

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
ADOPTION SERVICE – ANNUAL
REPORT FOR 2004-5**

**JAN BRUNTON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

**PAUL THOMPSON – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR EDUCATION &
SKILLS**

**TERRY REDMAYNE - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

21st July 2005

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 2004-5, 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 2004-5, activity and developments during 2004-5, and developments and issues for 2005-6.
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 5, 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 advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Adoption Service Annual 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:

AUTHOR: Judy Yelder, Family Placement Development Officer
TEL NO: 01642 - 303968

Address: Sandringham House, 170a Overdale Road, Middlesbrough
Website: <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk>

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE



ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004-5

Issued in June 2005 by
Middlesbrough Adoption Service
Sandringham House
170a Overdale Road
Middlesbrough TS3 7EA


Middlesbrough
moving forward

1. The Principles of the Adoption Service

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

- (1) Child focussed
The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- (2) 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.
- (3) 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 Adoption Service
- 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 Adoption Service
- 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 Adoption Service
- 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 Adoption Service
- 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

4. Staffing of the Adoption Service during 2004/5

There are 7 staff employed by Middlesbrough Council for the purpose of the Adoption Service. In addition, there are 2 staff employed by Hyder Business Services who provide administrative support to the Adoption Service. Details of the staff, their relevant qualifications and experience are as follows:

The Adoption Service was affected by staff shortages for most of the year. There was one vacant social worker post at the beginning of the year and a second became vacant in June 2004. Due to difficulties in recruiting suitable staff and restrictions on filling vacancies due to budget pressures, the vacancies were unfilled until new social workers were appointed in November 2004 and January 2005.

Details of the staff in post on 31st March 2005 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.
Karen Curran	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 2001	With Social Services since 2001. With the Adoption Service since 2003.
Connie O'Neill	Social Worker, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1984 CMS – 2001	With Social Services since 1984. With the Adoption Service since 2004.
Joyce Elliott	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 1999	With Social Services since 1993. With the Adoption Service since 2005.
Elizabeth Johnston	Social Worker, Permanence Team (part time)	CQSW – 1990	With Social Services since 1976. With the Adoption Service since 2000.
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.

6. Activity and developments during 2004/5

- (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	74
Number of requests for initial visits	36
Number of applications	12
Number of adopters approved	11
Number of children whose adoption plans were approved	20
Number of children matched with adoptive families	22
Number of adoption orders made	29

- (b) Middlesbrough Adoption Service has continued to offer post-adoption support, in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2003. The Service has a contract with the voluntary agency After Adoption and is 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 are 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. This course ran from February to July 2004 and was run in partnership with Hartlepool Adoption Service. It was not easy to get a viable group together, but the people who did attend were very enthusiastic and all felt that the course had been an invaluable source of support and learning.
- (c) In May 2004, the fieldwork teams within Children and Families were re-organised and as part of this, a Children Looked After team was created. This team focuses on working with children who are looked after and works closely with the Adoption Service to achieve better outcomes for children looked after. Further structural change was implemented in January

2005 when the Adoption Service became part of the newly created Children, Families and Learning Department.

- (d) The high level of adoptions in Middlesbrough and the staff shortages during the year mean that 2004/5 was a challenging year for the Adoption Service and it had difficulty in meeting all the demands placed in it.

7. Developments and issues for 2005/6

- (a) The Adoption Service is now fully staffed and the beneficial effects of this are beginning to show however there is still a heavy workload for team members due to the fact that they deal with long-term fostering as well as adoption.
- (b) 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 2004-5, the majority of children whose plans for adoption were approved were over the age of 2 and half of them were 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. The recruitment strategy will be reviewed during 2005/6 in order to ensure that we still using the most appropriate methods to find suitable adopters for Middlesbrough children.
- (c) 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 the end of December 2005. The new legislation will have major implications for all social workers who deal with children looked after and a programme of awareness-raising and training will be needed. All existing policies and procedures will need to be reviewed and updated where appropriate and new policies and procedures formulated in respect of new responsibilities that the legislation will introduce.
- (d) A recent visit from an inspector from the Commission for Social Care Inspection has raised awareness of the fact that we will be due for our 2nd major inspection of the Adoption Service in 2006. It has been agreed that it will be beneficial for us to carry out a self-assessment and internal review of the Adoption Service prior to this inspection to ensure that the Adoption Service is meeting the needs of the children of Middlesbrough and to identify any improvements or developments that may enhance the service.

Judy Yelder
Family Placement Development Officer
June 2005

Liz Watson
Permanence Team Manager