

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE– 17 MAY 2016

**REPORT ON THE ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND THE FOSTERING PANEL
ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016**

REPORT BY THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

ABSTRACT

This report informs members of the production of Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel Annual Report. The report highlights Angus Council's success over several years in providing an effective service for children, foster carers and adoptive parents and notes the demand on resources as well as the services provided. A full copy of the annual report is appended.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Children and Learning Committee:

- (i) Endorse the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel Annual Report and support the future plans.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/ SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/ COPORATE PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

- Our children and young people are confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens
- Individuals and families are involved in decisions which affect them
- We have improved the health and well being of our people and inequalities are reduced.

3. BACKGROUND

Angus Council has a statutory duty, under Section 1 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, to act as an adoption agency. The service required under this provision is for all those affected by adoption, namely child, birth parent, and adoptive parent. It must make suitable arrangements for the assessment of prospective adopters of children who may be adopted, and for placing children for adoption. The Act requires the Council to establish an Adoption Panel. Regulation 17 of the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 imposes an equivalent duty on the Local Authority to establish a Fostering Panel. Local authorities are required to report on the operation of their adoption agency on an annual basis. Angus Council has panels for both.

4. CURRENT POSITION

The Annual Report on the Angus Adoption Agency and the Fostering Panel provides information for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. It contains statistical information for this period and an overview of key trends over the last 3 years. Key issues from the report include:

- Progressing permanence plans for children
The need to speed up the process of moving children into placement where they have been identified as requiring adoption or permanent fostering is identified as both a national and local priority. To explore the opportunities for improvement, a review of Permanence practice will be completed and preparatory work has started. The aim of the review is to consider if current procedures and practice relating to children requiring permanent placements are achieving the best possible outcomes. Statistical information indicates that younger children are progressing through the process more timeously than older children.
- Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents and foster carers
Angus Council needs to ensure it has a sufficient number and range of approved carers available to achieve positive outcomes for Looked After Children. To maintain and increase the number of carers, continuous carer recruitment activity is necessary and this year our campaign has been on “Making Memories”. Whilst we have been successful in recruitment, we have been less successful in generating interest in permanent placements and carers for teenagers and children with disabilities which is where our demand lies. We will continue to focus on the recruitment of permanent and adoptive carers this year. A recruitment group meets regularly to explore ways of enhancing the recruitment of prospective carers and ideas and methods of working are reviewed and initiated. A Facebook page has also been developed and is being used to highlight recruitment and areas of interest in relation to adopting and fostering.
- Kinship Care Allowances
In October 2015, the Scottish Government announced changes to the level of payments to Kinship carers, including those with a Residence Order. Such carers are now entitled to allowances equivalent of those paid to foster carers minus child related benefits. Work has been ongoing to ensure that all relevant carers have had an individualised assessment of entitlement before their payments are revised and a system is in place to backdate any entitlement as required in accordance with the scheme. A review of the Kinship Care Scheme is to be undertaken and there has been investment in a kinship care social worker dedicated to supporting kinship carers.
- Care Inspectorate Inspection
In February 2015, Angus Council's Adoption Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate. The feedback provided was positive and the service continues to be graded at level 5 (Very Good) across all areas. There was one recommendation about ensuring the membership of the panel better reflects the local community and enhancing the formal support to panel members. This year, three new panel members have been recruited from the community and an action and development plan for members due to be implemented. A further inspection was underway at the time of writing.
- Review of Angus Skills Based Fostering Scheme
A review of the skills based scheme started in September 2015 with a consultation event exploring benefits and challenges of the existing scheme and opportunities for ensuring the scheme meets the needs of the children of Angus. At times it can be difficult to find placements for teenagers and children with more challenging behaviours. Foster carers have been integral in this review and the resulting three working groups looking at the skills mix of the carers; the challenges of some of the children placed in foster care; carers contributions to the work of the family placement service; paperwork; and respite. The Review is ongoing and is due to conclude by Autumn 2016.

5. PROPOSALS

It is proposed that Committee:

- (i) Endorse the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel Annual Report and support the future plans

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising out of this report.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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List of Appendices: Adoption Agency Annual Report 2015/16