

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE - 1 JUNE 2023

ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND FOSTERING PANEL - ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

REPORT BY KATHRYN LINDSAY - DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JUSTICE

ABSTRACT

This report informs members of the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel annual report for 2022-23. The report provides an overview of 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. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Children and Learning Committee:

- (i) Endorse the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel Annual Report
- (ii) Note that the Report will be published on the Council's website.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

2.1 This report contributes to outcomes across a range of strategic plans:

The Council Plan 2023-2028:

- Reduce inequalities in all our communities
- Provide the best start in life for children
- Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals
- Improve physical, mental health and wellbeing

The Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2021-23

- Our children having the best start in life in a nurturing environment
- Our children growing up healthy, confident, and resilient with improving physical and mental health and strengthened emotional wellbeing

Angus Promise Plan (Corporate Parenting Strategy):

- Keeping children and young people 'within their local communities where that meets their needs'

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, brothers and sisters, 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 Regulations require 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 every year. Angus Council has panels for adoption, fostering, kinship and adult resources, in line with best practice. The annual report details key information about the work of the panels and of the wider adoption agency.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 This annual report provides information for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. Within Angus, as of 31 March 2023, there were 198 children/young people being looked after and accommodated in family-based care:
- 128 children lived with kinship carers
 - 99 children/young people were in fostering placements
 - 53 fostering households offered a range of care options

Key issues from the annual report include:

4.2 Panel Work

Angus Council currently has four panels: an Adoption and Permanence Panel, a Fostering Panel, a Kinship Panel and an Adult Resource Panel.

Through the work of the Panel Advisor, there has been an increase in direct contact with birth parents, before and after panels, to offer support and collate feedback on their experience. There has also been a slight increase in the number of parents attending panel, likely due to panels being available virtually. Feedback continues to be sought from front line workers, carers and team managers in relation to panel attendance and experiences.

An information leaflet for parents on panel processes for permanence has been developed for sharing with parents by the child's social worker whenever a recommendation is made a child/ren is/are in need of permanent alternative care.

The quality assurance role has lent itself to offering support to social workers in relation to the permanence process through feedback from the Panel Advisor and panel members.

Again, the number of panels held has been broadly in line with previous years and has been sufficient to meet demand. Each scheduled panel has a high volume of assessments to consider. The commitment of panel members in Angus remains excellent, with established panel chairs in the role.

Alongside quality assurance and feedback systems, training continues to be offered to panel members. Most recently members have had input on Trauma Informed Practice and Understanding Mental Ill Health for Carers with exploration for panel members of the impact on the provision of safe care for children. Further joint training events are to be provided to promote the opportunity for shared learning and develop professional relationships between panel members and workers across the Children, Families and Justice Directorate.

There has been one appeal this year which was reviewed and upheld.

4.3 Recruitment of Carers

Three fostering families were recruited this year together with one supported lodging provider and three adoptive families. Despite a continued active and visible recruitment strategy, the number of enquiries, assessments and approvals remain below the level needed to keep children with local carers. We have sought to outsource care to external fostering agencies during this reporting period to ensure that children's needs are met. Whilst this has enabled some sibling groups to stay together, it does involve increased distance for family time and increases complexities in supporting reunification.

Our priority continues to be to place children in the Angus (or surrounding) area where possible and in line with children's needs. To achieve this, we continue to promote fostering wherever possible and support carers to a high standard to enable them to care for children. However, we do work in an increasing challenging landscape with high demand for external foster placements nationally. Other opportunities for those with caring capacities within the population are likely to be impacting the availability of carers for care experienced children as initiatives such as the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, has drawn people into providing support to other vulnerable groups.

Following Scottish Government guidance, our existing assessment and approval process for private fostering was adapted last year to enable a local response to any referrals in relation to unaccompanied minors from Ukraine. During the year, we approved one private foster carer, to provide care for two Ukrainian minors.

4.4 **Kinship Care**

Our use of family care (Kinship) is in line with last year. The number of children who are placed on a longer-term basis and where financial support is provided to the family (Kinship Orders) is consistent.

The Kinship team has experienced several changes over the past year, with regards to staffing. It was acknowledged that a review of arrangements would be beneficial to consider how best to arrange the available resources and deliver the support needed by kinship carers in Angus. Feedback from kinship families highlighted issues to consider around their experiences of assessment, attendance at panel and communication with the team.

An internal review of arrangements began in January 2023, with the Review Team meeting regularly to progress the objectives, with the input and feedback from kinship carers in Angus. The Kinship Care Consultative Group and a return to face-to-face support sessions, alongside online meetings, has supported engagement of kinship carers. The review is expected to conclude following final consultation with kinship carers in May 2023, following which recommendations will be considered by the Director of Children, Families and Justice regarding options for delivery going forward.

4.5 **Achieving Permanence**

There was an increase in the number of legal orders securing children's permanence during the previous year, largely due to covid related delays in court processes in the previous year, with five adoption orders and eight permanence orders granted providing children with legal security in their families. During 2022-23 there were four permanence orders and four adoption orders granted, securing children's permanence.

4.6 **Future Focus**

The growth of 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, remain the broad priorities for the targeted social media campaigns, local radio adverts and leaflets in correspondence to all Angus households. We have also sought to target those who have experienced and/or offered to host individuals and families from Ukraine, who may then wish to consider extending their experience of providing care.

The service has provided training, advice and support to carers and to young people about continuing care. A number of foster carers have since been approved as Adult Care Providers for a continuing care arrangement, which is supported by increased knowledge of staff about the continuing care legislation and processed involved.

As noted above, as the review of kinship care arrangements concludes, we are committed to taking forward the recommendations from this and seeking to place kinship carers front and centre of our care provision.

5. **PROPOSALS**

It is proposed that Committee endorse the Angus Adoption Agency and Fostering Panel Annual Report and note that the report will be published on the Council's website.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional financial implications arising out of this report.

7. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached.

8. CONSULTATION

The relevant members of the Council's Leadership Team have been consulted in the preparation 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: Peter McDonnell, Service Leader

EMAIL DETAILS: childrenandlearning@angus.gov.uk

List of Appendices: Adoption Agency Annual Report 2022-2023

Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Form

Name of Proposal

Report on The Angus Adoption Agency and the Fostering Panel Annual Report 2022-2023

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 No

(ii) It is a percentage increase in fees which has no differential impact on protected characteristics
No

(iii) It is for information only Yes

(iv) It is reflective e.g. of budget spend over a financial year Yes

(v) It is technical No

If you have answered yes to any of points above, sign off the Assessment.

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

Prepared by: Peter McDonnell, Service Leader, April 2023

Reviewed by: Karen Ross, Senior Practitioner, May 2023

Approved by: Kathryn Lindsay, Director Children, Families and Justice, May 2023