

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 31 JANUARY 2002

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANELS JANUARY – DECEMBER 2001

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To recommend that the Social Work Committee approve the amendment of the Policy and Procedures Documents that provide guidance for the functions of the Adoption and Fostering Panels, to take account of the changes in the Management structure brought about by the merger of the Educational and Social Services Department.
- 1.2** To advise Committee as to the performance of the Adoption and Permanency Panel and the Fostering and Resources Panel for the year outlined above.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1** On 28th March 1996, the Council agreed the creation of an Adoption and Fostering Panels for East Ayrshire Council, (Item 6, Page 677). The Adoption and Fostering Panels carries out its remit in accordance with policy established by the Council. It is an advisory body, making recommendations to the agency decision maker. Within East Ayrshire Council, under the Scheme of Delegation, the Depute Director of Social Work (Children, Families and Criminal Justice) determined recommendations made by the Panel. As a result of the merger of the new department, this function has been assumed by the Principal Officer, Children, Families and Criminal Justice. The Head of Social Work retains responsibility for the professional overview of the operation of the Adoption and Fostering Panels and its decision making
- 2.2** East Ayrshire Council currently has fully operational Adoption and Fostering Panels with separate minutes maintained to record adoption decisions and foster care decisions.
- 2.3** As reported to the Children, Families and Criminal Justice Sub-Committee of the Social Work Committee on 11 November 1998, (Item 2, Page 4019) regulations required the authority to have two separate Panels. It proposed that in East Ayrshire the Fostering Panel be known as 'The Fostering and Resources Panel,' and the Adoption Panel, be known as 'The Adoption and Permanency Panel.' This reflected the difference between temporary and permanent placements. Permanent placements can be secured by pursuing an adoptive placement or by recruiting carers who can offer a permanent placement for children or young people where the plan is for them not to return home, but where adoption is not appropriate.

2.4 The regulations require that there be a separate set of procedures and minutes for each Panel. However, although each Panel will have a distinct role and function, in practice the membership may be common to both Panels.

2.5 Composition of the Panel

The membership of the Adoption and Permanence Panel and the Fostering and Resources Panel consist of the following personnel:

Chairperson – Service Unit Manager (Children and Families)
Service Officer (Adoption and Fostering)
Children’s Unit Manager
Educational Psychologist
Legal Advisor
Medical Advisor
A Children’s Carer
An Adoptive Parent
An Independent Representative from Scottish Adoption Advice Society

3.0 **Adoption / Permanency Panel Functions**

3.1 The functions of the Adoption / Permanency Panel are:

- ◆ to consider permanency plans for all looked after and accommodated children, (including adoption and parental responsibility orders).
- ◆ to consider whether adoption is in the best interest of a particular child and if so, whether a freeing for adoption application should be made under section 18 of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978.
- ◆ 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 applications from prospective adopters and permanent foster carers.
- ◆ to consider all proposed permanent and adoptive matchings.

4.0 **Supplementary Functions of the Panel**

4.1 The Panel will review those cases where children have been freed for adoption and are not placed within six months of the order being made and advise parents after 12 months. (Reviews will be repeated every six months until a placement is made or the order is revoked).

4.2 The Panel will review annually all approved adoptive parents and permanent carers who are awaiting a placement.

- 4.3 Reports will be considered on the disruption of any permanent placement and the Panel will make recommendations about future planning in respect of the child and carers.
- 4.4 Following the disruption of a placement, the Panel will consider the recommendations from the adopters or permanent carers home review and in particular consider if the carers / adopters should still be approved or not.
- 4.5 The Panel will consider matters relating to financial assistance to adopters including approved adoption allowances and assistance with legal expenses.
- 4.6 In carrying out these functions the Panel have considered the following for the period 1st January 2001 – 31st December 2001.
- 4.7 The Panel have considered a total of **twelve permanency plans** for individual children. Eight of these were for Adoption, three were through Parental Responsibility Orders and one was through a Residence Order.
- 4.8 With regard to the number of couples approved to care for children on a permanent basis, there have been a total of **9 families** presented who are approved to care for **up to 16 children**.
- 4.9 In total there have been **8 children** matched with permanent carers.
- 4.10 One of the functions of the Adoption and Permanency Panel is to consider children who have been freed for adoption, but not placed within 6 months. East Ayrshire Council has one child who fits this criteria. Given his special needs, updated medical reports have been requested. Once this is available, an advert for a suitable family will be published.
- 4.11 The Panel has considered the **disruption of one long term placement** in the aforementioned period.
- 4.12 There have been a total of **30 Adoption Allowances** reviewed throughout the year covered. Adoption Allowances can be paid where this will help secure an adoptive home for a child who otherwise could not be readily adopted. The Social Work Department must consider whether an Adoption Allowance may be paid for any child being adopted, before an adoption order is made (Regulation 5 (I)). Adoption Allowances are paid quarterly and reviewed annually. The annual amount spent on Adoption Allowances from January – December 2001 was £118,000.

5.0 FOSTERING / RESOURCES PANEL FUNCTION

5.1 The functions of the Fostering and Resources Panel are:

- ◆ To consider applications from carers including children's carers, foster carers, shared carers and respite carers.

- ◆ To consider the linking and matching of placements which have exceeded 9 months, where no rehabilitation or permanency plan is in progress (usually young people over 12, subject to a supervision requirement). Placements exceeding 9 months will be known as “long term placements.”
- ◆ To consider requests for change of status or de-registration.
- ◆ To consider the annual training plan for carers.

5.2 In carrying out these functions, the Panel have considered a **total of 11 assessments**.

5.3 There has been 1 Children’s Carer, 1 Enhanced Carer, 5 Respite Carers and 2 Shared Carers and 2 Shared Care Plus Carers approved. Due to staffing issues, a decision was made to focus upon the support to existing carers and prioritise assessments for Respite Carers. As a result of this, much needed respite to our existing carers can now be provided.

5.4 Throughout the year the Panel has considered a **change of carer status in 10 cases**. In the main these reflect the increasing experience of carers who wish to widen their registration criteria to a broader age range or to increase the number of children they can care for.

5.5 Within the 10 cases there have been **4 carers deregistered** due to retirement.

6.0 THE WAY AHEAD

6.1 In July 2001 the ‘Draft National Care Standards’ for Adoption and Fostering were issued for consultation by the Scottish Executive. East Ayrshire Council responded to a request for comments to be made and in December 2001 responded to a further consultation relating to the additional costs involved in implementing the National Care Standards. (see Briefing Note).

6.2 As at 31 December 2001, there were 104 children and young people accommodated by East Ayrshire Council. 73 of whom were placed with Foster / Children’s Carers which demonstrates our commitment to placing children and young people with families as a first preference where appropriate.

6.3 During 2001 there were 2 children looked after and accommodated by East Ayrshire Council in respect of whom an Adoption Order was made. There are currently 4 children placed with prospective adopters.

6.4 In the year January 2002 – December 2002 we would hope to recruit 4 new permanent carers. This could potentially mean placement for up to 8 children.

6.5 It is also envisaged that 2 carers may apply for Residence Orders for children in their care. This would mean that these children would no longer be accommodated by the Department but raised by their carers who would assume the role of parent.

- 6.6** In the next year we would aim to increase the number of Children's Carers, Respite Carers and Shared Carers. We will also have to recruit carers who can offer a permanent placement for children and young people where the plan is for them not to return home, but where adoption is not appropriate.
- 6.7** We aim to approve 10 new Enhanced/Children's Carers which would provide 16 additional placements for children who require to be accommodated. This should enable all children under the age of 12 years to be placed within a family. It would also give some choice of the most suitable placement for children.
- 6.8** In addition the approval of 4 additional Respite Carers would enable us to meet our responsibilities to children's carers who are entitled to 6 weeks respite per year.
- 6.9** An increase of 4 new shared care and shared care plus placements would provide family based respite for up to 12 children with special needs.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** Nil.

8.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** The existing policy and procedural documents relating to the Fostering and Adoption Panels require to be updated taking account of the changes in the Management structure brought about by the merger of the Educational and Social Services Department. These documents are consistent with the Children's (Scotland) Act 1995 and many of the standards in the more recent National Standards on Adoption. This piece of work is crucial if East Ayrshire Council are to deliver a high quality service to children, birth parents and adoptive parents living in the area.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1** The Committee have been asked to endorse the amendments to the policy and procedural documents that provide guidance for the functions of the Fostering and Adoption Panels to take account of the merging of the department.
- 9.2** The Committee have also been asked to consider the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Panel and the Fostering and Resources Panel.
- (i) With regard to the Adoption and Permanence Panel information has been provided in relation to the number of permanent carers approved, the number of permanency plans for children recommended and the number of new permanent placements which have been made.

- (ii) Similarly, in relation to the Fostering and Resources Panel details have been presented which show the number of Children's Carers, Enhanced Carers, Respite Carers and Shared Carers and Shared Care Plus Carers who have been assessed and approved.

9.3 A copy of the relevant background papers as listed below is available in the Members Information Point.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and the required alteration to the policy and procedures regarding the functioning of the Fostering and Adoption Panels following the merger of the department.

10.2 To require the Director of Educational and Social Services to bring forward reports on the Adoption and Fostering Panels to Social Work Committee on an annual basis.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services
15^h January 2002
JH/LG/PJP
Enc (0)

List of Background Papers

1. Draft Adoption / Permanency Panel Policy and Procedures January 2002
2. Draft Fostering and Resources Panel Policy and Procedure January 2002
3. Committee Report on National Standards in Adoption (May 01).
4. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance Volume 2 and 3.
5. Draft National Care Standards (July 2001) Scottish Executive.

For further information please contact Lesley Gibson, Service Unit Manager (Services), Council Offices, John Dickie Street, Kilmarnock KA1 1BY (Tel. No: 01563 576901).

AGENDA