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**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE 3 FEBRUARY 2021**

**SUBJECT: INFORMATION REPORT MORAY FOSTERING AND ADOPTION  
PANEL REVIEW 2020**

**BY: CHIEF OFFICER HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE MORAY**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the work undertaken by the Moray Fostering and Adoption Panel during the period January to December 2020.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplified committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this committee the combining of the delegated responsibilities of Children and Young People Services, Governance, Strategy and Performance, (para 9 of the minute refers)

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The fostering panel and the adoption panel in Moray are set up by statute and operate as one joint panel in Moray. Their role is to scrutinise recommendations for the adoption and permanent fostering of children who are looked after by Moray Council; the approval and review of foster carers and prospective adopters and to make recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- 2.2 Consistent with previous reporting, the Moray Fostering and Adoption Panel has meetings scheduled monthly, with agreement for additional meetings to be arranged to respond to increased workload.
- 2.3 The revised functions of the Panel were approved by Committee on 23 August 2017 (paragraph 12 of the minute refers).
- 2.4 The composition of the Panel provides a wide range of knowledge and experience in relation to children separated from their families, allowing different perspectives on these matters to be obtained.
  - Current membership totals 17 including the legal and medical advisor. The Moray post of medical advisor became vacant in November 2019 and the medical advisor role has been met through NHS Grampian.

- The Committee report tabled 4 MARCH 2020 (para 9 of the minute refers), advised that 2 young people who have experience of care, had expressed interest in becoming panel members. The report said that having young people with care experience as panel members was one of “the asks” of the Champions Board. Neither of those young people progressed to full membership because of their personal circumstances. One was interested in the earlier stages of the process, prior to assessments being considered at panel, and the other found the reading was eating into her family time. Another young person who is care experienced is in the process of becoming a panel member. She has attended a training session with other panel members in October and she will attend her first panel as an observer in January.
- 2.5 The work of the Panel in 2020 continued irrespective of COVID but with adjustment. Meetings were hybrid, some members attended virtually others attended in person and were linked by using technology. We worked with a smaller cohort from the pool of panel members, so that we could progress panel business despite the glitches with technology.
  - 2.6 Agenda items were predominantly focussed on assessments and reviews of foster carers and adopters: there were only few cases for consideration for permanence for children. The impact of COVID on court business is likely to have had bearing on children being recommended for permanence, in Moray and across Scotland.
  - 2.7 Across Scotland there was no opportunity to lodge new cases from lockdown until July 2020. Given courts did not resume until August 2020, there is a backload of cases, with priority being given to time bound cases, cases which had been lodged prior to lockdown.
  - 2.8 For Moray, analysis suggests that the bigger influence in the reduction in numbers of children having their need for permanent care considered at panel, is the increase in kinship placements. Kinship is a destination in itself and more usually there is no need for permanence orders being secured by the authority.
  - 2.9 The statistics in terms of PACE (Permanence and Care Excellence) will show delays in securing orders and track numbers for kinship. This is reported on separately.
  - 2.10 Panel business meetings continue to be held. The agreed frequency is every 6 months. March and September had been the agreed months for meeting but given delays, in part influenced by COVID, that which would have been held in March was held in July 2020 and that for December will be held 13 January 2021. Key items discussed at the business meeting in July are: -
    - Agreement that business meetings will be held mid and end year.
    - Panel members will attend at least one business meeting in the year.
    - The induction booklet was finalised: the young person noted at 3.4 will “test drive” for use, purpose and revision.
    - Training has been limited by COVID: -

- M Smith, legal services presented a session on permanence orders on 08 January 2020.
  - It was agreed that various colleagues would present “the child’s care journey” on 21 October 2020: this was held.
  - The Resilience film which refers to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), was to be screened in November: this to be rescheduled.
  - On line training sessions will be available to panel members.
- Panel members are required to attend at least two training opportunities in the year.
- Processes to be used in circumstances where there are proposals to change the previously approved legal route to secure the care of a child were confirmed: the processes were considered at Practice Governance Group.
  - Example – when the agency plan is for a Permanence Order with authority to Adopt (POA) to be sought but change indicates that a PO rather than POA is appropriate, the change should be discussed at a Child’s Meeting, the recommendation should be carried into and minuted at the Looked After Child review, from where a memo should be sent to the ADM, recommending this change in the agency plan. Confirmation of the ADMs approval to the recommended change should be sent to panel.
- Panel will audit how children’s views are reflected within reports given the focus on their rights and participation. This is consistent with the Children (Scotland) Bill, which follows the United Nations Rights of the Child.

### **3. ADOPTION**

3.1 The panel considered the following during 2020: -

- Recommendation and subsequent approval of 2 new prospective adoptive families. This is a reduction in 4 based on the year 2019 but is consistent with the number approved in 2018. There are 4 families awaiting adoptive placements.
- Recommendation and subsequent approval for 2 children in need of permanence through adoption. This is the lowest number of children being recommended for adoption since 2009. As indicated at 3.8 one of the key factors in this may be the increased number of children, especially young children, who are living in kinship care with their extended families. For information - there are 29 children aged 5years and younger in the November statistics for looked after children. Of those 29 children: -
  - Three are looked after in foster care
  - Thirteen are looked after in kinship care
  - Nine are looked after at home within the care of their parents
  - Four were placed with their prospective adopters
- Recommendation and matching of 2 children with prospective adoptive families.
- In addition to 2 children having been matched direct processes are underway for 1 child.

The table at **Appendix 1** has the numbers for the years 2014 – 2020:-

## **4. FOSTERING**

4.1 The panel considered the following during 2020: -

- Recommendation and subsequent approval of 6 foster families.
- Recommendation and subsequent approval of 2 children in need of permanence through foster care.
- Recommendation and subsequent approval of 3 children for matching with a permanent foster family.
- A review of 17 fostering families.
- De-registrations – there were 8 fostering families who were deregistered because they retired after many years offering care for our looked after children and young people: others moved away or had specific reason to themselves. The numbers of deregistration each year are fairly consistent at between 8- 10. This is an issue when the number being approved is fewer than the registrations.

The table for this is attached as **Appendix 2** of the report.

## **5. DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

5.1 The Fostering and Adoption Panel review report tabled at Committee 4 March 2020 (paragraph \* of the minute refers) referred to our engagement with the PACE programme, referred to at 3.9 above. This is subject of separate reporting. It is considered that engagement with PACE has positively impacted on working practice with children, young people and their families in terms of supporting children to remain at home in the care of their parents, where this is safe to do so. However where continued care at home has been assessed unsafe, increasingly practice is for children to remain within their extended family in kinship care. This has been influential in the number of our foster carers, those who more usually care for younger children, having far fewer placements. Currently 10 fostering households, who offer care for younger children, have no placement.

5.2 To exchange ideas and pool learning and development, in 2020 we met with the Chairs of the panel in Aberdeenshire. There has been one meeting with a second being planned for January 2021. Themes that we have considered are processes; opportunities for joint training and the format for appraisals. The agenda in January will consider the key roles and remit of those roles: panel recruitment; quality assurance and voting.

## **6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

There continues to be coherence with the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the priorities within Moray 2026: - ambitious and confident young people - improving the life chances of children by supporting them, and their families, at the earliest possible stages and as required thereafter, to give all children in Moray the best possible opportunities to achieve their potential.

It is also linked to the Corporate Priority – More of our children have a better start to life and are ready to succeed.

**(b) Policy and Legal**

The Moray Fostering and Adoption Panel have procedural guidelines in accordance with Scottish Government guidance and regulations. The Panel make recommendations for the payment of adoption allowances under the Adoption Support and Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

**(c) Financial implications**

There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

**(d) Risk Implications**

There are no specific risks associated with this report.

**(e) Staffing Implications**

There are no specific staffing implications associated with this report.

**(f) Property**

The report has no property implications.

**(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

There are no equality implications associated with this report.

**(h) Consultations**

Interim Head of the Joint Integration Board; the Chief Executive; Interim Head of Children and Families and Criminal Justice Social Work services; Senior Human Resources Advisor; Paul Connor, Principal Accountant; Morag Smith Legal Services; Equal Opportunities Officer; Placement Services Manager and Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer have been consulted in the preparation of this report and are in agreement as regards to their respective responsibilities.

**7. CONCLUSION**

**7.1 Consistent with previous reporting, Moray Fostering and Adoption Panel continue to play a key role in the scrutiny of prospective adopters and foster carers who wish to be approved by Moray Council. The Panel also scrutinises care plans for children and young people in need of permanent care away from home either through adoption or permanent foster care. The statistics recorded within this report will continue to be presented annually.**

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Background Papers:  
Ref: SPMAN-1108985784-485