

Corporate Parenting Panel

29 September 2017



Annual Report of Adoption Service and Adoption Panels

Report of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, Durham County Council

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Panel with the Adoption Services and Adoption Panel Annual report (Appendix 2)
- 2 The report outlines:
 - Key activities and achievements of the Adoption Service and Adoption Panels during this period
 - Significant changes in adoption practice in England and Wales
 - Future Strategic Priorities for the Adoption Service in 2017-2018
- 3 Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, will deliver a presentation to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 29 September 2017, providing an overview of the Annual Report.

Background

- 4 The information presented in the report relates to the activity within Durham County Council Adoption Service and the activity of the two Adoption Panels.
- 5 The report covers the reporting period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 for both the Adoption Service and the Adoption Panels.
- 6 Adoption leadership data for 2016-17 is still not available, however internal data shows positive performance by Durham County Council in relation to key targets in comparison to the national and regional picture.
- 7 The past year has brought new challenges, which are reflected nationally including:
 - The increase in the numbers of Looked After children and in particular those with a plan of adoption
 - The increase in the number of children who have complex health and behavioural needs
 - The increase in the number of larger sibling groups
 - The reduction in the numbers of people coming forward to adopt
 - The increase in complex backgrounds/situations of individuals coming forward to adopt
 - The continuation in the number of adopters who do not feel they have the necessary skills to consider older children or children with complex needs

- The increase in the number of birth parents who have sought to appeal the granting of the Placement Order or oppose the granting of the Adoption Order at the point the adopters make their application.
- 8 There will be more challenges ahead in 2017/18 for the Adoption Service and the Adoption Panel particularly with a view to moving on towards Regionalisation, which have been highlighted in the report above.
- 9 The key priority areas to continue in the new financial year include:
- a) To continue to match and place children with adoption plans swiftly (in accordance with the timescale/targets set by DfE)
 - b) The continued recruitment of adoptive carers to meet the needs of Durham children so that these children can be placed with their prospective adopters locally without undue delay
 - c) The continued assessment of adopters wherever possible within the timescales set by DfE
- 8 Significant focus has been on adoption and permanence over the last 3-5 years as part of the DfE Adoption Reform Programme.
- 9 A key driver for the Children and Young Peoples Services is the Placement Efficiency Strategy 2017 which replaces the former Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy but maintains the legal requirements of the Sufficiency Duty.

Key Statistics and Achievements 2016-17

- 10 There were 51 children adopted from care, an increase of 28 on last year, from 23.
- 11 There were 22 prospective adopters in this year, which is fewer than the previous year, the reasons for which are explained in the report.
- 12 There were 65 children approved for adoption, an increase on last year, which reflects the increase in LAC overall.

Conclusion

- 13 The Adoption Services continues to focus on achieving the best outcomes for children and to prevent delay in achieving permanence for all children with a care plan of adoption.
- 14 The increased number of looked after children provides a continued challenge to the service and an improved focus on early permanence planning for children is a key priority for Children and Young Peoples Services in 2017 and into the future.

Recommendation

- 15 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to receive the Annual Report and presentation at the meeting on 29 September 2017 and discuss.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The provision of post adoption support is currently provided via a government grant, which is time limited to 2020. A budget pressure is possible thereafter. The introduction of a 'Fair Access' limit initially in December 2016 of £5000 per child may have financial implications moving forward as therapeutic support which is greater than the fair access limit will have to be match funded by the local authority

Staffing – There are no current implications for staffing. The Adoption Service is a stable and experienced team. The move to Regionalisation may have an impact in the future but it is too early to assess.

Risk – Liability to recruit adopters would limit placement choice, changes in national policy and Family Court practice can impact significantly on adoption practice.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – Efforts are made to ensure all children are considered for adoption, including those with complex and special needs.

Accommodation – No implications although the Adoption team is currently situated within the Fostering and Adoption Service at Littleburn Industrial Estate where it is known the contract is under review. Regionalisation brings with it a level of uncertainty as to the future accommodation requirements of the Adoption team.

Crime and Disorder – No implications

Human Rights – The right to a family life is established in family practice

Consultation – No implications

Procurement – No implications

Disability Issues – Children with a disability are targeted for specific adoption recruitment activity and support

Legal Implications – None at present, although government have signalled likely future change in legislation in this area

Appendix 2: Adoption Service and Adoption Panel Annual report

Attached as a separate document