

ANGUS COUNCIL

SPECIAL ARRANGMENTS COMMITTEE – 23 JUNE 2020

REPORT ON THE ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND THE FOSTERING PANEL – ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

REPORT BY KATHRYN LINDSAY DIRECTOR – CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JUSTICE

ABSTRACT

This report informs members of the production of the Annual Report on Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel. The report highlights Angus Council's ability to provide an effective service for children, foster carers, kinship carers and adoptive parents and notes demand on resources as well as the range of services provided. A copy of the annual report is appended.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) Endorse the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel Annual Report and support the future plans;
- (ii) Notes that the Report will be made publically available on the Council website.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS LOCAL OUTCOMES IMPROVEMENT PLAN/CORPORATE PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcomes:

- 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

3.1 Angus Council has a statutory duty, under Section 1 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, to provide an adoption service. The service required under this provision is for all those affected by adoption, including child, birth parent, siblings, natural grandparents, guardian 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 and subsidiary legislation 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.

3.2 Local authorities are required to report on the operation of their adoption agency on an annual basis. Angus Council has panels for both adoption and fostering and in line with best practice, have established a kinship panel to promote consistency and transparency of decision making in relation to kinship care. The annual report now also incorporates key information regarding the operation of this panel.

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The Annual Report on the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel provides information for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Key issues from the report include:

4.2 The Permanence Forum

The Permanence Forum was established to provide a more streamlined and consistent approach to progressing plans for children. There has been a significant reduction in the number of children being considered at the Forum, as reflected in the numbers of children being registered as in need of permanence. It is likely that the reduction is due to children being supported in the community either in with their birth parents or through kinship arrangements.

4.3 Establishment of a Kinship Team

A Kinship team and separate kinship panel has been established with a remit to assess and offer advice, guidance and support to kinship carers. The Kinship Team have had a very successful first year and are working to develop their role further providing a link worker service to kinship carers in order to mentor and support carers and ensure that any training needs identified at the kinship panel are taken forward.

4.4 Recruitment of Carers

Increasing the number of approved carers remains key to achieving better outcomes for Looked After Children. Despite an active social media campaign, we continue to see small numbers coming forward to foster. The service will continue to invest in and develop our social media campaign with the catch phrase "Change lives for the better. Adopt or foster an Angus child today". We have also developed a dedicated website which will be launched during 2020/21.

4.5 Fostering Development Plans 2020/21

The Angus Skills Level Based Scheme has been in place for a number of years. It is anticipated that this will be subject to consultation and review during 2020/21 to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

The service is developing a proposal to support the wider use of "informal carers" as part of our package of support for children and young people. Informal carers are trusted adults who are well known to the carer/s and child who are able to provide care for child up to a period of 23 hours. The development of the proposal is part of our work to recognize and act on the feedback from our looked after children and care leavers who told us that they want access to more "normal" experiences, like staying over with their extended foster family and trips away. Further work will be taken forward for consultation with approved carers in the first instance.

The continuing care and supported lodging service will continue to be developed to ensure the availability of the best support and choice for our looked after children and care leavers. This will include refreshing arrangements for the recruitment, assessment and training of supported lodging providers.

4.6 Training and Development

"Siblings Together" training is to be rolled out emphasizing the importance of the relationships siblings have. The training will be delivered to all relevant staff, foster carers, prospective adopters and kinship carers.

The secure base model is an attachment and resilience based model of caregiving. Work is on-going to introduce and embed this model across carer support and residential services in Angus to promote a unified approach to caring for children across all our care giving environments.

We have developed the family finding training we deliver to foster carers and now include carers in our pre-linking meetings. This is where we consider whether approved adopters can meet the needs of a child approved as in need of permanence. This has been received positively by carers and workers as they can share their experiences of caring for children to support identifying the right match for a child.

The Permanence team has a number of new workers and in recognition of the specialist function they will be carrying out, a development plan for the team has been designed to ensure consistent understanding of the process of permanence planning, assessments, family finding, identifying where there are delays and how we can overcome these.

4.7 Adoption Support

The service has reviewed how best to support birth parents when their children are registered as in need of permanence and/or adoption is granted. Birth parents are offered individual support in the first instance and we will work to support the development of a birth parent group.

Plans are underway to expand our adoption support by running a group for approved adopters who are waiting for children to be placed. They can currently attend the adoption support group but it has been raised by adopters that an additional group specific to their stage in the process would be helpful.

4.8 Resource Panel

The Resource Panel was introduced in September 2019 following service redesign. All referrals for a family placement resource are now considered by the Forum which is made up of two Managers from different parts of the Children, Families and Justice Service. All children who have been looked after and accommodated for more than 12 months and who do not have a plan for permanence are reviewed at panel. The operation of the Resource panel is reviewed 6 monthly

There have been 67 children referred to the Resource Panel for a fostering placement and 31 reviewed by the Forum. The Forum ensures that the children in greatest need get access to the range of resources required and ongoing review ensures that plans progress and minimise drift.

5. PROPOSALS

It is proposed that Committee endorse the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel Annual Report and support the future plans indicated.

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.

REPORT AUTHOR: Eunice McLennan, Service Leader - Resources

EMAIL DETAILS: PEOPLE@angus.gov.uk

List of Appendices: Adoption Agency Annual Report 2019/20