



CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

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DEVELOPMENTS IN ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Corporate Parenting Board a summary of the requirements of The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 and the current provision of the Council.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 came into force on 31st October 2003. These regulations are the first phase of a new national framework for adoption support, placing duties on local councils to maintain a core set of adoption support services. The regulations provide for many of those people affected by adoption the right to request an assessment of their need for adoption support services.
3. The introduction of the regulations reflects the acknowledgement of the life long implications of adoption for all those involved. The Government is keen to encourage more people to adopt children by helping to ensure the support they need is available to improve the success of adoptive placements and the outcomes for the children and families involved.
4. The Department for Education and Skills has issued for consultation further draft regulations 'The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 200X'. When finalised, they will replace the regulations currently operating. Middlesbrough will provide feedback to the Department for Education and Skills on the consultation document via the usual processes.

REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE REGULATIONS

5. The regulations set out who is entitled to receive assistance. The minimum set of adoption support services to be maintained by local authorities is as follows:
 - (a)
 - Counselling, advice and information
 - A modernised system for financial support
 - Support groups for adoptive families
 - Assistance with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth relatives
 - Therapeutic services for adopted children
 - Services to ensure the continuance of adoptive relationships
 - (b) The Adoption Support Services Adviser to help those affected by adoption to access adoption support services.
 - (c) Entitlement for adopted children and their families to receive an assessment of their needs for adoption support services.
 - (d) Development of adoption support plans for adoptive families.

ACTION TAKEN BY MIDDLESBROUGH SOCIAL SERVICES

6. Prior to the implementation of the regulations some services were already being provided. The regulations will now ensure that these services are not eroded but enhanced and developed further. To assist with the provision of adoption support services, ring-fenced central government funding was made available to all local authorities.
7. The local authority is required to appoint an Adoption Support Services Adviser. Within Middlesbrough, the role is formally vested in the Head of Children's Services, with day to day delegation to the Permanence Team Manager. The guidance to the regulations recommends that the Adviser is in the second tier of council management to ensure that inter agency arrangements are in place between social services, education, local health trusts and other local authorities. Vesting responsibility at this level ensures direct access to the Executive Director and thus the necessary influence across agencies.
8. A 'Welcome Pack' for adopters has been developed which gives information to newly approved prospective adopters about services that are available in-house and from external providers such as After Adoption and Adoption UK.
9. Middlesbrough has, for several years, had a Service Level Agreement with *After Adoption*, an independent agency that provides a range of services to adopted children/young people, adoptive parents, birth relatives and adopted adults and also to social workers and other professionals.
10. The services include:
 - provision of telephone help lines and leaflets
 - counselling
 - assistance to adopted adults seeking information about their birth family which includes searching and an intermediary service

- groups for adopted adults, birth parents and adoptive parents
 - support workers
 - group and family events for children and young people
 - specific work with parents losing their children to adoption through care proceedings
11. All newly approved adopters are offered free membership for a year of *Adoption UK*, an organisation that supports adoptive families before, during and after adoption. They publish a bi-monthly magazine, operate a helpline and provide a post placement training course and support tool for adoptive parents called '*It's a piece of cake – Parenting Hurt Children*'.
 12. Middlesbrough has commissioned *Adoption UK* to provide '*It's a piece of cake*' for adopters locally. It is a modular programme and the last module of the current course will be held in July. The programme will be evaluated following completion.
 13. An additional half post has been created within the Permanence Team to assist the team as a whole to meet the requirements of the regulations. The team therefore has an establishment of 4 full time equivalent social workers but, due to staff shortages and difficulties with recruitment, it has never operated with this level of staff.
 14. Social workers in the Permanence Team have attended 2 days specialist training on counselling adopted adults seeking information about their birth family. This will deliver an improved service to those individuals and their families.
 15. Practice guidance notes have been developed to assist social workers to identify the adoption support needs of a child when a plan for adoption is made and those of prospective adopters upon approval. This aids in identifying the individual adoption support plan when a suitable placement is identified for a child.
 16. Arrangements for the payment of adoption allowances, which existed prior to the introduction of the regulations, continue. The regulations give more flexibility to provide financial assistance if there is an assessed need.
 17. Many adopted children have experienced trauma in their early lives that may bring special challenges to adoptive parents that will require specific intervention. This could be a therapeutic service for the child/ family or the provision of respite care. Sometimes this will not be available from universal services and will therefore require commissioning.

OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT

18. Not Applicable

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

19. Ring fenced funding has been provided to assist with meeting the requirements of the regulations. However, it is not possible, given the criteria of when the council would be required to assess someone for adoption support services, to identify the financial implications at this stage.

20. The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 have placed a legal duty on the local authority to maintain a core set of adoption support services.
21. The Adoption Service covers the whole of Middlesbrough and will, therefore be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board support the continued development of services to meet the requirements of the regulations as they are currently set out.

REASONS

23. The actions taken are intended to meet the statutory requirements placed upon the Council.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003

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