



ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND FOSTERING PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides information on the operation of Angus Adoption Agency from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Angus Council has a statutory duty to provide an adoption service and meets this duty through the Adoption Agency which has been in place since 1 April 1996. Responsibility for the functions and decisions of the Adoption Agency rest with the Chief Social Work Officer with authority delegated to the Service Leader Justice acting as the Agency Decision Maker.

Angus Adoption Agency is responsible for decisions and tasks in relation to adoption and the operation of two panels; the Adoption & Permanence Panel which includes approval of kinship carers and the Fostering Panel.

Part 1 - PANELS

1.1 ANGUS ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL

The Adoption Panel is appointed to consider and make recommendations to the Adoption Agency. The principal functions of the panel in terms of the legislation are to:

- (a) To consider whether adoption is in the best interests of a particular child and if so, whether a 'Permanence Order with authority to adopt' application should be made
- (b) To consider whether a prospective adopter is suitable or continues to be suitable to be an adoptive parent
- (c) To consider whether prospective adopters would be suitable adoptive parents for a particular child.
- (d) To make recommendations on any other matter referred to it which is relevant to the adoption agency's functions under the Act

In practice supplementary functions of other issues the panel considers include:

- (a) Consideration of permanence plans for children other than adoption (including permanence orders)
- (b) To consider applications for adoption support including adoption and residence allowances and to review the payment of these allowances
- (c) Any other matter relating to permanence.

The Adoption and Permanence Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

1.2 ANGUS FOSTERING PANEL

The main functions of the Fostering Panel in terms of the legislation are to:

- (a) Make recommendations on the suitability or continued suitability of persons as foster carers.

- (b) To make recommendations as to whether a foster carer would be a suitable foster carer for:
 - a particular child or children
 - any child
 - Certain categories of child.
- (c) Make recommendations on the maximum number of children a particular foster carer may have in their care at any one time, subject to the placement limit set out in legislation.

The Fostering Panel also makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

To conform to regulations, the Fostering panel must be distinct from the Adoption and Permanence panel. Both panels meet on the same day and with the same members, but the business of the two panels is kept separate.

1.3 OPERATION OF THE PANELS

During 2018/19, the Adoption and Permanence Panel and the Fostering Panel have had two chairpersons: Audrey Osborne, Principal Educational Psychologist and Gail Aboim, Independent Chair: Kirsty Lee, Service Leader, Child Protection and Review has also acted as Chair. There are also 20 panel members with approximately six members in attendance at each meeting. Panel members include a medical adviser, legal adviser, social work staff, independent members and a representative from schools and learning. There has been an increase in panel membership this year with the appointment of social work representatives from a neighboring authority.

In 2018/19 43 panels were arranged; this included 21 Adoption and Permanence Panels, 1 finance panel and 21 Fostering Panels.

1.4 MANAGEMENT AND CO-ORDINATION OF PANELS

From 1 August 2018 a shared services panel coordinator has been appointed to work jointly across both Angus and Dundee Councils to organize and administer the panel system. This is part of the work of the Tayside collaborative and is a positive step in working together effectively to develop good practice and a shared understanding of the work in this area. The coordinator has responsibility for scheduling panel business; ensuring that the panel operates correctly and in line with regulations and sits on each panel as panel adviser. The coordinator also has responsibility for maintaining the panel membership and ensuring they have the required knowledge and training to fulfill the task.

1.5 CONSULTATION ON FUNCTIONING OF THE PANELS

There is a system in place for consulting with people who attend the panel. Every birth parent, foster carer, applicant, social worker and team manager who attends the Panel is given a questionnaire to complete regarding their attendance at Panel. The responses are collated and analyzed by the shared services coordinator and discussed at panel development events to inform future practice.

1.6 TRAINING OF PANEL MEMBERS

Training is important for all panel members particularly in view of the complexities of the cases they are required to consider. Panel members and Chairs attended a shared services training event led by Rhona Pollok from Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland on the legal climate and permanence practice in Scotland and a kinship training undertaken by Elizabeth Ross, Manager Carers Support Service. Panel Chairs have the option of attending Adoption and Fostering Alliance's Panel Chairs Meetings. The Panel Chairs, medical advisers and legal advisers meet with the Service Leader, Panel coordinator and Manager in the carers support service too. The Agency Decision Maker has also met with his counterparts in Dundee to share practice and look at performance themes.

1.7 REVIEW OF DECISIONS

There was one review of a kinship care approval which upheld the original panel decision.

Part 2 - ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE AGENCY

2.1 ADMINISTRATION OF SECTION 18 NOTIFICATIONS

Section 29/30 of Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 deals with adoption by a person who wish to petition the court for an adoption order. The adoption agency does not arrange these placements, but Section 19 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 requires the agency to become involved by producing a report for Court.

In 2018/19, the Adoption Agency received 7 notifications of intent to apply to be adoptive parents of relatives/step-children.

2.2 ADOPTIONS WITH A FOREIGN ELEMENT

The Adoption Agency may be approached by applicants wishing to adopt a child from overseas. Following any such approach, the Adoption Agency has a duty to assess applicants and provide information to the Scottish Government.

Angus Council introduced a charging policy in relation to inter-country adoption applications in 1998. Under this policy applicants will be charged a fee to cover the costs of the assessment. No such assessments were undertaken this year.

2.3 ADOPTION ALLOWANCE SCHEME

Angus Council currently operates an adoption allowance scheme.

During 2018/19, Angus Council paid Adoption Allowances for 19 children.

2.4 RESIDENCE ALLOWANCE SCHEME

The Scheme for the Payment of Residence Allowances has been in effect since 1997. The Kinship Scheme has also been revised and was approved at the Children and Learning Committee in September 2018.

Changes in legislation has resulted in an increasing number of kinship carers being eligible for financial assistance if they are caring for a Looked After child or if they have a Kinship Care order for a previously Looked After child. The numbers of Looked After children placed in kinship arrangement can vary at any given time however there is a significant increase in kinship payments in the past year.

Allowances Paid at 31 March 2019	
Adoption Allowances	19
Residence Allowances	49
Kinship Looked After	54

2.5 ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

The Local Authority as an Adoption Agency has a duty to provide a service to a number of persons including children who have been or may be adopted, their parents or guardians and those who have adopted or may adopt a child. This includes a duty to provide counselling to adopted children and adults, adoptive families, and to others who are affected by adoption including birth families. In Scotland, any adoptee aged 16 and over is entitled to receive information from the Agency in relation to his or her adoption. Where the adoption was granted in England, but the adopted person is now living in Angus, the adoptee may approach the Agency for the counselling that is mandatory under English legislation.

The adoption counselling service is coordinated and provided by the Permanence Team. The services can include individual counselling in relation to birth record counselling.

A post adoption contact service is provided by the Adoption Agency where an adoption includes an agreement that the adoptive parents and birth family will continue to share information.

2.6 INTERAGENCY PLACEMENTS

An arrangement exists between local authorities to allow children to be placed with adoptive parents or permanent foster carers in other areas. An interagency fee is charged by the authority, or voluntary agency, providing the assessment and support of the carers.

During 2018/19, there were 2 children placed with prospective adopters in Angus by another authority.

2.7 ADOPTION REGISTER AND RECORDS STORE

All adoption files relating to adoptions granted by Tayside Regional Council prior to 31 March 1996 are stored in the Adoption Archive in Dundee. Since 1 April 1996, all adoption files relating to adoptions arranged by Angus Council are stored locally in secure conditions. Staff from Angus Council Adoption Agency have access to this archive for adoption counselling purposes. The Permanence Team Leader is the Keeper of the Adoption Index.

Part 3 - OVERVIEW OF ADOPTION AGENCY BUSINESS

3.1 VOLUME AND BREAKDOWN OF PANEL BUSINESS

In 2018/19 43 panels were arranged; this included 21 Adoption and Permanence Panels, 1 finance panel and 21 Fostering Panels.

Panel Submissions	18/19
Children's permanence plans considered or reviewed at panel	19
Children matched with permanent foster carers	4
Children matched with adoptive parents	4
Foster Carers approved	18
Carers reviewed	34
Carers de-registered	16
Adoptive parent approved	4
Kinship carers approved	25
Residence allowance application	6
Residence allowances reviewed	43
Adoption allowance applications (no. of children)	1
Adoption allowance reviews (no. of children)	1

There continues to be a focus on permanence for children who cannot live within their birth family as evidenced by the number of children whose cases have been presented to panel. Whilst some children have successfully been placed in permanent families there remains a number for whom family finding is a challenge.

There were 18 foster carers approved this year but 3 were transition assessments from temporary foster to permanent foster care. We have also reviewed a number of foster carers who due to personal circumstances were not providing a placement for children or have retired from fostering. This has led to an increase in the number of foster carer deregistrations this year.

3.2 MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS FOR PERMANENCE

The first consideration when working with children who become looked after is the ability of the child's birth family to provide safe, permanent care for the child, and for this to be achieved within a reasonable period of time. If this is not possible, it is critical that alternative plans are made to provide the child with stability and security as they grow up. Unless members of the child's extended family are in a position to take on this role, the principal routes to long term security are adoption and permanent fostering. In the latter case, the child's position is likely to be secured legally by means of a Permanence Order under section 80 of The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007.

Achieving permanence for children continues to be a complex and time consuming area of work. Although the children may not be exposed to immediate physical risk, there are potentially significant risks to their long term well-being and development if the security of permanent care is delayed. The Adoption Agency has an important role in enabling permanence decisions to be made and implemented without undue delay. In 2018/19 we had two permanence orders granted, one variation of a permanence order and three permanence orders with authority to adopt and nine adoption orders were granted.

3.3 RECRUITMENT AND APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE CARERS

Recruitment of foster carers remains a challenge and we continue to make every effort to encourage growth in this area. We have an active social media recruitment campaign and our processes are reviewed regularly to ensure we engage anyone who is interested. Having an overall target provides a useful aim for recruitment initiatives, although the actual capacity of the service is determined as much by the skills and abilities of individual carers as it is by the overall number. At 31 March 2019, there are 48 active fostering families and 17 respite fostering families. We also have 9 approved fostering families and 7 respite families who are not currently providing a fostering service.

Externally commissioned placements are only used when we are not able to identify a suitable placement within our own resources. We currently make use of 9 external fostering placements for Angus children. We also have a shared service approach with Dundee City Council and Perth and Kinross Council and will offer placements to each other when we cannot resource one in house. As of 31 March 2019 we have 1 child placed with Dundee City Council carers and they have one child placed with Angus Council carers. There is a small administration fee incurred for these arrangements but it is more cost effective than an external agency

resource. There is a reciprocal agreement that we also charge for placements too.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Key Issues, Developments and Priorities

While the workload of the Adoption and Fostering panels continues to remain busy, feedback from those who attend panels suggests they have continued to fulfill the statutory obligations in an effective and professional manner. The importance of sustaining high quality placements to meet the needs of children and continue to develop the fostering service and identify permanent carers for all children who require such placements continues to be a central issue in Angus and across Scotland. This will remain the broad priority for the service in the coming year.

The key issues noted in the report, and the identified service development priorities are:

- **Establishment of a Permanence Forum for children**
A Permanence Forum has been introduced from April 2018 to provide a more streamlined and consistent approach to progressing plans for children. Twenty eight children have been considered and plans put in place to progress permanence where appropriate.
- **Service Review**
Children, Families and Justice have had a review of management structures and services which has seen the development of a carers support service with 3 teams each focusing on fostering, permanence and kinship. This sits alongside residential services in the resource service area which has a focus on ensuring consistency of care and approach for all our looked after and accommodated children.
- **Establishment of a Kinship team**
As part of the service review and in recognition in the change in legislation for kinship care, a kinship team has been established with the focus to assess and offer advice, guidance and support to kinship carers. There has been a significant increase in the number of children being placed with kinship families and we aim to focus on practice and the development of this area of business in 2019.
- **Introduction of a Shared Services Panel Coordinator**
Since August 2018 a shared services panel coordinator has been appointed to work jointly across both Angus and Dundee Councils to organize and administer the panel system. The coordinator has responsibility for scheduling panel business; quality assurance of the work submitted ensuring that the panel operates in line with regulations and sits on each panel as panel adviser. The coordinator also has responsibility for maintaining the panel membership and panel development.

- **Inspection of Adoption Agency and Fostering Services**
The services were inspected in June 2018 and were graded as good in all areas. We were inspected on areas in relation to quality of care and support and quality of staffing. There were no recommendations and no requirements. It was noted we have well skilled teams and offer a wide range of training and support to our carers who provide good quality care to our children as well as support to foster carers and adopters. The inspection highlighted delays for children in need of permanence in terms of planning for children that required to improve. The service was made aware that we need to progress assessments timeously.
- **Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents and foster carers**
Increasing the number of approved carers remains key to achieving better outcomes for Looked After Children. We continue to invest and develop our social media campaign with the catch phrase "Change lives for the better. Adopt or foster an Angus child today". There is ongoing competition locally from the private adoption and fostering agencies and we need to ensure that our approach to recruitment remains competitive given the scarce resources in this area and the ongoing needs of children who require to be fostered or permanently cared for.

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Service Leader
19 April 2019