

Corporate Parenting Panel

15 October 2021

**Annual Report on the Adoption Service:
April 2020 – March 2021**



**Report of Paula Gibbons, Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast:
Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children/Sunderland**

Electoral division(s) affected:

None.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This is the annual review of the Adoption Service report for 2020/21 including the identification of service priorities for 2021/22. National Minimum Standards 25.6 (2011) state that written reports are provided on the management, outcomes and financial state of the Agency every six months. Six monthly updates will be provided throughout 2021/22.

Executive summary

- 2 There has been a continued focus on recruiting sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children in Durham in 2020/21. Though the Adoption Team received a significantly reduced number of enquiries, 100 as opposed to 164 in 2019/20 and completed 51 initial visits, 41 prospective adopters were approved which is a striking increase on the previous year's figure of 25.
- 3 At the 31 March 2021, there were 9 prospective adopters in Stage 2 and 13 prospective adopters in Stage 1; this is potentially a further 22 families who will complete their adoption journey in 2020/21.
- 4 60 children have been matched at Panel. This is a slight decrease on the previous year's performance of 64 however this is in the context of court delays in the early part of 2020 which saw a temporary reduction in the number of Placement Orders being granted.
- 5 47 Adoption Orders have been achieved, which is a decrease of 8 on the previous year. As 46 children were living with their Prospective Adopters at 31 March 2021, it is projected that performance in this area will be significantly increased in the final report for 2021/22.
- 6 Actual gross expenditure on inter agency adoption placements has significantly decreased from £1.268 million in 2019-20 to £0.491 million. The focus and improved performance relating to the sufficiency of adopters within Durham to meet the needs of our children is a critical

part of the strategy to manage the budget associated with interagency adoption placements. The work of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to pool resources to match children to prospective adopters as quickly as possible will also support this work.

- 7 Expenditure on in house adoption allowances has slightly decreased from £0.879 million in 2019/20 to £0.827 million in 2020/21.
- 8 Adopt Coast to Coast launched on 1 April 2021 and the recruitment activity is led by a fulltime Communications and Marketing Officer in the Hub. There is a shared annual budget for recruitment, with each spoke contributing 1/3.

Recommendation

- 9 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are required to:
 - (a) Note the contents of the report and agree the proposed priorities as outlined in the Annual Report.

Background

- 10 This annual report sets out the previous performance and the direction of travel for the Adoption Team as a spoke in Adopt Coast to Coast.
- 11 The Adoption Team's improved performance in the numbers of prospective adopters approved and a reduced reliance on interagency placements are very positive as the team join colleagues in Cumbria and Together for Children (Sunderland) in our partnership RAA.
- 12 Adopt Coast to Coast was the 31st RAA to go live and it is important that the branding of Adopt Coast to Coast is recognised as well as its partnership with the three local authorities where the children's plans of adoption are agreed.

Main implications

- 13 Key priority areas for 2021/22:
 - (a) Panel Chairs annual report to be provided. Interim 6 monthly report for period 1 April – 30 September to be provided.
 - (b) To work collaboratively with our partners in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve prospective adopters in a timely manner.
 - (c) To ensure children's plans of permanence via adoption are progressed without delay.
 - (d) Fostering for Adoption placements and matches to be identified at the earliest possible stage in children's planning to prevent delay and ensure minimal moves for children.
 - (e) To recruit new panel members to the central list. This will ensure quoracy and prevent the possible need to stand down a panel due to lack of available panel members.
 - (f) To embed signs of safety into practice and panel processes in line with the Durham model of social work practice.
 - (g) To increase relationship based practice with trauma informed service developments, particularly in the development and support of post adoption contact.

Conclusion

14 Please note the contents of the Adoption Service's Annual Report which highlights practice achieved in 2020/21 and sets the direction of travel for the remainder of this financial year.

Other useful documents

- Statement of Purpose (May 2021)

Author

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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

Expenditure on inter agency adoption payments had risen significantly to 2018-19 and the budget was increased to reflect the growth in activity. Inter agency placements have declined in more recent years and the budget has in part been reallocated to other priority areas within Children and Young People's Services (CYPS). The demand driven nature of the provision, availability of suitably matched agency prospective adopters combined with the impact of internal recruitment of prospective adopters on the requirement for interagency placements provides challenges in accurately forecasting demand and potential cost. The interagency fees are however one off payments and cost significantly less than a child in a long term fostering placement.

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

Appendix 2: Adoption Annual Report

Attached as a separate document