assessment process.

## 7. Fostering Panel

7.1 Membership of Fostering Panels and their functions in respect of approving, reviewing and terminating approvals are 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.

7.2 The Fostering Panel has various functions, including responsibility for approving foster carers and the numbers and ages of children for whom they are approved, approving connected carers, changes of approval, consideration of Standards of Care concerns and oversight of 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 and the child is being matched with their permanent foster carers.

7.3 Fostering Panels are held at least once a month, but will sometimes be held twice a month to accommodate all panel business.

Number of panels held 2018/19	19
New Panel members	2
Resignation from Panel	0
Cancelled panels due to not being quorate	0

7.4 Panel membership includes a Chair, Vice-Chair, Independent Members, Social Workers, Health and Education representatives, and local councillors. As a result of feedback from the recent Ofsted report, significant changes are being made to the membership of the Fostering Panel including a new Panel Chair. A review of all Panel membership to ensure that Panel is robust in its challenge on cases presented will be undertaken in January.

### Summary of panel business, cases heard and categories

Form F (Approval of foster carers)	21
Form C (Full approval of connected carers as foster carers for specific child)	10
Change of Approval for foster carers	10
Permanent Match of child to carers	6
Standards of Care (concerns regarding care given to a child)	3
Standards of Care and Termination of Approval	1
Variation of Approval of foster carer	32
Annual Review (first, third and supplementary report)	18
Termination of Approval	10
Change to the Usual Fostering Limit	7

Extension of Temporary Approval of connected carer	1
Change of Approval following Annual Review	9
Exemption (IFA)	1
Approval Review	1

7.5 In the year 2018/19 we have had 11 carers leave Medway. 4 carers resigned following concerns from the Fostering Service about care being provided, and 7 carers resigned for personal reasons. Of the carers that resigned for personal reasons, 5 retired from fostering, 1 moved to become an adoptive parent of the child in placement and 1 moved to being a Staying Put provider for the child that was placed permanently.

7.6 Although not listed in the Panel business, 2 carers were deregistered as they were Fostering for Adoption carers. These are approved adoptive parents who are temporarily additionally approved as foster carers to enable them to take a child in care proceedings. This enables the child to be placed with their prospective permanent family prior to the completion of care proceedings. These cases are heard under Adoption Regulations, and therefore are not considered at Fostering Panel.

7.7 Training to Panel members is delivered by the service and has recently included induction for new panel members and training on GDPR and safeguarding.

## **8. Fostering Payments**

### **8.1 New payment scheme**

8.1.1 The new and simplified payment scheme went live on the 1st October 2018, in line with the Fostering Service Transformation Programme.

8.1.2 The process for claiming mileage has been implemented, 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.

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

### **8.2 Enhanced payments**

8.2.1 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.

8.2.2 Enhanced payments are reviewed every 3 months 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. It is usual for enhanced payments to stop if the child is awarded Disability Living Allowance.

## **9. Connected Carers**

### **9.1 Work of the Team**

9.1.1 The Connected Carers team undertakes assessments of prospective family members and friends when it may not be possible for a child or young person to remain in the care of their birth parents. The team undertakes work with family and friends who provide and support placements for children and young people with extended family members and other connected people who have a prior relationship with a child/ young person. This area of activity continues to grow due to the demands made by the courts following the implementation of the 26 week time scale for dealing with care proceedings. There were 36 new Special Guardianship and Connected Carer assessments undertaken in the year.

9.1.2 When an alternative carer is being considered, and the child is not already placed with the prospective carer, a viability assessment will be undertaken by a qualified social worker. In essence, this is a brief assessment, assessing whether the potential placement is viable. This will include safeguarding checks being undertaken such as police checks. If the assessment is positive, a further more in-depth assessment is undertaken. This is usually a 'Special Guardianship Assessment'. There were 69 Viability Assessments undertaken in the year.

9.1.3 There are times when a Looked after Child or young person is placed with alternative carers in emergency situations. These emergency placements are made under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010. This would entail a Regulation 24 Temporary Approval assessment and the carers would be fully assessed as family and friends foster carers under Fostering Regulations. The recruitment and assessment process differs from that for mainstream foster carers but still requires compliance with the Fostering Regulations 2011.

9.1.4 The team has a crucial role in keeping children within their extended family if it is safe to do so and meeting the overall strategy of keeping children in local permanent placements. This includes providing ongoing support, advice, guidance and training to the prospective carers, to ensure that they have the necessary skills to care for the child or young person.

9.1.5 Over the past year the service continues to improve in ensuring better outcomes for children. The team is committed to ensuring that children are placed with the right people at the right time. The key to this is ensuring that assessment are robust, support for families is effective and partnership working is strong.

### **9.2 Key priorities for the coming year are as follows:**

9.2.1 Continue to improve the quality of assessments further, to ensure that they are child focused, analytical and evidence based, with clear analysis of the applicant's ability to meet the child/children's needs in the long-term to be evident in assessments. Children to be seen and spoken to alone and direct work to be undertaken with children.

- 9.2.2 Every Connected Carers and Special Guardianship Assessment to explore the family and environmental factors which have shaped the life of the child thus far and the potential long-term impact/consequences of such.
- 9.2.3 Maintaining good working relationships with key professionals across the service to promote cohesiveness in service delivery. This is to include but not limited to: carers, internal children's services and legal colleagues across departments; external statutory partners such as health, education, police; and voluntary agencies such as the 'Young Lives Foundation' and 'Family Action. Every agency who is involved with the child should be consulted as part of the assessment process.
- 9.2.4 Engagement and consultation with children and families. Feedback forms to be developed to enable children and families and professionals to provide feedback to drive service improvement. Children to be consulted and their views to be obtained and recorded.
- 9.2.5 Improvement in the support, advice, guidance and training available for prospective carers, to ensure that they have the necessary skills to care for the child or young person.

## **10. Allegations/ Quality of Care/ Complaints**

### **10.1 Allegations and Quality of Care Concerns**

10.1.1 All allegations and quality of care concerns are fully explored and analysed to ensure safe practice going forward.

10.1.2 In 2018/19 there were 10 allegations made that required a LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) investigation. 2 were found to be substantiated and 8 were unsubstantiated.

10.1.3 Of the LADO investigations, the 2 substantiated claims led to carer resignation whilst we were undertaking Standards of care investigation. Due to the level of concern, the Panel recommended terminating approval of the carers for Medway Council. In addition, there were a further 5 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.

### **10.2 Fostering Complaints**

10.2.1 For the period of 2018/19 there were 2 complaints made about a foster carers and 6 made by foster carers about the fostering service. 4 of these complaints were made in relation to payments.

10.2.2 All of these complaints were resolved in Stage One.



### 10.3 Compliments

10.3.1 In June 2019, the Fostering Service held an Appreciation evening event to which all carers and children were invited to acknowledge and celebrate the positive contributions that all are carers make to the lives of our most disadvantaged children. The event was very positively received and appreciated by the carers.

### 11. Placement and carer information

11.1 In the period 2018/19, the Service has received 252 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 Sep 2018 – Sep 2019	252
Matched but placement not needed	44 (17%)
Placement not needed	40 (16%)
Placed with internal placements	101 (40%)
Placed with connected carer	1 (0.4%)
Placed with Independent Fostering Agency or external resource	59 (25%)
Other	7 (3.2%)

11.2 When the number of children matched but not placed or no placement needed is subtracted, in-house and supported lodgings placements account for 60% of the placements made.

11.3 According to data on frameworki, of all the children who were new entries to care, 72% were placed in internal placements.

11.4 The referrals received were from one child to sibling groups of six. Teenage children with high risk behaviours which we could not match against children already in placement were the hardest to place internally and led to external provisions being made.

11.5 We were able to place all large (4, 5 or 6) sibling groups internally and most sets of 2 or 3 siblings. The cost of placing these large sibling groups externally would have been significant to the Local Authority.

### 11.6 Supported Lodgings

11.6.1 During 2018/19, 17 Supported Lodgings Placements were made. Recruitment activity is increasing to be able to provide a wide range of options to young people. A recent dedicated recruitment drive for new Supported Lodgings Providers generated considerable interest and as a result new providers have been approved and 1 is in assessment.

## 11.7 Demographics of children living with Medway Carers

Placements as at 30 Sep '19		Connected care	In-house foster care (% of fostered)
Age	Age 0	3	21 (81%)
	Aged 1- 4	7	31 (79%)
	Aged 5- 9	9	46 (81%)
	Aged 10-15	17	86 (57%)
	Aged 16-17	3	21 (49%)
Parent & child		0	6 (75%)
Gender	Female	19	85 (64%)
	Male	20	120 (66%)
Ethnicity	White	35	182 (64%)
	Asian/Asian British	0	3 (100%)
	Black/Black British	0	2 (40%)
	Mixed	4	16 (89%)
	Other Ethnic Groups	0	2 (40%)
	BME Total	4	23 (74%)

11.7.1 In the last couple of years requests for Parent and Child placements have significantly increased. The Service has actively recruited and transferred existing carers to be Parent and Child carers. During 2018/19 although demand was still high, we were able to meet 75% of the placement need for Parent and Child placements, up from 36% last year.

11.7.2 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 external placements.

## 12. Placement stability and permanence

12.1 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."*

12.2 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.

- 12.3 Permanent Match assessments for all Medway children, whether in-house or external 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.
- 12.4 The number of children in long term stable placements continues to grow from 108 on the 30th September 2018 to 115 in September 2019, an increase of 6%. This is an overall increase since December 2016 of 17% which is very positive.

Time in placement (as at 30 Sep '19)	0 - 3 mths	3 - 6 mths	6 - 12 mths	1 - 2 years	2+ years	Total
Friends & relatives	7	5	7	5	15	39
Foster care	4	15	34	29	86	205
Total	48	20	41	34	101	244

- 12.5 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.
- 12.6 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.
- 12.7 Placement Disruption meetings are held if placements are longer than a year, or deemed permanent, and breakdown. This enables the professional network to understand more fully what led 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.

## 13. Foster Carer Learning & Development

### 13.1 Mandatory training

13.1.1 Following a review of training and expectations for carers, mandatory training was revised. Foster carers are now expected to complete:

- Paediatric First Aid (to be completed by both carers) updated every 3 years
- Child Protection/Safe Care (to be completed by both carers) updated every 3 years
- Child Development (to be completed by both carers) updated every 3 years
- Equality and Diversity(to be completed by both carers) updated every 3 years
- Attachment and Trauma and Therapeutic Parenting (to be completed by both carers) updated every 3 years
- Internet/Digital Safety (main carer and desirable for secondary carer) updated every 3 years

- Administration and Safe Storage of Medication (main carer and desirable for secondary carer) updated every 3 years
- Recording Skills (main carer and desirable for secondary carer) updated every 3 years

13.1.2 In addition to the mandatory training, there is a continuing focus on therapeutic parenting through the NSPCC Reflective Fostering training programme which is being delivered to all carers. Such training aims to encourage all carers to put themselves into the mind of the child and to understand behaviour from the child's perspective. This training will continue to be a focus for the team.

13.1.3 During the last year, Induction Training has been introduced for all new carers which comprises 3 days of further training following approval. All existing foster carers have also been booked onto these days training to ensure that the whole cohort of Medway foster carers receive the same information and adhere to the expectations of Medway Fostering Service.

13.1.4 Much of the ongoing foster carer training is now online in response to requests from carers. Certificates are provided from the training to ensure the service can monitor the training undertaken. Support groups are focussed on particular areas, such as adolescents, babies, parent and child and attendance at these groups is monitored.

## 13.2 **Personal Development Review**

13.2.1 Personal Development Reviews (PDR) are now being used across the service. These allow foster carers to identify what their training goals are for the course of the year, as well as any additional support they will require to achieve this.

13.2.2 PDR's are considered at foster carers annual review meetings, and progress is considered and recognised in this forum.

## 13.3 **Training Levels and Specialisms**

13.3.1 As part of the payment review, training was separated into 3 levels, Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced.

13.3.2 Carers are able to complete and maintain their mandatory training and remain as Foundation carers.

13.3.3 Courses offered at Intermediate level 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. Carers wishing to attain this level are also expected to attend 4 support groups (generic or themed) throughout each year.

13.3.4 Advanced level is achieved by completing Intermediate level training courses, but there is then a focus on sharing this knowledge and experience with other carers. Advanced level carers would be expected to:

- be a trained peer mentor and actively supporting new carers
- attend 4 support groups every year

- co-deliver one of the themed support groups
- offer a specialism, including specialist training and enhanced training workshops offered by the service

13.3.5 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 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Open Road, the NSPCC and the Looked After Children's nurses.

#### **13.4 Training, Standard and Development (TSD) Portfolios and Workshops**

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

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

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

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

#### **13.5 Access to external training and opportunities**

13.5.1 All foster carers have access to training through Medway Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

13.5.2 The Fostering Service is exploring how foster carers can access joint training with social work staff. This has been endorsed by the Interim Assistant Director.

13.5.3 Foster carers have had opportunities to be involved in Skills to Foster training, student social worker interviews, and a variety of other external training opportunities.

13.5.4 Research in Practice have delivered training to carers on adolescence and caring for young people through this time.

13.5.5 Medway and Kent have completed an exchange of foster carers to sit on each other's Fostering Panel.

### **14. Support for carers, children and placements**

#### **14.1 Support groups**

14.1.1 Support groups are offered monthly to foster carers. The level of attendance required by each fostering household varies depending on whether they wish to be Foundation, Intermediate or Advanced level.

14.1.2 Support groups remain structured with the first half for carers to feedback and support each other using a strengths-based approach.

14.1.3 The second half of support groups continues to be a chance for an informal workshop on areas relevant to carers and the children they look after. This year we have been joined by the Virtual School, Young Lives Foundation, Public Health, LAC nurses, CAMHS, METRO sexual health services and offered sessions on Messy Play, Social, Emotional and Persistence Coaching and Health.

14.1.4 Support groups have had increasing attendance over the last year, with a wider range of carers in attendance and the opportunity to share their thoughts and feedback about the service, the challenges they face and their positive achievements.

## 14.2 Induction training

14.2.1 Induction training is mandatory for all carers. Newly approved carers are required to complete the Induction training within two months of approval. Feedback from carers has been very positive, and this feedback has been used to further develop the groups.

## 14.3 Projects

14.3.1 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 over a period of ten weeks, where discussion and reflection are encouraged in relation to the children they care for.

14.3.2 Feedback from carers continues to be 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 third cycle is currently taking referrals to start in February 2020.

14.3.3 Medway Fostering Service continues to build relationships with CAMHS, and CAMHS delivered a 12 week group programme based on the Solihull Approach in January. There is not currently funding to offer this again, however we are hopeful this will be an option again in the future.

## 14.4 Community Based Fostering

14.4.1 Medway Fostering Service has developed a Community Based fostering scheme. The aims of this will be to support children and young people who are likely to experience multiple placement breakdown.

14.4.2 Children involved in this scheme, and their carers, receive the support of a 'hub' carers, who are "grandparent-like" figures. They offer 24/7 support to the carers and regular respite (sleepovers) to the children in their group at their home. They also organise regular social events and tailored support groups alongside the fostering social workers.

14.4.3 The first Hub group has recently started for children up to the age of 11 years where concerns have been identified that indicate they could be vulnerable to

multiple placement breakdowns unless support is put in place now to improve relationships between child and carer.

14.4.4 A further hub carer has been identified to work with teenage placements at risk of breakdown and it is anticipated that this will be operational early next year.

## 14.5 **Support**

14.5.1 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. The FSW is also working closely with the new Community Hub.

14.5.2 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.

14.5.3 Medway Council pay for all foster carers to be members of The Fostering Network. Carers receive 24 hour support, as well as advice, guidance and resources on a range of issues.

14.5.4 Medway Positive Action for Fostering 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.

14.5.5 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.

## 14.6 **Support for children**

14.6.1 In September 2017, 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.

14.6.2 The Fostering Mentors have designed and delivered support for children and young people who are in internal fostering placements. This support has been very well received by foster carers and children. Children have been supported when not in education, to access mainstream youth provision and also when making transitions. There is an ongoing youth work programme, In the Know, which works with children and young people across Medway in internal placements.

14.6.3 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.

14.6.4 Medway Council has adopted the Mind of My Own app to support children and young people in communicating their views. The Fostering Service has two Mind of My Own 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.

## **15. Children's voice, participation and the Medway Children and Young People Council**

15.1 The Fostering Service has developed the following areas of involvement and participation for children and young people through 2018/19.

- 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 Medway Children and Young People Council (MCYPC).
- Foster Carers have attended the MCYPC meeting to answer questions from young people around fostering.
- A member of the fostering team will be attending MCYPC meetings to ask young people what they feel we should be asking foster carers when we assess them, and what we should be asking when we interview staff for the fostering service
- A representative from the MCYPC and the Young Apprentice are part of a working group helping to write a Statement of Purpose for children about the Fostering Service
- 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 Mind of My Own app to let the Fostering Service know about their carers and their experiences.

## **16. Foster carer feedback**

### **16.1 Foster carer evaluation**

16.1.1 The Fostering Service has completed its first annual foster carer evaluation in July 2018.

16.1.2 The purpose of the evaluation was to produce a snapshot of the Medway Fostering service from the perspective of the foster carer. In addition, raising awareness of foster carer ambassador role and to identify what is working well and to use this as a platform to build upon and inform practice.

16.1.3 Ten questions were devised and a window of consultation was agreed. Carers were given the opportunity to access the evaluation within two different formats. A hard copy was sent to the carers as well as an email with a link to survey monkey to maximize the response.

16.1.4 160 fostering households were consulted, with 43 responses (26.38%). This included 27 returned evaluations forms with a further 16 completing the online



survey. Based on previous consultation with carers with limited response rates of between 5% and 10%, the return rate was very positive.

16.1.5 Carers identified that they felt valued from the fostering service and that they received a proactive response to their queries. Furthermore, the foster carers reported feeling encouraged and that supervision visits were reflective and solution focused.

16.1.6 Carers felt that the frequency of staff changing was unsettling to placements. As a service as a whole this has been acknowledged and work is being carried out on the retention and continuity in staffing.

16.1.7 During support groups, foster carers have an opportunity to provide feedback on what is going well and some of their challenges. Staff at these sessions provide immediate responses where possible, taking back anything which cannot be answered to the relevant person. Minutes of these meetings are shared each month in the foster carer newsletter, so that carers are aware of what the service is doing in response to any concerns or suggestions raised.

## **17. Service Developments 2019/20**

17.1 The Fostering Service continues to strive for best practice and to find creative, responsive and effective ways to support children and young people.

17.2 Throughout the next year the Service will focus on the following areas:

- To increase carer voice and representation across the Fostering Service, including in training, support groups and service development
- To review the fostering payment scheme to ensure it meets the needs of the service and carers
- To develop services and support available to birth children of fostering families, including a “Skills to Foster” for birth children.
- To focus on placement stability through development of stability ratings for each placement to enable support to be targeted where needed
- To increase Community Hub provision to enable support to be given to the most vulnerable placements
- To continue the focus on therapeutic parenting to enable carers to meet the needs of the most complex children who have suffered trauma
- To continue to review and amend all fostering policies to ensure they are right and fit for purpose

## **18. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 9 January 2020**

18.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Annual Fostering Report at its meeting on 9 January 2020 and its comments are set out below:

18.2 The Interim Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care, introduced the Annual Fostering Report which set out the work completed over the last year and how the service had met the needs of Medway’s looked after children. She explained that the recruitment of new foster carers continued to be a challenge, which was a national issue. She also reported that 7-8% of looked

after children had been in more than three placements in one year, some considerably more and focus on this issue was therefore key.

18.3 Members then raised a number of comments and questions, which included:

- **Improving in-house capacity** – officers added that Medway would be working with a Partner in Practice to learn from best practice and improve its fostering service, particularly in relation to the recruitment of foster carers and equipping in-house foster carers to support more challenging placements. Foster carers were also being provided with restorative justice and trauma training to help support more complex looked after children and also to help prevent placement breakdown. It was emphasised that getting placement matches right at the beginning was key to ensure the best outcomes of the young person placed.
- **Staff vacancies** – officers confirmed that agreement had been given to cover the vacancies within the service via agency support and this was underpinned by a range of recruitment drivers, such as ‘step up to social work’ and ‘return to social work’ and supporting newly qualified social workers.

18.4 The Committee noted the report.

## 19. 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

## 20. Implications for Looked After Children

20.1 This report considers all Medway Council foster carers, and the support and care they provide to Looked After Children.

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

## **21 Financial implications**

21.1 Failure to secure sufficient in-house placements will result in more young people being placed in more expensive external placements creating further budget pressures on placement budgets.

21.2 The service has transferred one fostering social worker and the associated budget from the fostering service to the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team as a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer. The service are also out to advert to recruit to the vacant marketing officer post.

21.3 The report describes the progress of the fostering transformation programme but does not seek any further financial support.

## **22 Legal implications**

22.1 There are no legal implications of this report being presented to Cabinet.

## **23. Recommendations**

23.1 The Cabinet is asked to consider and note the comments of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out at section 18 of the report.

23.2 The Cabinet is asked to note the Annual Fostering Report.

## **24. Suggested reasons for decisions**

24.1 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering (2011) require that Fostering Agencies report the activity of the fostering service to its governing bodies.

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### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Fostering Service Structure Chart

### **Background Papers**

None



# Appendix 1 - Fostering Service Structure Chart

