



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S AND LEISURE SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON 9 MARCH 2022**

**SUBJECT: INFORMATION REPORT MORAY FOSTERING AND
ADOPTION PANEL REVIEW 2021**

BY: CHIEF OFFICER HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE MORAY

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to the Education, Children's & Leisure Services Committee to provide an update of the work undertaken by the Moray Fostering and Adoption panel during the period January to December 2021. Members are asked to take note of the information contained within.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Fostering and Adoption panel in Moray is set up by statute and operate as one joint panel. Their role is to scrutinise (i) recommendations for the permanent fostering and adoption of children and young people who are looked after by Moray Council and (ii) the approval, review and matching of foster carers and prospective adoptive carers. The panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a final decision.

2.2 The Moray Fostering and Adoption panel meets on a monthly scheduled basis. Additional meetings can also be arranged to respond to increased workload and where considered necessary to meet the needs of the service.

2.3 The revised functions of the panel were approved by Children and Young People's Services Committee on 23 August 2017.

2.4 The composition of the panel seeks to provide as broad a range as possible of knowledge, skills and experience. It is particularly keen to extend the amount of members who have a lived experience of fostering and/or adoption either as a care receiver and/or care giver.

2.5 The current membership totals sixteen and the meetings must be quorate; in addition there is a legal advisor, a panel advisor and a newly appointed medical advisor. During the last six months there have been six new recruits

with a further two interested individuals who will be observing panel in February and March 2022.

- 2.6 The Chair of the panel has undertaken this role since August 2021 having previously been the Deputy for a number of years. The Panel Advisor has supported the panel since January 2021. The appointment of the medical advisor has been particularly welcomed as panel members noted its absence as a significant deficit.
- 2.7 The panel has continued throughout the course of the pandemic and has adopted a business as usual approach as far as possible. There have been ongoing adjustments throughout 2021 including the continued use of virtual meetings.
- 2.8 The agenda items for panel have been, primarily, focused on approvals and reviews of foster carers and adopters. This reflects a national trend where the impact of Covid on the court process has resulted in fewer children and young people being presented with care plans for permanence in either foster or adoptive placements.
- 2.9 In Moray there has also been an increased use of Kinship Care placements which provide an opportunity for young people to remain within their family and friends networks. It is likely that this is having some impact upon the numbers of children and young people being presented to panel recommending permanent fostering and adoption.
- 2.10 The business meetings for panel continue to be held on a six monthly basis where members are expected to attend at least one. The last two business meetings were held on 7 July 2021 and 26 January 2022. Examples of items for discussion at the business meetings are:
 - review of previous six months
 - review of panel processes and the expectations of members
 - innovations and changes
- 2.11 Panel members engage in ongoing training with at least two training events per year. This has been impacted by the pandemic in terms of their ability to attend face to face training. There are ongoing discussions with ICT in relation to developing online training.
- 2.12 The panel was ably assisted by the experience and knowledge of Jennifer Gordon, Service Manager, for a number of years. Jennifer retired in August 2021 and, subsequently, there was the successful recruitment of a new Service Manager, Carl Campbell, who started in post on 6 December 2021.

3. ADOPTION

3.1 During the course of 2021 the activity of the panel in relation to adoption was as follows:

Activity	Number
Adoption assessments	5
Adoption review	1
Permanence Orders with authority to adopt	2
Matching children with adoptive placements	0

3.2 The adoption activity of the panel has shown a gradual downward trend since 2019. This is likely as a result of local and national reductions in numbers of young people being presented to court due to the pandemic, alongside a shift in the approach of children going into care. It is anticipated that this is a short term situation where the panel is preparing for an increase in adoption activity through the course of 2022 and into 2023.

4 FOSTERING

4.1 During the course of 2021 the activity of the panel in relation to fostering was as follows:

Activity	Number
Fostering assessments	5
Change of approval	10
Foster carer review	19
Continuing care assessment	1
Deregistration/resignations	4
Foster carer transfer	1
Matching children with foster placements	4

4.2 The fostering activity of the panel has remained at a high level and has been largely consistent since 2019. The panel has demonstrated continued expertise in relation to foster carer reviews and quality assuring the care that is being provided to young people. The panel has provided robust scrutiny and challenge to Placement Services which is welcomed and highlights a shift towards becoming a learning organisation.

5 DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

5.1 The impact of pandemic has provided challenges but also opportunities for the panel. There is a current discussion about whether hybrid meetings might be

an option in the long term given its potential to widen participation and offer greater flexibility. There are limitations currently but the creative use of technology has already provided opportunities within meetings in other council settings. This is an area of future discussion where there are significant advantages, including transparency in the process, for the meetings to be face to face. This will need to be part of a wider discussion and consultation within and the service and to include the views and thoughts of foster carers and adopters.

- 5.2 Within the social work teams creative use of technology has allowed alternative methods of engagement for young people within a space they often feel more comfortable and confident; this will continue to be an improvement journey. As work to shape better engagement across social work services moves forward, this should positively impact the panel and it will be supported to engage with young people affected by decisions made. It is hoped that this will allow the voice of young people to be heard more clearly. This could capture their views and thoughts in a more meaningful way without them being compelled to attend meetings.
- 5.3 Although the panel has been successful in recruiting members, it recognises the need for continued diversity in knowledge, skills and experience. At this stage the panel is seeking new members with a range of professional backgrounds and life experiences.
- 5.4 There have been some challenges as a result of the pandemic in the ability of panel members to access training. Alongside this, there has been an impact on the ability to effectively induct new panel members. There are current discussions with ICT in relation to having an online offer in parallel with face to face training. It is planned for a bespoke induction alongside a rolling programme of training to include topics, amongst others, such as:
 - Kinship care, adoption and concurrency
 - Child protection
 - The child's journey
 - Sibling relationships
 - Legal context
 - The Promise
- 5.5 The panel Chair has created a newsletter for panel members in order to continue communication in between meetings. The first issue of this was circulated in December 2021 and was well received. This is a tool to aid communication regarding panel business and includes information such as policy and procedures, changes in membership and training. It is planned for the newsletter to be a minimum of quarterly where feedback will be gathered. This newsletter was circulated to the social work teams.

- 5.6 The panel Chair has been attending the Chairs Development Forum which is a national meeting of panel chairs. This has been a helpful forum to bring new innovations to Moray and to allow the chair to be part of a wider network where sharing of experiences and good practice happens.
- 5.7 The Performance and Care Excellence approach (PACE) has been slightly delayed through the course of the pandemic. However, this remains a key development area which will have a renewed focus through 2022 in order to embed best practice in relation to permanence planning in Moray.

6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

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

The Moray Fostering and Adoption panel is underpinned by the children's services plan with particular attention to Priority 4 "The outcomes and life chances of looked after and care experienced children and young people are improved". This links in, and is consistent with, the wider Corporate Plan for Moray Council.

The panel is sighted on and committed to upholding the principles of keeping The Promise and the UNCRC Incorporation Bill. It is seeking to develop its role in line with The Promise and the importance of children's rights particularly in regards to having a good childhood and to hear the voice of children, young people and their families. There are no contraventions of child's rights to consider as part of this report.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Moray Fostering and Adoption panel has procedural guidelines in accordance with Scottish Government guidance and regulations.

(c) Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no specific risk implications associated with this report.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications associated with this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio-Economic Impact

There are no equalities/socio-economic implications associated with this report.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impact

None

(i) Consultations

Interim Head of Service, Panel Advisor, Chief Officer Health and Social Care, Equal Opportunities Officer, Senior Human Resources Advisor, Principal Accountant, Legal Services Manager and Committee Services Officer.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The purpose of this report is to request that the Committee note the progress and development of the Moray Fostering and Adoption panel in 2021.**
- 7.2 The Moray Fostering and Adoption panel continues to serve the important function in the scrutiny and review of prospective adopters and foster carers who wish to be approved by Moray Council. It also scrutinises care plans for children and young people in need of permanent care through adoption or foster care including matching.**
- 7.3 The panel is emerging from the challenging period of the pandemic along with other functions within Moray Council. It has maintained a good level of performance despite these challenges and has supported the effective care planning and decision making for children and young people.**
- 7.4 It is envisaged that the panel will build on these strengths through the course of 2022. It is key that the induction and training programme for panel members is planned for effectively through the course of 2022. It also seeks to broaden the range of its members and to support the effective participation of young people through the creative use of technology.**
- 7.5 The progress of the panel and the associated statistical information will continue to be presented to the Education, Children's & Leisure Services Committee on an annual basis.**

Author of Report: Carl Campbell, Service Manager, Children & Families and Criminal Justice Social Work
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