



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 18 October 2023

REPORT TITLE:	ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 1ST APRIL 2022-1ST APRIL 2023
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report is to provide an overview to the Children Young People and Education Committee of the Adoption Annual Report for the period of 31st March 2022 - 1st April 2023 for consideration and scrutiny. The Fostering Annual Report provides an overview of the fostering service in terms of:

- Key performance to date
- Analysis of current practice
- Key issues and risks
- Plans for continuous improvement and progress over the next 12 months.

The Adoption Annual Report 2022-23 is at appendix A.

This report is focussed on a key aspect of the Wirral Plan 2021-26: Working together for brighter futures for our children, young people, and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes for all regardless of their background.

The report affects all wards but is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to note and endorse the Annual Adoption Report 2022-23 as attached at Appendix A to the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Children, Young People and Education Committee with assurance that the Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to children who would benefit from being adopted.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options have been considered as the Children, Young People and Education Committee require annual assurance that the Council is meeting its responsibilities.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Wirral is part of the Regional Adoption Agency incorporating Sefton, Knowsley, and Liverpool, called Adoption in Merseyside (AIM)
- 3.2 During 2022 to 2023 there were 22 adopters recruited across the region (all 4 areas). This is a low number of adopters being recruited to meet demand for adoption. To increase the numbers of adopters being approved. A significant work stream will be focused on improving marketing and communication around the service. It will also be focused upon consolidating some of the working processes across the four local authorities to ensure there is more consistency in work streams, personnel, and enough capacity to deliver on the services required.
- 3.3 Within Wirral there have been between 20-25 children adopted each year since 2021. There were 25 children adopted in 2023.

3.4 Annual Report Summary

- 3.5 The timeliness of some adoptions has been slow because of a lack of potential adoptive matches. This is as a result of the lower numbers of potential adopters due to a lack of recruitment of sufficient adopters across the region. There has been a range of long-term children's placements where a combination of elongated court proceedings which include parental appeals, and a backlog in the court process more generally has affected timeliness. This is related to post covid court timetabling, alongside the Court's duty to ensure that there are no alternatives to Adoption as it is such a strong permanence plan. Where there is the potential for family care such options must be fully exhausted and this can elongate the process depending on the issues for individual casework
- 3.6 The timeliness of the children who come into care and are then placed with an adoptive family has reduced from 809 days to 652 days, reflecting some joined up working between AIM and the social work team and improvements in matching process by AIM.

3.7 Service Priorities 2022 to 2023

- 3.8 During 2022 to 2023 there were 22 adopters recruited across the region (all 4 areas). A significant work stream will be focused on improving marketing and communication around the service. It will also be focused upon consolidating some of the working processes across the four local authorities to ensure there is more consistency in work streams, personnel, and enough capacity to deliver on the services required. There are now monthly AIM operational meetings aiming at driving these improvements (and others) forward and regular updates will be provided to Corporate Parenting Board and Committee about progress.
- 3.9 Wirral is also revamping its Adoption 'Champions' scheme aimed at providing specialist expertise and interface across AIM from specific personnel within the Wirral Permanence Service. Wirral does not have a stand-alone Adoption Team so the 'Champions' are key to ensuring support is embedded within and across social work teams. Having 'go to' personnel who are expert and consult in the adoption arena will provide additional expertise and resilience for staff.
- 3.10 Wirral is also working to ensure that its ability to track life story work and direct work across children who have been adopted or are being adopted is consistent through the use of new IT systems and management across the Permanence Service. Direct work is work that is focussed on face-to-face work with children and families, often involving life story books/resources so that children can understand their family history and journey through care. All children need to understand their identity and this work is an essential component in that and can be undertaken direct with the child/adoptive carers/foster carers and materials supplied for use later in childhood when more appropriate for additional information/context to be supported.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Wirral provides a proportion of the funding towards AIM which is reviewed by the strategic board. There is no planned increase at the moment in terms of the level of funding and any increase will be determined by the operational board with recommendations made to and approval sought from the strategic board on the issue.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The local authority has a duty to provide sufficiency of care options to children looked after, and as part of their sufficiency strategy local authorities must ensure their adoptive placements are considered along with other options for children's permanence.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no direct resource implications arising out of the report. It is anticipated that adoption champions will fulfil their responsibility as part of their normal work role and be supported in doing so by their manager.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 There are risks related to the fact there is no permanent head of service. A permanent member of staff in this role is important in being able to drive forward the service in a range of different work areas and streams. Active recruitment is planned for this role and there will be a new temporary Head of Service in post for the next 6 months from October 2023.
- 7.2 Low numbers of recruited adopters between 2022 and 2023 (22 across the regions) does provide a risk in that we do not have enough local adoptive placement to meet the needs of our children currently. This can potentially lead to increases in spend on interagency fees (using adoption agencies to source adoptive parents). Adoption in Merseyside, AIM, have an improvement plan where the marketing of the service and recruitment of new adopters is central to their strategy.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Adoption Report will be shared with key stakeholders across the council and partners.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. There are no equality issues arising from this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no community wealth implications arising out of the report.

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APPENDICES

The Annual Adoption Report 2022/2023

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Council Plan 2025

Wirral Sufficiency Strategy

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in accordance with section a of its Terms of Reference:

(a) exercising management, oversight and delivery of services to children and young people in relation to their care, wellbeing, education or health, with the exception of any powers reserved to full Council.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date