

REPORT TO: DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE
REPORT ON: FOSTERING SERVICES
REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK
REPORT NO: 864-2002

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

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

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Social Work Committee: -

2.1.1 Note and approve the contents of the report.

2.1.2 Approve the contents of the amended Fostering Panel Constitution.

2.1.3 Approve the expansion of the membership of the Fostering Panel to include an additional two members, as outlined in the amended constitution.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

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

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

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Fostering Service

Dundee City Council approved the adoption of the Social Work Department Foster Care Strategy on 19th March 2001 (Report 192-2001). This strategy introduced a unified skills-based fostering scheme which has been operational since April 2001. This was seen as a necessary progression to recognise the difficult task that foster carers undertake and to recognise the diverse and complex needs of the children and young people for whom they care for

In line with the Foster Care Strategy vision, the fostering service provides children and young people with: -

- ◆ A safe, nurturing environment; positive experiences of family life;
- ◆ well equipped, skilled and confident carers who offer high quality care; and
- ◆ a positive option alongside other forms of care

6.2 Children who are Looked After in a Family Placement.

Children who are in family placement present with various needs and demands. Some children are in a family placement overnight due to a family crisis, some are in a family placement for a number of weeks and some are in a family placement on a long-term basis.

The ages of children range from infants to young people aged 18 years, and sometimes beyond.

There are a number of tasks and roles that Foster Carers undertake. These include:-

- ◆ The day to day care needs of the children and young people;
- ◆ preparing children to return to their birth family;
- ◆ preparing children moving on to adoption;
- ◆ helping young people on to independent living; and
- ◆ caring for children with disabilities

In line with the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the principle of seeking the views of children and young people is addressed by providing children and young people in family placements with age appropriate opportunities to comment on their placements. Foster carers are viewed on a regular basis and in preparation for these Reviews children and young people can either provide written or verbal input to the review process. They are supported in this task by their social worker.

6.3 Family Placement Service

The family placement service (Fostering Service) consists of three Family Placement Teams. Two teams have responsibility for assessing and supporting foster carers involved in the Allowance, Fee and ACE Schemes. 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 are in permanent and adoptive placements.

These three teams share the task of recruitment, assessment and support to the carers. In addition there are particular workers who undertake specific tasks which include:

- ◆ Organisation of training (both pre-approval and post- approval)
- ◆ Collation of statistical information relating to enquiries and applications. This informs future needs profile and identification of training needs.

6.4 Training on various subjects is offered on an ongoing basis to each foster carer. Currently there are 8 carers undertaking SVQ level 3 and it is planned to offer this course to other foster carers on an ongoing basis.

6.5 The recruitment of carers is now being undertaken on an continual basis. The preparation groups take place once there are at least three couples or 6 individuals to take part in the training.

6.6 Fostering Panel

The operation of Dundee City Council Fostering Panel is governed by the Fostering Panel Constitution (Appendix 1, Dundee City Council Social Work Department Fostering Panel Constitution). The Panel meets fortnightly and is chaired by the Senior Officer (Adoption and Fostering). The Fostering Panel considers and recommends to the Agency:

- ◆ whether to recommend the approval of foster carers;
- ◆ advice on specific issues during the assessment process;
- ◆ what the approval should consist of, for example categories of children, age range, gender and if for a specific child;
- ◆ amendments of approval of foster carers;
- ◆ reviews of foster carers in respect of issues such as medical difficulties; and
- ◆ applications from relatives or friends who are known as Link Carers (Link Carers are where children have been placed by the Children's Hearing.)

- 6.7** The membership of the Dundee Fostering Panel comprises of experienced child care practitioners and managers, representation from Education and independent Panel members, one of whom is an adoptive parent and the other from a voluntary organisation. A medical advisor is also available for advice with regard to the fostering Panel and the fostering service in general.

In order to ensure that the Panel can effectively discharge its functions, it is important to ensure that the Panel make-up continues to be multi-agency. During the last year a number of changes have taken place in Panel membership. The task of being a Panel member is time consuming and not all members are able to attend on every occasion. To ensure flexibility and continued multi-agency involvement at all Panels it is recommended that Panel membership should be increased by two members. The Panel would then comprise a voting membership of 10 with a quorum at each Panel of not less than 3 voting members.

- 6.8** Between April 2001 and March 2002 the Panel considered and recommended on : -

Registration of Foster Carers	5
Amendments and extensions of existing carers	41
De-registration of Carers	16(9 Foster Carers and 7 Link Carers)
Link Carers	20

Once Foster Carers are approved by the Panel, they are reviewed on an annual basis, currently by the Manager of Family Placement. In the last year 130 reviews took place.

Future Plans

- 6.9** As of April 2003 Fostering Services will be registered and inspected in accordance with the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. The national care of fostercare and family placement services cover the following activities:-

- ◆ recruiting, selecting, approving, training and supporting foster carers;
- ◆ matching children and young people with foster carers;
- ◆ supporting and monitoring foster carers; and
- ◆ the work of agency fostering Panels.

These standards will be introduced in a gradual way over a three-year period.

Work is currently being undertaken to ensure that the standards identified are met. Should any standard be identified as not being met steps, will need to be undertaken to address this.

In Fostering Services, as in other aspects of placement provision, it is important to ensure that the services we provide as 'corporate parents' meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people. It is also important that steps are taken to ensure that issues of Best Value and continuous improvement are addressed. During the next year work will be undertaken to develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which will demonstrate the effectiveness of family placement for children and young people. Work will also take place to consider the workings of the Fostering Panel. Progress on this will be reported to Committee in autumn 2003.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 Consultation has taken place with the Directors of Education and Housing, and through the Children's Services Strategic Planning process with members of other organisations and agencies.

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.

9.0 SIGNATURE

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

6 December 2002

APPENDIX 1

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.

In Dundee City the Fostering Panel comprises of 10 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 10 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.