

**Annual Adoption Service Report – Six
Month Update 2024/25**

**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 To provide Corporate Parenting Panel with a six-month update on the review of the Adoption Service for 2024/25 including data from Quarters One and Two, 1 April to 30 September 2024.

Executive summary

Adopter Recruitment

- 2 From 1 April to 30 September 2024, DCC’s Adoption Team received:
 - (a) 52 initial enquiries.
 - (b) 34 initial visits were carried out.
 - (c) 12 Information sessions were held via Microsoft Teams, facilitated by DCC and Together for Children (TFC) Social Workers.
 - (d) Six Information, Counselling, and Preparation courses (ICP) were planned to be delivered on a shared basis between DCC and TFC adoption teams. One course was cancelled as only one applicant enrolled but five were delivered with the applicant from the cancelled course attending an alternative session. In total, 45 people attended.

Matching

- 3 Matches for children with adopters continues to be carried out in a timely manner, with a clear drive to promote Early Permanence care for children.
 - (a) 40 children had an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision for a plan of adoption.

- (b) 38 children have been granted a Placement Order.
 - (c) 22 Adoption Orders have been granted in this period.
 - (d) 28 children were matched compared to 20 in the previous period.
- 4 Early Permanence is a priority and within this period five children have been placed in this arrangement.

Panel

- 5 Panel continues to provide a high level of scrutiny and reflection in relation to the adopters and with matches.
- (a) 13 Adoption Panels have been held.
 - (b) Approval of 12 prospective adoptive households.
 - (c) A plan of adoption for a relinquished baby.
 - (d) 29 matches for children with approved adopters. All matches were recommended and latterly ratified by ADM.
 - (e) Ten matches were with DCC approved adopters,
 - (f) Five matches were with prospective adopters from our partner spoke, TFC.
 - (g) Fourteen matches were with another Local Authority, RAA or Voluntary Adoption Agency.
 - (h) All panel recommendations for children 's matches were ratified by the ADM within the timescale of seven days following panel.
 - (i) Recruitment for new panel members is ongoing.
 - (j) In this timeframe five new members have been interviewed and are undergoing statutory checks. No existing panel members have resigned during this period.
 - (k) No prospective adopters have been presented to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) during this period.
 - (l) There was one disruption during this period.

Keeping in Touch – formerly known as Post Box contact

- (a) 28 birth parents have been supported in writing their Post Box letter or understanding the process.

- (b) 289 letters were received and checked.

Post Adoption Support/Adoption Support Fund

- 6 This continues to be an increasing area of work in volume and complexity.
 - (a) 184 active post adoption support cases.
 - (b) 133 successful applications were made to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic intervention.

Non agency adoption

- (a) 12 initial visits have been completed, all have resulted in an assessment commencing.
- (b) Five Adoption Orders have been granted.
- (c) It is noticeable that court proceedings are taking longer, often with several hearings before the Order is granted. This is often due to the complexities surrounding the application, often including the birth parent moving to the UK from another country.

Access to adoption records

- 7 Access to records for adopted adults wishing to access their adoption records is undertaken by Adoption Social Workers.
 - (a) 18 adopted adults have requested this service.

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

- (a) Approximately 28 birth family members have requested and received support regarding their children's/grandchildren's adoption, by the Adoption Support Worker.

Recommendations

- 8 A detailed report covering all areas of the Adoption Team's work has been written and submitted to assist Corporate Parenting Panel members to fully understand the complex and differing nature of all of the 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 2024/25:
- (a) To continue to work collaboratively with our partner in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve prospective adopters in a timely manner.
 - (b) To ensure children's plans of permanence via adoption are progressed without delay.
 - (c) Early Permanence carers are to be identified at the earliest possible stage in children's planning to prevent delay and ensure minimal moves for children.
 - (d) Ensure that assessments of prospective adopters' progress within timescales in particular at Stage One of the adoption process.
 - (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 continue to build on the high-quality post adoption support offer to adopted children and young adults, supporting them to access therapy via the Adoption Support Fund.
 - (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 adopted children 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.
 - (i) To continue to upskill adoption social workers to offer support such as Theraplay.

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Appendix 1: Implications

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.