

## Corporate Parenting Panel

25 October 2024

Annual Adoption Service Report  
2023/24



### Report of Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, DCC

#### Electoral division(s) affected:

None

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 Annual review of the Adoption Service for 2023/24 including the identification of service priorities for 2023/24.

#### Executive summary

##### *Adopter Recruitment*

- 2 From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, DCC's Adoption Team received:
  - (a) 115 initial enquiries. 35 initial visits were carried out.
  - (b) 22 information sessions held via Teams, facilitated by DCC and Together For Children (TFC) social workers.
  - (c) Information, counselling, and preparation courses (ICP) has been delivered on a shared basis between Durham and TFC adoption teams.
  - (d) Nine ICP courses delivered out of a planned 12. Three of the 12 needed to be cancelled due to very low numbers.

##### *Matching*

- 3 Matches for children with adopters continues to be carried out in a timely manner, with a clear drive to promote early permanence (EP) care for children.
  - (a) 83 children had an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision for a plan of adoption.
  - (b) 65 children have been granted a Placement Order.

- (c) 51 Adoption Orders have been granted in this year.
- 4 Early Permanence is a priority and within this period seven children have been placed in this arrangement.
- (a) 2 x DCC EP carers,
  - (b) 4 x TFC EP carers,
  - (c) 1 x external voluntary agency EP carers.

### *Panel*

- 5 Panel continues to provide a high level of scrutiny and reflection in relation to the adopters and with matches.
- (a) 22 Adoption Panels have been held.
  - (b) Approval of 15 prospective adoptive households.
  - (c) The plan of adoption for a relinquished baby.
  - (d) 41 matches for children with adopters of which five were sibling groups of 2. All matches were recommended and latterly ratified by ADM.
  - (e) 21 matches were with DCC approved adopters,
  - (f) Eight matches were with prospective adopters from our partner spoke, TFC.
  - (g) 12 matches were with other Local Authorities, RAA's or Voluntary Adoption Agencies.
  - (h) All panel recommendations for children 's matches were ratified by the ADM within the timescale of 7 days following panel.
  - (i) Recruitment for new panel members is ongoing.
  - (j) In this timeframe 3 new members have been appointed, however three panel members have resigned due to personal circumstances.
  - (k) No applicants have been presented to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) within this year.
  - (l) No family (adoptive) breakdowns have taken place in this year.

### *Keeping in touch – formerly known as Post Box contact*

- (a) 188 birth parents have been supported in writing their Post Box letter or understanding the process.
- (b) 420 letters were received and checked.
- (c) DCC had a total 713 keeping in touch agreements in place.

### *Post adoption support/Adoption Support Fund*

- 6 This continues to be an increasing area of work in volume and complexity.
- (a) 151 active post adoption support cases relating to therapeutic needs and past trauma for adopted children and young people.
  - (b) 152 applications were made to the Adoption Support Fund.
  - (c) Total value of ASF approvals = £571,554

### *Non agency adoption*

- (a) 19 initial visits completed, with 15 resulting in an assessment commencing.
- (b) Eight Adoption Orders have been granted.
- (c) Three completed assessments are waiting to be finalised at court
- (d) 13 assessments are ongoing although not all will result in the families making an application to court.

### *Access to adoption records*

- 7 Access to records for adopted adults wishing to access their adoption records is undertaken by Adoption Social Workers.
- (a) 34 adopted adults requested this service.

### *Support to birth parents/grandparents whose children/grandchildren are in Care proceedings with plans of adoption.*

- (a) 23 birth parents / grandparents have requested and received support regarding their children's/grandchildren's adoption, by the Adoption Support Worker.

## **Recommendation**

- 8 A detailed report covering all areas of the Adoption Team's work has been written and submitted to assist CPP members to fully understand the complex and differing nature of all areas of work covered by the team. The Corporate Parenting Panel is requested to note the contents and agree the proposed priorities.

## **Background**

- 9 The 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.

## **Service Priorities**

- 10 Key priority areas for 2023/24:

- (a) Focus on the importance of relationship-based practise where an adoption social worker who takes an initial enquiry from a potential adopter maintains the allocation throughout the assessment process where possible. This is to allow consistent trusting relationships to be built and try and prevent a drop off after the initial enquiry.
- (b) To work collaboratively with our partners in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve adopters in a timely manner. Identifying any challenges to ensuring that timescale are met within stage 1 and stage 2 of the assessment process and working with partners such as the police and health to overcome those barriers.
- (c) Continue with the review of the matching process to ensure the process in Durham and TFC are in line with each other, that this progresses as quickly as possible and that there is robust information gathered, shared and recorded about the match of possible adopters to children.
- (d) To ensure children's plans of permanence via adoption are progressed at an early a stage as possible and to develop a new process to assist with the identification and tracking of these children. Work alongside TFC to share information at Children Waiting Meetings about unborn children who could be placed in Early Permanence from birth and match them with adopters going through the assessment process who could be approved before the child is born.
- (e) To continue to recruit new Panel members to the Central List. This will ensure quoracy and prevent the possible situation of having to stand a panel down due to lack of available Panel members.
- (f) To provide high quality post adoption support to adopted children and young adults, supporting them to access therapy via the Adoption Support Fund. Consideration to be given to the structure of the adoption team and whether Post Adoption Support should be managed differently.

- (g) To enhance and develop keeping in touch for adopted children and their birth families, ensuring that where possible relationships with birth families are built with adopters to facilitate different forms of keeping in touch such as more children adopted spending some direct time with birth family members.
- (h) To increase participation including using feedback from young people and children who have a brother or sister adopted.

## **Conclusion**

11 The update will provide an overview of the annual performance from the adoption service.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

No legal implications.

### **Finance**

All high-level payments are approved by senior management.

### **Consultation**

Feedback from various persons involved in adoption is gathered to enhance practice.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

The adoption service embraces equality and diversity throughout all of the areas of work carried out.

### **Climate Change**

The effect of overuse of vehicles is given full consideration and where appropriate TEAMS/virtual calls are used. Visits to adopters are made using the most cost effective and environmentally friendly method possible.

### **Human Rights**

Human rights are considered in all areas of adoption.

### **Crime and Disorder**

DBS and safeguarding checks are carried out to ensure persons wishing to adopt are safe to do so.

### **Staffing**

The adoption team has a strong, stable workforce.

### **Accommodation**

Spectrum 8, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham is the base for the Adoption Team.

### **Risk**

Risks to children are minimised through numerous checks in the assessment process of adopters, during the matching process and through to the Adoption Order being granted.

### **Procurement**

No implications.