

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

6<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2012

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>ADOPTION SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>NO</b>

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with performance information on the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the National Adoption Standards as set out in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The report will outline performance information in relation to Adoption during 2011/2012. An annual report was provided to elected members in September 2011.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

#### **Approval of Prospective Adoptive Families 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**

2.1 Eighteen new prospective adoptive families have been assessed and approved as suitable to adopt by the adoption panel. The majority of these assessments were completed without delay and within the timescales laid down in the National Minimum Standards of 8 months from application to approval. Two of the four assessments which were out of this timescale were due to a staff member's sickness absence which was longer than expected, resulting in their cases needing to be reallocated. One was out of timescale due to workload prioritising and the fourth due to the adopters own health issues.

2.2 The Adoption and Permanence Team Managers uses a 'future basing' tool to track the assessments of prospective adoptive families; this tool also highlights any potential delays in assessments, enabling solutions to be promptly sought. For example prospective adopters are now allocated a social worker once they have completed their application form, whenever possible, rather than waiting until they have attended the pre approval adoption training course. This has contributed to reducing delay in the assessment process.

## **Children who were adopted 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**

- 2.3 Each local authority is measured on the timeliness for adoptions; NI 61<sup>1</sup> measures the percentage of looked after children who have been adopted, who have been placed for adoption within twelve months of having a 'should be placed for adoption' decision. The national target for this indicator is 80%. In the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 a total of 23 children were adopted, two of which were adopted directly through the Court by their foster carers and so are not included within the count. Of the remaining 21 children, 14 were placed with adopters within 12 months of their 'Should be Placed for Adoption' decision, giving Wirral a percentage of 66.6% for NI61. The 7 children who took longer to place were either part of a sibling group, older or had special needs, which is in line with the difficulties experienced nationally in placing such children.
- 2.4 Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to date, 5 children have been adopted, 6 children have applications lodged with Court awaiting an Order. There are also 11 children matched or placed with prospective adoptive parents.
- 2.5 In order to meet the increasing demand for panel time, the Adoption Panel now meet every three weeks, rather than monthly and will hold extra ordinary panels to assist Court time tabling when necessary.

### **New initiatives – Adoption Action Plan - Score Cards**

- 2.6 The Government's action plan sets out a range of proposals to speed up the process for children; to overhaul the service for prospective adopters; and to strengthen local accountability for the timeliness of adoption services.
- 2.7 The adoption score cards have recently been published and highlight performance measures through ranking local authorities. Wirral's ranking was in the lower third resulting in urgent attention being given to areas of delay and indentifying how performance can be improved.

### **New initiatives – Concurrent planning**

- 2.8 The Adoption service has, on one occasion, in the past placed a new born child from hospital, with his sibling and her adoptive parents, as it was agreed that rehabilitation to birth parents was unlikely to be successful. The adoptive parents were dual approved as adopters and foster carers to enable him to be placed with them during care proceedings, thus reducing delay for the child and reducing the number of moves he had.
- 2.9 This is a form of concurrent planning, which is being encouraged by the Government. It is planned that the LAC Service Manager will contact local authorities who use concurrent planning more widely, to establish the merits of expanding its use for more Wirral children.

---

<sup>1</sup> NI 61 National Indicator: Percentage of looked after children adopted during the year who were placed for adoption within 12 months of the agency deciding that the child should be placed for adoption

### **3.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 3.1 It is important that Wirral Council has an Adoption service that is able to recruit, prepare, assess and approve prospective adopters that meet the needs of children that are in the care of the local authority, where there is a plan for adoption. The score card demonstrates a need to respond and that the service needs to be mindful of contributory factors that result in delay for children during court proceedings and the adoption process. The areas for improvement will be detailed in an action plan and the progress on the identified actions will be monitored through the Adoption Task Force. In addition the service recognises that whilst there has been significant improvement in the recruitment of prospective adopters from diverse backgrounds, there are further improvements needed in targeting recruitment for more difficult to place children.

### **4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 There are no proposals for consideration in this report; therefore there are no other options to consider.

### **5.0 CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 None required for the purposes of this report.

### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 6.1 None required in relation to this report, other than to note that a Voluntary Agency provides support to birth families and adults seeking information about their birth family.

### **7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

- 7.1 The budget for 2011/12 was £1,586,700 and the expenditure was £2,329,207. This includes the budget for the Adoption Team of £987,100, which has an employee budget of for 19 FTE, a budget for legal fees which overspent by £276,500 (due to the increase in the number of young people adopted) and a budget for Payments to Other Authorities which overspent by £45,000 as a result of young people being adopted outside Wirral. This budget also includes an amount of £599,600 for adoption allowances, which overspent by £390,000. A total of 143 young people were paid adoption allowances at the end of 2011-12 with an average annual cost of £7,200. In 2011/12 at total of 22 people were adopted, 14 of which received adoption allowances.

In 2012/13 the budget is £1,702,200 and the projected expenditure is expected to be £2,462,700. This assumes that an additional 14 people will receive adoption allowances in this year and is based on an average annual cost of £7,400, giving a projected overspend of £484,000. It also assumes that legal fees will overspend by the same amount as in 2011-12.

### **8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 None.

## **9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

An Equality Impact Assessment for Wirral's Permanency Policy was completed in February 2008. As this report has no recommendation for policy change there is no requirement for a new EIA.

## **10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no implications in relation to this report.

## **11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Adoption offers children the opportunity for permanence and to grow up within a family, thus reducing the risk of anti-social behaviour.

## **12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

12.1 That:

- (1) Elected members consider the information in the report and satisfy themselves that the service is being managed effectively and that there are good outcomes for the children and young people being adopted and their adopters.
- (2) Recently published national score cards for local authorities performances regarding adoption, are subject to a further report.

## **13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

13.1 The Adoption National Minimum Standard 25.6 requires the executive side of the local authority to:

- receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the service every 6 months,
- monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users

**REPORT AUTHOR:** *Simon Garner*  
*Strategic Service Manager*  
telephone: 0151 666 5575  
email: [simongarner@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:simongarner@wirral.gov.uk)

## **APPENDICES**

## **REFERENCE MATERIAL**

[Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011](#)

[Adoption Statutory Guidance](#)

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	20 <sup>th</sup> September 2011
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	26 <sup>th</sup> January 2011
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2010
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	17 September 2009
Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee:	16 March 2009
Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee	11 November 2008