



Durham County Council

Adoption Service

Annual Report of the Adoption Service and Adoption Panel Report

1ST April 2015 - 31ST March 2016



INTRODUCTION

2015-16 has been another busy and successful year for the DCC Adoption Service. Durham is outperforming the North East and England to ensure that children with a plan of Adoption are linked, matched and placed with suitable adopters at the earliest possible opportunity.

The purpose of this report is to highlight:

- Key activities and achievements of the Adoption Service and Adoption Panels from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.
- Significant changes in Adoption practice in England and Wales

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN ADOPTION: EXTERNAL DRIVERS

This past year has been marked by the following significant changes:

May 2015 – the Adoption Support Fund was implemented. This provides additional therapeutic support for adopted children and their families initially post order although in February 2016 this was extended to include children placed for adoption who had not yet been granted an Adoption Order. Initially Durham were not able to make significant use of this fund due to the extensive support offered by the Full Circle Service, so we were unable to claim for anything in house that was available on 1st March 2015. However in November 2015 we were notified that the referral criteria had changed and since then have made full use of the fund. To date Durham has claimed £145,122.27 from the fund. The majority of this has been for service delivery to adopted children and their families by Full Circle.

June 2015 - ‘Regionalising Adoption’. The government published a paper highlighting the intention to radically reform Adoption services within the timescale of this parliament (i.e. by 2020) by moving towards Regional Adoption Agencies. Collaborative work is underway in order to determine the way forward for Durham Adoption Service

27 March 2016 - ‘Adoption – a vision for change’. This published document confirmed the government’s determination to radically reform Adoption Services by the end of this parliament. The included further changes to the Adoption Support Fund to allow children and Families placed under Special Guardianship Orders to access funding for therapeutic support from the fund.

The above report also clarified that **COURT OF APPEAL JUDGEMENTS Re B-S AND Re B** had not brought about any change in the law, rather there was a greater responsibility on the local authority to ensure that the evidence presented to the court was robust enough to assist the court in decision making but that the government remains committed to adoption as the most positive solution for children who can no longer be brought up within their birth families. The government expressed concern in the reduction in the number of children receiving Agency Decision Maker approval across the country since those judgements and promised judicial reform to ensure that Adoption is considered as a positive outcome for children.

OFSTED SINGLE INSPECTION FRAMEWORK

Durham County Council Children's Services Single Inspection began on 22nd February 2016 and lasted for 4 weeks. The Adoption Service was closely scrutinised during this inspection.

The informal feedback received during the inspection was positive in regard to the Adoption Service although concerns were raised regarding the lack of Fostering for Adoption Placements and the lack of clarity in matching recruitment to the needs of Durham children.

The OFSTED report published in May 2016 found that adoption performance was assessed to be 'Good' whilst overall Durham 'Required Improvement to be Good'.

A number of outcomes have improved, for example for children whose plan is adoption. The adoption service is a strength within the authority. Work is child focused to ensure that a lifelong placement for children and young people is at the heart of all practice. The adoption service is stable, experienced and well led. A dedicated senior practitioner effectively monitors and tracks the individual progress of children. Plans for children are discussed at weekly team meetings and at fortnightly link meetings. This ensures that children awaiting placement are known to the managers and the team, keeping them at the forefront of the process

Children's progress through care proceedings and planning is effectively tracked to avoid unnecessary delay. However further work is needed to ensure that there is targeted recruitment of adopters which is informed by clear analysis of need, the area of focus identified by Ofsted.

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

On 31st July 2015 it was announced that BAAF was to close as it was no longer possible to sustain the organisation in the face of "significant changes and prevailing economic conditions".

BAAF, who had been supporting, advising and campaigning for children in care for three decades, transferred some of its functions to children's charity Coram to be housed in a newly created entity, CoramBAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy. Like BAAF they will operate as an independent membership organisation and take on BAAF's research, policy, professional advice and development work and administer the National Adoption Register for England, the Independent Review Mechanism and will run National Adoption Week. The Independent Review Mechanism evaluates adoption agencies' decisions not to approve an individual as an adopter on behalf of the Department for Education.

DCC ADOPTION SERVICE AND ADOPTION PANELS' ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The Head of Children's Services is Carole Payne.
- Karen Robb, Strategic Manager, for Looked After Children and Permanence Services, continued to serve as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- Mark Gurney, Strategic Manager for Child Protection and Disability, became temporary ADM.
- Bronwen Keegan, Operations Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle was appointed as temporary ADM in February 2016 to cover the sickness absence of the Strategic Manager.
- There continues to be a core group of experienced and highly skilled social workers in the team.
- In September 2015 Wendy Ellis was appointed as Permanent Team Manager.
- Lindsey Gray remains as Senior Practitioner with responsibility for Post Adoption and is the Adoption Support Senior Practitioner (Decision maker) for the Adoption Support Fund.
- Clare Bewley remains as Senior Practitioner with responsibility for Recruitment.
- In November 2015 Sarah Fitzpatrick was appointed as Senior Practitioner for Family Finding. This was following a successful 'Invest to Save' application.
- In January 2016 Sarah Riches joined the team as an Adoption Social Worker again following a successful 'Invest to Save' application. Sarah has a temporary contract until June 2017.
- There were 25 Adoption Panel meetings during the period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.
- Stella Chambers has continued to serve as Adoption Panel Administrator, supported by Catherine Dawson.
- Wendy Ellis remained Agency Advisor, together with senior practitioners Clare Bewley, Lindsey Gray and Sarah Fitzpatrick.
- The Adoption Panels continue to work in close partnership with the Adoption Service.

- The Adoption Panel Independent Chair, Agency Medical Agency/Vice-Chairman and Independent Panel Members continue to contribute to the training and preparation courses for prospective adopters.
- Appraisals for Adoption Panels members continue to be conducted annually and are all complete.
- Adoption Panel training took place in 2015 in respect of recent changes in practice with regard to legal issues, and Learning from Disruptions. This was joint training with Panel Members and the Adoption Service/LAC Permanence Team in attendance. Further relevant joint training is planned for the next financial year to include siblings together or apart, contact and the matching and selection processes.
- Most members of Adoption Service have individual laptops and the majority of the team members are enabled to access DCC IT systems and services remotely via the Juniper programme. This enables team members to work in a more efficient and effective manner, in planning their work and reducing travelling time.
- The Adoption Service reviewed its Recruitment and Marketing Strategy for 2015-2018. Regular monthly information drop in sessions were held and the number of training and preparation and counselling courses continued at 6 per year
- Members of the service continued to develop guidance and forms to meet the changes in regulation, including Prospective Adopters Report which marks the key stages of the prospective adopters' journey into adoption.
- DCC continues to provide excellent adoption support services with therapeutic input from Dr Joyce Powell, consultant Clinical Psychologist, and other members of the Full Circle Therapeutic Team.
- The number of children receiving adoption financial support and allowance remains high. On 27th March 2016 111 children's families were in receipt of an adoption allowance at a weekly cost £13,569.50. Over the period of 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 the number of children in receipt of an adoption allowances was 159 and the total expenditure for adoption allowances was £815,505.
- The majority of the children placed with prospective adopters enjoyed stability and security in their new permanent families. Unfortunately, in spite of intensive social work and multi-agency support, one child's adoptive placement disrupted on 21.4.15 (a child who had been in placement with his sister, whose placement disrupted in November the previous year). A Disruption Meeting was convened on 26.6.15 and the report of this meeting was never received due the demise of BAAF who had provided the independent chair.

- The Annual Family Summer Fun Day took place in July 2015, and the popular Christmas Party was held in December 2015. Both events were well received and attended.
- Although there were a number of Regional Activity Days held across the South of the country we did not feel it was appropriate to feature any of our children due to the distances involved. However Senior Practitioner for Family Finding arranged our own Future Families event on 18th March 2016 with support from other members of the team where 10 of our harder to place children (children in sibling groups or children with complex needs) were featured via DVD and information stalls.
- The featured children's social workers, fostering social workers and foster carers attended the event and waiting adopters were given the opportunity to find out extensive information about the children. The event was very well attended and the feedback from attenders was excellent. At the time of writing this report the outcome is still being evaluated.
- Fostering For Adoption: This is an aspect of adoption practice advocated by government where the risks are taken by the Adopters rather than the child. Children are placed prior to the granting of a Placement Order with families who are resilient enough to manage the complex task of fostering the child throughout Care Proceedings, with the child being 'placed for adoption' only following the granting of the Placement Order. This enables the child to build attachments with their permanent carers from an early age and reduces the need for broken attachments when children move on to an adoptive placement. This places the risk firmly on the adopters and their family, as a court may not agree to the plan of adoption for the child and may decide to return the child to the care of birth family.

Fostering for Adoption continues to be discussed with all prospective adopters during training and assessment. However, until recently there has been little interest in this form of adoption as enquirers feel they are unable to take the risk of a court deciding to return the child to their birth family. Also the demography of people wishing to adopt in this area tend to be people who work outside the home and are unable to make the financial commitment that this form of adoption requires.

However, this area continues to be pursued by the Adoption Service in line with government focus. In September 2015 an advertising campaign focussed particularly on Fostering to Adopt but met with little response.

The Adoption Service have developed printed information and the referral form to the team has been revised to ensure that Fostering for Adoption is considered by the child's social worker at the earliest opportunity and plans are already in place to access Approved Fostering for Adoption carers from Voluntary Agencies if this need cannot be met through DCC adopters.

VISION, VALUES AND AIMS OF DURHAM ADOPTION TEAM

The Adoption Service's vision, values and aims are:

- Our values will always be: "Children Come First", and will be at the centre of all our work.

We seek to:

- Be the best, approachable, professional and supportive Adoption Service.
- Be an Adoption Service that people choose.
- Value and celebrate the diversity, differences and background of our potential adopters.
- Be respectful, flexible, honest and transparent in the manner we work with prospective adopters, children and young people, and professionals from multi-agencies.
- Be a highly skilled and experienced team, with excellent mix of skills and abilities, seeking continual improvement in our work.
- Promote and provide a robust post adoption support service for all affected by adoption.
- Maximise use of technology and social media to enable us to be competitive in the changing face of adoption work.

RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS:

April 2015 - March 2016

1 Initial Enquiry

Table 1:

	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Initial Contact	24	11	21	15	14	21	10	19	19	22	17	10	203
Number of Enquiry Forms	19	9	19	10	11	14	7	15	13	9	11	7	144
Initial Visits	2	3	4	7	3	3	7	3	3	1	6	3	45
Registration of Interest (ROI) Accepted	3	3	6	2	7	2	1	4	2	2	2	3	37
Training	-	4	-	9	-	3	-	5	-	4	-	6	31

Previous year figures in brackets. This table demonstrates the reduction in Initial contacts that have been received over the period when compared with the previous 12 months (252), this has led to a reduced number of Enquiry forms (207), Initial visits (52), ROI's accepted (44) and people attending training (31). We continue to ensure that enquiries are screened and evaluated so that only people with the necessary skills to meet the needs of Durham Children are invited to progress to complete the Registration of Interest (ROI) and training

The Recruitment and Marketing Strategy has continued to generate interest from prospective adopters to apply to adopt with Durham County Council throughout the year although the interest in Adoption has not been high on the media profile which has a big impact on recruitment. We continue to advertise continually on Durham's website and Facebook page as well as more broadly in the community.

There is currently a mismatch between adopters waiting and children with a plan of adoption who are waiting to be matched which is common across the northern consortium and the whole country. We have a number of Adopters approved at panel and awaiting a link (currently 16 although 4 are currently being considered for tentative links to children). The majority of those waiting wish to adopt a female child, or a child without complexity, or both. We currently have 10 children who have complex needs that we are actively family finding for.

There were limited opportunities for collaborative work amongst the twelve Local Authorities in the North East Region. The reason for this was that there continues to

be a reduction in the numbers of children with a plan of adoption across the region and our partner agencies largely decided to reduce their advertising accordingly, because they were only accepting enquiries from people wishing to adopt older children, sibling groups or children with more complex needs. In Durham we have continued to recruit any suitable adopters who express an interest although this situation may be reviewed in the near future if the pool of adopters we have waiting continues to increase.

There were a total of 203 initial contacts with 45 progressing to Initial Visits. There were a high number of enquiries where it was not appropriate to progress to initial visit. The following are some of the reasons for not progressing:

- Ongoing fertility treatment
- Ongoing serious mental health issues
- Poor home conditions
- Could not be contacted
- Withdrew prior to the initial visit
- Had no spare bedroom
- Had not been as a couple for three years
- Smoking, or recent cessation of smoking

The assessment process remains robust to ensure that only carers who can meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into adulthood are progressed. Of the initial visits 31 prospective adoptive families have currently undergone training. This is due to the high level of screening and preparation work that is carried out with prospective applicants during and following the initial home visit to ensure that only enquirers with the necessary skills to adopt are progressed to Stage 1 of the adoption process.

2 Prospective Adopter Assessment

2.1 Recruitment Target

DCC Adoption Service aimed to recruit and approve enough families of prospective adopters during 2014/15 to meet the needs of Durham children with a plan of adoption and 35 adoptive families were actually approved. The reasons for this reduction in performance compared to the previous year are outlined below.

- There has been a reduction in the numbers of enquiries from prospective adopters and the majority wished to adopt a child without complex needs in order to meet their own needs to become parents often following issues with their own fertility.
- There continues to be a reduction in the numbers of children requiring a plan of adoption, along with an increase in the number of children with complex needs who require permanence through adoption.

The Adoption Service is robust during assessment processes and were successful in ensuring people without the necessary skills to adopt withdrew or were counselled out during the process.

The adoption process states that enquirers cannot move from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the process until references, medicals and DBS's have been received and the Adoption Service is constantly seeking to address delay caused particularly by medicals and DBS disclosures (currently up to 18 week timescale) not being processed by outside agencies in a timely manner. Many of these processes are beyond our control but impact on our performance.

2.2 Number of Prospective Adopters Approved 1st April 2015 – end March 2016

(Timescale Prospective Adopters Application Form received to Agency Decision Maker approval)

Table 2:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Number of approvals	0	4	2	4	5	1	4	4	3	3	4	1	35
0-1 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-3 months	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
3-6 months	0	4	1	2	2	1	0	2	1	0	3	1	17
6-12 months	0	0	1	2	1	0	4	2	1	3	1	0	15
12 months +	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

This table shows the length of time between the ROI being received and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt. This demonstrates that although the majority of adopters are approved within 6 months in accordance with Government requirements, where timescales are exceeded this was due to medical concerns (4), Applicants delay in providing information (1), Applicants took a break within the process for medical or personal reasons (7) applicants choosing to take a 6 month break between Stage 1 and Stage 2, Applicants not making themselves available for assessment (3), DBS issues (1) and availability of panel (1).

The Adoption Service continues to have a clear focus on recruitment with a robust Recruitment Strategy to enable the recruitment of sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children who have a plan of adoption. All team members continue to be actively involved in recruitment and training activities.

2.3 Inter-Agency Placements of children with DCC adopters

DCC approved adopters have been matched with children from other Local Authorities in 2015/16 due to the high level of waiting adopters in our own and all other local authorities:

3 Children Approved for Adoption

3.1 Number of Children Approved for Adoption by Agency Decision Maker-

Table 3:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2015/16	10	1	10	6	3	5	3	0	5	2	6	2	53
2014/15	6	0	9	2	2	1	2	5	1	6	7	5	46
2013/14	11	6	14	4	7	5	7	4	4	2	3	0	67
2012/13	8	7	12	2	7	1	9	4	0	6	9	2	67

There has been an increase in the number of looked after children in DCC approved for permanence through adoption compared to 2014/15.

3.2 Children with a plan of adoption whose plans have changed.

Table 4:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2015	0	0	1	0	1	4	6	2	1	1	0	3	19

The majority of the children were given ADM approval but the courts did not approve a plan of adoption.

Children with an Adoption Plan Waiting for Placement

As at 31 March 2016 there were 33 children with a plan of adoption awaiting placement

Number of children with Placement Order at 31 March 2016

There were 25 children who were the subject of a Placement Order

Number of children with ADM but awaiting a Placement Order 31 March 2016

There were 8 children whereby adoption was the agreed plan and for whom a Placement Order was not yet in place.

DCC has an overall strategic aim to secure permanence at the earliest opportunity and reduce delay for children moving onto their 'Forever Family'. There has been an increase in the numbers of children placed with family and friends with a view to securing permanence through a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order, although this could change following the recent publication of the Government paper: 'Adoption- a vision for change' where it is clarified about the expectations that local authorities will consider adoption plans for children over family placements wherever this is in the best interests of the child and the government has stated there will be legal changes to ensure that this happens where necessary

4 Matching

4.1 Number of DCC Adopters Matched to a Child 1.4.15 – 31.3.16

(Date of Agency Decision Maker approval of prospective applicants to date of the Agency Decision Maker approval of the Match)

A total of 37 matches were made (an increase on the previous year related to the increase in children with a plan of adoption)

Table 5:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2015/16	1	3	1	2	7	5	7	2	4	1	3	1	37
2014/15	8	3	4	2	2	0	6	2	3	1	1	0	32
2013/14	4	7	3	2	3	4	0	5	6	1	5	6	46
2012/13	3	2	6	6	3	2	9	10	1	5	4	4	55

Projected Matches planned at panel April/May 2016

Table 6:

Apr	May	Total
5	1	6

4.2 Inter-Agency Placements of Children with DCC Adopters

As all local authorities across the country have a surplus of adopters for children without complex needs there have been no children from elsewhere placed with Durham approved adopters

5 Children Placed for Adoption

5.1 Number of Children Placed for Adoption April 2015 – March 2016

Table 7:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
DCC	1	3	1	5	6	3	11	2	4	2	3	0	41
DCC- FC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VAA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
OLA	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	10
Total	1	3	5	6	6	6	11	2	4	2	6	1	53
2014/15	10	3	5	2	2	0	4	6	4	0	1	0	37
2013/14	12	6	3	6	3	4	0	3	6	5	3	1	52

Key: DCC – Durham County Council, VAA – Voluntary Adoption Agency, OLA – other Local Authority, FC – Foster Carer

5.2 Number of Children Placed for Adoption Awaiting Adoption Order as at 31.3.16

There were 42 children placed for adoption and awaiting an adoption order as at 31.3.16

The majority of prospective adopters continue to make their application to adopt following the 10 week review in order to progress their adoption at the earliest opportunity. It is expected that a significant proportion of these children will have their Adoption Orders granted by 31st March 2017

6. Adoption Orders

6.1 Number of Children Adopted

Table 8: No. of Adoption Orders granted 1.4.15-31.3.16

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
DCC	2	4	4	4	0	0	2	0	2	3	3	1	25
VAA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OLA	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
DCC-FC	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	3	4	4	4	0	0	4	0	2	3	3	1	28
2014/15	3	2	7	2	3	6	4	6	2	2	3	3	43
2013/14	3	4	5	5	5	11	8	10	7	4	8 (9)	1	73

- 28 adoption orders were granted between 1.4.15 – 31.3.16
- There has been significant delay in the granting of Adoption Orders in the past 12 months as a number of birth parents have contested the Placement Order at the Initial Birth Parent Hearing to consider the application for the Adoption Order has increased and is now the norm. In the majority of cases their appeal has not been granted but this has caused the Hearings to be adjourned until a later date causing delay in the granting of the Adoption Order. This creates anxiety for adopters which require and receive extensive support from their adoption worker at this time.

6.2 Pre-Adoption Order Disruption

1 child who had been placed for adoption by DCC was returned to the care of the Local Authority following an Adoption Disruption despite receiving comprehensive adoption support. This child was the full sibling of the child whose placement disrupted the previous year.

7 Non-Agency Adoption Orders

Table 9:

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
0	0	3	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	1	9

The majority of non-agency adoptions are processed and assessed by Adoption Social worker who has extensive experience in this area of work.

9 non-agency adoption orders were granted in 2015/16

8 Adoption Support

It is acknowledged that children placed for adoption and their families often require additional support over the period of their childhood. Durham has been a forerunner in the provision of support due to The Full Circle Therapeutic Service which provides bespoke therapeutic interventions in a timely manner.

This sets us apart from our regional neighbours and is often the reason why prospective adopters choose to come to Durham Adoption Agency

Adoption support systems and processes have been reviewed and re-designed to provide a more effective, efficient and responsive service for all affected by adoption which underpins the implementation of **Durham Adoption Support Passport**. Adopters and their families are informed that they have a right to request an assessment of their adoption support needs throughout the life time journey of their adoption experiences until the child reaches the age of majority at 18.

Adoption support needs are evaluated during assessment, match and placement in order to achieve positive outcomes and where required additional support from a wide range of services is available:

- Dedicated Looked After Nurses, life story co-ordinator, Full Circle Therapeutic Service, Clinical Consultant Child Psychologist and Medical Adviser all contribute to provide excellent support to adopters and professionals in addressing any health issues.
- Informal “buddy” support from approved adopters for newly approved adopters and those who need “friendly” support and advice.
- The LACES Service offers a wide range of support, advice and guidance to adopters and professionals with regard to educational issues. Use of Pupil Premium Plus continues to be promoted
- Out of Hours support is available for adopters through the Durham County Council Emergency Duty Team (EDT).
- The dedicated Consultant Clinical Child Psychologist provided 74 consultations to adopters during the period April 15 to end March 16. This consultation and support to adopters helped them to understand the impact of trauma and neglect upon children’s behaviour and relationships as well as thinking about the children and young people’s developmental, emotional and mental health issues and concerns and promoted placement stability. This is especially important during matching.

- The adoption support Fund has been available to access funds for therapeutic support for adopted children and their families. To date a total of £145,122.27 has been claimed from the fund to fund the support of children placed by and within County Durham
- Attachment Training is delivered by The Full Circle Team and receives excellent feedback from adopters and is invaluable to assist them in their understanding of the needs of children and some of the challenges their behaviour may bring ensuring that adopters offer suitable therapeutic parenting to children from the outset..

Additional Adoption Support Events:

- Two family fun day events are organised each year by the Adoption Service in July and December. These are well attended and received and give adopted children the opportunity to meet with other children and families
- The Service level agreement for providing post adoption support to birth parents, adoptive families, their children and young people continues to be held by PAC UK. This service has been extended for a further year in line with the original agreement
- Family and Friends of Adoption Events take place 6 times a year. These events are well received by the friends and families of prospective adopters and the feedback received is excellent.

A wide range of adoption support services with multi team/agency input is provided and these include regular training events, seminars, social events, drop in sessions, and individual casework

8.1 Birth Records Counselling

Table 10:

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
1	2	3	3	2	0	4	3	1	3	1	3	26

When a child reaches the age of 18 they can apply to view their birth records and make an application to DCC and are supported to do so. Records are sought and they're supported to view them.

8.2 Enquiries to Access to Adoption Information Adopted Adults

Table 11:

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
1	1	3	1	1	2	6	3	4	2	4	0	28

8.3 Referrals to Parents & Children (PAC) UK

Table 12:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Family support	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Adopters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adopted Adults	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	5
Contemporary Birth Parents	3	7	3	0	3	2	2	1	3	2	1	2	28
Birth Relatives (Post AO)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total	3	7	3	0	5	2	6	2	3	5	1	2	38

8.4 Number of Indirect Contact Arrangements In Place

We have 1,213 post adoption events from 31.3.15- 1.4.16 which include adoption allowance reviews, indirect contact with adopters and birth families (292 birth others, 210 birth fathers, 103 maternal grandparents, 47 paternal grandparents and 39 significant others) and 23 new Adoption Allowances

8.5 Request for an Assessment of Post-Adoption Support Needs

Table 13:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total

2015/16	0	1	3	2	1	2	7	2	18	4	1	1	42
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8.6 Number of referrals to Adoption Support Fund

Table 14:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2015/16	0	1	0	1	0	7	2	18	4	3	8	2	46

8.7 New Adoption Allowance Agreed

Table 15:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2015/16	0	1	8	1	3	0	4	0	3	2	0	1	23

The total number of children in receipt of an adoption allowance in 2015-16 =159
(expenditure £815.5k)

Contact Plans and 'The Post Box'

The Adoption Service operates an efficient and proactive Post Box system. This promotes the exchange of information in accordance with contact plans and agreements to assist the child and birth parents through varying stages of development. There are robust mechanisms to monitor and control information exchanged to safeguard the child and placement. The Adoption Service scan and retain information exchanged between adopters, adopted children and birth family members to have a backup of the information received in the event of this being required.

The provision of adoption support in maintaining indirect contact plans between adopters, adopted children and birth family members has increased in the last 5 years and can be complex and resource intensive. This reflects the increase in the number of children placed.

The opportunities presented by social networking sites such as Facebook also present considerable challenges in adoption placements as this has become a mechanism for tracing or unsolicited contact. This has caused significant distress to adopters and the dangers of this are highlighted within the ICP training.

9 Life Story Work Consultations

Month	Social Workers	Social Work Assistant	Residential Workers	Foster Carers	Adopters	Others e.g social workers, etc	Total
April	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
May	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
June	0	0	0	2	7	0	9
July	3	0	0	4	7	0	14
Aug	3	0	0	3	7	0	13
Sept	2	0	0	3	5	1	11
Oct	6	4	0	2	10	0	22
Nov	2	0	0	2	5	0	9
Dec	2	1	0	1	2	1	7
Jan 16	3	0	0	3	6	0	12
Feb	2	2	0	3	7	0	14
Mar	2	4	0	2	9	0	17
Total	23	7	0	23	56	2	128
2014/15	22	17	8	23	29	4	103
2013/14	85	43	22	34	58	19	261

Table 16:

10 Feedback from Adopters:

The Adoption team has received positive feedback at all stages of the adoption process.

11 Key Priorities for 2015/16

The Adoption Service "Statement of Purpose" 2015/16 sets out the aims and objectives of the team.

The main priorities of The Adoption Service will continue to focus on Recruitment & Assessment, Family Finding and Adoption Support.

- Recruitment & Assessment of adopters will be prioritised and targeted in order that in- house resources are available locally and within the region for children who need adoption placements. This will be directly linked to the needs of children with a plan of adoption.
- Family Finding will be proactive in order to provide placement choice and to avoid unnecessary delays in placing children in new families. In order to do this children are allocated a Family Finder on referral to the Adoption Service so their needs can be considered and they can be featured appropriately. This will allow every child with a plan of adoption to have the greatest opportunity to be matched with an adoptive family who can meet their needs throughout their lives as soon as possible.
- The Adoption Support Fund has brought changes to Adoption support services as the funding for therapeutic support has moved to an external fund managed by a Government appointed organisation. There is an obligation on the part of the Local Authority to assess the Adoption Support needs of any adopted child within Durham County Council. It is the Local Authority's responsibility to make this obligation known and the main impact of this has been felt within the Full circle Team rather than the adoption team as they provide the majority of therapeutic interventions within County Durham.
- The priority of the Adoption Service is to make and sustain stable adoption placements and to ensure that the lifelong needs of those affected by adoption are met.
- The Government have announced plans to regionalise adoption services in order to consolidate resources and reduce delay for children with a plan of adoption. This will present opportunities and challenges for the Adoption Service in the future.

12 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The Adoption Service continues to focus on achieving the best outcomes for children and to prevent delay in achieving permanence for the child with a plan of adoption and children remain the focus and the centre of everything we do.

See Appendix 2 which shows positive performance by DCC in relation to key targets in comparison to the national and regional picture.

The past year has brought new challenges which are reflected nationally including:

- The decrease in the numbers of children with a plan of adoption
- The reduction in the numbers of people coming forward to adopt
- The increase in the number of adopters who do not feel they have the necessary skills to consider older children or children with complex needs
- The increase in the number of birth parents who have sought to appeal the granting of the Placement Order at the point the adopters make their application for the Adoption Order. This has led to a significant increase in

the continued support required for Adopters at this time, as well as delay for both children and adopters alike

There will be more challenges ahead in 2016/17 for the Adoption Service and the Adoption Panel. These have been highlighted in the report above. The key priority areas to continue in the new financial year include:

- The drive to match and place children with adoption plans swiftly (in accordance with the timescale/targets set by DfE)
- The continued recruitment of adoptive carers to meet the needs of Durham children so that these children can be placed with their prospective adopters without undue delay,
- The continued assessment of adopters within the timescales set by DfE

Detailed action plans have been developed for each of these priorities, for implementation by the service.

Bronwen Keegan
Operations Manager
Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The provision of post adoption support is currently provided via a government grant, which is time limited to 2020. A budget pressure is possible thereafter.

Staffing – There are no implications for staffing. The Adoption Service is stable and experienced.

Risk – Liability to recruit adopters would limit placement choice, changes in national policy and Family Court practice can impact significantly on adoption practice.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – Efforts are made to ensure all children are considered for adoption, including those with complex and special needs.

Accommodation – No implications

Crime and Disorder – No implications

Human Rights – The right to a family life is established in family practice

Consultation – No implications

Procurement – No implications

Disability Issues – Children with a disability are targeted for specific adoption recruitment activity and support

Legal Implications – None at present, although government have signalled likely future change in legislation in this area

Appendix 2

Quarterly Adoption Survey Quarter 4 2015-16 (Period: 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016) - Adoption data

Coverage: Local Authorities in England

		Children waiting					Progress through the adoption process					Timeliness for children who have been adopted	
		With a decision but not yet placed as at	With a placement order but not yet placed as at	With a placement order but not yet placed (18 months or more since entering care) as at	Average length of time spent waiting (since entering care) for those with a placement order not yet placed (days)	Percentage of children waiting with a placement order at 31 Mar 2016 per looked after children at 31 Mar 2015	Number of ADM decisions	Number of placement orders granted	Number of children matched with adoptive families	Number of children placed with adoptive families	Number of children adopted	(AS1) Average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family	(AS2) Average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family
		31 Mar 2016	31 Mar 2016	31 Mar 2016	31 Mar 2016	31 Mar 2016	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16
ENGLAND		3,190	2,050	640	543	3	4,780	3,870	4,170	4,220	4,310	522	244
NORTH EAST		220	130	50	538	3	310	250	250	270	250	563	211
841	Darlington	15	15	x	449	7	15	15	5	5	10	x	x
840	Durham	30	25	x	389	4	55	50	50	30	420	173	
390	Gateshead	30	15	5	538	4	30	30	25	25	30	696	170
805	Hartlepool	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10	10	10	x	x
806	Middlesbrough	15	15	10	682	4	10	10	10	15	15	531	141
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	30	15	10	765	3	30	25	25	25	25	479	157
392	North Tyneside	10	x	x	x	x	20	15	15	15	20	563	278
929	Northumberland	30	10	0	x	3	35	20	35	35	35	704	246
807	Redcar and Cleveland	x	x	0	x	x	5	5	x	x	10	x	x
393	South Tyneside	5	x	x	x	x	20	25	15	25	20	467	x
808	Stockton-on-Tees	x	x	0	x	x	15	10	10	15	20	656	340
394	Sunderland	50	25	15	615	4	65	40	35	35	30	594	188

OTHER ST. NEIGHBOURS		470	310	100	541	2	740	630	700	720	790	512	255
876	Halton	20	15	0	363	7	30	25	10	10	15	446	135
342	St. Helens	10	10	x	x	2	25	25	35	35	50	603	359
359	Wigan	15	10	x	x	2	40	35	45	50	40	457	220
370	Barnsley	20	20	x	443	7	40	35	25	25	35	541	255
384	Wakefield	30	25	10	656	5	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

Note: DfE rounds counts to the nearest 5 at local authority level, nearest 10 at national and regional level. (x) means data has been suppressed due to low numbers i.e. less than 5. (..) means no data was submitted.

Quarterly Adoption Survey Quarter 4 2015-16 (Period: 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016) - Adopter data

Coverage: Local Authorities in England

		Progress through the adoption process				Prospective adopters waiting			Timeliness for adopters					
		Number of registrations	Number of approvals	Number of adoptive families matched to children	Number of adoptive families with children placed with them	Number of adoption orders granted	Number of prospective adoptive families not yet approved	Number of approved adoptive families waiting to be matched with children	Number of adoptive families approved			Number of adoptive families matched		
									Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	Q1 - Q4 2015-16	31 Mar 2016	31 Mar 2016	within 6 months of registration in 2015-16	after 6 months of registration in 2015-16	Information not available	within 3 months of approval in 2015-16	after 3 months of approval in 2015-16	Information not available
ENGLAND		2,700	2,940	2,570	2,540	2,600	1,710	2,520	780	1,870	290	680	1,850	30
NORTH EAST		170	200	170	170	160	120	200	60	120	10	40	140	x
841	Darlington	x	5	x	x	5	5	10	0	5	0	0	x	0
840	Durham	30	35	35	30	25	10	25	20	15	0	5	30	0
390	Gateshead	15	10	15	15	15	15	10	0	10	x	5	10	0
805	Hartlepool	5	15	10	10	10	25	15	x	10	x	0	10	0
806	Middlesbrough	10	15	x	x	5	x	15	0	10	x	x	x	0
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	25	40	30	30	25	20	55	5	35	0	x	25	0
392	North Tyneside	10	15	10	10	15	5	5	x	10	x	x	10	0
929	Northumberland	10	10	5	10	10	x	15	x	x	x	x	x	0
807	Redcar and Cleveland	5	10	x	x	5	x	10	0	10	0	0	x	0
393	South Tyneside	20	20	25	25	15	10	10	20	0	x	x	20	x
808	Stockton-on-Tees	15	10	5	5	10	10	15	x	10	0	0	5	0
394	Sunderland	20	20	20	20	15	10	5	5	10	x	10	10	0

OTHER ST. NEIGHBOURS		340	480	420	410	430	230	430	130	300	50	130	290	x
876	Halton	x	10	5	x	0	x	5	x	x	0	x	x	0
342	St. Helens	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
359	Wigan	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
370	Barnsley	35	25	25	20	15	20	15	x	20	x	10	15	0
384	Wakefield	..	..	..	..	..	x	15	..	..	..	..	..	..

Note: DfE rounds counts to the nearest 5 at local authority level, nearest 10 at national and regional level. (x) means data has been suppressed due to low numbers i.e. less than 5. (..) means no data was submitted.