



**ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND FOSTERING PANEL**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides information on the operation of Angus Adoption Agency and associated panels from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Angus Council has a statutory duty to provide an adoption service and meets this duty through the Adoption Agency which has been in place since 1 April 1996. Responsibility for the functions and decisions of the Adoption Agency rest with the Chief Social Work Officer and authority is currently delegated to the service leaders - justice and child protection and review to act as the Agency Decision Maker.

Angus Adoption Agency is responsible for decisions and tasks in relation to adoption and matters relating to permanence planning for children. Carers Support Service has responsibility for the successful operation of four panels, The Adoption & Permanence Panel, Fostering Panel, Kinship Panel, and Adult Resource Panel.

# OVERVIEW

## ALLOWANCES PAID

ADOPTION

**13** children

KINSHIP

**133** children

## CHILDREN'S NEED FOR PERMANENCE



**5**

Permanence orders

**3**

Permanence orders with authority to adopt

**5**

Adoptions granted

## Number of foster carers

Interim foster carers	13
Permanent foster carers	9
Short breaks foster carers	16
Contingency approved foster carers	4
Dual approval (interim/perm/short breaks)	12
Dual approval (interim/perm/short breaks plus adult provision)	16
External foster carers	18
Foster carers on time out	5



## Number of referrals by type

Referral for interim foster placement	58
Referral for short breaks	17
Interim foster placement review	143
Short breaks placement review	11
External foster placement review	8
Supported lodgings	1



## **Part 1 PANELS**

### **1.1 ANGUS ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL**

The Adoption and Permanence Panel is appointed to consider and make recommendations to the Adoption Agency. The principal functions of the Panel in terms of legislation are:

- 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 a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent 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, the Panel also considers:

- a) Permanence plans for children other than adoption, including permanence orders
- b) Applications for adoption support including adoption allowances and to review the payment of these allowances
- c) Any other matter relating to permanence, including the matching of children with foster carers

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 make recommendations:

- a) On the suitability or continued suitability of a person as a foster carer
- b) As to whether a foster carer would be a suitable foster carer for certain categories of children
- c) 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 ANGUS KINSHIP PANEL**

The main functions of the Kinship Panel are to make recommendations:

- a) On the suitability, or continued suitability, of a person as a kinship carer.
- b) in respect of kinship care assistance, which can include the payment of a regular allowance as well as financial assistance towards seeking a Kinship Care Order

The Kinship Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

### **1.4 ANGUS ADULT RESOURCE PANEL**

The main functions of the Adult Resource Panel are to make recommendations:

- a) On the suitability, or continued suitability, of a person as a supported lodgings provider, including provision for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people
- b) on the suitability, or continued suitability, of a person as a continuing carer

The Adult Resource Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

### **1.5 OPERATION OF THE PANELS**

During 2021/22, in line with government restrictions, the Adoption and Permanence, Fostering, Kinship and Adult Resource Panels have continued to operate virtually via Microsoft Teams. A hybrid model of Panels combining both virtual and face to face attendance is now being adopted as restrictions ease and we secure good quality equipment to support this approach. Moving forward we will be able to offer more choice to participants in how they want to attend Panel.

In 2021/22, 76 Panels were arranged, this included 25 Adoption and Permanence Panels, 25 Fostering Panels, 24 Kinship Panels and 2 Adult Resource Panels. This is only a slight decrease from the previous year and has been sufficient to meet demand.

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

A part time panel adviser was appointed in May 2021 to support the work and the development of the Panels. This role aims to provide oversight and support to the operation of the Panels, including developing expertise of our Panel chairs and members. The adviser offers consultation to workers, oversees and maintains panel membership and ensures members have the required knowledge and training to fulfill the task. This is a positive development and will enable continued improvement of performance monitoring and evaluation.

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

Panel attendees are asked to give feedback on their experience. Responses are collated, analysed and discussed at Panel development events to inform future practice. Given continued low response from birth parents, the panel adviser is now liaising directly with birth parents to ascertain their views and sensitively use their experiences to shape improvement. This forms part of ongoing development which is at an early stage. Work is ongoing regarding the extension of the MyViews app in relation to care placements which will encourage children and young people to engage digitally to share their views on their care experience.

## **1.8 TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT OF PANEL MEMBERS**

Training is important for all panel members, particularly in view of the complexities of the circumstances they are required to consider. The relevant generic training available to Angus Council employees, as well as the training for approved carers, is made available to all panel members. Newly recruited panel members have been trained for their role by an Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) consultant.

## **1.9 REVIEW OF DECISIONS**

There is a process in place whereby applicants can appeal the decision made by the Agency Decision Maker. One appeal was lodged in 2021/22 and was not upheld.

## **Part 2 - ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE AGENCY**

### **2.1 ADMINISTRATION OF SECTION 18 NOTIFICATIONS**

Section 29/30 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 deals with adoption by a person who wishes to petition the Court for an adoption order. Whilst the Adoption Agency does not arrange these placements, the Act requires the agency to become involved by producing a report for Court. These reports are completed as and when requested within Carers Support Service to ensure consistency of practice.

In 2021/22, the Adoption Agency received 3 notifications of intent to apply to become adoptive parents of relatives/stepchildren.

### **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. No such assessments were undertaken this year.

### **2.3 PAYMENT OF ALLOWANCES: ADOPTION ALLOWANCE SCHEME AND KINSHIP ASSISTANCE**

#### **Allowances Paid as of 31 March in 2020, 2021 and 2022**

	<b>31/03/2020</b>	<b>31/03/2021</b>	<b>31/03/2022</b>
Adoption Allowances	17	16	13
Residence Allowances Kinship Order	69	69	81
Kinship Looked After	48	55	52

During 2021/22 Angus Council paid adoption allowances for 13 children and kinship allowances for 133 children. There has been a steady increase in kinship allowances in line with changes in legislation in 2015.

### **2.4 ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

The local authority, as an Adoption Agency, has a duty to provide a service to people including children, who have been impacted by adoption.

Support groups for adoptive parents have continued to be offered virtually although there was a face-to-face adoption party held during Adoption Week Scotland in November 2021 which was well attended. Plans are in place to return to some face-to-face support groups as restrictions ease.

This past year has seen an increase in requests for adoption support for young people reaching teenage years and this demand has been met with one-to-one support and group sessions as well as individual child's plans as appropriate. A significant proportion have related to adoptive families whose children were not placed by Angus Council.

Post adoption contact, where adoption includes an agreement that adoptive parents and birth family will continue to share information, is facilitated by the Permanence team. Additional support has been provided throughout the pandemic during which time there has been increased anxiety for families around the welfare of individuals and increased demand for this service.

## **2.5 INTERAGENCY PLACEMENTS**

An arrangement exists between local authorities to allow children to be placed with adoptive parents. During 2021/22, one child was matched with prospective adopters in Angus by another authority and one child was matched with prospective adopters out with Angus allowing them to live with their brother.

## **2.6 ADOPTION REGISTER AND RECORDS STORE**

All adoption files relating to adoptions arranged by Angus Council are stored locally in secure conditions. The Permanence Team leader is the Keeper of the Adoption Index.



## Part 3 - OVERVIEW OF ADOPTION AGENCY and PANEL BUSINESS

### 3.1 VOLUME AND BREAKDOWN OF PANEL BUSINESS

<b>Panel Submissions</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
Children's permanence plans considered or reviewed at Panel	15	21
Children matched with permanent foster carers	2	4
Children matched with adoptive parents	5	2
Foster Carers approved	9	8
Contingency Foster Carers Approved	1	4
Foster Carers Temporary Variation in Approval	15	8
Foster Carers reviewed	31	23
Carers de-registered	14	10
Supported Lodgings Providers approved	0	2
Adoptive parent approved	2	1
Adoptive parents de-registered	0	2
Kinship carers applications 6 (interim)	22	17
Kinship carer application (appeal)	0	1
Kinship carers applications (long-term)	9	8
Kinship carers reviewed	10	13
Kinship Assistance- (Allowance Application)	5	0
Kinship Assistance (Legal Costs)	8	4
Kinship Assistance (s11 allowance reviews)	44	57
Adoption allowance applications (no of children)	1	0
Adoption allowance reviews (no of children)	0	0
Foster Family Support carers	0	3

Care planning for children who cannot live within their birth parents is a complex and critical area of practice. During the pandemic, Government restrictions impacted on the assessment and planning activity necessary to support decision-making in relation to the long-term care for children, as well as workload demands across services. It also created space for changes of circumstances in relation to individual children, carers, and birth families in some cases. These factors combined to extend the overall permanence pathway for some children. The progress of cases is monitored on an individual basis.

Matching of children with prospective adoptive parents and permanent carers has continued. Whilst permanence has been achieved for some children, there remain others for whom family finding is a challenge.

Twelve fostering families and one adoptive family were approved along with two supported lodgings providers. There were three families approved as support carers.

We also said goodbye to ten fostering families following de-registration. Our valued carers left for a variety of reasons including retirement and other personal reasons. We currently have five fostering families on time-out or awaiting de-registration.

There have been fewer foster carers used 'outwith their approval' however there has also been an increase in the use of external fostering agencies as the demand for placements continue to exceed our current internal resources. Scotland is facing a national shortage of foster carers however despite this national position, we have managed to evidence a modest growth and improved retention of carers. Recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a key priority for the service.



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

The primary consideration for children who become looked after is the ability of the birth family to provide safe, permanent care and for this to be achieved within a reasonable period. If this is not possible, it is crucial that alternative plans are made.

If extended family cannot take on this role, the main routes to long term security for children are adoption and permanent fostering. Achieving permanence for children is a complex and time-consuming area of work which involves detailed input across several relevant teams, including the Council's legal services. The Adoption Agency recognises its important role in enabling permanence decisions to be made and implemented without undue delay.



The number of legal orders securing children's permanence has increased compared to the previous year. There were one each of a permanence order, permanence order with authority to adopt and adoption order granted during 2020/21. In this reporting year, this increased to five permanence orders, three permanence orders with authority to adopt and five adoption orders granted.

### 3.3 RECRUITMENT AND APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE CARERS

Recruitment of foster carers and adoptive parents remains key to achieving better outcomes for looked after children. Whilst there has been a modest increase in the number of foster carers being approved in 2021/22, there has been a reduction in enquiries from 223 in 2020/21 to 117 in 2021/22; this is despite running a local radio campaign, active social media accounts, developing a new fostering and adoption newsletter and targeted internal campaigns for Angus Council staff.

On 31 March 2022, we had the following Angus Council resources available:

Interim foster carers	13
Permanent foster carers	9
Short breaks foster carers	16
Contingency approved foster carers	4
Dual approval (interim/permanent/short breaks)	12
Dual approval (interim/permanent/short breaks plus adult provision)	16
Foster carers on time out	5

As referenced in section 3.4 below, the number of Angus Council carers has not been sufficient to meet demand this year, resulting in 18 fostering families being commissioned from external agencies.

In 2021/22, four contingency foster carer families were approved using Covid legislation and two of these families are now undertaking transition assessments to become short break carers. These families have been a positive addition to the service providing short breaks placements for children during school holidays and weekends.

There are times when fostering families need a short break. To try to ensure continuity of care for our children and young people, members of the foster carer's extended family can be assessed and approved as family support carers. This means that children can stay with people with whom they have an established relationship, promoting family membership and a sense of belonging. We currently have ten family support carers providing short breaks to children placed with foster families.

The provision of continuing care allows young people to remain with their foster family until they are ready to make the transition into more independent living. There has been a steady increase in the number of young people making the decision to stay with their foster family. This is a positive choice for many young people offering them stability, security and continuity of care as they navigate the world of work or further education. It is anticipated that the number of young people choosing continuing care will continue to rise over the next year. The increase in continuing care placements however results in a decrease in the number of available foster families, thus the need for ongoing recruitment of new foster families.

Supported lodgings provision can offer a stepping-stone towards independent living by offering a greater degree of independence within a supported living environment. In response to the humanitarian crisis, we have also recruited supported lodgings providers for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. There is capacity currently within this resource.

### **3.4 FOCUS AND MONITORING OF EXTERNAL COMMISSIONED PLACEMENTS**

Externally commissioned placements are used when the service is unable to identify a suitable placement within our own resources. On 31 March 2022, we had 18 external fostering placements for 25 children, one of whom was placed on a continuing care basis and two children have been matched on a permanent basis. External agency foster carers have a link with a supervising social worker from the Angus

fostering team who monitor the placement in respect to the carer's role.

The increase in demand for foster placements is a national crisis and is due to a number of factors. This includes the number of children being accommodated, the increasing length of time children are remaining with their foster families along with the increasing number of young people remaining with their foster family on a continuing care basis.

Whilst there is a shared service agreement with Dundee City and Perth and Kinross Councils to offer placements to each other during periods of peak demand, due to the pressures in all three local authorities, it has not been possible to share placements.

### **3.5 RESOURCE PANEL**

The main role of the Resource Panel is to consider the range of community-based resources (including the range of internal and external foster placement) to allow children and young people to be looked after within their local community, supported by a package of appropriate community resources.

A breakdown of resource panel business and comparison with the previous year is as follows:

#### **1 April 2021- 31 March 2022**

<b>Type of referral</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
Referral for interim foster placement	41	58
Referral for short breaks	9	17
Interim foster placement review	75	143
Short breaks placement review	22	11
External foster placement review	22	8
Supported lodgings	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>238</b>

Referrals over the past year evidence an increasing demand on all our fostering resources, both in relation to referrals for new placements as well as the length of time children are remaining in placement.

## Part 4 - KEY DEVELOPMENTS

The workload of the Adoption and Permanence and Fostering Panels, along with the Kinship and Adult Resource Panels has continued to be busy in 2021/22. Areas of development include the revision of the panel members' handbook and new tailored development sessions. Panel members have attended virtual training on Siblings Together and a Panel Development Day.

The use of support meetings and unplanned ending meetings are now firmly embedded in practice both for internal and external foster placements. These learning reviews allow us to reflect on key decisions and identify learning and practice improvement. There has been success in stabilizing some placements identified as at risk thus avoiding placement breakdowns for some children.

Support to carers has continued with more face to face supervisory and support visits taking place. Children having returned to school full time after a period of pandemic disruption reduced the need for additional support for many carers.

The consultation in relation to the skills level-based fostering scheme is complete and three working groups involving workers and foster carers are currently reviewing the competencies, training and enhancements with a view to adapting the scheme in line with the consultation outcomes. This approach of directly involving our carers in service developments is invaluable to ensuring we deliver the right support.

Recruitment of foster carers and adoptive parents continued to be impacted significantly due to Covid restrictions. We continued to host recruitment events online and introduced outdoor events as restrictions eased. Increasing the number of approved foster carers and adoptive families remains key to achieving better outcomes for our looked after children. We continue to run an active social media campaign, including setting up an Instagram account as well as Facebook and Twitter. We ran two internal campaigns to target Angus Council staff, promoting the foster and kinship carer policy for staff as well as an internal campaign to recruit contingency foster carers, specifically targeting teachers and social workers employed by Angus Council.



In 2021 the Home Office placed responsibility on local authorities to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children/young people requiring accommodation. In response we have developed our supported lodgings scheme approving two families who are willing to provide a home to an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person.

This involved additional work for the Fostering team liaising with different agencies including adult services to ensure the needs of young people are fully met. This is a resource which will require to be developed further as ongoing referrals will be received as part of the National Transfer Scheme. Additional training has also been provided to carers.

The Kinship team continue to support kinship carers who care for looked after children and children subject to Kinship Orders. The team have developed their role further providing regular support visits to kinship carers of looked after children to ensure that support and training needs are taken forward.

Adoption and Kinship weeks were celebrated with many families attending our celebratory children's parties.

Groups for children of primary school age have engaged in Songshop workshops as well as festive parties. The opportunity to engage in Duke of Edinburgh scheme was also available to older young people.

We have launched a monthly Carers Support newsletter which is sent to all foster, kinship and adoptive families. This is a platform to share what is happening in our service as well as signposting carers to learning opportunities both locally and nationally.

In the main training opportunities for carers and adopters has been presented virtually and an online training calendar has been devised to streamline the process for families.

We continue to support the work of Angus Council's Promise and Siblings Together working groups with ongoing training being provided to all carers and staff.





The service offers support to 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, the development of a birth parent group was not possible. There are now ongoing discussions with a voluntary organisation around supporting a funding application to develop a support offer to birth parents.

The service has engaged in a pilot project working in partnership with Psychologyspace. This provides workers and carers with reflective practice opportunities, case consultation and group work to support reparative care of the child and young people they are looking after.

The Permanence Forum continues to consider care planning for children with a view to securing their long-term future. There continues to be fewer children being referred to the forum than in previous years.

#### **Part 5 - SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2022/23:**

- Continue work to build and sustain high quality placements for children who need alternative care, specifically including the identification of permanent foster, kinship and adoptive families for children.
- Grow continuing care and supported lodging capacity to ensure the availability of support and choice for our young people, care leavers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. These areas remain the broad priorities for 2022/23.
- Ensure our methods of engagement, including face-to-face and technology enabled, maximise the opportunities for participation
- Develop a Kinship Carers consultative group and Handbook
- Deliver training on The Promise implementation, Secure Base and Trauma Informed Practice to Panel Members
- Update the Panel Handbook in keeping with changes in legislation and policy.
- Continue to embed the Panel Adviser role in relation to performance and improvement
- Respond to emerging requirement to support Unaccompanied Minors from Ukraine