

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 16 OCTOBER 2000**

**REPORT ON: WORKING TOGETHER FOR DUNDEE'S CHILDREN IN NEED  
ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANELS**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK**

**REPORT NO: 659-2000**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The report informs members of the Authority's statutory requirements in relation to its role as an Adoption Agency. It provides details of the work carried out by the Adoption and Fostering Panels when undertaking the duties placed upon the local authority in respect of children in need. The report also provides information on the role and responsibilities of the Agency Decision Maker.

### **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 Acknowledge work and commitment of Fostering and Adoption Panel members.

2.1.3 Instruct the Director of Social Work, in future, to provide separate annual progress reports on the Fostering Service and Adoption Service in the City. These reports will include details of the work of the Adoption and Fostering Panels and will be provided as part of the "Working Together for Dundee's Children in Need" framework.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The work of the Adoption and Fostering Panels is in line with the principles of Agenda 21 in that efforts are made wherever possible to meet the needs of children locally and for their social, education and health needs to be promoted.

### **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

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

### **6.0 MAIN TEXT**

6.1 Under the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 1996, and the Fostering of Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996, the local authority has a duty to appoint an adoption panel, a fostering panel and an agency decision maker to carry out certain specified functions. Further details of these functions are contained in the attached document, "Report on Dundee City Council's Adoption and Fostering Panels April 1996 – March 2000".

6.2 In Dundee, the same people serve on both the Adoption and Fostering Panels, bringing a pool of expertise to an important aspect of child care planning. One group of panel members can operate more efficiently, can develop a consistent approach across all areas of family placement, and are easier to service by medical and legal advisers.

6.3 The panels, which meet fortnightly, are chaired by the Senior Officer (Adoption and Fostering). The importance of the work carried out by the panels in contributing to the care planning for very vulnerable children should be noted. The report highlights the personal commitment shown by many panel members in carrying out this crucial role.

6.4 In Dundee, the Manager of Children’s Services, within the Social Work Department, carries out the Agency Decision Maker’s role. The Agency Decision Maker’s responsibility is to make decisions in respect of children in need based on recommendations made by the Panel members.

6.5 The statistical information provided in Appendices 1 and 2 details the business of the panels in respect of both children and applicants. In the year April 1999 to March 2000, 34 children were presented to Panel as being in need of permanent substitute care, either by way of adoption or permanent foster care. The children involved varied in age from seven children aged 0-24 months to 17 children aged 2-5 years, six children aged 6-10 years and four children aged between 11 and 15 years.

**7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Director of Support Services and the Director of Education have been consulted in the preparation of this report. The contents of the report have also been discussed with the members of the Adoption and Fostering Panels.

**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**

Director of Social Work \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**REPORT ON**

**DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL'S**

**ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANEL**

**APRIL – MARCH**

**1996 – 2000**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report contains information about the membership and functioning of Dundee City Council Adoption and Fostering Panels and gives details of the work presented to both Panels from April 1996 to March 2000. Reference is also made to the remit of the Sub-Panel which considers reviews of adoption, custody and residence allowances and new applications for residence allowances. Information is also provided on the responsibilities of the authority agency decision maker who also carries out a key role in relation to permanency planning for children.

## **BACKGROUND**

In March 1996 Dundee City Council approved the establishment of Adoption and Fostering Panels to fulfil the following duties of the local authority:

- a to act as an adoption agency;
- b to meet the requirements of the Adoption (Scotland ) Regulations 1996; and
- c to meet the requirements of the Fostering of Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996.

## **STATUTORY FUNCTIONS OF THE PANELS**

### **The Adoption Panel**

The functions of the Adoption Panel, as set out in Regulation 11 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, are:

- to consider whether adoption is in the best interests of a particular child and, if so, whether a Freeing application should be made under Section 18 of the 1978 Act;
- to provide a written report of the consideration given by them to alternatives to adoption and in circumstances where adoption with parental contact is recommended, why adoption is recommended rather than an alternative course of action;
- to consider whether an adopter is suitable as an adoptive parent; and
- to consider whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent for a particular child.

The Adoption Panel also has supplementary functions. These are covered by Regulation 11(6) which gives agencies the discretion to seek the panel's advice on other relevant matters. Such matters could include the need:

- to consider permanency plans for children;
- to consider plans to place siblings together or separately;
- to monitor and review the implications of plans for children;

- to review, after a specified time, approved adoptive parents who have not been linked with a child;
- to consider reports on the disruption of any adoptive placement and make recommendations about whether adoption is still in the best interests of the child, and whether the prospective adopters should still be approved, and, if so, the levels of their approval; and
- to consider matters relating to financial assistance for adopters, for example approved adoption allowances or the payment of legal expenses incurred by the adopters in obtaining an adoption order.

In addition to the functions already described, the panel plays a crucial role in identifying patterns which emerge in the work with families. In highlighting these themes, the panel provides feedback which helps staff to reflect on practice and to change or develop the services offered to children and their families. The panel, therefore carries out an integral role in the planning for children and in ensuring positive outcomes.

### **The Fostering Panel**

The Fostering Panel considers whether or not to recommend the approval of foster carers. It also considers amendments to approval and provides advice regarding ongoing assessments.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANELS**

The membership of both panels comprises of experienced child care practitioners and managers, a representative from the Education Authority, medical adviser, and two independent members, one of whom is an adoptive parent and the other a senior child care practitioner from a voluntary agency. As well as obtaining medical advice, in certain circumstances panels must also seek legal advice and so a legal adviser attends relevant panels.

Currently 8 members are available to attend each panel with panel membership being reviewed every two years to ensure a degree of consistency. Unfortunately individual members, due to their own circumstances have not been able to continue and the panel membership has needed to be reviewed more frequently. It is also intended to review the composition of the panels with a view to increasing the pool of members and widening the experience they bring.

The commitment given by Panel members is high and is much appreciated as it promotes quality child care practice. To support panel members in carrying out their duties, and to ensure they are equipped for the task, members are offered training approximately three times a year.

## **PANEL MEMBERS VIEWS**

Panel members views have been sought so that their comments can be included in this report. Members emphasised the importance of the quality of reports submitted to the panel. Comprehensive, well written reports, which provide an analysis of the assessment undertaken mean cost effectiveness in the time needed by panel members to discuss particular cases. Panel members also commented on the personal commitment given to the role by individual members. Preparation for each panel takes at least three hours and it should be recognised that this often happens in the individual's personal time.

## **THE PANELS**

The panels are co-ordinated and chaired by the Senior Officer, Adoption and Fostering. The depute chair is a Senior Social Worker from a child care and assessment team.

The Panels meet fortnightly and sometimes more frequently if required. In preparation for each panel, members require to study all the relevant papers to enable them to participate in the in-depth deliberation and discussion necessary to make informed recommendations. The recommendations made by both panels are then discussed with the Agency Decision Maker.

All applicants, whether prospective foster carers or adopters, are invited to attend the panels. This promotes transparency in the process by giving the opportunity for the applicants to discuss their application directly with the panel members. It also gives panel members the opportunity to ask any questions about matters they want to clarify.

Both panels take on a broader role which is to provide a specialist forum where policy and practice issues relating to the adoption and fostering services can be debated.

### **Allowances Sub Panel**

As a result of the amount of business the Adoption and Fostering Panels have to undertake, an additional panel was formed to review residence, custody, and adoption allowances and new applications for residence allowances.

This panel meets monthly and comprises of a Senior Resource Worker, Welfare Rights representative, Independent Panel Member and the Senior Officer, Adoption and Fostering. Like the Adoption and Fostering Panels, this panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. For further details see Appendix 1 'Panel Statistical Information, April 1996 – March 2000'.

## **AGENCY DECISION MAKER**

The Agency Decision Maker is appointed by the Director of Social Work, and in Dundee is the Manager of Children's Services. Given the importance of this role, the Agency Decision Maker must have a sound knowledge, experience and expertise in child care.

Like the panel members, the Agency Decision Maker receives all relevant papers including the minute of the meeting and bases his or her decisions on the presenting paperwork, the discussion at the panel and the subsequent recommendations. To ensure that timescales are adhered to a depute Agency Decision Maker has also been appointed.

## **PRIMARY REASONS FOR CHILDREN BEING PRESENTED TO PANEL**

A child will only become looked after away from home after a comprehensive assessment has identified that this will be in the child's best interests. In the majority of circumstances the aim will be to return the child to the care of their own family. This aim will be achieved by working in partnership with the child, parents and members of the extended family where appropriate.

A decision not to return a child must also be based on a full assessment and firm grounds and evidence which establishes good reasons for this action.

Dundee City Council believes that the best place for children to be brought up is within their own families and that parents should be given every opportunity to parent their child. The local authority will make it clear to parents what is expected of them in order for them to resume permanent parenting of their child.

Making a decision not to return a child to their birth family has a very profound and significant impact on the child and his or her parents. This is why a clear assessment of need must be undertaken and must indicate that such a decision is in the best interest of the child.

Social Workers may face a dilemma in deciding how long they should continue to help a family to work towards resuming the care of their child. It needs to be recognised that in continuing to work to rehabilitate a child with his or her own family, the child may become more damaged. For an older child this may eventually make it more difficult to find an appropriate future permanent placement.

When it is clear that children can no longer be cared for by their family, it is appropriate to move swiftly to secure alternative plans for permanency so that they do not drift in the system.

For some children the aim of permanence can be hindered by difficulties experienced in finding the right family. This is specifically true for older sibling groups and for children with disabilities. This is not only a local problem but a nation-wide problem.

## **FORMAT AND CONTENTS OF REPORTS**

### **Reports on Children (Known as Form E)**

Reports have to be completed about every child who is to be considered by a panel. These reports include information on the background history of the family; the birth family's wishes; the child's history including education, health and identity; the child's significant relationships; the child's wishes and feelings; the plan for the child; intended contact arrangements; preparation of the child for placement, and the legal situation.

These reports are used for a number of purposes which include:

- providing the panel and Agency Decision Maker with sufficient information and evidence to make recommendations and decisions;
- sharing with prospective adopters;
- sharing part of the report with other local authorities and voluntary agencies if looking for a resource outwith Dundee and;
- providing the child with details of why they could not be cared for by their birth parents. This is used when adults return for adoption counselling.

### **Reports on Applicants (known as Form F)**

The agency needs to be satisfied that applicants have an understanding of children's needs and can meet these needs. Prior to an assessment being started, all applicants are interviewed and attend preparation groups. If applicants move on to the next stage of the process a full assessment is carried out, the results of which are presented on a Form F report. The social worker compiling the report needs to assess and analyse the information in order to make a recommendation which is then discussed at the panel.

These reports have to be completed on all prospective foster carers and adoptive parents.

### **Assuring Quality**

The issue of performance is crucial in this area of work and certain steps have been taken to assure quality. Senior Social Workers undertake a crucial role in offering support and guidance to workers, some of whom may never have undertaken such work before. Guidance is also available from members of staff from the permanence team who are linked to each care and assessment team. To ensure consistency in quality, all reports are seen by the Senior Officer, Adoption and Fostering prior to inclusion on panel agendas. In the last six months no reports have required to be returned or deferred from panel due to the quality of their content.



## Timescales

In planning for a child's future care, minimising delay is crucial and social workers are given specific timescales for completion of reports for presentation to panel. Legislation also lays down specific time scales for decisions to be made following a panel recommendation.

## PANEL STATISTICS

The children presented to the panels are looked after away from home for a variety of reasons. Many will have been affected by distressing and damaging experiences including physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. Some will be looked after because of the mental or physical illness, or death of a parent. Others will be looked after because families are unable to provide adequate care for them due to alcohol or drug misuse.

Panel statistics are collated routinely. Statistics are kept in relation to the number of:

- ✓ children presented for Permanency;
- ✓ reviews of children;
- ✓ adopters and permanent carers;
- ✓ reviews of permanent carers;
- ✓ children presented for a match with prospective carers or adopters;
- ✓ new adoption allowances;
- ✓ reviews of adoption allowances;
- ✓ foster carers;
- ✓ amendments to foster carers approval;
- ✓ de-registration of carers; and
- ✓ link carers:- relatives or friends assessed and children placed with them through the Children's Hearing

Further details of the activity of the Panels is given in Appendix 2 'Panel Registration Information April 1996 – March 2000'.

## Number of Adoptions Orders Granted

Figure 1 gives details of the number of adoptions granted in respect of children who have previously been looked after by Dundee City Council.

**Figure 1:**

Year	April 1996- March 1997	April 1997- March 1998	April 1998- March 1999	April 1999- March 2000
Number of Adoptions Granted	11	9	15	13

The details in Figure 1 relate to local authority adoptions and do not include step-parent adoptions as these are not presented to the adoption panel.



**APPENDIX 1**

**ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN APRIL 1996 - MARCH 2000**

	April 1996 - March 1997	April 1997 - March 1998	April 1998 - March 1999	April 1999 - March 2000
<b>Children presented for permanence/adoption</b>	19	27 (2 children presented twice)	22 (2 children presented 3 times)	34
<b>Children reviewed</b>	7	5	5	15
<b>Children presented for a match</b>	15	10	17	19
<b>Age Band of Children</b>	4 (0-24 months) 4 (2-5 years) 9 (6-10 years) 2 (11-15 years)	8 (0-24 months) 4 (2-5 years) 8 (6-10 years) 5 (11-15 years)	3 (0-24 months) 9 (2-5 years) 5 (6-10 years) 2 (11-15 years)	7 (0-24 months) 17 (2-5 years) 6 (6-10 years) 4 (11-15 years)
<b>Sibling Groups and Ages</b>	2 sibling groups of 2 aged 7 + 8 years and 10 + 12 years	6 sibling groups of 2; 1 aged 11 + 13 years, 1 aged 4 + 6 years 1 aged 5 + 7 years 1 aged 14 months (twins) 1 age 3 + 6 years and 1 aged 9 months (twins)	4 sibling groups of 2; 1 aged 5 + 8 1 aged 2 + 6 1 aged 1 + 5 years 1 aged 10 + 11	1 sibling group of 3 3 sibling groups of 2; 1 aged 8 + 9 years 1 aged 3 + 5 years 1 aged 8 + 11 years 3 sibling groups of 3; 1 aged 1,3 + 5 years 1 aged 1,2 + 4 years and 1 aged 2,3 + 5 years (with Link Carer - Residence)
<b>Number of Matchings</b>	3 (0-24 months) 4 (2-5 years) 6 (6-10 years) 2 (11-15 years)	3 (0-24 months) 2 (2-5 years) 4 (6-10 years) 1 (11-15 years)	2 (0-24 months) 4 (2-5 years) 9 (6-10 years) 2 (11-15 years)	6 (0-24 months) 10 (2-5 years) 2 (6-10 years) 1 (11-15 years)

**APPENDIX 2**

**PANEL REGISTRATION INFORMATION FOR CARERS APRIL 1996 - MARCH 2000**

	April 1996 - March 1997	April 1997 - March 1998	April 1998 - March 1999	April 1999 - March 2000
<b>Permanent Carers/Adopters</b>	8	12	10	12
<b>Review of Permanent Carers</b>	2	8	3	1
<b>Applications for Adoption Allowance</b>	1	11	2	2
<b>Temporary/Mainstay Carers</b>	11	11	22	19
<b>Private Foster Carers</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>Relative Foster Carers</b>	4	3	0	0
<b>Amendments and Extensions to approval</b>	31	47	36	34
<b>Review of carers (not at panel)</b>	54	47	60	72
<b>De-Registration</b>	13	16	13	17
<b>Link Carers</b>	0	4	12	7