



**ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND FOSTERING PANEL**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides information on the operation of Angus Adoption Agency from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

Angus Council has a statutory duty to provide an adoption service and meets this duty through the Adoption Agency 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 Area Manager, Criminal Justice Services 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 and the Fostering Panel. The administration, management and co-ordination of all Adoption Agency functions, is the responsibility of the Team Manager of the Permanence Team but has been covered by Fostering 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 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 2016/17, the Adoption and Permanence Panel and the Fostering Panel have had two chairpersons: Audrey Osborne, Principal Educational Psychologist and Margaret Wells, Independent Chair. There are also 11 panel members who 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 should have a depute chair, who will cover in the chair's absence. One panel requires to identify a new depute. For details of current panel membership, refer to Appendix 1. Panels meet twice per month.

In 2016/17, 37 panels were arranged; this included 20 Adoption and Permanence Panels (one cancellation), 1 Review Panel, and 17 Fostering Panels. This reflects a decrease of 20% of panel business compared to the previous year caused by there being no financial reviews conducted during 2016/17 due to an ongoing review of residence and adoption schemes. The financial panel would account more or less for the 20% reduction in panel business.

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

Panels are managed and coordinated by a Team Manager within the Family Placement Service. 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 Coordinator 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 Coordinator 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**

There is a system in place for consulting with people who attend the panel. 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 are given to people on the day of the Panel but response rates remain low. 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

attended one development day facilitated by Adoption and Fostering Alliance to consider roles and responsibilities of the Panel. 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 Area Manager and Team Managers in Family Placement Services.

## 1.7 REVIEW OF DECISIONS

There was one review 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 or couples 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. Applicants in these non-agency placements must notify the local authority where they live, of their intention to apply for an Adoption Order. The Adoption Agency is then required to produce a full report for the court.

In 2016/17, the Adoption Agency received 14 notifications of an intent to apply to be adoptive parents of relatives/step children; representing a significant increase on the previous year. Although the Adoption Agency has received only one confirmation of an Adoption Order being granted, it is likely that figure is an underrepresentation as the Adoption Agency is not routinely informed of the outcome of these court proceedings.

**Fig 1 - Section 18 Adoption**

	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
S.29\30 Notifications	4	7	4	14
S.29\30 Adoptions Granted	0	1	2	1
S.29\30 Withdrawn	0	0	0	0

### 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.

The relevant legislation requires a very specific service to be provided to people interested in adopting a child from abroad or wishing to take a child out of the UK for adoption. Historically there have been very few such

circumstances in Angus; nevertheless the Adoption Agency is required 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.

During 2016/17, there were two inter-country adoption enquiries which did not proceed past the initial enquiry stage.

### **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 (Report 400/98). The existing scheme is due to be reviewed.

During 2016/17, Angus Council paid Adoption Allowances for 20 children. One adoption and one pre-adoption allowance were granted and a further two allowances were continued following an Order being granted.

### **2.4 RESIDENCE ALLOWANCE SCHEME**

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

During 2016/17, Angus Council continued to pay residence allowances for 54 children. Three new residence allowance applications were considered during the year and four residence allowances ceased. In October 2015, changes were introduced to the level of allowances payable to Kinship Carers and those eligible for Residence Allowances. Those carers are now entitled to allowances equivalent of those paid to foster carers (minus child related benefits).

The number of adoption and residence allowances paid is summarised below.

**Fig 2 - Allowances Paid**

	<b>14/15</b>	<b>15/16</b>	<b>16/17</b>
<b>Adoption Allowance</b>	24	18	22
<b>Residence Allowances</b>	61	52	53

### **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 have a problem relating to adoption such as birth parents or relatives. 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 by the Permanence Team Manager. Referrals are passed to the Permanence Team Manager and are allocated to social workers. In 2016/17 31 people were in receipt of adoption support.

In addition to the duties under the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, the Adoption Support Services and Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2009 made provision for Adoption Support Services including assessment of the needs of individuals affected by adoption. The same legislation makes provision in relation to adoption allowance schemes. Ten people have been offered birth record counselling, 11 birth parents and 10 adoptees have been offered counselling.

## **2.6 ADOPTION CONTACT**

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. There are currently 39 children for whom a mail box agreement is in place. Six families receive direct support from Children and Young People Services in the People Directorate to facilitate contact between adopted children and their birth family. This is an area of work which is expanding.

## **2.7 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 2016/17, there were 4 children placed with prospective adopters in Angus by other authorities and 3 children placed by the Council out with Angus.

## **2.8 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 have 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

During 2016/17, 45 panel meetings were held: 22 Fostering Panels and 23 Adoption and Permanence Panels.

**Fig 3 Total submissions to the adoption and fostering panels**

Panel Submissions	Adoption and Permanence Panel			Fostering Panel		
	14/15	15/16	16/17	14/15	15/16	16/17
Children presented (Form E)	12	9	10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Children presented – earlier decision deferred for reconsideration of legal route	12	7		N/A	N/A	N/A
Children reviewed (inc children reviewed in need of permanence)	5	21	12	N/A	N/A	N/A
Children de-registered	2	2	-	N/A	N/A	N/A
Matching (no of children)	12	11	7	N/A	N/A	N/A
Carer applications	13	0	5	15	7	7
Family member applications	0	0	1	1	1	4
Carer reviews (inc update reviews)	2		3	36	32	40
Carer reviews (decision deferred)	0	1	0	0	1	7
Carers de-registered	1	0	1	10	8	0
Adoption allowance applications (no of children)	0	0	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adoption allowance reviews (no of children)	2	14	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adoption allowance applications deferred (no of children)	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Residence allowance applications (no of children)	7	3	6	N/A	N/A	N/A
Residence allowance applications deferred \ unsuccessful	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Residence allowance reviews (no of children)	27	35	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
One-off payment (legal cost) applications (no of children)	3	1	5	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adoption Allowance ceased	2	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Residence Allowances ceased	5	0	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Consultancy/ advice	N/A	0	0	N/A	2	N/A
Out with approvals	N/A	2	0	66	47	47
Private fostering application	0	0		N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>105</b>

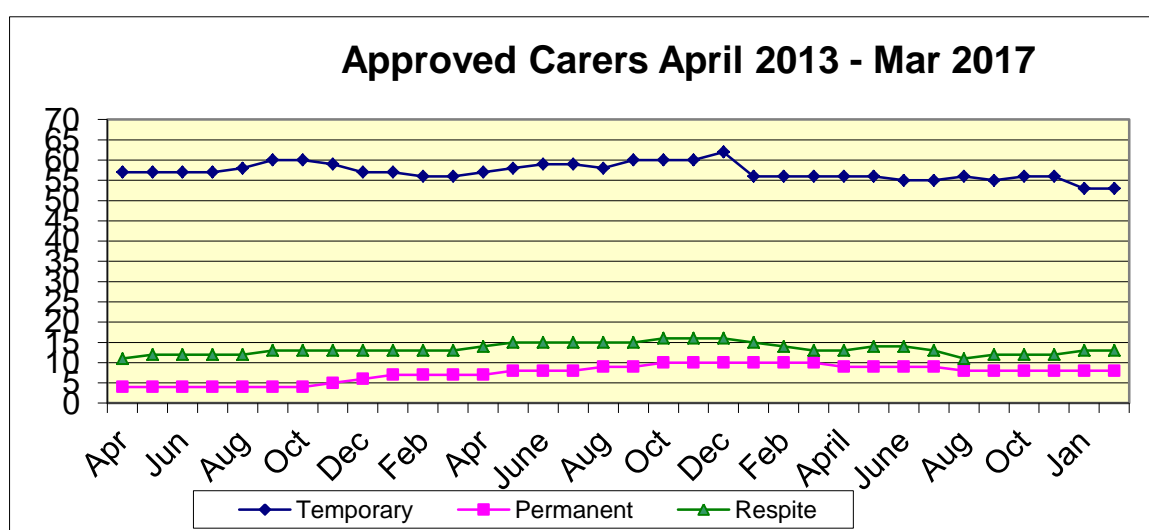
### 3.2 MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS FOR PERMANENCE

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 is 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 2016/17 six children had permanence orders with authority to adopt granted, seven permanence orders and 9 adoption orders were granted.

### 3.3 RECRUITMENT OF PROSPECTIVE CARERS

Based on an analysis of the number of foster carers needed, a recruitment target was set for 2016/17 to reach a total of 85 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 March 2017, there are 85 foster carers (48 temporary, 8 permanent plus 18 on time out and 11 respite carers).



Carers in the Angus Skills Based Fostering scheme are approved at one of three levels. We currently have 18 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. 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. During 2016/17, the average number of children in placement dropped from 1.6 to 1.45. Only 8 carers are approved to take 3 children.

Externally commissioned placements are only used when we are not able to identify a suitable placement within our own resources. We currently have two children in temporary external foster placements and three children in permanent placements. Placements with external agencies are relatively expensive, but the introduction of a national commissioning framework has slightly reduced these costs and clarified expectations about the service provided.

We continue to make efforts to recruit permanent foster carers for children unable to return to their families but where adoption is not an appropriate option. There are 9 permanent carers providing placements for 14 children.

### 3.4 APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE CARERS

Recommendations to approve prospective foster carers and adoptive carers are made by the Adoption and Fostering panels. The panels also review a carer's approval minimally every three years after the initial twelve month review 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 6 (below).

**Fig 4 Carers registered by the adoption and fostering panels**

		14/15	15/16	16/17
<b>Permanent Carers</b>	Adopters	8	7	2
	Perm Foster Carers	3	0	3
<b>Temporary Carers</b>	Temporary	7	5	6
	Respite	5	4	1
<b>Support Carers</b>		2	3	5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>

### 3.5 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. The Scottish Adoption Register (SAR) provides a national system that helps local authorities explore potential links across Scotland and

beyond. It does this by providing a national linking service, hosting matching events that allow adopters to find out more about children requiring placements directly from the people. Three children have been matched through SAR.

**Fig 5 Children placed through the North East consortium/SAR**

	<b>14/15</b>	<b>15/16</b>	<b>16/17</b>
Angus children placed in other authorities	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
Children from other authorities placed in Angus	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</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 arrangements in 2016/2017.

## **Part 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 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:

#### **4.2 Review of Permanence Processes 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. The wider children and families service is in the process of reviewing the local approach to managing permanence. The scope of the review includes both procedures and practice in relation to children requiring permanent placements and engagement with key stakeholders is underway. It is anticipated that any changes arising will be implemented by April 2018.

#### **4.3 Recruitment of prospective adoptive parents and foster carers**

Increasing the number of approved carers remains a key to achieving better outcomes for Looked After Children. This year we have invested

significantly in a social media campaign launched in November 2016 with the catch phrase "Change lives for the better. Adopt or foster an Angus child today". Our campaign has generated significant interest from the public but the challenge of identifying suitable carers is ongoing. We continue to meet regularly to explore ways of enhancing the recruitment of prospective carers and ideas and methods of working are reviewed and initiated.

#### 4.4 Kinship Care

A review of the Kinship Carers Scheme is ongoing and a new post was created to appoint a kinship social worker dedicated to supporting kinship carers, development work will continue during 2017/18.

#### 4.5 Care Inspectorate Inspection

Angus Council's Adoption Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in April 2016. The service continues to be graded at level 5 (Very Good) across all areas and received positive feedback. A recommendation relating to how we review and monitor external fostering agencies to address quality and practice issues promptly is being progressed.

#### 4.6 Review of Angus Skills Based Fostering Scheme

The revised skills based scheme was agreed at Children and Learning Committee in January 2017 for implementation in July 2017. The scheme was reviewed to better meet the needs of our looked after children. The main changes to the scheme focused on eligibility criteria, training requirements, the introduction of a skills level forum and specific additional fees.

#### 4.7 Smoking Policy for Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents

A smoking policy for foster carers and adoptive parents was approved at the Children and Learning Committee in November 2016. This makes clear that we will not place children under the age of 11 in a household where any adult smokes. This is a significant demonstration of our commitment to promote the health and wellbeing of looked after children. The policy came into effect immediately but only applies to new placements and has therefore not impacted on any children who were already in settled placements where carers smoked.

#### 4.8 Review of Respite Provision for Children in Foster Care

This was considered by Children and Learning Committee in January 2017 when it was agreed that paid respite for foster carers would reduce from 28 days per year to 14 days. This was in response from feedback from our children and young people that respite is disruptive and does not promote their sense of wellbeing and belonging. In order to encourage carers to take children on holiday with them, we have also introduced an additional daily allowance to help cover the costs.

Eunice McLennan  
Area Manager  
21 April 2017

## APPENDIX 1

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

	<b>Panel 1</b>	<b>Panel 2</b>
Chairperson	Margaret Wells (Independent)	Audrey Osborne (People)
Depute Chair	Kirsty Lee (Senior Planning Officer, Children's Services)	Paul Donaldson (Independent)
Co-ordinator	Elizabeth Ross (Children's Services) Lindsey Foreman (Children's Services)	Elizabeth Ross (Children's Services) Lindsey Foreman (Children's Services)
Panel member		
Medical Adviser	Gwendolynn Fagerson (Health)	Gwendolynn Fagerson (Health)
Legal Adviser	Various (Resources Directorate)	Various (Resources Directorate)
Panel Member	Barry Howard (Educational Psychologist)	Anne Martin (Independent Member)
Panel Member	Fiona Roberts (Team Manager Children's Services)	Linda Riddell (Nurse Adviser Child Protection)
Panel Member	Ruth Watson (Independent)	Graham Malcolm (Independent)
Panel Member	Sarah Turner (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)	Agnes Boath (Senior Welfare Rights Officer)
Agency Decision Maker	Alan Hope (Area Manager Criminal Justice Service)	Alan Hope (Area Manager Criminal Justice Service)

### ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANEL FEEDBACK FORMS

#### COLLATED RESPONSES 2016/17

A total of 65 feedback forms were returned during this period. Below are some of the themes that emerged

#### **Attendees were asked around the practical arrangements at Panel:**

- The questions were appropriate, proportionate and clearly delivered.
- We waited in waiting room for over an hour with no explanation of why we were not called.
- Good to meet Panel members and get your views across/and feedback.
- Good arrangement of meeting rooms to keep individuals separate.

#### **Were you clear about what Panel members were asking you and were you given sufficient time to answer?**

- Very clear and made to feel comfortable.
- The questions were appropriate, proportionate and clearly delivered.
- We waited in waiting room for over an hour with no explanation of why we were not called.
- Good to meet Panel members and get your views across/and feedback.
- Yes, never felt pushed given plenty time to think and answer.
- Very relaxed.
- Panel members were good listeners, which gave us a feeling of being comfortable to answer.

#### **Did the panel listen to you and treat you with courtesy and respect?**

- Absolutely – no rush and very relaxed.
- Felt at ease, friendly, relaxed but still professional.
- No concerns at all.

#### **What aspects of the Panel did you find most positive?**

- Felt relaxed and positive. Lots of friendly faces. But also a smaller panel than my previous experience which helped.
- Panel make carers feel at ease.
- Panel members listened to workers and re-approached their decision/discussion following additional information being discussed.
- They were supportive of the work the foster carers had evidenced.
- That they listened to the foster carers views and perspectives. That they took into consideration the complexities around fostering.
- Panel was on time. Panel members were respectful and gave time to answer questions fully.
- Felt the Panel had a very good understanding of the complexities, and the challenges the foster carers experience on a daily basis.

#### **What aspects of the Panel did you find most difficult?**

- Just trying to anticipate what I would be asked – Bit anxiety provoking!

- Only self inflicted nerves.
- Took a while to hear the recommendation.
- Panel running approx.. 1hr late. Impact on timing for other participants as well as impact on own diary.
- Some Panel members expressions appear to be somewhat judgemental.
- Can be an intimidating but very welcoming and open.
- None, it's always an apprehensive time going in front of a Panel, but everyone did all they could to make us feel at ease.
- Final approval so I was very nervous as a positive outcome was so important to me. Interview style with so many panel members is a little daunting.

**Any comments about the way the outcome of the Panel was communicated to you?**

- Clear indication of recommendation and timescales for decision. Thanked for attending.
- Very clear and understandable for the foster carer to understand.
- The chair was very sensitive to the applicant.
- The Panel made a quick decision and communicated this clearly to the applicants.
- Yes Panel were very clear, and it was communicated to myself sufficiently.
- I was very happy about the way I was told and happy with the positives I was given.

**Any other comments:**

- Very easy going Panel. Put us at ease very quickly.
- I felt the Panel members style was very professional and gave the opportunity for the applicants to expose themselves, for better or worse, which is their purpose.
- No, I am just really pleased that my family is about to start a new chapter in our lives and look forward to this with enthusiasm.
- Would like to thank Panel members for the continuing approval for foster caring and would like to say we have enjoyed our first year! Thank you.
- A very relaxed feeling I got when I went into Panel and everyone treated me with courtesy and respect.