



**ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY
ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24**

ANGUS
fostering
& Adoption

Report prepared by:
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Introduction

This is the Angus Council annual adoption service report for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It provides an overview of Adoption activity and performance. The report will also provide an overview of the Carer Support Service, including fostering and kinship care.

Angus Council has a statutory duty to provide an adoption service and meets this duty through the Angus Adoption Agency, which has been in place since 01 April 1996. Responsibility for the functions and decisions of the Adoption Agency rests with the Chief Social Work Officer, with authority delegated to appropriate officers in Children Families and Justice acting as the Agency Decision Maker.

Angus Adoption Agency is responsible for decisions and tasks concerning adoption and matters relating to permanence planning for children. The Carers Support Service has responsibility for the successful operation of four panels, The Adoption & Permanence Panel, Fostering Panel, Kinship Panel, and Adult Resource Panel (Appendix 1 Roles and Responsibilities).

Our Values

Care

“Sometimes it’s not possible for children to live with their family.... But they must belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as they need to.”

[The Promise, Scotland](#)

The Carers Support service, referred to in this report as ‘the 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.

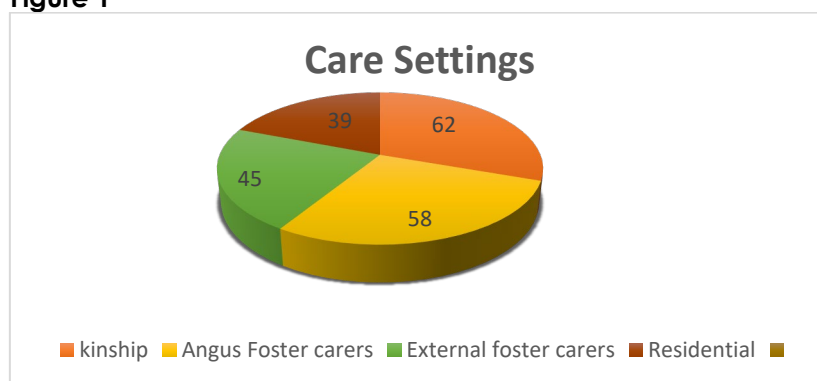
The Service encourages a trauma-informed approach to meeting children’s needs. We support carers to work to provide a secure base for the children and young people we care for, which is a therapeutic framework for caregiving, and the teams work hard to provide that secure base to our carers.

We work collaboratively with carers and with our colleagues across Angus to promote a mutual understanding of the wider legislative and social policy drivers affecting children, young people and families, paying specific attention to the national policy such as Getting It Right for Every Child, The Promise and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and local priorities as set out in the Angus Council Plan.

Context

On 31 March 2024, in Angus, there were 206 children and young people being looked after and accommodated. As outlined in Figure 1 below, of those, sixty-two were living with kinship carers, and 103 were living with foster carers. Thirty-nine children were cared for in residential care settings and residential education settings.

Figure 1

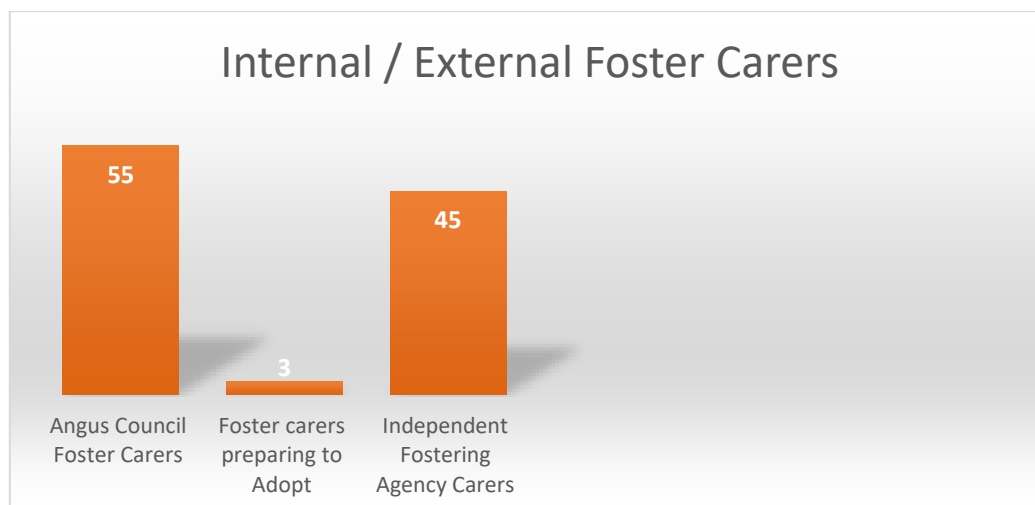


On the same date, Angus Council were supporting a total of 148 children and young people who were living with kinship carers. Many of the children living with kinship carers are not formally 'looked after' by Angus Council. Some will be the subject of residence orders, which grants kinship carers parental responsibility for child(ren) in their care, and some will have lived with extended family as part of a family arrangement before any social work involvement.

Angus Council provides support to 179 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.

We have used a larger number of Independent Fostering Agency placements this year, where local placements were not available or where we were unable to meet the individual needs of children from local resources. On 31 March 2024, we had thirty-two external fostering placements in place for forty-five children compared to twenty external fostering placements for twenty-eight children last year.

Figure 2



The increased use of external foster placement may be seen as positive, insofar as we have been successful in working with external agencies to secure and match more children requiring family-based care, despite the continued national shortage of foster carers and pressures felt across the sector. However, this also means that children may be placed some distance from Angus, away from recognised beneficial bonds and connections with their family, friends, and local communities to get the care they need.

In addition, the use of external fostering agencies adds further financial pressures, both in terms of placement costs, and in terms of the impact on staff time, to travel out of area to undertake statutory visits to children in placement, and to support and facilitate family time.

Reflections on the Year

Panels

Adoption, Fostering, Kinship and Adult Resource Panels are convened regularly to evaluate assessments and reports in respect of adopters, foster carers, kinship carers and adult placement providers. The panel will also consider permanence plans for children. Throughout the past year, panels have continued to be held approximately every 2 weeks. In total, seventy-three panels were convened, a small decrease from 2022 – 2023 when 75 panels were convened. Of the seventy-three, there were 26 Adoption and Permanence Panels, 27 Fostering Panels and 20 Kinship Panels. These numbers have remained consistent over the past 4 years.

Within this, there has been an increased agenda for each panel. This is unlikely to be sustainable and consideration will be given to increasing the number of

panels convened to ensure there are no additional delays to important decision making.

Volume and Breakdown of Panel Business

There has been a noted increase in the number of permanence plans considered by the Adoption and Permanence Panel. Twenty-nine were considered between April 2023 and March 2024, compared to fourteen presented in 2022/23. This represents an increase of 107% from the previous year (see Figure 3).

There has been an increase in the number of children matched with permanent foster carers. In 2022/23 only one match was progressed with a permanent foster carer, while over the past year, four children were matched.

Three children were matched with their adoptive families during 2023/24. This is an increase from one child the previous year.

Adoption assessments presented at the Adoption and Permanence Panel have increased from three assessments in 2022/23 to 4 in the past year. There were no adopters deregistered during 2023/24.

There are several factors which may have contributed to the increase observed:

- As part of our Service Improvement work, changes have been made to our approach to permanency planning for children who require alternative permanent care.
- A shorter more focussed assessment format for the permanence report has been trialled and is now in use across the service.
- We have established a local data set and Managers from across the Children Families and Justice service meet regularly to review the data and report on themes.
- Quality and Review Officers chair the newly established Permanence Planning Meetings (PPM) for all children for whom permanent alternative care is being considered, which provides improved oversight and continuity in care planning.
- PPMs are chaired by the Quality and Review Officer who has chaired the child's planning meetings throughout their care journey.
- Timescales for permanence plans are agreed at Permanence Planning Meetings and the Quality and Review Officers continue to monitor progress within the looked after review process.

Figure 3

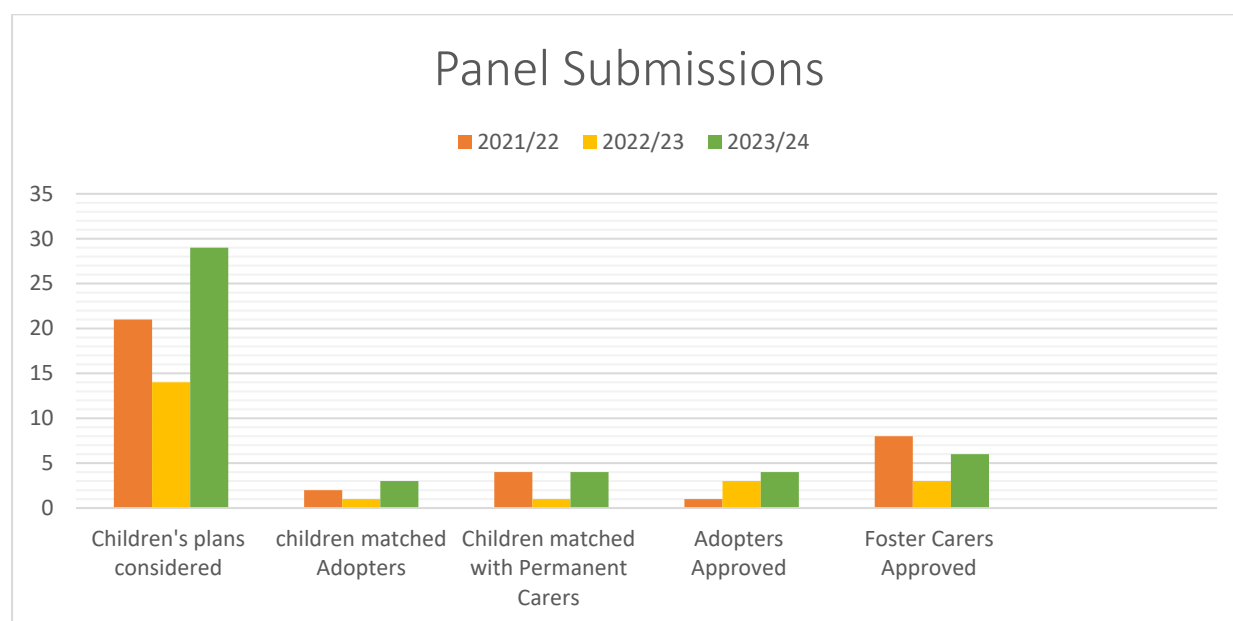


Figure 4

Adoption and Permanence Panel Submissions	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/24
Children's permanence plans considered or reviewed at Panel	15	21	14	29
Children matched with permanent foster carers	2	4	1	4
Children matched with adoptive parents	5	2	1	3
Adoptive parent-approved	2	1	3	4
Adoptive parents de-registered	0	2	1	0
Appeals at panel		1	1	0

The Permanence Team coordinates and supports families with the indirect letterbox scheme with forty-two adoptive families being supported currently.

In the past year, the team have also offered 1:1 post-adoption support to twenty-seven families. There is also a duty telephone line for adopters to call for advice, and an average of two calls are received each week. Adopters

also have access to the out of hours duty telephone service, operated by social workers in the service.

Fostering Panel

The number of fostering applications considered by the fostering panel has increased, with six fostering households presented and subsequently approved this year. In the previous year, three fostering assessments were presented, and that figure represented a significant decrease from 2020/21 and 2021/22, when 9 and 8 fostering applications were approved, respectively. Of the six households approved, only one offered interim care on a full-time basis. The approval was for one child aged 0 – 5 years. One family was approved to provide care or supported lodgings specifically to an unaccompanied child seeking asylum. The others were approved as short break carers.

The number of foster carers who were deregistered at the panel has also increased. Fourteen fostering households were recommended for deregistration, each at their request. Primary reasons cited are retirement and changes in family or personal circumstances.

The total number of foster carers approved by Angus Council continues to decrease. On 31 March 2024, 27 interim foster carers, thirteen short break carers, and eleven permanent carers were approved. On the same date in 2020, 32 interim foster carers were approved, with sixteen short breaks carers and twelve permanent carers.

This follows national trends where data has evidenced a decrease in fostering households. The [Care Inspectorate Fostering and Adoption](#) information for 2022/23 highlights that there has been a downward trend in the number of new foster carers approved over the past five years, across local authority and independent services. The downward trend had accelerated in 2022/23.

Sixty-four percent of local authorities experienced a net loss in foster care households in 2022.

In Angus, we have been aware for several years that many of our foster carers were considering retirement. Some have experienced changes in their family circumstances that have prompted their request to deregister.

We are also aware that there are some barriers to those families who are interested in fostering. The housing crisis has impacted many families in Scotland. Fewer families have a spare room, or spare rooms available. Many potential carers believe that they would need to give up employment to be able to be assessed. Single carers who do want to give up work to become foster carers, have told us that they feel uncertain about finances and feel that they could not rely on an income from fostering. Our Communication Strategy this year has had a focus on addressing some of these myths around fostering in an attempt to increase enquiries. Despite this, we have been unable to

demonstrate the necessary increase in enquiries and approvals to meet local need.

Figure 5

Fostering Panel Submissions	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/24
Foster Carers approved	9	8	3	6
Foster carers reviewed	31	23	25	22
Foster Carers de-registered	14	10	9	14

Figure 6

New Approvals at Panel 2023/24		
Type of care	Age Range	Number of children
Interim foster care	0-5	1
Unaccompanied children seeking asylum	12 and older	1
Short Break Care	0 – 12	1
Move from interim to permanent care	Specific child	1
Move from interim to permanent care	Specific children	2
Support carers (short breaks)	Specific children	1

Recruitment

The recruitment of foster carers and adopters continues to be a high priority. The service is supported by a dedicated communications officer, who coordinates recruitment and marketing. Over the past year, we have arranged marketing campaigns using a variety of approaches. We utilise various channels to reach our key audience. The campaigns have used our existing foster carers and adoptive parents as advocates. The carers and staff within the service work hard to produce innovative content for social media platforms and attend events throughout Angus to promote fostering and adoption. We continue to use radio, digital media, and poster campaigns to reach potential carers living in Angus.

Kinship Panel

The number of kinship carer assessments presented at the Kinship panel has increased with twenty-nine kinship households presented and subsequently approved. The fostering team have had responsibility for kinship assessments since 03 January 2024 as part of our service improvement work. The Celsis '[Spotlight on Kinship care](#)' briefing notes that kinship care is a crucial part of Scotland's care system. It highlights the international evidence demonstrating the strong value of kinship care for children feeling loved, safe, and secure with family.

Figure 7

Kinship Panel Submissions	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/24
Kinship carers assessments	22	17	16	29

Adult Resource Panel

We have had no new supported lodgings providers presented at the Adult Resource panel in the past year. Since the introduction of Supported Lodgings Scheme, we have had a limited uptake in Angus.

Figure 8

Adult Resource Panel Submissions	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/24
Supported Lodgings Providers approved	0	2	1	0

Panel Advisor

The Panel Advisor has a key role in supporting and monitoring panel business and performance. Significant staffing issues in the service has meant the role has been covered by the Carer Support Manager and both Team Leaders during much of this year. This created challenges in progressing planned development activities with panel members.

Since December 2023, a Senior Practitioner within the Quality and Review Team has covered the Panel Advisor role on a sessional basis, this has led to improved panel administration and support and the development of an outline improvement plan, which is now in place.

Training to support our staff to attend Adoption and Fostering Panel has been developed and facilitated. Training has taken place in each team with individual information, training and support being offered to each Social Worker attending panel. In terms of the training, the feedback from Team Managers, Senior Practitioners and Social Workers attending the panel has been positive. Social Workers state they feel "more prepared." Panel members

have reported that the quality of information shared during panel by those who have completed the training has been of a higher standard than previously. Issues and themes have been identified and communicated to the Carer Support Service, Locality and Quality and Review Teams, which supports further improvement activity.

Work will take place next year to integrate into the QI&R Service which will ensure good quality cover and bring consistency to practice.

Court submissions

After permanence plans are agreed, Angus Council will submit an application for a permanence order. A permanence order is a court order that aims to ensure a child who cannot return home is safe, stable, and can grow up in a permanent home. The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 introduced permanence orders, which can:

- Remove the child from the children's hearing system.
- Last until the child turns eighteen.
- Allow foster carers and others to have some or all parental rights and responsibilities.

Only a local authority can apply for a permanence order. The order can include:

- Deciding where the child lives
- Removing parents' rights and responsibilities
- give these rights and responsibilities to someone else, like social work or foster carers.
- Saying that the child can be adopted.

Figure 9

Court Submissions	2022/23	2023/24
Permanence orders granted.	4	2
Permanence orders granted with authority to adopt.	4	0
Adoptions granted.	3	4
Stepparent Adoptions	5	7

Kinship Review

As discussed in last year's annual report, the Kinship service review began in January 2023, with the review team seeking regular input and feedback from kinship carers in Angus. The review was completed in September 2023, with the

recommendations agreed upon by the Senior Management Team and implemented in January 2024.

With the support of our kinship carers, we were able to look at the supports that worked well, and the areas where we needed to improve. The three carer support teams became two. One team works with all our interim carers and one team works with all our long-term or permanent carers. We have developed a less intrusive assessment process, and we continue to focus on the support that carers have asked for.

Feedback from kinship carers has been positive. Feedback includes,

'It is great to see these developments that I am sure will make the journey to kinship carer an easier and more streamlined one for future families who need help in such distressing times'.

'I look forward to having a worker allocated and like the idea of two teams. The need for support changes over time but goes in peaks and troughs so a contact person is great'.

'I feel hard and assured that what I contributed has been acted on accordingly. I am sure this has been a challenging time for all in the team so thank you for seeing it through, the work you do has real importance in our lives.'

Care Inspectorate Inspection of Fostering and Adoption Services

In February 2024 we were advised that a full short-notice inspection of both adoption and fostering services would be undertaken. The Inspectorate evaluates registered services using a framework informed by the Health and Social Care Standards.

Our services were considered against Key Questions 1 and 5.

Key Question 1: How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

Key Question 5: How well is our care and support planned?

The Fostering Service was awarded a **grade of 5 (very good)** for both quality indicators.

The Adoption Service was also awarded a **grade of 5 (very good)** for both quality indicators.

In preparation and throughout the inspection, the service was supported by colleagues across Children Families and Justice, with significant support provided by our Quality Improvement Team and Business Support colleagues

demonstrating a whole service culture of support. The collaborative working and positive relationships across all parts of the service were noted by both inspectors and highlighted as an area of good practice.

There were several positive points in both inspection reports, which we've utilised within our social media and recruitment campaigns, for instance:



Conclusion

This year has seen significant changes to the Carer Support Service, specifically in how we support kinship carers to meet the needs of children in the short and long term and towards the latter part of this year, to improve the quality of information presented to panel to ensure improved decision making.

This has contributed to the aim within our Improvement Plan to develop our supports and scaffolding of carers, with a view to increase the number of children we are able to place and maintain within kinship care. This is both an evidenced based approach, as highlighted within this report, and a strategic decision, based on the financial pressures of using external fostering agencies, amidst the stated challenges of a decreasing number of fostering households nationally.

The number of permanence plans approved for children in Angus has increased significantly. This has led to increased efforts to find permanent families for these children. We have not been able to match all of these children with permanent carers. We will continue to work to find families to meet the individual needs of our children, and to identify those children who are best cared for by their current interim carers.

The Plan for 2024/25

In the coming year, we continue in our aim to stabilise our carer numbers, by retaining our current carers and the recruitment of additional carers. We hope to continue to care for most of our children in internal fostering placements, with less reliance on independent fostering agencies.

In keeping with The Promise and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, we will continue to support children to stay with family members wherever possible and we will develop the supports we offer kinship carers. We will update our Operational Instructions and Staff Guidance for Kinship Care, to ensure best practice across Angus.

The actions to support these aims are outlined in the following documents:

- Carer Support Development Plan 2024/25
- The Adoption and Fostering Panel Action Plan 2024/25

We will continue the improvements in Panel development and will recruit a permanent Panel Advisor.

Roles and Responsibilities in Carer Support

The Panels

Four Panels are 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. They will also approve funding for S.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.

Interim Care Team

This team, previously known as the fostering team, provides support to kinship carers, foster carers, continuing care providers and supported lodging providers.

The team are responsible for the assessment and support of new and interim kinship carers, who care for children from Angus. Carers living in Angus who care for children from other areas can also be supported.

Assessments of kinship carers are undertaken and presented at panel. 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 regular training events and information sessions are arranged.

The team are also responsible for assessing and supporting foster carers who provide care for children on a temporary, short break or continuing care basis.

Supported lodging providers who provide care and accommodation for young adults are also supported.

The team provides 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 reviews in line with regulations.

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 and allocated for home study assessment within reasonable timescales.

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 and positive relationships have been developed with independent fostering agencies to ensure collaborative working to best meet the individual needs of our children.

Permanent Care Team

The Permanence Team support permanent kinship carers, foster carers, and Adopters.

Kinship carers who have secured Residence or S11 orders for the children in their care are supported by the team alongside other permanent carers. The team are responsible for the assessment of permanent foster carers and prospective adopters.

The team arrange and facilitate regular pre-approval training for prospective adopters.

Family finding is undertaken for children identified as needing permanent alternative care.

Support groups and training events such as therapeutic parenting are facilitated by the team and offered to kinship carers, foster carers, and adopters. Support and regular activities are offered to the children of carers and adopters where appropriate.

Adoptive parents are supported throughout the adoption process and post-adoption support is provided.

The team facilitate indirect communication between children and young people and their birth families if needed. They offer ongoing support to birth families to promote their engagement with this process,

Care experienced young people, and adults seeking access to adoption records are offered guidance and support.

Children's Permanence

The children's Permanence workers are responsible for progressing permanence plans for children who are 5 years or less. They will work in partnership with locality social workers to complete Permanence Reports for consideration at panel.

Following approval of permanence plans for children aged 0 – 5 years at the Adoption and Permanence Panel, the children's permanence workers will assume case responsibility for those children and will thereafter lead on family finding and matching with adopters.