

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Social Work Committee - 21 June 2004

REPORT ON: Fostering Services

REPORT BY: Director of Social Work

REPORT NO: 463 - 2004

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report informs members of the progress of Fostering Services, including the business of the Fostering Panel.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:

2.1 Note the current fostering services being provided in Dundee and approve the contents of this report.

2.2 Approve the contents of the amended Fostering Panel Constitution. (Appendix 1)

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The work of the Fostering Service and of the Fostering Panel is in line with the principles of Agenda 21 in that efforts are made whenever possible to meet the needs of children locally and for their social, education and health needs to be promoted within a family setting.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The work undertaken by the Fostering Services and the Fostering Panel recognises and values diversity and promotes the principle of equal opportunities.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Fostering Services

Foster care is now established as one of the main ways of looking after children and young people separated from their birth families and who are in public care and is a positive option alongside other forms of care. During the period April 2003 to March 2004 there were 183 new admissions with 148 of these, including all under 12 year olds, being located within fostering placements. In line with Dundee's Foster Care Strategy vision the fostering service aims to provide children and young people with a safe, nurturing environment, positive experience of family life, and well equipped, skilled and confident carers who are able to offer a high quality of care.

Children who are in foster care present with a wide variety of needs and demands and may remain in foster care for only a day or so, several weeks or months or even on a long-term basis. Undoubtedly, the ranges of needs and challenges that children in foster care present has become significantly more complex over recent years and the tasks that foster carers are called on to undertake have increased accordingly. Alongside meeting the day to day care needs of a child, foster carers may now be called upon to be directly involved in the contact and rehabilitation plans for children to return to their birth families, to prepare children for moving on to adoption, assisting young people in preparing for more independent living, caring for children with disabilities and acting as advocates and representatives of the children in reviews, meetings and at Children's Hearings.

In recognition of the complexity of tasks that foster carers need to undertake Dundee has developed a skills based fostering service with three different types of carers available to offer placements. Payments are based on a carer's ability, availability and willingness to undertake specific tasks.

The ACE carers are professional carers who require qualifications in childcare up to and including SVQ level 3. At the present time Dundee has 7 ACE carers with a vacancy for another. A family are currently undergoing assessment.

There are currently 51 Fee carers who have completed initial training and who have demonstrated skills and competency in carrying out the tasks required.

There are currently 6 Allowance carers who have demonstrated competence to undertake identified tasks in relation to caring for children.

Placement choice, identified by the House of Commons Health Committee Report 1996 is essential to have a real chance of matching children's needs with a carer's abilities and to produce better outcomes for the child. Whilst the majority of the fostering service is provided in-house Dundee has responded to heavy demand for placements and has sought to enhance the choice of placements via limited external commissioning. Dundee currently has service level agreements with four fostering independent or voluntary fostering agencies.

All family based respite provision for children with disabilities is provided through Barnardo's Family Support Team.

6.2 **Family Placement Service**

The Family Placement Service consists of three teams, two of which have responsibility for assessing and supporting temporary foster carers. The third team (Permanence Team) has responsibility for assessing and supporting permanent foster carers and adopters. This team also has case responsibility for children who have been identified as requiring permanent substitute care either via adoption or permanent fostering.

The three teams work closely together to cover all aspects of fostering and adoption including recruiting, training and supporting carers and their families, providing adoption counselling and working with children and young people in preparation for permanency. They also provide a weekday telephone duty service for colleagues looking for foster placements and for dealing with general enquiries about fostering and adoption issues. More recently the family placement teams have become involved in preparing reports for courts in relation to residence applications and Section 22 adoptions.

There is a recruitment group, drawn from members of all three teams and including foster carers. The group has developed a recruitment strategy taking on board the messages from research that recruitment success is often related to local schemes and that foster carers themselves should play a more central role in recruitment. Over the past 18 months the group has been involved in a range of initiatives aimed at raising the profile of fostering services and recruiting carers.

Preparative training and post -approval training are recognised as key areas in the fostering service and are essential to provide the level of knowledge and skills that foster carers require to effectively meet the needs of the children placed with them. Training on an ongoing basis is offered to each foster carer tailored to their individual needs and interests. Training offered over the past year has included dealing with conflict and aggression, building resilience, child protection, promoting health and social well-being and workshops or male carers. Additionally 8 carers have undertaken SVQ level 3 training on Childcare.

6.3 Fostering Panel

Dundee City Council Fostering Panel meets a minimum of once a fortnight and is chaired by the Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering or in her absence by the Senior Social Worker of a Children and Families Team.

The statutory functions of the Panel are:

- to consider all prospective foster carers and recommend whether they should be approved as carers
- what categories of child the approval should be for, for example age range, gender and if for a specific child

Dundee City Council Fostering Panel also undertakes a number of supplementary functions including:

- giving advice on specific issues during the assessment process
- considering amendments to approval of carers
- 6 monthly reviews of ACE carers
- applications from relatives or friends for approval as Link Carers (where children have been placed by a Children's Hearing)

The Fostering Regulations 1996 specify that a Medical Adviser must be appointed to the panel and that the local authority must be satisfied that the numbers, qualifications and experience of individual panel members will enable it to efficiently discharge its functions.

The membership pool of the Dundee City Council Panel currently comprises experienced childcare practitioners and managers, representatives from Education and a voluntary organisation, independent panel members including an adoptive parent and a former foster carer, a medical advisor and a legal advisor.

During the last year there have been several changes in the membership of the Panel due to staff changes and other reasons. The task of being a panel member carries a high level of responsibility and requires a significant time commitment from individual members. Not all members are able to attend on each occasion and several members are now only able to make a part-time commitment to attendance. Furthermore, there has been a steady increase in the number and complexity of cases to be discussed at Panel that have led to several additional Panels having to be convened. To ensure flexibility, breadth of knowledge and experience and continued multi-agency involvement on all panels it is recommended that panel membership be increased by three members. The panel would then comprise a voting membership of 12.

6.4 Statistics of Situations Presented to Panel

Between January 2003 - March 2004 the Panel considered the following:

• Registration of foster carers	8
• Amendments and extensions to approval for existing carers	17
• ACE carer reviews	10
• Advice Panels	2
• De-registration of foster carers	3
• Link carer approvals	10

6.5 Developments in Fostering Services

- As of 1st April 2004 the fostering agency is registered with the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and will be inspected in accordance with the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 against the National Care Standards for Foster Care and Family Placement Services.
- Fostering services within Dundee are currently being reviewed within the wider context of the review of Fieldwork Services. The Family Placement Review is essentially an update of the Best Value Review (1999) and Foster Care Strategy (2001) and is primarily focused on looking at whether the current structure best meets the needs of Dundee children requiring placements, whether the current staffing structure best supports this service and trying to achieve the best balance between in-house provision of placements and external placements purchased from the independent and voluntary sector.
- A new Foster Care Handbook has been produced and is currently being distributed to all Dundee foster carers. This handbook is designed to assist carers in their task of caring for children and young people who are looked after away from home.
- Recruitment has continued to be a major focus of the fostering service. A rolling programme of events has been implemented including obtaining permission from local Asda and Tesco supermarkets to leaflet drop at their outlets. Increased uses of the Internet and council intranet have also produced positive results. Overall the recruitment strategies have proven successful with 99 fostering enquiries and a further 18 non-specific enquiries during the period April 2003 to March 2004. However, many of these do not progress to full assessment and approval and there remains an acute shortage of foster care placements within Dundee. This shortage is mirrored throughout Scotland and the rest of the UK. The demand on placements is increasing steadily both in terms of numbers and the complexity of needs that children requiring placement present with and recruitment needs to remain high on the agenda.
- There is evidence, across Scotland, of a rise in the numbers of babies and very young children of substance misusing parents suffering from neglect. In Dundee, recent improvements in the early identification, monitoring and intervention of pregnant substance abusing mothers has led to a significant demand for specialist foster placements. In response to this a Changing Children's Services Fund proposal has been submitted to secure funding for additional foster carers with specialist skills to care for these children who may have particular health and development needs.

7.0 CONSULTATION

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

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

Date: 9 June 2004

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

FOSTERING PANEL CONSTITUTION

Dundee City Council Social Work Department, in accordance with its duty as a Fostering Service, and the requirement of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, hereby appoints a Fostering Panel.

ROLE AND FUNCTION

The Panel's primary functions are to consider and recommend to the agency:

- (a) Whether to recommend the approval of Foster Carers;
- (b) advise on specific issues during the assessment process;
- (c) what the approval should consist of, for example, categories of children, age range, gender and if for a specific child;
- (d) amendments to the approval of Foster Carers;
- (e) reviews of Foster Carers where there are specific difficulties;
- (f) de-registration of carers where the Social Work Department are recommending de-registration of the carers; and
- (g) applications from relatives or friends who are known as Link Carers (Link Carers are where children have been placed through the Children's Hearing).

COMPOSITION

A Fostering Service must satisfy itself that the numbers, qualifications and experience of individual members of a Fostering Panel will enable it to discharge its duties and in Dundee the Panel will comprise of 12 voting members appointed by the Director of Social Work. A quorum for each Panel should consist of not less than 3 voting members. In addition although the medical adviser is a voting member, he or she cannot make up the quorum.

Dundee City Council Fostering Panel is made up of 12 voting members who include: -

- 1 A Senior Social Work Manager who co-ordinates and chairs the Panel;
- 2 Social Work Staff members with appropriate qualifications and expertise in adoption;
- 3 Representatives from other agencies, departments and independent members who are considered competent in terms of their knowledge, skills and experience;

4 Medical Adviser to the Panel.

In the absence of the designated Chair, another social work representative will act as Depute Chair.

The balance of Panel Members offers a wide experience and reflects a multi agency approach that provides objectivity. Membership should, where possible reflect the racial and cultural heritage of prospective Foster Carers and other staff may be asked to participate in particular Panels where there is a specific need.

Membership will be reviewed annually. Vacancies will be filled promptly.

MEETINGS

The timing and the frequency of meetings is determined by the Chair of the Panel in consultation with Panel members and will be determined by the needs of the Authority in its capacity as a Fostering Agency.

AGENCY DECISION-MAKING

The Agency Decision-Maker is appointed by the Director of Social Work and is currently the Manager, Children's Services. The Agency Decision-Maker receives all reports presented to Panel and the Panel minutes. This allows the Agency Decision-Maker to make decisions on full information and to understand why the Panel has reached particular recommendations. The Agency is required to make a decision within 14 days of the Panel. Panel recommendations and the Agency Decision are intimated, in writing, by the Chair of the Panel, to prospective foster carers.

APPEALS

Appeals by prospective Foster Carers against a Panel's recommendation(s) and subsequent agency decision are expected to be made in writing to the Director of Social Work within 14 days of the receipt of notification of the agency decision. Upon receipt of an appeal The Director of Social Work will appoint an Appeal Panel where appropriate.