

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

**ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES CABINET MEMBER**

**ADOPTION SERVICE SIX MONTHLY BUSINESS REPORT APRIL– SEPT 2011**

**1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide the Cabinet Member with a business report summarising the work of the Adoption Service between 1 April 2011 and 30 September 2011.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption) which came into force in April 2011. The service is inspected by Ofsted under these standards every three years. The last statutory inspection of service took place in June 2009. The outcome of the inspection was very positive with the service receiving a rating of 'Good' with no requirements or recommendations.
- 2.2 There is an expectation within the regulatory framework that a business report is presented to the Cabinet Member for information. Until this year, this was required annually. The new National Minimum Standards now require this report to be provided every six months. This is the first six monthly report and covers the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011.
- 2.3 The main responsibilities of the Adoption Service are to:
- Recruit, assess and train adoptive families.
  - Provide ongoing support, training and monitoring to adoptive families.
  - Provide a Family Finding and Matching Service for children requiring an adoption placement.
  - Provide Adoption Support Services to adopted children and their families to maintain adoption placements including support groups.
  - Provide an assessment for adoption support to persons prescribed in ASR4.
  - Provide Birth Record Counselling to adopted adults.
  - Provide advice, counselling and support to birth parents and other significant birth family members affected by adoption.

- Provide a 'letter box' contact system between adopted children and members of their birth families, which is used by approximately 142 families at any one time.
  - Regular consultation with adopters, the children of adopters and the children who are adopted.
- 2.5 As previously reported, the service has been selected to be included in Ofsted's programme of pilot inspections. The purpose of the pilot is to allow Ofsted to compare outcomes under the draft new Inspection framework with outcomes under the current one. It will take place between the 28 November and 16 December 2011. Our participation in the pilot will be invaluable preparation for our next statutory Inspection which is due to take place anytime from April next year.
- 2.6 The Adoption Service comprises a Team Manager and five Adoption Social Workers. This was increased during the period from four to five whole time equivalent Adoption Social Workers with the additional worker commencing in post in September 2011. This has added capacity to the service to ensure it is able to meet its core requirements and help to achieve our priority of achieving permanence for children by enabling them to live in stable, safe placements and form meaningful attachments to their carers.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

The service has continued to progress in a number of areas. These include:

- 3.1 Continuation of the process implemented earlier in the year for the early identification of, planning for and monitoring of harder to place children to reduce delay in them being placed for adoption.
- 3.2 Establishment of a 'central list' of adoption panel members as part of new adoption agency arrangements. This list currently has nine members and recruitment of new members is ongoing.
- 3.3 As previously reported, the service, in partnership with CAMHS, developed further strategies to ensure support is fully in place to meet the needs of children and adopters following placement. This has contributed to there being no disruptions to adoptive placements during the period.
- 3.4 The age range profile of children with a plan of adoption during the period is younger than the previous year. This reflects the aims of the service to ensure timely decision making and a shared concern with the courts to minimise delay for children who need a sense of permanence.
- 3.5 North Lincolnshire Council continues to be at the forefront of developing a business model in relation to the operation of the Yorkshire and Humber adoption consortium and will become the provider authority responsible for managing and co-ordinating the business and activities of the consortium on behalf of all of the member local authorities and agencies.
- 3.6 To continue to strive for excellence, the Adoption Service has linked with the North Yorkshire Adoption Service who were recently rated as 'Outstanding' in their Ofsted inspection to share good practice and benchmark the service.

#### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 The Adoption Service Six Monthly Business report April – Sept 2011 is attached for information only (appendix 1). The structure of this (and future) business report covers the following core aspects:

- Introduction
- Service management,
- Service Activity
- Finance
- Consultation and Feedback
- Plan for Excellence - Future Service Developments
- Conclusion

4.2 The business report supports the Adoption Service Statement of Purpose, as revised April 2011, which comprehensively describes the aims and objectives of the Adoption Service and what facilities and services are provided.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

5.1 Nationally there is a shortage of adoptive placements, particularly for children with complex needs or within sibling groups. In order for the Adoption Service to meet the future needs of the North Lincolnshire care population, it is vital that the ongoing investment in the service continues and we continue to take the lead in the region through developing business and partnership arrangements with regional partners.

5.2 We currently have 56 adopted children whose families are in receipt of financial support at a total cost of £6,814.10 per week. This is in line with nationally agreed rates.

#### **6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

6.1 Statutory - The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005, the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption) and revised statutory guidance implemented in April 2011.

6.2 In order to ensure the Adoption Service continues to meet statutory requirements it needs to ensure it achieves these revised standards. The service is inspected by Ofsted and will be measured against the new standards under revised inspection evaluation processes.

6.3 There are clear expectations within the Ofsted inspection framework, and a strong focus from National drivers and key messages, that adoption services need to be robust, provide sufficient placements and achieve positive matches for children. The Service is inspected by Ofsted under these standards every three years

## **7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Feedback from adopters regarding the service they receive from the Adoption Team has continued to be extremely positive indicating that they feel fully supported throughout the process.
- 7.2 At the annual Adoption and Fostering Fun Day held in September, adopted children were asked if they would like more opportunities to meet with other adopted children and, if so, how they would like this to happen. Children said they would like to participate in activities and gave suggestions. The Adoption Team is now using this feedback to organise sessions.
- 7.3 Adopters were also asked for their feedback regarding the quality of adoption support they and their children receive pre and post adoption. Overwhelmingly, their responses were very positive. All rated the services as either 'Excellent' or 'Very good'.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Member notes the report and supports the continued development of our work in Adoption.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

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Date: October 2011

**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**  
Adoption Service Business Plan April – Sept 2011

# **Business Report on North Lincolnshire Adoption Service**

**April 2011 – September 2011**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption) which came into force in April 2011. The service is inspected by Ofsted under these standards every three years. The last statutory inspection of service took place in June 2009. The outcome of the inspection was very positive with the service receiving a rating of 'Good' with no requirements or recommendations.

1.2 The main responsibilities of the Adoption Service are to:

- Recruit, assess and train adoptive families.
- Provide ongoing support, training and monitoring to adoptive families.
- Provide a Family Finding and Matching Service for children requiring an adoption placement.
- Provide Adoption Support Services to adopted children and their families to maintain adoption placements including support groups.
- Provide an assessment for adoption support to persons prescribed in ASR4.
- Provide Birth Record Counselling to adopted adults.
- Provide advice, counselling and support to birth parents and other significant birth family members affected by adoption.
- Provide a 'letter box' contact system between adopted children and members of their birth families, which is used by approximately 142 families at any one time.
- Regular consultation with adopters, the children of adopters and the children who are adopted.

1.3 This report follows on from the 2010 – 2011 Business Report and details the business of the Adoption Service during the period April 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 – September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011.

## **2. SERVICE MANAGEMENT**

- 2.1 The Adoption Service comprises a Team Manager and 5 Adoption Social Workers. The increase in capacity from 4 to 5 whole time equivalent Adoption Social Workers took place during the period, the additional worker was recruited and started 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011. She has completed an Induction process and begun to undertake mandatory training.
- 2.2 During the past 6 months members of the team have attended training on matching and supporting adoptive placements, diversity, child protection and social networking and adoption.
- 2.3 The service has been very successful in its retention of skilled, experienced staff. The Team Manager who manages the service has now been in post for 18 months. The four adoption established social workers have continued to remain in post with no turnover of staff other than the addition of the new post.
- 2.4 Following the self assessment, the service has ensured it is compliant with the New National Minimum Standards (NMS) that came into force at the end of the period in April 2011, the service action plan is progressing to further enhance practice in line with the revised standards.
- 2.5 The updated Statement of Purpose was agreed by Cabinet Member in April 2011, the service has subsequently been working to this revised document.

## **3. SERVICE ACTIVITY - April 2011 to September 2011.**

### **The Adoption Panel**

- 3.1 The adoption panel meets monthly to make independent recommendations on the approval of new adoptive carers, matching of children to carers and plans for adoption for individual children.
- 3.2 17 children have been presented to the Adoption Panel including 5 sets of 2 siblings received a 'Should be placed for adoption' decision between April 2011 and September 11. This compares with 14 children in the 12 months between April 2010 and March 2011.
- 3.3 Of the 17 children, matches have since been presented to the panel for 3 children. Proposed matches in respect of a further 2 children are due to be heard by the panel in November. Of the remainder, potential placements have been identified for an additional 3 children and placement orders have yet to be made by the Court in respect of 9 children before intensive family

finding can begin. All of the children, whichever part of the adoption process they are at, are currently within statutory timescales applicable to the National Indicator. The average age of the whole cohort is 18 months with 10 children aged 1yr or under.

- 3.4 Between 1 April 2011 and 30 September 2011, 8 children have been adopted from the care of the local authority and 6 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) have been granted. These were placed with their adoptive families in previous years. Of these, 50% met the national measure of being placed with their adoptive family within 12 months of the decision to be adopted being made. This reflects the complex needs and age profile of the children previously placed for adoption. The children outside the timescale were older and/or had health issues creating challenges and delays in identifying adoptive families for them. There is also 1 child placed in the previous year still awaiting an adoption order, she has complex needs and is receiving a high level of support to the placement.
- 3.5 Currently, whilst the overall number of children coming through for adoption is relatively unchanged from last year, the age range profile of children has reduced and there are more younger children coming through.
- 3.6 So far this year 5 children have been placed with adoptive families, 4 were placed within the 12 month timescale showing that the focus on early, effective interventions and planning is leading to improvements in achieving permanence in a timely effective manner. The implementation of the process for the early identification of, planning for and monitoring of harder to place children led by the Adoption Team Manager, as detailed in the previous business report, is also contributing towards reducing delay in children being placed for adoption. It is projected that placements will be sought for a further 19 children by the end of March 2012.
- 3.7 Three sets of prospective adopters have been approved during the same period. The approval of another set of adopters was reviewed and subsequently rescinded due to personal; issues.
- 3.8 The central list of panel members has increased with the addition of another psychologist, an Independent adoption social worker and an educational psychologist who will join the list in December. We are also looking to recruit another adoptive parent and someone with knowledge and expertise regarding BME issues.

### Children Adopted (1 April 2011 - 30 September 2011)

Gender	6 Females, 2 Males												
Age at Adoption	<table border="1"> <caption>Data for Age at Adoption Bar Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Age</th> <th>Number</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>1</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Age	Number	1	2	2	2	3	2	4	1	10	1
Age	Number												
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10	1												
Siblings	1 group of 2 siblings												
Placement: type	2 were with families from Consortium, 3 North Lincs, 3 Other LA												

## 4 FINANCE

4.1 The service level agreement continues to be in place with After Adoption, Yorkshire, to provide birth parent and adoptee counselling as required. This provides birth families with access to a service that is Independent of North Lincolnshire. Between April 2011 and September 2011 individual services were provided in 21 cases including adoptees and birth family members.

This comprised the following:

- Adoptees - 11
- Birth Relative/Sibling - 6
- Birth Relative/ Parent - 3
- Birth Relative/Grand Parent – 1

Referred by:

- NLC - 16
- Self -1
- Relative - 2
- Other - 2

4.2 North Lincolnshire Council is leading the development of a business model in relation to the operation of the Yorkshire & Humber adoption consortium which includes 15 Local Authorities and 3 independent adoption agencies and will become the provider authority responsible for managing and co-ordinating the business and activities of the consortium on behalf of all of the member local authorities and agencies. A letter of agreement to the arrangements has been distributed to all partners.

#### 4.3 Adoption Financial Support

We currently have 56 adopted children who are in receipt of financial support at a total cost of £6,814.10 per week.

### 5 CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

5.1 Feedback from adopters regarding the service they receive from the Adoption Team has been extremely positive indicating that they feel fully supported throughout the process.

5.2 At the annual Adoption and Fostering Fun Day held in September, 17 adopted children were asked if they would like more opportunities to meet with other adopted children. They were also asked how they would like this to happen. The vast majority (88%) showed an interest in the idea. Without exception these children said they would like to participate in activities and provided us with some suggestions. The Adoption Team is now using this feedback to organise sessions which, as far as possible, will appeal to the children and others who did not attend the Fun Day.

5.3 Adopters were also asked for their feedback regarding the quality of adoption support they and their children receive pre and post adoption. Overwhelmingly, their responses were very positive. Of the 18 adopters who completed feedback forms all rated the services as either 'Excellent' or 'Very good'. Some adopters chose to make the own comments that included:

"We've been offered loads of support and never made to feel silly for asking".

" Our social worker and all other staff have been superb during and after both of our adoptive experiences"

" We have found the events the team organise second to none"

5.4 At the Fun Day and later Consultation and Participation evening, the views of adopters were also obtained on how best services could be developed to meet both their and their children's needs. There was a significant level of support for the ideas of a newsletter, an online forum and the use of a buddying/mentor scheme where experienced adopters could provide support to other less experienced ones. Adopters also felt that a means by which their children could have more contact with other adopted children would be a positive thing. This group is being developed

## **6 PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE - FUTURE SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS**

- 6.1 Training for panel members will continue to focus upon Child Protection training which will take place quarterly, the next training will take place in December 2011.
- 6.2 The adoption newsletter which will provide regular information about the service to all adoptive carers, children and relevant others will be in place by the end of November 2011
- 6.3 The BAAF commissioned training on safeguarding in relation to assessments and matching processes for staff in the adoption service alongside colleagues from across the service will take place on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011.
- 6.4 The service is developing an activity based group for adopted children to provide the opportunity for them to meet with other adopted children, share experiences and discuss any issues they wish. This will be in place by the end of November 2011.
- 6.5 The service has developed a children's guide to adoption support in different versions for varying age groups. This is being distributed to relevant children following consultation with adopters on 20th September 2011.
- 6.6 Through developing regional partnership arrangements, the service is seeking to share excellence, develop joint approaches and pool resources. The service is developing jointly commissioned training with NE Lincs aimed at increasing the skills set of adoption social workers in the often challenging and complex area of post adoption support delivered to adoptive families. The main focus of this will be equipping adoption social workers with more parenting strategies which they can pass on to adoptive families who are struggling to understand and manage the behaviours of their children. This will be in place early in the New Year.
- 6.7 Under partnership arrangements with NE Lincolnshire to provide inter-country adoption services, a jointly commissioned service level agreement is now in place with Yorkshire Adoption Agency to provide this service.
- 6.8 The service has also taken the opportunity to pursue excellence through seeking sector led appraisal and advice, and is working jointly with managers from the North Yorkshire Adoption Service – who recently achieved 'Outstanding' in their Ofsted inspection of their service. This will enable the service to benchmark ourselves alongside recognised outstanding practice. Visits to the agency will commence on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

- 6.9 The service has a proactive timetable in place during National Adoption week (31<sup>st</sup> October – 6<sup>th</sup> November) to publicise adoption. This will include recruitment activity at Waters Edge and the Isle, raising awareness on staff desktops throughout the council and use of the local media.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 At the last inspection of the service in 2009, the service was judged to be 'good' with no recommendations or requirements. It has, however, continued to build on this success and meet the needs of the children and their families in North Lincolnshire. The number of children adopted or moving to Special Guardianship arrangements remains consistently high as a proportion of those in care and trends continue to show an improvement in the timescales in achieving adoptive placements.
- 7.2 Following the review of the Children and Young Peoples Service a further investment in the North Lincolnshire Adoption Service took place, the additional staff member started in September. This added capacity to the team helps ensure the service meets its statutory duties and has the capacity to recruit and assess prospective adopters.
- 7.3 Following the implementation of the new NMS, in April 2011 the central list of panel members was put in place. We are continuing to recruit to the new list to increase from the current 9 members. There is a dedicated training package for panel members in line with the NMS and a programme of induction, appraisal and review of panel members to ensure the panel is fully equipped to meet it's responsibilities under the standards and regulations. New members of the central list will receive an appraisal within a year of their appointment.
- 7.4 The adoption service has been successful in a bid for a pilot inspection under the new Ofsted framework for inspecting adoption services. This will take place at the end of November and will provide a clear indication of the progress the service has made since the last inspection.