



**ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND FOSTERING PANEL**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides information on the operation of Angus Adoption Agency from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

Angus Council has a statutory duty to provide an adoption service and meets this duty through the Adoption Agency that became operational on 1 April 1996. All functions and decisions of the Adoption Agency rest with the Chief Social Work Officer who is the Head of Children and Young People Services in the People Directorate. This authority is currently delegated to a Senior Manager for Adult Services who acts 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 and the Fostering Panel. The administration, management and co-ordination of all Adoption Agency functions, is the responsibility of the Permanence Team Manager, Family Placement Services.

## **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 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 to be an adoptive parent
- (c) To consider whether prospective adopters would be suitable adoptive parents for a particular child.

Supplementary functions of the panel include:

- (a) Consideration of permanence plans for children other than adoption (including permanence orders)
- (b) To consider applications for post 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 who is the Senior Manager, Adult Services.

### **1.2 ANGUS FOSTERING PANEL**

The main functions of the Fostering Panel are to:

- (a) Advise on the suitability of persons who apply to be foster carers.
- (b) To state whether their recommendation is in respect of:
  - a particular child or children
  - any child
  - Certain categories of child.
- (c) Consider the continuing approval of foster carers' following their annual carer's review.

The Fostering Panel also makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Senior Manager, Adult Services.

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**

The Adoption and Permanence Panel and the Fostering Panel have two chairpersons, Audrey Osborne, Principal Educational Psychologist and

Margaret Wells Independent Chair and 11 panel members. These members attend alternate panels 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.

Each panel has a depute chair, who will cover in the chair's absence.

For details of the current panel membership, refer to Appendix 1. Panels meet twice per month.

Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, 43 panels were arranged. This included 21 Adoption and Permanence Panels, 21 Fostering Panels and one Finance Panel. Two Panels were cancelled due to staffing shortages. This is reflected in the decrease in the number of cases considered by panel however the demand on panel time remains high. Attendance at panels remains high, demonstrating a continuing high level of commitment from panel members.

#### **1.4 MANAGEMENT AND CO-ORDINATION OF PANELS**

The panels are managed and co-ordinated by the Permanence Team Manager. The panel co-ordination role involves offering consultancy to workers, advising panel members on policy and procedural issues, overseeing the administration of the panel and sitting as a panel member.

The Co-ordinator maintains statistics for all business presented to the panels and maintains and reviews waiting lists for all children registered for permanence, approved adopters and permanent foster carers.

The Co-ordinator is supported in the administration of the Adoption Agency and the panels, by two senior clerical officers.

#### **1.5 CONSULTATION ON FUNCTIONING OF THE PANELS**

A system for consulting with people who attend the panel was introduced during 2004. Every foster carer, applicant, social worker and team manager who attends the Panel is given a questionnaire to complete regarding their attendance at Panel.

In an effort to make the consultation process more effective and to increase response rates, the questionnaires were sent to people electronically since February 2014 via Survey-Monkey. Unfortunately there were technical difficulties with this which resulted in a return to paper responses. Plans are underway to re-introduce Survey-Monkey in May 2015. The response to the consultation questionnaires are summarised in Appendix 2.

## **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 have attended two development days one entitled "Who are we" which explored the roles of panel members and the skills and experience the panel membership has. This theme was explored further at the next event when consideration was given to issues in respect of self-evaluation and a panel development plan was formulated. The Panel Chairs have attended BAAF's Panel Chairs Meetings and the Panel Chairs, medical advisers and legal advisers have had regular meetings with the Service Manager responsible for Adoption and Fostering, the Panel Co-ordinator and Team Manager, Fostering Services.

## **1.7 APPEALS**

There was one appeal and no advice hearings held during 2014-2015.

## Part 2 - ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE AGENCY

### 2.1 ADMINISTRATION OF SECTION 18 NOTIFICATIONS

Section 29/30 of Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 involves relatives or step parents who wish to petition the court for an adoption order. The adoption agency is not arranging these placements, but Section 18 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 does require the agency to become involved. Applicants in these non-agency placements must notify the local authority within whose area they have their home, of their intention to apply for an adoption order. The Adoption Agency is then required to produce a report for the court providing full information about the circumstances of the petitioners and the proposed adoption.

Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 the Adoption Agency received 7 notifications. Although the Adoption Agency has received one confirmation of an Adoption Order being granted, it is likely that this figure does not represent the number of Adoption Orders granted. This will be addressed with the court.

**Fig 1 - Section 18 Adoption**

	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
S.29\30 Notifications	4	12	8	9	7	4	10	1	4	7
S.29\30 Adoptions Granted	4	2	3	2	6	2	1	1	0	1
S.29\30 Withdrawn	0	1	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	0

### 2.2 INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

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 the applicants and provide information to the Scottish Government.

The legislation affecting intercountry adoption requires local authorities to provide an enhanced service to people who are interested in adopting a child from abroad. Historically there have been very few people in Angus applying to be approved as intercountry adopters; nevertheless the legislation means that we have to be able to provide clear information both on the way we will assess prospective adopters and on the process they must negotiate with other countries.

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.

Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 there was no inter-country applications. Angus Council have received one notification of a convention application which is in relation to a child who wishes to be adopted by a relative living in United States of America.

### 2.3 ADOPTION ALLOWANCE SCHEME

Angus Council currently operates an adoption allowance scheme. The most recent scheme was set up following the implementation, of the Adoption Allowance (Scotland) Regulations 1996 and was approved by the Social Work Committee on 21 April 1998 (Committee Report 400/98). The existing scheme has been adapted in line with the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and is currently under review. There have been an increasing number of adoption and residence allowances granted over the last 10 years.

During the year 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 Angus Council continued to pay adoption allowances for 24 children. No new adoption allowance applications were presented during the year as there were no children who were eligible for the adoption allowance placed for adoption. Two adoption allowances ceased as the criteria was no longer met.

### 2.4 RESIDENCE ALLOWANCE SCHEME

The Scheme for the Payment of Residence Allowances was approved by the Social Work Committee on 7 October 1997 (Committee Report 1008/97).

During the year 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 Angus Council continued to pay residence allowances for 61 children. Six new residence allowance applications were considered during the year. Five residence allowances ceased during this time.

The number of adoption and residence allowances paid is summarised below. Custody allowances have now ceased and were replaced by residence allowances.

**Fig 2 - Allowances Paid**

	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	14/15
Adoption Allowances	19	20	19	21	27	28	30	23	24
Custody Allowances	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Residence Allowances	15	18	25	41	44	52	53	53	61



## **2.5 ADOPTION COUNSELLING**

The Local Authority as an Adoption Agency has a duty to provide a service to children who have been or may be adopted, the parents or guardians of such children and to persons who have adopted or may adopt a child. This includes a duty to provide counselling to adopted children and adults, adoptive families, and to other people who have a problem relating to adoption such as birth parents or relatives. In Scotland any adoptee who has attained the age of 16 years 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 by the Permanence Team Manager. Referrals are passed to the Permanence Team Manager and are allocated to social workers. In 2014/15 26 people were in receipt of post adoption counseling.

## **2.6 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

In addition to the counseling described above, additional duties were placed on local authorities by the Adoption Support Service Regulations in 2009 with regard to assessment of need for individuals affected by adoption. The purpose of the new legislation is to increase the support available to adoptive families and to clarify the arrangements where placements are made which cross agency borders. The additional demand for services is likely to grow incrementally as adoptions are granted under the terms of the new regulations. 19 people have engaged in birth record counselling, 5 birth parents have been offered counselling and 11 families have been offered direct post adoption support.

## **2.7 POST ADOPTION CONTACT**

A post adoption contact service is provided by the Adoption Agency where an adoption has been made which includes an agreement that the adoptive parents and birth family will continue to share information. There are currently 24 children for whom a mail box agreement is in place. Five families receive direct support from Children and Young People Services in the People Directorate in respect of facilitating contact between adopted children and their birth family. This is an area of work which is expanding.

## **2.8 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, that has assessed and will support the carers.

During 2014/15 there was 1 child placed with prospective adopters in Angus by another authority and 1 child placed by the Council out with Angus.

## **2.9 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 in secure conditions at Bruce House, Arbroath. Staff from Angus Council Adoption Agency has access to this archive for adoption counselling purposes. The Permanence Team Manager is the Keeper of the Adoption Index.

## **Part 3 - OVERVIEW OF ADOPTION AGENCY BUSINESS**

### **3.1 VOLUME AND BREAKDOWN OF PANEL BUSINESS**

Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, 43 panel meetings dealt with 163 items of business. The Adoption and Permanence Panel consider whether children are in need of permanent care, applications for adoptive carers are considered and recommended for approval. Recommendations are made as to whether children should be matched to carers and deregistration of carers and children who no longer require to be placed in a permanent placement. Applications for Adoption and Custody allowances are also considered and reviewed on a regular basis.

The Fostering Panel considers applications from prospective foster carers and registered carers are reviewed by Panel minimally once every three years and they can also recommend carers are de-registered. Foster carers also have a separate annual review undertaken out with Panel processes. In 2014-15, 13 foster carers were approved and 13 permanent/adoptive carers were approved.

### **3.2 MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS FOR PERMANENCE**

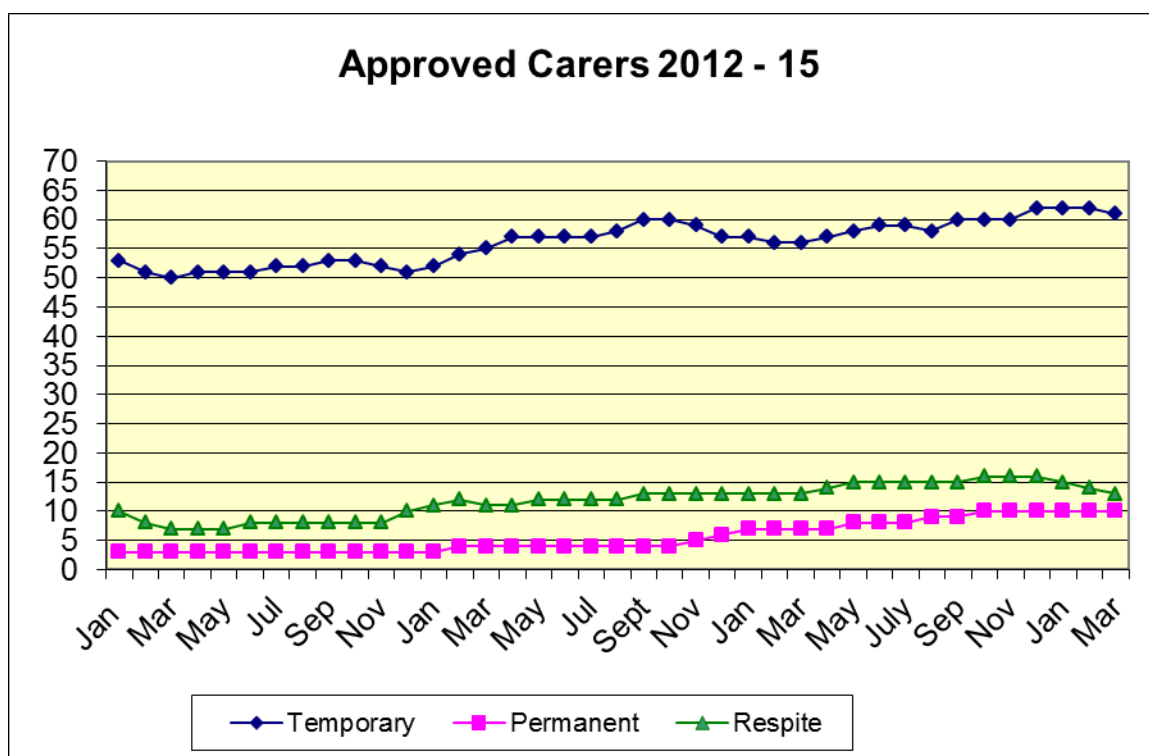
The first consideration when working with children who become looked after is the ability of the child's birth family to provide safe, permanent care for the child, and for this to be achieved within a reasonable period of time. If this is not possible it is critical that alternative plans are made to 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 alternatives for providing the child with 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 and 83 of The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007.

Achieving permanence for children is a complex and time consuming area of work. Although the children may not be exposed to the immediate risks present in child protection cases, there are considerable risks to their long term well being and development if they are not provided with the security of permanent care or if there are significant delays in achieving this. The Adoption Agency has an important role in enabling permanence decisions to be made and implemented without undue delay.

In 2014-15, 35 children were presented to the panel to establish the most appropriate legal route to progress plans for children and secure them legally in the long term. Options considered are permanence orders with authority to adopt or permanence orders. Twelve children were placed in permanence and adoptive placements and four children were adopted. The numbers of children where we are progressing plans compares positively to previous years.

### 3.3 RECRUITMENT OF PROSPECTIVE CARERS

Based on an analysis of the number of foster carers needed, a recruitment target was set for 2014/15 to reach a total of 75 carers. 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 31/3/15 there were 86 foster carers, (63 temporary, 10 permanent inc. 5 on time out)) and 13 respite carers. The reduction towards the end of the chart noted in the graph below followed the deregistration of a number of carers (5) who have retired from fostering.



Carers in the Angus Skills Based Fostering scheme are approved at one of three levels. We currently have 11 carers approved at level 3. These carers are required to have significant experience of fostering and be able to evidence a wide range of skills. Moving carers to this level takes time. We will continue to work towards the projected target of 15 carers at this level. One of the long term objectives of the service is to reduce the average number of children in placement with each foster carer, on the basis of evidence that in general, outcomes are improved where there are fewer children in placement. Over the period 1/4/14 to 31/3/15 the average number of children in placement has dropped from 1.8 to 1.6. The number of level 2 and level 3 carers approved to take only one or two children remains at 26.

The use of externally commissioned placements has reduced and is well below the national average. In Scotland as a whole local authorities purchase on average 27% of their placements from independent providers. The current figure in Angus is 6% (2 temporary, 5 permanent) Placements with external agencies are relatively expensive, but the

introduction of a national commissioning framework has slightly reduced these cost as well as clarifying expectations about the service provided.

We have made particular efforts to recruit permanent foster carers for children unable to return to their families but where their age or circumstances mean that adoption is not an appropriate option. The number of permanent carers has increase to 10, providing placements for 19 children.

### 3.4 APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE CARERS

Recommendations to approve prospective foster carers and adoptive parents are made by the Adoption and Fostering panels. The panels also review carer's approval every three years and deal with any requests for variation in the category or level of approval. Although the primary responsibility for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers and adoptive parents lies with the Fostering and Permanence Teams, the panel enables the agency to maintain an overview of this work.

The number of prospective foster carers and adoptive parents approved by the panel is summarised in Figure 3 (below).

**Fig 3 Carers registered by the adoption and fostering panels**

		05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
<b>Permanent carers</b>	<i>Adopters</i>	4	11	10	9	13	13	4	8	10	8
	<i>foster carers</i>	3	0	0	1	2	2	1	1	3	3
	<i>Total</i>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Temporary carers</b>	<i>Specialist carers scheme</i>	1	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	<i>Foster care</i>	10	6	8	6	8	5	9	11	22	14
	<i>Total</i>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>		<b>14</b>
<b>Family based respite (previously ARCH)</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
<b>Relatives \ family based</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>27</b>

### 3.5 NORTH EAST CONSORTIUM<sup>1</sup> (NEC) and SCOTTISH ADOPTION REGISTER (SAR)

The search for appropriate families for children requiring permanence extends to other areas if there are no suitable families approved by Angus Council. In 2005 the North East consortium became a formalised family placement consortium, administered by BAAF. (British Association of

<sup>1</sup> The Consortium has representatives from various Councils: Fife, Perth & Kinross, Dundee, Angus, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Clackmannen, Stirling, Falkirk, Moray and Highland.

Adoption and Fostering) This has improved the operation of the consortium and considerably reduced the administrative burden on us and other authorities, in addition to identifying matches for children.

The Scottish Adoption Register (SAR) is also working with adoption agencies across Scotland to increase opportunities for family finding.

One child has been matched through the consortia/SAR.

**Fig 4 Children placed through the North East consortium/SAR**

	<b>05/06</b>	<b>06/07</b>	<b>07/08</b>	<b>08/09</b>	<b>09/10</b>	<b>10/11</b>	<b>11/12</b>	<b>12/13</b>	<b>14/15</b>
Angus children placed in other authorities	2	5	4	0	3	3	1	2	<b>1</b>
Children from other authorities placed in Angus	4	6	2	1	5	3	3	0	<b>1</b>

### **3.6 PRIVATE FOSTERING**

Private fostering arrangements exist where parents make arrangements with people who are not close relatives and not approved foster carers, to care for their children for 28 days or longer. Local authorities are required to assess, approve and support such arrangements. There have been no notifications in respect of private fostering arrangement in 2014/2015. A Publicity campaign will be taken forward to ensure members of the public are aware of their responsibilities in relation to this area.

## Part 4 CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Key Issues, Developments and Priorities

While the workload of the Adoption and Fostering panels continues to remain consistently busy, feedback from those who attend panels suggests they have continued to fulfill the statutory obligations in an effective and professional manner. The difficulty of sustaining a sufficient number of foster carers and of identifying 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:

#### 4.1.1 Progressing permanence plans for children

The priority for the Adoption Agency is to make use of the performance data to improve outcomes for children by speeding up the process. Quarterly meetings are held with Team Managers, Legal and Democratic Services, Medical Advisor and Manager of the Community Assessment and Review Service to ensure a collective oversight of all children in the permanence process and to ensure we are targeting the correct resources and supports. 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. The system for monitoring and managing the progress of children requiring permanent care has been established. Work continues to be progressed to address the barriers to progressing permanence for children but some of these are out with the control of the local authority including delay in court processes.

#### 4.1.2 Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents and foster carers

Increasing the number of approved carers remains a key factor for us to achieve better outcomes for Looked After children. A joint STV campaign with Dundee and Perth & Kinross which aired from Autumn 2014 until May 2015 has yet to generate the response we had hoped for. However, there has been some success in recruiting foster carers who wish to offer permanence to children. 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.

#### 4.1.3 Assessment of prospective adoptive parents and permanent foster carers

The evaluation questionnaires summarised in appendix 2 indicate that the majority of prospective carers are positive about their experience of the service and the assessment process and this is an area we will continue to monitor.

#### 4.1.4 Independent fostering agencies

A national commissioning framework is now in place for placements made by local authorities with independent fostering services. This has served to reduce the cost of these placements and to clarify expectations in terms of the service provided. The use of independent fostering agencies remains low by comparison with other local authorities

as we continue to prioritise the local provision of placements for children.

#### 4.1.5 Care Inspectorate Inspection

In February 2015 Angus Council's Adoption Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate. The feedback, provided was very positive and the service continues to be graded at level 5 (Very Good) across all areas. There was one recommendation in relation to the membership and support to panel members. The panel membership needs to reflect better the community the council serves including a gender balance and people with experience of adoption. Individual panel members need to receive supervision/appraisal in relation to their role. An action plan is underway to address this and recently an advert was placed in the local paper to seek new membership of the panel.

#### 4.1.6 Placement descriptors

The Scottish Government is implementing a set of national descriptors to be used across all local authorities to obtain an overview of all children's placements in foster care. Placements will be divided in to five categories Permanent – secured by a Permanence Order, Long term – a placement for longer than 24 months not secured by a permanence order and Interim, a placement less than 24 months not secured by a Permanence Order. Emergency – which is an unplanned placement made in an emergency where no other type of placement is available and Short Break which forms a planned series of short breaks. Work is underway to ensure the Council has the correct placement descriptors in place.

*Eunice McLennan  
Service Manager  
23/04/15*



**APPENDIX 1**

**ANGUS COUNCIL ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE AND FOSTERING PANEL MEMBERS**

	<b>Panel 1</b>	<b>Panel 2</b>
Chairperson	Margaret Wells (Independent member)	Audrey Osborne (People)
Depute Chair	Kirsty Lee (Senior Planning Officer, Social Work and Health)	Barbara Cowan (Community Assessment and Review Officer)
Co-ordinator	Elizabeth Ross (Children's Services, Social Work and Health)	Elizabeth Ross (Children's Services, Social Work and Health)
Panel member	Lindsey Foreman (Children's Services, Social Work and Health)	Lindsey Foreman (Children's Services, Social Work and Health)
Medical Adviser	Gwendolynn Fagerson (Health)	Gwendolynn Fagerson (Health)
Legal Adviser	Various (Department of Resources)	Various (Department of Resources)
Panel Member	Marion Dowie (Adult Care, Social Work and Health)	Anne Martin (Independent member)
Panel Member	Fiona Roberts (Team Manager Children's Services, Social Work and Health)	Susie Buchanan (Adult Care)
Panel Member	Jackie Marshall (Independent Member)	Paul Donaldson Independent
Minute Taker	Elaine Allan (Senior Clerical Officer)	Moira Hunter (Senior Clerical Officer)
Welfare Rights Adviser to the panel	Agnes Boath (Senior Welfare Rights Officer, Social Work and Health)	Agnes Boath (Senior Welfare Rights Officer, Social Work and Health)
Agency Decision Maker	George Bowie (Senior Manager, Adult Services)	George Bowie (Senior Manager, Adult Services)

### ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANEL APPLICANTS/CARER FEEDBACK FORMS

#### COLLATED RESPONSES RECEIVED FOR THE YEAR

APRIL 2014 -MARCH 2015

#### **A total of 43 feedback forms were returned during this period**

Feedback was very positive with a high number of carers/applicants in attendance. Attendees reported they were encouraged to attend panel and that they were well engaged in the discussions. A sample of the feedback is listed below.

#### **Comments**

- If I did not understand a question, I asked them to rephrase, which they did.
- Very clear
- We understood all the questions
- Questions were clearly asked and relevant to the reasons we were at the Panel.
- Encountered nothing to be concerned about. All questions were straight forward.
- This has been the most positive Panel I have attended in 11 years. All members made us feel welcome and in no way intimidating. Questions were precise and to the point. All questions were framed clearly and in a manner that was easy to understand.

Practical arrangements were also considered and time spent at the Panel was viewed as appropriate. Attendees were also asked if they were listened too and treated with respect.

#### **Comments:**

- Upon arrival I was led to waiting room and was taken into meet the panel by chairperson. There was beverage supplied.
- Rooms were private which helped with confidentiality – appropriate refreshments on offer.
- I was made feel relaxed.

- Much preferred the location of Arbroath than Forfar.
- Well run process that put us both at ease.
- Very comfortable atmosphere. Ample time to answer questions.
- Panel seemed interested in what my comments were.
- I was allowed the time I required to answer questions. Although, I felt that I was not given time to regroup myself in between different members of Panel asking questions.
- I opened my mouth to speak but unfortunately Team Manager beat me to it. No one picked up on this.
- The meeting felt informal, although it is a formal panel.
- Due to the emotions of the day, at times the questions felt difficult but the Panel gave time and supported us to answer.
- I felt that they explained what was happening in a clear understandable way.
- The Panel members made us feel welcome and tried to make us feel relaxed, aware of how emotive this was for us.
- They seemed interested in what I was saying.
- I do feel I was treated with a great deal of respect.
- Yes very much so, the lady who invited us into Panel was really nice and the Panel were all friendly enough and made us feel as comfortable as could be in front of them.
- I feel however, that they had already made their decision and nothing I said would have made any difference.

Attendees were asked what were the most positive and difficult aspects of the panel.

### **Comments**

- The Panel were friendly and encouraging. We felt valued by the panel. I love my job as a foster carer and it was good to be able to express this.
- Having to look back over the past year and find how much I've learned.
- They were all very positive. Professional although made you feel relaxed.
- Recognition of all we have experienced in the last year and the response without son's viewpoint being taken seriously.
- Knowing that it was the last part of assessment process. Panel members were polite and patient.

- Panel members were friendly and did seem to be listening/interested in what we said.
- It was in Arbroath and not Forfar.
- Being allowed to have honest feedback about kids.
- It is nice to be asked questions as you then feel you have been part of the process in the hope this is a last step for the child to begin a better future.
- Clear concise feedback on the day, made to feel welcome and at ease. Good to have access to photos of Panel before entering and familiarising ourselves with the members.
- Reassuring words from Panel members and the support of workers.
- Having Social Worker and Team Manager with us, as they were both able to answer a question that only they could. They were both supportive.
- The different interests in the Panel re questioning to find out more about me as a person and as a foster carer.
- Nothing the whole experience was terrifying, I felt judged and criticised.
- Felt valued as a carer.
- Just a little nervous as to what would be asked. I don't like being centre of attention.
- Discussing personal difficulties and the emotions of the whole experience as this was life changing decision for us as a family.
- We felt the process was smooth and appropriate. Our Social Worker had prepared us well.
- It is talking about a child who you have cared for and now this is the last time you will call them yours.
- It is a stressful and anxious time for people like us who have already formed an emotional attachment to a child they have never met.
- Discussing very personal and difficult information, emotional.

Attendees were asked for any further comments

### **Comments**

- Would have liked to have known if Panel felt we already made the criteria for Level 3 and if so could have said so, so we could have moved level there and then instead of taking another year.
- No, other than to thank those that have been involved in supporting us, providing the training and encouraging us throughout the last 10 months.

- I was happy to be told by the chairperson of the Panel that it was an unanimous decision to pass me, also that the Panel had thought I had come across as confident, relaxed and answered questions fully. Also those Social Workers were told not to try to change my upbeat, positive attitude.
- It would be helpful if the Carers could be heard without the presence of the child's worker/Senior being there to either prevent us from answering or undermining what we do say. We are both of the belief that when we left, the Panel did not have an objective view of the children's behaviours and what qualities were needed to parent them.
- Have seen huge improvements over the last five years, or so, in the Fostering Panels. They have become more "user friendly".