

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2nd JUNE 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

THE ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update Elected Members about the work of the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the National Adoption Standards as set out in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. This report serves as an annual report for 2009/10 and updates the performance information provided in the report of September 2009.

1. Background

- 1.1 Under the requirements of the National Adoption Standards Elected Members, in their role as Corporate Parents, should be informed on a regular basis about the activity of the adoption service. Information set out in the reports should include the numbers of prospective adoptive families approved by the adoption panel, the numbers of children placed for adoption and the number of adoption orders granted.
- 1.2 Information should also be provided on the time taken in approving prospective adoptive families and the timeliness of placing children within an adoptive family once they have had a 'Should be Placed for Adoption' recommendation at panel.
- 1.3 This report will also outline the details of the post adoption services that Wirral is able to directly provide and commission.

2 Approval of Prospective Adoptive Families 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010

- 2.1 During this period 14 prospective adoptive families were approved as 'Suitable to Adopt'. With only one exception each of the Prospective Adopter's Reports (PAR) were completed and approved within the timescales laid down by the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2003.
- 2.2 The one exception involved a couple who were originally not approved by panel. A lengthy process then followed involving the Adoption Independent Review Mechanism which eventually resulted in their approval.
- 2.3 Of the 14 approved prospective adoptive families, at 1st April 2010; 8 families were waiting a match, 5 families had been matched with children and 1 family had been deregistered at their own request.
- 2.4 The adoption service are mindful to recruit, train and swiftly assess families, who can meet the needs of children in Wirral. It therefore anticipated that at least 7 of the 8 families will be matched in the near future. There is one approved prospective adoptive family, who are unlikely to be matched with any children in Wirral due to their particular religious background. The details of this prospective adoptive family have been shared with Adoption 22 Consortium, which comprises of the Northwest adoption agencies, in order for a match to be achieved regionally.

2.5 In order to improve the quality of their PARs all staff within the adoption service are now trained in undertaking 'Attachment Style Interviews'. As a result more information is now available to the service concerning the risk/resilience of prospective adopters and their ability to access support when under stress.

2.6 Prospective adoptive families continue to be offered training prior to the PAR commencing to help them understand fully the needs of children being placed.

3 Children who were Adopted from 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010

3.1 During this period, 24 children have been granted Adoption Orders.

3.2 National Indicator 61 is concerned with the timeliness of adoptions and requires that an Adoption Order be granted within 12 months of the Adoption Panel's 'Should Be Placed for Adoption Decision'. Of the above children, 21 were placed within 12 months of the 'Should Be Placed for Adoption Decision'; which translates as 87.5%. There is a table in appendix one which outlines Wirral's performance against NI 61 alongside that of comparator authorities.

3.3 All of the 3 children who did take longer to place did have more complex needs than most children. One of the children had previously experienced an adoption breakdown, so eventual adoption was inevitably delayed as a second suitable match was made and supported.

3.4 In order to achieve such positive results, the adoption service, has worked hard at each stage of the process. The LAC Service Manager now takes a lead for quality assuring the Child Permanence Reports (CPR). By improving the quality of CPRs, it is hoped that the task in relation to matching and placing children with prospective adopters will become easier.

3.5 Several members of the adoption team are now trained in completing 'story stem' work. This is a therapeutic technique which is used to assess children's attachment and readiness for adoption. Clearly better quality information concerning children's attachment will contribute to better matching.

3.7 The adoption team also ensure that the information they provide to the Court is sufficiently detailed and clearly outlines the birth parent's perspective. To this end the team have been commended by the Court in relation to the quality of the reports presented. It is also worth noting that the Team Manager has been particularly forthright in ensuring that Court dates do not delay performance against NI 61.

4 Children placed for Adoption, not yet Adopted 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010

4.1 During this period there were 21 children placed in adoptive families but not yet adopted. Of these children 9 were awaiting a Court date following an adoption application having been lodged. The adoptive families for the other 12 children had yet to lodge their application.

4.2 Some of the 9 children with applications lodged and awaiting a Court date have waited for some time for the adoption to be finalised. Within this group however are children who were previously placed for adoption and experienced a disruption and children with more complex needs.

- 4.3 For these children the delay in securing an adoption order could be viewed more positively as significant preparation work is being undertaken with these children to ensure their preparedness for adoption and to avoid future breakdowns.
- 4.4 In order to ensure children are sufficiently prepared for adoption there is now a staff member trained in undertaking 'Theraplay'. This is a technique aimed at ensuring children and parents are prepared for adoption through attachment based play.

5 Matching Wirral Children with Wirral Adopters 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010

- 5.1 As a local authority, it is important that prospective adoptive parents are recruited who can meet the needs of the children we have waiting for an adoptive family.
- 5.2 Of the 24 children adopted during 2009/2010 and the 21 children placed for adoption all except one have been placed with Wirral adopters. The one child placed with another agency was placed within the Merseyside area.

6 Post Adoption Support Services

- 6.1 In October 2009 a process of development in relation to post adoption support services began. Four Social Workers who previously made up the Assisted Residence Order and Discharge Team (ARD) joined the Adoption Team. In addition a new Senior Practitioner post has also been created, this post has recently been recruited to with the successful candidate due to start on the 1st June 2010.
- 6.2 With the additional posts it is proposed that the adoption team will be able to offer a dedicated post adoption support service. The Senior Practitioner will take on the role of the Adoption Support Advisor (as outlined in the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003) and will take a lead role in developing post adoption support. It is intended that the Adoption Team will become the Adoption and Permanence Team, as the team will also be responsible for delivering support following the making of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).
- 6.3 The adoption team continues to produce a newsletter for families which includes feature articles, available training and notification of social events. There is also a page dedicated to children and young people with articles, competitions and information on events.
- 6.4 The fortnightly parent and tots group, dedicated to adoptive families continues to run successfully.
- 6.5 Negotiation is currently taking place with the Youth Service, with a view to securing their involvement in the future of the Adoption Youth Club.
- 6.6 The Bi-monthly support group, which meets in the evening, continues to be well attended. This is used for general discussion, but also at times has speakers
- 6.7 The adoption team also held a summer fun day and Christmas party for adoptive families. Each event was well attended and willingly supported by staff giving up time during their weekend.
- 6.8 Adopters living in Wirral also have access to assessment of needs to enable them to access other post adoption support services including financial support or direct work via the child and adolescent psychotherapist who is linked to the team.

- 6.9 In addition to providing support to adoptive families the agency also has a duty to provide support to birth families affected by adoption. Currently in order to avoid a conflict of interest support to birth families is delivered through an arrangement with After Adoption which is a voluntary sector adoption agency. There is a plan to re-tender for this service during 2010/11.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The adoption service is rightly proud that 24 children have been adopted during 2009/10 and that the NI 61 was at 87.5% on the 31st March 2010. It is clear that the adoption service is on track to ensure a good number of children are adopted in 2010/11 with 9 adoptive families having already lodged applications on the 31st March 2010.
- 7.2 It is clear that Wirral is able to recruit sufficient prospective adoptive families to meet the needs of children with a 'Should be placed for adoption' decision.
- 7.3 Post Adoption Support is now developing into a service in its own right. It is anticipated that this service will strengthen in 2010/11 through the leadership of the new adoption support advisor.
- 7.4 The next report in six months will ensure elected members continue to receive full and accurate information on adoption performance.

8. Risk Assessment

If the Adoption Service does not perform in relation to the national indicators then there is a risk that the outcomes for some children will be adversely affected. Children need permanence in order to form strong and secure attachments to their carers and to have positive outcomes as they grow up. Adoption is a significant means to achieving this for some children.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 None

10. Staffing Implications

- 10.1 None

11. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

- 11.1 An effective and efficient Adoption Service promotes children's equal opportunity to be considered for permanence through adoption.

12. Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 Children and young people who are secured permanently within families are more likely to grow up to be mature and responsible adults.

13. Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 13.1 None

14. Planning Implications

14.1 None

15. Anti-poverty Implications

15.1 None

16. Social Inclusion Implications

16.1 None

17. Local Member Support Implications

17.1 Children whose plan is to achieve permanence through adoption are likely to originate from all wards within the authority.

18. Background Papers

Adoption National Minimum Standards 2003
Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003
Adoption and Children Act 2002
Adoption Service Inspection Report Sept 2008.
Adoption Service Six Monthly Report Sept 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS

That

(1) Members are asked to note and comment on this report

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services