

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

AGENDA



Tuesday 25 July 2017

at 4.00 pm

**in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Clark, Harrison, Lauderdale, Moore, Morris, Robinson and Sirs.

Co-opted Members: Jo Heaton, C of E Diocese and Stephen Hammond, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Mark Tilling (Secondary), David Turner (Primary), Alan Chapman (Special).

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Thomas, Chair of Adult Services Committee

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2017 (*previously circulated and published*).

4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

No items.

5. KEY DECISIONS

No items.



6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

- 6.1 Adoption Annual Report 2016/17 and Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2017/18 – *Director of Child and Adult Services*
- 6.2 To nominate Local Authority representatives to serve on School Governing Bodies – *Director of Child and Adult Services*

7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- 7.1 Fostering Service Interim Report – Quarter 4 (Dec 2016 – Mar 2017) – *Director of Child and Adult Services*

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 19 September 2017 at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool



CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

25 July 2017



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17 AND
ADOPTION AGENCY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
2017/18

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 Non key

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 For Children's Services Committee to note the Annual Report of the Adoption Agency 2016/17 (**Appendix 1**)

2.2 For Children's Services Committee to approve the Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose for 2017/18 (**Appendix 2**).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The work of the Adoption Services is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of adoption services. The National Minimum Standards together with regulations for adoption and the placement of children looked after form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies.

3.2 It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards that the service produces a Statement of Purpose for adoption services and reviews these at least annually. It is also a requirement that the executive side of the local authority receive six monthly reports detailing the management, outcomes and functioning of the Adoption services. This information is provided within the Annual Report, attached as **Appendix 1**. The Statement of Purpose for 2017/18 is attached in **Appendix 2**.

- 3.3 The Annual Report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff, and adopters, the constitution of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, the achievements of the service during the year and the priorities for further service development in 2017/18.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 There are no specific financial considerations needed for this report. However it is important to note that this is a statutory function for the council and therefore resources need providing to ensure this function is fulfilled.

5. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications in relation to this report.

6. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Options have been considered and there are no child and family poverty impact issues. All families and children that need support from this service are supported.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The adoption service ensures that they support all those people that want to adopt and children who need to be adopted.

8. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no staff implications in relation to this report.

9. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 There are no asset management implications in relation to this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the Adoption Agency Annual Report and approve the Statement of Purpose in line with the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Adoption Agency is a statutory service of the Council and as such Children's Services Committee, having the responsibility for Children's Services, require information to be able to provide scrutiny and oversight in relation to how services are delivered and their effectiveness.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 Adoption Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011.

13. CONTACT OFFICER

Karen Douglas-Weir, Head of Service, Looked After Children and Care Leavers, Karen.douglas-weir@hartlepool.gov.uk 01429 405584

Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Children's Services, Danielle.swainston@hartlepool 01429 523732

Together we will build better futures



Contents

| Title | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Foreword | 3 |
| Introduction | 4-5 |
| Adoption Team Structure | 6 |
| Governance and Oversight of Adoption | 7-8 |
| Recruitment and Assessment of Adopters | 9-10 |
| Family Finding | 11 |
| Preparation for Placement | 12 |
| Post Adoption Support | 13-14 |
| Regional Adoption Agency | 15 |
| Achievements in the past year | 16 |
| Priorities for 2016-2017 | 17-18 |
| Some quotes from Hartlepool adopters | 19 |

Foreword

Welcome to the Adoption Services Annual Report of 2016-17. In Hartlepool we have set out our overarching ambition and aspiration in our Children Looked After Strategy stating that:

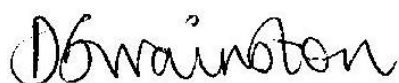
“Hartlepool Council will provide children and young people with permanence and stability to enable them to thrive, enjoy a happy and secure childhood and become confident adults who achieve their aspirations”.

The Adoption Service has a key role in contributing to this by delivering a high quality and effective Adoption Service.

The service continues to perform effectively against national and regional indicators. The service has a clear focus on continuous improvement and works hard to ensure that children, potential adopters and adopters are able to contribute to the ongoing development of the service.

The service is part of the Regional Adoption Leadership Board to ensure that best practice is understood, shared and implemented across the service.

There continue to be some challenging times ahead with the development of a Regional Adoption Agency. Hartlepool is fully supportive of this development and will continue to ensure that children’s stability and permanence is at the heart of this service.



Danielle Swainston
Assistant Director, Children’s Services
July 2017

Introduction

The annual Adoption Agency report provides information about the activity of and outcomes achieved by the service during 2016-17 and outlines plans and strategic priorities for 2017-18.

The 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance and Adoption National Minimum Standards places a requirement upon Local Authority adoption services to ensure that the Executive side of the Council receive 6 monthly reports on the management and outcomes of the agency. The Annual Report provides a full review of the service and an interim progress report is made to the Children's Services Committee at the end of the second quarter of the financial year.

Following the Government report published in March 2012 'Action Plan for Adoption - Tackling Delay', this report highlights the challenges faced when placing children for adoption. These challenges have been the catalyst for Adoption Reform which is legislated within the Children and Families Act 2014.

The aim of the Adoption Service is to recruit, train and support adopters to provide high quality adoptive placements for the children. This is achieved through the following objectives:

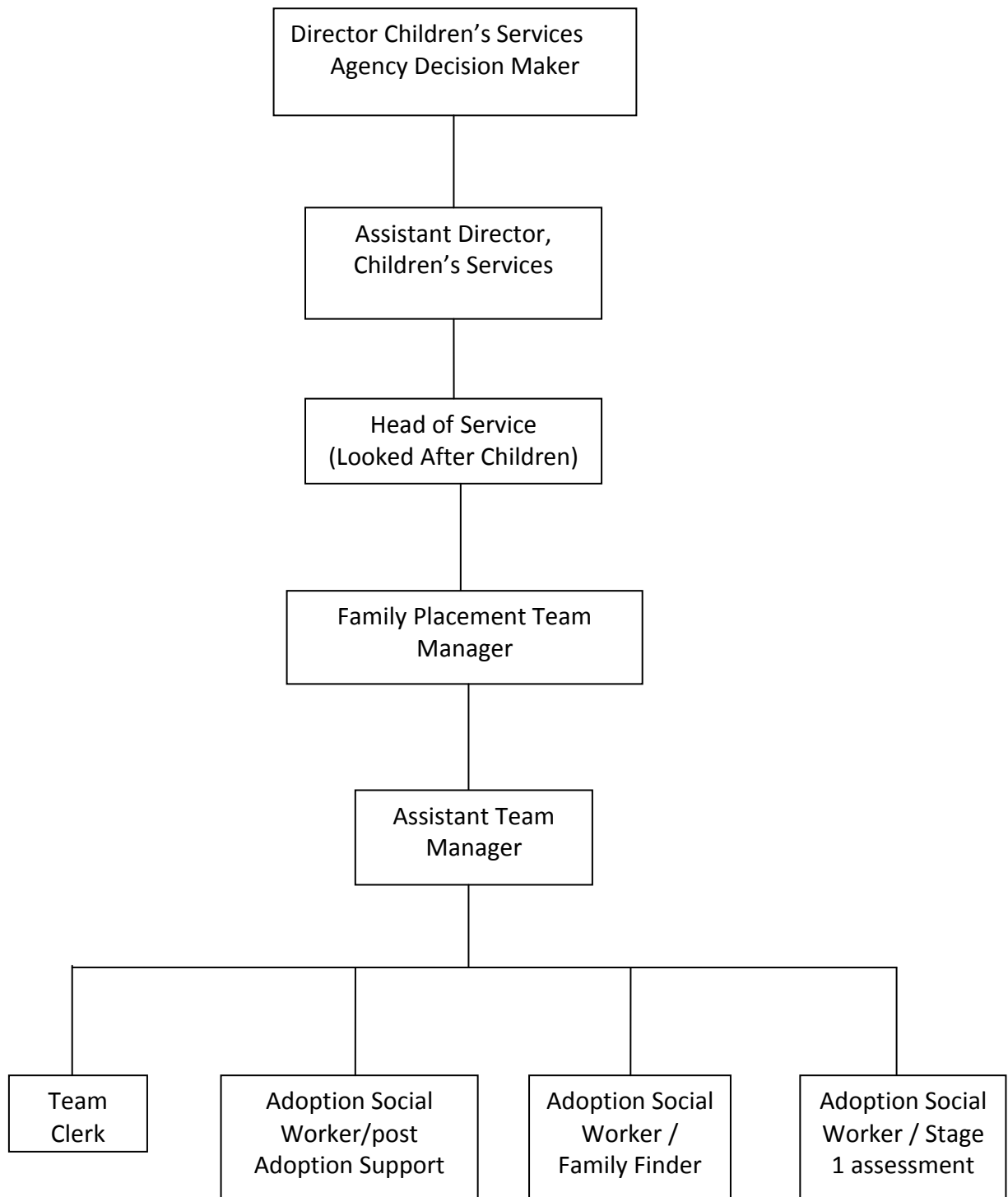
- Ensuring that where children cannot remain in the care of their birth parent/s, they are placed with appropriate adoptive parent/s at the earliest opportunity;
- Providing robust assessment of and support to adoptive carers and children to meet identified needs;
- Providing advice and support to birth families;
- Managing and facilitating Post Box contact arrangements that support the exchange of information which meets the needs of the children, adoptive parent/s and birth parent/s;

- Fulfil statutory requirements in relation to the Adoption & Children Act 2004 for the adoption of a child by a step parent;
- Providing advice, support and guidance in relation to permanence planning and facilitate family finding for children;
- Ensure the Adoption Panel is supported to provide robust consideration and recommendations relating to the approval of adopters, and matching of children with their adoptive families;
- Providing support to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to consideration and decision making regarding plans for the adoption of children.



Hartlepool Adoption Service is managed in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2004. The Adoption National Minimum Standards and the Regulations 2011 form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

Adoption Team Structure



Governance and Oversight of Adoption

The Adoption Service prepares an Annual Report and a six monthly progress report on its activities and performance which are presented to Children's Service Committee.

Hartlepool Borough Council was one of the first local authorities to be inspected under a new single inspection framework in November / December 2013. The overall judgement was that the local authority leads effective services that meet the requirements for Good. A separate judgement is made on the effectiveness of adoption performance and this was also judged to be Good. Many strengths of the adoption service are reflected in the inspection report and no areas for improvement were identified.

The Adoption Score Cards are published annually by the Department for Education and measure the effectiveness of the local authority against key targets for adoption performance. The Hartlepool Adoption Scorecard demonstrates that the local authority is performing well and achieving government targets. Information from the Scorecards indicates that :

- For children who are placed for adoption in Hartlepool, the length of time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is shorter than the national average. (507 days in Hartlepool compared with 593 days nationally.)
- For children in Hartlepool the timescale between the local authority being granted a placement order and the local authority deciding on a match with an adoptive family is significantly lower than the national average. (204 days in Hartlepool compared with 223 days nationally).
- In Hartlepool 56% of children wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family compared to 47% nationally.

Hartlepool Borough Council's Family Placement Panel is appropriately constituted with an Independent Chair Person and a number of Panel Members with the appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the Panel for consideration.

Panel Members are fully trained and join a central list of people who can be called on to attend Panel, this includes an Independent Chair, one Vice Chair, seven Agency Social Workers, an Elected Member, five Independent Members, 1 of which is a foster carer for another authority. Panel membership also includes three members who have direct experience of adoption. Panel also benefits from a Medical Advisor.

The Panel also receives advice from the local authority Legal Advisor and Panel Advisor.

The Panel meets fortnightly and makes recommendations on the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children with adoptive families to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Director of Children's Services is the Adoption Agency Decision Maker and as such makes the final decision in relation to approval of prospective adopters, children's adoption plans and adoption matches. The Agency Decision Maker is robust in their quality assurance and decision making ensuring that the best interest of children is always at the heart of what we do.

Recruitment and Assessment of Adopters

| | |
|---|----|
| Number of Approved Adopters as at 31.03.17 | 13 |
| Number of Adopters currently being assessed 31.03.17 | 6 |
| Number of Adopters waiting to complete training 31.03.17 | 1 |
| Number of Adopters with children in placement but not yet adopted | 6 |
| Number of Initial Visits undertaken 2016/17 | 13 |
| Number of applications received 2016/17 | 10 |

The Adoption Service recruitment strategy is updated on an annual basis and a range of methods are used to attract prospective adopters to Hartlepool Borough Council Adoption Agency. We continue to be particularly successful in achieving personal recommendations from Hartlepool's approved adopters and their families. Advertisements are placed in the Primary Times and regional publications, alongside a particular focus this year on digital advertising through Facebook. We continue to have a need for placements for siblings groups and older children and this will be the priority of the recruitment strategy for 2017-18.

Adopters attend four days of modularised training which has been updated to meet the requirements of the two stage assessment process. This training aims to provide prospective adopters with information and covers the adoption process, legal procedures, child development, attachment and resilience, child abuse and safeguarding and looks at adoption from the perspective of the birth family and the child. Feedback from prospective adopters who attend the preparation training is positive however we continually strive to add new dimensions to the training. The Panel Chair and Panel Advisor have recently become involved with the preparation training and meet with prospective adopters to discuss the panel experience and Agency Decision Making process, this session is well received.

In addition to the training, post approval support groups are held 4 times per year. This training is aimed at supporting adopters and continuing their learning. Topics include talking to your child about adoption, understanding difficult behaviour, managing introductions, post adoption support and facing up to Facebook. Alongside this adopters who are waiting to be matched are invited to attend the regional Waiting Adopters Group which takes place quarterly.

Family Finding

The Adoption Team plays a key role in finding adoptive families for children. From the point of where adoption is likely to be the permanent plan for a child, the adoption team track the planning for that child to ensure there is no delay in finding an appropriate family.

| | |
|---|----|
| Number of children awaiting adoptive placement as of 31 March 17 | 13 |
| Number of children matched and placed in an adoptive placement from 2016/17 | 8 |
| Number of children adopted between 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017 | 12 |

A key focus of the adoption reform agenda is to ensure children are placed without any delay. To facilitate this we have a family finder post whose remit is to become involved with children needing permanence via adoption at the earliest stage.

The Family Finder role ensures the authority is proactive in its search for the right family for a child. This search includes Hartlepool's approved adopters and can be widened to consider prospective adopters available via the Northern Consortium (where members meet regionally to share any adopters approved either by neighbouring authorities or voluntary adoption agencies), the Adoption Register, Adoption Link, or individual profiles for children sent to all adoption agencies. The Family Finder and Social Worker will, where necessary, attend adoption activity events in search of the right family for a child.

There is a robust matching process which is undertaken in order to identify and prepare a child and prospective adopters for placement. This starts with an exchange of written and verbal information followed by a meeting between foster carer, social worker and adopters. We continue to ensure that prospective adopters meet with the Agency's Medical Advisor to discuss any health related matters for the child prior to match.

Preparation for Placement

Children are prepared for placement in accordance with their assessed needs and depending on their age and understanding.

The service has the support of a Play Therapist and Filial Therapist based within the Specialist Services Division who provide advice and where appropriate direct support in the preparation and placement of children within the adoptive family. The potential disruption and impact on children when moving placement cannot be underestimated and it is

crucial that significant planning and support is provided at this time.



Where the Play Therapist is involved or where there is a need they are involved in the Family Finding and Planning and Introductions process for the child. Advice is sought regarding any potential issues that may arise and plans are adjusted to take into consideration any suggestions to ensure that the child has a smooth transition their adoptive placement.

Life Story work is completed by the Social Worker, this should be with a child if he or she is old enough or on behalf of the child if they are very young. The Adoption Team has completed training in Life Story Work and direct work with children for foster carers and social workers. A resource library has been established and the whole service has attended 'direct work with children' seminars where practitioners shared ideas, resources and advice was available from play therapists.

Post Adoption Support

The Adoption Team manage the 'post box system' this is an exchange of information essentially between adopters and adopted children and birth parent/extended family members. There are approximately over 200 different pieces of information exchanged and this continues to grow annually. The authority has an electronic system which has updated and improved the management of these arrangements.

The post box system is a vital part of the statutory services provided to birth parents, adopters and adoptees; it supports the children's sense of identity, their understanding and knowledge of their birth family and can provide reassurance to both children and birth family of each other's welfare.

The post adoption support which includes the post box system, supervision and support of post adoption contact and applications to the ASF is undertaken by a dedicated experienced Social Worker within the Adoption Team.

Local Authorities are responsible for the delivery of post adoption support to adopters and children for 3 years following the making of an Adoption Order. This support is currently provided by the Adoption Team and we have a part time dedicated social worker post to this area of practice. The Adoption Team provide regular newsletters to all those who have adopted children via Hartlepool Adoption Agency. They offer training events on subjects such as Life Story Books and behavioural issues such as 'how to develop empathy'. In addition there are social events including the annual Christmas party which this year was attended by over 30 children and their families. Our adopters are also invited to any regional events offered by After Adoption.

Following the publication of the report "Further Action on Adoption: Finding more loving homes" (DfE January 2013) and the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) 1st May 2015, requests for assessments for therapeutic support from the fund are increasing steadily with successful applications to the fund growing. In 2016/17 there were 15 applications made to the fund of which all applications were successful and the families have received therapeutic support.

The Adoption service continues to commission a service from After Adoption to provide independent advice and support to birth parents, adopters and adoptees. To increase the numbers of people accessing this valuable service we are (with their permission) currently referring all birth parents to this service. However referrals can still be made by either the person themselves or by a social worker on their behalf where necessary if there is a need beyond the point of social work involvement. After Adoption also hold events in the region for all adoptive families to attend.

Regional Adoption Agency

In June 2015 the DfE published the paper Regionalising Adoption setting out its proposals to move to regional adoption agencies with an aim to: speed up matching and markedly improve the life chances of neglected and damaged children; improve adopter recruitment and adoption support; and reduce costs.

Hartlepool Borough Council has for some time been considering the possibility of merging with its neighbouring authorities with whom it has pre-existing positive working relationships with. In 2014 Mott McDonald completed a feasibility study examining the possibility of the then four authorities forming a joint adoption agency.

The probability of this initiative has been further considered in view of the DfE publication (see above). In 2015 a joint bid to form a regional adoption agency was made by the four interested Local Authorities (Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Darlington and Redcar and Cleveland) they were subsequently joined by Stockton who wished to be included.

The five Local Authorities made a successful bid to the DfE for funding to develop the Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency and commissioned IMPOWER to support in the strategic development of the RAA. A second bid for interim funding was successful in April 2016 to finance the continuation of this project. A project manager has now been appointed and Hartlepool are currently leading on this project on behalf of the Tees Valley Authorities.

It is anticipated that the project will be live from late 2017. The aims of the RAA will help:

- Speed up matching and markedly improve the life chances of children in care.
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support.
- Support best proactive and support reduced costs for adoptive placements.

Achievements in the past year

2013 OFSTED's new approach to inspection is a single inspection of the whole of Children's Services and this includes the Adoption Service. Hartlepool Borough Council was one of the first of the Local Authorities to be inspected by OFSTED under this framework with the inspection taking place in November/December 2013. Overall the Authority was judged as GOOD with a sub judgement of GOOD for adoption. The inspection report highlights a number of strengths of the services and there were no recommended areas for improvement in relation to adoption. It is anticipated that the scheduled return to take place in 2017 will at least maintain if not better the judgement previously made.

The adoption team have now firmly embedded the new BAAF Two Stage assessment process. One worker within the team is dedicated to monitoring recruitment activity up until the point of allocation to a worker for assessment. This sharing of tasks and responsibilities enables us ensure that assessments are completed within the required timescale.

The adoption team benefits from having a named Family Finder who attends Permanency Planning Meetings and, where there is a need, initiates the Family Finding process for those children requiring permanency via adoption. Her role allows us to family find from the earliest stages and has reduced delay in the adoption process.

Hartlepool Borough Council continues to be an active member of the Northern Consortium and have membership of the Adoption Register and Adoption Link, over the past year we successfully matched the majority of children needing adoptive placements with in-house approved adopters.

Priorities for 2017-2018

Following a successful year of performance in 2016/17, the service strives to deliver continuous improvement and has identified the following priorities for the coming year:

- To respond promptly to any adoptive enquiries including those received via the National Gateway (First 4 Adoption);
- To continue to improve recruitment timescales using the now fully embedded two stage assessment process;
- To deliver the Department's plans for early permanence for very young children with a plan for adoption through foster to adopt and concurrent planning.
- To support placing social workers in completing factual, comprehensive and informative Child's Permanency Reports;
- To utilise the existing Family Finding post to identify children needing adoptive placements earlier and using our own resources, established links and new research to positively match with adopters within timescales;
- To work collaboratively with the regional consortium, Adoption Link, Activity Days, and opening minds events to identify placements for children with complex needs and sibling groups;



- To work positively and proactively with the child's social worker to improve the quality of Life Story work;
- To provide those who have adopted with post adoption support;
- To respond swiftly to requests for therapeutic support from the Adoption support Fund to those living in the Hartlepool area who have adopted.
- To utilise and develop the electronic post box system;
- To develop Life Appreciation Days for children whose plan is for adoption;
- Target our current advertising campaign to look specifically at recruiting adopters for older children and siblings group;
- To monitor adoption timescales at least quarterly via Performance Managements Clinics and regular briefings to the Business Unit Managers Meetings identifying trends at the earliest opportunity;
- To take an active role as the lead authority of the Regional Adoption Agency to strive forward to being part of a regional adoption agency, pooling resources with neighbouring local authorities to recruit, train and assess prospective adopters ultimately increasing choice for social workers when considering permanency via adoption for children.

Some quotes from Hartlepool adopters;



“Our Social Worker has been the best we could have asked for, always there when we needed her”

“This is a brilliant agency, we are adopting again for a 2nd time with Hartlepool”

“At the adoption panel we love that you find out if you are approved on the same day”

“The family finder and therapist were amazing, a fantastic approachable support”

“The matching process and panel all went smoothly, no complaint at all”.

“The information we received from Hartlepool was really good and made us feel confident”



Hartlepool Borough Council

Child and Adult Services

Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

April 2017

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council initially approved this Statement of Purpose on 29 September 2003.

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Service's signed this document on behalf of the Elected Members.

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated on an annual basis and is submitted for approval to Elected members.

This document was reviewed and updated in March 2017 and is to be submitted for approval by Elected members.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and revised as appropriate by the Team Manager of the Adoption Services no later than April 2018.

CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Page 4 | VALUES, AIMS, OBJECTIVES |
| Page 6 | SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE ADOPTION AGENCY |
| Page 7 | STAFFING INFORMATION |
| Page 8 | ADOPTION AGENCY - ORGANISATION AND CONTROL OF OPERATIONS |
| Page 11 | COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE |
| Page 12 | USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS AND ADDRESSES |
| Page 14 | APPENDIX 1 – HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE |

Values, Aims and Objective

Value Statements

The value statements listed below underpin the provision of Adoption services in Hartlepool.

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the need for services of those affected by adoption.
- Government will work in partnership with local government, other statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that these standards are delivered.

Aims and objectives of the Adoption Service

Adoption means an Adoption Order under the 1976 Act or preceding legislation and vests parental responsibility in the adopters. The Order extinguishes the rights and duties of birth parents including any parental responsibility any person had before the Order (updated in 2002 Act).

Adoption affects the following groups of children;

- Babies whose parents cannot or do not wish to care for them.
- Children who are in the care of the Local Authority.
- Children cared for by relatives.
- Children in a step-parenting family.
- Children privately fostered.
- Children brought into the country from abroad.

Hartlepool Borough Council Adoption Service aims to provide a range of adoptive placements for those children requiring permanent substitute families.

The Adoption Service aims to ensure that prospective adopters are provided with the skills, knowledge and support to enable them to meet the assessed needs of children placed and to provide a safe and secure home environment.

The following guiding principles underpin the services provided by the Adoption Service:

- Adoption is a process with life long implications for adopted people, adoptive parents and birth parents.
- There is a commitment to providing adoption services to all sectors of Hartlepool's population and to seek to provide sensitive needs led services to children, parents and adopters.
- There is a duty to establish and maintain services designed to meet the needs of adopted children, adopters and birth parents.
- There is recognition of the importance of incorporating research and user feedback into the formulation of policies, procedures and practice. Constructive feedback from service users is welcomed and should be directed to the Adoption Service Team Manager.
- The provision of after adoption services to adopted adults, birth relatives, adopted children and their families, intermediary services to birth relatives and support and advice to birth parents where the plan for adoption has been made and the parents are contesting the plan.

Objectives

- To conduct recruitment activities and employ strategies in order to attract the range of adopters identified for children.
- To undertake effective assessments of prospective adopters within timescales specified in National Guidance as prescribed by BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering).
- To establish and support a Permanence Panel to consider assessments and make recommendations for approval by the agency decision maker.
- To provide pre-approval training for prospective adopters equipping them to meet the needs of children referred for adoption and developing their awareness of adoption issues.
- To protect children from abuse and neglect.
- To create stability for children who require permanent substitute families.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members where appropriate.
- To create lifelong attachments with adoptive parents in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- To work in partnership with children and young people, prospective adopters, birth parents and social workers.
- To provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his/her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.

- To provide or contract to provide after adoption services to provide support to people who have been adopted, their birth families and adoptive parents.

Services provided by the adoption agency

The Adoption Service provides the following services and facilities:

- Recruitment, assessment and preparation of prospective adopters.
- Family finding for children awaiting adoptive placements.
- Support to adoptive placements.
- Assessment for post adoption support.
- Where necessary and when the criteria is met applications to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic support.
- Adoption and Fostering panel training
- Consultation and advice to social workers considering adoption as an option for a child/children.
- Post adoption support service.
- Post Box Service.

More detail on each of these areas of service provision can be found in the departmental Adoption Procedures.

In April 2003, Hartlepool Borough Council entered into a formal contract with “*After Adoption*” an agency specialising in post adoption support to provide services to the following groups in the form of individual work or group support. This contract has been extended until April 2018 and will be in place until the Regionalisation of adoption services is complete.

This support is available for:

- Adopted adults
- Birth Parents and Relatives with children under 18 who have been adopted or where the plan is adoption
- Adopted Children and their families
- Special Guardians
- Birth relatives where the children that were adopted are now adults

Staffing information

| Name and Job Title | Date of Appointment | Qualifications | Experience |
|--|----------------------------|--|--|
| Karen Douglas-Weir Head of Business Unit Resources and Specialist Services | August 2015 | Dip SW BA Hons Advanced SW Practice Practice Teaching Award PQ1 | Team Manager Senior Practitioner |
| Christine Croft Team Manager | April 2013 | DIPSW 1997 PQ1 CCA ILM Diploma in Management | Qualified in 1997 experience as a Safeguarding Social Worker Nominated Worker Experience in Fostering in both the independent and local authority sectors from 2002. |
| Jacqui Dixon Assistant Team Manager | October 2009 | DIPSW 2002 PQ1 | Children and Families Resource Team Manager Nominated Worker |
| Clare Frankland Social Worker/Post Adoption Support Worker | April 1989 | CQSW PQCCA DIPSW | Qualified in 1981 Generic social work before specialising in Family Placement since 1988. Vast experience of adoption work |
| Kath Bishop Social Worker | June 2013 | BSc Hons SW | Qualified in 2009. Worked in the Special Needs Education setting before qualifying as a Social Worker. Experience of working with Children and Families, before moving to current post |
| Angi Simmonds Social Worker/Family Finder | April 2015 | BSc Hons SW | Qualified in 2013. Worked in Early Intervention and the Duty Team before moving to current post |
| Amanda Cunliffe Administrative Support | 2010 | NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Business Administration | C&AS Admin Children and Families |

Adoption agency - organisation and control of operations

The Placement Team Manager who is ultimately responsible to the Assistant Director within the Child and Adult Services Department manages the Adoption Service. The Agency Decision Maker is currently the Director of Child and Adult Services.

The Placement Team Manager supervises the Assistant Team Manager who in turn takes responsibility for supervising the two full time adoption social workers. The Placement Team Manager is also the Agency Panel Adviser.

As with any Adoption Agency, the Adoption and Fostering Panel is crucial to the monitoring and quality assurance of the work of the agency and enables the agency to meet its statutory obligations.

Statutory Requirements

1. Specific requirements govern the composition and terms of reference of Adoption Panels. These are set out in the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendments) Regulations 2011
2. The Adoption Panel established by Hartlepool Borough Council performs an important role in assisting the agency to reach the best possible decision in respect of:
 - The suitability of prospective adopters.
 - Whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter.

The Panel can give advice to the agency (but is not required to do so) on:

- Contact arrangements
- The number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, sex, likely needs and background.

The panel is also required to feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports presented to panel as part of its quality assurance role.

The Regulations seek to ensure that the Adoption Panel has a separate identity from the agency with an important independent element. The National Minimum Standards (England) 2011, and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 further endorse this level of independence.

Panel Composition

In accordance with amended regulations in force from April, 2011, Hartlepool Borough Council have established a “central list” of persons considered to have the appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the Panel for consideration.

The requirement is that the panel is a multi agency body with a considerable element of independence from the adoption and fostering service. This independence means that they do not make the decisions on behalf of the adoption and fostering service but make recommendations in relation to their statutory functions.

There is no limit to the number of people on the central list and the same people do not have to be appointed to every panel meeting. For the purpose of considering adoption matters the members of the central list will include:

- Panel Chair
- Two Agency Social Workers
- The Medical adviser to the agency
- Other persons considered suitable including independent persons. These people could include specialists in education and Child and Adolescent Mental Health and those with personal experience of adoption
- The composition of panel may include other Social Workers

The Panel chair is required to be independent of the agency and to have the following significant qualities:

- The authority and competence to chair a panel
- The ability to analyse and explain complex situations
- The ability to identify key issues , problems and solutions
- Excellent interpersonal, oral and written communication skills

Panel business can only be conducted if there are at least five members which for the purposes of considering adoption matters must include:

- The Independent Chair or Vice Chair – the guidance now indicates that more than one Vice Chair can be appointed
- At least two Social Worker experience of adoption.
- At least one other “independent person”- who is not a member or employee of the Adoption Agency.

In addition to the members of the Panel, the Adoption Panel should also include:

Panel Adviser: This is the Placement Team Manager who attends the Panel in an advisory capacity. They advise the Chairperson and panel members on matters of agency policy, practice and procedure. The Adviser takes back any issues raised by Panel members to the Adoption Social Workers or the agency as a whole.

The professional adviser is not a panel member and does not take part in reaching a recommendation.

Legal Adviser: *This person advises the Panel on any relevant legal issues. The Legal Adviser is not a Panel Member and does not take part in reaching a recommendation.* If they are unable to attend Panel in person legal advice is given in writing.

Membership of Hartlepool Adoption and Fostering Panel Central List includes

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| • Chairperson | Independent Person |
| • Vice Chairperson | Head of Service Safeguarding |
| • Vice Chairperson | Vacant |
| • Agency Social Worker | Head of Service, South Locality |
| • Agency Social Worker | Head of Service SEND |
| • Agency Social Worker x 2 | Team Manager, Safeguarding and Assessment |
| • Agency Social Worker | Team Manager, Through Care Team |
| • Elected Member | |
| • Independent member | Adopter/Adopted Person |
| • Independent member | Retired Social Worker |
| • Independent member | Foster carer/Adopter |
| • Independent member | Virtual Head Education/Adopter |
| • Independent member | Retired LAC Nurse |
| • Medical Adviser | |

Advisers to Panel

- Panel Adviser
- Legal Adviser
- Medical Adviser

Formal voting is not a requirement of the Adoption & Fostering Panel and the Chairperson must try to encourage a consensus view amongst Panel Members. The Panel Chairperson can ask for further information to be made available for Panel Members where a clear consensus is not possible. Any serious reservations expressed by Panel Members must be minuted for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker in Hartlepool is Sally Robinson the Director of Child and Adult Services.

All Panel members are required to have a current Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check and new members are also asked to provide two references which are verified by telephone, an employment history and verification of their identity. New members of the Panel attend a Panel as an observer prior to attending as a full member. They will also receive an induction programme relevant to their needs as part of this process.

Panel members are required to participate in annual reviews. Reviews of the panel members are conducted by the Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser. The annual review of the Panel Chair is conducted by the Agency Decision maker.

The agency is required to arrange panel training at least one day a year but the intention is to extend this to provide additional half day sessions to update on developments throughout the year.

The Adoption & Fostering Panel meets twice monthly and is instrumental in monitoring and evaluating the provision of services to ensure that the quality and effectiveness of the adoption service are of an appropriate standard.

On occasion additional panels may need to be arranged to meet the needs of the service for instance when complying with court timetables in terms of approving plans for adoption.

Complaints Procedure

Complaints can be made about any aspect of service provided by the Children's Services Department. Complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days. There are up to three stages to the complaints system but the aim is to resolve complaints quickly and informally at Stage One wherever possible.

The complaints system can be used by; users of services, carers of those using services, potential service users, foster carers or adopters. The system can also be used to appeal about a decision made about a service provided by the department.

Complaints are dealt with in three stages:

- Stage One: The informal resolution stage. A complaint will be acknowledged and a Social Work Team manager will look in to the complaint and try to resolve it. The complainant will be notified of the outcome within 10 working days or 20 working days if the complaint is complex.
- Stage Two: The complaint will be considered by an Independent Person who will check that the investigation is fair and complete
- Stage Three: The Review Panel Stage. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with any part of the written response at Stage 2 it is possible for the complainant to go to a review panel.

As well as the corporate complaints system detailed above, prospective adopters who have not been approved by Panel have two main options:

Prospective adopters who have not been approved by Panel are entitled to make further representations to Hartlepool Borough Council, as the Adoption Agency;

OR

From 30 April 2004, prospective adopters have the right to refer their case to an Independent Review panel for a review of the agency's determination. The independent panel do not have the power to overturn the original decision but will make a recommendation to the agency on the suitability of the applicants to be adoptive parents.

These options cannot be run simultaneously; prospective adopters who have not been approved by panel must decide whether to make further representations to the agency or seek an independent review of the decision.

Useful Contact Numbers and Addresses

Family Placement Team
8-9 Church Street
Hartlepool
TS24 7DJ

Tel: 01429 405588
E-mail – fosterandadopt@hartlepool.gov.uk

After Adoption
Unit 112
The Design Works
William Street
Felling
Gateshead
NE10 OJP

Tel: 0191 4788396
Action Line: 0800 056 8578
Website: www.afteradoption.org.uk
E-mail – helpline@talkadoption.org.uk

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)
Head Office
Saffron House
6-10 Kirby Street
London
EC1N 8TS

Tel: 0207 7421 2601

BAAF Northern England Tel: 0113 289 1101

Website: www.baaf.org.uk
E-mail: mail@baaf.org.uk

Independent Review Mechanism
Unit 4 Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Leeds
LS12 6 AJ

Telephone: 0845 4503956 or 0113 2022080
Email: irm@irm.org.uk

Anne Longfield

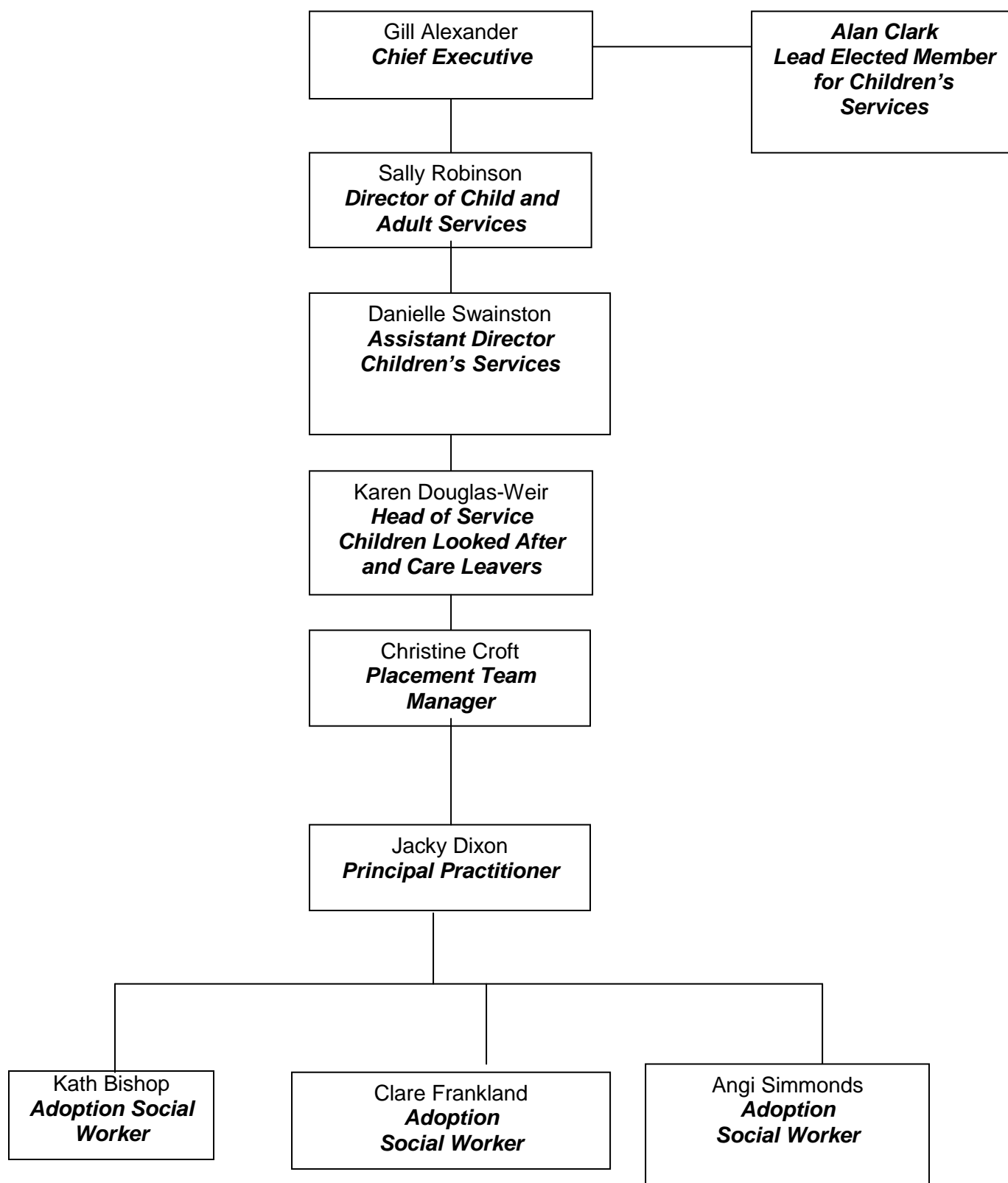
Children's Commissioner

Childrens Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Telephone 0800 528 0731 or 02077838330
info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL – ADOPTION SERVICE



CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

25 July 2017



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: TO NOMINATE LOCAL AUTHORITY
REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE ON SCHOOL
GOVERNING BODIES

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

Non key

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To update members of the Children's Services Committee in respect of vacancies that currently exist for local authority representative governors, and to request that members recommend nominees to the governing bodies where vacancies currently exist.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Reports have previously been presented to the Children's Services Committee in February and July 2015 alerting members to the requirement that local authority governors are now nominated by the local authority but appointed by the governing body on the basis that the nominee has the skills to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school, and meets any other eligibility criteria they may have set.
- 3.2 A schedule (**Appendix A**) is attached setting out details of vacancies which currently exist, together with applications received (**Appendix B**). **This item contains exempt information under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government), (Access to Information), (Variations Order 2006) namely, information relating to any individual (Para 1).**

4. PROPOSALS

4.1 None

5. RISK IMPLICATIONS

None

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

None

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

None

8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

None

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

None

10. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

None

11. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

None

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 That committee gives consideration to applicants as set out in **Appendix B** in respect of local authority nominations for consideration by governing bodies where vacancies currently exist.

12.2 That committee nominates the applicants as described in **Appendix A**.

13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that the nomination of local authority governors will contribute to improve the effectiveness of the governing body to which they are appointed.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

15. CONTACT OFFICER

Ann Turner
Governors Support Manager
Child and Adult Services
Civic Centre
Hartlepool
Telephone 523766
Email: ann.turner@hartlepool.gov.uk

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

25th July 2017



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: FOSTERING SERVICE INTERIM REPORT-
QUARTER 4 (DEC 2016 – MAR 2017)

1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

For information.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the final quarter of 2016/17. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and as such there is a requirement to provide the executive side of the Council with performance information on a quarterly basis.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The work of the Fostering Service is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of Foster Care for children looked after. The National Minimum Standards, together with regulations for fostering and the placement of children looked after, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Fostering Agencies.
- 3.2 The report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff and Foster Carers, the constitution of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective Foster Carers and progress in relation to the priorities set out in the Fostering Annual Report.
- 3.3 The Fostering Services Minimum Standard 25.7 requires Fostering Services to ensure the executive side of the Local Authority:
- Receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 3 months;

- Monitors the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children;
- Satisfies themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

4. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION (AS OF 31 MARCH 2017)

- 4.1 The fostering team continue to recruit and assess prospective foster carers to minimise the dependency and need to source costly external placements for children.
- 4.2 There are currently 114 foster carers (including 22 of those approved as Connected Persons). These carers provided placements for 184 children and young people, including 7 young people in Staying Put placements and 28 children/young people in Connected Care foster placements. This represents an increase of four fostering households since the previous quarter and an increase of 20 children placed from the previous quarter.
- 4.3 Of the 114 approved fostering households, there are currently three foster carers who are currently on hold due to the individual circumstances of the carer, equating to 3 placements. There are a small number of placements that cannot be used due to the specific matching needs of the children/young people already in that foster placement.
- 4.4 The fostering team has continued the recruitment collaboration with the four neighbouring local authorities within the Tees Valley, Tees Valley Fostering, the initiative shares resources and strategies to enable increased recruitment activities to take place across the sub region. We continue to focus this recruitment on specifically recruiting more foster carers for sibling groups and teenagers. A radio campaign and a television advertisement has recently been aired and we continue to work with Tees Valley Fostering on shared initiatives for advertisement and recruitment.
- 4.5 The table below provides details of the recruitment activity which has taken place in the third quarter of 2016/17.

| | |
|---|--|
| Initial Enquiries – including survey of where did people hear about the service | Initial Enquiries 12 Source HBC Website 1 Own volition 7 Hartbeat 1 Facebook 1 Friend recommendation 1 TV/Radio advert 1 |
|---|--|

| | |
|--|--|
| Information packs sent out between 31.12.16 and 31.3.17 | 12 |
| Initial Visits How many proceeded | 4 3 |
| Preparation Group | A preparation group was held in March 2017 and was attended by 5 fostering households. |
| How many prospective Carers are in the assessment process? | There are currently 3 prospective fostering households in stage 1 of assessment. There are 5 prospective fostering households in stage 2 of the assessment. |

5. FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL

- 5.1 The Family Placement Panel continues to be held on a twice monthly basis and agenda items include both fostering and adoption matters. Between 31 December 2016 and March 2017 5 panel meetings have taken place. The panel has a full cohort of members now available. Any new appointments continue to receive induction training and ongoing training throughout the year. Yearly appraisals of panel members are also undertaken.
- 5.2 From 31 December 2016 March 2017 Panel has made recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker on the following fostering matters:
- Seven Foster Carer approvals, five of which are Connected Foster Carers;
 - The matches of four children with a long term Foster Carer;
 - Six foster care reviews.
 - Three Connected Persons Resignations
 - The best interest decision for twelve children for Long Term Foster care.

There have been no foster carer resignations in this quarter.

- 5.3 There are effective processes in place for the recommendations made by Panel to be considered by the Agency Decision Maker and the timescale for this is within 10 working days of the Panel meeting taking place.

6. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The Fostering Team consists of a Team Manager who has management responsibility for the Fostering and Adoption Service, an Assistant Team Manager and six social work posts, 5 of which are full time posts. Included in this we have a full time social worker on a 12 month temporary contract, this post is to cover the post held by the current family finder. The part time social worker is currently on maternity leave.
- 6.2 The Fostering Team continues to benefit greatly from the support of a team clerk. The role of this worker is to continue to offer admin support to the Fostering Team and she is responsible for the planning, preparation and smooth running of Fostering and Adoption Panel.
- 6.3 In addition the Fostering Team continues to benefit from the ongoing role of Family Finder (whose role is currently being covered by an Adoption Social Worker alongside her substantive post). This role continues to be instrumental in family finding for those children and young people in need of permanency via long term fostering.
- 6.4 The Family Finder has been instrumental in developing links with independent agencies and ensuring processes work efficiently between the local authority and the independent agencies.
- 6.5 The Family Finder worker has ensured that plans for permanence are identified as early as possible and that a Permanency Planning meeting is closely followed by a process meeting to minimise delay for children and ensure that social workers are supported in producing quality timely matching reports.

7. DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE SERVICE

- 7.1 The number of children becoming looked after in this final quarter has again increased, this continues to be in line with an increase in referrals for connected carer assessments. We are continuing to recruit, assess and approve new carers consistent with an aim to be able to offer placement choice to placing social workers. We continue to need placements for sibling groups of 3 or more and older teenagers which will be the focus of ongoing targeted recruitment campaigns.

- 7.2 As part of their development and progression, all new foster carers are encouraged to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers Portfolio within a 12 months post approval timescale. All approved Connected Person's Carers have an increased timescale of two years to complete the portfolio. Support in completing the portfolio is available from both supervising Social Workers and existing approved carers wishing to reach progression level Band 4 where there is a requirement to provide mentoring and support. We continue to have a high proportion of our carers who achieve their TSD qualification within the required timescale.
- 7.3 All foster carers are required to complete a record of the training they have attended for the year of their approval. The four mandatory courses are child protection, first aid, attachment and E-Safety. There is a requirement that these courses are completed within one year of approval and updated every three years.
- 7.4 Foster carers are provided with bespoke training specific to their needs whilst caring for looked after children. The bespoke training is reviewed annually and reflected on during the foster carers annual reviews.
- 7.5 Foster carer support groups have continued to take place bi-monthly. Groups are usually attended by 20+ foster carers and offer an element of training, usually provided by a guest speaker delivering information which is of interest to carers and an informal Support Group Session towards the end of the evening.
- 7.6 The Support Groups are arranged and facilitated by at least two members of the Fostering Team who are available to discuss any issues raised by individual carers or the group as a whole.
- 7.7 The fostering team also facilitate a bi-monthly coffee morning for foster carers, which is an informal support meeting.
- 7.8 Foster Carer retention is an essential part of the Fostering service and as such a great emphasis is placed upon this. Within this quarter the fostering team planned organized and facilitated The annual Foster Carers Celebration event attended by almost 90 foster carers where their contribution to fostering was duly recognised and celebrated.

8. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Fostering service ensures that it supports all foster carers to enable them to support our children and young people.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The service continues to recruit and assess prospective Foster Carers to provide placement choice. The fostering service will continue to work in collaboration with the Tees Valley local authorities in respect of fostering recruitment. In addition to this the team will continue to respond to requests for Connected Person's assessments.

10. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 There are no asset management considerations within this report.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Children's Service Committee is asked to note the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service in the final quarter of 2016/17.

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 12.1 The Fostering Service is required to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to children looked after by the local authority and provide regular reports to the Children Services Committee to enable the Committee to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.
- 12.2 Children's Services Committee has an important role in scrutinising the activities of the fostering services to ensure that performance in this area is robust.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Fostering National Minimum Standards Services 2011;
- Fostering Regulations 2011;
- Fostering Annual Report 2015/2016

14. CONTACT OFFICER

- 14.1 Karen Douglas-Weir, Head of Services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, Karen.douglas-weir@hartlepool.gov.uk (01429) 405584 (Direct) / (01429) 405588 (Reception)
- 14.2 Christine Croft, Team Manager (Family Placement) Christine.croft@hartlepool.gov.uk 01429 287216