

**Fostering Service Annual Report 2016-17**

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| **AUTHOR OF PUBLICATION:**  | **Ann Domeney** |
| **POST:**  | **Assistant Director** |
| **DIRECTORATE:**  | **Children and Adults** |
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**Fostering Service Annual Report 2016 - 2017**

**Section 1: Background Information**

1.1 This is a report on the performance of the Medway Council Fostering Service in line with Department for Education National Minimum Standards and other Statutory Guidance.

1.2 It provides details of the Medway Council Fostering Service activity between October 2016 and October 2017. This Annual Report also sets out plans for future service development.

1.3 The Annual Report is for a wide audience of stakeholders and other interested parties including Elected Members, service users, staff and colleagues from other agencies. It gives details of activity, performance and developments in the Fostering Service over a 12 month period. This report is to be read with the Statement of Purpose that is updated on an annual basis.

1.4 Introduction

1.4.1 The work of Medway Council Fostering Service is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, The National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (amended) and associated amended regulations and guidance.

1.4.2 Medway Council’s Looked After Children Strategy 2015 – 18 lists the following objectives:

* Ensure that permanency is at the heart of all our planning and that we will work in partnership with colleagues across Children’s Social Care to secure positive outcomes for children involved in care proceedings within the required timescales.
* Ensure that young people in care achieve their potential academically and they have access to a range of opportunities for employment, training or further education.
* Ensure young people leaving care make a successful transition to adulthood.
* Ensure that children looked after and care leavers’ views and experiences inform current and future service delivery.
* Improve the health and well-being of looked after young people and care leavers.
* Provide timely and high quality interventions with partner agencies to help children remain living or return to their families.
* Ensure all looked after young people and care leavers are safeguarded through the provision of trained, supported and motivated staff who understand and are alert to the potential for exploitation and abuse of young people and who take the right action at the right time.
* These objectives are central to the development and growth of the Fostering Service and will be considered throughout the report.

1.4.3 Medway Council Fostering Service provides safe, regulated foster care placements for children looked after and contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the county. The key priority for the service is to ensure that all children looked after by Medway, whether the arrangement is short or long term are cared for in in loving, secure and stable families.

1.4.4 The Fostering Network reports [March 2016] that there is a national shortage of foster carers. It estimates that 7,600 more foster carers are required to meet the needs of children coming into care.

1.4.5 Medway Fostering Service is actively responding to this challenge with the development of a recruitment team, digital transformation and the use of targeted marketing and advertising.

**Section 2: Service Structure** 

2.1 The Fostering Service

2.1.1 Medway Council Fostering Service has several component parts which includes recruitment and approval of foster carers, a generic fostering team which offers practical and emotional support to approved carers as per statutory requirements, supported lodgings providers and connected carers.

2.1.2 Connected Carers team within the Fostering Service assesses carers who are connected to the child placed and operates under the same regulations. This annual report does not report on the performance of this specific service.

2.1.3 The Generic Fostering Team is staffed by experienced permanent practitioners. There is currently a 0.49fte vacancy, and the team are currently advertising for a Supervising Social Worker in line with the service’s Transformation Programme due to new carers joining the service.

2.1.4 A fostering duty system operates daily to support the finding, matching and placing of children with Medway Council foster carers. The system operates between 8.45am and 5.15pm Monday to Friday. Carers, professionals and the public are able to contact through the Medway Council switchboard.

2.1.5 The Fostering Service works closely with teams across Children’s Services to ensure that the child’s care plan is progressed without any delay and best outcomes for vulnerable children are met.

2.1.6 The support level for both the child and the foster carer is considered at the point of matching, as part of the placement plan, and subject to regular placement support meetings as required.

2.1.7 Since January 2017, a social worker from the fostering team has been seconded to the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team as a Fostering Reviewing Officer. When a foster carer is due a statutory annual review, the review meeting is undertaken independently to ensure impartiality and offer a mechanism of safeguarding for the child and carer.

2.1.8 The Fostering Review Officer also completes Standards of Care Review meetings, where concerns have been identified regarding carers. This again allows a level of independence from the Fostering Service, and the officer will then take these cases to Fostering Panel where appropriate for fuller discussion and recommendations on continued approval.

**Section 3: Recruitment**

3.1 Fostering recruitment remains the key priority across the Fostering Service for both foster carers and Supported Lodgings providers.

3.2 Recruitment is particularly targeted for the following groups:

* Foster carers for older children and teenagers;
* Foster carers for sibling groups;
* Foster carers for children with more challenging needs; and
* Foster carers for Parent and Child placements.

3.3 The Skills to Foster training has been renewed and is now delivered across 3 days. Six Skills to Foster courses have been run in 2016/17.

3.4 Advertising activity

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

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

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

3.5 Recruitment activity

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

**Section 4: Fostering Panel**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Section 5: Fostering Payments**

5.1 New payment scheme

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

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

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

5.2 Enhanced payments

5.2.1 To support all of Medway’s children and young people in care, there is an ability for carers to receive an enhanced payment which is related to the child’s need. This enables us to support Medway carers with more complex children and young people.

5.2.2 Enhanced payments are reviewed regularly, by the Head of Service, to allow an update on the child’s progress and scrutiny of how the money has been used to support the child and his/her placement.

**Section 6 : Allegations/ Quality of Care/ Complaints**

6.1 Allegations and Quality of Care Concerns

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

6.1.2 In 2016/17 there were 4 allegations made that required a LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) investigation. 1 of these investigations was found to be substantiated, 2 unsubstantiated and 1 is yet to be resolved.

6.1.3 Of the LADO investigations, the substantiated claim was taken to Fostering Panel. Due to the level of concern, the Panel recommended for terminating approval of the carers for Medway Council. In addition, there were a further 3 matters considered as standards of care concerns. These included inappropriate carer response to a child, carers inappropriate language towards a child and carers failing to prioritise the needs of a looked after child. All were subject to a review and recommendations regarding approval made to fostering panel. Recommendations included altering carers age range and type of approval, increased carer training and decrease in the number of possible placements. The Panel supported the suggested changes to approval and this was agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.

6.2 Fostering Complaints

6.2.1 For the period of 2016/17 there were 8 complaints, 6 against carers and 2 against Medway Council. Of these complaints, 7 were resolved at Stage 1.

6.2.2 One complaint lodged against Children’s Services also included questions for the Fostering Service and the Service is awaiting the result of this complaint.

6.3 Compliments

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

**Section 7: Placement and carer information**

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

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

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

7.3 Supported Lodgings

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

7.4 Demographics of children living with Medway Carers

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

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

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

**Section 8: Placement stability and permanence**

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

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

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

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

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

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

8.5 The Fostering Service aims to identify any instability in placement at the earliest opportunity. This enables the appropriate support to be put in place following a placement stability meeting.

8.6 During placement stability meetings, support and services are discussed which would enable the placement to continue and to help both the child and the carer. Services such as a family support worker or fostering mentor are commonly identified.

8.7 Placement Disruption meetings are held if placements are longer than a year, or deemed permanent, or a breakdown. This enables the professional network to understand more fully what lead to the breakdown, to ensure support is put in for the young person in their new placement, and to ensure that learning is absorbed into day to day practice to help prevent future breakdowns.

**Section 9: Foster Carer Learning & Development**

9.1 Consultation

9.1.1 Consultation on learning and development was offered to carers to encourage discussion on course content, delivery, location and timing. Foster carers requested some flexibility in regards to timing due to caring commitments and also an increase in mandatory training.

9.1.2 This information was incorporated into the training calendar for 2016/17 and will be included in the calendar for 2018.

9.2 Personal Development Review

9.2.1 From 1 November, all foster carers will complete a Personal Development Review (PDR) as a part of their annual review. This document will be used as a conversational tool to discuss what has been learned over the past year, agree training and learning needs for the coming year and to identify how any goals set will be reached. This will be reviewed and updated each year.

9.2.2 A review took place of all mandatory courses. With the Fostering Service developing therapeutic parenting and models across the Service, attachment, therapeutic parenting and child development have been added as mandatory courses.

9.3 Training levels and specialisms

9.3.1 As part of the payment review, training was separated into 3 levels. This model will be delivered from April 2018 within the new training calendar.

9.3.2 Carers are able to complete and maintain their mandatory training and remain as Level 1 carers.

9.3.3 Courses offered at Level 2 enable carers to gain a deeper understanding of the children they are looking after and begin to discuss a more therapeutic and holistic approach to caring.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9.5 Access to external training and opportunities

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

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

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

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

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

**Section 10: Support for carers, children and placements**

10.1 Support groups

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

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

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

10.2 Induction support groups

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

10.3 Projects

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

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

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

10.4 Support

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

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

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

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

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

10.5 Support for children

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

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

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

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

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

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

* A care experienced Young Person attends our Skills to Foster course.
* A care experienced Young Person attends our Fostering Panel.
* Links have been made with the Children in Care council.
* Foster Carers have attended the Children in Care council meeting to answer questions from young people around fostering.
* Work has started in developing a set of interview questions from young people when interviewing supervising social workers.
* A representative from the Children in Care Council spoke at the Foster Carer Conference.
* Every half term or school holiday, the Fostering Service delivers an event and activities for children and young people.
* Young people are actively involved in placement disruption meetings.
* Children and Young People are using the MoMo app to let the Fostering Service know about their carers and their experiences.

**Section 12: Service Developments 2017/18**

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

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

* Targeted recruitment of at least 15 standard fostering placements, 10 Supported Lodgings placements, 5 Parent and Child carers and 2 Therapeutic Fostering carers.
* To have a clear fostering presence in Fostering Fortnight to encourage carers to join Medway Council.
* To develop the Short Break service to be meeting the needs of disabled children and young people.
* For the Learning and Development programme to be embedded, with carers developing their specialisms.
* Therapeutic parenting styles to be embedded with all foster carers, with carers able to understand and utilise these techniques with the children in their care.
* To continue to improve Placement Stability, reducing the number of breakdowns related to carer needs.
* For children and young person voice to be a central theme across the whole service.