

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7 August 2025

Annual Fostering Report 2024-2025

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the business and operations of Medway Fostering Service during the 2024-2025 period. The report also sets out our aims and objectives for the next financial year.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the Fostering Service Annual Report 2024-2025.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. Medway Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000.
- 2.2. Medway Council Fostering Service provides safe, regulated foster care placements for children in care and contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children. The key priority for the service is to ensure that all children who are in the care of Medway Council, whether the arrangement is short or long term are cared for in loving, secure and stable families.
- 2.3. The Fostering Regulations 25.7 requires the senior managers of the Local Authority to receive written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial position of the fostering service.
- 2.4. This report is consistent with national policy, legislation, and guidance. It is linked to key local planning documents, in particular the Medway Council

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

3. Background

- 3.1. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the business and operations of Medway Fostering Service during the financial year 2024-2025. It includes relevant data on the service's performance and activities, as well as updates on the functioning and progress of the Fostering Panel. Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming 2025-2026 period.

4. Options

- 4.1. There are no options for decision making. This is a report to share information on the progress of the fostering service.

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1. During the 2024–2025 period, Medway Fostering Service focused on the following strategic goals:

- **Increase the number of in-house foster carers**, reducing reliance on independent fostering agencies.
- **Enhance recruitment from diverse backgrounds**, ensuring our carers reflect the communities we serve.
- **Strengthen the support offer for foster carers**, making it competitive and appealing to prospective carers.
- **Expand specialist fostering provision**, including placements for sibling groups and Parent and Child arrangements.
- **Join the Local Authority Fostering South East (LAFSE) Hub**, fostering regional collaboration and shared learning.
- **Launch Medway's first Mockingbird Constellation**, supported by Local Authority Fostering South East and Department for Education (DfE) funding, to provide a community-based model of foster care that enhances stability and support.
- **Submission for Ofsted Registration of Supported Homes hosts**, we have submitted to register the Supported Homes hosts with Ofsted in October 2024, and this is still being processed by Ofsted.

Registered Foster Carers – Annual Overview

- 5.2. As of 31 March 2025, there were 78 generic foster carer households, 16 connected carer and 4 temporary approved carer households. We are

operating in a competitive climate where the national picture is challenging. The fruit of our recruitment activity is beginning to show, and we anticipate that 25/26 will show further improvement in recruitment.

5.3. We are currently looking after 143 children, an increase from 138 children in placement with Medway foster carers on 31 January 2024.

Year	Newly approved generic fostering households	Newly approved kinship care households (inc. temp approvals)
2020-21	12	25
2021-22	15	35
2022-23	10	25
2023-24	7	22
2024-25	8	19

The table illustrates the new foster carer and kinship carer approvals from 2020 relating to the count of registered foster carer households, the total number of foster placements, and the instances of deregistration.

5.4. During 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 there was a total of 38 fostering household deregistration.

Year	Deregistrations
2016-17	40
2017-18	34
2018-19	40
2020-21	42
2021-22	53
2022-23	39
2023-24	31
2024-25	38

The table below illustrates an increase in carers resigning to improve the permanence plans for the children they care for. 14 carers left fostering due to either adopting or having a special guardianship order for the children they care for.

Reasons	Count
Carer ceased fostering	1
Carer retirement	11
Ceased fostering because the family adopted the child/children	1
Ceased fostering because the family took out a special guardianship	13
Initiated by fostering service	7

Personal carer circumstances	3
Transferred to IFA	2

5.5. There has been a reduction in the number of carers leaving to pursue fostering with Independent Fostering agencies and of those that did, all of these were in the wake of practice related difficulties that were addressed by the service. Of the de-registrations that were initiated by the foster carers, 11 were due to retirement and 3 kinship carers ceased to care for the children due to the outcome of the care proceedings.

Service Development Priorities for 2025–2026

Key Objectives for 2025-2026:

- **Increase the number of in-house foster carers**, reducing reliance on independent fostering agencies.
- **Enhance recruitment from diverse backgrounds**, ensuring our carers reflect the communities we serve.
- **Strengthen the support offer for foster carers**, making it competitive and appealing to prospective carers.
- **Expand specialist fostering provision**, including homes for sibling groups and Parent and Child arrangements.
- **Implement the new restructured Fostering Service** as of 1 April 2025
- **Continuation of collaboration with the Local Authority Fostering South East (LAFSE) Hub**, fostering regional collaboration and shared learning.
- **Launch two more Mockingbird Constellation** with specific thematic around adolescents and children and young people with disabilities.
- **Ofsted Registration of Supported Homes hosts**, we have submitted to register the Supported Homes hosts with Ofsted in October 2024, and this is still being processed by Ofsted.
- **Kinship Allowance Pilot provider application**: submission of application to Department for Education (DfE) to become one of the local authorities to become one of the participating local authorities.
- **Development of the Kinship offer**: implementation of key reforms around kinship offer as outlined in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Conclusions

5.6. At the heart of Medway's Fostering Service is a shared commitment to providing loving, stable, and high-quality care for all children and young people in supported accommodation and foster care, including those supported by connected carers. We're passionate about spreading the word across our community about the ongoing need for foster families who can offer safe and nurturing homes to children who need them most, local homes for local children.

5.7. Over the past year, we've made great strides in modernising the service to meet growing demand. These improvements are helping us better support our carers and the children in their care. We have also had the benefit of a diagnostic report from the Local Government Association which has helped the service look back at itself; the recommendations from which have helped shape out service plan for 2025-2026.

5.8. We're proud to work hand-in-hand with our partner agencies, local organisations, and the wider community to ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive. Together, we're building a stronger, more supportive fostering network, one that puts children and young people at the centre of everything we do.

6. Risk management

6.1.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Recruitment and retention of foster carers	High national and regional competition for foster carers, with a saturated market and declining number of fostering households.	Implement targeted recruitment campaigns, participate in regional recruitment hubs, and enhance support and incentives for carers.	A II
Staff turnover and service continuity	High turnover with 47.05% new starters in 2024/25, impacting service stability and continuity.	Strengthen management support, recruit Assistant Team Managers, and provide robust induction and supervision.	B II
Placement sufficiency	Insufficient in-house placements leading to reliance on independent fostering agencies.	Expand in-house provision, launch 2 Mockingbird constellations, and increase recruitment of diverse carers.	A III
Regulatory compliance and timeliness	Delays in DBS checks and medical reports affecting assessment timelines and	Improve coordination with external agencies and streamline internal processes	B III

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	leading to unregulated placements.	to ensure timely submissions.	
Conversion rate of enquiries to approvals	Low conversion rate from initial enquiries to approved carers due to eligibility issues and competition.	Enhance follow-up processes, appoint dedicated Enquiries Officer, and improve applicant engagement.	B III

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

7. Consultation

7.1. Foster carers are regularly asked for feedback on various aspects of the service and were fully consulted on the proposed changes to the payment scheme for carers. To strengthen the fostering voice and promote collaboration, the new service manager continued to facilitate a six-weekly forum. This forum serves as a platform for foster carers to share experiences, exchange ideas, and provide feedback. It facilitates open and constructive discussions, encouraging a sense of community and support among Medway foster carers.

8. Climate change implications

8.1. There are no positive or negative climate change/carbon emission implications arising from the report.

9. Financial implications

9.1. There are no additional financial implication from 24-25 that have not been agreed and factored into budgets for 25/26. However, the failure to secure enough in-house placements will continue to result in more young people being placed in more expensive external placements creating further budget pressures on an already overspent placement budget.

9.2. Failure to continue to develop the service or keep our allowances in line with other Local Authorities and agencies will result in more foster carers resigning and further loss of in-house placements. This in turn forces us to use more external placements. Which will have an impact in budgets in other services.

9.3. For the 2025/26 financial year, as part of the one Council Financial Improvement and Transformation Plan the Fostering Service has a savings target of £300,000. This is to recruit and approve more inhouse foster carers to keep children closer to home and reduce the use of external IFA placements. As at quarter one, the service has delivered 35% of this savings totalling £105,831.

10. Legal implications

10.1. There are no legal implications for the Council arising from this report.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Children’s Services Annual Fostering Report 2024-2025

Background papers

None.