

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 JANUARY 2011

SUBJECT:	ADOPTION SERVICE UPDATE REPORT
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR SHEILA CLARKE
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 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. In addition the report will outline performance information to date in relation to both Adoption and Permanence during 2010/2011.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

2.1 That

(1) Elected members consider the information contained within this report

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

3.1 To provide an update to 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.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 In accordance with 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 families approved by

the adoption panel, the numbers of children placed for adoption and the number of adoption orders granted.

- 4.2** 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 from Adoption Panel.

Approval of Prospective Adoptive Families between 1st April 2010 to 1st December 2010

- 4.3** Ten new prospective adoptive families have already been 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. Three of the assessments were however, delayed due to staff sickness resulting in a change of assessing Social Worker.
- 4.4** The Adoption and Permanence Team Manager uses a 'future basing' tool to track the assessments of prospective adoptive families. As a result the Team Manager is aware of any potential n completing assessments, so that an early resolution can be sought. One change in practice, which has reduced delays, is that adopters are now completing their application forms during the first of the adoption information giving sessions, as opposed to completing the forms prior to the session. Prospective adopters are keen to attend the information sessions and as a result the forms do get completed. Previously some prospective adopters were slow to complete their application form and as a result their attendance at an information session and subsequent assessments were delayed.
- 4.5** The adoption service clearly benefits from the skills, knowledge and experience of the assessing Social Workers. All of the assessing Social Workers are now trained in completing attachment style interviews, which they use to inform their judgment as to the suitability of prospective adopters.
- 4.6** The adoption service are mindful to recruit, train and assess families swiftly who can meet the needs of children with a 'should be placed for adoption' recommendation. It is clear that the increased number of families approved as suitable to adopt has occurred in direct response to the increase in the number of care proceedings being issued which in turn generate more plans for adoption.
- 4.7** To date the adoption service have benefited from couples and single persons regularly contacting the service to express an interest in becoming adoptive families. The contact information for the adoption service is available through the Wirral Council website, the British Association For Adoption and Fostering website and the Adoption 22 website.
- 4.8** The adoption service does however recognise that there are now children from a diverse range of backgrounds along with children with more complex
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needs with a care plan for adoption. As a result the adoption service now has a recruitment strategy to ensure that recruitment activity in respect of prospective adopters is targeted at a wider range of community groups.

Matching Children with Wirral Adopters

- 4.9** The Adoption Service continues to ensure that children with a plan for adoption are matched with Wirral Council adoptive families, wherever possible, and appropriate to meet children's needs. Between 1st April 2010 and 1st December 2010, 11 children have been matched with prospective adopters, seven of whom have been placed with adopters approved by Wirral Council. Wirral Council continue to be part of Adoption 22. This is a consortium of 22 Adoption agencies within the Northwest including both local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies. One of the aims of Adoption 22 is for agencies to share prospective adopters within the region. As a result Wirral Council seeks to ensure that children who cannot be placed with Wirral Council adoptive families are placed with adoptive families from Adoption 22.
- 4.10** Since the 1st April 2010 four children have been placed with adoptive families from Adoption 22. For one child there were no Wirral Council adoptive families approved who were a suitable match and clearly it was not appropriate to delay matching for this child. Another child was placed within adoption 22 because his siblings had been adopted by the same family. The other two children were twins with additional needs, who could not have been matched immediately with Wirral Council adoptive families.
- 4.11** There is also a sibling set of three children waiting to be matched with an adoptive family who are outside of Adoption 22. This match is being proposed due to the risk that the children's birth family present. This led to an Adoption Panel recommendation, and subsequent decision, that they should be placed outside the Northwest region.

Children who were adopted from 1st April 2010 to 1st December 2010

- 4.12** During this period 18 children have been adopted, which means that the Court has granted an Adoption Order.
- 4.13** The national indicator for adoption (NI 61 Timeliness of Adoptions) does not however focus on the numbers of children who have been adopted, but on the percentage of children adopted who have been placed for adoption within twelve months of having a 'should be placed for adoption' decision.
- 4.14** On the 30th November 61.5 % of the children adopted, had been placed within twelve months of the decision (NI61) against a national target of 80%. When considering this indicator it is important to note that the numbers concerned are small, so that one delayed placement can impact significantly on the percentage. If 3 more children who had been adopted during the first eight months of this financial year had been placed within the twelve month timescale then Wirral Council would have achieved the national target during this period. There are at least five more children who we anticipate will be
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adopted prior to 31 March 2011 and this will have a positive impact on this indicator.

- 4.15** Of the children who were not placed within the timescales there is a sibling group of two children where there is a significant age gap between the two siblings and a development uncertainty in respect of the younger child. Another child's adoptive placement broke down during the introductions. As a result there was a delay in achieving a placement within the timescales whilst direct work was undertaken with this child to ensure her readiness for another placement.
- 4.16** There are checks built in at every stage of the process to ensure that we avoid or minimise placement delay. For example the senior practitioners within the Adoption Service work closely with district Social Workers offering advice and support around the completion of child permanence reports (CPR). The Adoption and Permanence Team Manager and the LAC Service Manager work closely to ensure that the quality of the CPR presented to Adoption Panel is high. Clearly if there is quality information on the CPR then the task of matching a child with an adoptive family will prove to be easier.

Post adoption and post Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support

- 4.17** As noted above the Adoption Service is now part of the Adoption and Permanence Team. Since June 2010 a Senior Practitioner has been in post who undertakes the role of the Adoption Support Advisor (ASSA). The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2003 require the appointment of an ASSA. This role was previously undertaken by the Team Manager, alongside her other duties. In addition there are now four Social Workers within the Adoption and Permanence Team whose specific role is to deliver post adoption and post SGO support.
- 4.18** In terms of post adoption support, adoptive families living within Wirral continue to receive the Adoption News letter. Within the newsletter social events and support groups for adoptive families are advertised.
- 4.19** The fortnightly parent and tots group for adoptive families is now a well established group and following a period of closure the Adoption Youth Club, "Adaptations", has now resumed with active involvement from the Youth Service. The bi monthly support group for adoptive families continues to take place; there is a new monthly drop in service for adoptive families, the Adoption Service held a family fun day in September 2010 and the annual Christmas Party took place on the 11th December 2010. It has been noted within the Adoption 22 Consortia that Wirral Council offers a good range of post adoption support.
- 4.20** In October 2010 a contract was secured in line with the council's procurement policy, with 'After Adoption' a voluntary sector adoption agency, to deliver post adoption support for birth families and adopted adults seeking to trace their birth parents. This work cannot be undertaken by Wirral due to the potential conflict of interest.
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4.21 From April 2010 post SGO cases have transferred from the Districts into the Adoption and Permanence Team. Each of these cases has a clear SGO support plan which may include financial support, direct support from a Social Worker or links to other support services. There are currently 90 SGO support cases within the Adoption and Permanence Team. All of the cases will be reviewed by the team on an annual basis and those requiring services in addition to financial support, are allocated to a Social Worker.

4.22 Letters have been sent to families informing them of the range of post SGO support services available, including support around contact issues, direct work with children and sign posting to a range of universal services. Most requests for support have been in respect of the issue of contact with birth families. Support is provided to arrange contact sessions and supervising more difficult contacts between children and other family members.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

5.1 It is important that children, who need a permanent new family, have opportunity to be secured for their childhood with adoptive parents, where appropriate. As highlighted in this report we need to continue to recruit prospective adopters from diverse background to meet the needs of increasing numbers of children with a plan for adoption. Having sufficient capacity both in Wirral and through Adoption 22 to provide adoptive families is an important element of the Looked After Children Change Programme, which seeks to reduce, where safe, the numbers of children in care.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 As there are no proposals there are no other options to be considered.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 None required as the report is providing information required statutorily.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 No implications in relation to this report, other than to note that a Voluntary Agency provides support to birth families, and adults seeking information, as referenced in the body of this report.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 None.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Adoption and Permanence Service ensures that all adoptive applicants are welcomed equally, with openness and respect. No applicant will be discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, culture, language, gender, age, financial status or sexuality. A child's sense of identity is actively promoted, with particular awareness of diversity and difference.

11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for Wirral's Permanency Policy was completed in February 2008. There is no requirement for an additional EIA in relation to this report as there are no recommended policy changes.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 No implications in relation to this report.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

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APPENDICES

None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Adoption Standards and Practice Guidance

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee	2 June 2010
Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee	17 September 2009
Children and Young People and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee	16 March 2009

