

ADOPTION SERVICE SIX MONTHLY REPORT

Executive Summary

This report updates 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. The report sets out the relevant performance information since the last report in March 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 some of the post adoption services that Wirral are able to offer. Adoption has changed over time, and legislation now recognises that the granting of an adoption order is not the last time a family will need to have contact with adoption support services. Rather than mainly relinquished babies, the children now being placed for adoption have at times experienced significant disadvantage in society and they and their adoptive families will continue to need ongoing support. The aim of the service is to enhance the quality of family life and to prevent family breakdown.

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

- 2.1 During this period 3 prospective adoptive families were approved as 'Suitable to Adopt'. Two assessments took six months to complete and the third took five months, well within timescales laid down in National Minimum Standards.
- 2.2 Two of these families are waiting for a suitable match to be identified, with the third family currently being considered for a match with a sibling group of two children.
- 2.3 The adoption service are mindful to recruit, train and assess families swiftly, who can meet the needs of children who are waiting. To this end pre and post approval

training is offered to all adopters to help them understand fully the needs of children being placed.

3 Children who were adopted from 1st April to 31st July 2009

- 3.1 During this period 6 children have been granted Adoption Orders. Of those 6 children, 5 were placed with their prospective adopters within 12 months of having a 'Should Be Placed for Adoption' decision (NI 61 Timeliness of adoptions). This gives us a figure of 83%.
- 3.1 The one child outside of this standard was an older boy who needed direct work to prepare him for and adoptive placement. He also experienced a disruption in the introductions with the first family identified.

4 Children placed for Adoption, not yet Adopted

- 4.1 It is important to note that with the introduction of the new National Indicator Set, which started 1st April 2008, the key performance indicator now used is focusing on the timeliness of placing children with adoptive families, rather than simply the number of children adopted.
- 4.2 Currently there are 23 children in adoptive placements awaiting Adoption Orders. Of those children 14 were placed within 12 months of having a 'Should Be Placed for Adoption' Decision.
- 4.3 For 5 of the 23 children there were some difficulties to finding them an adoptive family within the 12 month target, due to either their age, being part of a sibling group or a medical condition.
- 4.4 4 of the children are placed with foster carers who are applying directly to the court for an Adoption Order, therefore there is no 'Should Be Placed for Adoption Decision' and Placement timeline, and should be discounted from the overall calculation.
- 4.5 If all the children above are adopted before the end of the financial year, taking account of the 6 already adopted this will amount to 19 out of 25 children being adopted within 12 months of a 'Should Be Placed for Adoption Decision' which is 76%.

5 Matching Wirral Children with Wirral Adopters

- 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 6 children adopted so far this year and the 23 placed for adoption, 23 were placed with or adopted by, Wirral adopters and the remaining 6 with outside agencies.

6 Adoption Support Services

- 6.1 Currently there is a mailing list of 177 families across Wirral whom all receive a Bi-monthly News letter, with 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.

- 6.2 There is a fortnightly parent and tots group, dedicated to adoptive families. This is gaining membership and friendships are being forged beyond the groups.
- 6.3 There is a fortnightly Adoption Youth Club, which is very well attended and feedback from parents and children is positive. The aim of the youth club is to offer young people, through a variety of activities, a safe environment in which they can practice their social skill with their peers.
- 6.4 There is a Bi-monthly support group, which meet in the evening and is well attended. This is used for general discussion, but also at times has speakers and used for training. Some of the Post Adoption Support Services have developed as a direct result of discussions in this group.
- 6.5 Adopters living in Wirral also have access to assessment of needs to enable them to access other post adoption support services or to be signposted to other agencies.
- 6.6 The adoption team have also held a Christmas party for adoptive families and will be holding a summer fun day in September. These events are held outside of work time and staff willingly contribute to supporting them.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 As is indicated in this report the timeliness of placing children with adoptive families is expected to improve on last years figures. Although it is unlikely to ever achieve 100% on this performance indicator, the adoption service are working hard to make improvements.
- 7.2 Also highlighted in the report, more Wirral children are being placed with Wirral's own adopters, which is of benefit to children generally and illustrates that the adoption service recruitment strategy is meeting the needs of children and adopters.
- 7.3 Post Adoption Support Services are in place to enable adoptive parents to redress some of the damage and help children recover. To achieve this, the service has highly skilled and trained staff, who need to continue to be supported and resourced in working preventatively.
- 7.4 The next report will be provided at the beginning of April so that a full years adoption performance figures can be provided. The six monthly reporting thereafter will then ensure committee has as full and accurate information on adoption performance in future. The April 2010 report will also include the Annual Report of the Adoption Panel.

8 Financial and Staffing Implications.

There are none arising from this report.

9 **Equal Opportunities Implications.**

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

10. **Human Rights Implications.**

The promotion of permanence through adoption specifically supports children's right to a family life.

11. **Local Agenda 21 Implications.**

There are none arising from this report.

12. **Community Safety Implications.**

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

13. **Planning Implications.**

There are none arising from this report.

14. **Local Member Support Implications.**

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

15. **Background Papers.**

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

16. **Recommendation**

16.1 Members are asked to note and comment on this report.

Howard Cooper
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