



Durham County Council Fostering Service

The Annual Report of The Fostering Panels and the Fostering Service 2016-17



Introduction

The information presented in this report relates to the activity within Durham County Council Fostering Service and the activity of the three Fostering Panels.

This report demonstrates the reporting period from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 for both the Fostering Service and the Fostering Panels. The work of the Panels and the Panel members is central to The Fostering Service and the Service is most appreciative of the skills, knowledge and commitment of all of its Panel members.

Legal perspective

The legislation, guidance and regulation relating to Fostering Services and Fostering Panel are enshrined in;

- The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011,
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: The Care Planning Placement and Case Review
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 which came into force on 1st July 2013.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2015, which came into force on 1st April 2015

Durham County Council Fostering Service

Context

The Fostering Service comprises four separate teams which are

- The Short Term Support Team
- The Permanence Team
- The Recruitment Team
- The Placement and Kinship Team

This provides:

- A focus on the recruitment of Foster Carers
- A focus on children and young people requiring a permanent or long term foster care
- A focus on the assessment and support of Family and Friends Foster Carers

- A focus on children requiring short term foster placements and the identification of the best match for them
- A focus on maximising the resources of the Fostering Service

Activity in 2016/17

The Fostering Service, Foster Carers and Fostering Panels have achieved the following:

- There has been an increase in the number of mainstream carers and placement capacity. This has risen from 234 households on 31st March 2016 to 237 households on 31st March 2017. The number of approved foster placements on 31st March 2017 was 713. This was an increase of 83 placements from the previous year, and an increase of 200 placements over the last 5 years. However these increases have not kept pace with the level of demand and placement shortages currently still exist.
- The number of children placed with Durham foster carers on 31st March 2017 was 552 children. This is a significant increase in filled placements from 437 children in March 2016
- The number of unavailable placements was 120. This was due to a variety of factors which included: carers pending resignation (mostly Family and Friends), carers unavailable due to health/family problems, the needs of the child in placement, and placement only available for a sibling due to a shared bedroom. 13 placements were unavailable due to the young person remaining with the carer under Staying Put.
- There has been a continued increase in the number of approved placements in the Fostering Service. In four years this has risen from 513 placements in 2013 to 713 placements in 2017
- The service continues to seek to match children who have a plan of permanence via long term fostering with long term Foster Carers. 11 children were matched with in-house Foster Carers, and 7 children were matched with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Foster Carers. However, as of 31st March 2017 there were 57 children who had an identified plan of permanence via long term foster care who were not yet matched in a permanent foster placement. The seeking of suitable placements for these young people remains a strategic priority and ongoing development work is taking place via the fostering service review and the placement efficient strategy to meet the needs of these children.
- The Service has developed a process to commission long term IFA placements for specific children where we have not been able to identify a suitable in-house resource. This work is in the early stages and initial results are promising. Initially, the details of 5 children were shared with the IFA's and placements for 3 of these children identified and the children are currently in placement.
- The assessment and approval of Family and Friends Foster Carers has continued to be an important aspect of the work of the Fostering Service. There has continued to be increase in the number of assessments of Family and Friends Foster Carers with 47 being completed in 2016/17, compared with 39 in 2015/16 and 41 in 2014/15. Importantly for children it has provided permanence for them. 29 families provided permanence to children through Special Guardianship Orders, and a further 5 through Child Arrangement Orders during 2016/17.

- The Service has continued to raise the professional profile of Foster Carers and address standards of care issues when necessary.

The Fostering Service was also considered by OFSTED as part of their inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The inspection commenced on 22nd February 2016 and concluded on 18th March 2016, with a final report being published on 16th May 2016.

The report highlighted the following:

- Most children live in good-quality placements that are meeting their needs effectively, including placements that have been sustained over long periods of time. Good communications between residential placements and social workers help to support children remaining in placements. At the time of the inspection, few children (5.6%) were reported as having had three or more placements in the previous year. This figure has been improving over time as a result of targeted improvement action, and is better than the most recently available figures for both similar local authorities and England overall.
- A large majority (77%) of children looked after are placed within the local authority. Of those placed outside the local authority, most (92%) are placed in a neighbouring local authority. This promotes children's identity and ongoing contact with their wider family. A very large majority of children (90%) are placed with families. Thirty three children (5%) are placed with their own parents, a figure in line with the most recently published national figures.
- The Fostering Service has clear priorities and a determination to achieve permanence for children and young people. There is a clear strategy to recruit carers for permanence, as well as for teenagers and for groups of brothers and sisters. The number of children placed with Durham foster carers has increased over time, from 336 in March 2013 to 436 in March 2015. The Fostering Panel plays a key role in the quality assurance of the service. This has meant that the quality of matching, reports and life story work has improved.
- The recruitment of foster carers is robust, with all relevant checks and interviews undertaken. Foster carers receive good-quality training to support them in caring for children and young people. They particularly welcomed the training delivered by the Full Circle service regarding attachment and the difference it has made to their approach in handling and managing children's and young people's behaviours to minimise risk. Foster carers receive good support with regular visits from their supervising social worker, and say that workers are responsive to their requests for information and advice.

Changes and Developments in 2016/17

There have been a number of changes to the management within the Fostering Service:

- Karen Robb returned to the role of Strategic Manager of the service following a long period of sick leave, an interim Strategic Manager covered the post for a six month period.
- In March 2017 Chris Bell was appointed Operations Manager Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle.

- Andy Jennings continued as temporary Team Manager of the Short Term Team until Bronwen Smith returned to her substantive post in March 2017.
- Kathy Welsh retired as Team Manager of the Placement and Kinship Team and Christine Kuate was appointed, taking up the post in February 2017.

The Fostering Service has also worked on the following developments/changes:

- Development of the Foster Xtra initiative which aims to provide a multi-agency approach to meet the needs of both children/young people with the most complex needs and challenging behaviour, through providing increased support to Foster Carers. This initiative builds on the previous scheme of Fostering Plus which did not attract a sufficient number of applicants. Foster Xtra has so far assessed two carers, one going to panel in June 2017 and one scheduled to go to Panel in August 2017.
- Promotion of the “wrap around service” to support fragile placements. This service has enabled up to 15 children to be supported in their placement and complete preventative work with the child and their carers to prevent placement disruption or breakdown.
- Implementation of the amendments made to the Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 which came into force on 1st April 2015. These amendments established long term foster care as a legally defined permanence option for looked after children and specified requirements to be met when this is the permanence plan for the child. It also allowed for greater flexibility in social work support in these situations and underlined the importance of foster carers being consulted and involved in the decision-making process concerning the child they care for.
- Consolidation of the support group for Family and Friend carers on a quarterly basis.
- Consolidation of the Launch Pad support group for newly approved carers to offer tailored support to carers in their first year.
- Provision of the new welcome pack to ensure new carers have information about the support they can receive and fostering policies and procedures at the point of approval.
- Continued development of the training provided to Foster Carers through the provision of additional courses to meet identified needs.
- Consolidation of the policy changes required by “Staying Put” arrangements for care leavers aged 18 years and above, and service wide meetings to ensure consistent practice facilitated by the Fostering Service. On 31st March 2017 there were 13 young people continuing to live with their previous foster carers either through the Staying Put, or Shared Lives initiatives.
- Greater involvement of Foster Carers in the specific development of aspects of the service including focus groups on Foster Carer recording, training , and recruitment.

Foster Carer Information

Numbers and type of foster care provision.

Table 1 below gives the breakdown of Foster Carers by the type of foster care they are currently providing

Type of Care	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Short Term Care	108	101	98	125
Both Short Term and Permanent Care	69	70	85	30
Permanent Care	42	55	51	82
TOTAL MAINSTREAM	219	226	234	237
Family & Friends Care	36	39	44	70
Family & Friends Temp Approved	45	32	28	56
TOTAL FAMILY & FRIENDS	81	71	72	126
TOTAL MAINSTREAM AND FAMILY & FRIENDS	304	297	306	363

The above shows that on 31st March 2017 there were 363 registered Foster Carers, which included 56 carers who had temporary approval under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. This is a considerable increase particularly in relation to Family and Friends Carers.

This data represents a snapshot picture on this date. However, it masks the movement of carers during the year particularly Family and Friend carers, a proportion of whom are approved and de-registered within the year when a permanent order is made, for example, Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order (refer to approval and de-registration details)

Summary and analysis of number and types of foster carer provision

- In relation to mainstream Foster Carers (short term approval; dual approval for short term and permanence approval ;and permanence approval) there has been a net increase of 3 Foster Carers (234 to 237 carers) when the number of mainstream de-registrations are taken into account.
- There were 25 new carers approved last year between 1/4/16 – 31/3/17
- There were 103 de-registrations between 1/4/16 – 31/3/17

The biggest increase in the approval category of carers relates to those carers who are approved for permanent care only. This has risen from a total of 51 carers offering permanence to 82 offering permanence only. This reflects the fact that carers approved for both short term and permanence have had long term placements made and hence are no longer available for short term placements. Most permanent carers have matched placements with very few permanent placements available. We now have 206 children in permanent placements which is the single biggest number of children for any type of fostering. Table 1 shows that there has been an equally big

shift in carers offering both short term and permanence therefore this accounts for the increase. It relates to the fact we now try and approve carers for both types of care from the start and they often have a short term placement first before a permanent match or the short term placement that subsequently remains permanently.

- The number of short term carers has also increased which is important given the increasing number of children being placed in foster care.
- There has been a significant increase in carers who are fully approved Family and Friend Foster Carers which has risen from 44 to 70 carers.
- In relation to carers with temporary approval this number fluctuates considerably throughout the year and the number does not represent the throughput during the year. Temporary approval is only initially granted for 16 weeks. Last year there were 28 temporary approvals on the 31st March 2016. This year the number has doubled to 56 Regulation 24/25 carers. This would indicate that in the forthcoming year there will be continued significant increase in fully approved Family and Friends carers. There was also 132 temporary approved carers between 1/4/16 – 31/3/17

Table 2 Ethnicity of children and carers on 31/03/17

	Foster Children	Foster Carers
White		
British	535	644
Irish	00	02
Any other white background	08	03
Mixed		
White and Black Caribbean	00	00
White and Black African	02	00
White and Black Asian	01	00
Any other mixed	04	
Asian	00	01
Black/Black British		
Black Caribbean	00	00
Black African	01	00
Any other Black	00	01
Any other ethnic group	01	01
	552	652

Analysis of ethnicity

- The above table shows the majority of Foster Carers approved by Durham County Council are White British and the majority of Children Looked After are White British.

Location of Approved Foster Carers

Table 3 below shows approved Foster Carers by geographic location. It excludes Family and Friends carers as they do not offer placements to unconnected children and therefore the foster carer geographical characteristics are not relevant.

Locality	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Northwest Durham	39	41	41	45
Durham & Chester le Street	55	60	63	66
East Durham	27	27	28	28
Bishop Auckland/Crook	35	35	33	33
Sedgefield and Spennymoor	33	34	36	30
Out of County South	17	9	12	13
Out of County North	13	20	21	22
TOTAL	219	226	234	237

Analysis of location of Foster Carers

- The locality of approved mainstream Foster Carers is not evenly distributed.
- Approximately a quarter of all carers live within Chester-le Street and Durham and this has continued to increase. This is the most populated area within Co Durham and centrally located and therefore within easy travelling distance for all Durham children.
- Only one locality within Co Durham has seen a decrease in approved carers. This is the Spennymoor and Sedgefield area. All others have either remained static or increased slightly.
- The number of carers living outside the DCC boundary has increased by one. Two thirds of carers living outside the County boundary offer permanent placements. In most cases they live just outside the county boundary and in neighbouring local authority areas and many live in the east with easy access to the Easington area. In particular there is a group of carers living in Houghton-le Spring and another cluster in Darlington.

Foster Carer approvals 2016-2017

Table 4 - approval of Foster Carers by type of provision

Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
New mainstream Foster Carers	27	24	22	25
Reassessment of carers	15	13	5	2
Family and Friend Carers	28	41	39	47
Total	70	78	66	74

Analysis of Foster Carer approvals

- The number of Family and Friends approvals has increased from the previous year from 39 to 47.
- There was a slight increase in the number of mainstream carers approved in comparison to the previous year.
- The number of reassessments of short term carers for permanence reduced .This was anticipated because of the change to assessing prospective carers for long term fostering as well as short term fostering if they are motivated and have the potential.
- One reassessment was completed because a couple separated and therefore an assessment as a single carer was undertaken.

Foster Carer De-registrations

Table 5 - Foster Carer De-registrations by provision

Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Short term carers only	06	08	12	12
Permanent carers	08	07	05	08
Temporary approval	49	55	31	45
Family & Friends care	14	35	32	26
Foster carer support respite	01	04	00	00
TOTAL	78	109	80	91

Analysis of Foster Carer de-registrations

- 93 carers were de-registered during the year 2016-2017.
- The majority of de-registrations were Family and Friends Foster Carers who were either temporarily approved or fully approved. 71 carers compared with 62 carers the previous year.
- Temporary approved Family and Friends carers de-registration increased to 45 compared to 32 the previous year.
- Fully approved Family and Friend carers who were de-registered decreased from 31 to 26 carers. This impacts on the number of fully approved Family and Friend Foster Carers which has risen to 70 carers as less carers are exiting the system.
- 20 mainstream carers were de-registered which is an increase to last year. This is lower than national figures which estimate that 10-15% of carers leave the service each year.

Table 6 - Reasons for Foster Carer de-registrations

Reason for De-registration	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Family circumstances <i>ie house move, change of employment, health, birth/deaths</i>	8	2	5	3
Retired/Resigned	9	19	8	15
Carer withdrew from process (following temporary approval)	3	4	5	3
Concerns from the Service	5	9	4	7
Child moved on/ to independence	1	3	0	0
Child returned to family	11	17	13	22
Supported lodgings/staying put conversion	3	3	1	0
Legal orders in respect of children	31	50	40	34
- SGO	19	41	34	29
- CAO	-	5	5	5
- RO/IRO	13	3	1	0
- Adoption	-	1		0
Other			4	9
TOTAL	79	109	80	93

It is important to recognise that Foster Carers own family situations impact on their ability/availability to foster and can result in them deciding not to continue fostering for example life events such as births, deaths, relationship breakdowns and employment changes.

Analysis of the reasons for Foster Carer de-registrations

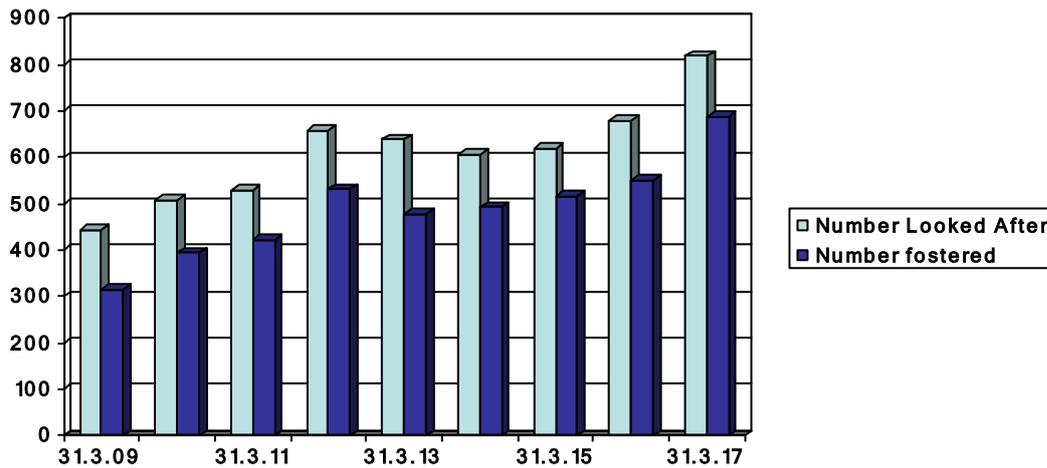
- Approximately 33% de-registrations of carers were because a legal order had been made in respect of children being cared for. These were all positive outcomes and secured permanence for these children.
- In total 33 Family and Friends Foster Carers were de-registered as the result of Court Orders which secured permanence for children meaning they were no longer Looked After.
 - 29 carers became Special Guardians
 - 4 carers were granted Child Arrangement Orders.
 - 22 Family and Friends carers de-registered because young people returned home to family.
- 20 mainstream carers resigned for the following reasons:
 - 3 carers retired from fostering after long service
 - 1 couple resigned following the unplanned ending of two placements and they decided they no longer wished to foster.
 - 8 carers family circumstances changed either through ill health, change of employment status, moved out of area or assumed caring responsibilities and they therefore resigned
 - 5 carers resigned following concerns raised with them about the care they provided

- 2 carers were de-registered following concerns about their suitability to foster
- 1 carer resigned to become a supported lodgings provider

Looked After Children

Table 7 - number of Looked After Children and fostered children

This gives the number of Looked After Children in Durham on 31st March each year and the number placed with Foster Carers on these dates during the same period.

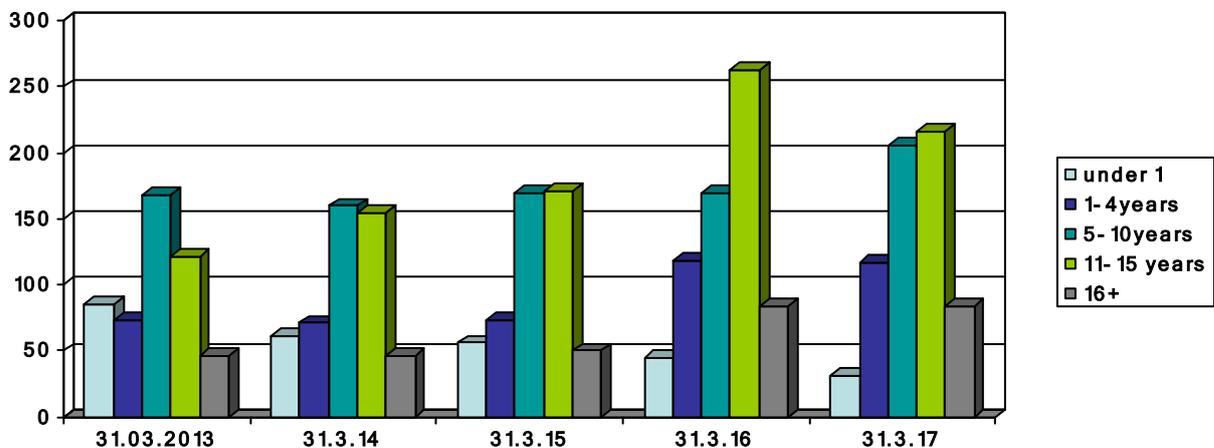


Analysis of the LAC population

- The number of Looked After Children has increased since last year from 680 to 818 on 31st March 2017. The trajectory is upwards for the last three years.
- The number of children placed in foster care has increased for the last four years.

The number of children placed with Foster Carers by age

Table 8 - the number of children placed with Foster Carers by age range on 31st March each year



Analysis of placements by age of child

- The number of baby placements has fallen slightly
- The number of 1-4 years old has remained relatively stable
- The number of children 5-10 years old has increased
- The number of children 11-15 years old has decreased
- The number of young people over 16 years has increased slightly

It should be noted that the above is a snap shot based upon the actual number of carers as of March 31st on consecutive years and does not account for monthly changes throughout each year.

Long term Foster Placement Disruptions

In 2016/17 there were 11 long term foster placement disruptions, resulting in children requiring an alternative foster placement.

The reasons for disruptions were:

- 2 Foster Carers resigned
- 6 Foster Carers felt unable to manage the challenging behaviours and emotional distress displayed by the children/young people
- 3 young people displayed sexualised behaviour which could not be safely managed within the foster family

IRO Information

The IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) Service chairs foster carer annual reviews. Foster Carer reviews is a separate statutory function under the Children Act (1989), Guidance and Regulations (2011), the National Minimum Standards (DfE 2011a) and the Fostering Service (England) Regulations (DfE 2011b) and this forms the regulatory framework for fostering services in England under the Care Standards Act 2000. Standards require the Foster Carer Review to be chaired by an independent person.

The Fostering Service Regulations state that Foster Carers are required to have a review not more than one year from approval and thereafter at intervals of not more than a year or whenever the Service consider it necessary. First review, contentious reviews and reviews every 3 years are presented to the Fostering Panel.

When chairing foster care reviews the IRO is responsible for scrutinising the Local Authority's recommendations in relation to foster carer's approval and to make recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about what carers' future approvals should entail. This in turn enables the local authority to appropriately match children with carer's specific skills and expertise ensuring that children are safeguarded in their foster placement and their care needs are met.

The reviewing processes also allows the IRO service to scrutinise the training needs and developed skills of carers to ensure that carers are banded at the appropriate level and that they are receiving good support from the service.

Table 9 - Number of foster carer reviews completed

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Number of Foster care reviews	230	272	250
Number of reviews held within time-scale	99.2%	98.2%	96%

Analysis of foster carer reviews completed

There were fewer foster carer reviews undertaken in 2016/17 which is attributed to the changes to the review process, whereby reviews take place at 11 month intervals, rather than 10 month intervals

There are a number of reasons why the number of reviews held within timescales has declined, which has included standards of care issues resulting in reviews being postponed until decisions could be made.

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING PANELS

The role of a Fostering Panel

The role of the Fostering Panel is to:

- Provide an independent perspective, informed by a range of expertise and skills
- Monitor and quality assure social work practice in the best interests of children and young people placed in foster care
- Provide recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker that accurately reflect the facts of the case presented to it in relation to the approval of Foster Carers, matches of children for permanence and children’s plans

The Legal Framework of Fostering Panels is contained in Appendix 1.

In April 2013 the Fostering Service established a third Panel to manage the increasing volume of work reflecting the increased activity of the service.

The current configuration of Fostering Panels is

- Two Permanence Panels. These panels focus on Family and Friend approvals, approval of Child Permanence Reports for children’s plans for permanency through long term fostering, and matches of children with Foster Carers.
- One Panel focussing primarily on approvals, reviews and de-registrations of carers.

This framework has ensured that matters are presented to Panel in a timely manner. Further consideration will be required to the structure of the Panels should the current volume of work continue to increase.

Membership of the Panels

On 1st April 2011 The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011 came into effect. This resulted in changes to the composition, quoracy and processes in Panel.

It is recognised that Panels operate most effectively when there is a diverse membership with an understanding of the fostering tasks and the needs of children. Panel composition therefore includes a wide range of professional backgrounds, adults who have experienced foster care/adoption, and Foster Carers from other agencies as well as elected members.

Prospective Panel members complete an application form and are interviewed for the post. Disclosure and barring checks are undertaken and personal references taken up. There is a clear induction process, induction pack and an opportunity to observe a Panel prior to sitting as a member. Panel members are expected to sign a confidentiality statement and receive an annual appraisal. They are also offered the opportunity to attend training, including specific panel training.

The Role and Function of the Fostering and Permanence Panels

The Fostering Panels are required to:

- Consider each application of prospective Foster Carers for approval as Foster Carers offering placements of a short term nature or permanent placements.
- Make recommendations to the Fostering Service regarding the terms of approval for those applicants and their suitability to become Foster Carers.
- Consider those applications made by Family and Friends following their temporary approval as Foster Carers under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 to:
 - offer permanent or short term placements; and
 - to recommend whether or not the applicants are suitable to become Foster Carers for named child/children.
- Consider all First Annual Foster Care reviews (regulatory requirement) and subsequently Foster Carer reviews every 3 years (Durham County Council policy)
- To consider any contentious reviews of approved Foster Carers and make recommendations regarding terms of approval and continued registration.
- Ensure feedback to the Agency Decision Maker and Senior Managers of the Durham County Council on Fostering Service policy, procedures and practice matters

Agency Advisers to the Fostering and Permanence Panels

Each Fostering Panel is supported by an Agency Adviser. During the period of this report the Agency Advisers to the Panels were:

- Lorraine Botcherby (Team Managers, Permanence Team) for the Permanence Panel A

- Andy Jennings (Temporary Team Manager) for Permanence Panel B
- Florence Coulter (Team Manager, Recruitment Team) for the Fostering Panel
- Christine Kuate became Agency Adviser for Permanence Panel B from March 2017 after Andy Jennings left the service

Agency Decision Maker

During this period The Agency Decision Makers for the Fostering Panels were:

- Karen Robb, Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence
- Gill Horrobin, Interim Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence (August – November 2016)
- Bronwen Smith, Operations Manager, Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle (until February 2017)
- Mark Gurney, Strategic Manager (from March 2017)

The Independent Review Mechanism

From April 2009 the Independent Review Mechanism was extended to cover fostering matters having previously been only focussed on adoption issues. It provides an independent review of the suitability of fostering applications presented to it from potential and current Foster Carers in cases where the decision has been not to approve them as a foster carer, or to terminate or change the terms of their approval.

There were no Foster Carers during 2016-17 who applied to the Independent Review Mechanism.

Training

The training needs of Panel members are identified through their individual annual appraisals, Panel activity and processes.

Panel have access and training programme information which has given them access to CAMHS, LACES and the general courses which are available to Foster Carers. All Panel members complete e-learning Data Protection training. During the year training was provided to Panel regarding

- The Fostering Service and key fostering data
- Implementation of DFE guidance on “ Permanence, long term foster placements”
- Focus on the Relative Experience Project and issues facing kinship carers
- Dilemmas in Fostering assessments

Fostering Panel Business Meetings

These meetings occur twice a year. These meetings consist of the Chairs, Vice Chairs, Agency Advisers, Panel members and Senior Managers.

They are chaired by the Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence or Operation Manager, Fostering and Adoption, and Full Circle. The purpose of these meetings is to share information, to promote consistency across the Panels, to improve Panel practice/processes, to identify training needs and to discuss strategic service developments which may impact on Panel business.

Permanence Review/Placement Stability Meetings

Bi-monthly Permanence Review Group meetings are held to monitor the progress of all aspects of permanence and placement stability. These meetings are attended by Operations Managers and Team Managers across Looked After and Permanence Service. The meeting reviews all plans of permanence to ensure they are progressed within the desired timescales wherever possible, and ensure that all appropriate actions have been taken to prevent unnecessary drift and delay.

THE FOSTERING PANEL

Fostering Panel Activity

The Panel met 12 times during the year.

Table 10- summary of Panel Activity

Activity	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Form F assessments of short term carers presented to Panel	15	17	20	23
Reassessments presented to Panel	5	3	4	1
Review of short term carers	69	36	35	47
Deregistration of Foster Carers	0	8	7	18
Matches of children with carers		3	13	2

Analysis of Fostering Panel Activity

- The number of Form F's presented to this Panel increased slightly from 20 to 23. Similar to the previous year, a number of the assessments were undertaken for Foster Carers who would be approved for permanence only and therefore they were presented to the 2 Permanence Panels
- Panel considered one match of two children with their current carer following the presentation of their reassessment for permanence to Panel
- The number of foster care reviews presented to Panel increased slightly. This reflects the decision that all fostering reviews would be presented to this panel
- There were two reviews which were brought to Panel because of concerns about the standard of care provided. Panel considered the information and recommended continued approval in one case and de-registration in the other case. These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker

- The number of de-registrations doubled. This also relates to the decision that all de-registrations are presented to this Panel to provide closer scrutiny

Terms of Approval for new Foster Carers

There has been a change in policy to approve carers for a wider age range but within this having a clear assessment of the best match in terms of age

Table 11 - breakdown of carers by preference for age of placements

Age Range	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
0 – 2 years only	2	1	0	1
Under 11 years	9	13	15	18
11 years plus	2	1	1	3
Wide age range	1	2	4	1
TOTAL	14	17	20	23

Analysis of age preference

- The majority of newly approved carers' skills lie in the 0-11 age group with 19 carers being approved for this category
- One carer was approved for babies only. This reflects the number of baby placements required during the year. In addition 15 households' terms of approvals included approval to care for babies
- 1 household was approved and able to foster children with a very wide age range. This relates to their considerable previous experience
- 1 household only was particularly interested in fostering teenagers
- The profile of Looked After Children indicates a shortage of Foster Carers for the 11+ age group

New Foster Carers by Area

Table 12 - breakdown of new Foster Carers by area

Area	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
North West	6	1	6	3	3
Durham & Chester-le Street	2	5	3	7	10
East Durham	0	0	1	2	3
Sedgefield/ Spennymoor	5	2	3	3	1
Bishop Crook	2	4	3	2	5
Out of County	2	2	1	3	3
TOTAL	17	14	17	20	25

Analysis of Foster Carers by area

- There was an uneven distribution of new Foster Carers across the County
- The highest numbers of new carers live in the Durham area which is the most central locality
- There was no targeted marketing of any geographical area during this year, although we did have some specific publicity events in Weardale and Easington
- The carers living out of the county live near the border of County Durham

Foster Carer Reviews presented to the Fostering Panel

Table 13 - type of reviews

Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
First reviews	20	10	12	16
Reviews called following a specific issue	2	1	1	2
3 year reviews	47	25	19	27
TOTAL	69	36	32	45

Analysis of type of reviews

- There was an increase in the number of reviews presented to Panel this year which relates to the decision made during the year that all foster care reviews would be presented to this panel to provide consistency and to reflect a more even distribution of panel workload
- The majority of reviews presented to Panel were third reviews – 27 in the year
- Two foster carer reviews were presented to Panel as a result of concerns. The Panel recommended re-approval in one case and de-registration in the other case and this was endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker

De-registrations

There were 18 de-registrations of Foster Carers in 2016/17

Analysis of de-registrations

- There were more de-registrations of Foster Carers noted at Panel this year because of the decision to note all de-registrations at this panel to provide increased oversight of issues.

Key Themes from The Fostering Panel

Quality of Reports

- The quality of reports to Panel this year has been good with Panel regularly commenting about the high standard of the Foster Carer assessments. Importantly feedback from carers in Panel confirms their view that the reports were accurate and thorough.

Positive Views from Panel Members

- Panel members in their appraisals commented positively about the management of the Service and Chairing of the Panels.
- Panel members were appreciative of the high quality of administrative support to Panels.

Feedback from applicants & social workers about Panel

Applicants and social workers are given the opportunity to feedback via a questionnaire when they attend Panel. 2016-17 feedback examples included:

- Panel experience was fine. We were nervous but were made to feel at ease, everyone was given time to speak and be listened to. Any questions were answered.
- The Panel asked us a range of questions which we felt were relevant. We felt listened to and respected.
- Panel had thoroughly read the report and asked relevant questions.

The majority of returned questionnaires stated they had waited approximately 5 -10 minutes, although a couple stated they waited a longer period.

Most applicants stated they did not have any suggestions for improvements. However, one carer stated that it would be helpful to be given the time of Panel sooner.

The Permanence Panels
Permanence Panel Activity

Panel A met 12 times and Panel B met 10 times during the year. There was six extraordinary Panel meeting during 2016/17

Table 15 - Summary of Permanence Panel Activity

Panel Workload		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Approvals of permanence Foster Carers		12	6	2	2
Approvals of permanence Foster Carers via reassessment		11	9	0	2
Approval of Family Friends Foster Carers (Form C)		28	41	39	47
Approval of children as suitable for permanence via long term fostering		52	22	24	31 children
Match of children approved for permanence with an IFA permanence Foster Carers		11 (14 children)	9 (9 children)	7 (8 children)	7 children
Match of children approved for permanence with permanence Foster Carers		22 (29 children)	42 (54 children)	16 (24 children)	11 children
Reviews of Foster Carers	1 st Reviews	14	22	18	5
	3 rd Reviews	42	25	16	3
	Other	0	0	2	0
	Total	56	47	36	8
De registrations of Foster Carers		70	97	73	69

Analysis of Permanence Panel Activity

- There continues to be an increase in the number Family Friends Foster Carers recommended for approval at Panel over 2016-17 (47)
- There were 11 children matched to permanent Foster Carers in 2016-17, and 7 children were matched with IFA carers, a total of 18 children matched. This is a significant reduction from 2015-16 when 32 children were matched. This is the result of the service maximising the use of our in-house long term placement resource, as well as an increase in the number of looked after children with a plan of permanence via long term fostering.
- The 31 children's plans recommended by Panel in the last year for children requiring permanence through long term fostering represents an increase on the previous two years. This is likely to be attributed to the increase in the LAC population with more children having a plan of permanence via long term fostering

- There has been a reduction in the number of reviews presented to the Permanence Panels, following a decision to present reviews to the Fostering Panel to increase consistency.
- There were 69 de-registrations of Family and Friends Foster Carers, a slight reduction from 73 de-registrations in 2015/16. 55 de-registrations resulted from the child/ren either returning home or being made subject of a legal order, representing a positive permanent outcome for the children concerned.
- There were 47 Form C assessments presented to Panel. There has been a net increase in fully approved Family and Friends Foster Carers from 44 in 2015/16 to 70 in 2016/17

Approval of Permanence Plans for Children and matching children

Table 16 - approval of permanence plans for children and their match with permanent carers

Permanence Plans/Matching	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Approval of children as suitable for permanent placement	52	22	24	31
Match of children approved for permanence with an IFA permanence Foster Carers	11 (15 children)	9 (9 children)	7 (8 children)	7 (7 children)
Match of children approved for permanence with permanence Foster Carers	22 (29 children)	42 (54 children)	16 (24 children)	11 (11 children)

Analysis of permanence plans and matching

- There have been 31 children's plans recommended by Panel in the last year for children requiring permanence through long term fostering. This represents an increase on the previous year, 2015-16. This figure does not represent all of the children who have a plan of permanence via long term fostering, as some children have plans confirmed via the Court process not via the Permanence Panel Process. Work is being undertaken to review the presentation of Child Permanence Reports (CPR's) to Panel with a view to minimising delay for children.
- The Permanence Team continues to work closely with the Adoption Team and on occasions when a plan of adoption cannot be achieved within the child's timescale, these cases are transferred to the Permanence Team so permanence via long term fostering can be considered; usually reflecting the contingency agreed at Court upon the granting of the Care Order.
- There have been 7 children matched with Independent Fostering Agency carers over this period, which is consistent with the previous year.
- 11 children were matched with in-house long term Foster Carers, which is a reduction on previous years, see analysis of Permanence Panel activity above for an explanation for this reduction.

De-registrations of Family and Friends Foster Carers

Table 17 – de-registrations

Reason	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Carer moved	0	0	0	0
Carer unable to meet standards and uncooperative/unsuited to care	6	8	0	5
Carer adopted child	0	1	1	0
Residence Order/Child Arrangement Order granted	13	5	5	5
Special Guardianship Order granted	19	63	33	29
Breakdown/disruption of placement	2	0	0	2
Move to supported lodgings scheme	3	2	0	0
Changes in family circumstances	0	0	0	4
Rehabilitation to family	11	10	13	17
Retirement	1	0	4	0
Young person moved to independence	1	0	1	2
Resignations	3	3	7	0
Change of Care Plan	0	0	0	4
Child moved to foster care/adoption	4	1	1	0
Carer withdrew	3	4	8	1
Another family member came forward	3	0	0	0
Remains on independent TC basis	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	70	97	73	69

Analysis of de-registrations of Family and Friends Foster Carers

- The trend for more than half of de-registrations to follow the granting of Court orders as to the long term residence of one or more children has reduced slightly from 53.4% in 2015/16 to 49.2% in 2016/17 following the granting of a Residence or Child Arrangement Order (5) or Special Guardianship (29) Orders. These cases represent positive outcomes for children under Court scrutiny.
- 17 de-registrations were the result of children returning to live with parents or other family members and 2 de-registration were the result of young people achieving independence
- Only one family and friend carers withdrew as they requested not to continue with the assessment, this is a significant reduction from 2015/16 when 8 carers withdrew
- 5 carers were de-registered as they were unable to meet the Fostering National Minimum Standards, or were considered as unsuitable to care
- Mainstream foster carer resignations are now presented to the Fostering Panel

Family and Friends Foster Carer approvals

Table 18 – approval of Family and Friends Foster Carers

Approvals	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Approval of Family Friends Foster Carers (Form C)	28	41	39	47

Analysis of Family and Friends foster carer approvals

- There has been a further increase in 2016-17 in the number of Family and Friends Form C assessments where Panel has recommended approval as Foster Carers, reflecting positive consideration of the child's family network within the assessment process, in line with the Children Act 1989 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
- The BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) Form C Assessment tool has been continually used across Durham County and there have been 47 Relative and Friend Assessments presented to Panel and approved this year.

Key Themes from Permanence Panel

- CPR's have been of a variable standard, some requiring additional work, but not requiring a deferment. Matching Reports from Fostering Supervising Social Workers and children's Social Workers have continued to be to a good standard.
- Form C Assessments of kinship, friends and family connected persons to the child, have maintained improvement, with few exceptions requiring deferment for additional information.
- Contact issues and the health needs of both applicants and children have continued to be key themes within Form C assessments, as has consideration of how both younger and older applicants will manage currently placed younger children during their teenage years.
- A significant issue is the delay in the return of some DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) enhanced clearances and a number of medical assessments for Form C applicants under regulation 24, necessitating a greater number of extensions of temporary approval for assessment under regulation 25 and the re-scheduling of Panels' business. In relation to the DBS checks the delay is primarily caused by applicants difficulties in supplying the appropriate identification documentation as required by the barring service. In relation to the health information the delay is primarily caused by capacity issues of either the General Practitioner undertaken the health assessment or the Agency Medical Advisor overseeing this. These delays are beyond the control of the Fostering Service, however bi-monthly meetings are held and chaired by the Operations Manager where all issues relating to DBS checks and medicals are tracked and followed up as appropriate.
- The improvement in the representation of children's views within reports presented to Permanence Panels in 2015/16 has been maintained and further embedded in practice in 2016/17.

- The Panels' workload continues to be significant, and further work has been undertaken by the Agency Advisors and Panel Administrators to enhance quality assurance and timeliness at all stages of the process, prior to and following Panel.

Feedback from applicants and social workers about panel

Feedback questionnaires are offered to all applicants and professionals who attend Panel.

Feedback from professionals attending Panel

- Professionals reported that their experience of attending Panel was positive.
- They stated that Panel members were welcoming, introduced themselves and were friendly.
- They felt questions were fair, that answers were listened to, that Panel members were sensitive, and that Panel were appreciative of the work undertaken
- Waiting times were generally satisfactory i.e. 5-10 minutes, in one case the waiting time was one hour

Feedback from applicants attending panel

- Applicants felt comfortable, they felt they were treated fairly and with respect
- One applicant felt anxious, but panel members offered reassurance and made them feel comfortable
- Applicants said they had been given the opportunity to be listened to, and to ask questions
- All applicants said that attending panel was a positive experience

Summary

- In 2016/17 the three Fostering Panels have continued to be very busy, with six extraordinary panels being held to manage workload. It is anticipated this will continue into 2017/18. It will be necessary to recruit further panel members to support quoracy and enhance multi-agency representation.
- The Panels make a valuable contribution both in terms of robust decision making, and identifying issues in relation to practice.
- As the LAC population has risen, the need for additional foster placements has increased, resulting in an increased focus on mainstream foster carer recruitment.
- There is clear evidence that we need to recruit additional long term Foster Carers, so we can achieve permanence via long term fostering for those children who need it and placements for teenagers.
- 31 children had a plan of permanence via long term fostering confirmed by Panel in 2016/17. The Permanence Team work to identify appropriate long term in-house foster placements for these children, and we have devised a process to commission IFA foster placements for an identified cohort of children who are waiting for their permanent foster placement.

- The number of temporarily approved Foster Carers has continued to increase, with a resultant increase in Form C Fostering Assessments being undertaken. There has also been an increase in the number of approved Family and Friends Foster Carers. Some of the Family and Friends Foster Carers reside outside of the area, which presents further challenges in relation to assessment and ongoing support.
- The service are facing significant challenges in identifying appropriate placements for teenagers with complex needs, and this challenge is shared by our regional colleagues, both in other local authorities, Independent Fostering Agencies and External Residential Care providers. Work is ongoing as part of the Placement Efficiency Strategy to identify alternative practice models to more effectively and efficiently support these young people, whilst recruitment is ongoing in line with the service's recruitment strategy

Strategic Priorities and Key Actions for 2017-2018

The report highlights some real challenges that the fostering service has faced in the last year, particularly in relation to the challenges in recruiting sufficient foster carers to meet the demands of a constantly growing and increasing number of children with a plan of requiring foster care. A number of areas of the service are in development in order to address these challenging areas and meet with the service's strategic priorities in the coming year, as described below.

- An Independent Fostering Service Review has been commissioned and was completed in April 2017. A service response to this has now been finalised with a proposed restructure of the fostering service, along with an implementation plan has now been completed and it is anticipated that a revised fostering service structure will be in place from the end of July 2017. This structure will allow greater focus and emphasis on effective identification of placements and matching of young people to placements when they first become Looked After and will allow the fostering service to be much closer aligned to the children's social work teams and thus achieving more effective early permanence planning for children who require a permanent foster care placement.
- A Placement Efficiency Strategy is in place to ensure that all areas of the service are efficient and this strategy has re-introduced the Placement Resource Panel, which came back into effect in May 2017. This panel ensures that there is Senior Management oversight and scrutiny of all children who become Looked After, and also allows senior management oversight and scrutiny of the progress of the child's plan and their journey in the Looked After process, to seek to ensure drift and delay is avoided.
- Foster carer recruitment remains a key priority with a strategic target of 250 new foster carer households having been set for 2017-2018. In response to this a multi-faceted high level recruitment plan has been formulated and is in place for 2017-2018. The plan has been developed jointly by the Fostering Recruitment Team and the Marketing and Communications Team and includes targeted periods of recruitment at times when research indicates interest nationally in fostering is particularly high (May, September and January), as well as rolling marketing campaigns and promotion throughout the year and at the time of key events in the calendar. The marketing plan involves a multi-platform approach

with printed media, radio and social media all being used, as well as recorded interviews and case studies of existing foster carers.

- The processes and procedures for children who require permanence via long term fostering have also been reviewed and a new process will be implemented from July 2017 which will streamline the process for children and young people and reduce drift and delay in identifying appropriate permanent placements for children who required them.

This report has been prepared in April 2017, prior to the submission of the annual Data Set information to the DfE

APPENDIX 1

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF PANELS

ACTS

The Children Act 1989
The Data Protection Act 1998
The Protection of Children Act 1999
The Adoption and Children Act 2002
The Children Act 2004

REGULATIONS

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013

STANDARDS

UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999
Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of carers 1999
Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011

GUIDANCE

The Children Act 1989 Guidance vol 4: Fostering Services 2011
The Children Act 1989 Guidance vol 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2011
Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011
Effective Fostering Panels BAAF 2011