

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 28TH MARCH 2011

REPORT ON: ANNUAL REPORT OF ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICES

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 164 - 2011

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report informs members of the work of the Adoption Service and the Fostering Service during 2010, including the business of the Adoption & Permanence Panel and the Fostering Panel. It also provides the proposed service improvement plan for the year ahead. (appendix 1)

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes and approves the contents of the annual reports and the proposed service improvement plan for 2011.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 ADOPTION SERVICE AND THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL

4.1.1 The new Adoption & Children (Scotland) Act 2007 came into force on 28 September 2009, accompanied by a set of Regulations. Staff in Children's Services were fully briefed on the implications of the new Act during the lead up to and during the first months of implementation in 2010. Departmental procedures were updated as required. Further e-mail briefings and training events were provided throughout 2010 as practice and policy issues emerged.

4.1.2 One of the key changes in the new Act has been the establishment of a new, flexible Permanence Order which can be tailored to the specific needs of individual children. In Dundee such Orders are increasingly being used to provide greater stability for children and young people in permanent fostering placements by sharing parental responsibilities with their permanent foster carers and taking them out of the Children's Hearing system.

4.1.3 The Act placed greater responsibilities on Local Authorities to provide adoption support services to a wider range of people affected by adoption. Report 146 - 2010 noted and approved the establishment of an Adoption Support Worker post, whose primary focus would be to develop these services and provide the first point of contact for people seeking such services. This worker is now in post. The use of Adoption Support Plans has been established, which provides a clear framework for ongoing

support to children and families affected by adoption, particularly important where children have special or complex needs.

- 4.1.4 The 2010/11 Care Commission Inspection of the adoption service was undertaken in November 2010, only 10 months after the previous annual inspection as a result of the proposed regulatory changes being introduced in April 2011.
- 4.1.5 The service achieved a Grade 5 - Very Good.
- 4.1.6 The inspection report noted that the service had progressed systematically since the last inspection. Post adoption support groups had been successfully established and there were good examples of post adoption services being commissioned for specific children. In the relatively short timescale since the last inspection, staff had made very good progress in developing and recording service user views. Monitoring and quality assurance systems were seen to be effective.
- 4.1.7 Dundee is a founding member of North East Consortium. This resource sharing forum has now been in existence for more than 13 years. It is a valuable asset in finding families for "harder to place" children.
- 4.1.8 In 2010 7 matches were made within the Consortium's own resources and a further 9 were made as a result of the links between the North East and West of Scotland Consortia and the Scottish Resource Sharing Network.
- 4.1.9 All members of the Consortium have now adopted a charging policy based on interagency fees recommended by BAAF. This means that agencies now pay for any placements they purchase and can offset some of these expenses by making available for placements, any families they cannot themselves find suitable placements for, within a reasonable period of time. In 2010 Dundee received income for 4 placements.
- 4.1.10 In 2010 the Consortium also provided a training event for staff, foster carers and adopters.
- 4.1.11 It is anticipated that the work of the Consortium will be enhanced in 2011 by the launch of the Adoption Register for Scotland. This service, established by the Scottish Government and to be run by the British Association for Fostering and Adoption (BAAF), will be a free service designed to maximise the opportunities for finding families for children by providing a database for all children requiring placements and families offering such placements and a data-linking facility.
- 4.1.12 In terms of recruitment, there remains a shortfall in the number of permanent foster carers and adopters across the UK. 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 growing demand for placements. Members of the Recruitment Group, including foster carers and adopters, have maintained excellent liaison with local media and have made creative use of local advertising opportunities, such as slots on Radio Tay, an interview feature in the Evening Telegraph and the continuation of STV advertisements. Recruitment is a priority in the service improvement plan.
- 4.1.13 In addition, Dundee is engaged in a pilot with Scottish Adoption, a voluntary adoption agency, aimed at recruiting adopters for specific children. The outcome of this pilot will be evaluated in due course and, if successful, may lead to further such campaigns in future.

- 4.1.14 Dundee has also continued to work in partnership with Barnardo's Side by Side service in the recruitment of both permanent foster carers and temporary carers for children with complex needs.
- 4.1.15 A comprehensive review of recruitment activities is underway and will be concluded in 2011 with the focus on ensuring that recruitment is based on evidence of what works and is targeted to maximise the best use of resources.
- 4.1.16 The composition of the Adoption and Permanence Panel remains largely unchanged over the past 12 months, with the membership reflecting a wide range of experience and knowledge, both professional and personal.
- 4.1.17 The Panel continues to fulfil its statutory functions and a number of supplementary functions. These include:
- Considering all permanency plans for children whenever Adoption or a Permanence Order is being considered for any child.
 - Monitoring and reviewing the permanence plans for children on a regular basis if a permanent placement has not been identified
 - Considering all proposed matches between children and permanent carers
 - Considering all applicants to adopt
 - Reviewing all approved permanent and adoptive carers who have not been linked with a child within 12 months
 - Considering applications for adoption allowances
 - Considering adoption support plans
- 4.1.18 All Panel members undertake a period of induction that includes observations of Panel meetings. All Panel members are asked to attend a number of training sessions each year. In 2010, training included Permanence Orders and related new legislation and the use of Adoption Support Plans.
- 4.1.19 Panel Statistics

	January - December 2010
Adoption plans identified	18
Permanent fostering plans identified	6
Permanent kinship placements identified	10
Total permanence plans agreed	34
Reviews of permanence plans	31
Adoption matches	14
Permanent fostering matches	19
Kinship matches	10
Total matches	43
Applicants to adopt	8
Applicants to permanently foster a specific child	5
De-registrations	2

- 4.1.20 Themes arising from the adoption service and the adoption and permanence panel remain the same as in previous years. The increasing population of looked after and accommodated children throughout 2010 and the high numbers of these requiring permanent substitute care away from birth parents, means there is a shortfall in both suitable adoptive, and permanent fostering placements.
- 4.1.21 Being able to provide a child with a permanent placement, stability, and continuity of care, and the opportunity to develop lasting attachments to significant people optimises the chance for them to lead successful lives. Conversely, living with

unpredictability and disorder can impair physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. The younger a child is at time of permanent placement, the better the placement outcome. Thus the need to ensure timely, well-informed and decisive planning for the long-term future of children is paramount.

- 4.1.22 Reports for the Adoption & Permanence Panel need to be comprehensive and evidence-based to ensure that sufficient information is available to enable clear plans to be agreed and progressed. Work continues to be undertaken through the Permanence Action Plan, in conjunction with supervision and support from Social Work team managers, to help social workers produce consistently high quality reports within timescales.
- 4.1.23 Dundee continues to be successful at recruiting a small number of prospective adopters with the traditional profile ie childless couples or those with one birth child who are wishing to parent one or two pre-school children with no significant health or developmental issues and no ongoing birth family contact.
- 4.1.24 Whilst Dundee has had limited success in recruiting foster carers who are specifically offering permanent placements, there has been more success in supporting existing temporary carers to offer permanent placements to children and young people already in their care. Research indicates that such placements often provide a lower risk of disruption than those where children are placed on a permanent fostering basis with previously unknown carers.
- 4.1.25 Due to the shortfall in existing in-house resources, Dundee has continued to have to rely on external placements to meet its needs. In the past 12 months 3 adoptive placements were secured via voluntary agencies or the North East Consortium and 13 children or young people were matched with permanent carers from voluntary or independent fostering agencies, the majority of whom were their existing carers. In addition, adoptive placements are currently being sought externally for 13 children. No permanent fostering placements are being sought.
- 4.1.26 It is acknowledged that there are clear resource and budgetary implications arising from an increasing reliance on external agencies to bridge the placement shortfall. However, such use has led to many children securing a permanent placement.
- 4.1.27 The need to fully explore extended family and friends as potential permanent carers for children who cannot return home has been a continuing theme in 2010. Some work has been undertaken in relation to developing the more systematic use of Family Group Conferencing and Family Meetings but this has not progressed as much as had been hoped and is an area for development in 2011.

4.2 **2009 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE FOSTERING PANEL AND THE FOSTERING SERVICE**

- 4.2.1 The demands on the Fostering Service of children requiring family based placements have continued to rise steadily over the past 8 years. Dundee's Family Placement service has been successful in retaining a relatively stable group of foster carers and indeed increasing the number of fostering households (90) and temporary & permanent fostering beds (160).
- 4.2.2 The additional Resource Worker posts established in Report 146-2010 have been a feature in increasing the number of applications to foster which have been progressed whilst maintaining a high quality support service to foster carers, an essential element

of the strategy to retain good quality carers and provide better outcomes for children looked after in foster care.

- 4.2.3 The fostering service acknowledges the continuing need to further develop the in-house provision of foster placements and reduce the reliance on expensive external placements. Unfortunately, at the present time, there remains a shortfall in service provision which is being met by fostering providers from the independent and voluntary sector.
- 4.2.4 The service has now established comprehensive contractual arrangements with each of the independent and voluntary agencies it commissions to provide fostering services. A framework for monitoring and review of these arrangements is in place to ensure that the services provided represent good value as well as good quality services and outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after. In addition, Dundee continues to be closely involved in the development of a National Fostering Contract.
- 4.2.5 Barnardo's Side by Side fostering service in Dundee was extended in 2008 to provide a small number of full-time fostering placements, both temporary and permanent, to children and young people with additional support needs alongside the provision of respite placements for those children with complex needs.
- 4.2.6 Dundee continues to operate a dedicated Recruitment Group, made up of family placement staff and managers, foster carers and adopters. This group takes a lead role in maintaining a high profile for fostering and adoption recruitment in the city and nationally. Recruitment is a high priority on the service improvement plan this year.
- 4.2.7 There is strong competition in the area of recruitment from the independent fostering sector, many of whom have established offices in the local area. In spite of this, Dundee has been able to retain and indeed slightly increase the number of fostering households it supports in the last year.
- 4.2.8 The 2010/11 Care Commission Inspection of the fostering service was undertaken in November 2010, only 10 months after the previous annual inspection as a result of the proposed changes to the inspection framework in the coming year.
- 4.2.9 The service achieved a Grade 5 - Very Good.
- 4.2.10 The inspection report concluded that Dundee City Council fostering service had continued to build on the established good practice since the last inspection. Communication within the service was very good and staff and carers felt that the service generally was well managed at team and service level. The report recommended the service should develop a more systematic approach to participation, demonstrating the cycle of information sharing, consultation, evaluation, action and improvement. This is also a high priority in our service improvement plan.
- 4.2.11 An evaluation questionnaire completed by Dundee's foster carers, noted that a significant majority of those who responded thought that the adoption and fostering services in Dundee performed very well overall and a number of respondents also commented on the high quality of service from childcare social workers. There was a general awareness of the potential implications of the current economic climate on the services provided and more carers, the continuing need for good quality, relevant training for carers and decisive, timely care planning and decision making for children.
- 4.2.12 The fostering panel's composition remains largely unchanged over the past 12 months, although some members have had to reduce their availability due to

competing work demands. Recruitment of Panel members is planned for 2011 to ensure the Panel is able to continue to carry out its functions satisfactorily.

- 4.2.13 The Panel continues to fulfil 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 approval 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

4.2.14 Panel statistics

	January - December 2010
Fostering approvals	10
Foster carer reviews & amendments	56
Emergency extensions	6
Foster carer de-registrations	4
Kinship carer applications	41
Residence allowance applications	12
Applications for legal fees for residence orders	5

- 4.2.15 All Panel members undertake a period of induction that includes observations of Panel meetings. All panel members are asked to attend a number of training sessions each year. In 2010 training included training on the 2007 Act and the Looked After Children Regulations 2009.
- 4.2.16 The themes arising from the Fostering service remain the same as in previous years. The demand for placements for children and young people has continued to rise during 2010, whilst the number of approved foster carers within Dundee has not kept pace with demand for placement.
- 4.2.17 The number of carers willing to consider offering placements to older or more challenging children and young people or larger sibling groups remains significantly less than the requirement for such placements. This gap has been filled, to some extent, by the independent fostering providers. Not only are there significant financial implications but there are also hidden costs when children are being moved away from their local communities, schools and friends to access care placements.
- 4.2.18 The numbers of children identified as requiring permanent fostering remains high in Dundee. Although few foster carers are being recruited specifically offering permanent fostering placements, a significant number of temporary carers are subsequently offering permanence to children they are already looking after. In the main this is a positive development, providing stability and continuity of care. As a consequence there are currently very few children awaiting permanent fostering placements.
- 4.2.19 The current system for the review of foster carers approval, whilst complying with national care standards and regulatory requirements, does not provide the level of independent monitoring and scrutiny the service aspires to. To this end the system is

being reviewed, including benchmarking against other fostering agencies, and proposals for an improved system will be progressed in 2011.

- 4.2.20 The number of children and young people who are looked after by kinship carers or informal kinship carers continues to rise steadily within Dundee, from 338 children in January 2010 to 367 by December. Many of these arrangements are likely to be long-term or permanent and may require a level of ongoing support. The Looked After Children Regulations 2009 prescribe the framework for the assessment of kinship carers. Dundee's operating procedures comply with these regulations.

4.3 **CONCLUSION**

- 4.3.1 Throughout 2010 Dundee City Council's adoption and fostering services have continued to maintain a high quality, professional service within the context of increasing demands for placements, ongoing carer support and rigorous external inspection. Staff within these services continue to work closely with service users, partner agencies, stakeholders, foster carers, adopters and others to ensure that children and young people's needs are being met and that improved outcomes are achieved.

5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Equality Impact Assessment. There are no major issues.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/>.

6.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

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

7.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Service Improvement Plan (Appendix 1)
Care Commission Reports for Adoption and Fostering Services 2010
Equality Impact Assessment

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DATE: 17th March 2011

APPENDIX 1

FAMILY PLACEMENT ACTION PLAN 2011

	Safe Healthy active Nurtured Achieving Responsible Respected and Included children
Recruitment	<p>More focussed and targeted recruitment, linked to trends.</p> <p>Ace scheme recruitment</p> <p>Expansion of the service in terms of new carers. Review timescales from initial interest to completion and ADM decision.</p> <p>Child Specific recruitment and evaluation of the pilot with Scottish Adoption</p> <p>Recruitment Annual report /with analysis of effectiveness of different types of recruitment.</p> <p>Collection of data for future planning</p> <p>Consider dual approval at point of assessment/preparation</p>
Forms	<p>Changes made to existing forms to be completed and placed on forms index.</p> <p>Review of existing carers review forms</p> <p>Introduce and use for every placement the family placement referral form and individual placement agreement. This requires a roll out to locality teams and case responsible teams</p>
Legislation	<p>The implications of the new legislation Protection of Vulnerable groups will be actioned in respect of the services.</p> <p>Consolidate the training on the new legislation in Adoption support with regard to the planning review and monitoring processes.</p> <p>Work with Permanence team to agree family placement contribution to adoption support role</p> <p>Complete and implement recommendations from Care Commission Inspection 2010</p>
Data Collection	<p>Confirm and agree the data we need to collect, for service improvement needs</p> <p>This has to include information collected from recruitment</p> <p>Carers questionnaires</p> <p>Carers exit interviews</p> <p>Information collected from carers reviews</p> <p>Disruptions meetings</p> <p>Statistics agreed for annual returns and care commission purposes</p> <p>Placement breakdowns (short term)</p>
Profile	<p>Agreement to chair an external fostering panel for an independent provider</p> <p>The role we play in the induction of new staff.</p> <p>Realise opportunities to share the information with the whole of children's services</p> <p>Make sure family placement staff are fully aware of wider developments within children's services.</p>

Policy	<p>Review of current policies and consideration of existing policies in other areas which should supplement our carer's core skills training strategy.</p> <p>Involvement of carer on residential policy for sexual health</p> <p>Look at adapting current policies in residential to make them fit for purpose for Family placement.</p> <p>Private Fostering Awareness raising.</p> <p>Kinship care policies and processes review if they are fit for purpose.</p>
Foster Carer Handbook	<p>Currently under review - Completion date August 2011</p> <p>Review will include carers, Young people and children's rights officer, and other professionals in service</p> <p>Use of the consultative group to involve more carers in planning, policy and service improvement</p>
Training	<p>Establish a core training strategy for carers audit existing training, set priorities, and look at more specialised training linking to age approval. Look at a strategy for dealing with the mandatory two day training.</p> <p>Link resource workers into this training through evaluation of training records for carers</p>
Admissions Panel	<p>Review of panel, processes and procedures to make sure it is working in terms of the management of resources</p> <p>Further discussion required from service managers and team managers about the use of admissions panel for planned placements and the emergency system the tensions between the two and the children who get lost or drift in the system due to the lack of cohesion with the current system.</p>
Carer Reviews	<p>Currently looking at best way of doing these as current process is not independent enough. Comparison with other authorities and external providers has been completed now looking at detail/resource implications of offering every carer an annual review at panel. This will be taken through the consultative forum. Need to include and establish timescales for disruptions and risk assessments for carers following significant incidents</p> <p>Reviews should incorporate action points for carers where necessary.</p>
Budgets	<p>Team managers to become involved in budget discussions. Agreement on priority spends for the service necessary. External placement budget to be fully discussed with management team and should link with better processes for the management of resources.</p> <p>Extract permanent placements from budget check due process has been followed through care plan which will give more realistic projection of longer term spends.</p> <p>Working group on fees and allowances to be set up</p>
Carer Feedback	<p>Make sure the consultative group is working effectively. Agreement it will return to four times a year</p> <p>Summarise and analyse the feedback from the questionnaires and carers reviews</p> <p>Make all information more available for carers to access on computer.</p>

Safeguards/publications		<p>Introduce disruption meetings within reasonable timescales, make sure the complaints system for young people is fit for purpose and re-assess the role of the children's rights officer in terms of family placement</p> <p>Analyse the information from review reports completed by children.</p> <p>Make sure we have assessed ourselves against the recommendations of the Plymouth Safeguarding Review</p> <p>Consider the review of the dispute between the Orkney Islands Council and Cambridgeshire County Council regarding provision of support.</p>
Record Keeping		<p>Look at quality of reports from carers and children. Is the format fit for purpose</p> <p>Need to have quality assurance on all reports for carers reviews</p>
Contracts		<p>Establish the review and monitoring framework for all independent providers.</p> <p>Contracts now signed for major providers management need to reach agreement on which major providers we will commission services from in terms of best outcomes for children</p>