



**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
1st JULY 2004**

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003-4**

**BRENDA THOMPSON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SOCIAL
SERVICES AND HEALTH CARE**

**JAN DOUGLAS - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL
SERVICES**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with the Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for the year 2003-4, attached as Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND

2. The Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service gives information on the principles, aims, objectives and functions of the Adoption Service, the services and facilities provided, the staffing during 2003-4, activity and developments during 2003-4, and developments and issues for 2004-5.
3. The Annual Report is intended to be a stand-alone document but some of the material is also contained in the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service, which has already been presented to members of the Corporate Parenting Board for approval. Sections 6 and 7 of the Annual Report contain information which does not appear in the Statement of Purpose.

OPTION APPRAISAL

4. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

5. There are no immediate financial or legal implications in this report. There are no specific ward implications as the Adoption Service covers the whole of Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board note the content of this report.

REASONS

7. It is important that elected members are aware of this aspect of Social Services' work in order that they can effectively fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents to children looked after.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

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**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
ADOPTION SERVICE**



**ANNUAL REPORT FOR
2003/4**

Issued by
Middlesbrough Adoption Service
Sandringham House
170a Overdale Road
Middlesbrough TS3 7EA

1. The Principles of the Adoption Service

The work of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service is based on the following principles:

(a) Child focussed

The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.

(b) Partnership

The Adoption Service will work in partnership with parents and children, adoptive parents and their families, foster carers, social work staff, other professionals and other agencies when delivering the service.

(c) Anti-discriminatory practice

The Adoption Service will respect Human Rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism.

2. The Aims and Objectives of the Adoption Service

The main aim of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service is:

- ◆ to provide suitable adoptive placements for children who are looked after by Middlesbrough Council and whose assessed need is for an adoption placement

The secondary aims of the Adoption Service are to provide services to meet the needs of:

- ◆ adults who wish to adopt children
- ◆ children whose natural parents are requesting adoption
- ◆ children who have been adopted, and their adoptive families
- ◆ the parents, guardians and other birth relatives of adopted children
- ◆ adults who were adopted as children

3. The Functions of the Adoption Service

The main functions of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service are:

- ◆ to recruit, prepare, assess and approve adopters
- ◆ to work in partnership with the child's social worker in order to identify suitable adoptive placements for children looked after by Middlesbrough Council
- ◆ to provide counselling for birth parents who are considering relinquishing a child for adoption and to make all the arrangements for the placement if their decision is to place their child for adoption
- ◆ to provide post-adoption support for adoptees, adopters and birth relatives, in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- ◆ to provide court reports for non-agency adoption applications

4. The Services and Facilities provided by the Adoption Service

The services and facilities provided by Middlesbrough Adoption Service fall into 8 main areas:

(a) Those provided to prospective adoptive parents:

- Information and advice about adoption
- Initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming adoptive parents
- Preparation training for applicants
- Assessment of applicants using BAAF Form F
- The opportunity to attend the Family Placement Panel when their application is presented

The above services are provided to people who live within reasonable travelling distance of Middlesbrough and who wish to adopt a child from within the UK. They are also provided to people who wish to adopt a child from outside of the UK but in these instances, the applicants must be resident within the area of Middlesbrough Council.

(b) Those provided to adopters approved by Middlesbrough Adoption Service

- Support from a named member of the Permanence Team throughout the various stages of the matching, linking and placement processes
- A regular newsletter specifically for adopters approved by Middlesbrough Adoption Service.
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Social Services
- The opportunity to have a year's free membership of Adoption UK (a national voluntary organisation which supports adoptive families before, during and after adoption).
- Financial support with expenses related to the introduction and placement of a child, if the child is looked after by Middlesbrough Council.
- An adoption allowance, if the circumstances of the child and the adopters meet the appropriate criteria
- Financial support with expenses related to direct contact with birth relatives, if this is part of the plan for the child

(c) Those provided to children looked after by Middlesbrough Council for whom adoption is the plan

In this situation, the main responsibility for work with the child normally rests with the child's social worker and the Adoption Service works in partnership with the social worker to:

- identify whether there are any adopters approved by Middlesbrough Adoption Service who are a suitable match for the child
- advise and assist with referral to regional consortia and the National Adoption Register if no appropriate local matches are available
- advise and assist with referral to family-finding publications such as Be My Parent and Adoption UK, if no appropriate local or regional matches are available
- receive the initial enquires from people responding to any publicity
- identify whether there are any suitable matches for the child resulting from consortium referrals or publicity
- accompany the child's social worker to visit any potential adoptive families for the child
- provide advice to the child's social worker about the placement and adoption process, especially in instances where the social worker has no previous experience of this area of work
- organise and participate in life appreciation days for children when this is part of the placement plan

(d) Those provided to adopters approved by other agencies with whom a Middlesbrough child is being placed for adoption

- Financial support with expenses related to the introduction and placement of a child
- An adoption allowance, if the circumstances of the child and the adopters meets the criteria
- Financial support with expenses related to direct contact with birth relatives, if this is part of the plan for the child

(e) Those provided to birth parents who request adoption for their child or unborn child

- Counselling about the available options and their implications
- Information, advice and support if the birth parent decides to place their child for adoption
- Making all the arrangements for a suitable pre-adoptive placement if necessary
- Making all the arrangements for a suitable adoption placement
- Provision of a post-adoption post-box service for exchange of information with the adopters of the child
- Financial assistance with expenses related to direct contact with the child and the adoptive family, if this is part of the plan for the child
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Social Services
- Information about other sources of support for birth parents

(f) Those provided to birth parents and other relatives of children looked after by Middlesbrough Council who have been placed for adoption

- Provision of a post-adoption post-box service for exchange of information with the adopters of the child
- Financial assistance with expenses related to direct contact with the child and the adoptive family, if this is part of the plan for the child
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Social Services
- Information about other sources of support for birth parents

(g) Those provided to adopted adults and birth parents/relatives of children who have been adopted in the past

- Counselling
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Social Services
- Information about other sources of support for adopted adults, such as NORCAP

(h) Those provided to other agencies

- Reports to the Court in relation to non-agency adoption applications
- Supervision of placements on request, where another authority has placed a child for adoption with adopters approved by Middlesbrough Adoption Service

5. Staffing of the Adoption Service during 2003/4

There are 6 staff employed by Middlesbrough Council for the purpose of the Adoption Service. They are based in the Permanence Team, which also provides services related to long-term fostering. In addition, there are 2 staff employed by Hyder Business Services who provide administrative support to the Adoption Service. Details of the staff in post on 31st March 2004 are as follows:

Name	Job title	Qualifications	Experience
Liz Watson	Team Manager, Permanence Team	CQSW - 1976 B.T.E.C. Management Studies 2002	With Social Services since 1974. With the Adoption Service since 1996
Val Thompson	Social Worker, Permanence Team	CQSW - 1990	With Social Services since 1990. With the Adoption Service since 2002.
Linda Hall	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 1995 PQ1 – 2002	With Social Services since 1995. With the Adoption Service since 2003.
Karen Towers	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 2001	With Social Services since 2001. With the Adoption Service since 2003.
Judy Yelder	Family Placement Development Officer (shared with Fostering Team)	CQSW – 1976 Certificate in Training & Development – 1992	With Social Services since 1976. With the Adoption Service since 1999.
Gill Bisp	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services (shared with Fostering Team)	NVQ Business Admin. Level 2 – 1995 Level 3 – 1997 Level 3 Key Skills - 1997	With Social Services since 1981. With the Adoption Service since 1996.
Sue Atkinson	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services (part-time, shared with Fostering Team)	B.T.E.C. Business Admin – 1996	With Social Services since 1998. With the Adoption Service since 2000.

During 2003/4, one social worker from the Permanence Team left to take up a post with a local voluntary agency and due to recruitment and budgetary problems, this post remained vacant for the rest of the financial year.

6. Activity and developments during 2003/4

- (a) Levels of activity during the year have been high, reflecting the increased use of adoption as an option for children looked after. A summary of the main areas of activity is as follows:

Number of enquires received	84
Number of requests for initial visits	24
Number of applications	11
Number of adopters approved	14
Number of children whose adoption plans were approved	26
Number of children matched with adoptive families	26
Number of adoption orders made	19

- (b) On 30th April 2003, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England came into force. The legislation and standards were regulated during 2003/4 by the National Care Standards Commission and Middlesbrough's Adoption Service was one of the first authorities to be inspected under the new arrangements. Notice was given in the second half of May that the inspection would take place from 7th – 9th July 2003 and as a result, the preparation period leading up to the inspection was a challenging time for the service. The actual inspection ran very smoothly and the overall feedback about the service was very positive. The inspection report did identify some issues which need to be addressed and an action plan has been devised and agreed with the Inspectors.
- (c) An Inspection by the Social Services Inspectorate of the whole of Children's Services also took place in July 2003 and staff of the Adoption Service were involved in providing information and taking part in interviews relating to this inspection process. The feedback received about the Adoption Service was very positive.
- (d) In October 2003 the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2003 were implemented. This legislation is part of the Government's drive to modernise adoption services and places new requirements on local authorities to maintain a minimum set of adoption support services, to appoint an Adoption Support Services Advisor, to assess the need of individuals and families for adoption support services, and to develop and review adoption support plans. Middlesbrough Adoption Service had already developed a contract with the voluntary agency After Adoption and was able to fulfil some of the requirements of this legislation by means of this contract. Funding has also been provided for several packages of services to support adoptive placements where the child(ren) have significant emotional or behavioural problems. Some other more general services were offered in addition to this, such as a year's membership of Adoption UK (a self-help organisation run by adopters for adopters) and the chance to attend a post-placement training course called 'It's a piece of cake' which is also provided by Adoption UK. However it is interesting to note that the response rate to these new services has been less than was anticipated.
- (e) In September and October 2003 and February 2004, the Team Manager and Development Officer were involved in presenting some sessions of a 3 day training course called 'Parenting the Public Child' which was aimed at social workers, foster carers and other members of staff who deal with children looked after. The 3rd day of the course covered topics relating to adoption and permanence. The Team Manager and Development Officer were also involved in planning and delivering training to the Family Placement Panel, which is required under the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.

- (f) The high level of adoptions in Middlesbrough means that the Adoption Service has difficulty in meeting all the demands placed on it. Other neighbouring authorities face similar issues to a greater or lesser extent and during 2003, work was done to explore the possibility of combining with Hartlepool, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton to develop or commission a joint adoption service. A feasibility study was completed by an independent consultant which recommended that a joint service was not the best option but that closer working on particular areas such as recruitment and training (of both staff and prospective adopters) should be pursued.

7. Developments and issues for 2004-5

- (a) At the end of May, one of the social workers left the Permanence Team to take up a post in one of the locality teams. This means that at present the Permanence Team has 2 full-time social work vacancies, representing a 50% vacancy rate. It is inevitable that this vacancy level will have a negative impact on the service provided until the vacancies are filled. The posts are being advertised but unfortunately, a previous advert did not result in any applications.
- (b) At the beginning of May, the fieldwork teams within Children and Families were re-organised and as part of this, a Children Looked After team was created. This team will focus on working with children who are looked after and is likely to work closely with the Adoption Service to achieve permanence for children whenever possible. This development is welcomed by the Adoption Service .
- (c) The recruitment of adopters who are able to meet the needs of the children who are waiting for placements will continue to be a challenge for the Adoption Service in Middlesbrough, as it is in other parts of the country. During 2003-4, the majority of children whose plans for adoption were approved were over the age of 2 and part of a family group. There has been a slight increase in the last year of the number of adopters approved for children in this category but not sufficient to meet the demand. An additional challenge to recruitment is the fact that Middlesbrough is a small geographical area and many children cannot be placed within the Middlesbrough area due to contact and family issues. It is hoped that closer working with other neighbouring authorities may have some impact on this problem.
- (d) The coming year is likely to generate a lot of activity related to the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which is scheduled for September 2005. Several consultation documents have already been issued and more are likely in the next few months. Staff from Middlesbrough Adoption Service will be involved in the consultations by attending national events and also being part of regional meetings held by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering and the Northern Regional Consortium. The new legislation will have implications for all social workers who deal with children looked after and a programme of awareness-raising and training will be needed in due course.

Judy Yelder
Family Placement Development Officer
June 2004

Liz Watson
Permanence Team Manager