

ANGUS COUNCIL

FAMILY, EDUCATION AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE – 24 SEPTEMBER 2024

ANGUS ADOPTION AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

REPORT BY KIRSTY LEE, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JUSTICE

1. ABSTRACT

This report informs members of the Family, Education & Justice Committee of the Angus Adoption Agency annual report for 2023-24. 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.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

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

The Angus Community Plan 2022-30:

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

The Council Plan 2023-2028:

- When children cannot safely live at home, keep our children local in Angus, providing for their education and family needs.

The Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2023 - 2026

- Our children have 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. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Family, Education and Justice Committee:

- (i) Endorse the Angus Adoption Agency Annual Report 2023-24; and
- (ii) Notes that the Report will be published on the Council website.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 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 subsidiary legislation 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.

- 4.2 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 resource, in line with best practice. The annual report details key information about all panels and the wider work of the adoption agency.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 This annual report provides information for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Within Angus, as of 31 March 2023, there are 165 children and young people who are looked after and accommodated in family-based care:

- 62 children live with kinship carers
- 103 children/young people are in fostering placements. Of these, 55 were placed with Angus Council foster carers, with 45 placed with external fostering agencies. The remaining 3 were in pre-adoptive fostering
- The service has 53 fostering households who offer a range of care options

Many of the children living with kinship carers are not formally looked after, for instance, some are the subject of residence orders. Thus, the wider number of children and young people who were being supported by Angus Council in kinship care was 148.

Key issues from the annual report include:

5.2 Panel Work

Angus continues to have four panels: The Adoption and Permanence Panel, The Fostering Panel, the Kinship Panel, and the Adult Resource Panel.

The Panel Advisor has a key role in supporting and monitoring panel business and performance. The service has had significant staffing issues affecting progression of planned development activities with panel members. However, since December 2023, alternate arrangements have been implemented, which has supported the identification of key areas for development and an interim improvement plan is now in place.

Staff training on attending the Adoption and Fostering Panel has also been developed and facilitated, which has received positive feedback from staff and panel members, who note improved quality of information shared during panel by those who have completed the training.

Again, the number of panels held has been broadly in line with previous years and has been sufficient to meet demand. However, we have had no new supported lodgings providers presented at the Adult Resource Panel in the past year.

5.3 Recruitment of Carers

Six fostering families were recruited this year together with four adoptive families. The recruitment of foster carers and adopters continues to be a priority and we have an ongoing active and visible recruitment strategy. The service is supported by a dedicated communications officer, who coordinates recruitment and marketing campaigns, using a variety of approaches and positive messaging.

However, despite a recruitment strategy and the successes last year, the total number of approved foster carers continues to decrease. This follows national trends where data shows 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.

5.4 Kinship Care

The Kinship Care service review began in January 2023 and was completed in September 2023, with the recommendations agreed upon by the Children, Families and Justice Senior Management Team and implemented in January 2024.

Our kinship carers were clear during the review process about the supports that worked well and the areas where we needed to improve. As a result, the Carers Support service have restructured and we have developed a less intrusive assessment process, and we continue to focus on the support that carers have asked for.

This focus is both an evidenced based approach, in terms of the crucial role kinship care has within our care system, 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.

5.5 Achieving Permanence

There was an 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.

In addition, there was an increase in the number of children matched with permanent foster carers. In 2022-23 one match was progressed, while over the past year, four children were matched.

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

5.6 Care Inspectorate Inspection of Fostering and Adoption Services

In February 2024 we were advised that a full short-notice inspection of both 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

Both the Fostering and Adoption Services were awarded a grade of 5 (very good) for both quality indicators.

The inspection reports were presented to Committee on 30 May 2024 – link below:

[Link to May Committee Reports](#)

5.7 Plan for the Year Ahead

It is our aim to continue to strive to stabilise our carer numbers, by retaining our current carers and the recruitment of additional carers. This will support us to care for more of our children in internal fostering placements, with less reliance on independent fostering agencies.

We will continue to support children to stay with family members wherever possible and we will develop the supports and scaffolding of carers, with a view to increase the number of children we are able to place and maintain within kinship care.

We will aim to maintain the high-quality standards of care, as evidenced in the inspection, that support carers to remain with Angus. As noted, families were well supported by staff, who were highly skilled, knowledgeable, and promoted a culture of learning and development. 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

In addition, we will continue the improvements in Panel development and will recruit a permanent Panel Advisor hosted within the Quality, Improvement and Review Service to promote resilience and enhance support for Panel.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

The demands as reported above are recorded in the Children Families and Justice operational risk register and subject to regular analysis or trends, risks and mitigation.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out, as this report is for information only.

10. CHILDRENS RIGHTS AND WELLBEING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A Childrens Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment has not been undertaken a full assessment is not required as the "General Principles" do not apply to this proposal. No policy decision is required that will impact on children.

11. 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.

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List of Appendices:

- Angus Adoption Agency Annual Report 2023-24