

## **REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE – 7 OCTOBER 2021**

### **FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

#### **1 Reason for Report / Summary**

- 1.1 The Annual Report for Aberdeenshire's Fostering Service outlines the work undertaken by the Service to recruit, assess, approve and support fostering households for Aberdeenshire's children requiring family care outwith their family of origin during 2020.

#### **2 Recommendations**

**The Committee is recommended to:**

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the Fostering Annual Report 2020 and provide comment to the Fostering Service; and**
- 2.2 Continue to support the Fostering Service's recruitment campaigns.**

#### **3 Purpose and Decision Making Route**

- 3.1 This report is being presented to the ECS Committee as part of Children's Services' commitment to raise the profile of fostering provided to children and families in need of such services in Aberdeenshire and to invite feedback on both the achievements and challenges for the Service.
- 3.2 This report contributes to Children's Services' self-evaluation and improvement planning process to ensure that resources are appropriately supported and allocated, and the Service is able to continue to meet local need. The views of children and adults who use the Service inform both service delivery and improvement work.

#### **4 Discussion**

- 4.1 The aims of Aberdeenshire's Children's Services are first and foremost to enable and support children to remain in their families of origin and where this is not possible and where alternative, family-based care is required, the Fostering Service recruits, prepares and supports foster families who can meet the needs of children.
- 4.2 Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service has its practice underpinned by the core components, values and principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and within the legislative context of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.
- 4.3 The Fostering Service is a regulated Service and is inspected every two years by the Care Inspectorate against the National Standards.

4.4 The Fostering Service is delighted to present its Annual Report for 2020 (Appendix 1), which outlines the progress made over the last year to meet the needs of Aberdeenshire’s children who require alternative family care and the support and training provided to the fostering families who come forward to offer this service.

## 5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 This report helps deliver Council Priorities: Our People- Education and Health & Wellbeing; and

5.2 Aberdeenshire’s Children’s Services Plan Priority – Corporate Parenting.

5.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		X	
Staffing		X	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland	X [IIA attached as Appendix 2]		
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing	X [IIA attached as Appendix 2]		
Climate Change and Sustainability		X	
Health and Wellbeing		X	
Town Centre First		X	

5.4 There are no staffing implications.

5.5 Financial implications become relevant for the Council when the Service is unable to recruit enough fostering households for the number of children requiring alternative family-based care and to provide the requisite level of support and training to retain our existing fostering households. Fostering can be purchased from voluntary organisations at a cost of between £800 and £1,500 weekly, as part of the Scotland Excel national framework for the procurement of fostering services. However, this continues to place considerable pressure on the Out of Authority Budget. Purchasing commissioned fostering services does not provide a saving to the fostering budget as this is already being used to capacity.

5.6 As per paragraph 10.9 in **Appendix 1**, Aberdeenshire Council had to purchase foster care for 15 children in 2020 through the national framework. For some children this was for permanent foster care.

5.7 An integrated impact assessment has been carried out as part of the development of the proposals set out above. It is included as **Appendix 2** and

outlines that there are a number of positive impacts in the continued provision of a fostering service in Aberdeenshire.

5.8 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- ACORP001 – Budget pressures;  
[Link to Corporate Risk Register.](#)

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- BSSR001 – Balancing the books;
- ECSSR003 – Embedding GIRFEC; and
- ECSSR004 – Support inclusive, vibrant and healthy communities.  
[Link to risk register page on website](#)

## **6 Scheme of Governance**

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the [Scheme of Governance](#) and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section E.1.1 (a) of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance, as the matter relates to Children's Services.

**Laurence Findlay**  
**Director of Education and Children's Services**

Report prepared by Elaine Dickson and Sara Youngson, Fostering Team Managers  
Date 6 August 2021

### **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2020  
Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment

## Annual Report of the Fostering Service

1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The practice of Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service, located within Children's Services is underpinned by the core components, values and principles of GIRFEC (Getting It Right for Every Child). These are enshrined within the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009. The Fostering Service is also committed to implementing the recommendations of Scotland's Independent Care Review and "The Promise" which came from this.
- 1.2 The Fostering Service is committed to providing high quality foster care to Aberdeenshire's children and young people who require alternative family-based care.
- 1.3 The Fostering Service continued to work as effectively as possible throughout the current Covid-19 pandemic, which had a major impact on Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering households, particularly during the lockdown periods.

### 2. Aberdeenshire's Fostering Service consists of:

2 Team Managers

1.5 fte Senior Practitioners – Recruitment, Assessment and Training

1.5 fte Social Workers – Recruitment, Assessment and Training

1 Senior Practitioner – Supervision and Support

9.2 fte Social Workers – Supervision and Support

3 Family Support Workers

- 2.1 Following the retiral of two senior practitioners at the beginning of 2020, the senior practitioner element of the posts reduced from 3 to 1.5 fte posts. The successful applicants to the recruitment, assessment and training posts, therefore joined the Fostering Service during the pandemic. This impacted on the new workers being able to meet colleagues face to face and undertake a normal induction period, due to home working during the initial lockdown.

### 3. Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers

- 3.1 Ongoing recruitment of foster carers in Aberdeenshire remains challenging and the Local Authority competes not only with neighbouring Authorities but also with several voluntary and private agencies within our boundaries.
- 3.2 Our recruitment team use Facebook <http://bit.ly/fosterandadoptshire>, local advertising, the Fostering website, posters, information leaflets and good news stories. We target geographically, and for specific groups for fostering, such as permanent, interim and long term fostering families for teenagers, children with disabilities, and large sibling groups. **59** Fostering information packs were requested during 2020, compared to 66 in 2019 and 77 packs in 2018.

- 3.3 Whilst word of mouth recommendations from existing Foster Carers continues to invite interest (**9** registrations in 2020, 11 in 2019) the Service has had an ongoing Facebook presence since December 2014. Facebook posts are regularly updated and contain information designed to generate interest in fostering. This has been particularly relevant trying to recruit during a global pandemic.
- 3.4 Our Facebook presence continues to grow and remains popular with both existing carers and potential applicants. We monitor the initial source of information on Fostering that new applicants' state as being pivotal in their decision to note an interest in fostering with us and electronic sources such as the Facebook page and the website are quoted as being the initial source of information in **10** noted interests (7 in 2019.) From the 59 information packs sent out throughout Aberdeenshire in 2020, **22** households returned a Registration of Interest in Fostering in 2020 (30 in 2019 & 33 in 2018).

#### **4 Training of Prospective Foster Carers**

- 4.1 Following prospective foster carers registering an interest in fostering, an initial face-to-face visit is usually undertaken and where potential applicants wish to progress their application, they are invited to attend 'Skills to Foster' training. The prospective Foster Carers apply to foster after completing this training. In 2020, the majority of initial visits were undertaken virtually and information was provided electronically.
- 4.2 The 'Skills to Foster' training usually takes place over three full days, at separate times throughout the year and is mandatory for anyone wishing to apply to become a Foster Carer. For couples, the expectation is that both applicants attend the training. However, during the pandemic in 2020, the 'Skills to Foster' training had to be adapted to be delivered virtually by our recruitment and training staff.
- 4.3 We deliver this training using The Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' materials. Training is normally delivered by dedicated Fostering recruitment and training staff along with Aberdeenshire's experienced Foster Carers and Looked After young people. Again, as a result of the pandemic, it was not possible to include our existing Foster Carers and Looked After young people in the virtual cohort in 2020. We were unable to offer the dedicated face-to-face session 'Our Family Fosters' for the children of applicants either.
- 4.4 Between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, there was 1 virtual cohort of the 'Skills to Foster' training, which took place in June 2020. There were a total of **10** prospective fostering households that attended the training, compared to 17 households from 3 cohorts in 2019.
- 4.5 **10** households applied to foster for Aberdeenshire following the training and **8** proceeded to assessment (10 in 2019). These figures reflect the national picture across the UK.
- 4.6 Although existing Foster Carers could not be involved in The Skills to Foster training for prospective fostering households in 2020, they were involved in opportunities for service development such as sharing information about useful online learning and development they had undertaken, participating in events such as Foster Care Fortnight and sharing their experiences as Foster Carers during a pandemic.

## 5. Approval

- 5.1 Following a period of robust assessment, the application for approval is presented to Aberdeenshire's independently chaired Fostering, Kinship and Supported Lodgings Panel. Panel members scrutinise the application prior to making a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker as per the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.
- 5.2 Information about the approval process is provided throughout the training and assessment period and applicants are invited to attend the Panel in person when their application to become approved Foster Carers is being considered. During 2020 from March onwards, the Fostering Panel was held virtually, necessitating all attendees to use Microsoft Teams or to be invited in via their mobile phones.
- 5.3 Aberdeenshire's Fostering Panel made recommendations on **7** new applications for approval as Foster Carers from 1 January to 31 December 2020 (16 in 2019). The reduction in new applications is linked to the reduction in Registrations of Interest in Fostering, the reduction in the number of 'Skills to Foster' training cohorts and in the recruitment and selection of 2 (1.5 fte) new recruitment, assessment and training workers during the pandemic.
- 5.4 The 7 new applications consisted of:
- 1 Interim, Long Term & Short Break Fostering Family (1 single carer)
  - 3 Interim & Long-Term Fostering Families (3 couples)
  - 1 Interim & Short Break Fostering Family (1 couple)
  - 2 Short Break Fostering Families (2 couples)
- 5.5 There were no applications from prospective foster carers to become permanent Foster Carers. Again, these figures reflect the national picture across the UK and emphasise the difficulty in recruiting families who can commit to providing permanent care until a child becomes an adult, i.e. for the duration of their childhood. However, **5** of our existing Fostering households became approved permanent carers for 7 children already in their care (3 single children and 2 sibling groups of 2).

## 6. Support

- 6.1 The learning and development needs of Foster Carers are considered within the annual Training Needs Analysis for Aberdeenshire's Education & Children's Services. Training that is required is noted by both Foster Carers and Fostering Social Workers within their monthly supervision sessions throughout the year. The learning and development needs of individual Foster Carers are also considered within their annual Foster Carer review.
- 6.2 This information informs the Fostering Service Training Plan for the year. A programme of training is drawn up for Foster Carers and they are provided with both written and electronic information. All Fostering households are required to complete 30 hours of learning and development annually, which can be accrued by attendance at face-to-face training, e-learning and completing related reading. Learning and development

hours can also be accrued through their practice as Foster Carers by attending multi agency meetings and liaising with different professionals and services.

- 6.3 Between March and December 2020, coronavirus restrictions prevented face-to-face training going ahead for Foster Carers and the Fostering Service had to provide an increased level of online and virtual learning and development opportunities to Foster Carers to support Foster Carers to meet their required learning and development hours. From 1 January to 31 December 2020, the Fostering training programme included the following:

Online Safety, Cybercrime & Cyberbullying  
Tobacco & Care Experienced Young People  
Child Protection (from Basic awareness modules through to CSE Awareness)  
Basic First Aid Awareness  
Therapeutic Parenting  
Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity  
The Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children  
Trauma, Secondary Trauma & Self-Care  
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)  
Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder  
Attachment, Loss & Managing Transitions  
Caring for Vulnerable Children (6 week online Celcis course)  
Managing Allegations (Virtual session)  
Supporting Contact (Virtual session)  
Positive Interventions on behaviour management, (2 day virtual session)  
How to Parent as you Hope during Lockdown (Dan Hughes webinar)

- 6.4 As well as having access to the Aberdeenshire Learning and Development Online (ALDO) portal for learning, the Fostering Service highlights a range of training providers and resources such as Future Learn and Kinderley, which provide free learning covering a range of topics. Foster Carers also have the opportunity to access over 90 e-learning courses through the AC Education service, which the Fostering Service purchases a licence for annually.

- 6.5 During 2020, 149 AC Education e-learning courses were allocated to Aberdeenshire Council Foster Carers, an increase of 19% compared to 2019.

## **7. Support to Foster Carers**

- 7.1 The Aberdeenshire Fostering Service recognises the importance of good quality support to Foster Carers and their families, supporting them to care for children and young people, to understand and respond to complex behaviour and needs and to manage the impact of the fostering task on Fostering families. During March to December 2020, the Fostering Social Workers provided support and supervision to Foster Carers virtually via telephone and online as well as socially distanced, outdoor visits when restrictions allowed.

- 7.2 In addition to support from their allocated Fostering Social Worker, Foster Carers receive support from the Fostering Service's 3 dedicated Family Support Workers. The Family Support Workers provide support to Foster Carers and their families through one-to-

one support with looked after children and support for the children of Foster Carers on an individual basis and through the Sons and Daughter Group and activities. The Family Support Workers also organise and facilitate Foster Carer Support Groups and group activities throughout the year such as a Foster Carer summer picnic and Christmas meal.

- 7.3 Foster Carer Support Groups are held across Aberdeenshire during the school term dates which provide opportunities for peer support and training. 'Men in Foster Care' Support Groups are facilitated by one of the male Fostering Social Workers on a quarterly basis, with attendance open to Foster Carers in Aberdeenshire as well as Foster Carers from a local Independent Fostering Agency and a bordering Local Authority.
- 7.4 Between 16 January and 16 March 2020, **11** Foster Carer Support Groups were held with 61 Foster Carers in attendance and 7 Foster Carers attended the 'Men in Foster Care' Support Group in January 2020. Training was given at 10 of these groups, including speakers in attendance from the Children's Rights service, the Grampian Fire & Rescue Service, Aberdeenshire Service Development Officer and the Childsmile Dental Service. Training topics also covered the impact of trauma on child development, transitions and the impact of sexualisation and sexual violence in the media on children and young people.
- 7.5 Due to coronavirus restrictions, the Fostering Service was unable to provide a Foster Carer Summer Picnic, Foster Carer Christmas Meal or group activities such as the Bennachie Climb and some of the activities planned for the Sons and Daughters Group during the 2020 summer school holidays. The Fostering Service had to adapt the ways in which it provided support and involved Foster Carers and their families throughout the year. The Fostering Service encouraged Fostering households to engage in different activities including different themed window displays and craft activities during March and April; members of the Fostering team and Fostering households submitted photos which were shared on the Adoption and Fostering in Aberdeenshire Facebook page.
- 7.6 The theme of Foster Carer Fortnight (FCF) 2020 (11-24 May 2020) was #ThisisFostering. The Fostering Service acknowledged that the Coronavirus had become a part of everyday life and asked our Fostering households to share thoughts and images starting with a different letter each day, relating to fostering, caring for children and young people and the things that were helping them to manage the lockdown restrictions. These were shared on the Facebook page and at the end of the campaign, the letters were rearranged to spell 'The Coronavirus'.
- 7.7 The Fostering team and a range of different staff across Aberdeenshire Council also participated in a video montage, clapping for Aberdeenshire Foster Carers and thanking them for the incredible job that they do, which was shared on social media at the end of the fortnight.
- 7.8 In November and December 2020, the Fostering Service trialled 2 virtual Foster Carer Support Groups via Microsoft Teams with 5 Foster Carers attending. Foster Carers shared their experiences over the previous 8 months whilst in

lockdown including the challenges of supporting home-schooling, attending virtual meetings as well as general issues living with coronavirus and government restrictions.

## **8 Termination of Foster Carer Approval**

- 8.1 Only **5** Fostering households requested that their approval as Foster Carers be terminated during 2020 (compared to 12 in 2019.) Most of the households had been Fostering for Aberdeenshire for a considerable time and due to changes in their circumstances including ill-health or retirement, decided to request that their approval be terminated. Two of the households were short break foster carers, who could not continue to offer short breaks as a result of the coronavirus restrictions and chose to deregister instead.
- 8.2 On average there is a 10% reduction in Fostering households annually, therefore we are always striving to recruit to absorb these losses and retain our current fostering resource levels. This reflects the national picture across the UK, however during 2020 the average reduced to 5%.

## **9 Foster Carer Reviews**

- 9.1 In line with Looked After Children (Scotland) regulations, Foster Carers must be reviewed at the Fostering Panel within 12 months of their initial approval and every subsequent 3<sup>rd</sup> year. In line with the guidance accompanying the Looked After Children Regulations, it is good practice to review Foster Carers annually. Aberdeenshire had individual agreements with 2 external independent chairs to undertake these, however both gave notice towards the latter half of 2019. The recruitment process to replace the independent annual review chairs took place in the Spring of 2020, just as the pandemic occurred.
- 9.2 From March to December 2020, all Foster Carer annual reviews and all fostering reviews presented to the Fostering Panel were undertaken virtually. There were **25** fostering reviews presented to the Fostering Panel during 2020 (22 in 2019) and 1 Skills uplift (5 in 2019), where 1 fostering household moved from Skills Level 1 to Skills Level 2.

## **10 Placement of Children**

- 10.1 From 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020, **147** referrals were made to the Fostering service for children and young people requiring foster care, excluding short break requests. Although this reflects a decrease of 13% in the number of referrals to the Fostering Service compared to 2019 (170 referrals), it is important to note that the Service was operating within the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic and referrals were only resourced, which were considered to be essential, to prevent children coming to harm. **81** children and young people were placed with Aberdeenshire Foster Carers (not including short break stays to support children to remain at home in their family of origin, including children with additional support needs and disabilities); **37%** of these were required on an emergency basis on the same day (54 children). Children were aged from birth to 15 years and 11 months old and had a wide range of needs, including children with very complex needs and challenging behaviour.

- 10.2 The Fostering Service required to balance the risks to children who required the care and protection of being placed with Foster Carers with the duty of care to Foster Carers and their families, particularly when requests were received for children and young people who were living in households where an individual was suspected or confirmed as being positive for the coronavirus.
- 10.3 The Fostering Service developed risk assessments that considered whether children and young people had knowingly been exposed to the coronavirus, were displaying symptoms or had tested positive. Discussions took place with colleagues within the Out of Hours Emergency Service (OOHES) to ensure that Personal Protective Equipment was available for Foster Carers, if a child required to be placed with them on an emergency basis out with office hours.
- 10.4 The Fostering Service produced emergency guidance in terms of contingency planning for children and young people in recognition of the potential for a significant increase in the number of children requiring foster care arrangements. This included advice from the Care Inspectorate that SSSC registered Social Work staff or GTC registered Teachers employed by the local authority could offer a placement to a child or young person, where no alternative placement was available. This was in line with amendments made to Section 36 of the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 by the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020. Fortunately, the Aberdeenshire Fostering Service did not require to use this provision during 2020.
- 10.5 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 introduced Continuing Care, which means that young people can remain with their Foster Carers up until the age of 21. Continuing Care is part of that continuum of care that better prepares looked after young people for successful transitions out of the looked after system, based on plans which reflect their needs and aspirations, promotion and continuity of established relationships and backed up by consistent, personalised support from local authorities and other corporate parents. During 2020, a further **2** fostering families gained approval as Continuing Care Carers taking the total to **15** households, with **8** young people remaining with their Foster Carers on a Continuing Care basis.
- 10.6 Of the **5** young people, who chose not to remain with their Foster Carers in Continuing Care, **1** young person moved on to live independently in their own tenancy and **4** young people chose to remain with their Foster Carer on an informal basis under a private arrangement. Although the Service recognises this is in the best interest of young people who are settled in placement, it limits availability among Foster Carers who offer teenage placements.
- 10.7 In 2020 **5** fostering families with an interim category of approval were approved to offer permanent placements to children who had been placed on a temporary basis (**7** children in total). Although these outcomes are positive for the children, they limit Foster Carer availability for other children.
- 10.8 There is an increasing number of children who have a complexity of need who are difficult to place in foster care. Children with limited educational provision and extreme behaviours can be challenging to integrate into family life: some children need to be the only child in a household which is difficult for us to provide; others quickly demonstrate that they cannot manage the intensity of family relationships. Historically, this would be

noted among older teenagers, however the Service is continuing to have requests made for much younger children with such matching considerations that their needs can only be met by an extremely limited pool of very skilled Foster Carers.

- 10.9 During 2020, 15 (37 in 2019) placements were purchased from Voluntary Organisations working in Scotland, a decrease of over 50% compared to 2019. This may in part be due to the pandemic as fewer children were also referred during this period. These placements were needed at times when the Service had no available Carers who could meet the needs of children who required foster care. During searches of Voluntary Organisations, the Service has noted limited or no availability not only in the Aberdeenshire area, but also across Scotland, with a few children being placed as far away as the Central Belt. Traditionally places for teenagers, siblings and children with disability were more difficult to resource, but during 2020 it became much more evident that Voluntary Organisations were also experiencing significant difficulties in the recruitment of all Foster Carers.
- 10.10 The Independent Care Review and “The Promise” report which stemmed from this calls for a radical transformation of Scotland’s care system and presents a number of challenging recommendations as to how this must be brought about. One of these recommendations is that Scotland must end the practice of separating brothers and sisters unless this is required for reasons of safety. This presents a number of challenges for the Fostering Service as traditionally it is very difficult to recruit foster carers who are able to accommodate a larger group of brothers and sisters. This would be a challenge nationwide and is not specific to Aberdeenshire.

## 11 Feedback

- 11.1 Fostering can be a positive experience for children and young people who require to be cared for away from their birth families. The following statements are from a range of children and young people and were provided for their carer’s annual reviews during 2020.

*“They listen to my problems, are always there and are so understanding. They never let me down. I have a very stable support network and placement, and I wouldn’t change a thing for the world.”*

*“The support and opportunities I receive and commitment and encouragement...”*

*“Because they give me care and love and also take me on holidays and we have family nights like watch a film and whatever else”.*

*“They are kind and understanding and they look after us and treat us like family...”*

*“They treat me like one of their own and I get to know their family... I like cooking, walking, talking, movie nights...”*

*“I am included in all activities, I am treated with respect, and I feel listened to”*

*"I love her and I want to stay with her forever"*

11.2 Fostering is also a positive experience for Aberdeenshire's foster carers. The pandemic, however brought many challenges for households across the UK and our fostering households were no exception. Caring for children and young people with complex challenges and difficulties especially during the lockdown periods cannot be underestimated and Aberdeenshire's foster carers rose to the challenge of home schooling and keeping children safe. The following statements are from a range of foster carers relating to their role during 2020.

*"This is the hard part of fostering...trying to balance the care needs of everyone when one or two are struggling. It's my job to care for everyone. At times of high stress, crisis or competing demands, I have got to put my priorities in place."*

*"I listen to my 5yr old foster child and have done since she moved in, she constantly repeats over and over 'I want my mummy, when can I go home'. I try to reassure her that she is safe here and will be cared for and loved... I work well with Mum....Mum comes to contact ..."*

*"We have a positive relationship with our Fostering worker, despite it being difficult for visits to be made against the backdrop of Covid-19. We have never felt abandoned...we have been guided through the process of fostering well."*

*"Home schooling was really tough and very draining with teenagers; trying to manage a composite family it was very challenging at times. We had very good support and our worker and she took me out for walks, it was nice to talk to an adult."*

*"New carers have missed the coffee mornings and opportunities to mix with other carers. For me, sometimes issues are not a big problem that would require answers from Social Work but the groups provide opportunity to get input from other carers as we share similar experiences."*

*"Fostering in 2020 has been amazing, it's brought a focus for me and my own children during the pandemic and we've loved having our young boy stay with us. The support from Aberdeenshire council has been great, Everybody I've worked with has made such a great effort towards the child in our care, myself and my family. Honestly forever grateful for the experience."*

11.3 Feedback from birth parents and social workers is an essential component of building the confidence of foster carers and aiding with their learning and development. This helps foster carers to know the care they provide is received positively and if there are areas, which require strengthening. The following statements are from annual reviews which took place during 2020.

*"Birth dad has always said that there is good communication between him and the foster carers in terms of the ongoing contact with his son. Dad has stated within formal meetings that he is happy with the care his son receives from his foster carers".*

*“The foster carers have communicated sensitively to the birth family and the child’s parents regard the foster family positively. Both parents and the wider extended family have hoped that the foster carers would look after their son forever through adoption or permanent fostering.”*

*“It was clear from the discussions that mum had built a relationship with the foster carer and was beginning to feel more comfortable as the contacts progressed”.*

*“With lockdown, the 6 yr old child did find it difficult with all his normal routines not able to be in place and he became very anxious and stressed, which led to a deterioration in his behaviour. He is still reaching his developmental centile and in some areas is succeeding above his age and stage. This is down to the foster carers patience, guidance and role modelling of their own children at this time.”*

*“In the lead up to the young person’s move, the foster carers had video calls with her daily to allow them to build the relationship. She is now observed to be very comfortable in their company. They have been brilliant in supporting her through challenging times and to understand difficult situations around family contact and how to manage her emotions. The carer has raised any concerns for the young person appropriately ensuring that her wellbeing needs are met.”*

## **12 Inspection by the Care Inspectorate**

12.1 The Fostering Service is inspected annually by the Care Inspectorate.

12.2 The Agency was last inspected in June 2019 against the Health and Social Care Standards in Scotland.

12.3 Quality of care and support & quality of management & leadership were the two themes inspected in 2019, with the Authority graded at **5** for care & support and **4** for management & leadership. There were no requirements or recommendations made of the Fostering Service.

12.4 Grading reflects performance of the Service in these areas. The Care Inspectorate Grading structure is as follows;

6	Excellent	3	Average
5	Very Good	2	Weak
4	Good	1	Unsatisfactory

12.5 The Care Inspectorate introduced a new **Duty of Candour** in April 2018, where all health, social work and care services must by law produce a report on the specific steps taken to carry out their duty of candour when a serious adverse event happens. The report should include information about the learning involved in such incidents.

12.6 All Fostering workers have read the guidance and completed an online e-learning module on the new duty, to help staff understand their obligations under the legislation

e.g. they will need to let the people affected know, offer to meet with them and apologise.

12.7 There have been no specific adverse events to report under the Duty of Candour during 2020.

### **13 Service Priorities for 2021**

13.1 Continue to implement, monitor and review Continuing Care agreements and the 16+ Finance scheme.

13.2 Work with Foster Carers, colleagues and Fostering Panel members to update the Foster Carer Annual Review paperwork and guidance.

13.3 Update our existing policies and procedures available electronically on Aberdeenshire Council website Fostering page.

13.4 Continue to develop participation opportunities for Foster Carers and their families.

13.5 Continue to develop participation opportunities for care experienced young people to participate in Foster Carer training, recruitment and service improvement.

13.6 Continue to promote the need for permanent Foster Carers in Aberdeenshire through the Facebook page and at the 'Skills to Foster' training.

13.7 Actively consider and respond to the challenges presented in Scotland's Independent Care Review and "The Promise", particularly around the issue of not separating brothers and sisters unless for reasons of safety.

**Elaine Dickson & Sara Youngson**  
**Fostering Team Managers**  
**Family Placement Service**  
**06.08.2021**

# Aberdeenshire Council

## Integrated Impact Assessment

### Aberdeenshire Council Fostering Service Annual Report 2020

Assessment ID	IIA-000131
Lead Author	Andrew Dick
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Approved By	Leigh Jolly
Approved On	Monday September 06, 2021
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# 1. Overview

This document has been generated from information entered into the Integrated Impact Assessment system.

Annual Report describing the activity of Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service during the reporting period 2020.

During screening 4 of 10 questions indicated that detailed assessments were required, the screening questions and their answers are listed in the next section. This led to 2 out of 5 detailed impact assessments being completed. The assessments required are:

- Childrens' Rights and Wellbeing
- Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty

In total there are 17 positive impacts as part of this activity. There are 0 negative impacts, all impacts have been mitigated.

A detailed action plan with 1 points has been provided.

This assessment has been approved by leigh.jolly@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

The remainder of this document sets out the details of all completed impact assessments.

## 2. Screening

Could your activity / proposal / policy cause an impact in one (or more) of the identified town centres?	No
Would this activity / proposal / policy have consequences for the health and wellbeing of the population in the affected communities?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect greenhouse gas emissions (CO2e) in the Council or community and / or the procurement, use or disposal of physical resources?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the resilience to extreme weather events and/or a changing climate of Aberdeenshire Council or community?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have an impact on people and / or groups with protected characteristics?	Yes
Is this activity / proposal / policy of strategic importance for the council?	No
Does this activity / proposal / policy reduce inequality of outcome?	Yes
Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's rights?	Yes
Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's wellbeing?	Yes

## 3. Impact Assessments

Children's Rights and Wellbeing	No Negative Impacts Identified
Climate Change and Sustainability	Not Required
Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty	No Negative Impacts Identified
Health Inequalities	Not Required
Town Centre's First	Not Required

## 4. Childrens' Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment

### 4.1. Wellbeing Indicators

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Safe	Yes			
Healthy	Yes			
Achieving	Yes			
Nurtured	Yes			
Active	Yes			
Respected	Yes			
Responsible	Yes			
Included	Yes			

### 4.2. Rights Indicators

<p><b>UNCRC Indicators upheld by this activity / proposal / policy</b></p>	<p>Article 1 - Definition of a child            Article 3 - Best interests of the child            Article 4 - Protection of rights            Article 5 - Parental guidance and a child's evolving capacities            Article 6 - Life, survival and development            Article 9 - Separation from parents            Article 12 - Respect for the views of the child            Article 19 - Protection from all forms of violence            Article 23 - Children with disabilities            Article 27 - Adequate standard of living            Article 39 - Recovery and rehabilitation of child victims</p>
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### 4.3. Positive Impacts

Impact Area	Impact
<b>Achieving</b>	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service ensures that all children and young people living with foster carers have access to high quality education tailored to their individual needs.
<b>Active</b>	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service supports foster carers to provide a range of activities and opportunities to children and young people in their care to ensure that they are active.
<b>Healthy</b>	As part of the ongoing support to fostering households, Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service ensures that all necessary arrangements are in place to meet the health needs of any child living with foster carers.
<b>Included</b>	Ongoing support and training is provided to foster carers through Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service to promote children and young people's identity. This includes promoting ongoing relationships with their birth families whenever this is safe and appropriate.

Impact Area	Impact
Nurtured	Foster carers within Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service receive extensive training and support to understand the needs of children who cannot live at home with their birth families, so that they can provide a nurturing alternative place to live.
Responsible	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service supports its foster carers to understand the changing needs of children and young people over time. This allows for support to be provided on encouraging the development of independence and appropriate responsibility in children and young people living with foster carers.
Respected	Children and young people living with foster carers supported by Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service are supported to share their views on the care received in order to shape the ongoing delivery of the service.
Safe	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service robustly recruits, trains, assesses and supports foster carers who can provide a safe place to live for children and young people who are not able to live at home with their birth families.

#### 4.4. Evidence

Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
Internal Data	Aberdeenshire Council Fostering Service Data and Statistics	The annual report 2020 of the Fostering Service contains feedback from children, young people, foster carers and birth families of children and young people who have been placed with Aberdeenshire Council foster carers. It also contains relevant data and statistics on numbers of referrals, numbers of fostering households and other activity of the service during the review period.	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service is continuing to provide an essential, high quality service to children and young people who require care outwith their birth families.

#### 4.5. Accounting for the Views of Children and Young People

Direct feedback from children and young people who live or have lived with foster carers during the reporting period are included in the accompanying annual report 2020.

#### 4.6. Promoting the Wellbeing of Children and Young People

All foster carers go through a robust assessment, training and approval process prior to any children/young people being placed with them. Following approval as foster carers regular ongoing support and supervision is provided by staff from the Fostering Service. Regular reviews, formal and informal, take place to ensure that the quality of care being provided to children and young people is of a high standard. All of this ensures that each of the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators for each child/young person are met.

## **4.7. Upholding Children and Young People's Rights**

When children and young people are placed with foster carers this means that all efforts to support them to remain within their birth families have been exhausted. The provision of alternative care through living with foster carers affords children and young people the right to live in a safe, stable environment for as long as this is required.

## **4.8. Overall Outcome**

No Negative Impacts Identified.

The continued provision of a Fostering Service ensures that children and young people who cannot live at home with their birth families is of a high quality and ensures that the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators of each child/young person are met. There are no identified negative impacts associated with this.

## 5. Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment

### 5.1. Protected Groups

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Age (Younger)	Yes			
Age (Older)		Yes		
Disability	Yes			
Race	Yes			
Religion or Belief	Yes			
Sex	Yes			
Pregnancy and Maternity	Yes			
Sexual Orientation	Yes			
Gender Reassignment	Yes			
Marriage or Civil Partnership	Yes			

### 5.2. Socio-economic Groups

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Low income		Yes		
Low wealth		Yes		
Material deprivation		Yes		
Area deprivation		Yes		
Socioeconomic background		Yes		

### 5.3. Positive Impacts

Impact Area	Impact
Age (Younger)	Children who cannot live at home with their birth families are provided with a safe and nurturing place to live through Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service.
Disability	Foster carers are recruited and supported to care for children with a range of disabilities.
Gender Reassignment	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service provides the necessary care to children and young people who require it on the basis of their need and does not discriminate on the basis of gender reassignment status.
Marriage or Civil Partnership	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service has a diverse range of fostering families including single carers, married carers, carers who are in a civil partnership, and carers who are unmarried/not in a civil partnership. Similarly a service is provided to children and young people who come from a diverse range of birth family compositions.

Impact Area	Impact
Pregnancy and Maternity	On some occasions babies are placed with foster carers immediately following birth. In such circumstances, foster carers will liaise with maternity services to ensure that there is an appropriate transition period for the child moving to their care.
Race	Foster carers are supported to care for children of different races and ethnic origins. They are supported to make all necessary adjustments to ensure any specific needs associated with this are met.
Religion or Belief	Foster carers care for children and young people from a diverse range of backgrounds. They are supported to care for children from all religious/belief backgrounds, and none.
Sexual Orientation	Foster carers are supported by Aberdeenshire Council Fostering Service to care for child of all sexual orientations and to support children and young people in this area.
Sex	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service ensures that there are foster carers who can care for all sexes of children and young people.

## 5.4. Evidence

Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
Internal Data	Aberdeenshire Council Fostering Service Data and Statistics	The annual report 2020 of the Fostering Service contains feedback from children, young people, foster carers and birth families of children and young people who have been placed with Aberdeenshire Council foster carers. It also contains relevant data and statistics on numbers of referrals, numbers of fostering households and other activity of the service during the reporting period.	Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service is continuing to provide an essential, high quality service to children and young people who require care outwith their birth families.

## 5.5. Engagement with affected groups

Direct feedback from children and young people who live or have lived with foster carers during the reporting period are included in the accompanying annual report 2020.

## 5.6. Ensuring engagement with protected groups

The feedback contained within the annual report 2020 includes participation from those with a range of protected characteristics.

## 5.7. Evidence of engagement

The feedback contained within the annual report 2020 includes the views of children and young people living with, or who have lived with, foster carers and therefore who have lived experience

of the service.

## 5.8. Overall Outcome

No Negative Impacts Identified.

Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service provides care and support to children and young people from a range of backgrounds, on a non-discriminatory basis, for as long as is required. There are no negative impacts associated with this.

## 5.9. Improving Relations

Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service continues to work in partnership with a range of people and groups including foster carers, birth families, children and young people as well as professionals such as those in health, education and the third sector.

## 5.10. Opportunities of Equality

Care experienced young people statistically experience a range of poorer outcomes compared to their non-care experienced counterparts. The continued provision of a high quality Fostering Service will ensure that strides continue to be made to reduce this inequality.

## 6. Action Plan

Planned Action	Details	
Continued provision of a high quality fostering service for children and young people who are unable to live at home.	<b>Lead Officer</b>	Elaine Dickson
	<b>Repeating Activity</b>	Yes
	<b>Frequency</b>	Ongoing
	<b>Duration</b>	Ongoing
	<b>Expected Outcome</b>	Continued provision of high quality foster care for those children and young people who require this.
	<b>Resource Implications</b>	Staffing Costs.