

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 12 AUGUST 2021

REPORT ON THE ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND THE FOSTERING PANEL – ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

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 the 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 publicly available on the Council website.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COMMUNITY PLAN

2.1 This report contributes to the following outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan 2017-2030 and the Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families.

- Children are given the best start in life;
- Physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing is improved;
- There are more opportunities for people to achieve success.
- Our children and young people who experience particular inequalities and disadvantage will achieve health, wellbeing and educational outcomes comparable with all other children and young people.

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, fostering and kinship, in line with best practice. The annual report now also incorporates key information regarding the operation of all three panels and the wider work of the adoption agency.

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The Annual Report on the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel provides information for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Key issues from the report include:

4.2 **Exit Interviews**

Exit interviews are offered to all foster carers who leave the fostering service, giving them an opportunity to provide feedback on their fostering experience. This information presents the service with an opportunity to make changes and improve practice.

4.3 **The Permanence Forum for children**

The Permanence Forum provides a more streamlined and consistent approach to progressing plans for children. There has been a significant reduction in the numbers 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 their birth families or in kinship households.

4.4 **Support to Carers**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, carers have faced different challenges this year with many having had to home school the children in their care. A variety of support has been provided by the service through home visits, virtual and telephone support. Practical support provided included additional financial assistance to purchase digital equipment so that children and their carers can access support. We also introduced an additional fee which has been paid to foster carers engaged in home schooling.

Despite lockdown, adoption and kinship weeks were a great success with a programme of activities and fun provided by the teams. Each of these sessions were well attended and positive feedback was received.

4.5 **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 have small numbers coming forward to foster and adopt. In order to complement the social media work, we have developed a dedicated website which was launched in 2020/21 www.fosteringandadoption.angus.gov.uk. A recruitment campaign focusing on Angus Council employees during fostering fortnight also highlighted the supports available to employees of Angus Council who are kinship or foster carers. These policies reflect the Council's ongoing commitment to delivering its broader Corporate Parenting duties.

4.6 **Carer Support Development Plans 2020/21**

The skills level-based scheme has been in place for a number of years and is currently under review. A consultation process is underway involving foster carers and key stakeholders. The service will progress to review the findings and adapt the scheme accordingly.

There will be an ongoing focus on developing continuing care and supported lodging services to ensure the availability of the best support and choice for our looked after young people and care leavers. This includes refreshing arrangements for the recruitment, assessment, and training of supported lodging providers.

4.7 **Training and Development**

Workers within the fostering, permanence and kinship teams have worked hard to offer training opportunities for carers and adopters, moving from face to face training to virtual training. Alongside training sessions, additional support groups were also offered to foster carers and adoptive families.

The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 places a new duty on local authorities to take steps to promote, on a regular basis, personal relations, and direct contact between a child in their care and their brothers and sisters. In line with these changes to legislation, “siblings together” training was delivered to all relevant staff, foster carers, prospective adopters and kinship carers to highlight the importance of promoting and maintaining these relationships.

The Secure Base Model is being implemented across the Resource Service, as it is recognised that a secure base is at the heart of any successful, caregiving environment - whether within the birth family, in foster care, kinship care, residential care or adoption. The Carers Support Service has embraced this model by facilitating training around the key themes of secure base to support carers and adoptive parents to promote security, confidence, competence, and resilience in the children they care for. The model is also used by supervising social workers, including in the supervision of carers and staff and is used to inform the assessment of carers. For more information please refer to Information Schedule presented to Children and Learning Committee on 16 February 2021 - [Information Schedule - Secure Base Model](#).

4.8 **Adoption Support**

The service has reviewed how best to support birth parents when their children are registered in need of permanence and/or adoption is granted. Birth parents are offered individual support in the first instance, however due to Covid-19, the development of a birth parent group has not been possible. Plans are underway to reintroduce these once restrictions allow. Adoption support groups have continued to operate, albeit virtually. These continue to be well attended. Plans are also underway to expand our adoption support services to extended family members of prospective adopters in order that we can develop a shared understanding of an adopted child's journey and associated support needs.

4.9 **Development of an Adult Provision Panel**

Plans are underway to develop an Adult Provision Panel for the review and approval of continuing care providers and supported lodging providers in order to bring a consistent and objective approach to the approval of this group of carers.

4.10 **The Promise**

Between 2017 and 2020, the Independent Care Review listened to the experiences of over 5500 care experienced children, young people, adults, and professionals working in the care system to create a vision to improve the care system in Scotland. The work of the Care Review culminated in the publication of seven reports in February 2020, including 'The Promise'.

'The Promise' report sets out a vision for what the future of care for Scotland's children and young people could be. It advocates for the provision of more intensive, preventative support to families to keep them together where it is safe to do so. It also says that, where that is not possible, the alternative should provide children with a loving home, with positive and lasting relationships and support to thrive.

Over the coming year, the Carers Support Service will collaborate with our carer community so that we can support the delivery of that vision, building on the good practice that already exists. We are currently delivering information sessions to all staff and carers about The Promise with a view to developing an action plan, aligned to the Council's Corporate Parenting Plan, to detail how we will help make this ambition a reality.

4.11 **Siblings together**

As noted above, there are changes to the legislation (namely the introduction of Section 13 of the Children (Scotland) 2020 Act and the Looked After Children (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021) which came into force on 26 July 2021.

These changes confer a duty on the local authority to place brothers and sisters, where appropriate, with the same carer (foster carer or kinship carer), or place brothers and sisters in homes which are near to each other (if this would better safeguard and promote the welfare of a child than a placement in the same home).

The changes will also allow the extension of foster placement numbers to more than three children per household. Recruiting and supporting foster carers to care for brothers and sisters together will continue to form part of our strategy.

5. **PROPOSAL**

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 2020-2021



Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Form

(To be completed with reference to Guidance Notes)

Step 1

Name of Proposal – Report on The Angus Adoption Agency and the Fostering Panel Annual Report 2020-2021

Step 2

Is this only a **screening** Equality Impact Assessment Yes
(A) If Yes, please choose from the following options **all** reasons why a full EIA/FSD is not required:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| (i) It does not impact on people | Yes/No |
| (ii) It is a percentage increase in fees which has no differential impact on protected characteristics | Yes/No |
| (iii) It is for information only | Yes |
| (iv) It is reflective e.g. of budget spend over a financial year | Yes/No |
| (v) It is technical | Yes/No |

If you have answered yes to any of points above, please go to **Step 16**, and sign off the Assessment.

(B) If you have answered No to the above, please indicate the following:

Is this a full Equality Impact Assessment	/No
Is this a Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment	/No

If you have answered Yes to either or both of the above, continue with Step 3.

If your proposal is a **strategy** please ensure you complete Step 13 which is the Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment.

Step 3

(i)Lead Directorate/Service:

(ii)Are there any **relevant** statutory requirements affecting this proposal? If so, please describe.

(iii)What is the aim of the proposal? Please give full details.

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

(iv)Is it a new proposal? Yes/No Please indicate OR

Is it a review of e.g. an existing budget saving, report, strategy, policy, service review, procedure or function? Yes/No Please indicate

Step 4: Which people does your proposal involve or have consequences for?

Please indicate all which apply:

Employees Yes/No

Job Applicants Yes/No

Service users Yes/No

Members of the public Yes/No

Step 5: List the evidence/data/research that has been used in this assessment (links to data sources, information etc which you may find useful are in the Guidance). This could include:

Internal data (e.g. customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).

Internal consultation (e.g. with staff, trade unions and any other services affected).

External data (e.g. Census, equality reports, equality evidence finder, performance reports, research, available statistics)

External consultation (e.g. partner organisations, national organisations, community groups, other councils.

Other (general information as appropriate).

Step 6: Evidence Gaps.

Are there any gaps in the equality information you currently hold? Yes/No

If yes, please state what they are, and what measures you will take to obtain the evidence you need.

Step 7: Are there potential differential impacts on protected characteristic groups? Please complete for each group, including details of the potential impact on those affected. Please remember to take into account any particular impact resulting from **Covid-19**.

Please state if there is a potentially positive, negative, neutral or unknown impact for each group. Please state the reason(s) why.

Age

Impact

Disability

Impact

Gender reassignment

Impact

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Impact

Pregnancy/Maternity

Impact

Race - (includes Gypsy Travellers)

Impact

Religion or Belief

Impact

Sex

Impact

Sexual orientation

Impact

Step 8: Consultation with any of the groups potentially affected

If you have consulted with any group potentially affected, please give details of how this was done and what the results were.

If you have not consulted with any group potentially affected, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating action of any negative impact (Step 9)?

Step 9: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce potentially negative impacts?

Step 10: If a potentially negative impact has been identified, please state below the justification.

Step 11: In what way does this proposal contribute to any or all of the public sector equality duty to: eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of

opportunity; and foster good relations between people of different protected characteristics?

Step 12: Is there any action which could be taken to advance equalities in relation to this proposal?

Step 13: FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

This step is only applicable to **strategies** which are key, high level decisions. If your proposal is **not** a strategy, please leave this Step blank, and go to Step 14.

Links to data sources, information etc which you may find useful are in the Guidance.

Step 13(A) What evidence do you have about any socio-economic disadvantage/inequalities of outcome in relation to this strategic issue?

Step 13(B) Please state if there are any gaps in socio-economic evidence for this strategy and how you will take measures to gather the evidence you need.

Step 13(C) Are there any potential impacts this strategy may have specifically on the undernoted groupings? Please remember to take into account any particular impact resulting from **Covid-19**.

Please state if there is a potentially positive, negative, neutral or unknown impact for each grouping.

Low and/or No Wealth (e.g. those with enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provision for the future.

Impact

Material Deprivation (i.e. those unable to access basic goods and services e.g. repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, leisure and hobbies).

Impact

Area Deprivation (i.e. where people live (e.g. rural areas), or where they work (e.g. accessibility of transport).

Impact

Socio-economic Background i.e. social class including parents' education, people's employment and income.

Impact

Other – please indicate

Step 13(D) Please state below if there are measures which could be taken to reduce socio-economic disadvantage/inequalities of outcome.

Step 14: What arrangements will be put in place to monitor and review the Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment?

Step 15: Where will this Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment be published?

Step 16: Sign off and Authorisation. Please state name, post, and date for each:

Prepared by: Eunice McLennan, Service Leader, Resources Children, Families and Justice 27/07/21

Reviewed by:

Approved by:

NB. There are several worked examples of separate EIA and FSD Assessments in the Guidance which may be of use to you.
