



Corporate Parenting Panel

Date **Friday 25 October 2019**
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**

Theme - Adoption

1. Adoption Services Update and discussion item - Report of Andrea Houlahan, Strategic Manager (Pages 3 - 24)
 - a) Presentation (Pages 25 - 32)
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Substitute Members
4. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2019 (Pages 33 - 38)
5. Declarations of Interest
6. Number of Looked After Children - Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care
7. Ofsted Updates including ASC and ILACS feedback
8. Update from Investing in Children
9. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.
10. 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)

11. Regulation 44 Visits - Summary Report - Joint Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care and Martyn Stenton, Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children (Pages 39 - 84)
12. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Helen Lynch

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
17 October 2019

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

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

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton,
J Considine, P Crathorne, J Grant, I Jewell, P Jopling,
M McKeon, L Maddison, J Makepeace, O Milburn, C Potts,
A Reed, G Richardson, E Scott, M Simmons, C Wilson

Co-opted Members

C Baines
N Harrison
K Myers
W Taylor
K Watson
Young person representative of the Children in Care Council
(CiCC)

Contact: Jill Hogg

Tel: 03000 269 711

Corporate Parenting Panel

25 October 2019

Report on the Adoption Service 2018/19



Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 Annual review of the Permanence and Adoption Service for 2018/19 including the identification of service priorities for 2019/20.

Executive summary

- 2 In 2018/19 there was an increase in the number of children placed for adoption by Durham County Council (from 35 in 2017/18 to **49** in 2018/19). There is consistency in the number of placement orders granted to Durham County Council by the Courts; (in 2017/18 54 Placement Orders were granted and 2018/19 **55** Placement Orders were granted). Durham successfully made 10 Foster to Adopt placements in 2018/19, leading to good outcomes for these children.
- 3 The service continues to provide a wide range of high quality support to prospective adopters and routinely receives good feedback from them.
- 4 In 2018/19 Durham County Council Adoption Service used a number of inter-agency placements (other LA's and Voluntary Adoption Agency's) due to the lack of available in-house adopters. This continues to significantly impact upon the expenditure of the Adoption service. Invoices to the value of £863,386 (**an overspend of £629,015**) were paid in 2018/19 for inter-agency placements – with future year commitments for final payment to Providers of £189,333 resulting from the same placements.
- 5 In February 2019 the County Council awarded the service an additional £1.4 million growth to address the identified budget pressure in connection with interagency adoptions.
- 6 There are a number of service priorities for 2019/20 including the need to recruit a diverse and increased number of adopters including foster to

adopt (F2A), to meet the need and demand of children with a plan of adoption.

- 7 In addition, Durham Adoption Service will become part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by March 2020. Durham County Council Adoption Service are already working alongside RAA partners (including; Sunderland City Council: Together for Children and Cumbria County Council).

Recommendation

- 8 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are required to:
 - (a) note the contents of the report and proposed priorities.

Background

- 9 Nationally the number of children becoming looked after continues to rise.
- 10 Nationally Local Authorities continue to struggle to recruit the number of adopters to meet the need and demand of children with a plan of adoption.
- 11 Research indicated that early permanence is the least disruptive for children. To date Durham have placed 10 children in foster to adopt (F2A) placements.
- 12 The creation of the RAA was in part the Government's response to the high number of inter-agency fees.

Data Accuracy

- 13 The data has been taken from current spreadsheets held by the local authority in respect of children with a plan of adoption and the adoption service activities.
- 14 Due to the timing of this report and the migration to Liquid Logic it has not been possible to obtain this information from Liquid Logic due to the backlog of data migration. The practice will need to be monitored closely on Liquid Logic moving forward to ensure the adoption information is recorded accurately to inform future reporting and the transition to a RAA.
- 15 In addition, there is need for greater scrutiny of inter-agency placements, including the impact of placing a child out local area and the impact this has on the child/ren and their adopters /adopters in accessing after adoption support.

Achievements in 2018/19

- 16 There continues to be a good quality adoption service support from Dr Joyce Powell Consultant Clinical Psychologist and the Full Circle Therapeutic team
- 17 Children placed for adoption have enjoyed a stable and secure placement with their permanent families and there have been no adoption disruptions in this period.
- 18 Children with plans of adoption have been matched in a timely way and placed at the earliest opportunity and where necessary if in-house carers cannot be identified local, regional and national searches have been utilised.
- 19 Activities days held, in partnership with Sunderland City Council Together for Children and Cumbria County Council adoption services, where children with a plan of adoption have been featured has continued to prove a positive way of identifying and securing matches for children and adopters.
- 20 To date Durham has made 10 Fostering to Adopt placements

Key Priorities: The key priority areas to continue in the new financial year remain:

- 21 The adoption service to make and sustain stable adoptions placements and ensure lifelong needs of those affected by adoption are met
- 22 The adoption service continues to have a clear focus on recruitment in the current competitive market and that there is a priority in recruiting adopters to match the needs of children who have a plan of adoption.
- 23 Adoption recruitment to focus on increasing in-house adopters who live locally and within the region so that children can live as closely to their birth communities as possible.
- 24 Every child will have an allocated family finder at the point of adoption referral, allowing the greatest opportunity for their needs to be matched when placed with their new families.
- 25 Family finding to be proactive and provide placement choice, avoiding any delays for the placement of children with their new families as soon as possible.
- 26 A continued focus on the implementation of the Regionalise Adoption Agency.

27 A continued commitment to embedding the early permanency strategy to ensure that children's plans are progressed in a timely way so that those with plans of adoption are placed at the earliest opportunity.

Other useful documents

- Marketing and Recruitment Strategy

Author: Andrea Houlahan Tel: 03000 263991

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Section 3 Adoption and Children Act 2002 places a duty on each local authority to maintain within their area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of:

- (a) children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians,
- (b) persons wishing to adopt a child, and
- (c) adopted persons, their adoptive parents and natural parents

By making arrangements for the adoption of children and for the provision of adoption support services. The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 contain detailed requirements which local authorities must comply with in order to comply with this duty.

Finance

There has been investment in CYPS to support the ongoing work within the adoption service.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

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Durham County Council Adoption Service

Annual Report of the Adoption & Permanence Service

1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

Adopt with us



Durham County Council Adoption Service overview

- The Head of Children's Services is Helen Fergusson.
- Karen Robb, Strategic Manager, for Looked After Children and Permanence Service has continued to serve as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- Carmel Murray, Operations Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Full Circle was appointed and took up the role of Adoption Agency Advisor for Child's Permanence Reports in August 2018. She left Durham County Council to take up employment in a neighbouring authority in March 2019.
- Sara Peterson Team Manager has assumed the role of Adoption Agency Advisor in respect of children's cases.
- There continues to be a core group of experienced and skilled social workers in the Adoption Team.
- The newly created three Social Work Consultants have dedicated practice lead roles. Lindsey Gray leads Post Adoption Support, Sarah Fitzpatrick leads Early Permanence and Family Finding, and Wendy Ellis leads (From May 2019) Recruitment Assessment and Adopter Training.
- The Team Manager Adoption post is currently vacant. A permanent appointment has been made and the new Team Manager will start in September. The changes in management arrangements over the year have been difficult for the team and the service.
- There were 23 Adoption Panel meetings held during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.
- Dianne Main has continued to serve as Adoption Panel Administrator, supported by Emma Dobie and Catherine Dawson.
- The Adoption Panel Independent Chairs, Barbara Brelsford and Mary Greenwood, Agency Medical Advisor / Vice-Chairman Dr Sally Wade and Independent Panel Members continue to contribute to the training and preparation courses for prospective adopters.
- Elected Members are also Panel Members. These are Councillor Ivan Jewell and Councillor Heather Smith.
- Annual Appraisals for Adoption Panel members continue to be conducted and have been completed within the year. Regular monthly information drop in sessions were held throughout this period.

- Information, counselling and preparation courses (ICP) have been held as part of the adopter's recruitment and assessment. Further training, preparation and counselling courses will be planned, however will be jointly undertaken with our RAA partners, Sunderland City Council: Together for Children and Cumbria County Council. (In 2020, Durham Adoption Service will become part of a Regional Adoption Agency - RAA).
- Durham Children and Young Peoples Services continue to provide good quality adoption support services with therapeutic input from Dr Joyce Powell, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, and the Full Circle Therapeutic Team.
- The number of adopters receiving an adoption allowance for their child / children remains high. Currently 80 families are receiving an allowance totalling £770,228.16 per year.
- Children with care plans of adoption and who are placed with prospective adopters have enjoyed stability and security in their new permanent families and there have been no adoption disruptions in this period.
- All children with a care plan of adoption are matched with suitable adopters. Wherever possible the match has taken place at the earliest opportunity.
- Where children cannot be matched with in house adopters this is identified quickly to avoid delay and a local, regional and national search is undertaken at the earliest opportunity to ensure that a placement is identified to meet the children's needs.
- In partnership with Sunderland City Council Together for Children and Cumbria County Council Adoption Services; Activity Days have been held throughout the year feature children with a care plan of adoption. This has proved to be a positive experience for both children and adopters. There have been several positive matches identified using this approach.
- To meet the needs of children in Durham, particularly new born babies and infants there has been an increase in the numbers of Fostering to Adopt placements (F2A). These placements provide children the opportunity to move into their new permanent family at the earliest opportunity. The placement is with approved adopters who have additional temporary approval as foster carers. When the courts grant a Placement Order the child's placement and status changes from fostering to 'placed for adoption'). To date, Durham have made 10 Fostering to Adopt placements.
- The Annual Family Summer Fun Day took place in July 2018, and the Christmas Party was held in December 2018. Both events were well received and attended. A Summer Fun Day and Christmas Party will be arranged in 2019.

As an Adoption Agency we will

- Ensure that children are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay.
- Treat prospective adopters and adopters with openness, fairness and respect.
- Make prospective adopters' first points of contact informative and welcoming.
- Approach adopter recruitment in the spirit of inclusiveness with a view to identifying potential and opportunity – no-one should be automatically excluded.
- Recruit prospective adopters who can meet all or most of the needs of children waiting for, or likely to need, adoption and signpost prospective adopters to other agencies if there is insufficient local demand.
- Explain to prospective adopters the needs and profiles of the children waiting to be adopted.
- Ensure preparation and training, the home study assessment, and approval process are explained and proceed efficiently.
- Regularly review progress on matching with prospective adopters, and where a match cannot be found locally inform waiting adopters about 'Linkmaker' (an independent organisation where children who have a plan of adoption are feature nationally).
- Provide adopters and prospective adopters with information, counselling and support, as and when needed, throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- Provide prospective adopters with information about the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).
- Work in partnership, and with other agencies and the Courts, to ensure that all decisions are timely and joined-up.

The Adoption Service is committed to reflecting the spirit and intentions of the Adopters Charter 2011.

Service information – Children

Number of children referred to adoption 1/4/18-31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
15	10	1	4	5	3	16	6	2	7	9	3	81

Comparison 2017/18 - 101

Number of agency decisions of a plan of adoption 1/4/18-31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
6	5	10	1	0	4	20	3	7	15	5	1	77

Comparison 2017/18 - 61

Placement Orders granted 1/4/18-31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
4	3	3	6	7	1	3	12	3	8	3	2	55

Comparison 2017/18 - 54

Children matched at panel and placed for Adoption 1/4/18-31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
5	6	2	4	10	3	6	1	2	4	2	4	49

Comparison 2017/18 - 35

Children made subject to Adoption Orders 1/4/18-31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2	7	2	2	4	5	4	9	2	4	4	2	44

Comparison 2017/18 – 53

The total number of children who were placed but not yet adopted including those from previous years at the end of March 19 is :21

Disruptions 1/4/18-31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Comparison 2017/18 – 0

At the end of March 2019 there were **59 children with ADM**, allocated for family finding. Of the 59 children 36 had Placement Orders. Of the 36 with Placement Orders 17 have strong links and either progressing to panel or being explored. Family Finding is continuing for the other 19 children.

Summary:

The figures for 2018/19 show there has been a decrease in the number of referrals in comparison to the previous year (from 101 on 2017/18 to **81** in 2018/19).

There has been an increase in plans of adoption being agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (from 61 on 2017/18 to **77** in 2018/19). The number of Placement Orders are similar; (in 2017/18 54 Placement Orders were granted and 2018/19 **55** Placement Orders were granted).

In comparison to 2017/18 there has been an increase in children matched and placed for adoption (from 35 in 2017/18 to **49** in 2018/19).

Durham County Council Adoption Service have increasingly several inter-agency placements due to insufficient suitable inhouse adopters being available. Consequently; in 2018/19 a total of **44** children were matched with adopters from other adoption agencies (LA or VAA – Voluntary Adoption Agency). This has a significant impact on the budget and expenditure for looked after children resulting in **an overspend of £629,015** in respect of 37 children, for inter-agency placements in the 2018/19. Additionally, the increase in inter-agency placements impacts upon workloads of staff working across all teams as they often spend significant period travelling throughout the country to consider prospective matches and support adoptive placements.

The figures for 2018/19 show that there has been a decrease in the number of children being made subject to an Adoption Order. In 2017/18 53 children were made subject to an Adoption Order and in 2018/19 only **44** children were made subject to an Adoption Order.

Of all the children who are currently placed with approved adopters, **21** of those children currently do not have an Adoption Order. Adopters can apply for the Adoption Order 10 weeks after the child is placed and in most circumstances the adopters will make the application. There are instances where an adoptive placement may need a further period of review and in these instances, adopters are advised and/or chose to delay applying for the Adoption Order. A further example which may delay the granting of Adoption Order is when birth parents further contest the plan of Adoption.

There were no pre-Adoption Order disruptions in 2017/18 or 2018/19. The last disruption was in 2015, this is testament to the skill of our staff in matching and the support provided to our adopters and children in placement.

Achieving Early Permanence

In August 2018 Durham CYPS launched our Early Permanence Strategy and our teams are working hard to further embed the strategy and the Care Planning for children to improve outcomes and reduce delay. The primary focus of Early Permanency Planning is to prevent children drifting within looked after arrangements-and to provide a clear practice framework focussing on permanency.

Durham County Council is committed as a Corporate Parent for Children looked after and young people and will work diligently to find permanent, safe homes for children in care that meet their specific needs, in a timely manner. There are now much stronger and improved ways in which we work with social work teams across the County to ensure we are delivering the aims and objectives of our Early Permanence Strategy

The Adoption Team works closely with the Looked After Permanence Team and the Pre-Birth Teams. The LAC Permanence team are primarily responsible for writing the Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) and for collating life-story work for those children with a plan of adoption. Where childrens cases are held within the Pre Birth Team they will undertake the CPR`s and associated work. This means that workers are particularly skilled and experienced in this area and this means the overall quality of the work is good whilst also reducing delay for children. Once a Placement Order has been granted the Permanence Team, the Pre Birth Team and Adoption Team will work together to undertake family finding, preparing the child for adoption, and putting together a plan for introductions and adoption a support plan, including statutory documents and court reports.

Fostering to Adopt (F2A)

Durham are actively recruiting adopters who can offer a foster to adopt placement for babies and infants. Research concludes that babies / young children who are in the care system are often moved between carers prior to the courts reaching a decision about who will care for the child in the long term. The move of placements can impact on a child's emotional well-being. Early Permanence Planning and using F2A placements removes the risk of placement moves or disruption by placing a child early with adopters, who are initially approved as adopters who can also foster. If the courts agree a plan of adoption the child remains in placement with a change only from one of fostering placement to one of an adoption placement. To date

Durham have made **12** Foster to Adopt (F2A) Placements which is a fantastic achievement. The feedback from those adopters who have undertaken these placements despite the anxieties is very positive and the service is now having these carers talk to prospective adopters about their experiences.

Service Information - Adoption Recruitment

Adopters' recruitment to approval 1/4/18- 31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
1	1	2	1	5	3	1	2	4	1	3	4	28

Comparison 2017/18 – 21

Adopters matching 1/4/18- 31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
5	3	3	8	9	4	3	3	2	3	2	4	49

Comparison 2017/18 – 44

Summary:

The figures for 2018/19 show there has been an increase in the number of adopters recruited and approved. In 2017/18 there were 21 adopters recruited and approved and this year there have been **28** adopters recruited and approved.

There has also been an increase in the number of adopters matched to children, as there were 44 adopters matched to children in 2017/18 to **49** in 2018/19 (including inter-agency adoptions, 17 were Durham adopters); whilst it is positive, most Local Authorities and or RAA's are seeking interagency placements at a cost, due the shortage of available / suitable adopters. (as noted, Durham Adoption Service spent £863,386 in 2018/19 for interagency placements, an overspend of £629,015).

Service information – Post Adoption Support

After Adoption support**

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
5	6	5	5	5	4	0	5	5	9	4	**	53

** After Adoption North East ceased trading with immediate effect in March 2019.

Children placed for adoption and their families often require additional support over the period of their childhood and Durham has always been a forerunner in the provision of support due to our ‘ **Full Circle Therapeutic Service**’. This team provides bespoke therapeutic interventions in a timely manner. (In 2018/19 Full Circle offered consultations, support or training to **102** prospective adopters / adoptive families).

Adoption support needs are identified early and are evaluated during assessment, matching and placement to achieve positive outcomes for children. Where required additional support from a wide range of services is available. In addition to Full Circle the team may access the support and or advice from the Dedicated Looked After Nurses, Life Story Co-ordinator, and Medical Adviser.

Durham Adoption Service also offer access to informal “buddy” support from approved adopters, for our newly approved adopters.

The Virtual School Service offers a wide range of support, advice and guidance to adopters and professionals with regards 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).

Durham Adoption Allowances 1/4/18-31/3/19

Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
0	3	0	1	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	11

At **31/3/19 80 families** were receiving an allowance totalling £770,228.16 per year.

Number of Indirect Contact Arrangements in place

We have 3230 post adoption events in 2018/19 which includes adoption allowance reviews, indirect contact with adopters and 646 birth families involved in post adoption contact managed by Adoption admin which includes birth mothers, birth fathers, grandparents and significant others) and 11 new Adoption Allowances.

Number of referrals to Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund has now been available since 2015 to access funds for therapeutic support for adopted children and their families. In the year 2018/19 a total of **£184,783.30** was claimed from the fund for the support of children placed by and within County Durham. During the period 78 applications were made, 5 of these were withdrawn. This resulted in 73 approved applications. Of these 60 were for adopted children and 13 for children subject to a Special Guardianship Order who are also within scope of the fund.

Contact Plans and 'The Post Box'

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

Life Story Work Consultations

All adopters are offered a consultation with our Life-story Co-ordinator Ingrid Ford at the point of professional's meetings; prior to matching panel. They also meet her at the ICP group.

'Family and Friends of Adopters' Events take place 6 times a year. These events are well received by the friends and families of prospective adopters and the feedback received is excellent.

Birth Records Counselling

When a child reaches the age of 18 they can apply to view their birth records and make an application to DCC. Records are sought and adopted persons are supported to view them either by the adoption team or by our Service level provider. Many of these applications are transferred to our service level provider.

Non-Agency Adoption Applications

Most non-agency adoptions are processed and assessed by an Adoption Social Worker who has extensive experience in this area of work. 4 non-agency adoption orders were granted in 2018/19. This this does not reflect the workload as most non-agency adoptions require a significant amount of assessment before it becomes apparent that they will / will not progress.

Regionalisation

The **Regionalising Adoption Guidance** was issued in June 2015. The focus of this was to encourage Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) to strengthen their relationships to improve speedier matching of children, improve adopter recruitment and support, and to reduce costs around children looked after, it required all adoption agencies to consider how they can work more closely in their regions.

The **Education and Adoption Act 2016** introduced powers to require Local Authorities and VAAs to join together to form Regional Adoption Agencies (**RAAs**).

The Vision for a Regionalised Adoption System:

'A system where matching is as quick as possible, recruitment is as effective as possible and adoption support quality is high'

Coast to Coast is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) partnership of five Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA), After Adoption, ARC Adoption, Barnardos NE, Caritas Care and DFW Adoption together with Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children Sunderland.

Coast to Coast will deliver high quality, adoption services across the three local authority areas, raising performance to the levels of the highest performing Adoption Agencies and improving outcomes for children across the region.

Within the RAA there will be an opportunity to establish mechanisms to ensure a wider overview of our children who become looked after, opportunities to develop clearer transparency and protocols for Early Permanence Planning for children (EPP) and increased opportunities to share costs and to benefit from economies of scale. Durham's County Council's Adoption Service will continue to be a key partner in working towards the development of the new 'Coast to Coast RAA which is set to go live by April 2020.

Service Objectives

Objectives of the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service is committed to achieving best outcomes through the continual development and delivery of a range of high-quality services via a combination of 'in-house' provision and in partnership with other agencies.

The Adoption Service's key objectives are:

- Ensure that children are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay and are matched and placed with prospective adopters who can meet most, if not all, of their assessed needs.
- To ensure that children live with prospective adopters where they are loved, feel safe and are safe, where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted. Where they are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities. Where they are supported to achieve their educational potential and where the education and achievements of children is valued and promoted.
- To recruit, prepare and approve prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of looked after children who are to be placed for adoption and who can provide them with a home where the child will feel loved, safe and secure.

- To ensure that the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the over-riding objectives to promote the welfare of children throughout their lives.
- To ensure that contact with birth parents, siblings, other members of the birth family and significant others is arranged and maintained when it is beneficial to the child.
- To ensure that children have clear and appropriate information about themselves, their birth parents and families, and life before their adoption.
- To support birth parents and birth families to take an active part in the planning and implementation of their child's adoption, wherever possible.
- To ensure that children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs and are provided with the services to meet those needs.
- To ensure that adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to their adoption, where appropriate, and contact is facilitated between an adopted adult and their birth relatives if that is what both parties want.
- To ensure that children, prospective adopters and adopters are clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption service and what service and facilities it provides.
- To ensure that children's cultural and identity needs are met by promoting equality and diversity in the approach with all service users.
- To ensure that The Adoption Service is informed and developed in accordance with the views of children, young people, and their birth and adoptive families.
- To ensure that children and service users receive a service from staff, managers, volunteers, panel members and decision-makers who are carefully selected, trained, supported and managed to deliver an efficient and effective service.
- To ensure that allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support of children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time support the person who is subject of the allegation.
- To ensure that records are clear, accurate, up to date and stored securely, and contribute to an understanding of a child's life.

Service Priorities 2019/20

The Adoption Service "Statement of Purpose" 2018/19 sets out the aims and objectives of the team. The main priorities of The Adoption Service will continue to focus on Family finding Recruitment & Assessment, and Post Adoption Support.

- The priority of the Adoption Service is to make and sustain stable adoption placements and to ensure that the lifelong needs of those affected by adoption are met.

- The Adoption Service continues to have a clear focus on recruitment in an ever-competitive market place and are concentrating on developing a robust Recruitment Strategy suitable for the current situation moving into 2020. This will hopefully enable the recruitment of enough adopters to meet the needs of children who have a plan of adoption. Therefore, the recruitment & assessment of adopters will be prioritised and targeted in order that in-house resources are available locally and within the region for children who need adoption placements. This will be directly linked to the needs of children with a plan of adoption.
- Family Finding will continue to be proactive to provide placement choice and to avoid unnecessary delays in placing children in new families. To do this, children are allocated a Family Finder on referral to the Adoption Service, so their needs can be considered, and they can be featured appropriately. This will allow every child with a plan of adoption to have the greatest opportunity to be matched with an adoptive family who can meet their needs throughout their lives as soon as possible.
- Plans are progressing to Regionalise with our geographical neighbours Together for Children (Sunderland), Cumbria and Durham to form a new Regional Adoption Agency- Coast to Coast. The plan is that the new organisation will be hosted by Cumbria County Council. It is anticipated that the new delivery model will be operational from April 2020. Durham County Council's Adoption Service will therefore become part of the Coast to Coast RAA by April 2020.

Summary and Conclusion

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

The past year has brought new challenges, reflected nationally including:

- The increase nationally in the numbers of children with a plan of adoption.
- The decrease in the numbers of people coming forward to adopt leading to a nationwide search for suitable families for most children with a plan of adoption in Durham.
- The continued increase in the number of adopters who do not feel they have the necessary skills to consider children with complex needs.

There will be more challenges ahead in 2019/20 for the Adoption Service and the Adoption Panel.

The key priority areas to continue in the new financial year remain:

- The drive to match and place children with adoption plans swiftly.
- A commitment to continue to develop early permanence for children.
- The continued recruitment of adoptive carers to meet the needs of Durham children so that these children can be placed locally with their prospective adopters without undue delay.
- The continued assessment of adopters within timescales.

Karen Robb

Strategic Manager for Looked after Children and Permanence

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Annual Report

Adoption and Permanence Services 2018-2019

Andrea Houlahan
Strategic Manager

Overview

- Experienced workforce
- Ofsted Feedback – strong service
- 23 Adoption panel during 18-19
- Elected members support
- Training for all panel members
- Annual appraisal of panel chairs
- Comprehensive training offer to prospective adopters

Altogether better

Overview – continued

- Adoption support – Full Circle, clinical psychology service
- Adoption allowance available as appropriate
- Timeliness of matching
- Increase number of fostering to adopt
- Strong interface between adoption services and pre-birth services
- Adoption events

Altogether better

Summary – Performance

- Decrease in referrals
- Increase in plans for adoption
- Increase in matched placements
- Decline in number of Adoption orders being granted
- No adoption disruptions
- Implementation of the Early permanence strategy
- Increase in recruitment of adopters

Altogether better

Post Adoption Support

- EDT, Full Circle, Buddying,
- Life story work
- Medical advisor, dedicated nurses,
- Educational support – pupil premium
- Adoption support fund
- Contact – post box
- Family/friends adopters events

Priorities 2019/2020

- Continued offer of sustainable placements
- Focus on recruitment to match needs
- Local adopters
- Continued timely family finding and matching
- Placement choice
- Implementation of the regional Adoption Agency

Altogether better

Any Questions????

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DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 27 September 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, L Brown, J Carr, J Considine, J Grant, I Jewell, P Jopling,
M McKeon, C Potts, A Reed, E Scott and H Smith

Co-Opted Members:

C Baines, W Taylor and a young person representative of the Children in Care Council

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Services Manager)
Helen Fergusson (Head of Children's Social Care)
Lindsey Herring (Children's Commissioner)
Robert Johnson (Project Manager, Investing in Children)
Laura Malone (Strategy Team Leader)
Claire Morris (Strategic Manager, Looked After Children Resources)
John Pearce (Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services)
Martyn Stenton (Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children)
Christine Stonehouse (Virtual School Head)
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlton, Crathorne, Richardson, Simmons and Wilson, from co-optee Neville Harrison, and, from officer Selwyn Morgans.

2. Substitute Members

Councillor L Brown was present as substitute for Councillor M Simmons.

Prior to the formal business, the Chair welcomed attendees including the newly appointed Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, John Pearce, and, Strategic Manager for Looked After Children Resources, Claire Morris. It was announced that the meeting was to be the Virtual School Head, Christine Stonehouse's last meeting and the Chair placed on record his thanks to Christine for all her hard work and support and the Panel wished her well in her new role.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 19 July 2019 were agreed as a correct record. With reference to minute number 9, the Panel noted that Councillor P Jopling had been appointed to the fostering panel.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that, as at 27 September, the number of looked after children stood at an all-time high of 874. The Panel noted that this increase is reflected regionally.

6. Ofsted Updates

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to the recent Ofsted inspection at Aycliffe Secure Unit and the ILACS inspection (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services). A report is due to be published on 21 October and further details will be provided at the next Panel meeting on 25 October.

7. Update from Investing in Children

The following update was provided by Investing in Children:

- Work is being carried out with partners to develop an Independent Skills and Living Portfolio as young people in care often need extra support when moving to independent living, particularly with the practical skills and responsibilities associated with living in their own accommodation.
- There has been investigation into a London-based national charity for children in care and young care leavers to identify whether there could be scope to link-up with this organisation.
- A charity has developed a virtual reality experience in relation to leaving care and the team is looking into this.
- Three young people have been appointed to the kinship carer panels.

The Panel took time to view a display created by the young people of the Children in Care Council at the joint CICC/ CPP meeting which took place on 19 September 2019. The display illustrated how young people feel about their experiences of being in care. In addition, the young people had also created a robot, 'Charlie', made from boxes which represents a carer.

The young people used Charlie to display the personal attributes that they would like their carers, including corporate parents, to have.

8. Feedback from the Investing in Children from the CICC / CPP meeting on 19 September 2019

The Project Manager for Investing in Children thanked the Members who attended the joint meeting adding that it would have been appreciated if more Panel members had attended. The Chair reminded Members of the importance of attending the joint meetings, adding that the next Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 25 October will include a 'take-over' session by the Children in Care Council, with a Care Leavers training session being held at the conclusion of the meeting.

One of the issues raised at the joint meeting was the issue of access to mobile phones and social media, with some young people in care and some foster carer's own children being allowed more access than others. The Head of Children's Social Care acknowledged that whilst standard guidelines are required, there is a need for some flexibility. It was agreed that this issue should be taken forward.

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to very favourable comments from the Ofsted inspectors about the positive impact the young people of the Children in Care Council are having and the difference their views and ideas are making.

9. Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0-25 years, 2019-20

The Panel received a report and presentation from Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care which outlined the Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2019-20 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

10. Quarter One 2019/20 Performance

The Panel received a report and presentation from Laura Malone, Strategy Team Leader, on performance management for the first quarter of 2019-20 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that the report included the information requested at a previous meeting in relation to caseloads by worker-type and the number of foster carers deregistered.

The Strategy Team Leader responded to questions and comments as follows:

- Referring to the placement chart, Members requested that the costings for each placement type be included in future reports, observing that although only 0.2% of young people are placed in secure accommodation, this is likely to represent a significant cost. The Strategy Team Leader undertook to include costing information in future reports.

- In response to a question on the number of young people missing from care, the Strategy Team Leader clarified that between April and June 2019, 24 children went missing from care. Members requested that the number of children be included in future reports, together with the percentage of looked after children with a missing incident. Members also requested more details as to the definition of 'missing' ie whether there is a time-frame used to define when a young person is officially declared missing. The Head of Children's Social Care commented that more detailed information will be provided to a future meeting on the duration of time of missing incidents, and, how incidents are followed-up and the after-care and support provided.
- Members referred to the data on the health and wellbeing of children in care and observed that it would be interesting to have comparative data for young people within the general population regarding health assessments, immunisation rates, substance misuse etc. The Strategy Team Leader explained that some of this information, for example data relating to health assessments, is not easy to access.
- The Chair referred to 7% of looked after children who are placed over 20 miles from the child's home and asked for more information on this. Members commented that for some young people it can be difficult to define exactly where home is and that, in some circumstances, it may be of benefit to the child to be placed away from home. Members also referred to the risks that being placed a long distance from home may pose. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that a map showing the location of Children's Homes throughout the county had been produced for the scrutiny review into residential children's homes and that this map will be shared with the Panel.
- Members asked about the circumstances which would lead to children being placed with their parents on a Care Order. The Legal Services Manager explained that, in some cases, the local authority considers it necessary to share parental responsibility with parents when a child is being returned to parent's care, for example where parents have only recently ended a violent relationship, or, have only recently managed to cease using drugs or alcohol.

11. Updated Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The Panel received a report and presentation from Lindsey Herring, Children's Commissioner for Adult and Health Services, on the Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers published in June 2019 (for report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Children's Commissioner responded to comments and questions as follows:

- At the present time Durham has no care leavers in unregulated placements.
- In relation to the matching process for adoption, risk assessments are undertaken.
- Private residential care homes are profit-making organisations. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the findings from the Overview and Scrutiny review into Children's Residential Care provision will inform the future strategy.

The Panel then considered the following questions in groups and a note was taken of their comments:

1. How can elected members promote and encourage members of the public to consider becoming foster carers for Durham County Council?
2. How can elected members work with communities to alleviate any concerns and positively promote the development of new DCC children's homes for vulnerable children and young people?
3. How can elected members, who are actively involved in regulation 44 visits further support and promote the development of DCC children's homes in local communities?

12. Exclusion of the public

Resolved:

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 paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

13. Regulation 44 Visits: Summary Report

The Panel considered the monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and outstanding responsive repairs (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be received.

14. Any other business

The Head of Children's Services updated the Panel on the recent Ofsted inspections, with further details to be provided at the next meeting, following the publication of the report. Members were reminded that the next meeting, on Friday 25 October, will take place from 9.30 to 10.30 am and this will be followed by a Care Leavers training session.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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