

COMMITTEE:	Education & Children's Services Committee
MEETING DATE:	18 November 2025
BY:	Depute Chief Executive Children and Communities
REPORT TITLE:	Fostering in East Lothian
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To share the Fostering, Adoption and Kinship Care annual report 2024/2025 with the Education and Children's Services Committee.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the dedication and resilience of East Lothian's caring community, acknowledging the life changing difference they make to our children and young people.
- 2.2 Note the wide range of work undertaken by the fostering, adoption and kinship care workforce and their commitment to keep The Promise.
- 2.3 Note the Fostering, Adoption and Kinship Care annual report (Appendix 1)

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In line with our commitment to Keep The Promise, East Lothian continues to see a reduction in the number of children who require to be looked after and accommodated (*legal definition and not chosen language*) out with their family. We continue to prioritise keeping children at home when they are safe and loved. If this is not possible, we will always explore extended family options and are pleased to see an increase in kinship arrangements being supported. Social workers continue to be creative in their ways to keep children in their own homes and communities and it is positive to see this reflected in our recent data.

- 3.2 When a child or young person is at risk of significant harm and it is not safe for them to remain in the care of their parent/s, Children's Services will always seek to find suitable family options to provide safe and loving care in the first instance. When there are no suitable family members available, we will seek a suitable East Lothian Council foster care placement as this type of care is the closest to a family setting as possible for the child.
- 3.3 In some families, long term risks of significant harm mean that permanent, alternative care is required for children. Assessing and recruiting adoptive families in East Lothian ensures we are able to match children with safe, loving and permanent homes when this is absolutely necessary.
- 3.4 Whether a child lives with kinship carers, foster carers or are adopted, it is crucial that all carers are robustly assessed to ensure they are the best people to provide the highest level of care. It is equally important that carers are then consistently supported to ensure that they remain able to adapt as the child's needs change as they get older.
- 3.5 The importance of having dedicated, skilled social workers who truly understand the complexities of caring for children who have experienced adversity and trauma is outlined throughout the report. During the year, the teams have been developing their practice in a range of areas including:
- The introduction of a dedicated play therapy service for children, supporting the exploration of their experiences in a trauma-informed, safe and nurturing environment.
 - A new child-centred approach to planning transitions for children.
 - The launch of the Parent Partner scheme to provide practical, relationship-based support for adoptive families with limited local support networks.
 - The pilot for a first concurrent adoption placement which can minimise the moves for a baby and offer greater stability from the start of a child's life.
- 3.6 Ensuring that children receive the highest standards of care in safe, loving families remains the absolute priority for children's services and this report provides an overview of the range of work that makes this possible.

Current Data

- 3.7 The annual report shows a range of data, and it is important to acknowledge that behind every statistic is real people, living real lives that for a range of reasons have required social work involvement. We share this data with sensitivity to illustrate the crucial work in this area.

- 3.8 It is positive to note that at this point there has not been a significant reduction in the number of East Lothian foster carers this calendar year despite six families terminating their registration in 2024/2025. There has been a steady increase in approvals and a positive increase of children who are being supported in local family placements. This is a result of the impact of the fostering fee increase in 2024 as well as a steady increase of enquiries because of consistent social media messaging. The team hope to build on this success and aim to hold a record number of preparation groups next year.

	Full time foster carers	Support care / short breaks foster carers	Number of children living with an East Lothian foster carer
October 2025	45 (plus four pending approval)	11	56
December 2024	46	12	53
December 2023	44	7	46
December 2022	51	6	67
December 2021	51	11	57
December 2020	51	6	64

Foster care figures 2020-2025

- 3.9 The annual report outlines the work of the fostering, kinship care and adoption panels who sit throughout the year to provide essential governance to all legal processes surrounding the recruitment and review of the caring community. Panels consist of highly skilled and experienced practitioners and people with lived experience who give their time to ensure that children in East Lothian are well cared for. Children's Services are extremely grateful for panel member's commitment and are always happy to hear from people who are considering applying to sit on a local panel.

- 3.10 Particular highlights of the data include:

- The reduction in use of independent foster care agencies, allowing more children to remain close to their communities.
- Evidence that more siblings are being placed together when this is assessed as beneficial.
- An increase in kinship carers being approved at panel, demonstrating the commitment to keeping children within their extended families whenever this is possible.

Expanding our carer community

- 3.11 We welcome the continued support of elected members in promoting foster care and adoption recruitment, and we particularly appreciate social media posts being shared amongst relevant networks. We continue to try and keep pace with neighbouring Local Authorities and are aware that some have increased their own fostering fees in recent months.
- 3.12 The service continues to find it challenging to recruit foster carers who are interested in and have the skill set to look after teenagers. The current carers who look after teenagers are excellent and most fostering placements will transfer to continuing care placements meaning the young person can stay in their home for longer. While this is positive for the young person and it is practice, we wish to encourage, it means we are less able to offer new young people a family setting when they require care. Some young people who could be cared for in foster care if a space was available are instead moving to a residential, group living environment. This is not always in their best interests and can affect their outcomes.

Looking ahead

- 3.13 The dedicated services that support fostering, kinship care and adoption will continue to develop their approach in line with national policy and legislation and continuing to improve the way that feedback is used to shape service development and social work practice. The teams will continue to expand their digital recruitment strategy to enhance visibility and encourage engagement.
- 3.14 The caring community in East Lothian provides exceptionally high standards of care to babies, children and young people and this is evident in the passion and commitment shown by carers and the outcomes achieved. The supporting social work teams are a pivotal part of children's services, and we are grateful for the support of the Committee and Elected Members in supporting recruitment, acknowledging the complexity of work in this area and championing caring in East Lothian.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None

5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Finance: None
- 5.2 Human Resources: None

5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None

5.4 Risk: None

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 **Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.**

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken, and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

X

or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

[Enter information on impacts that have been identified]

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report has been published and can be accessed via the Council's website:

https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments

7 APPENDICES

7.1 Adoption and Kinship Care annual report (Appendix 1).

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Adoption and Kinship Care annual report (Appendix 1)

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

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Head of Service Approval

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Designation	Head of Children's Services
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	yes
Approval Date	30 October 2025

FOSTERING ADOPTION & KINSHIP CARE

ANNUAL REPORT



April 2024 / March 2025



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Welcome

We are delighted to present this year's Fostering, Adoption, and Kinship Care Annual Report, celebrating the incredible dedication, compassion, and resilience of our team and wider caring community.

This year, Children's Services sustained safe, local and loving care while reducing reliance on external provision. We strengthened our in-house fostering and therapeutic capacity, scaled kinship support, and introduced innovations such as the concurrency pilot and the Parent Partner scheme. We evidenced performance improvement in areas including recruitment, placement stability and panel business, with a clear focus on trauma-informed, relationship-based practice.

Our service has continued to develop in response to the evolving needs of children, young people, and families across East Lothian.

This report highlights the collaborative efforts of our dedicated team, and the carers who play a vital role in providing stability and care. Together, this reflects a strong, coordinated approach to delivering high-quality support across fostering, adoption, and kinship services.

The Fostering Team

The fostering service is supported by a highly skilled and dedicated team of social workers and senior practitioners. Their collective experience, professionalism, and commitment to children and families continue to be the foundation of the service's success.

The fostering team continues to manage a diverse and demanding caseload, including foster carer recruitment, foster carer assessments, foster carer reviews, presentations to fostering panel, foster carer training and support, and leading the fostering duty service. The team offers a wealth of knowledge to the service, ensuring that every assessment, placement, and support intervention is delivered in a trauma informed manner, with care, insight, and a strong focus on positive outcomes.

Overview and trends

Over the past year, we have observed a continuation of key trends within fostering services. Notably, there has been a reduction in the number of new foster placements, as well as a decline in the use of independent agency placements. This shift aligns with the aspirations of *The Promise*, which prioritises supporting families to keep children safely within their own homes or extended family networks. The increased use of kinship care and a focus on early intervention are likely contributing factors to the reduced demand for foster placements.

We are pleased to report that, in nearly all cases, placements have been made using East Lothian's own foster carers. Only two independent agency placements were required, both involving children already placed with agency carers and moving to carers they had an existing relationship with. Minimising the use of external agencies helps maintain community connections and school placements, which are vital for stability and continuity.

Referrals for short break placements have remained consistent with previous years, as has the number of referrals later withdrawn due to changes in need. However, demand for residential placements has increased, and sourcing appropriate options continues to be a significant focus for the team.

There have been several positive developments worthy of note. In almost all cases, we successfully kept siblings together, and the number of placement moves (8) remains significantly lower than the peak of 20 in 2020. This improvement reflects better matching processes and the introduction of pre-placement planning meetings for all planned moves.

We have also seen a rise in referrals for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Of the eight requests received, only one resulted in a foster placement, with two young people placed in residential care. Several referrals did not progress, either due to young people choosing not to come to Scotland or the lack of suitable placements. Recruiting carers for UASC remains a challenge, particularly given the limited information available at the point of referral, which makes it difficult for carers to assess suitability.

Fostering/Kinship/ Adoption Services	2024/2025 (FY)
Adoption placements achieved	3
Foster Care Placements achieved	12
Foster Care Placement Moves (carer– carer)	8
Emergency respite foster care achieved	0
Placed with External Foster Carers (out with East Lothian)	2
Carer holiday respite/carers emergency respite	62
Recurring respite (for a child in foster care)	2
Recurring respite (for a child living with family)	1
Outreach (family supported by a foster carer during daytime).	4
Residential Placements	18
Continuing Care/Young Adult placement	11
Resource requested not available	0
Resource requested not available (supervised contact)	0
Resource requested not available (childcare for kincarers)	0
Requests for placement/service withdrawn	66
Kinship Care Assessment/ Approval's	13
Stepparent /Non-Agency Adoptions	2
Post adoption support (new requests)	9

UASC referrals	8
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¹ 4 of which were short break placements

² Of 16 full-time and short break placements made only one sibling group was being placed separately

Fostering recruitment

Enquiries	Preparation Groups	Foster carer/Nominated carer approval
32	3	11

We have focused our recruitment methods on Facebook posts and a monthly drop-in as the primary methods of recruiting new foster carers. This stripped back approach only started in September 2024, but is already paying dividends, with a noticeable increase in enquiries citing social media as the reason for coming forward. Whilst we hope attendance at the drop-in continues to improve, other enquirers have mentioned having seen the drop-in advertised online, which again suggests that our improved online presence is making a difference.

More traditional methods are also proving beneficial, in particular, word of mouth. We have had several people contacting us who are foster carers with other Local Authorities or private agencies who, having spoken to our foster carers, have decided to transfer to East Lothian Council.

The increase in our foster carer fees in April 2024 has been a significant factor in encouraging foster carers to transfer from other agencies to ourselves. The increase in fees may also have encouraged people to consider fostering as an alternative to their current employment.

With this number of enquiries, we have been able to run three preparation groups in the last financial year. We have co-facilitated these groups with a neighbouring Local Authority.

Of course, not every enquiry results in a new foster carer. We were however able to approve eleven new foster carers and nominated carers (families known to and nominated by a foster carer to offer short break and outreach to children in their care) in the last financial year (see fostering panel information) and most of these carers already have placements. We also have four foster carer assessments started in this financial year, which will be completed later in 2025.

In terms of further marketing, we plan to extend our use of social media through other platforms which will come at no additional cost. We are also currently developing our own bespoke website for the fostering, adoption and kinship service, recognising that when this model has been adopted by other Local Authorities, this has generated an increase in enquiries. We remain keen to use lamppost wraps around the county, as this is a proven method of recruitment and used by a number of other local authorities.

We were also involved in the Scottish Government's National Foster Carer recruitment campaign. Whilst at this point, there has been limited impact on increase of volume in recruitment enquiries, we give cognisance, along with our Scottish Government and other local authority colleagues, that we are still at an early stage in this process, and that a positive impact may still be realised from this campaign. The Scottish Government are currently considering repeating this national campaign, which we will be again participate in.

Adoption and Kinship Services Overview

As with the fostering service, the adoption and kinship service is delivered by a highly skilled and dedicated team of social workers and senior practitioners. Their collective experience, professionalism, and commitment to children and families continue to be the foundation of the service's success.

The adoption and kinship team continues to manage a diverse and demanding caseload, including kinship assessments, adoption assessments, post-adoption support, and contributions to the fostering duty service. The team brings a wealth of knowledge to the service, ensuring that every assessment, placement, and support intervention is delivered with care, insight, and a strong focus on positive outcomes.

The growing volume of kinship assessments—14 completed in 2024–25 compared to 9 in the previous year—has placed significant pressure on the team, often requiring cross-team collaboration to manage workload effectively.

In addition to delivering core services, the team provides a range of ongoing supports to adoptive families. Regular bulletins are issued throughout the year, offering training updates, guidance, and practical resources tailored to the needs of adoptive parents. A variety of support groups are also facilitated, including:

- **Therapeutic-themed sessions**, offering a safe space for reflection, shared experiences, and emotional support.
- An **Under-5s group**, designed to support families in the early stages of adoption, with a focus on attachment, play, and early development.

These initiatives reflect our commitment to sustaining meaningful, responsive, and relationship-based support for adoptive families at every stage of their journey.

The team also delivers adoption preparation groups and undertakes step-parent adoption assessments, linking and matching, panel participation, concurrency planning, and pre-placement meetings. These areas have all shown steady growth in recent years. To reduce reliance on external agencies and enhance sustainability, the team is also expanding its internal therapeutic capacity, supporting complex assessments and interventions in collaboration with partners such as Children First, KCASS, and Adoption UK. This integrated approach reflects a commitment to delivering high-quality, trauma-informed support tailored to the needs of children and families.

Kinship care service

East Lothian Council is committed to keeping families together whenever possible, and we work to improve the long-term outcomes for all children. Kinship care is considered the first option when parents cannot provide the care that a child requires.

We work in partnership with other agencies to support kinship carers because we want to keep children safely together with their families wherever possible. We know that providing care can be challenging and exhausting and that we must scaffold our kinship families with support as much as possible.

The kinship care service has continued to grow over the past year, reflecting the increasing importance of kinship care within our wider support framework.

Kinship care support service

We continue to work in close partnership with Children First to deliver East Lothian's kinship support service. To ensure the service remains responsive and accessible, it is delivered through a co-designed, tiered model of support that adapts to the changing needs of children and families. This flexible approach allows for both self-directed and practitioner-led engagement, ensuring families receive the right level of support at the right time.

The model provides three levels of support: Level 1 offers information and signposting; Level 2 provides light-touch support and access to group sessions; and Level 3 delivers intensive, regular support for families with more complex needs. Group activities remain a core element of the service, with a range of geographically and thematically focused groups delivered throughout 2024–25—many of which were co-designed with kinship carers and children.

In addition to local support, all families are offered access to the Children First Financial Wellbeing Service, which provides advice on income maximisation, debt, and budgeting, as well as the Children First Support Line, a year-round digital helpline offering whole-family support. This integrated model ensures that kinship families receive holistic, accessible, and meaningful support.

Adoption Assessments and Family Matching

Recruiting and assessing adoptive families remains a vital part of our work, ensuring children from across the country, who are assessed as requiring permanent care, can be matched with safe, permanent, and loving homes. In 2024–25, we successfully approved three adoptive families and were also able to match four children with families. This reflects our continued commitment to finding the right families for children, regardless of geography, and highlights the national reach and impact of our adoption service.

Concurrency adoption pilot

This year, we were pleased to pilot our first concurrency adoption placement—a significant milestone for our service. In a concurrency placement, a baby is placed with prospective adopters at birth while parallel planning continues. This approach is designed to minimise the number of moves that a child experiences in early life, offering greater stability and continuity of care. Research shows that outcomes for babies in concurrency placements are significantly improved, particularly in terms of attachment and emotional development. We look forward to building on this pilot and exploring how concurrency can become a more established part of our adoption pathway.

Post-Adoption Support

Post-adoption support continues to be a vital and demanding aspect of our service, as we work alongside adoptive families navigating a range of complex and evolving needs. Over the past year, we have been exploring new and flexible approaches to enhance the support we offer. This includes the introduction of therapeutic services tailored to individual family circumstances, as well as trialling self-directed, funded support packages. These initiatives aim to ease pressure on families and promote positive, sustainable outcomes for both children and their caregivers.

Launching the Parent Partner scheme

This year, we were proud to launch East Lothian's parent partner scheme, a new initiative designed to provide practical, relationship-based support to adoptive families who may be facing ongoing challenges with limited support networks. The scheme introduces *parent partners*—individuals who are either experienced adoptive parents or professionals working directly with children and young people, such as social workers, family support workers, or teachers.

Parent partners are trauma-informed and trauma-responsive, with a strong understanding of the complex experiences many adopted children have faced. After a short assessment process and registration under fostering regulations, parent partners are approved through

the adoption panel. They begin by building trust with the family and child, gradually progressing to offering short periods of respite, including day visits and, eventually, overnight stays.

This innovative model aims to reduce stress for adoptive families, promote stability, and improve outcomes for children by offering consistent, trusted support from someone who truly understands their journey.

Since launching the scheme, we have successfully recruited and matched our first parent partner with an adoptive family—an arrangement that has worked extremely well and demonstrated the value of this model in practice. Building on this success, we are now exploring the potential to extend the scheme to include kinship and foster carers. This development would allow more families to benefit from consistent, trauma-informed support, helping to reduce stress and promote stability for both carers and children.

Panels/Governance

Our permanence, adoption, and fostering panels play a vital role in ensuring robust decision-making and high standards of care. These panels manage complex and often life changing business and rely on highly skilled administrative support to ensure they are run efficiently and effectively.

Permanence/adoption panel

Our permanence panel members come from a variety of backgrounds currently including social work, adoptive parents, Children's Panel and independent members.

Recommendations of appointment to the panel are made by the Panel Co-ordinator to the Agency Decision Maker, with panel chairs and members being supported by regular training and annual reviews.

The panel's role is to ensure there are comprehensive assessments and review of permanent carer applications, matching arrangements and to consider permanent care plans for children. The panel makes recommendations which are passed to the Council's Agency Decision Maker, who will ratify and endorse, or otherwise, the recommendations received from the panel. The Decision Maker is required to make a decision within 14 days of the panel date.

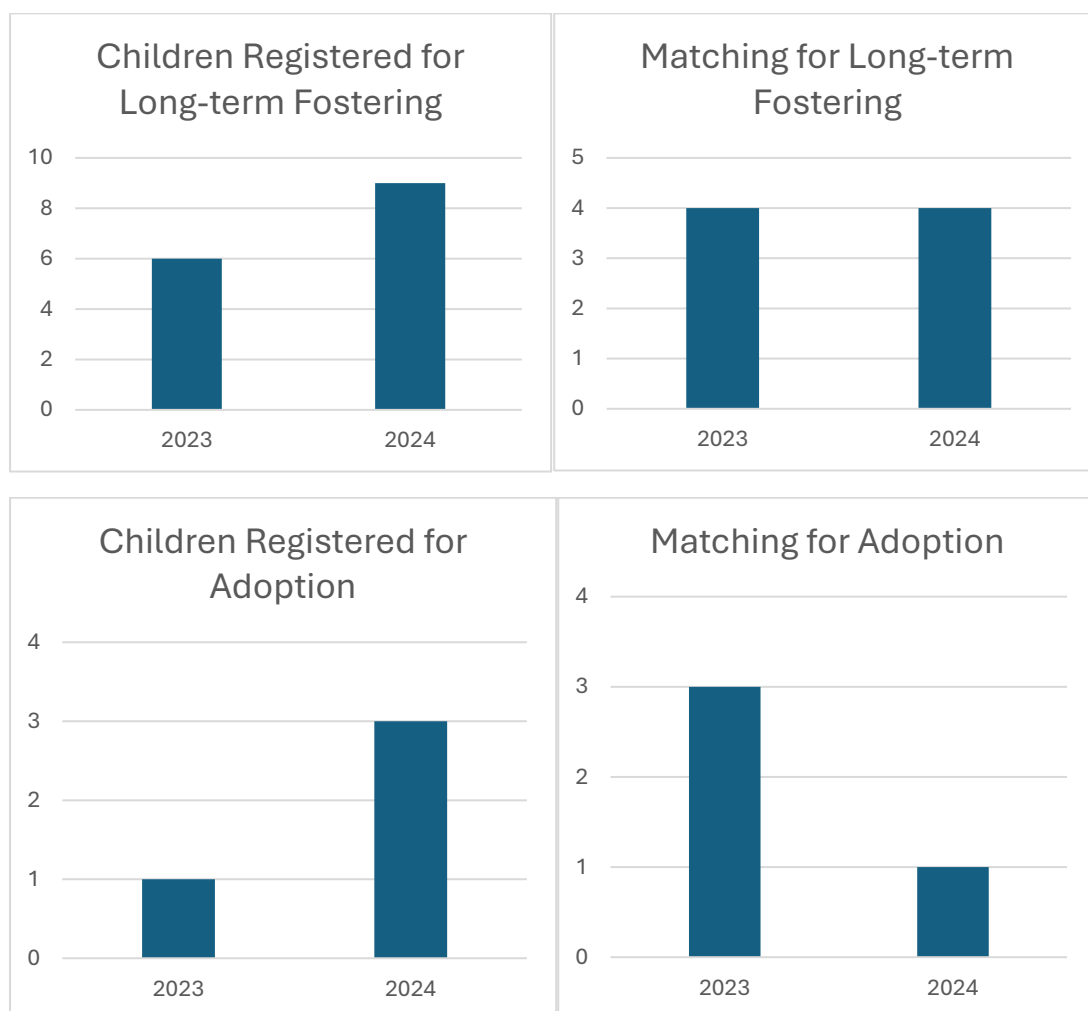
East Lothian Council follow the practice of inviting birth parents to permanence registration panels and during the year April 2024 to March 2025 birth parents attended on six out of nine occasions which represents an attendance rate of 66.6%

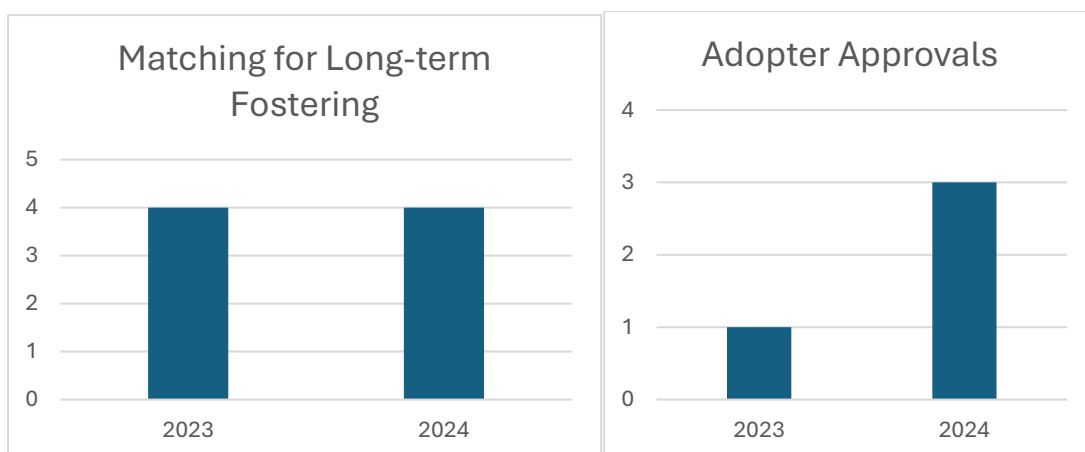
Between April 2024 and March 2025, the permanence panel met on 19 occasions.

Permanence panel business April 2024 to March 2025

- 3 children were registered for Adoption
- 9 children were registered for permanent fostering placements
- 1 child was matched with prospective adopters
- 4 children were matched with permanent fostering families
- 3 Adopters were approved
- 1 Permanent foster carer approval
- 3 Adopters were reviewed

Permanence Panel Business Graphs April 2023 to March 2024 and April 2024 to March 2025





Fostering panel

Members of East Lothian Council's fostering panel come from a variety of backgrounds including Housing, service development, retired social workers, nursery education and other local authority social workers and foster carers. We have three fostering panel chairs who manage the meetings on a rota basis. Recommendations of appointment to the panel are made by the Panel Co-ordinator to the Agency Decision Maker, with panel chairs and members being supported by regular training and reviews.

The fostering panel make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to:

- Foster carer approvals, reviews and termination of approvals.
- Continuing carer and host family approvals.
- Share the Care approvals and reviews.

Foster carers are initially reviewed by the panel 12 months after their approval date and then every two years thereafter, or when there is a request to change the remit of their approval.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the fostering panel met on 15 Occasions.

Fostering panel business April 2024 to March 2025

11 Foster Carer/Nominated Carer Approvals

14 Foster Carer Reviews

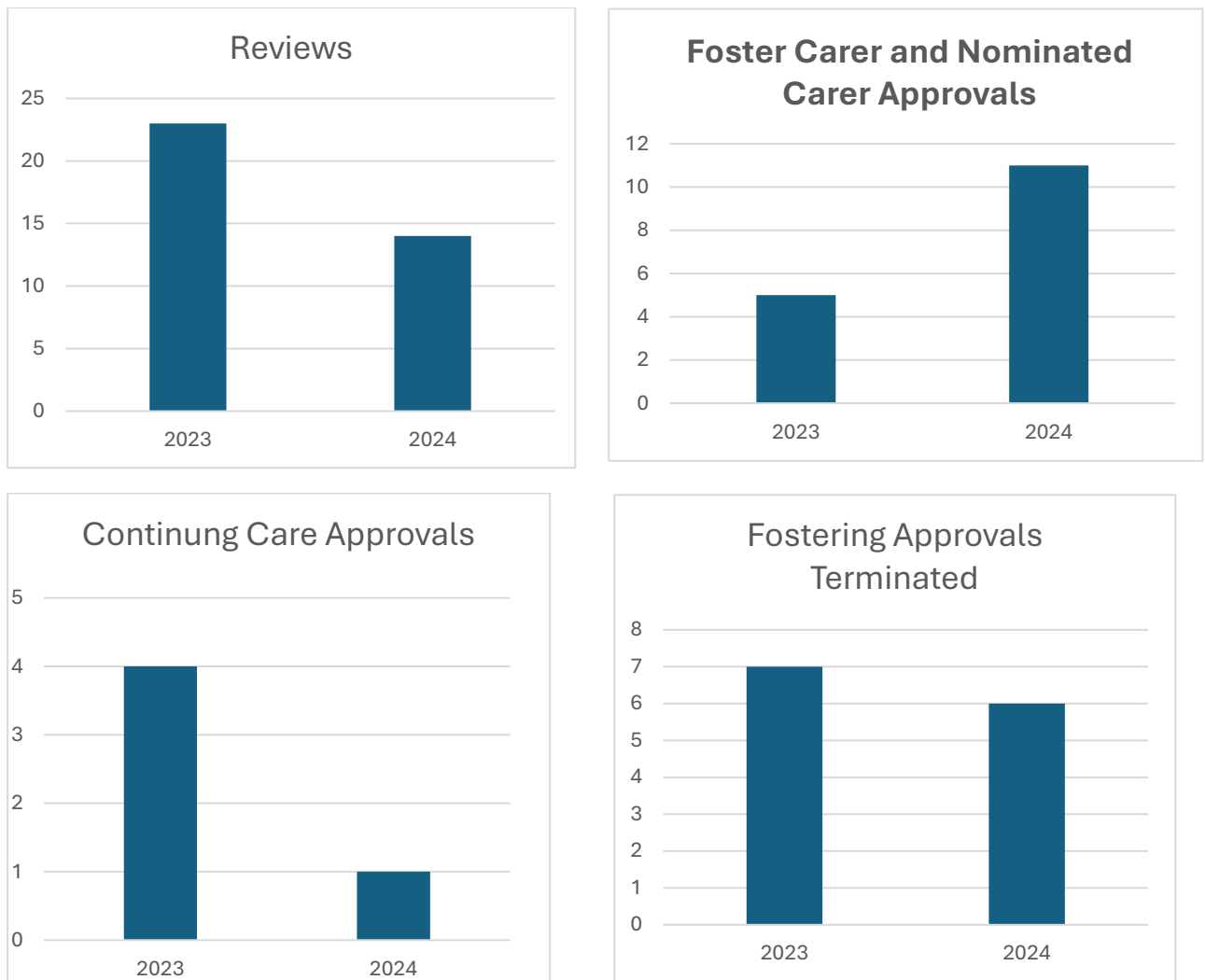
6 Foster Carer Terminations

2 Share the Care Reviews

4 Share the Care Terminations

1 Continuing Care Approval

Fostering Panel Business Graphs April 2023 to March 2024 and April 2024 to March 2025



Permanence/adoption and fostering panels also have business and management meetings, which are held on a twice-yearly basis and are chaired by the panel co-ordinator. These forums allow the opportunity to discuss and address any process issues, practice developments, as well as providing an important quality assurance function.

Continuing Care in Scotland

Continuing Care offers young people who are/were previously looked after, the right to remain in their placement until they are 21 years of age. Between April 2024 and March 2025, one fostering placement was converted to continuing care, and this brought the total to 11 young people in continuing care placements being offered by our foster carers as of 31st March 2025. Remaining in their care placement is the best outcome for these young people, as it provides them with stability and ongoing support and removes the pressure for them to leave care before they are ready for independent living. It does, however, inevitably impact on the number of fostering placements we have available for other children. During the last 12 months, six young people moved on from continuing care to independent living situations, however, many of our carers continue to offer them ongoing support.

Kinship care panel

The East Lothian Council kinship care panel benefits from the diverse expertise of its members, who bring a wide range of professional backgrounds to the role. The panel includes experienced social workers currently serving within children's services, as well as representatives from valued third sector organisations. Leadership of the panel is shared by two dedicated chairs, who facilitate meetings on a rotational basis to ensure consistency and collaborative decision-making.

The kinship care panel make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to:

- Kinship carer approvals, reviews and termination of approvals.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the kinship care panel met on 13 Occasions, up from 9 in the period 2023/24.

Kinship care Panel Business April 2024 to March 2025

13 kinship care panels & 13 kinship carer approvals.

Integrated Practice Across Fostering, Adoption, and Kinship Services

Improving transitions for children

One of the key areas of development this year has been improving the experience of children transitioning between placements. This important work has been led by a senior practitioner in the fostering team, who has pioneered a new, child-centred approach to planned moves. Leadership in this area has been instrumental in shaping a more thoughtful and trauma-informed process and the team presented this work at a national social work conference.

The new approach includes the introduction of a matching proforma to improve placement matching, as well as pre-move planning meetings for all planned transitions. These changes aim to reduce the number of placement moves, support children in processing feelings of loss, and help them stay connected to their personal journey and the important people within it.

This initiative is grounded in research and best practice, which highlight that one of the most distressing aspects of care is the experience of broken attachments. By improving how we support children through transitions, we aim to reduce this sense of impermanence and promote greater emotional security and self-esteem. Written guidance for carers is currently in development to support the implementation of this model.

Therapeutic work

The team remains dedicated to enhancing our in-house therapeutic provision, with a clear focus on building sustainable, trauma-informed support for children and young people. By strengthening our internal capacity, we aim to reduce reliance on external providers—delivering more consistent care while also achieving potential cost efficiencies.

Enthuse - play therapy service

This year marked a significant milestone with the launch of our in-house play therapy service. A family support worker in the team has qualified as play therapist and now works primarily with adoption, kinship, and foster families, providing therapeutic support to 13 children and young people between September 2024 to September 2025. The service, based at a local primary school, offers a safe and nurturing environment where children can explore their experiences through evidence-based therapeutic play.

This development reflects our ongoing commitment to expanding trauma-informed, relationship-based support within the community, and to building on the strengths and skills of our existing team.

Therapeutic Life Story Work

A key milestone this year has been the training of four social workers in the Richard Rose Model of Therapeutic Life Story Work. Workers are now actively engaging with children and young people across the service, helping them make sense of their experiences and build stronger emotional resilience.

Support Groups:

BUSS® LEAPlets: Supporting Early Development Through Play

In 2024, the fostering, kinship, and adoption teams secured funding from the Social Workers' Educational Trust to implement the BUSS® (Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems) LEAPlets® program—an early year's intervention designed to support children under six whose early development may have been disrupted.

LEAPlets® is an 11-week, play-based group intervention that promotes secure attachment and supports children's physical, sensory, and emotional development. The program structure includes:

- Week 1: A preparatory session for parents and carers.
- Weeks 2–11: Joint sessions involving children and their caregivers.

The intervention focuses on three foundational sensorimotor systems—vestibular (balance and movement), proprioceptive (body awareness), and tactile (touch and sensory processing)—which are critical for children's ability to engage in learning, social interaction, and emotional regulation.

We are proud to have launched Scotland's first LEAPlets group in January 2025, supporting children aged 2.5 to 4.5 years. Sessions were delivered under the supervision of the BUSS® founder. Participating families reported increased awareness of their children's developmental needs and observed notable improvements in confidence, engagement, and enjoyment among the children.

Building on the success of the initial group, the teams plan to deliver two LEAPlets cohorts annually. The program will continue to welcome families from fostering, adoptive, and kinship backgrounds, contributing to a broader strategy of early intervention and developmental support within permanence services.

Neurodiversity carer support groups

Since January 2025, two dedicated carer-led support groups have been established to meet the growing needs of carers supporting neurodiverse care-experienced children. These groups—one for foster carers and adopters, and one for kinship carers—offer a structured yet informal space for open dialogue, peer support, and shared learning.

Facilitated discussions are guided by feedback from carers and enriched by contributions from guest specialists. Topics to date have included neurological functioning and identity development, with future sessions planned on neurodiversity in girls, educational advocacy, sensory processing, and inclusive communication strategies.

Attendance remains strong, with 10–16 carers participating in each session, either online or in person. These groups reflect a collaborative and responsive approach to supporting carers navigating the complexities of neurodiversity.

Children’s activity group

In January 2025, the teams launched a dedicated children’s activity group aimed at strengthening relationships among care-experienced children and young people. The group provides a welcoming and inclusive space for children from fostering, adoptive, and kinship backgrounds to connect, build friendships, and—where possible—spend time with siblings in a relaxed and enjoyable setting.

Monthly events have included a variety of creative, active, and nature-based experiences such as:

- Baking sessions
- Trampoline Park visits
- Easter crafts and egg hunts
- Woodland walks
- A beach day outing

Each event has been well attended, with participation ranging from 10 to 25 children. Feedback from both children and carers has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the value of shared experiences in fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Planning is underway for the remainder of the year’s events, with a continued focus on inclusive, fun, and relationship-building activities. The group has not only supported the development of peer relationships among children but has also fostered connections among carers, contributing to a broader network of support within East Lothian’s caring community.

Training and Support Across Fostering, Adoption, and Kinship Services

We remain committed to investing in the development, wellbeing, and resilience of our foster carers, as well as the broader network of kinship and adoptive families.

Listening and responding to foster carer feedback

In October 2024, a Foster Carer Consultation was held to gather views on training provision. In response, several key improvements were implemented:

- A dedicated fostering team Facebook group was established to share upcoming training opportunities.
- A colour-coded training calendar was introduced to clearly highlight mandatory training and support advance planning.
- Training sessions were scheduled with carers' needs in mind—avoiding school holidays, splitting courses across multiple days, and offering sessions during school hours where possible.
- A blended approach was maintained, offering both in-person and online training to ensure accessibility and flexibility.

Expanding access to core training

Carers expressed a need for more frequent access to mandatory training. In response, three children's services colleagues were identified and trained as facilitators for Team Teach, a programme designed to equip carers with strategies for managing challenging behaviour with confidence and care. These facilitators will also oversee re-accreditation, monitor training expiry dates, and offer consultation where needed.

Team Teach has been incorporated into the 2025 training calendar and will be delivered regularly throughout the year.

Building practical skills

In addition to behavioural support, First Aid training is now being offered to ensure carers are equipped with essential emergency response skills. These developments reflect our ongoing commitment to building a confident, well-supported, and knowledgeable caring community.

Strengthening partnerships and expanding training opportunities

In March 2025, East Lothian children's services renewed its memberships with the Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland (AFKA) and CoramBAAF. These

partnerships continue to provide valuable access to free, high-quality training courses for carers, supporting their ongoing learning and development.

Additionally, Penumbra has delivered both in-person and online training sessions focused on self-harm awareness. These sessions have been well-received by carers, who found the content informative and supportive in helping them better understand and respond to the needs of the children and young people in their care.

This year, we were also pleased to offer funded places for carers on the *Care Excellence Programme* delivered by Richard Rose THEiA. This comprehensive five-day online training course equips carers with essential knowledge and skills in areas such as child development, attachment, the impact of trauma, Therapeutic Life Story Work, caring for children with complex trauma, self-care, and managing vicarious trauma.

We are actively encouraging all carers to take part in this valuable learning opportunity, which supports their ongoing development and enhances the quality of care provided to children and young people across our services.

In January 2025, post-approval training for foster carers was successfully re-established, marking a renewed commitment to continuous learning and support. This training is co-facilitated in partnership with Midlothian Council's fostering team, promoting collaboration and shared expertise across local authorities.

Training opportunities have been extended to foster carers, adoptive parents, and kinship carers, ensuring a consistent and inclusive approach to supporting all members of the caring community in their vital roles.

Improving engagement with post-approval training and online learning

Whilst post-approval training for carers was successfully re-established in January 2025, attendance has unfortunately been lower than anticipated. Currently delivered in-person at Danderhall, Midlothian, the sessions have been offered at varied times—including evenings and during school hours—to accommodate different schedules. However, these efforts have not significantly improved uptake.

In response, we are actively evaluating ways to increase participation. Potential improvements include offering a hybrid model that combines in-person and online delivery, as well as hosting sessions at a more accessible East Lothian venue to better meet carers' needs.

In parallel, the *LearnPro* platform has been revamped to enhance user navigation and accessibility. While we've seen an encouraging increase in the number of foster carers registering on the platform, completion rates for training modules remain low. We are exploring further strategies to support carers in engaging with and completing online learning, ensuring they can access the knowledge and tools they need in a flexible and user-friendly format.

Upcoming training opportunities

A comprehensive training programme has been developed to support the ongoing learning and development of foster carers, kinship carers, and adoptive parents throughout the year. The schedule reflects a commitment to equipping carers with the knowledge and skills needed to respond to the complex needs of the children and young people they support.

2025 training schedule

- **January:** Record Keeping and Report Writing
- **February:** Trauma-Informed Practice
- **March:** The Impact of Substance and Alcohol Misuse
- **April:** Self-Harm Awareness (delivered by Penumbra)
- **May:** Understanding and Responding to Sexual Behaviour Problems
- **June:** Advocacy, the UNCRC, and Participation Opportunities for Young People (facilitated by Who Cares? Scotland)
- **August:** The Impact of Domestic Abuse
- **September:** Continuing Care and Transitions to Adulthood
- **October & November:** Topics to be confirmed, ensuring responsiveness to emerging needs and carer feedback

This programme reflects our commitment to delivering relevant, timely, and evidence-based training that supports carers in providing safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate care.

Enhancing trauma-informed training through co-production

We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of our mandatory training programme, with a particular focus on *Trauma-Informed Practice*, *Brain Development*, and *Self-Regulation*. While recent training delivered by Cyrenians on *Understand, Communicate and Resolve* was positively received, our evaluation highlighted the opportunity to develop a more tailored approach. As a result, we have committed to designing a bespoke training programme in collaboration with foster carers, ensuring it reflects their lived experiences and practical needs.

This new initiative is being developed in partnership with East Lothian Council's senior project officer (person centred/trauma informed) and the Educational Psychology team, with the aim of creating a holistic, trauma-informed framework. A foster carer focus group will be established to support co-production, and we hope to introduce co-facilitation of training sessions by foster carers in the longer term—recognising the unique value of their insight and experience.

As part of our induction and first-year training pathway, carers are expected to complete the following core modules:

- **Child Protection Awareness and Response – Level 1**
- **Adult Support and Protection – Level 1**
- **Paediatric First Aid** (for those caring for children aged 0–12)
- **Emergency First Aid** (for those caring for children and young people aged 12+)
- **Team Teach – Level 1**
- **Trauma-Informed Practice – Level 1**
- **Trauma-Skilled Practice – Level 2**

This evolving programme reflects our commitment to delivering high-quality, responsive training that empowers carers and strengthens outcomes for children and young people.

Conclusion

We believe that across the fostering, adoption and kinship care service, we have continued to positively develop our practice in accordance with relevant legislation, local and national policies, the assessed needs of the children, young people, carers and families with whom we are working alongside, within a trauma informed and therapeutic manner.

In the coming year, we will focus on continuing to expand our digital recruitment strategy, including the launch of a dedicated service microsite to enhance visibility and engagement.

We will embed the transitions guidance fully into practice, supported by the publication of carer-facing tools. Parent Partner support will be upscaled across both kinship and fostering pathways, while hybrid learning uptake will be increased through targeted completion goals for LearnPro.

We will also broaden our therapeutic supports to all carers and reduce external expenditure by investing in in-house provision, delivering more sustainable support for children and families.

We are proud of the innovative training programmes, strengthened partnerships, and trauma-informed practices that have taken root this year with regards to supporting all children, young people and carers. Most importantly, we are proud of the children and young people at the heart of everything we do—whose voices, experiences, and futures continue to inspire us.

Thank you to everyone who plays a part in this vital work.



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British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact us via **www.contactscotland-bsl.org**

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