

North Yorkshire Council

Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17th September 2025

Fostering Service Update

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides an overview of the Fostering Service with a specific focus on the numbers of children currently Looked After and the number of Foster Carers within North Yorkshire and the support provided to North Yorkshire Foster Carers.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 North Yorkshire continues to see an increasing number of children requiring Foster Care, reflecting wider national trends and local pressures. In response, the Fostering Service has worked tirelessly to meet this growing need through the provision of placements with both unrelated mainstream foster carers and Kinship carers (connected individuals such as family members or close friends).

2.2 While we continue to recruit and support mainstream carers, a growing proportion of children are being placed with Kinship carers under temporary approval, pending full fostering assessments. This reflects our commitment to keeping children within their networks wherever possible. This work aligns directly to North Yorkshire's practice model in working with families to ensure children can remain within the family network and communities.

2.3 North Yorkshire remains low in its use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). Instead, children are placed with our own approved foster carers, ensuring greater consistency and oversight, stronger relationships between carers and local teams and better alignment with our values and practice model. This approach supports local placement stability, cost-effectiveness, and continuity of care.

2.4 In June 2024, a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee highlighted a shift in fostering trends across North Yorkshire:

- There were more children living in foster care than at any point in the past decade.
- This increase coincided with a decrease in the number of new unrelated foster carer approvals.
- At the same time, there was a notable rise in children being placed with Kinship carers (family or known individuals) under temporary approvals, while full fostering assessments were completed.

3.0 UPDATE ON FOSTERING PERFORMANCE

3.1 To provide an update since the last report to Oversight and Scrutiny Committee here are the key headlines:

- There remain more children living in foster care than at any point in the past decade. The current number of children in foster care has increased up to 426 children at the end of Q1 2025/26 an increase of 6 children compared to Q4 2024/25 (n=420). As a year on year (Q1 2024/25) comparison the number has increased by 51 children a +14% increase – see appendix 1.
- There are currently 75% (Q1 2025/26) of looked after children in foster care. North Yorkshire's performance is significantly stronger than Yorkshire and the Humber at 70%, statistical neighbours 67.6% and nationally 67% - see appendix 2. As a year on year comparison at Q1 2024/25 there were also 75% of looked after children in foster care.
- This increase coincided with a decrease in the number of new unrelated foster carer approvals. Which have seen an improvement at the end of Q1 2025/26 up to 7 unrelated foster carer approvals compared to 6 unrelated approvals at the end of Q4 2024/25 – see appendix 3. As a year on year comparison at the end of Q1 2024/25 there were 9 unrelated foster carer approvals.
- At the same time, there was a notable rise in children being placed with Kinship carers (family or known individuals) under temporary approvals, while full fostering assessments were completed. There are currently 179 children placed with connected carers at the end of Q1 2025/26, this is an increase of 11 children compared to Q4 2024/25 (168 children placed). As a year on year comparison at the same point last year (Q1 2024/25) there were 166 children placed with a Kinship carer representing a +8% increase.

This trend reflects:

- A growing reliance on Kinship care and network-based placements.
- The strength of North Yorkshire's practice model, which prioritises keeping children within their existing support networks.
- The need for continued investment in assessment capacity, training, and support for connected carers to ensure safe and sustainable placements.

3.2 There is a shortage of applicants coming forward to foster which is a national picture and one that a lot of Local Authorities are acutely seeing as an issue. However, encouragingly we have seen a significant increase in the number of enquiries received. In North Yorkshire we have seen our enquiries at the end of Q1 2025/26 increase significantly to 67 enquiries received compared to 42 at the end of Q4 2024/25, this is the highest peak since Q3 2023/24 with 75 enquires received, this was related to a targeted exercise to the Homes from Ukraine facilitators when the programme was coming to an end. Before that there were 109 received after the pandemic at Q1 2022/23. North Yorkshire is not immune to the national foster care crisis but is actively driving marketing and recruitment to try and combat this. – see appendix 4. As a year on year comparison at the end of Q1 2024/25 there were 42 enquires demonstrating an increase of 15 more enquiries received in the period.

3.3 Newly approved unrelated carers have increased at the end of Q1 2025/26 to 7 compared to 6 at the end of Q4 2024/25, after experiencing a decline in Q2 2024/25 and Q3 2024/25, at the same point last year at Q1 2024/25 there were 9 unrelated approvals a decrease of 2 carers year on year.

3.4 The number of approved foster carers has increased to 538 up from 518, Q4 2024/25, the number of approved households is up to 324 compared to 311 (Q4 2024/25). The consistent marketing and recruitment activity is making a real difference for the service. At the same point last year there were 512 approved foster carers, this represents a +26 carers a +5% increase year on year.

3.5 The age profile of carers remains stable with the age 55-59 cohort remaining the largest cohort for kinship and unrelated carers. De-registrations of all foster carer households decreased

from 23 in Q4 2023/24, to 13 at the end of Q1 2025/26 which is a significant improvement of 10 less carers deregistering, this will help the service with placement stability. As a year on year comparison at Q1 2024/25 there were 22 deregistration of foster carers, demonstrating 11 more deregistration's in the period of carers.

3.6 North Yorkshire has responded to this with different recruitment campaigns and adapting our marketing approach. The service has just run a short breaks campaign which received excellent coverage across the BBC. The news piece has received coverage on BBC Look North main 6pm news on July 15th, as well as being the main news item in the lunchtime bulletin. Please see attached link: [BBC look North short term carers fostering segment](#) . It aired in multiple areas of the region including Yorkshire, Cumbria, and Tyne Tees. The online PR coverage was the top story on the BBC website all day on July 15th and 16th July. The service has continued with the golden hello initiative for newly approve unrelated carers.

4.0 CURRENT SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 North Yorkshire is committed to supporting foster carers not only through training and supervision, but also by promoting access to enriching experiences that benefit both carers and the children they care for. There is ongoing work to standardise the leisure pass offer across the county, ensuring that all foster carers, regardless of geographic location receive a consistent and equitable package of benefits. This includes access to local leisure centres, cultural events, and recreational activities.

4.2 A number of foster carers have recently benefited from free tickets to the Open Air Theatre in Scarborough, where they have enjoyed concerts and performances with the children in their care. These opportunities have promoted positive shared experiences between children and their carers.

4.3 North Yorkshire has invested in an updated version of its "Skills to Foster" course, which serves as the preparation programme for all prospective foster carers. This foundational training is a critical part of the assessment journey, equipping applicants with the knowledge, insight, and confidence needed to begin their fostering role. The updated course will continue to provide a realistic view of fostering, including challenges and rewards while offering opportunities for reflection, discussion, and peer learning. Ultimately it will ensure carers feel prepared and supported from the outset of their journey. The content includes the following:

1. What children need –including why children need fostering, their development, including brain development, and how to meet their needs
2. Fostering relationships – including the importance of relationships, children's rights, the team around the child and planning, working with birth families and building support networks for the fostering household
3. A protective and loving home – including understanding harm, risk, abuse and neglect, safeguarding and child protection, disclosures and protective care
4. Therapeutic care – including how to create a therapeutic environment, attachment, impact of trauma, how to build connection and understand behaviour, therapeutic recordings and the importance of self-care.
5. Supporting Identity – including understanding identity, belonging, memory and life stories, EDI, supporting diverse needs of children and cultural competence.
6. Transitions and Endings – the impact of separation and loss, supporting stability, child-centred transitions, preparing for adulthood and more.

4.4 The Mockingbird Family Model is a pioneering approach to foster care that aims to replicate the structure and support of an extended family. North Yorkshire has three established Mockingbird Hubs with two in the East and one in the West and has just recruited a fourth Hub Home in Selby. We are also planning a step down hub from the Children's Homes.

4.5 The model creates small communities called constellations—groups of 6 to 10 fostering households led by a hub home carer. Key Features of the model are:

- Peer support: Foster carers share experiences and advice
- Respite care: Emergency sleepovers and planned breaks
- Social connection: Regular events to reduce isolation
- Stability for children: Stronger relationships and fewer placement breakdowns
- Flexibility: Supports various placement types including Kinship care

4.6 The current constellations are made up of the following:

Constellation one (East)	7 fostering families 12 looked after children
Constellation two (East)	7 fostering families 15 looked after children
Constellation three (West)	9 fostering families 20 looked after children
Constellation four (South East)	In development

4.7 The impact for those children who have unfortunately experienced breakdowns, has been minimised due to the fact that they have then been cared for by people within the constellation who they know and have built a positive relationship with. Children who live within the constellations have opportunities to extend their family network and therefore strengthen their support as they development and transition into adulthood.

4.8 North Yorkshire’s Fostering Service is currently rolling out Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families (TCIF) training to all staff and foster carers. This initiative aligns with wider council practice, as TCIF is increasingly being adopted across multiple services to support children and young people in distress.

4.9 TCIF is a trauma-informed approach designed to help carers and professionals prevent and de-escalate crises while also strengthening carers’ ability to respond therapeutically to challenging behaviour. We hope it will promote placement stability and emotional safety for children through building a shared language and consistent practice across services. In doing this we hope it will help reduce placement breakdowns while improving outcomes for children with complex emotional needs and foster a culture of resilience, empathy, and proactive support.

4.10 In July 2025 the Foster Service held its Bi Annual conference which was run slightly differently this year with it being referred to as a ‘Family Fun Day’. In the morning Foster Carers had a training session while the children completed a range of activities and then all came together for a picnic lunch before family activities in the afternoon. The day concluded with the presentation of long service awards, recognising the dedication and commitment of foster carers across the county. The event ended with a celebration of achievements, reinforcing the value placed on carers and the positive impact they have on children’s lives. This new format was well received and reflected the service’s commitment to training, recognition, and relationship-building within the fostering community.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

5.1 North Yorkshire has a strong practice model that prioritises keeping children within their existing family and support networks wherever possible. This approach reflects our commitment to

minimising disruption and promoting stability for looked-after children. A significant proportion of children in care are placed with family members or close connections, rather than with unrelated foster carers. These carers are initially granted temporary approval as Kinship Connected Carers, allowing children to remain in familiar environments while a full fostering assessment is completed.

5.2 This model reduces the emotional impact of entering care and being placed away from familiar adults, maintains cultural, familial, and community ties. It also supports long-term stability and permanency planning.

5.3 Fostering North Yorkshire ensures that Kinship carers are provided with training, supervision, and practical support throughout the assessment process. This ensures they are equipped with the skills and confidence to care for children under different legal orders, including Special Guardianship. We support carers through an open-door policy, offering ongoing advice and assistance beyond formal approval.

5.4 Fostering North Yorkshire is committed to ensuring that children do not experience the intrusion of being a Looked After Child for longer than is necessary. We actively support timely and appropriate permanency planning, recognising that long-term stability is best achieved through legal orders that reflect a child's need for security and belonging.

6.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS

6.1 The fostering service has a significant impact on other services both within the council and externally. Fostering services in North Yorkshire play a vital role in supporting children in care. When fostering is well supported and stable, it reduces pressure across multiple services by promoting placement stability, educational engagement, emotional wellbeing, and safeguarding.

6.2 The North Yorkshire Fostering Service is committed to delivering high-quality, child-centred care through strong collaboration with partner agencies including Health, Education, Housing, and Youth Services. We recognise that fostering is not an isolated function but a significant part of the wider care system.

6.3 At the end of 2023/24 Looked after children in foundation year obtaining a good level of development was reported as 54.5, this is higher than Yorkshire & the Humber (44.8), Statistical neighbours (41.1) and national statistics (41.4).

6.4 Furthermore, Looked after children achieving a 9-4 pass in English and Maths performance is strong with 22.6% achieving, North Yorkshire performance is strong against Yorkshire and the Humber statistical neighbours 18.8% and nationally 18.1%. See appendix 5.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 North Yorkshire continues to offer a strong financial package to approved foster carers, recognising the vital role they play in supporting children and young people. In April 2025, Foster Care Payments were increased by 2.5%, in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI)—the standard calculation used in fostering. This ensures carers are supported in line with inflation and rising living costs.

7.2 Regional benchmarking confirms that North Yorkshire remains generous in its allowances compared to neighbouring authorities. The increased payment rates ensure that North Yorkshire's allowances remain above the national minimum set by the Government.

7.3 The Day Care rate was increased to £9.77 per hour, aligning with 80% of the National Living Wage being introduced in April 2025.

7.4 In 2023/2024, additional financial enhancements were introduced:

- An above-inflation increase to the Accredited Foster Carer Premium
- Introduction of bridging payments for Accredited Foster Carers
- A new policy to cover the first 100 miles of travel for all foster carers, which had previously been expected to be paid from the child's or young person's allowance

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 All staff within the Fostering Service regularly undertake compulsory training in information security and data protection, ensuring compliance with statutory responsibilities and best practice in safeguarding sensitive information.

8.2 Following recent changes in the management team, agency advisors to the Fostering Panel have participated in a dedicated training session to ensure they remain fully informed of the legal and statutory framework underpinning fostering practice and decision-making.

8.3 The service benefits from access to a specialist lawyer in adoption and fostering, which provides valuable legal oversight and guidance—particularly in relation to court proceedings, Kinship arrangements, and permanency planning. This legal expertise strengthens the quality and timeliness of assessments, reports, and care planning under the Public Law Outline.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Fostering Service in North Yorkshire is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion across all aspects of its work. This includes recruitment, training, placement matching, and ongoing support for carers and children.

9.2 The service recognises the importance of ensuring that children in care are supported to maintain their identity, including cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage. Placement decisions are made with consideration of the child's background and emotional needs.

9.3 Efforts are ongoing to increase the diversity of foster carers, particularly from underrepresented groups such as Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and carers with disabilities. Inclusive recruitment activity and marketing are being reviewed to support this aim.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 While the direct environmental impact of fostering services is relatively low, North Yorkshire's Fostering Service recognises its role in contributing to the council's wider climate change and sustainability goals.

10.2 The service is committed to reducing unnecessary travel by promoting virtual meetings, training, and supervision where appropriate. In addition, we encourage the use of local placements to minimise travel for children, carers, and professionals. We also consider how we can promote digital documentation and communication to reduce paper use where appropriate.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

11.1 The Fostering Service in North Yorkshire continues to provide a strong and responsive service to children and foster carers across the county, despite ongoing pressures around the recruitment of mainstream carers.

11.2 The county's practice model, which prioritises keeping children within their existing networks, has led to an increase in placements with Kinship carers under temporary approval, while full fostering assessments are completed. This approach supports stability, continuity, and emotional wellbeing for children.

11.3 North Yorkshire has maintained a low reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies, with the majority of children placed with our own approved foster carers, ensuring consistency, quality, and alignment with local values.

11.4 The service continues to innovate and invest in support for carers, including:

- The rollout of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families (TCIF) training
- The expansion of the Mockingbird Service
- Investment in the Skills to Foster preparation course
- Lobbying of the leisure pass offer to ensure equitable access across the county
- Continued marketing and recruitment activity to attract more carers to North Yorkshire

11.5 Collaborative working with Health, Education, and other partners remains central to meeting statutory responsibilities and supporting carers.

11.6 The service is committed to promoting permanency and reducing the time children spend in care, including through support for Special Guardianship Orders and ongoing assistance for carers post-order.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the overview and progress of the Fostering Service in North Yorkshire.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 Number of children in foster care
Appendix 2 Children looked after comparisons
Appendix 3 New Foster carer households
Appendix 4 Initial Enquiries
Appendix 5 Looked after children attainment

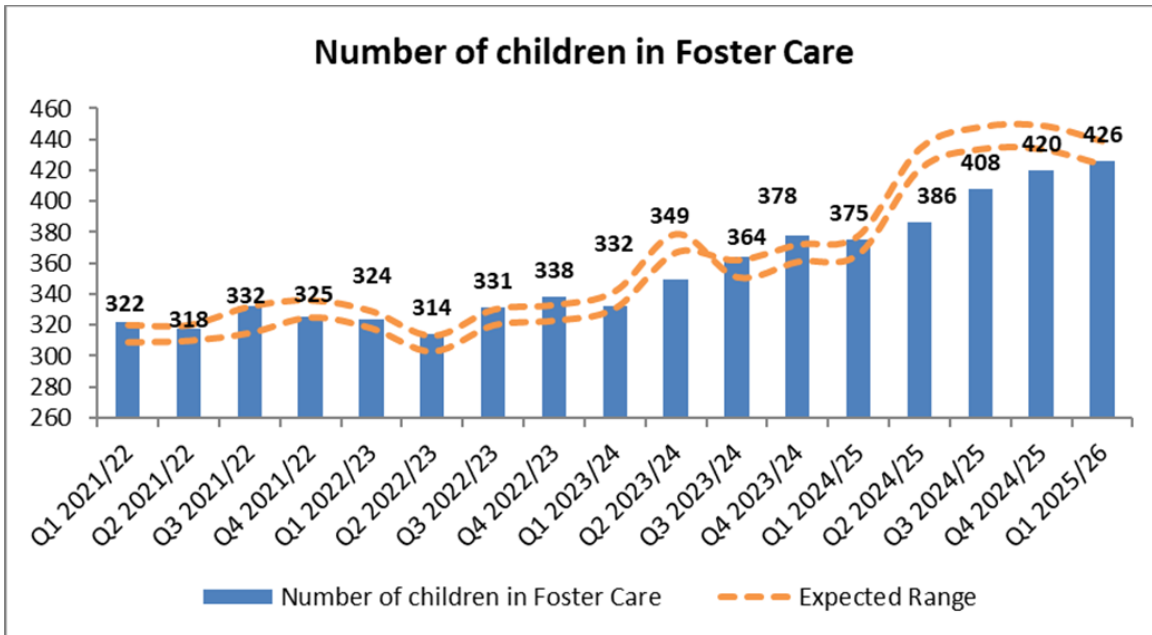
Sir Stuart Carlton
Corporate Director – Children and Young Peoples Services
County Hall
Northallerton
13th August 2025

Report Author – Rosie Appleby Head of Placement Support
Presenter of Report – Rosie Appleby Head of Placement Support

Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.

Appendices

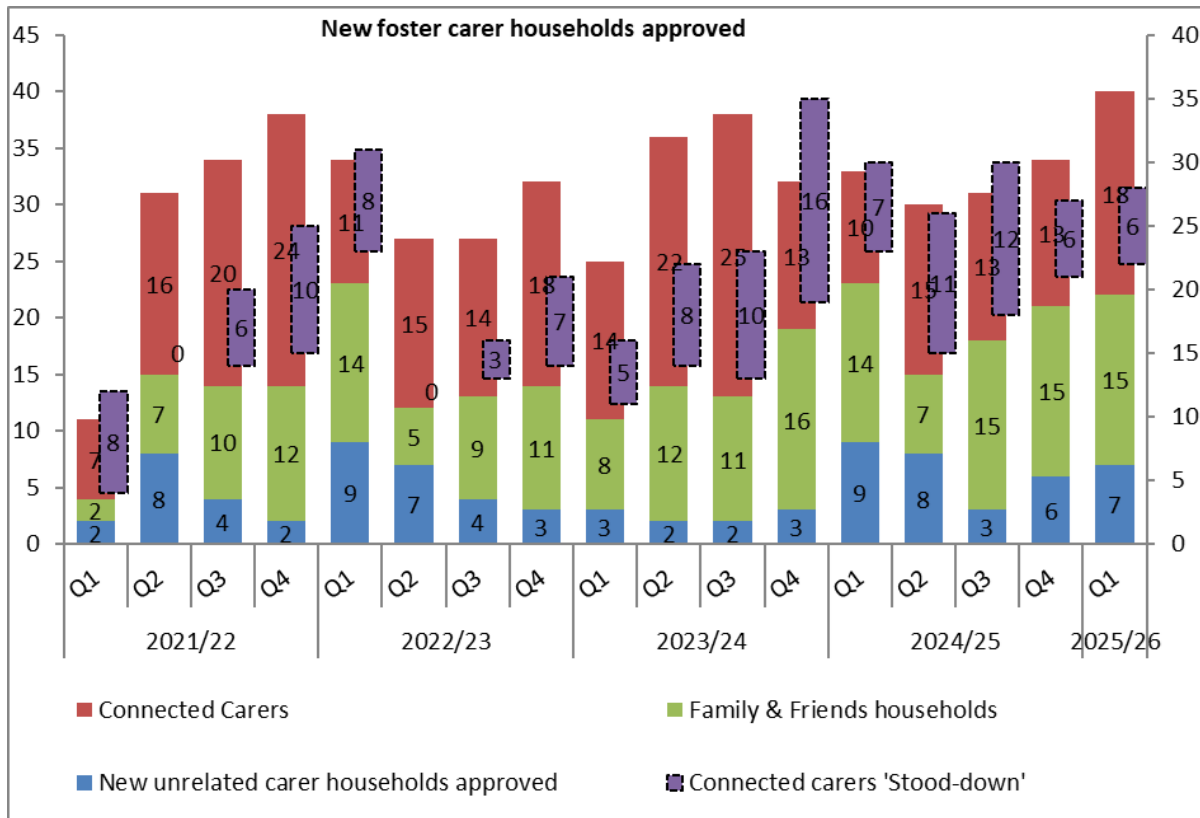
Appendix 1



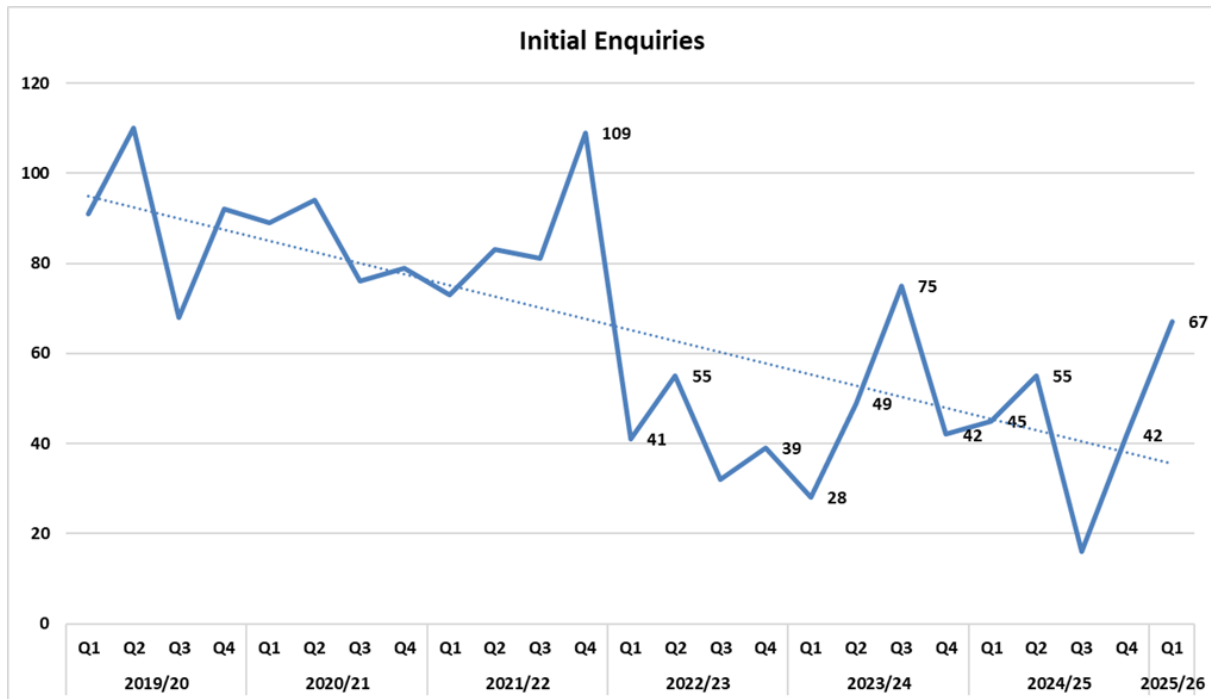
Appendix 2



Appendix 3



Appendix 4



Appendix 5

