

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 22 JUNE 2015

REPORT ON: ANNUAL REPORT ON ADOPTION SERVICE

REPORT BY: HEAD OF SERVICE, STRATEGY, INTEGRATION, PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

REPORT NO: 229-2015

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides members with an update on the work of the Adoption Service during 2014/15 including the business of the Adoption & Permanence Panel. It details proposed developments for the coming year and advises committee of the updated Panel Constitution (Appendix 1). The Adoption Service Plan was approved at Committee in February 2013. Reference is made to Article V of the minute of the meeting of Social Work and Health Committee held on 25th February 2013 where report 81-2013 was submitted in relation to Annual Report on Adoption Service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the contents of the report and proposed developments as outlined in paragraphs 4.10 and 4.11.
- 2.2 Agrees the amended Panel constitution as outlined in paragraph 4.12..

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

- 4.1 Delivering early permanence to children and young people is a priority of the Scottish Government who have commissioned CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland) to work alongside local authorities to take forward their own improvement projects. The Government is also developing national data on permanence to support improvement. This followed research undertaken by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), published in 2011, which highlighted that, nationally, permanence was taking too long to be achieved for many children. SCRA are currently undertaking follow-up research.
- 4.2 Scotland's Adoption Register was established in 2011 with the aim of increasing the opportunities for finding families for children via a data-linking facility. Early in 2015 the Register reached 100 children matched via a Register link. The Register has also hosted a number of activities such as adoption exchange days and film featuring events. Adoption exchange days are an opportunity for prospective adopters to attend and hear first hand about children who are waiting for adoptive placements and to see photos and DVDs of the children. The Scottish Government are currently considering legislation to make referral to the Adoption Register mandatory.
- 4.3 The Care Inspectorate undertook an announced inspection of the adoption service in Dundee in August 2014. The service achieved grades of Good across all areas. The inspection report noted a number of areas in which the service performed well, including

the family finding and recruitment activities, partnership working with neighbouring authorities, the Adoption and Permanence Panel, the support and training of staff and the quality of support offered to prospective adopters. The inspection considered a number of areas for improvement which included developing staff appraisal, increasing the amount of lifestory work for children and developing clearer systems to ensure feedback from stakeholders is linked to service improvements.

- 4.4 Recruitment of adopters is a priority as the numbers of children requiring permanent fostering and adoptive placements continues to grow. Dundee City, Angus and Perth and Kinross Councils jointly developed a TV campaign in September 2014 to recruit permanent families. The TV campaign was linked to a dedicated webpage and enquiry phone line. Dundee also established a programme of events to support the messages from the TV campaign which included raising awareness of the need for temporary and specialist foster carers. They included drop-in sessions in community centres, external speakers, media interviews with existing foster carers and adopters and advertising on local buses and radio. The service continues to receive a steady flow of enquiries and is hopeful that it will be successful in increasing the numbers of families willing to make a lifelong commitment to a child.
- 4.5 The adoption and fostering service has also developed a Facebook page to raise general awareness and promote the recruitment activities that are happening locally.
- 4.6 In 2014 a part-time post was established to support family finding for children. The worker has made positive links with the Scottish Adoption Register, North East Consortium and voluntary adoption and independent fostering agencies. This supports staff to actively progress links with potential permanent families. From the outset Dundee has engaged fully in all of the activities of the Scottish Adoption Register, including participation in the Adoption Exchange days. A small number of matches have been made as a result.
- 4.7 The need for a confident and skilled workforce is recognised. A programme of Child Centred Permanence Planning training is delivered 3-4 times/year and there are a range of other learning opportunities for staff and carers supported by a quarterly Permanence Forum. This provides an opportunity for practitioners and managers to share information and good practice in permanence planning.
- 4.8 During 2014 the service began work with CELCIS on an improvement agenda focusing on the key factors that contribute to drift in permanence and an action plan has now been agreed. Dundee has also been one of the participants in the SCRA research.
- 4.9 The Adoption and Permanence Panel continues to fulfil all of its statutory functions and a number of supplementary functions. These include:

Considering all permanence plans for children aged under 12 years;
Considering all proposed permanent matches between children and permanent carers;
Reviewing permanence plans for children;
Considering and approving applicants to adopt and reviewing potential adopters annually as appropriate.

Statistics highlighting the work of the Panel and the service are included in appendix 2.

Panel members are recruited on an on-going basis to ensure a pool of experienced and skilled members. Panel members have access to regular training events.

- 4.10 Options for developing a small concurrent planning scheme are currently being explored. In concurrent planning foster carers are recruited who are also approved as adopters. They must be willing to foster a baby and support a return to the birth parent, with the possibility that, if unsuccessful, the fostering arrangement will lead to adoption. The main benefit of concurrent planning is to reduce the disruption built into the more usual system where a baby or young child who may need to be adopted is placed initially with foster carers then moved to an adoptive placement only once a final decision can be made. Concurrent planning aims to improve the welfare and outcomes for highly vulnerable looked-after children by reducing delays in achieving permanency and in reducing the number of placements and disruptions children experience.

4.11 There are a number of agencies in other parts of the UK who have established concurrency schemes and a number of local authorities in Scotland are now in the early stages of developing such schemes. Initial discussions have taken place between Perth, Angus and Dundee City Councils and CELCIS regarding opportunities for partnership working or a joint venture.

4.12 The attached amended panel constitution (Appendix 1) takes into account the current changes in the reporting structure, from Director of Social Work to Chief Social Work Officer.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management.

5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached to this report.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and Head of Democratic and Legal Services were consulted in the preparation of this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Laura Bannerman
Head of Service
Strategy, Integration, Performance & Support Services

Date: 10th June 2015

**DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL
SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT**

ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL CONSTITUTION

Dundee City Council Social Work Department, in accordance with its duty as an Adoption Agency, and the requirement of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009 hereby appoints an Adoption Panel.

ROLE AND FUNCTION

The Panel's primary functions are to make recommendations on the following matters:

- (a) whether adoption is in the best interests of the child;
- (b) whether an application for a permanence order granting authority for the child to be adopted should be made under section 80 of the Act;
- (c) whether a prospective adopter is suitable or continues to be suitable to be an adoptive parent;
- (d) whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent for a particular child; and
- (e) any other matter referred to the adoption panel which is relevant to the adoption agency's functions under the Act.

SUPPLEMENTARY FUNCTIONS OF THE PANEL

The Panel also undertakes the following supplementary functions:

- (a) considers permanence plans for children;
- (b) considers plans to place siblings together or separately;
- (c) monitors and reviews the implementation of permanence plans for children;
- (d) reviews after 12 months approved adoptive parents who have not been linked with a child;
- (e) considers reports on the disruption of any adoptive placement and make recommendations about whether adoption is still in the best interests of the child;
- (f) considers matters relating to adoption support, including financial assistance for adopters.

COMPOSITION

An Adoption Agency must satisfy itself that the numbers, qualifications and experience of individual members of an Adoption Panel will enable it to discharge its functions. In order to do so, Dundee City Council Adoption and Permanence Panel will comprise a minimum of 6 members.

The Panel membership will include:

- A Social Work Manager or an independent person appointed by the Social Work to co-ordinates and who Chairs the panel.
- Social Work Staff members with appropriate qualifications and expertise in adoption, fostering or the needs of looked after children appointed by the Chief Social Work Officer.
- Representatives from other agencies, departments and independent members appointed by the Chief Social Work Officer who are considered competent in terms of their knowledge, skills and experience.
- A Medical Adviser, who is a registered medical practitioner and is appointed by the Health Board. There may be more than one Medical Adviser
- A Legal Adviser, who is a solicitor or advocate and who is nominated by the Head of Democratic and Legal Services. There may be more than one Legal Adviser or the named Legal Adviser may delegate this task to others.

A Depute Chair will undertake the responsibilities of the Chair if required due to the chair's unavailability.

The balance of Panel members offers a wide experience and reflects a multi agency approach that provides objectivity. Panel members should have an awareness of differing racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Other staff, such as translators or diversity advisers may be asked to participate in any particular panels where there is a specific need.

Except for the medical and legal advisers, membership of the Panel will be for 12 months in the first instance. Thereafter, renewal of membership will be considered on a bi-annual basis. Where the agency is of the opinion that any member of the Panel is unsuitable or unable to remain as a member it may terminate membership at any time by giving notice in writing with reasons

MEETINGS

A quorum for each Panel meeting will be 3 voting members, excluding the Medical Adviser and Legal Adviser.

The Panel may only make a recommendation relating to whether adoption is in the best interests of the child or whether an application for a permanence order granting authority for the child to be adopted should be made if a Legal Adviser is present at the meeting of the Panel at which the recommendation is made or legal advice has been provided to the Panel by such an adviser.

The Panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations.

The timing and the frequency of meetings is determined by the needs of the Authority in its capacity as an Adoption Agency.

AGENCY DECISION MAKING

A minimum of 2 Agency Decision Makers will be appointed.

The Agency Decision Maker will make decisions in relation to the recommendations arising from the mandatory and supplementary duties of the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

The Decision-Maker receives all reports presented to Panel and the Panel minutes. This allows the Decision-Maker to make decisions on full information and to understand why the Panel has reached particular recommendations. The Decision-Maker is required to make a decision within fourteen days of the Panel.

Panel recommendations and the agency decision are intimated in writing, by the Panel Co-ordinator to prospective adopters and parents of children when a decision has been made that their child is in need of permanent substitute care.

APPEALS

Appeals by prospective adopters against a Panel's recommendations and subsequent agency decision should be made in writing to the Chief Social Work Officer within 28 days of the receipt of notification of the agency decision. Upon receipt of such an appeal the Chief Social Work Officer will consider the matter and appoint an Appeal Panel where appropriate in accordance with the Agency's published appeals procedure.

Adoption & Permanence Panel Statistics

	2014
Permanence plans agreed by ADM (total)	79
Permanence plans agreed - adoption	37
Permanence plans agreed - fostering	23
Permanence plans agreed - kinship	18
Matches – adoption	25
Matches – fostering	19
Matches - kinship	19
Adoptions granted	12
Adopters approved	12
Adopters de-registered	0

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOL

Part 1: Description/Consultation

Is this a Rapid Equality Impact Assessment (RIAT)?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Is this a Full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Date of Assessment:	20/05/15	Committee Report Number: 229-2015
Title of document being assessed:	Annual report on Adoption Service	
1. This is a new policy, procedure, strategy or practice being assessed (If yes please check box) <input type="checkbox"/>	This is an existing policy, procedure, strategy or practice being assessed? (If yes please check box) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. Please give a brief description of the policy, procedure, strategy or practice being assessed.	Report on the Adoption Service and the Adoption & Permanence Panel.	
3. What is the intended outcome of this policy, procedure, strategy or practice?	Note the work undertaken by the service and intended developments in 2015/16. Agree the amended constitution of the Adoption & Permanence Panel.	
4. Please list any existing documents which have been used to inform this Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment.	None	
5. Has any consultation, involvement or research with protected characteristic communities informed this assessment? If yes please give details.	No	
6. Please give details of council officer involvement in this assessment. (e.g. names of officers consulted, dates of meetings etc)	Margo Dymock	
7. Is there a need to collect further evidence or to involve or consult protected characteristics communities on the impact of the proposed policy? (Example: if the impact on a community is not known what will you do to gather the information needed and when will you do this?)	No but feedback will be sought on an on-going basis via consultative events and Adoption & Permanence Panel	

Part 2: Protected Characteristics

Which protected characteristics communities will be positively or negatively affected by this policy, procedure or strategy?

NB Please place an X in the box which best describes the "overall" impact. It is possible for an assessment to identify that a positive policy can have some negative impacts and visa versa. When this is the case please identify both positive and negative impacts in Part 3 of this form.

If the impact on a protected characteristic communities are not known please state how you will gather evidence of any potential negative impacts in box Part 1 section 7 above.

	Positively	Negatively	No Impact	Not Known
Ethnic Minority Communities including Gypsies and Travellers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People with a disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socio-economic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 3: Impacts/Monitoring


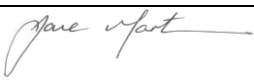
<p>1. Have any positive impacts been identified?</p> <p>(We must ensure at this stage that we are not achieving equality for one strand of equality at the expense of another)</p>	<p>Increasing numbers and range of adoptive families. Minimising drift in progressing permanence plans for children.</p>
<p>2. Have any negative impacts been identified?</p> <p>(Based on direct knowledge, published research, community involvement, customer feedback etc. If unsure seek advice from your departmental Equality Champion.)</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>3. What action is proposed to overcome any negative impacts?</p> <p>(e.g. involving community groups in the development or delivery of the policy or practice, providing information in community languages etc. See Good Practice on DCC equalities web page)</p>	<p>N/a</p>
<p>4. Is there a justification for continuing with this policy even if it cannot be amended or changed to end or reduce inequality without compromising its intended outcome?</p> <p>(If the policy that shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination you must stop and seek legal advice)</p>	<p>N/a</p>
<p>5. Has a 'Full' Equality Impact Assessment been recommended?</p> <p>(If the policy is a major one or is likely to have a major impact on protected characteristics communities a Full Equality Impact Assessment may be required. Seek advice from your departmental Equality lead.)</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>6. How will the policy be monitored?</p> <p>(How will you know it is doing what it is intended to do? e.g. data collection, customer survey etc.)</p>	<p>Monthly data reports to Childrens Service Management Team, quarterly reports for service group and annual reports to Committee</p>

Part 4: Contact Information

Name of Department or Partnership	Social Work
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Type of Document	
Human Resource Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
General Policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Strategy/Service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change Papers/Local Procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidelines and Protocols	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Manager Responsible	Author Responsible
Name: Margo Dymock	Name: Gail Aboim
Designation: Service Manager Resources	Designation: Senior Officer Adoption & Fostering
Base: Dudhope Castle	Base: Dudhope Castle
Telephone: 436004	Telephone: 436007
Email: margo.dymock@dundeecity.gov.uk	Email: Gail.aboim@dundeecity.gov.uk

Signature of author of the policy:		Date: 20/05/15
Signature of Head of Service:		Date: 22/05/15
Name of Head of Service:	Jane Martin	
Date of Next Policy Review:	Annually	