

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

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

REPORT ON: ANNUAL REPORT ON FOSTERING SERVICE

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

REPORT NO: 230-2015

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report details the work of the Fostering Service during 2014/15 including the business of the Fostering Panel. It also summarises proposed developments for the year ahead.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

2.1 Notes the contents of report and the proposed developments as outlined in paragraph 4.11.

2.2 Approves the amended panel constitution for the Fostering Panel as outlined in paragraph 4.10.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 A National Review of Foster Care was completed in 2013 which resulted in six recommendations in relation to: placement descriptors; a national foster carer database; placement limits; learning and development; allowances and fees. The Scottish Government agreed, in January 2014, to progress all of the recommendations.

As a result of this it was agreed that the maximum number of children in care placements would be 3 if unrelated, however exemptions were agreed for sibling groups and emergency situations. This was introduced locally at the end of December.

Descriptors for five types of foster placement were agreed. These are:

- Permanent
- Long-Term
- Interim
- Emergency
- Short Breaks

Work is ongoing nationally to implement these into local care planning and data collection systems and the Care Inspectorate.

Further information in relation to the national database is awaited and work is also ongoing in relation to developing a learning and development framework for foster carers in Scotland linked to the National Standards for Foster Carers.

In addition, research has been undertaken nationally on allowances and consideration is now being given to a minimum rate or a set rate of allowances being established.

The Government accepts that the issue of setting rates of fees was for local authorities to decide but emphasised that a more strategic approach was needed.

- 4.2 Members will recall that the gradings for the fostering service were significantly reduced in April 2014 following the Care Inspectorate upholding two complaints. The Service put an action plan in place to address the issues raised and, in June 2014, an unannounced visit by the Care Inspectorate noted the progress that had been made and upgraded the Service to Adequate. The Inspectorate has now considered further evidence of the progress that has been made and in April 2015 the Service was upgraded again to Good in all areas.
- 4.3 The recruitment of foster carers, particularly those able to offer permanent placements remains a priority. The numbers of children and young people requiring both temporary and permanent fostering continues to grow. Dundee City, Angus and Perth and Kinross Councils jointly developed and launched 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 campaign which included raising awareness of the need for temporary and specialist foster carers. This included drop-in sessions in community centres, external speakers, media interviews of existing foster carers and adopters and advertising on local buses and radio. The family placement service is continuing to receive a steady flow of enquiries and it is noteworthy that a number of these relate to an interest in permanent fostering.
- 4.4 The adoption and fostering service has continued to develop its dedicated website www.changetheirlives.co.uk providing a wide range of information to members of the public on the services provided. There is also a restricted access area for approved adopters and foster carers that provides up to date information on policies, procedures, recruitment events, learning and development resources and consultations. This website continues to be developed and it is hoped that it will become interactive for carers to share good practice and information. The service has also developed a Facebook page to raise general awareness of adoption and fostering and to promote local recruitment activities.
- 4.5 In 2014 a part-time post was established dedicated to supporting family finding for children. The worker appointed to this post has made positive links with the Scottish Adoption Register, North East Consortium and voluntary adoption and independent fostering agencies. This enhances the work of the Family Finding Group in terms of supporting staff and actively progressing links with potential permanent families.
- Family finding activities have taken account of emerging evidence about the effectiveness of using photographs and DVDs to profile children. A number of staff and carers have received training and support to enable them to produce high quality digital materials which have been used at national recruitment events and on secure web-based family finding sites.
- 4.6 The Foster Carer Handbook was reviewed and updated during 2014/15 and is published on the website; carers who do not have access to the internet can be provided with a hard copy. A system is also now in place for ongoing review and updating the handbook.
- 4.7 The service has a well-established programme of quality learning opportunities for foster carers. Training has been provided through a combination of in-house and commissioned services and there is clear evidence of the positive impact that this has had in supporting carers to provide a high standard of care. During 2014/15 the service has engaged in a formal evaluation of the training and is in the process of developing a more structured, transparent learning framework for carers that makes clear what the service expects from carers and what carers can expect from the service. It will also take account of the developments within the national carer training strategy and any in-house developments in relation to establishing a Skills Level Fostering Service.

4.8 The Fostering Panel has continued to fulfil all of its statutory functions and a number of supplementary functions. These include:

- Considering assessments of all prospective foster carers
- Making recommendations on the numbers and categories of child the carer should be approved for
- Considering amendments to approval of carers
- Bi-annual reviews of all foster carers
- 8 weekly reviews of emergency extensions to approval
- Applications from relatives or friends for approval as kinship carers
- Applications for Residence Allowances
- Private fostering applications
- De-registration of carers.
- Statistics highlighting the work of the Panel and wider service are included in Appendix 2.

The service continues to recruit and review Fostering Panel membership to ensure a pool of experienced and skilled members is maintained. Panel members attend training events and have additional learning opportunities a minimum of three times a year.

4.9 In addition service users and carers have participated in the recruitment of resource workers and this will continue as good practice.

4.10 The constitution of the Fostering Panel has been amended to reflect the current changes in Senior Management from Director of Social Work to Chief Social Work Officer (Appendix 2).

Developments for 2015/16

4.11 A recent review of the specialist Alternative Community Experience (ACE) Foster Carer Scheme was carried out to consider whether the existing scheme best met the changing needs of children and young people. A number of options for revised schemes were proposed but no clear decisions made about the preferred way forward. Work on further options are being progressed, including consideration of a Skills Level service that would apply across the fostering service. Detailed work needs to be undertaken to set criteria and expectations and payment structure for each of the levels.

4.12 Consultations continue with carers about the revision of policies. Regular consultation meetings are arranged throughout the year to allow carers a forum to raise any issues they want to discuss. Newsletters are sent out on a regular basis and carers are encouraged to become members of working groups.

4.13 The Service will continue to monitor the panel business and may have to increase the number of panels or change its remit, depending on developments.

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 carried out 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 and Support Services

Date: 10th June 2015

**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 requirements of the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 hereby appoints a Fostering Panel.

ROLE AND FUNCTION

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

- (a) whether a prospective foster carer is suitable or continues to be suitable to be a foster carer;
- (b) whether a prospective foster carer would be a suitable foster carer for –
 - (i) a particular child or children;
 - (ii) any child; or
 - (iii) certain categories of child;
- (c) the maximum number of children a particular foster carer may have in their care.

SUPPLEMENTARY FUNCTIONS OF THE PANEL

- (a) advise on specific issues during the assessment process;
- (b) reviews of foster carers on a bi-annual basis or where amendments to approval are sought;
- (c) recommend whether approval of carers should be terminated;
- (d) consideration of emergency extensions to foster carer approval;
- (e) whether a relative or friend would be a suitable kinship carer for a specific child.

COMPOSITION

A Fostering Agency must satisfy itself that the numbers, qualifications and experience of individual members of a Fostering 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 appointed by the Chief Social Work Officer.

The Panel membership will include:

- A Social Work Manager or an independent person who Chairs the panel.
- Social Work Staff members with appropriate qualifications and expertise in fostering or the needs of looked after children appointed by the Chief Social Work Officer.
- Representatives from other agencies, departments and independent members 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. The pool of Panel members may include 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 designated 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.

Membership of this 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 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 Panel Co-ordinator in consultation with the Panel Chair and will be determined by the needs of the Authority in its capacity as a Fostering Agency.

AGENCY DECISION MAKING

A minimum of 2 Agency Decision Makers will be appointed by the Chief Social Work Officer.

The Agency Decision Maker will make decisions in relation to the recommendations arising from the mandatory and supplementary duties of the Fostering 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 Chair or Panel Co-ordinator to foster carers, prospective foster carers and kinship carers.

REVIEWS

Requests for reviews of agency decisions by foster carers, prospective foster carers or kinship carers against an 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 a request the Chief Social Work Officer will consider the matter and appoint a Review Panel in accordance with the Agency's published review/appeals procedure.

Fostering Panel Statistics

	2014
Foster Carer Reviews	67
Amendments to Foster Carer approvals	26
Foster Carers approved	7
Foster Carers de-registered	6
Kinship Carers approved (at Fostering & Adoption Panels)	45

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: 230-2015
Title of document being assessed:	Annual report on the Fostering 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 Fostering Service and the Fostering 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 Fostering 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 foster carer reviews, carer consultative group and Fostering 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 foster care placements. Developing more robust framework of training and support to carers.</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>Not required</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>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	