

Report 157/23

Appendix



**ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY AND FOSTERING PANEL  
ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

**ANGUS  
Fostering  
& Adoption**

Report prepared by:  
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## **Introduction**

This Annual Report sets out the delivery of our Kinship, Fostering and Adoption services throughout the year from April 2022 until March 2023. The report takes a retrospective look at the previous year's developments within the service as well plans for the coming year.

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, with authority delegated to the Service Leader, Partnerships, Practice & Justice Services acting as the Agency Decision Maker, alongside other nominated officers within Children, Families & Justice.

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.

## **Our Values**

The Carers Support service aims to ensure that children and young people live in an environment which promotes equality, valuing and respecting their individuality and diversity. This applies to their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, culture, disability, and sexuality. We endeavour to provide the highest standard of family-based care for vulnerable children and young people, to secure their immediate safety and welfare and to provide an environment, which will allow them the opportunity to develop as individuals to reach their full potential and prepare them for successful adult lives.

The Service encourages a trauma informed approach to meeting children's needs, we support carers to work to provide a secure base for the children and young people we care for, and the teams work hard to provide that secure base to our carers.

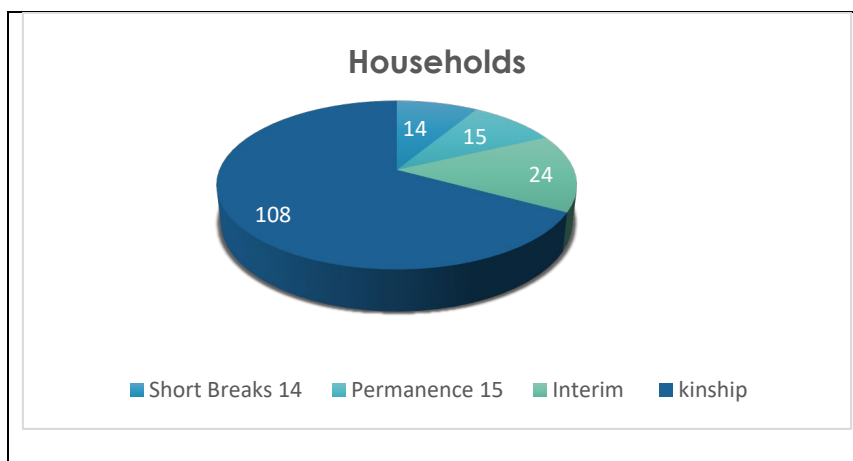
We work collaboratively with carers and with our colleagues across Angus to promote a mutual understanding of the wider legislative and social policy drivers, paying specific attention to the council plan and to our shared aims that keep the needs of the child at the centre of our thinking and planning.

## **Context**

On 31 March 2023, in Angus, there were 198 children/young people being looked after and accommodated. Of those, 51 were living with kinship carers, and 99 were living with foster carers. The remaining 48 live in residential care settings and in residential education settings.

On the same date, Angus Council were supporting 129 children and young people, who live with kinship carers. Many children living with kinship carers are not looked after. Some will be the subject of residence orders, and some will have lived with extended family before any social work involvement.

Angus Council is supporting 161 households who provide alternative care to children and young people. These households comprise families, couples, and single people, who offer a range of different care placements and services, as summarised below:



### The Panels

There are four Panels operating in Angus. The Adoption and Permanence Panel, The Fostering Panel, the Kinship Panel, and the Adult Resource Panel. These are the formal mechanisms through which recommendations are made to the local authority regarding the suitability of prospective foster carers and adopters. The panel reviews all relevant information, including reports from social workers and other professionals involved in the assessment process, to ensure that the best interests of the child are being met.

The Adoption and Permanence Panel is independently chaired and considers assessments of prospective adoptive parents, permanent foster carers, and dual approval of carers. The panel consider the matching of children with approved prospective adopters and permanent carers. The panel also considers the deregistration of adoptive parents or permanent carers who no longer wish to progress, or who are assessed as being unable to have ongoing approval.

The Fostering Panel's primary legal function is to make a recommendation about a person's suitability to be a foster carer. In doing so, they consider the terms of approval, including the number and age range of children carers wish to care for. Foster carers are reviewed regularly at panel, minimally every 3 years.

The Kinship Panel consider assessments of kinship foster carers on an interim or long-term basis. They will also approve funding for section 11 (residence) orders. Kinship carers can be reviewed at panel.

The Adult Resource Panel consider assessment and reviews of supported lodgings and continuing care providers.

### **Kinship Team**

The Team support kinship carers who care for children from Angus. Carers living in Angus who care for children from other areas area also supported. Assessments of kinship carers are undertaken and presented at panel, with ongoing review processes in place. Kinship allowances are arranged and reviewed. Varying levels of support are offered, to meet the needs of each family. Practical support, resources, advice, and guidance are available. Support groups take place twice monthly in different towns in Angus, and training events are arranged. Newsletters are distributed regularly.

### **Fostering Team**

This team is responsible for supporting foster carers who provide care for children on a temporary, short breaks or continuing care basis. Supported lodging providers who provide care and accommodation for young adults are supported. Foster carers receive a range of formal and informal support, including formal supervision, short breaks, peer support, out-of-hours support and access to independent support, as well as support for sons and daughters.

A wide range of training opportunities are developed and offered each year, along with the provision of regular support groups. Carers are consulted regularly to ensure the topics covered meet current needs. Supervising Social Workers collaborate with foster carers to produce reports for the carers' annual review. The recruitment of new carers is a priority, and the 'Skills to Foster' training programme is delivered regularly to ensure any prospective carers are informed and prepared.

A duty service is available to support carers and colleagues. This service manages referrals in respect of children who need to be looked after and accommodated with foster carers or within residential care settings. Placements made with external independent fostering agencies are monitored, children and carers are visited regularly to ensure contracts with agencies are current and meet the needs of each young person.

### **Permanence Team**

The Permanence Team support permanent foster families, working in partnership with other professionals to meet the needs of the children, in line with care plans. Prospective adopters are offered guidance and training before comprehensive assessments are completed. Support groups, and training events are facilitated. Family finding is undertaken in respect of children identified as needing permanent alternative care. Adoptive parents

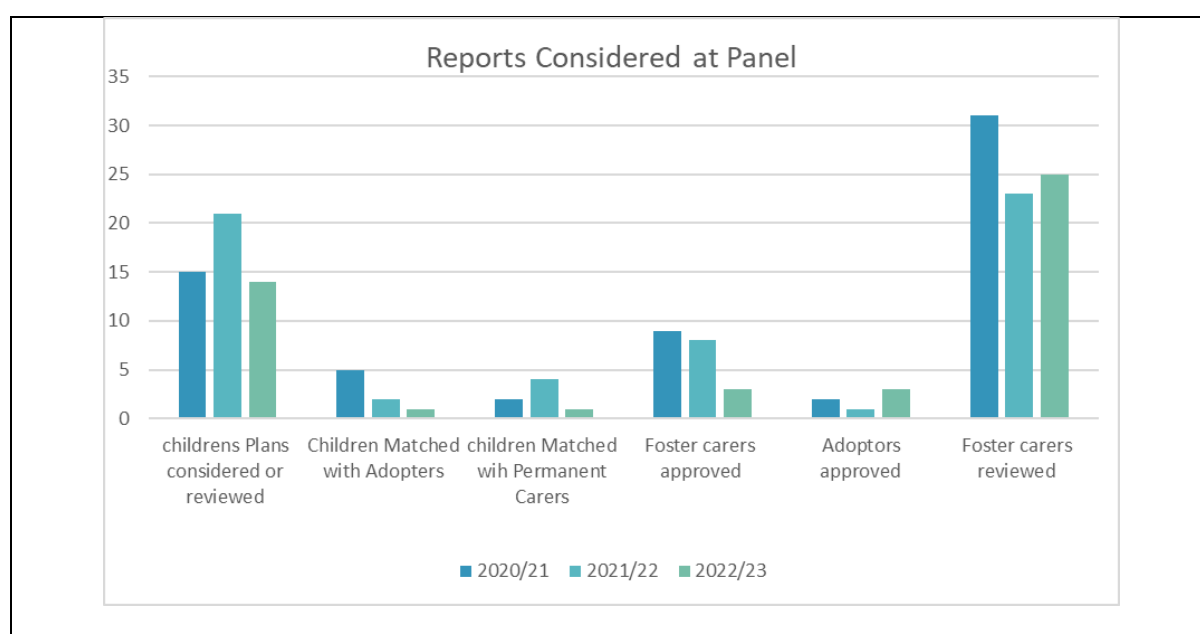
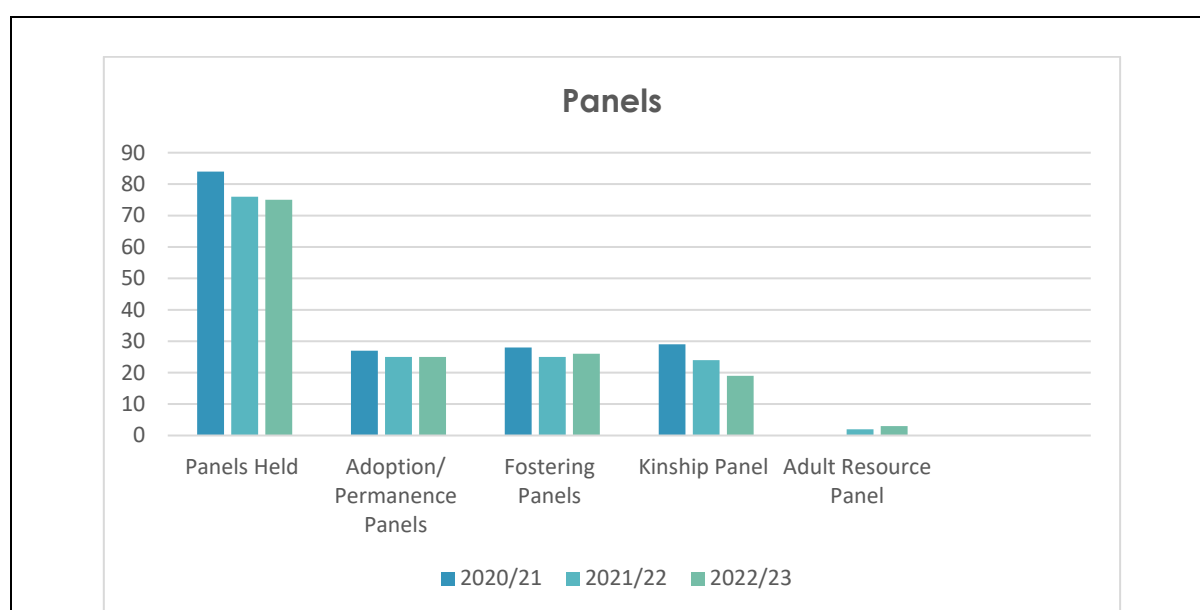
are supported during the matching process, and post-adoption support is provided.

Theraplay-based training and supports are offered to foster carers, adopters, and to their children, as well as ongoing work with birth families to offer support and to facilitate indirect contact. Care experienced young people, and adults seeking access to Adoption Records are offered guidance and support.

## Reflections on 2022/23

### Panels

Throughout the reporting period, Panels continued to be held regularly with numbers of referrals to panel outlined in the graph below:



## Volume and Breakdown of Panel Business

<b>Panel Submissions</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
Children's permanence plans considered or reviewed at Panel	15	21	14
Children matched with permanent foster carers	2	4	1
Children matched with adoptive parents	5	2	1
Foster Carers approved	9	8	3
Foster carers reviewed (interim/Perm/Short Breaks)	31	23	25
Foster Carers de-registered	14	10	9
Contingency carers deregistered	0	0	2
Supported Lodgings Providers approved	0	2	1
Adoptive parent approved	2	1	3
Adoptive parents de-registered	0	2	1
Kinship carers assessments	22	17	16
Appeals at panel	0	1	1

Gaining successes in the recruitment of carers has been difficult these past 12 months, and the reduced number this year may in part be an impact of the government home for Ukraine Scheme, which has sought host families for Ukrainians fleeing the conflict with Russia. In terms of retention, since 1 April 2022, three interim carers and four short break carers have resigned from the service. This has been due to them experiencing health issues or deciding to have a change in career.

In addition, we have had four interim carers, three short break carers and three permanent carers taking some time out from fostering, with one couple returning after a break of 6 months. The reasons for taking a period of time out have been due to illness, carers taking time to reflect on a placement breakdown, and a change in circumstances that has required a break from fostering to support their own family.

## Court submissions 2022/2023

Order Type	Number Granted
Permanence order	4
Permanence order with authority to adopt	4
Adoption	3
Step-Parent Adoption	5

Recording of decisions in relation to all aspects of children's care and carer approval is of critical importance and the business support service continue to provide an excellent service to the Panel, ensuring that quality minutes and agendas are distributed within required timescales. Given the short timescales involved, this efficiency has supported the smooth running of Panel processes.

### **Kinship – Service Review**

Changes during the last year impacted on capacity to meet the needs of kinship carers from within a discrete team. Feedback from kinship families highlighted some issues relating to their experiences. This included assessment, attendance at panel and communication with the team. We have therefore taken the opportunity to formally review our arrangements to consider:

- whether the allocated resource remains appropriate to deliver kinship care assessment and support
- the level of resource required to deliver the desired outcomes, based on evidence of demand, and consider if there are opportunities for improved ways of working
- the wider Carers Support Service and determine if the current role and remit of the team suffice

The Review began in January 2023 and is expected to conclude following final consultations with kinship carers in May 2023. A report will be shared with the Children, Families & Justice leadership team to inform the way forward.

### **Kinship Team – Current Work**

On an interim basis, while the review progresses, the work of the kinship team is overseen by a Senior Practitioner within the Directorate's Quality Improvement Team. Support and guidance are offered in relation to the standard and quality of assessments. Feedback has been collated about the assessment format and informed suggested changes to the assessment, to improve the experience of carers engaging in the process.

Kinship carers have access to a duty worker who ensures enquiries or requests for support are responded to the same day. All assessments continue to be

progressed and advice and guidance is provided (including but not limited to practical support, financial support, support with parenting strategies and support to access other services).

Support groups are facilitated twice each month, in Arbroath and in Forfar. A core group of carers attend the group regularly and note the benefit they feel from the support. The consultative group has noted views that it can be difficult to join groups initially and work is ongoing with carers to consider how this might be made easier.

A Kinship Party was held on Saturday 18 March 2023 to celebrate Kinship Week (11-17 March). The event was well attended, and the children, carers and workers all said they enjoyed this time together. Feedback has included the benefit felt from mixing with families in similar circumstances, and the bonds the children were making with other young people in the group. Carers have noted that some of the children do not acknowledge their circumstances when with school friends, but within this setting they talk openly about their family life.

### **Fostering Team**

The fostering team have continued to prioritise work to increase the recruitment and retention of foster carers. We have taken existing carers on initial visits to prospective foster carers. A dedicated recruitment and training focus has been developed by one of the social workers. Collaborative work has been ongoing with colleagues in Horizon to recruit carers and supported lodging providers for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

Following consultation, and in partnership with carers, the skills level scheme has been reviewed. A working group comprised of staff and carers worked to make the scheme clearer, fairer, and reflective of the secure base principles.

The referral form used by social workers to share information about children and young people in need of a placement, has been reviewed. A previous focus on legislation and background information may have led to a reduced emphasis on the essence of each young person. The form now encourages better articulation of the individual attributes and needs of each of the young people and how workers envisage these needs could be met within a family care setting.

Informal support for carers, within their own group of families and friends, has been considered. Clear guidance is now in place to ensure carers feel confident when they do need to reach out for short periods of support. This guidance was used by a carer recently when a close relative had a medical emergency. The carer felt confident arranging overnight care for a young person with a trusted family member, well known to the young person. This flexibility facilitated the carer to fully support their family member and be able to speak in person to medical staff.



Work continued with Shona Quinn, Chartered Clinical Psychologist, who has facilitated a second, 'Connect, Reflect, Grow' group for Angus carers. The group offered an opportunity for a group of carers to come together, encouraging honest reflection, exchange of ideas and parenting strategies within a therapeutic parenting framework. This has been reviewed and evaluated positively by participants. A further impact evaluation will be considered in due course.

Training was facilitated to explore the impact and implementation of The Promise. Joint training has been undertaken with Panel members.

The shared services group, with counterparts in Dundee City and Perth and Kinross Councils, planned and facilitated a Tayside training event. Dr Mary Beek delivered a Secure Base workshop to staff and carers from all three local authorities.

One member of the team is trained in Theraplay and will use these skills to offer support and training to Angus carers over the coming months.

Work has been undertaken with a view to build productive relationships and develop our partnership working with external fostering agencies. This is ongoing, supported by the establishment of partnership meetings to discuss our emerging service needs and share information, knowledge and learning.

### **Permanence Team**

The Permanence Team focus on ensuring that children's permanence plans progress without undue delay.

The team benchmarked our previous arrangements with other local authorities and, with the support colleagues, developed a new child permanence report format. The new format has been trialled by key staff across the Children, Families and Justice Directorate and has received positive feedback. It is likely that following evaluation and wider consultation this will be embedded within the Directorate's Assessment Strategy and Operational Instructions.

The team has worked in partnership with Justice Services, to support an organisation called 'Alternatives Dundee' to apply for external funding to enable them to extend their support for birth parents affected by permanence to the Angus area. The funding bid was successful and delivery in Angus has started, this growth in the support available for families is very welcome.

Having considered feedback, research evidence on post adoption support and adoption breakdown and benchmarking with other local authorities, the team have reviewed how they facilitate child appreciation days. This led to the introduction of a new practice model which has received positive feedback from adopters and other agencies involved in interagency matches. The model was used to direct work with adoptive parents who had

asked for support concerned their adoption was at breaking point. The outcome was that adoptions have been maintained families have been observed repairing bonds.

As part of our wider contribution to growing the next generation of Social Workers, we continue to release the Permanence Team Leader to deliver regular input at the University of Dundee around kinship, permanence, and foster care.

### **Progress on Service Development over 2022/23:**

**1) 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.**

We have prioritised the recruitment of foster carers in Angus. Our recruitment group involves staff from across key specialisms along with foster carers who are interested in supporting the development of the service. This has supported the generation of new ideas around how we can approach recruitment and our marketing strategy. These changes have only recently been embedded so we have not yet evidenced a significant increase in enquiries.

**2) 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.**

The recruitment group have focussed on finding innovative ways to recruit supported lodgings providers. During 2022/23, we used targeted social media campaigns, local radio adverts and issued leaflets to all Angus households to raise awareness of the opportunities.

The team provided training, advice, and support to carers and young people about continuing care. Several foster carers have since been approved as Adult Care Providers to enable a continuing care arrangement. Staff report being more informed about continuing care and processes involved.

**3) Ensure our methods of engagement, including face-to-face and technology enabled, maximise the opportunities for participation**

At the start of 2022/23, there continued to be some Covid-19 related restrictions, particularly in relation to the size of groups we could gather for in-person training and events. We continued to be careful about our expectations of carers and recognised that many of our carers (or members of their family) have some health vulnerabilities. We took steps to avoid any unnecessary exposure to Covid-19, and other viruses that appeared to be prevalent following the periods of lockdown. We continued to use the Microsoft Teams platform for meetings, training, and supervision.

As guidance allowed, we developed hybrid working, which works well for carers and staff alike. Teams have continued to ensure children and young people are seen in person wherever possible.

The Panels continue to be held via Microsoft Teams, with a hybrid option available to enable carers and parents to choose to be “in the room” alongside their social worker. It is noted that some parents voiced a continued preference for in-person Panels. We are actively considering whether to build in a full in-person Panel option.

#### **4) Develop a Kinship Carers Consultative Group and Handbook**

The Kinship Carers Consultative Group is now established and is well attended by carers. The ‘Kinship Carers Handbook’ has been completed and will be published following the completion of the kinship review (to allow the final version to reflect any changes).

#### **5) Deliver training on The Promise implementation, Secure Base and Trauma Informed Practice to Panel Members**

Detail of training provided has been offered above. This action is complete. Following changes to the wider senior leadership structure within the Children, Families and Justice Directorate, several additional Agency Decision Makers have been identified. Bespoke training will be delivered to Agency Decision Makers as part of the 2023/24 priorities.

#### **6) Update the Panel Handbook in keeping with changes in legislation and policy**

Work has continued to review the Panel Handbook, final changes will be required to reflect the outcome of the kinship review before distributing to panel members.

#### **7) Continue to embed the Panel Adviser role in relation to performance and improvement**

The Panel Advisor has arrangements in place to get direct feedback from birth parents, of whom there has been a slight increase in the number attending panel. Virtual panels have made attendance easier for some. Feedback is sought from social workers, carers and managers in relation to panel attendance and experiences.

Support is offered to social workers through feedback from the Panel Advisor, panel members and the Agency Decision Maker. Thematic feedback is collated and informs the operational improvement plan.

Considering parents' feedback, an information leaflet explaining the permanence panel process has been developed and is now shared with parents at the point that a recommendation is made that their child(ren) need permanent alternative care.

Panel processes, operational instructions and guidance related to Homes for Ukraine, Supported Lodgings, Continuing Care and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children have been established.

A panel development day is planned for early 2023/24 to update panel members on the aforementioned areas of practice, with a further training session planned for front line workers. Individual level panel member and panel chair reviews will be implemented in 2023/24.

## **Further Key Developments**

### **Ongoing Review of Skills Scheme**

Carers were invited to drop-in sessions as part of the ongoing consultation in relation to our skills-based scheme. Proposals for amendments to the scheme were outlined followed by question-and-answer sessions. All carers were also given an opportunity to send in feedback.

Having reviewed the feedback, the service implemented a revision to the skills-based scheme structure which aims to:

- Enable more effective matching of children's needs with carers experience, knowledge, and skills.
- Increase the availability of internal placements, including to keep brothers and sisters together through a revised fee framework for such placements.
- Improve the mechanisms for carers who have met the requirements of the scheme to move up and down levels to better reflect the care they can provide.
- Reduce the risk of placement breakdown and reliance on external placements by ensuring that payments made in circumstances where a child requires an individual placement, do not negatively impact on our carers' financial circumstances and fully reflect the expectations of an individual placement agreement.

### **Foster Carer Handbook**

The fostering handbook is being updated to reflect The Promise, which challenges us to change our language and terminology when talking about children and young people who are cared for within a fostering family.

Additional information and guidance have been included for foster carers on 'Informal Care in Fostering'. This is in direct response to The Promise, to support a child or young person to feel fully included in the fostering family. The service has been actively supporting foster carers to identify extended family members and/or friends to provide short periods of care (23 hours or less) to children and young people. The aim is to lessen the anxieties for children and young people who often go to short break provision with carers they do not know.

Where carers identify key people within their support network who could provide informal care, a Local Authority Check for all adults in the household are undertaken to ensure this is safe and appropriate.

### **Priorities for the Year Ahead:**

#### **Consolidation**

- Continue to refine policies and financial arrangements across kinship, fostering, adoption, continuing care and supported lodgings to ensure equity and fairness for children and young people in Angus

#### **Training**

- Ensure Training Officer develops training offer in line with the expressed needs of supported carers
- Agree the format/s to be used for future training delivery

#### **Kinship**

- Complete the Kinship Service Review
- Further develop knowledge of our kinship demographic and how we can best meet their needs
- Review information provided to kinship families, including social media

#### **Fostering**

- Embed relevant aspects of the brothers and sisters' legislation
- Further consider how the fostering service can engage more effectively with birth families ensuring that their views are heard
- Refresh the mentoring scheme for foster carers
- Involve carers, where opportunities for improvement are identified, to review, feedback, and change

#### **Permanence**

- Refine permanence process to ensure children's plans are progressed timeously by social workers confident in their practice
- Develop and make available, the Adoption Handbook
- Embed shared development sessions with locality teams to improve collaborative working