

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Social Work Committee – 15 January 2007

REPORT ON: Review of Adoption Service

REPORT BY: Director of Social Work

REPORT NO: 29-2007

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report informs members of the progress of the Adoption Service during the past 12 months, including the business of the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee: -

2.1 Note and approve the contents of the report.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Any financial costs involved will be met from within the existing Social Work budget.

4.0 SUSTAINABILITY POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 This report does not directly impact on the Council's Sustainability Policy.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The work undertaken by the Adoption Services recognise and values diversity and promotes the principle of equal opportunities. Permanent foster carers, prospective adopters and Panel members are drawn from diverse cultural, religious and ethnic background reflecting the needs of looked after and accommodated children.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 During the past year Dundee City Council Social Work Department has continued to fulfil it's duties as an adoption agency as laid down in the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 and amended in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. This involves recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, alongside placement support to children, adopters and birth relatives.

6.2 On 1st April 2004 Dundee registered as an adoption agency with the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care. During October - December 2006 the Commission undertook their first inspection in Dundee against the National Care Standards for Adoption Agencies. The focus of their inspection on this occasion was recruitment and assessment of adoption applicants and the work of the Adoption & Permanence Panel. The written inspection report is likely to be published in early 2007.

6.3 Children and Young People

- 6.3.1 Over the past 5 years there has been a 38% rise in the numbers of children and young people becoming looked after in Dundee. There has been a corresponding increase in the numbers of children requiring permanent substitute care away from their birth parents. Currently 90% of accommodated children under the age of 12 years who are not already living with members of their extended family are actively being considered for permanence or already in a permanent placement. There has been an increase in the numbers of large sibling groups (3 or more children) and very young children needing placements. All indications from both local and national indicators are that this overall increase in numbers is likely to be a long-term trend.
- 6.3.2 The majority of children who are unable to be looked after by their parents, including an increasing number of babies and very young children, are from background of significant parental drug or alcohol abuse and long-term parental mental health issues. These children have been subjected to such neglect and abuse that many of them are already experiencing health and developmental difficulties or are at high risk of developing such difficulties at some point during their childhood. The complex needs of these children require skilled adoptives supported by specialist services, in particular from social work, health and education.
- 6.3.3 The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill 2006 is now in it's final stages of progression through the Scottish Parliament and likely to be implemented early in 2008. Amongst the key elements of this legislation is the expansion of adoption support services, acknowledging the range of people affected by adoption and the complex and often life-long needs of children who now require adoption.
- 6.3.4 The Bill will also introduce new legal orders, called Permanence Orders, which will enhance placement stability for a number of those children and young people who require permanent substitute care but for whom adoption is not a suitable option. Whilst the modernisation of comprehensive adoption services provided for under the new legislation is welcome it does have implications for resourcing of the service in the future and account must be taken of this at both the local and national level.

6.4 Recruitment

- 6.4.1 Throughout the past year, recruitment of prospective adopters and permanent foster carers has continued to have a high profile in Dundee to try to keep pace with the demand for placements. The recruitment group, comprising of family placement social work staff and foster carers and adopters, have developed a number of strategies including increased liaison with local media and creative use of local advertising opportunities. The STV television campaigns for fostering and adoption have been particularly successful in raising awareness of adoption and fostering issues and inviting interest from potential applicants.
- 6.4.2 The North East Consortium, a resource sharing network whose membership is made up of 8 local authorities from the north-east of Scotland and British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF), has also been instrumental in adding to the overall placement choice for children across the region. The Consortium appointed a co-ordinator in December 2005 who has established and administers a resource database. The NEC liaises with the West of Scotland Consortium to further build on the capacity for resource sharing. Dundee currently adheres to the BAAF interagency fee charges when placing children with carers from other authorities, voluntary or independent agencies and proposes to extend this to any placements made within the NEC from February 2007. The NEC has also produced a CD-Rom featuring adopters of sibling groups to supplement the recruitment work undertaken by individual authorities.

6.5 Adoption & Permanence Panel

6.5.1 Committee Report 602-2005 noted the proposals, subsequently agreed by Committee, for reviewing and restructuring the Adoption & Permanence Panel. The restructuring along with the recruitment and training of new Panel members was successfully undertaken during the first six months of 2006.

6.5.2 The Panel now comprises independent Chairs, a Professional Adviser, Medical & Legal Advisers, agency employees and members who are independent of the local authority, including a number of adoptive parents. This has increased the breadth of knowledge and experience available to inform the Panel in its deliberations. Further recruitment is planned for 2007, hopefully to include representatives from the voluntary sector and an elected member.

6.5.3 The Panel continues to fulfil its statutory duties:

- To consider whether adoption is in the best interests of a particular child and, if so, whether a freeing application should be made under Section 18 of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978.
- To provide a written report of the consideration given by the Panel to the alternatives to adoption and in circumstances where adoption with parental contact is recommended, why adoption rather than an alternative course is recommended.
- To consider whether an applicant is suitable to be an adoptive parent.
- To consider whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent for a particular child.

6.5.4 Dundee's Panel also undertakes a number of supplementary functions including:

- Considering all permanency plans for children.
- Monitoring and reviewing the permanence plans for children within 12 months if they are not placed in their permanent placements.
- Reviewing all approved permanent and adoptive carers who have not been linked with a child within 12 months.
- Considering reports on the disruption of any adoptive placements and recommending whether adoption remains in the best interests of the child.
- Considering whether adoption allowances or other financial assistance for adopters is required.
- Giving advice at an early stage of the assessment process of adoption applicants regarding whether to progress with the assessment or not.

6.6 Panel Statistics

Between January 2006 - December 2006 the Panel considered the following:

• Number of permanence plans for children	39
• Reviews of permanence plans	27
• Number of children matched with adopters	16
• Applicants to adopt	15
• Number of advice panels	1
• Number of disruption panels	0
• De-registration of prospective adopter	1

6.6.1 The increase in Panel business, particularly in relation to the number of children being presented for permanence, reflects the rise in the numbers of looked after and accommodated children. The number of reports being presented has increased markedly over recent months, providing evidence of a shift towards more timely and focused care planning for children who cannot return home to their birth families. Whilst the quality of many reports is satisfactory there remains a need to ensure that all reports meet this standard. Training is to be delivered in early 2007.

6.6.2 The commitment shown by Social Work staff, Panel members, foster carers and prospective adopters to meeting the complex needs of children and young people within a changing social and legislative environment should be acknowledged and supported.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Chief Executive, the Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and the Depute Executive (Finance) have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None.

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Director of Social Work

Date: 8 January 2007