

## Corporate Parenting Panel

16 December 2022

### Annual Report on the Adoption Service 2021/2022



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## Report of Jodie Henderson , Practice Lead, Children in Our Care, Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

### Electoral division(s) affected:

None.

### Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide a six monthly review of the Adoption Service for 2022 including the identification of service priorities for 2022/23.

### Executive summary

- 2 This bi- annual report sets out the performance and the direction of travel for the Adoption Service as a spoke in the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast.

### Recommendation

- 3 Corporate Parenting Panel is requested to:
  - (a) Note the contents and agree the proposed priorities.

## Background

- 4 From August 2022 to November 2022, the Adoption Service received 97 enquiries, completed 43 initial visits, and 11 adopters approved (Data pulled from Liquid Logic)
- 5 On the 21 November 2022, there were 38 prospective adopters in Stage 2 and 36 prospective adopters in Stage 1, this is potentially 42 families who will complete their adoption journey in 2022/2023
- 6 16 children have been matched at Panel. 14 matches were within the regional adoption agency (RAA), 12 with DCC approved adopters and 0 with our partner spokes. 1 child was placed with adopters approved by voluntary agencies and 1 child placed with another RAA out of area.
- 7 We continue to meet the statutory deadline for all Stage Two assessments, with only one assessment being out of timescale due to unforeseen circumstances. There is ongoing work to ensure that we meet our statutory obligations and how we can align this within the Liquidlogic software system.
- 8 We have a high rate of timely matches with adopters and children. We have 9 families waiting to be linked with a children/child. We currently have only 3 adopters in Durham that have been waiting over six months to be matched – with one couple on hold due to moving home. We have undertaken a regional audit to look at these cases and ensure that we have established good practice and that we continue to ensure that there is limited drift and delay, and that their profile are being explored.
- 9 4 children have been placed this year have been placed under Fostering for Adoption regulations, with one been placed in this reporting period.
- 10 This is a key area of development for Durham, and we are developing processes with families first, placements and the pre birth team to highlight children where this plan would be appropriate. We need to ensure that teams are exploring these plans and that they clearly explore the rationale for not opting out of foster to adopt plan. At this time there is some resistance from the Courts around foster to adopt placements and we are supporting our social workers to effectively address this within the Court and the care plans.
- 11 A Funding Bid has been awarded to develop work with both Fostering and Adoption around concurrency planning. This is a 1 day a week post and will sit within the adoption team and work

closely with colleagues within fostering to establish concurrency planning within Durham children services. This is an exciting pilot project that will hopefully help establish carers/adopters that will care for children who primarily may be consider for fostering as a final plan.

- 12 The aim of this pilot is to build on the foundations of concurrency planning. Supporting the service to develop training around concurrency planning and ensuring that early permanence and planning is a continual area of development and excellence
- 13 27 Adoption Orders have been granted within this period. This has improved since the Somerset Judgment, and we are seeing cases moving forward and final orders being granted. Our permanence team have been commended by his Honour Judge Wood as been the only Authority in the region that regularly give feedback to the Courts in relation to Birth Parents and continue to ensure that their views are heard and that they are supported. There is a high standard of practice within this team and the quality of CPRs produced within the child timeline is outstanding.
- 14 We have 5 new panel members that have been successfully recruited in this period. 4 panel members resigned due to personal circumstances and the 2 panel medical advisors remain on to provide medical information. There has been 10 Adoption Panels within this reporting period
- 15 Panel continues to provide a high level of scrutiny and reflection in relation to the adopters and with matches. The adoption chairs are experienced at coordinating meetings that are productive, challenge with kindness and provide clear recommendations to the ADM.
- 16 There is a drive to appoint social workers onto the Adoption Panel and a commitment to ensure that we have appropriate cover for panel, that allows our social workers to attend and contribute, but also does not impact on their time with children and families. There has been one successful recruitment onto panel and a further four workers across the Children in Care service that will be making an application.
- 17 We continue to supported birth parents/sibling/child post box contact letters. We have supported 19 birth parents in writing their post adoption contact letters, both virtually and face to face, we are also establishing links with other local authorities in relation to post adoption contact to ensure that this communication is received and timely. The post adoption contact continues to work well and there

is a dedicated worker who will provide support to parents and children if this is needed.

- 18 We also have established links with the Pause project and our worker supports Mothers who are working with Pause to support them to write post adoption contact letters and provides a reflective space in which they can address their worries around this. In this reporting period we have supported 3 mothers within this area.
- 19 95 children have been supported through successful assessments of need completed by Social Workers within the adoption team. There have been 28 Applications made the Adoption Support fund to the value of £84,922.50. 21 of these have so far been approved to the value of £65,582.50.
- 20 There is a high volume of adoption support assessments, and we continue to develop our expertise in this area. We are continually supporting our practitioners to attend training and will create depth and understanding when completing assessments and offering advice. For example training in Supporting Adoptive Families: Brain-based Parenting, De-escalation and the Implementation of the PACE Model. This bespoke training will be implemented into our adopters training and shared across the workforce. This is an area of agreed priority across Coast to Coast both in the preadoption and post adoption stage in line with the national agenda.
- 21 15 referrals for non-agency adoption enquiries have been received in this reporting period. We have had 4 Adoption Orders granted and further two waiting for final hearing dates. There has been an increase in enquiries from special guardians in relation to Non-Agency Adoption. Our understanding of this is they need support with understanding their roles and responsibilities under such an order
- 22 We have successfully recruited two permanent adoption social workers into the team, alongside another social worker within the permanence team. This will offer further support to staff and support with both family finding and adoption support and child permanence. There is a stable and support staff team in place, and extensive knowledge and expertise within the team. It is noted that there have been some challenges for the service within the last six months, however the team have come together, and the service delivery remains high.
- 23 There is continued collaboration with the Adoption Team and Full Circle, which continues to develop a streamlined service for families in need.

- 24 Continued collaboration with the partner spokes of Coast to coast remains positive and staff development events have been held. There is a focus on recruitment events, celebration events and shared training. Ideas and learning are freely shared and alignment of working practices are being established. Regional Management events have been established post covid and this encourages collaboration across all borders within the region.

### **Data Accuracy**

- 25 Liquid Logic is almost fully embedded in the Adoption Team for performance reports to be directly produced from the Liquid Logic system. The Adoption Dashboard has now been constructed and reporting areas have been identified. Further evaluation of the dashboard is taking place to ensure that this optimises service delivery.

### **Service Direction**

- 26 Key priority areas for 2022/23:
- (a) Continue to work collaboratively with our partners in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve adopters in a timely manner.
  - (b) To ensure children's plans of permanence via adoption are progressed without delay
  - (c) Fostering for adoption placements and matches are to be identified at the earliest possible stage in children's planning to prevent delay and ensure minimal moves for children. Work around the development of this continues and plans implemented.
  - (d) Work around continued recruitment of new panel members to the central list. This will ensure quoracy and prevent the possible need to stand a panel down due to lack of available panel members.
  - (e) Continue to embed signs of safety into practice and panel processes in line with the Durham model of social work practice.
  - (f) Increase relationship-based practice with trauma informed service developments, particularly in the development and support of post adoption contact.
  - (g) Continue to identify potential plans of adoption for children as early as possible. This will allow for targeted adopter recruitment at the earliest possible point. Where there is a need for an

adopter able to take sibling groups, older children or children with more complex health or disability needs, thus preventing delay or the need to purchase adopters at a high cost from external providers.

- (h) Continue to promote and recruit adopters across the RAA
- (i) A focus on recruitment into foster to adopt and concurrency placements.

## **Conclusion**

- 27 Please note the contents of the Adoption Service's Annual Report which highlights practice achieved in 2021/22 and sets the direction of travel for the remainder of this financial year.

## **Author**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **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 demonstrated a significant decrease in 2020/2021, reversing the trend experienced over the previous three years as the service continues to maximise placements with adopters recruited by the authority directly. While interagency fees are an additional material expense, they are 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

None

### **Procurement**

None