



Corporate Parenting Panel

Date **Friday 29 September 2017**
Time **9.30 am**
Venue **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

Business

Part A

**Items during which the Press and Public are welcome to attend.
Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chairman's
agreement.**

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2017 (Pages 3 - 8)
5. Number of Looked After Children - Update from Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
6. Looked After Children Breakdown - Presentation of Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
7. Annual Report of Fostering Service and Fostering Panels - Report and presentation of Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence (Pages 9 - 40)
8. Annual Report of Adoption Service and Adoption Panels - Report and presentation of Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence (Pages 41 - 64)
9. Children in Care Council - Update from Senior Project Worker, Investing in Children
10. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.
 - a) MASH Visit
 - b) Feedback from CPP Training Course - Westminster Briefing
11. Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information.

Part B

Items during which it is considered the meeting will not be open to the public (consideration of exempt or confidential information)

12. Regulation 44 Visits Summary Report - Report of Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers (Pages 65 - 90)
13. Update on Regulation 44 Visits Provider - Update from Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
14. Responsive Repairs/Service Direct - Update from the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel
15. Ofsted Update - Presentation of Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
16. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Development Item

17. Recruitment and Marketing of Foster Carers - Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence

Helen Lynch

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
21 September 2017

To: **The Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

Councillor P Brookes (Chairman)
Councillor H Smith (Vice-Chair)

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton, J Considine, P Crathorne, G Darkes, E Huntington, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, O Milburn, C Potts, A Reed, G Richardson, A Savory, E Scott, M Simmons and C Wilson

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 28 July 2017** at **10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes (in the Chair)

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton, J Considine, P Crathorne, E Huntington, M McKeon, J Makepeace, C Potts, A Reed, G Richardson, M Simmons, H Smith and C Wilson

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Manager, Children and Adult Services), Helen Fergusson (Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers), Ann Haigh (Deputy Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre), Irene Lavelle (Strategic Lead for SEND, Standards, Improvements and Virtual School Head), Andrew Moss (Business Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre), Carole Payne (Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding), Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence), Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chairman introduced attendees. This meeting was the final meeting for Carole Payne and Irene Lavelle and the Chairman thanked Carole and Irene for all their hard work and wished them well. The Chairman welcomed Helen Fergusson, Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, who will be the new lead officer for the panel.

The Chairman paid tribute to Councillor Morris Nicholls whose funeral was held on Friday 21st June.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Darkes, Jewell, Milburn, Savory, Scott and from officers, Marie Baister, (Designated Nurse, Looked After Children) and Selwyn Morgans (Centre Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre).

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Declarations of Interest

With reference to item 6, Councillor Makepeace declared an interest as an employee of Wrixon Care Limited.

4. Minutes

With an amendment to the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2017 to include apologies from Councillors C Potts and G Richardson, the minutes were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. Number of Looked After Children

The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding, informed the panel that the number of looked after children was 794. The number of looked after children would be a standard item of business for future meetings and the panel would be provided with not only the figure but also information on ages and placement profiles periodically. Members were notified that a weekly LAC update is provided to officers therefore information is available upon request.

6. Looked After Children Annual Report 2016/17

The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding, presented the Looked After Children Annual Report 2016/17 and introduced Karen Robb, Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence. The Strategic Manager referred members to the report and delivered a powerpoint presentation which explained some of the key elements (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

In response to a request from Councillor Makepeace for more information on the 189 care leavers, the Strategic Manager responded that the young people are aged between 18-25 years and they are classed as eligible or relevant under the Leaving Care Act. It was agreed that a detailed report on care leavers should be brought to a future meeting of the panel.

Councillor Charlton commented that the presentation was very informative adding that it was interesting to note that the two age profile groups identified as priority areas are children under the age of 4 years and the 10-15 age group, and that a high number of looked after children come from the east of the county. The Strategic Manager responded saying that there are various factors in a child's circumstances which may lead to them entering the care system including behavioural issues with the onset of adolescence, mental health, school refusal and deprivation. Councillor Huntington referred to children under 4 and commented that bonding issues may be a risk factor. The Strategic Manager explained that the vulnerable parent pathway helps to identify vulnerable parents and the service does a lot of work with vulnerable parents both at the pre-birth and post-birth stages. The Strategic Manager added that the service is increasingly involved with families who have issues with multiple children which suggests that some families become trapped in a cycle.

The Legal Manager for Children and Adult Services, Kelsey Clayton, briefly explained how children initially enter the care system including through care orders made by the courts or through voluntary arrangements, adding that there has been a significant increase in the number of care orders in recent years, and, an increasing incidence of families being involved in repeat care cases, having successive children removed.

The Legal Manager for Children and Adult Services offered to present a report on care proceedings to a future panel meeting and the Chairman welcomed this.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Makepeace declared an interest as an employee of Wrixon Care Ltd.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

7. Aycliffe Secure Services Update

Ann Haigh, Deputy Centre Manager of Aycliffe Secure Services, presented the update report on Aycliffe Secure Services and delivered a powerpoint presentation which included information on the homes at Aycliffe Centre, the school, specialist services and key findings from the recent Ofsted inspection (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Chairman advised that any member wishing to visit the centre should contact Jayne Watson, Senior Partnership Officer, (Tel. 03000 268 371), who would arrange this.

In response to a question from the Chairman as to how the panel would like to be kept informed on matters relating to looked after children and secure services, it was agreed that the panel would require, at the minimum, an annual update and ideally a six-monthly update.

In response to a question from Councillor Reed as to how the young people are reintegrated into the community, the Deputy Centre Manager explained that this is done on a phased return with specialist social work and youth offending support where appropriate.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

8. Corporate Parenting Panel sub-group and panel representation

The Senior Partnership Officer, Partnerships and Community Engagement, presented the Corporate Parenting Panel sub group and panel representation report (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Members identified additional sub / group and panel representatives and the Senior Partnership Officer advised that an updated list would be circulated in due course.

The Senior Partnership Officer informed the panel that membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel includes six non-voting co-opted members consisting of three school representatives and three representatives from other agencies.

It was proposed that the authority to appoint co-opted members would be granted to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, in consultation with the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, and, that the appointments be staggered for two years and four years, to provide consistency.

Resolved:

- i. That additional sub group / panel representatives be identified.
- ii. That Member representation on sub groups / panels for 2017/18 be ratified.
- iii. That Co-opted Members be appointed.

At the request of Councillor Charlton, the Chairman agreed that the agenda item on Regulation 44 Visits would be considered as the next item of business.

9. Regulation 44 Visits Summary Report

The Head of Children's Services presented the Regulation 44 Visits Summary Report (for copy of report see file).

The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding, informed the panel that interim arrangements for the Regulation 44 Visits are working well. She then went on to explain the feasibility study that had been undertaken.

In response to a question from Councillor Richardson, the panel was informed that members' visits would commence in September and that members would be contacted directly by the provider in relation to arranging joint visits.

Resolved:

That the action plans for May and June 2017 be received.

10. Children in Care Council (CICC)

The Chairman provided an update from the Children in Care Council. The Panel was informed that 'Become' charity will be holding a 'North East Passport to Parliament' event on 17 August to inform young people how to use politics for change. Information on this would be circulated to the panel. It was reported that representatives from the CICC will meet with Cllr Potts, Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, on 8 August. Other activities that the CICC are currently involved with include work on the review of the Health Passport and the development of material for foster care training.

11. Exclusion of the public

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

12. Durham Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus Update

Irene Lavelle, Strategic Lead SEND Standards and Improvement, Virtual School Head Teacher, presented an update on Durham Virtual School Pupil Premium Plus and delivered a powerpoint presentation (for copy of report and presentation see file).

It was agreed that the Virtual School Pupil Premium would be revisited in the autumn.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

13. Responsive Repairs

The Chairman informed the Panel that he and Councillor Bennett had attended a monitoring meeting at Service Direct and that Councillors Brookes and Bennett would continue to be the representatives on the Service Direct sub-group.

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Corporate Parenting Panel

29 September 2017



Annual Report of Fostering Service and Fostering Panels

Report of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, Durham County Council

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Panel with the Fostering Services and Fostering Panel Annual report (Appendix 2)
- 2 The report outlines the work of the Fostering Service during 2016-17 and the activity of the Fostering Panels. It also outlines the future strategic direction of the service to meet the needs of the increased number of looked after children.
- 3 Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, will deliver a presentation to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 29 September 2017, providing an overview of the Annual Report.

Background

- 4 The information presented in the report relates to the activity within Durham County Council Fostering Service and the activity of the three Fostering Panels.
- 5 The report covers the reporting period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 for both the Fostering Service and the Fostering Panels.
- 6 The report complies with the statutory requirements as set out under Regulation 35 (review of quality of care) of the Fostering Regulations 2011. These require the responsible individual should monitor all matters set out in Schedule 7, which relate to standards of care and the overall management of the service and to improve the quality of the foster care provided by the Fostering Service.

Recommendations

- 7 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to receive the Annual Report and presentation at the meeting on 29 September 2017 and discuss, to ensure ongoing improvement of the service to meet the needs of children looked after within foster care.

Contact: Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence,
Karen.Robb@durham.gov.uk Tel: 03000 265759

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The increased numbers of looked after children is an area of budget pressure. The sharp increase over 2016-2017 has meant the service has been unable to keep pace with demand particularly those older young people or those with complex and challenging needs. There has been an increase in placements which are externally commissioned which are of high cost. These are primarily residential placements, including residential schools and Independent Foster Care placements (IFA's). Recruitment of in house foster carers is slowly increasing as part of a clear strategy within the Placement Efficiency Plan, to ensure the correct placement mix to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers.

Staffing – The increased numbers of looked after children has had an impact on the caseloads of social workers across the service and following a successful bid for additional finance a number of additional posts have been created in Child Protection Teams and Looked After Teams. An additional Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) post has also been created and a new Head of Looked After Service.

Risk – The Local Authority must ensure it adequately safeguards children who are deemed at risk of significant harm and provide suitable care where children cannot live within their families. Not to do so, places the Council at risk if children are harmed and risks a poor Ofsted outcome.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – The service must ensure it has sufficient foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of looked after children who may have special needs arising from disability or their cultural or heritage backgrounds.

Accommodation– None

Crime and Disorder– None

Human Rights– children and young people have the right to a family life where they can flourish and achieve the best outcomes that they can. Where children cannot live safely within their birth families, the Local Authority must ensure it makes satisfactory and suitable arrangements for their care as children and into adulthood.

Consultation– None

Procurement– None

Disability Issues– Children and young people with disabilities or complex needs will require foster carers with special skills to meet their needs. This aspect is part of the Recruitment Strategy for the Fostering Service.

Legal Implications– Children's Services works within a clear statutory framework under the Children Act 1989 and associated legislation to ensure children and young people are safeguarded from significant harm.

Appendix 2: Annual Report of Fostering Service and Fostering Panels

Attached as a separate document

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Durham County Council Fostering Service

The Annual Report of The Fostering Panels and the Fostering Service 2016-17



Introduction

The information presented in this report relates to the activity within Durham County Council Fostering Service and the activity of the three Fostering Panels.

This report demonstrates the reporting period from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 for both the Fostering Service and the Fostering Panels. The work of the Panels and the Panel members is central to The Fostering Service and the Service is most appreciative of the skills, knowledge and commitment of all of its Panel members.

Legal perspective

The legislation, guidance and regulation relating to Fostering Services and Fostering Panel are enshrined in;

- The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011,
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: The Care Planning Placement and Case Review
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 which came into force on 1st July 2013.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2015, which came into force on 1st April 2015

Durham County Council Fostering Service

Context

The Fostering Service comprises four separate teams which are

- The Short Term Support Team
- The Permanence Team
- The Recruitment Team
- The Placement and Kinship Team

This provides:

- A focus on the recruitment of Foster Carers
- A focus on children and young people requiring a permanent or long term foster care
- A focus on the assessment and support of Family and Friends Foster Carers

- A focus on children requiring short term foster placements and the identification of the best match for them
- A focus on maximising the resources of the Fostering Service

Activity in 2016/17

The Fostering Service, Foster Carers and Fostering Panels have achieved the following:

- There has been an increase in the number of mainstream carers and placement capacity. This has risen from 234 households on 31st March 2016 to 237 households on 31st March 2017. The number of approved foster placements on 31st March 2017 was 713. This was an increase of 83 placements from the previous year, and an increase of 200 placements over the last 5 years. However these increases have not kept pace with the level of demand and placement shortages currently still exist.
- The number of children placed with Durham foster carers on 31st March 2017 was 552 children. This is a significant increase in filled placements from 437 children in March 2016
- The number of unavailable placements was 120. This was due to a variety of factors which included: carers pending resignation (mostly Family and Friends), carers unavailable due to health/family problems, the needs of the child in placement, and placement only available for a sibling due to a shared bedroom. 13 placements were unavailable due to the young person remaining with the carer under Staying Put.
- There has been a continued increase in the number of approved placements in the Fostering Service. In four years this has risen from 513 placements in 2013 to 713 placements in 2017
- The service continues to seek to match children who have a plan of permanence via long term fostering with long term Foster Carers. 11 children were matched with in-house Foster Carers, and 7 children were matched with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Foster Carers. However, as of 31st March 2017 there were 57 children who had an identified plan of permanence via long term foster care who were not yet matched in a permanent foster placement. The seeking of suitable placements for these young people remains a strategic priority and ongoing development work is taking place via the fostering service review and the placement efficient strategy to meet the needs of these children.
- The Service has developed a process to commission long term IFA placements for specific children where we have not been able to identify a suitable in-house resource. This work is in the early stages and initial results are promising. Initially, the details of 5 children were shared with the IFA's and placements for 3 of these children identified and the children are currently in placement.
- The assessment and approval of Family and Friends Foster Carers has continued to be an important aspect of the work of the Fostering Service. There has continued to be increase in the number of assessments of Family and Friends Foster Carers with 47 being completed in 2016/17, compared with 39 in 2015/16 and 41 in 2014/15. Importantly for children it has provided permanence for them. 29 families provided permanence to children through Special Guardianship Orders, and a further 5 through Child Arrangement Orders during 2016/17.

- The Service has continued to raise the professional profile of Foster Carers and address standards of care issues when necessary.

The Fostering Service was also considered by OFSTED as part of their inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The inspection commenced on 22nd February 2016 and concluded on 18th March 2016, with a final report being published on 16th May 2016.

The report highlighted the following:

- Most children live in good-quality placements that are meeting their needs effectively, including placements that have been sustained over long periods of time. Good communications between residential placements and social workers help to support children remaining in placements. At the time of the inspection, few children (5.6%) were reported as having had three or more placements in the previous year. This figure has been improving over time as a result of targeted improvement action, and is better than the most recently available figures for both similar local authorities and England overall.
- A large majority (77%) of children looked after are placed within the local authority. Of those placed outside the local authority, most (92%) are placed in a neighbouring local authority. This promotes children's identity and ongoing contact with their wider family. A very large majority of children (90%) are placed with families. Thirty three children (5%) are placed with their own parents, a figure in line with the most recently published national figures.
- The Fostering Service has clear priorities and a determination to achieve permanence for children and young people. There is a clear strategy to recruit carers for permanence, as well as for teenagers and for groups of brothers and sisters. The number of children placed with Durham foster carers has increased over time, from 336 in March 2013 to 436 in March 2015. The Fostering Panel plays a key role in the quality assurance of the service. This has meant that the quality of matching, reports and life story work has improved.
- The recruitment of foster carers is robust, with all relevant checks and interviews undertaken. Foster carers receive good-quality training to support them in caring for children and young people. They particularly welcomed the training delivered by the Full Circle service regarding attachment and the difference it has made to their approach in handling and managing children's and young people's behaviours to minimise risk. Foster carers receive good support with regular visits from their supervising social worker, and say that workers are responsive to their requests for information and advice.

Changes and Developments in 2016/17

There have been a number of changes to the management within the Fostering Service:

- Karen Robb returned to the role of Strategic Manager of the service following a long period of sick leave, an interim Strategic Manager covered the post for a six month period.
- In March 2017 Chris Bell was appointed Operations Manager Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle.

- Andy Jennings continued as temporary Team Manager of the Short Term Team until Bronwen Smith returned to her substantive post in March 2017.
- Kathy Welsh retired as Team Manager of the Placement and Kinship Team and Christine Kuate was appointed, taking up the post in February 2017.

The Fostering Service has also worked on the following developments/changes:

- Development of the Foster Xtra initiative which aims to provide a multi-agency approach to meet the needs of both children/young people with the most complex needs and challenging behaviour, through providing increased support to Foster Carers. This initiative builds on the previous scheme of Fostering Plus which did not attract a sufficient number of applicants. Foster Xtra has so far assessed two carers, one going to panel in June 2017 and one scheduled to go to Panel in August 2017.
- Promotion of the “wrap around service” to support fragile placements. This service has enabled up to 15 children to be supported in their placement and complete preventative work with the child and their carers to prevent placement disruption or breakdown.
- Implementation of the amendments made to the Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 which came into force on 1st April 2015. These amendments established long term foster care as a legally defined permanence option for looked after children and specified requirements to be met when this is the permanence plan for the child. It also allowed for greater flexibility in social work support in these situations and underlined the importance of foster carers being consulted and involved in the decision-making process concerning the child they care for.
- Consolidation of the support group for Family and Friend carers on a quarterly basis.
- Consolidation of the Launch Pad support group for newly approved carers to offer tailored support to carers in their first year.
- Provision of the new welcome pack to ensure new carers have information about the support they can receive and fostering policies and procedures at the point of approval.
- Continued development of the training provided to Foster Carers through the provision of additional courses to meet identified needs.
- Consolidation of the policy changes required by “Staying Put” arrangements for care leavers aged 18 years and above, and service wide meetings to ensure consistent practice facilitated by the Fostering Service. On 31st March 2017 there were 13 young people continuing to live with their previous foster carers either through the Staying Put, or Shared Lives initiatives.
- Greater involvement of Foster Carers in the specific development of aspects of the service including focus groups on Foster Carer recording, training , and recruitment.

Foster Carer Information

Numbers and type of foster care provision.

Table 1 below gives the breakdown of Foster Carers by the type of foster care they are currently providing

Type of Care	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Short Term Care	108	101	98	125
Both Short Term and Permanent Care	69	70	85	30
Permanent Care	42	55	51	82
TOTAL MAINSTREAM	219	226	234	237
Family & Friends Care	36	39	44	70
Family & Friends Temp Approved	45	32	28	56
TOTAL FAMILY & FRIENDS	81	71	72	126
TOTAL MAINSTREAM AND FAMILY & FRIENDS	304	297	306	363

The above shows that on 31st March 2017 there were 363 registered Foster Carers, which included 56 carers who had temporary approval under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. This is a considerable increase particularly in relation to Family and Friends Carers.

This data represents a snapshot picture on this date. However, it masks the movement of carers during the year particularly Family and Friend carers, a proportion of whom are approved and de-registered within the year when a permanent order is made, for example, Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order (refer to approval and de-registration details)

Summary and analysis of number and types of foster carer provision

- In relation to mainstream Foster Carers (short term approval; dual approval for short term and permanence approval ;and permanence approval) there has been a net increase of 3 Foster Carers (234 to 237 carers) when the number of mainstream de-registrations are taken into account.
- There were 25 new carers approved last year between 1/4/16 – 31/3/17
- There were 103 de-registrations between 1/4/16 – 31/3/17

The biggest increase in the approval category of carers relates to those carers who are approved for permanent care only. This has risen from a total of 51 carers offering permanence to 82 offering permanence only. This reflects the fact that carers approved for both short term and permanence have had long term placements made and hence are no longer available for short term placements. Most permanent carers have matched placements with very few permanent placements available. We now have 206 children in permanent placements which is the single biggest number of children for any type of fostering. Table 1 shows that there has been an equally big

shift in carers offering both short term and permanence therefore this accounts for the increase. It relates to the fact we now try and approve carers for both types of care from the start and they often have a short term placement first before a permanent match or the short term placement that subsequently remains permanently.

- The number of short term carers has also increased which is important given the increasing number of children being placed in foster care.
- There has been a significant increase in carers who are fully approved Family and Friend Foster Carers which has risen from 44 to 70 carers.
- In relation to carers with temporary approval this number fluctuates considerably throughout the year and the number does not represent the throughput during the year. Temporary approval is only initially granted for 16 weeks. Last year there were 28 temporary approvals on the 31st March 2016. This year the number has doubled to 56 Regulation 24/25 carers. This would indicate that in the forthcoming year there will be continued significant increase in fully approved Family and Friends carers. There was also 132 temporary approved carers between 1/4/16 – 31/3/17

Table 2 Ethnicity of children and carers on 31/03/17

	Foster Children	Foster Carers
White		
British	535	644
Irish	00	02
Any other white background	08	03
Mixed		
White and Black Caribbean	00	00
White and Black African	02	00
White and Black Asian	01	00
Any other mixed	04	
Asian	00	01
Black/Black British		
Black Caribbean	00	00
Black African	01	00
Any other Black	00	01
Any other ethnic group	01	01
	552	652

Analysis of ethnicity

- The above table shows the majority of Foster Carers approved by Durham County Council are White British and the majority of Children Looked After are White British.

Location of Approved Foster Carers

Table 3 below shows approved Foster Carers by geographic location. It excludes Family and Friends carers as they do not offer placements to unconnected children and therefore the foster carer geographical characteristics are not relevant.

Locality	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Northwest Durham	39	41	41	45
Durham & Chester le Street	55	60	63	66
East Durham	27	27	28	28
Bishop Auckland/Crook	35	35	33	33
Sedgefield and Spennymoor	33	34	36	30
Out of County South	17	9	12	13
Out of County North	13	20	21	22
TOTAL	219	226	234	237

Analysis of location of Foster Carers

- The locality of approved mainstream Foster Carers is not evenly distributed.
- Approximately a quarter of all carers live within Chester-le Street and Durham and this has continued to increase. This is the most populated area within Co Durham and centrally located and therefore within easy travelling distance for all Durham children.
- Only one locality within Co Durham has seen a decrease in approved carers. This is the Spennymoor and Sedgefield area. All others have either remained static or increased slightly.
- The number of carers living outside the DCC boundary has increased by one. Two thirds of carers living outside the County boundary offer permanent placements. In most cases they live just outside the county boundary and in neighbouring local authority areas and many live in the east with easy access to the Easington area. In particular there is a group of carers living in Houghton-le Spring and another cluster in Darlington.

Foster Carer approvals 2016-2017

Table 4 - approval of Foster Carers by type of provision

Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
New mainstream Foster Carers	27	24	22	25
Reassessment of carers	15	13	5	2
Family and Friend Carers	28	41	39	47
Total	70	78	66	74

Analysis of Foster Carer approvals

- The number of Family and Friends approvals has increased from the previous year from 39 to 47.
- There was a slight increase in the number of mainstream carers approved in comparison to the previous year.
- The number of reassessments of short term carers for permanence reduced .This was anticipated because of the change to assessing prospective carers for long term fostering as well as short term fostering if they are motivated and have the potential.
- One reassessment was completed because a couple separated and therefore an assessment as a single carer was undertaken.

Foster Carer De-registrations

Table 5 - Foster Carer De-registrations by provision

Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Short term carers only	06	08	12	12
Permanent carers	08	07	05	08
Temporary approval	49	55	31	45
Family & Friends care	14	35	32	26
Foster carer support respite	01	04	00	00
TOTAL	78	109	80	91

Analysis of Foster Carer de-registrations

- 93 carers were de-registered during the year 2016-2017.
- The majority of de-registrations were Family and Friends Foster Carers who were either temporarily approved or fully approved. 71 carers compared with 62 carers the previous year.
- Temporary approved Family and Friends carers de-registration increased to 45 compared to 32 the previous year.
- Fully approved Family and Friend carers who were de-registered decreased from 31 to 26 carers. This impacts on the number of fully approved Family and Friend Foster Carers which has risen to 70 carers as less carers are exiting the system.
- 20 mainstream carers were de-registered which is an increase to last year. This is lower than national figures which estimate that 10-15% of carers leave the service each year.

Table 6 - Reasons for Foster Carer de-registrations

Reason for De-registration	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Family circumstances <i>ie house move, change of employment, health, birth/deaths</i>	8	2	5	3
Retired/Resigned	9	19	8	15
Carer withdrew from process (following temporary approval)	3	4	5	3
Concerns from the Service	5	9	4	7
Child moved on/ to independence	1	3	0	0
Child returned to family	11	17	13	22
Supported lodgings/staying put conversion	3	3	1	0
Legal orders in respect of children	31	50	40	34
- SGO	19	41	34	29
- CAO	-	5	5	5
- RO/IRO	13	3	1	0
- Adoption	-	1		0
Other			4	9
TOTAL	79	109	80	93

It is important to recognise that Foster Carers own family situations impact on their ability/availability to foster and can result in them deciding not to continue fostering for example life events such as births, deaths, relationship breakdowns and employment changes.

Analysis of the reasons for Foster Carer de-registrations

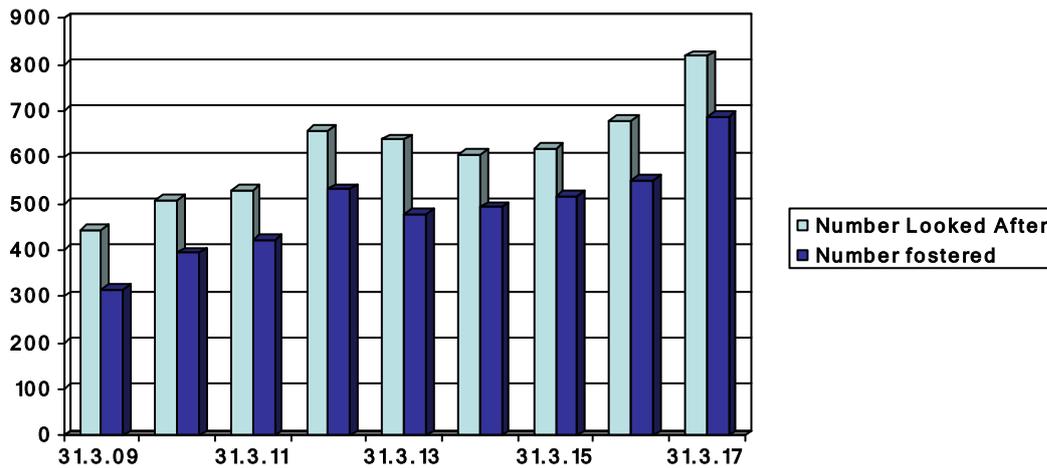
- Approximately 33% de-registrations of carers were because a legal order had been made in respect of children being cared for. These were all positive outcomes and secured permanence for these children.
- In total 33 Family and Friends Foster Carers were de-registered as the result of Court Orders which secured permanence for children meaning they were no longer Looked After.
 - 29 carers became Special Guardians
 - 4 carers were granted Child Arrangement Orders.
 - 22 Family and Friends carers de-registered because young people returned home to family.
- 20 mainstream carers resigned for the following reasons:
 - 3 carers retired from fostering after long service
 - 1 couple resigned following the unplanned ending of two placements and they decided they no longer wished to foster.
 - 8 carers family circumstances changed either through ill health, change of employment status, moved out of area or assumed caring responsibilities and they therefore resigned
 - 5 carers resigned following concerns raised with them about the care they provided

- 2 carers were de-registered following concerns about their suitability to foster
- 1 carer resigned to become a supported lodgings provider

Looked After Children

Table 7 - number of Looked After Children and fostered children

This gives the number of Looked After Children in Durham on 31st March each year and the number placed with Foster Carers on these dates during the same period.

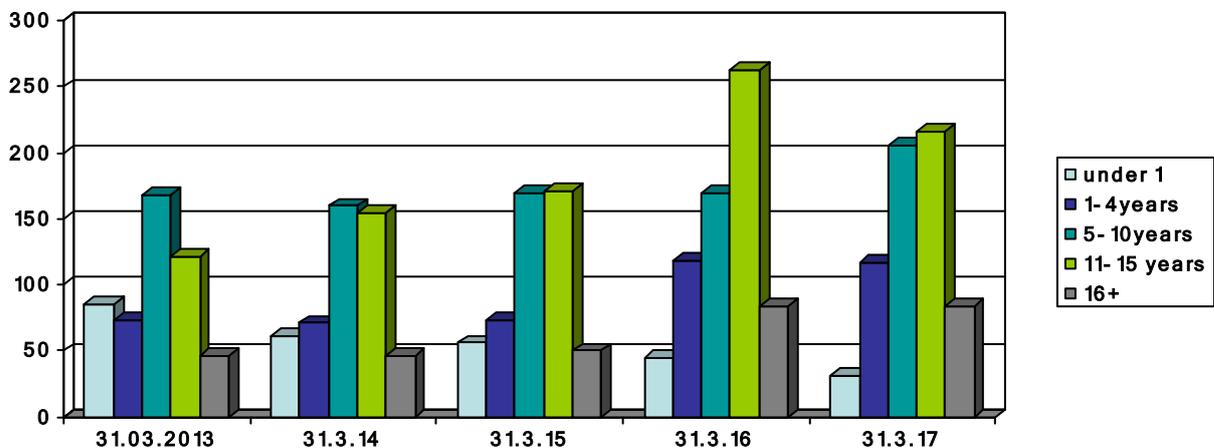


Analysis of the LAC population

- The number of Looked After Children has increased since last year from 680 to 818 on 31st March 2017. The trajectory is upwards for the last three years.
- The number of children placed in foster care has increased for the last four years.

The number of children placed with Foster Carers by age

Table 8 - the number of children placed with Foster Carers by age range on 31st March each year



Analysis of placements by age of child

- The number of baby placements has fallen slightly
- The number of 1-4 years old has remained relatively stable
- The number of children 5-10 years old has increased
- The number of children 11-15 years old has decreased
- The number of young people over 16 years has increased slightly

It should be noted that the above is a snap shot based upon the actual number of carers as of March 31st on consecutive years and does not account for monthly changes throughout each year.

Long term Foster Placement Disruptions

In 2016/17 there were 11 long term foster placement disruptions, resulting in children requiring an alternative foster placement.

The reasons for disruptions were:

- 2 Foster Carers resigned
- 6 Foster Carers felt unable to manage the challenging behaviours and emotional distress displayed by the children/young people
- 3 young people displayed sexualised behaviour which could not be safely managed within the foster family

IRO Information

The IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) Service chairs foster carer annual reviews. Foster Carer reviews is a separate statutory function under the Children Act (1989), Guidance and Regulations (2011), the National Minimum Standards (DfE 2011a) and the Fostering Service (England) Regulations (DfE 2011b) and this forms the regulatory framework for fostering services in England under the Care Standards Act 2000. Standards require the Foster Carer Review to be chaired by an independent person.

The Fostering Service Regulations state that Foster Carers are required to have a review not more than one year from approval and thereafter at intervals of not more than a year or whenever the Service consider it necessary. First review, contentious reviews and reviews every 3 years are presented to the Fostering Panel.

When chairing foster care reviews the IRO is responsible for scrutinising the Local Authority's recommendations in relation to foster carer's approval and to make recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about what carers' future approvals should entail. This in turn enables the local authority to appropriately match children with carer's specific skills and expertise ensuring that children are safeguarded in their foster placement and their care needs are met.

The reviewing processes also allows the IRO service to scrutinise the training needs and developed skills of carers to ensure that carers are banded at the appropriate level and that they are receiving good support from the service.

Table 9 - Number of foster carer reviews completed

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Number of Foster care reviews	230	272	250
Number of reviews held within time-scale	99.2%	98.2%	96%

Analysis of foster carer reviews completed

There were fewer foster carer reviews undertaken in 2016/17 which is attributed to the changes to the review process, whereby reviews take place at 11 month intervals, rather than 10 month intervals

There are a number of reasons why the number of reviews held within timescales has declined, which has included standards of care issues resulting in reviews being postponed until decisions could be made.

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING PANELS

The role of a Fostering Panel

The role of the Fostering Panel is to:

- Provide an independent perspective, informed by a range of expertise and skills
- Monitor and quality assure social work practice in the best interests of children and young people placed in foster care
- Provide recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker that accurately reflect the facts of the case presented to it in relation to the approval of Foster Carers, matches of children for permanence and children's plans

The Legal Framework of Fostering Panels is contained in Appendix 1.

In April 2013 the Fostering Service established a third Panel to manage the increasing volume of work reflecting the increased activity of the service.

The current configuration of Fostering Panels is

- Two Permanence Panels. These panels focus on Family and Friend approvals, approval of Child Permanence Reports for children's plans for permanency through long term fostering, and matches of children with Foster Carers.
- One Panel focussing primarily on approvals, reviews and de-registrations of carers.

This framework has ensured that matters are presented to Panel in a timely manner. Further consideration will be required to the structure of the Panels should the current volume of work continue to increase.

Membership of the Panels

On 1st April 2011 The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011 came into effect. This resulted in changes to the composition, quoracy and processes in Panel.

It is recognised that Panels operate most effectively when there is a diverse membership with an understanding of the fostering tasks and the needs of children. Panel composition therefore includes a wide range of professional backgrounds, adults who have experienced foster care/adoption, and Foster Carers from other agencies as well as elected members.

Prospective Panel members complete an application form and are interviewed for the post. Disclosure and barring checks are undertaken and personal references taken up. There is a clear induction process, induction pack and an opportunity to observe a Panel prior to sitting as a member. Panel members are expected to sign a confidentiality statement and receive an annual appraisal. They are also offered the opportunity to attend training, including specific panel training.

The Role and Function of the Fostering and Permanence Panels

The Fostering Panels are required to:

- Consider each application of prospective Foster Carers for approval as Foster Carers offering placements of a short term nature or permanent placements.
- Make recommendations to the Fostering Service regarding the terms of approval for those applicants and their suitability to become Foster Carers.
- Consider those applications made by Family and Friends following their temporary approval as Foster Carers under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 to:
 - offer permanent or short term placements; and
 - to recommend whether or not the applicants are suitable to become Foster Carers for named child/children.
- Consider all First Annual Foster Care reviews (regulatory requirement) and subsequently Foster Carer reviews every 3 years (Durham County Council policy)
- To consider any contentious reviews of approved Foster Carers and make recommendations regarding terms of approval and continued registration.
- Ensure feedback to the Agency Decision Maker and Senior Managers of the Durham County Council on Fostering Service policy, procedures and practice matters

Agency Advisers to the Fostering and Permanence Panels

Each Fostering Panel is supported by an Agency Adviser. During the period of this report the Agency Advisers to the Panels were:

- Lorraine Botcherby (Team Managers, Permanence Team) for the Permanence Panel A

- Andy Jennings (Temporary Team Manager) for Permanence Panel B
- Florence Coulter (Team Manager, Recruitment Team) for the Fostering Panel
- Christine Kuate became Agency Adviser for Permanence Panel B from March 2017 after Andy Jennings left the service

Agency Decision Maker

During this period The Agency Decision Makers for the Fostering Panels were:

- Karen Robb, Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence
- Gill Horrobin, Interim Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence (August – November 2016)
- Bronwen Smith, Operations Manager, Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle (until February 2017)
- Mark Gurney, Strategic Manager (from March 2017)

The Independent Review Mechanism

From April 2009 the Independent Review Mechanism was extended to cover fostering matters having previously been only focussed on adoption issues. It provides an independent review of the suitability of fostering applications presented to it from potential and current Foster Carers in cases where the decision has been not to approve them as a foster carer, or to terminate or change the terms of their approval.

There were no Foster Carers during 2016-17 who applied to the Independent Review Mechanism.

Training

The training needs of Panel members are identified through their individual annual appraisals, Panel activity and processes.

Panel have access and training programme information which has given them access to CAMHS, LACES and the general courses which are available to Foster Carers. All Panel members complete e-learning Data Protection training. During the year training was provided to Panel regarding

- The Fostering Service and key fostering data
- Implementation of DFE guidance on “ Permanence, long term foster placements”
- Focus on the Relative Experience Project and issues facing kinship carers
- Dilemmas in Fostering assessments

Fostering Panel Business Meetings

These meetings occur twice a year. These meetings consist of the Chairs, Vice Chairs, Agency Advisers, Panel members and Senior Managers.

They are chaired by the Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence or Operation Manager, Fostering and Adoption, and Full Circle. The purpose of these meetings is to share information, to promote consistency across the Panels, to improve Panel practice/processes, to identify training needs and to discuss strategic service developments which may impact on Panel business.

Permanence Review/Placement Stability Meetings

Bi-monthly Permanence Review Group meetings are held to monitor the progress of all aspects of permanence and placement stability. These meetings are attended by Operations Managers and Team Managers across Looked After and Permanence Service. The meeting reviews all plans of permanence to ensure they are progressed within the desired timescales wherever possible, and ensure that all appropriate actions have been taken to prevent unnecessary drift and delay.

THE FOSTERING PANEL

Fostering Panel Activity

The Panel met 12 times during the year.

Table 10- summary of Panel Activity

Activity	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Form F assessments of short term carers presented to Panel	15	17	20	23
Reassessments presented to Panel	5	3	4	1
Review of short term carers	69	36	35	47
Deregistration of Foster Carers	0	8	7	18
Matches of children with carers		3	13	2

Analysis of Fostering Panel Activity

- The number of Form F's presented to this Panel increased slightly from 20 to 23. Similar to the previous year, a number of the assessments were undertaken for Foster Carers who would be approved for permanence only and therefore they were presented to the 2 Permanence Panels
- Panel considered one match of two children with their current carer following the presentation of their reassessment for permanence to Panel
- The number of foster care reviews presented to Panel increased slightly. This reflects the decision that all fostering reviews would be presented to this panel
- There were two reviews which were brought to Panel because of concerns about the standard of care provided. Panel considered the information and recommended continued approval in one case and de-registration in the other case. These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker

- The number of de-registrations doubled. This also relates to the decision that all de-registrations are presented to this Panel to provide closer scrutiny

Terms of Approval for new Foster Carers

There has been a change in policy to approve carers for a wider age range but within this having a clear assessment of the best match in terms of age

Table 11 - breakdown of carers by preference for age of placements

Age Range	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
0 – 2 years only	2	1	0	1
Under 11 years	9	13	15	18
11 years plus	2	1	1	3
Wide age range	1	2	4	1
TOTAL	14	17	20	23

Analysis of age preference

- The majority of newly approved carers' skills lie in the 0-11 age group with 19 carers being approved for this category
- One carer was approved for babies only. This reflects the number of baby placements required during the year. In addition 15 households' terms of approvals included approval to care for babies
- 1 household was approved and able to foster children with a very wide age range. This relates to their considerable previous experience
- 1 household only was particularly interested in fostering teenagers
- The profile of Looked After Children indicates a shortage of Foster Carers for the 11+ age group

New Foster Carers by Area

Table 12 - breakdown of new Foster Carers by area

Area	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
North West	6	1	6	3	3
Durham & Chester-le Street	2	5	3	7	10
East Durham	0	0	1	2	3
Sedgefield/ Spennymoor	5	2	3	3	1
Bishop Crook	2	4	3	2	5
Out of County	2	2	1	3	3
TOTAL	17	14	17	20	25

Analysis of Foster Carers by area

- There was an uneven distribution of new Foster Carers across the County
- The highest numbers of new carers live in the Durham area which is the most central locality
- There was no targeted marketing of any geographical area during this year, although we did have some specific publicity events in Weardale and Easington
- The carers living out of the county live near the border of County Durham

Foster Carer Reviews presented to the Fostering Panel

Table 13 - type of reviews

Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
First reviews	20	10	12	16
Reviews called following a specific issue	2	1	1	2
3 year reviews	47	25	19	27
TOTAL	69	36	32	45

Analysis of type of reviews

- There was an increase in the number of reviews presented to Panel this year which relates to the decision made during the year that all foster care reviews would be presented to this panel to provide consistency and to reflect a more even distribution of panel workload
- The majority of reviews presented to Panel were third reviews – 27 in the year
- Two foster carer reviews were presented to Panel as a result of concerns. The Panel recommended re-approval in one case and de-registration in the other case and this was endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker

De-registrations

There were 18 de-registrations of Foster Carers in 2016/17

Analysis of de-registrations

- There were more de-registrations of Foster Carers noted at Panel this year because of the decision to note all de-registrations at this panel to provide increased oversight of issues.

Key Themes from The Fostering Panel

Quality of Reports

- The quality of reports to Panel this year has been good with Panel regularly commenting about the high standard of the Foster Carer assessments. Importantly feedback from carers in Panel confirms their view that the reports were accurate and thorough.

Positive Views from Panel Members

- Panel members in their appraisals commented positively about the management of the Service and Chairing of the Panels.
- Panel members were appreciative of the high quality of administrative support to Panels.

Feedback from applicants & social workers about Panel

Applicants and social workers are given the opportunity to feedback via a questionnaire when they attend Panel. 2016-17 feedback examples included:

- Panel experience was fine. We were nervous but were made to feel at ease, everyone was given time to speak and be listened to. Any questions were answered.
- The Panel asked us a range of questions which we felt were relevant. We felt listened to and respected.
- Panel had thoroughly read the report and asked relevant questions.

The majority of returned questionnaires stated they had waited approximately 5 -10 minutes, although a couple stated they waited a longer period.

Most applicants stated they did not have any suggestions for improvements. However, one carer stated that it would be helpful to be given the time of Panel sooner.

The Permanence Panels
Permanence Panel Activity

Panel A met 12 times and Panel B met 10 times during the year. There was six extraordinary Panel meeting during 2016/17

Table 15 - Summary of Permanence Panel Activity

Panel Workload		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Approvals of permanence Foster Carers		12	6	2	2
Approvals of permanence Foster Carers via reassessment		11	9	0	2
Approval of Family Friends Foster Carers (Form C)		28	41	39	47
Approval of children as suitable for permanence via long term fostering		52	22	24	31 children
Match of children approved for permanence with an IFA permanence Foster Carers		11 (14 children)	9 (9 children)	7 (8 children)	7 children
Match of children approved for permanence with permanence Foster Carers		22 (29 children)	42 (54 children)	16 (24 children)	11 children
Reviews of Foster Carers	1 st Reviews	14	22	18	5
	3 rd Reviews	42	25	16	3
	Other	0	0	2	0
	Total	56	47	36	8
De registrations of Foster Carers		70	97	73	69

Analysis of Permanence Panel Activity

- There continues to be an increase in the number Family Friends Foster Carers recommended for approval at Panel over 2016-17 (47)
- There were 11 children matched to permanent Foster Carers in 2016-17, and 7 children were matched with IFA carers, a total of 18 children matched. This is a significant reduction from 2015-16 when 32 children were matched. This is the result of the service maximising the use of our in-house long term placement resource, as well as an increase in the number of looked after children with a plan of permanence via long term fostering.
- The 31 children's plans recommended by Panel in the last year for children requiring permanence through long term fostering represents an increase on the previous two years. This is likely to be attributed to the increase in the LAC population with more children having a plan of permanence via long term fostering

- There has been a reduction in the number of reviews presented to the Permanence Panels, following a decision to present reviews to the Fostering Panel to increase consistency.
- There were 69 de-registrations of Family and Friends Foster Carers, a slight reduction from 73 de-registrations in 2015/16. 55 de-registrations resulted from the child/ren either returning home or being made subject of a legal order, representing a positive permanent outcome for the children concerned.
- There were 47 Form C assessments presented to Panel. There has been a net increase in fully approved Family and Friends Foster Carers from 44 in 2015/16 to 70 in 2016/17

Approval of Permanence Plans for Children and matching children

Table 16 - approval of permanence plans for children and their match with permanent carers

Permanence Plans/Matching	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Approval of children as suitable for permanent placement	52	22	24	31
Match of children approved for permanence with an IFA permanence Foster Carers	11 (15 children)	9 (9 children)	7 (8 children)	7 (7 children)
Match of children approved for permanence with permanence Foster Carers	22 (29 children)	42 (54 children)	16 (24 children)	11 (11 children)

Analysis of permanence plans and matching

- There have been 31 children's plans recommended by Panel in the last year for children requiring permanence through long term fostering. This represents an increase on the previous year, 2015-16. This figure does not represent all of the children who have a plan of permanence via long term fostering, as some children have plans confirmed via the Court process not via the Permanence Panel Process. Work is being undertaken to review the presentation of Child Permanence Reports (CPR's) to Panel with a view to minimising delay for children.
- The Permanence Team continues to work closely with the Adoption Team and on occasions when a plan of adoption cannot be achieved within the child's timescale, these cases are transferred to the Permanence Team so permanence via long term fostering can be considered; usually reflecting the contingency agreed at Court upon the granting of the Care Order.
- There have been 7 children matched with Independent Fostering Agency carers over this period, which is consistent with the previous year.
- 11 children were matched with in-house long term Foster Carers, which is a reduction on previous years, see analysis of Permanence Panel activity above for an explanation for this reduction.

De-registrations of Family and Friends Foster Carers

Table 17 – de-registrations

Reason	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Carer moved	0	0	0	0
Carer unable to meet standards and uncooperative/unsuited to care	6	8	0	5
Carer adopted child	0	1	1	0
Residence Order/Child Arrangement Order granted	13	5	5	5
Special Guardianship Order granted	19	63	33	29
Breakdown/disruption of placement	2	0	0	2
Move to supported lodgings scheme	3	2	0	0
Changes in family circumstances	0	0	0	4
Rehabilitation to family	11	10	13	17
Retirement	1	0	4	0
Young person moved to independence	1	0	1	2
Resignations	3	3	7	0
Change of Care Plan	0	0	0	4
Child moved to foster care/adoption	4	1	1	0
Carer withdrew	3	4	8	1
Another family member came forward	3	0	0	0
Remains on independent TC basis	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	70	97	73	69

Analysis of de-registrations of Family and Friends Foster Carers

- The trend for more than half of de-registrations to follow the granting of Court orders as to the long term residence of one or more children has reduced slightly from 53.4% in 2015/16 to 49.2% in 2016/17 following the granting of a Residence or Child Arrangement Order (5) or Special Guardianship (29) Orders. These cases represent positive outcomes for children under Court scrutiny.
- 17 de-registrations were the result of children returning to live with parents or other family members and 2 de-registration were the result of young people achieving independence
- Only one family and friend carers withdrew as they requested not to continue with the assessment, this is a significant reduction from 2015/16 when 8 carers withdrew
- 5 carers were de-registered as they were unable to meet the Fostering National Minimum Standards, or were considered as unsuitable to care
- Mainstream foster carer resignations are now presented to the Fostering Panel

Family and Friends Foster Carer approvals

Table 18 – approval of Family and Friends Foster Carers

Approvals	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Approval of Family Friends Foster Carers (Form C)	28	41	39	47

Analysis of Family and Friends foster carer approvals

- There has been a further increase in 2016-17 in the number of Family and Friends Form C assessments where Panel has recommended approval as Foster Carers, reflecting positive consideration of the child's family network within the assessment process, in line with the Children Act 1989 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
- The BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) Form C Assessment tool has been continually used across Durham County and there have been 47 Relative and Friend Assessments presented to Panel and approved this year.

Key Themes from Permanence Panel

- CPR's have been of a variable standard, some requiring additional work, but not requiring a deferment. Matching Reports from Fostering Supervising Social Workers and children's Social Workers have continued to be to a good standard.
- Form C Assessments of kinship, friends and family connected persons to the child, have maintained improvement, with few exceptions requiring deferment for additional information.
- Contact issues and the health needs of both applicants and children have continued to be key themes within Form C assessments, as has consideration of how both younger and older applicants will manage currently placed younger children during their teenage years.
- A significant issue is the delay in the return of some DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) enhanced clearances and a number of medical assessments for Form C applicants under regulation 24, necessitating a greater number of extensions of temporary approval for assessment under regulation 25 and the re-scheduling of Panels' business. In relation to the DBS checks the delay is primarily caused by applicants difficulties in supplying the appropriate identification documentation as required by the barring service. In relation to the health information the delay is primarily caused by capacity issues of either the General Practitioner undertaken the health assessment or the Agency Medical Advisor overseeing this. These delays are beyond the control of the Fostering Service, however bi-monthly meetings are held and chaired by the Operations Manager where all issues relating to DBS checks and medicals are tracked and followed up as appropriate.
- The improvement in the representation of children's views within reports presented to Permanence Panels in 2015/16 has been maintained and further embedded in practice in 2016/17.

- The Panels' workload continues to be significant, and further work has been undertaken by the Agency Advisors and Panel Administrators to enhance quality assurance and timeliness at all stages of the process, prior to and following Panel.

Feedback from applicants and social workers about panel

Feedback questionnaires are offered to all applicants and professionals who attend Panel.

Feedback from professionals attending Panel

- Professionals reported that their experience of attending Panel was positive.
- They stated that Panel members were welcoming, introduced themselves and were friendly.
- They felt questions were fair, that answers were listened to, that Panel members were sensitive, and that Panel were appreciative of the work undertaken
- Waiting times were generally satisfactory i.e. 5-10 minutes, in one case the waiting time was one hour

Feedback from applicants attending panel

- Applicants felt comfortable, they felt they were treated fairly and with respect
- One applicant felt anxious, but panel members offered reassurance and made them feel comfortable
- Applicants said they had been given the opportunity to be listened to, and to ask questions
- All applicants said that attending panel was a positive experience

Summary

- In 2016/17 the three Fostering Panels have continued to be very busy, with six extraordinary panels being held to manage workload. It is anticipated this will continue into 2017/18. It will be necessary to recruit further panel members to support quoracy and enhance multi-agency representation.
- The Panels make a valuable contribution both in terms of robust decision making, and identifying issues in relation to practice.
- As the LAC population has risen, the need for additional foster placements has increased, resulting in an increased focus on mainstream foster carer recruitment.
- There is clear evidence that we need to recruit additional long term Foster Carers, so we can achieve permanence via long term fostering for those children who need it and placements for teenagers.
- 31 children had a plan of permanence via long term fostering confirmed by Panel in 2016/17. The Permanence Team work to identify appropriate long term in-house foster placements for these children, and we have devised a process to commission IFA foster placements for an identified cohort of children who are waiting for their permanent foster placement.

- The number of temporarily approved Foster Carers has continued to increase, with a resultant increase in Form C Fostering Assessments being undertaken. There has also been an increase in the number of approved Family and Friends Foster Carers. Some of the Family and Friends Foster Carers reside outside of the area, which presents further challenges in relation to assessment and ongoing support.
- The service are facing significant challenges in identifying appropriate placements for teenagers with complex needs, and this challenge is shared by our regional colleagues, both in other local authorities, Independent Fostering Agencies and External Residential Care providers. Work is ongoing as part of the Placement Efficiency Strategy to identify alternative practice models to more effectively and efficiently support these young people, whilst recruitment is ongoing in line with the service's recruitment strategy

Strategic Priorities and Key Actions for 2017-2018

The report highlights some real challenges that the fostering service has faced in the last year, particularly in relation to the challenges in recruiting sufficient foster carers to meet the demands of a constantly growing and increasing number of children with a plan of requiring foster care. A number of areas of the service are in development in order to address these challenging areas and meet with the service's strategic priorities in the coming year, as described below.

- An Independent Fostering Service Review has been commissioned and was completed in April 2017. A service response to this has now been finalised with a proposed restructure of the fostering service, along with an implementation plan has now been completed and it is anticipated that a revised fostering service structure will be in place from the end of July 2017. This structure will allow greater focus and emphasis on effective identification of placements and matching of young people to placements when they first become Looked After and will allow the fostering service to be much closer aligned to the children's social work teams and thus achieving more effective early permanence planning for children who require a permanent foster care placement.
- A Placement Efficiency Strategy is in place to ensure that all areas of the service are efficient and this strategy has re-introduced the Placement Resource Panel, which came back into effect in May 2017. This panel ensures that there is Senior Management oversight and scrutiny of all children who become Looked After, and also allows senior management oversight and scrutiny of the progress of the child's plan and their journey in the Looked After process, to seek to ensure drift and delay is avoided.
- Foster carer recruitment remains a key priority with a strategic target of 250 new foster carer households having been set for 2017-2018. In response to this a multi-faceted high level recruitment plan has been formulated and is in place for 2017-2018. The plan has been developed jointly by the Fostering Recruitment Team and the Marketing and Communications Team and includes targeted periods of recruitment at times when research indicates interest nationally in fostering is particularly high (May, September and January), as well as rolling marketing campaigns and promotion throughout the year and at the time of key events in the calendar. The marketing plan involves a multi-platform approach

with printed media, radio and social media all being used, as well as recorded interviews and case studies of existing foster carers.

- The processes and procedures for children who require permanence via long term fostering have also been reviewed and a new process will be implemented from July 2017 which will streamline the process for children and young people and reduce drift and delay in identifying appropriate permanent placements for children who required them.

This report has been prepared in April 2017, prior to the submission of the annual Data Set information to the DfE

APPENDIX 1

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF PANELS

ACTS

The Children Act 1989
The Data Protection Act 1998
The Protection of Children Act 1999
The Adoption and Children Act 2002
The Children Act 2004

REGULATIONS

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013

STANDARDS

UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999
Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of carers 1999
Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011

GUIDANCE

The Children Act 1989 Guidance vol 4: Fostering Services 2011
The Children Act 1989 Guidance vol 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2011
Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011
Effective Fostering Panels BAAF 2011

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Corporate Parenting Panel

29 September 2017



Annual Report of Adoption Service and Adoption Panels

Report of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, Durham County Council

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Panel with the Adoption Services and Adoption Panel Annual report (Appendix 2)
- 2 The report outlines:
 - Key activities and achievements of the Adoption Service and Adoption Panels during this period
 - Significant changes in adoption practice in England and Wales
 - Future Strategic Priorities for the Adoption Service in 2017-2018
- 3 Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, will deliver a presentation to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 29 September 2017, providing an overview of the Annual Report.

Background

- 4 The information presented in the report relates to the activity within Durham County Council Adoption Service and the activity of the two Adoption Panels.
- 5 The report covers the reporting period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 for both the Adoption Service and the Adoption Panels.
- 6 Adoption leadership data for 2016-17 is still not available, however internal data shows positive performance by Durham County Council in relation to key targets in comparison to the national and regional picture.
- 7 The past year has brought new challenges, which are reflected nationally including:
 - The increase in the numbers of Looked After children and in particular those with a plan of adoption
 - The increase in the number of children who have complex health and behavioural needs
 - The increase in the number of larger sibling groups
 - The reduction in the numbers of people coming forward to adopt
 - The increase in complex backgrounds/situations of individuals coming forward to adopt
 - The continuation 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 or oppose the granting of the Adoption Order at the point the adopters make their application.
- 8 There will be more challenges ahead in 2017/18 for the Adoption Service and the Adoption Panel particularly with a view to moving on towards Regionalisation, which have been highlighted in the report above.
- 9 The key priority areas to continue in the new financial year include:
- a) To continue to match and place children with adoption plans swiftly (in accordance with the timescale/targets set by DfE)
 - b) The continued recruitment of adoptive carers to meet the needs of Durham children so that these children can be placed with their prospective adopters locally without undue delay
 - c) The continued assessment of adopters wherever possible within the timescales set by DfE
- 8 Significant focus has been on adoption and permanence over the last 3-5 years as part of the DfE Adoption Reform Programme.
- 9 A key driver for the Children and Young Peoples Services is the Placement Efficiency Strategy 2017 which replaces the former Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy but maintains the legal requirements of the Sufficiency Duty.

Key Statistics and Achievements 2016-17

- 10 There were 51 children adopted from care, an increase of 28 on last year, from 23.
- 11 There were 22 prospective adopters in this year, which is fewer than the previous year, the reasons for which are explained in the report.
- 12 There were 65 children approved for adoption, an increase on last year, which reflects the increase in LAC overall.

Conclusion

- 13 The Adoption Services continues to focus on achieving the best outcomes for children and to prevent delay in achieving permanence for all children with a care plan of adoption.
- 14 The increased number of looked after children provides a continued challenge to the service and an improved focus on early permanence planning for children is a key priority for Children and Young Peoples Services in 2017 and into the future.

Recommendation

- 15 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to receive the Annual Report and presentation at the meeting on 29 September 2017 and discuss.

Contact: Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence,
Karen.Robb@durham.gov.uk Tel: 03000 265759

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. The introduction of a 'Fair Access' limit initially in December 2016 of £5000 per child may have financial implications moving forward as therapeutic support which is greater than the fair access limit will have to be match funded by the local authority

Staffing – There are no current implications for staffing. The Adoption Service is a stable and experienced team. The move to Regionalisation may have an impact in the future but it is too early to assess.

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 although the Adoption team is currently situated within the Fostering and Adoption Service at Littleburn Industrial Estate where it is known the contract is under review. Regionalisation brings with it a level of uncertainty as to the future accommodation requirements of the Adoption team.

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: Adoption Service and Adoption Panel Annual report

Attached as a separate document

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Durham County Council

Adoption Service

Annual Report of the Adoption Service and Adoption Panels

1ST April 2016 - 31ST March 2017



INTRODUCTION

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 the service in all areas.

The information presented in this report relates to the activity within Durham County Council's Adoption Service and the activity of the two Adoption Panels.

The report will consider performance during the reporting period from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 and will highlight

- Key activities and achievements of the Adoption Service and Adoption Panels
- Significant changes in adoption practice in England and Wales
- Strategic Priorities for 2017-2018

VISION, VALUES AND AIMS OF DURHAM ADOPTION TEAM

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

- Our core value is that the child is at the centre of all our work and we want the best for Looked After Children, as if they were our own.

We seek to:

- Be the best, most approachable, most responsive, most professional and most supportive Adoption Service in the region.
- Be the highest quality 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 within the service and multi-agencies.
- Be a highly skilled and experienced team, with excellent mix of knowledge, skills and abilities, seeking continual improvement in everything we do.
- 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 and to improve our effectiveness and efficiency.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN ADOPTION: EXTERNAL DRIVERS

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

Regionalising Adoption

Discussions have continued with regard to Regionalisation, which culminated in March 2017 with a Practice Improvement Framework (PIF) bid being submitted, with After Adoption as the lead agency. This bid detailed the proposal that Durham County Council Adoption Service, with Cumbria County Council Adoption Service and Sunderland (now 'Together for Children' registered as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) for adoption), along with the 4 existing voluntary agencies of After Adoption, Barnardos, ARC and DFW Adoption, should set up a collaboration with a view to forming a Regional Organisation in the future. No response is expected until at least September 2017 due to the general election.

Plans to move towards this collaboration are in the early stages, however, all parties are committed to ensuring that any impact on children and families is positive.

Adoption Support

The Adoption Support Fund was changed to include children subject to Special Guardianship (September 2016) and to introduce a 'fair access limit' (December 2016) this is to ensure that funds are utilised in the best way possible, so that children and families receive the support that they need. Any therapeutic support now has a limit of £5000 per child per annum or has to be match funded by the local authority and is available from placement of the child into their adoptive family until the child reaches the age of 18. For the period in question, the service has claimed £101,137.01 for 32 children/families with a further £20,392.50 being claimed following assessment of children's post adoption support needs from external therapeutic organisation/ training (8 children/families)

'Adoption – a vision for change'. This published white paper policy document confirmed the government's determination to radically reform Adoption Services 'by the end of this parliament'.

In Court, final plans of adoption have continued to be delayed due to birth parents seeking to appeal the granting of the Placement Order prior to placement, or seeking to oppose the granting of an Adoption Order once the prospective adopters make their application to adopt. Contested adoptions increase anxiety for prospective adopters as they await the outcome of a court decision prior to proceeding and this causes an increase in the number of days children remain Looked After prior to the making of a final order.

Fewer adopters have been recruited this year, not only within County Durham but nationally. A new targeted Recruitment and Marketing Plan has been developed in order to seek to address this. There has been a reduction in numbers of prospective adopters presented to the Adoption Panel and a reduction in the number of approved adopters over the year.

The adoption team continues to ensure that only adopters who have the necessary skills to meet the needs of children with a plan of adoption are presented to panel for approval. The reduction in the number of available adopters has significantly impacted on the work of the team and made family finding much more difficult and

has also increased the number of inter-agency placements during this reporting period. Whilst the team continue to ensure that placements are sought at the earliest opportunity for the child, this has involved seeking approved adopters from all over the country in order to meet the individual needs of the children. Although this is in line with the government agenda to reduce delay, it does mean that children are being more often placed outside the north east region.

Fostering For Adoption

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 aims to reduce the risks of attachment issues 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 is a key strategic priority and key area of improvement for the service and this practice will be embedded into the service during 2017-2018. Fostering for Adoption continues to be discussed with all prospective adopters during training and assessment. 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. Despite this, this area continues to be pursued by the Looked After Children and Permanence Service and will be promoted more actively during information and assessment processes over the next year.

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.

The Adoption team will now receive early alert notifications from the Public Law Outline (PLO) Panel, so that Fostering for Adoption is considered at a much earlier point in the care planning process. This aims to increase early planning, increase placement stability, reduce the number of moves for children and ultimately achieve permanence as early as possible.

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, served as ADM in the absence of Karen Robb as did Bronwen Smith (nee Keegan) to cover the long-term sickness absence of the Strategic Manager in 2016.
- In March 2017 Chris Bell was appointed as Operations Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle.

- Wendy Ellis is the Team Manager.
- There continues to be a core group of ten experienced social workers in the team.
- There were 22 Adoption Panel meetings during the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.
- Stella Chambers has continued to serve as Adoption Panel Administrator, supported by Catherine Dawson.
- The Adoption Panels' Independent Chairs, Mary Greenwood and Barbara Brelsford, 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 2016 in respect of recent changes in practice with regard to Family Finding. This was joint training with Panel Members and the Adoption Service/LAC Permanence Team in attendance.
- The Adoption Service reviewed its targeted Recruitment and Marketing Strategy for 2015-2018 and this has continued to be revisited and refined especially due to the decline in interest in Adoption and the increase in the numbers of Looked After Children in Durham
- Durham County Council 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 post placement and post adoption financial support and allowance continues to be high. This group consists of children with identified complex needs and sibling groups. At 31st March 2017, 112 children's families were in receipt of an adoption allowance at an annual cost of £701,144. Each individual adoption allowance is reviewed on an annual basis and can be paid until a child is 18 or beyond where additional needs are identified.
- The majority of the children placed with prospective adopters enjoyed stability and security in their new permanent families. In spite of intensive social work and multi-agency support, one child's adoptive placement disrupted in 2016. A Disruption Meeting was held to consider why this happened and whether lessons can be learned for the future from this relatively rare event. Panel training is in the process of being arranged in order that all involved can evaluate and take learning from this report.
- The Annual Family Summer Fun Day took place in July 2016, and the popular Christmas Party was held in December 2016, where Santa made another welcome annual appearance. Both events were well received and attended by adopters and their children and families.

- On 18th March 2017 the service arranged a Future Families DVD event where 14 of the "harder to place children" (children in sibling groups or children with complex needs) were featured via DVD and an information stall. 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 detailed information about the children. At the time of writing this report the outcome is still being evaluated. Interest was expressed by prospective adopters in 8 of the children featured, however not all were suitable to meet those children's needs. Two links are progressing to match as a result of the event.
- The Adoption Service was also considered by OFSTED as part of their inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The inspection commenced on 22nd February 2016 and concluded on 18th March 2016, with a final report being published on 16th May 2016. The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is good with the following taken directly from the report itself;
 - *The adoption service in Durham is very child focused. Achieving a lifelong placement for children 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. This ensures that children awaiting placement are known to the managers and the team, keeping them at the forefront of the process. Progress of prospective adopters is also tracked. Since November 2015, this new system has had a positive impact in reducing the time between placement order and being matched. This is currently at 179 days, against a set target of 230 days.*
 - *All children who require an adoptive placement have a child permanence report completed by the LAC permanence team. This team has been in place since April 2014. The agency decision maker (ADM) and panel chair report that the quality of reports has improved over the past year. Permanence reports sampled by the inspectors were mainly good, with child-focused and reflective assessments.*
 - *Children are well prepared for adoption. All have personalised child-friendly timetables and information booklets to ensure that they are fully informed and involved in their plans. The adoption service has an established letter-box system, to coordinate indirect contact. This is sensitive to all and thorough in its processes. The later life letters seen are written in a clear and candid way that give a summary of the child's history. Life story work is child centred and includes all the people involved in a child's journey. The service is committed to ensuring that children receive Life Story Books by the time that the Adoption Order is made, and recognise this is as an area for improvement.*
 - *Children's needs are very well supported and assessed by the Full Circle service. This is a therapeutic service that is offered to all children looked after. This service is highly commended by all professionals and adopters who spoke with inspectors. To ensure that the right placements are requested for brothers and sisters, Full Circle workers complete a thorough assessment of each child's needs. All placement requests for brothers and sisters to stay together have been achieved in the past year. The Full Circle service is also involved in the training of prospective adopters. In addition, a clinical psychologist meets with all adopters before matching takes place. The needs of each child are holistically and realistically presented to the potential*

matched carers. This is supported by the work of the adoption team and has resulted in only one disruption in the past 12 months. The panel and the service reflected on this disruption to capture learning and consider any changes to improve services.

- *The national adoption scorecard measures the average length of time between children becoming looked after and being placed for adoption. Performance against this indicator is an improving picture. For 2014–15, a sizeable reduction of 102 days was achieved from the previous year, at 449 days. The latest information for this year shows a further positive reduction to 421 days, which is again below the national target.*
- *The local authority's recruitment strategy for adopters is not based on an analysis of predicted numbers, needs and profiles of children, which is an omission. However, the service attracts a large number of enquiries, and a broad range of recruitment activity is employed. Adopters are prepared and trained to a good standard. This training is currently being refreshed to ensure that it is inclusive to all potential adoptive families, reflects current practices and presents a realistic and balanced perspective on both positive and challenging aspects of adoption. Inspectors saw evidence of good-quality assessment practice. Adopters confirmed to inspectors that they are positive about the communication they had received following their initial enquiry, subsequent assessment visits, and training and support (Recommendation).*
- *The adoption service promotes the adoption register for adopters who have been approved by the panel if they are unable to be considered for a match immediately. There have been no fostering-to-adopt placements made, with only one placement available currently. This aspect of the service is in the early stages of development and is recognised by the authority as an area for further development.*
- *The quality of post-adoption support is good. The Full Circle service provides an accessible, timely and comprehensive range of therapeutic techniques to support children and families.*
- *The adoption panel is well managed and appropriately constituted. Feedback from adopters who have attended the panel is positive. It demonstrates effective oversight of adoption decisions and the approval of adopters. The chair of the panel and the agency decision maker, along with other key professionals, meet quarterly to discuss issues and challenges that have occurred. This ensures that the practice of the panel and service is informed by research and evidence-based practice. The adoption panel plays a key role in quality assurance, providing appropriate challenge and clear decision making.*

**RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS:
April 2016 - March 2017**

Table 1: Initial Enquiry

	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Initial Contact	15	11	17	8	14	13	16	15	11	29	13	13	175 (203)
Attendees at Information Events	4	2	1	1	2	6	8	0	2	10	6	6	48
Number of Enquiry Forms	6	3	12	6	9	5	4	15	4	10	7	7	88 (144)
Initial Visits	2	3	1	4	3	1	1	2	3	3	3	2	28 (45)
ROI Accepted	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	1	3	4	4	2	29 (37)
Training	-	-	-	6	-	4	0	4	0	6	0	8	28 (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. This led to a reduced number of enquiry forms, initial visits and ROI's accepted, with only 28 people attending training.

The service continues to ensure that enquiries are screened and evaluated thoroughly, which ensures that applicants are appropriate and suitable to progress. Following training it was discovered that a number of enquirers were not actually in a position to proceed with their application due to personal issues and these were placed on hold in accordance with procedures where applicants can take up to 6 month gap between Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the adoption process.

There has been a significant reduction in the interest in adoption over the last 12 months. The targeted Recruitment and Marketing Strategy has continued but has failed to generate sufficient interest from prospective adopters to apply to adopt with Durham County Council. The service continues to advertise continually on Durham's website and Facebook page as well as more broadly in the community. There has also been ongoing advertising for both fostering and adoption on Durham County Council's pool cars and buses. Staff also attended the recent Durham Pride Event where the Adoption Service was promoted and staff were in attendance to give information and advice.

The experience of Durham is not unusual in the local or national context. The number of children with complex needs has increased and the reduction in the availability of approved adopters has resulted in fewer suitable families when utilising the additional resources of Linkmaker and/or the Adoption Register.

Within the North East there are 2 other regional adoption agency proposals. Firstly, Adoption North East- Northumberland, Newcastle, North and South Tyneside and Gateshead, secondly, Adopt Teesside- Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Darlington. There is no proposal for wider collaborative work amongst the twelve Local Authorities in the North East Region as these groups work now within their own areas, despite the increase in Looked After children and therefore in the numbers of children with a plan of permanence via adoption.

Prospective Adopter Assessment

Recruitment Target

Durham County Council's Adoption Service aimed to recruit and approve enough families of prospective adopters during 2016/17 to meet the needs of Durham children with a plan of adoption and 22 adoptive families were approved last year. The reasons for this reduction in performance compared to the previous year due to a reduction in the numbers of enquiries from prospective adopters, and the majority wished to adopt a child without complex needs in order to become parents, often following issues with their own fertility.

A greater emphasis has been placed on ensuring that recruitment is targeted to the specific needs of children who require adoption, which it is hoped will improve performance in the coming year.

Table 2: Number of Prospective Adopters Approved 1st April 2016 – 31st March 2017

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Approvals	0	2	3	2	2	0	0	3	1	3	2	4	22
0-1 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-3 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3-6 months	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	9
6-12 months	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	3	0	2	1	1	13
12 months +	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2015/16	0	4	2	4	5	1	4	4	3	3	4	1	35

This table shows the length of time between the ROI received and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt. This demonstrates that the majority of adopters took longer than the 6 months, which is the Government requirement. Where timescales are extended this is due to a range of different reasons including;

- Medical concerns
- Applicants delay in providing information
- Applicants choosing to take a 6 month break between Stage 1 and Stage 2
- Applicants not making themselves available for assessment
- Disclosure and Barring Service issues and availability of panel.

The services are delivered by the Adoption Services and continue to be focussed on recruitment and training activities that are continuously reviewed to enable the recruitment of sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children who have a plan of adoption.

Inter-Agency Placements of children with DCC adopters

One Durham County Council approved adoptive family was matched with children from Sunderland generating income to the local authority. All other approved adopters have been matched to Durham Children.

Children Approved for Adoption

Table 3: Number of Children Approved for Adoption by Agency Decision Maker

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2016/17	0	5	6	5	9	6	8	2	5	7	3	9	65
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 a small increase in the number of looked after children in Durham approved for permanence through adoption compared to 2015/16 and 2014/15. However this small increase is in the context of a significant increase in the total number of Looked After Children during this period. This is indicative of the complex needs of the Looked After population and the challenges in making and securing Adoption Plans for these children.

Table 4: Children with a plan of adoption whose plans have changed.

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2016/17	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	4

There is a significant reduction in the number of children's plans that changed away from adoption with only 4 compared to 19 in the previous year. This is mainly due to a change in the Courts who are again beginning to favour adoption as a positive choice for children who can no longer remain with their birth family.

Children with an Adoption Plan Waiting for Placement

As at 31 March 2017 there were 43 children with a plan of adoption awaiting placement

Number of children with Placement Order at 31 March 2017

There were 34 children who were the subject of a Placement Order

Number of children with Agency Decision Maker approval but awaiting a Placement Order 31 March 2017

There were 40 children with an agreed plan and for whom a Placement Order was not yet in place. This is again indicative of court imposed time-tabling which create delay in securing children's plans. There are also children placed and awaiting an order being made.

Matching

Table 5: Number of DCC Adopters Matched to a Child

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2016/17	4	2	1	3	2	1	0	2	2	4	4	5	30
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

Children Placed for Adoption

Table 6: Number of Children Placed for Adoption April 2016 – March 2017

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
DCC	1	4	1	4	2	0	1	3	4	4	3	5	32
DCC- FC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
VAA	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
OLA	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Total	2	4	1	7	5	0	2	3	4	5	3	7	43
2015/16	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

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

Due to the lack of available adopters within Durham, particularly those who could consider a child with complex needs, there was an increase in the number of children placed with Voluntary Agencies and other local authorities, as the adoption team remain committed to placing children with their new families at the earliest opportunity.

Number of Children Placed for Adoption Awaiting Adoption Orders

There were 35 children placed for adoption and awaiting an adoption order as at 31st March 2017.

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 2018.

6. Adoption Orders

Table 7: No. of Adoption Orders granted

DCC	43
VAA	1
OLA	7
DCC-FC	0
Total	51
2015/16	28
2014/15	43

Fifty one adoption orders were granted during the period of 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. This was a significant increase on the previous year, 28, and more than 14/15 when 43 children were adopted.

The number of birth parents who contest the Placement Order, or oppose the granting of the Adoption Order at the Initial Birth Parent Hearing has increased and is now the norm. In the majority of cases, their application or appeal has eventually not been granted, but this has continued to cause hearings to be adjourned until a later date causing delay in the granting of the Adoption Order. This creates anxiety for adopters who require and receive support from their adoption worker at this time, and extends the duration of time that the children remain Looked After.

Table 8: Pre-Adoption Order Disruption

DCC	1
VAA	0
OLA	0
DCC-FC	0
Total	1
2015/16	1

One child who had been placed for adoption by Durham County Council was sadly returned to the care of the Local Authority following an Adoption Disruption.

Table 9: Non agency adoptions (step parent adoptions)

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2016/17	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
2015/16	0	0	3	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	8

Although there continues to be a high level of applications for assessment for non-agency adoptions these appear to be more and more complex with the majority of enquiries not progressing to full assessment following initial visit.

Post 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 the provision of support due to The Full Circle Therapeutic Service, which provides bespoke therapeutic interventions in a timely manner. No other local authorities have this service and it is a strong element in our recruitment and support offer.

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 at the time of the match 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 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 Virtual School 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) when required.
- 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. For the period in question Full Circle has claimed £101,137.01 (32 children/families) with a further £20,392.50 being claimed following assessment of children's post adoption support needs from outside therapeutic organisation/ training (8 children/families). Total £121,529.51. (2015/16 £145,122.27). The reduction is due largely to unexpected changes by Government to funding available and the 'fair access' limit introduced by Government in December 2016 to manage the high number and costs of applications across the country.
- 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. All adopters are offered the opportunity to attend the attachment course either prior to or following placement.

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 and their parents 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 was changed to After Adoption in April 2017 following a competitive process. Early indications are that After Adoption has a better understanding of the tasks involved in supporting adoptive families which will ultimately lead to a better service provided
- Family and Friends of Adoption events take place 6 times a year and are facilitated by Life Story Co-ordinator. 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.

Birth Records Counselling

When a child reaches the age of 18 they can apply to view their birth records and make an application to Durham County Council and are supported to do so. Records are sought and the adopted person is supported to view them either by an experienced member of the team or After Adoption. Last year 8 people received birth records counselling.

Enquiries Access to Adoption Information by Adopted Adults

There was an increase to 41 from 28 in the previous year of enquiries for adopted adults.

Referrals to Parents & Children (PAC) UK

There were 24 referrals to PAC (UK) mainly from contemporary birth parents last year.

Request for an Assessment of Post-Adoption Support Needs

Twenty four requests were received for post adoption support.

Number of referrals to Adoption Support Fund

There were 46 referrals to the Adoption Support Fund.

New Adoption Allowance Agreed

The number of children receiving adoption financial support and allowance remains high. At w/c 26th March 2017 112 children's families were in receipt of an adoption allowance at a weekly cost £13,483.55. Twenty three new allowances were agreed last year.

Contact Plans and 'The Post Box' Service

Four hundred and ninety nine adoptive families, 292 birth mothers, 210 birth fathers, 103 Birth Maternal Grandparents, 47 paternal grandparents and 39 significant others are logged for the exchange of indirect contact annually making a total of 1190 separate indirect contact episodes. This increases with every child matched.

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 informal tracing or unsolicited child/parent contact occurring. This continues to cause significant distress to adopters and the dangers of this are highlighted within the ICP training.

Life Story Work Consultations

Table 16: Number of Consultations

Year	Social Workers	Social Work Assistant	Residential Workers	Foster Carers	Adopters	Others	Total
2016/17	19	11	0	26	67	15	138
2015/16	23	7	0	23	56	2	111
2014/15	22	17	8	23	29	4	103
2013/14	85	43	22	34	58	19	261

Training and consultation has continued to be the main focus of the life story work and there are ongoing developments in both these areas including an opportunity to have the voice of the child present on the Family and Friends workshop and also the Adoption Preparation and Counselling course. This has included the production of a piece of film work with an adopted child in Durham and also the ability to access and use a film which includes the voice of teens and their views and experiences of adoption that the life story co-ordinator was involved with in Leeds .

Recent developments have also included the setting up of a supported peer group for adopters. The Adopters Voice is in its early stages, however we had a positive first meeting mid-March and are planning for an innovative and creative future which will include, self-care elements as well as learning and sharing.

Application for Investing in Children status has been submitted and the evidence that has been provided includes the film of our young person talking about adoption and their experiences, discussion with a birth child regarding their involvement during their families preparation to adopt and the update of the Children’s Guide to Adoption. We are also planning to include the voice of the child, wherever possible, to the Adoption Facebook page.

Another area of growth and development within life story work has been the regular and consistent consideration to provide Life Appreciation days for children in Durham with older children, children in sibling groups, children with complex needs and children placed outside Durham. In the last year we have hosted 6 which has also provided an opportunity to work more closely with birth family which been a positive experience for these children and will support the information held in their life story.

Feedback from Adopters

The Adoption team has received positive feedback at all stages of the adoption process (available on request). Quotes from adopters have been added to the advertising campaigns where permission has been given.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2017/18

The Adoption Service “Statement of Purpose” sets out the aims and objectives of the team.

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

- Recruitment and 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.
- Fostering to Adopt to become more embedded in the information and assessment processes and to raise awareness of this within early care planning to ensure early permanence is achieved wherever possible.
- Family Finding will be proactive in order to provide placement choice and to avoid unnecessary delays in placing children in new families. Following a plan of Adoption being approved by the Agency Decision Maker a family finder is allocated so their needs can be considered and they can be featured appropriately. This will continue to 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.
- Timely, efficient and high quality support to be provided, utilising The Adoption Support Fund to ensure that placement stability is maximised.
- 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.
- To contribute to and support the plan to regionalise adoption services in order to consolidate resources and reduce delay for children with a plan of adoption. This will present both opportunities and challenges for the Adoption Service in the future.

Chris Bell
Operations Manager
Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle

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