

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**  
**7<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL**  
**ADOPTION SERVICE – ANNUAL**  
**REPORT FOR 2005-6**

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CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

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**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 2005-6, 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 2005-6, activity and developments during 2005-6, outcomes for children and developments and issues for 2006-7.
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, 7 and 8 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 the work of the Children Families and Learning Department 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 2005-6

Issued in August 2006 by  
Middlesbrough Adoption Service  
Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre  
Cargo Fleet Lane  
Middlesbrough TS3 8PB

  
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 birth 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 for their child
- ◆ 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 undertake assessments of the need for adoption support
- ◆ 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 10 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
- 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 adoption placement process
- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- 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.
- Financial support with expenses related to direct contact with birth relatives, if this is part of the plan for the child
- Provision of a post-adoption post-box service for exchange of information with their adopted child's birth family

### **(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
- make a referral to regional consortia and the National Adoption Register if no appropriate local matches are available
- make a 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 assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- 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 and support with the process if necessary
- 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
- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- 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 and support with the process if necessary
- 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
- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- 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**

- Counselling in relation to access to birth records
- 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 birth parents/relatives of children who have been adopted in the past**

- Information and advice about access to information and the availability of intermediary services
- Information about other sources of support

**(i) Those provided to adoptive families resident within the area of Middlesbrough Council**

- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Adoption Service

**(j) 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 2005/6**

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 in post on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2006 are as follows:

Name	Job title	Qualifications	Experience
Liz Watson	Permanence Team Manager (currently on long-term sick leave)	CQSW – 1976 B.T.E.C. Management Studies 2002	With Social Services since 1974. With the Adoption Service since 1996
Karen Curran	Permanence Team Manager (Temporary)	DipSW – 2001	With Social Services since 2001. With the Adoption Service since 2003.

Val Thompson	Social Worker, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1990	With Social Services since 1990. With the Adoption Service since 2002.
Connie O'Neill	Social Worker, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1984 CMS – 2001	With Social Services since 1984. With the Adoption Service since 2004.
Joyce Virth	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 1999	With Social Services since 1993. With the Adoption Service since 2005.
Tony Kerr	Family Placement Senior Practitioner (Temporary) (shared with Fostering Team)	CSS – 1990 Practice Teacher Award – 2002	With Social Services since 1983. With the Adoption/Fostering Service since 1997.
Judy Yelder	Family Placement Development Officer (shared with Fostering Team)	CQSW – 1976 Certificate in Training & Development – 1992 B.T.E.C. Management Studies - 2005	With Social Services since 1976. With the Adoption/Fostering 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/Fostering 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/Fostering Service since 2000.

After being affected by staff shortages for a period of 18 months, the Adoption Service began the year with a fully-staffed team. Unfortunately, in October 2005 the Permanence Team Manager became ill, leading to her being absent on a long-term basis. The Fostering Team Manager managed both the Fostering and the Permanence teams from October 2005 until 1<sup>st</sup> June 2006. In addition, a social worker from the Fostering Team was appointed as a Senior Practitioner to work with both the Fostering and the Permanence Teams.

On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2006, a social worker from the Permanence Team was appointed a Team Manager on a temporary basis. Later in the same month, a part-time social worker from the team retired due to ill-health. As a result, the Permanence Team has currently got 2 vacancies – 1 full-time and 1 part-time.



## 6. Activity and developments during 2005/6

- (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	68
Number of requests for initial visits	30
Number of applications	16
Number of adopters approved	13
Number of children whose adoption plans were approved	22
Number of children matched with adoptive families	17
Number of adoption orders made	22

- (b) In addition to the usual activity, the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2005 had a great impact on the team. The new legislation is a comprehensive overhaul of a previous Act which had been in force since 1976. Two team members were part of a group set up to oversee the implementation of the new legislation and were involved in planning and delivering training sessions to other members of staff. It has taken some time to adjust to the changes that have resulted but the new ways of working are gradually becoming embedded into our practice.
- (c) In January 2006, as a response to the new legislation, a system of Permanence Planning Meetings was introduced. These meetings are organised and chaired by the Senior Practitioner. Their purpose is to guide children's social workers through the process of permanence planning for children and ensure that the necessary tasks are identified and completed within timescales. They are proving very beneficial, as they mean that the Adoption Service becomes aware of the children and their plans at an early stage in the process.
- (d) The recruitment strategy was reviewed during 2005. The approach used is that of a drip-feed of different types of information at different levels and this continues to produce a good flow of enquiries. The most significant area of growth, in terms of sources of enquiries, is the use of internet advertising and publicity. It was also identified that although we receive a good flow of enquiries, we need to generate more enquiries from people who are interested in children over the age of 2. These issues will be addressed in our plans for the year ahead.
- (e) As part of a review of workloads within the whole of the Family Placement Service, it was recognised that the demands on the Permanence Team were particularly heavy. As a result, it was agreed that the responsibility for the supervision and support of long-term foster carers would be transferred from the Permanence Team to the Fostering Team and this transfer is now under way.

- (f) The appointment of a Senior Practitioner also meant that there was the capacity to carry out a review of our systems for paying adoption allowances. The review identified several areas for improvement and these will be addressed in the year ahead.
- (g) In January 2006, the Permanence Team, together with the Fostering Team and the Children Looked After Team, moved from Sandringham House to newly created offices at the Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre. The improvement in the standard of accommodation was much appreciated, although the disadvantage is that the team is no longer in the same building as the children's social workers so communication can be more difficult.
- (h) To sum up, it has been another challenging year for Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service. The high level of adoptions in Middlesbrough, combined with the implementation of a major change in legislation, mean that it would have been a challenge even if the team had been fully staffed. The situation that existed for a large part of the year was that 2 members of the team were affected by life-threatening illnesses and the remaining members of the team had to cope not only with increased workloads but also the emotional impact of their colleagues' health problems. The professional way in which they dealt with this is a credit to everyone concerned.

## **7. Outcomes for Children**

- (a) In order to inform future recruitment plans and evaluate the effectiveness of the Adoption Service, a study has been undertaken of all children whose plans for adoption were approved in the 3 year period from April 2003 to March 2006 and is summarised below.
- (b) In the 2 year period from April 2003 to March 2005, 46 children had plans for adoption approved. The profile of these children is as follows:

### **Ages of children**

Under 2	18 (39%)
Age 2 – 5	22 (48%)
Over 5	6 (13%)
Youngest child	1 month
Oldest child	9 years

### **Characteristics of children**

Single children	19
Sibling groups of 2	12
Sibling groups of 3	1
38 children are of white British ethnicity	
2 children are of Pakistani ethnicity	
4 children are of white British/Pakistani ethnicity	
1 child is of white British/Caribbean ethnicity	
1 child is of white British/Iranian ethnicity	
5 children have special needs (e.g. medical problems, learning disability)	

## Outcomes for these children

## Source of adoption placements

Adopted	34	Internal	22
Placed for adoption	3	External – voluntary agency	9
Stayed with foster carers	4	External – local authority	6
Returned to birth family	4		
Still waiting for a family	1		

% of adoption placements which were an appropriate ethnic/cultural match – 89%

- (c) In the period from April 2005 to March 2006, 22 children had plans for adoption approved. The profile of these children is as follows:

### Ages of children

Under 2	9 (41%)
Age 2 – 5	9 (41%)
Over 5	4 (18%)
Youngest child	5 months
Oldest child	9 years

### Characteristics of children

Single children	14
Sibling groups of 2	4

All children are of white British ethnicity  
3 children have special needs (e.g. medical problems, learning disability)

## Outcomes for these children

## Source of adoption placements

Adopted	4	Internal	9
Placed for adoption	9	External – voluntary agency	3
Returned to birth family	1	External – local authority	1
Placed with a relative	1		
Still waiting for a family	7		

% of adoption placements which were an appropriate ethnic/cultural match – 100%

- (d) This study has highlighted some very positive outcomes for children which have been achieved by the Adoption Service. For the period 2003-5, the vast majority of children with a plan for adoption are now adopted. A minority achieved permanence by another route; however those children who stayed with foster carers or returned to birth family did so as a positive choice, not because the plan for adoption had not been achieved. There is only 1 child who is still waiting for an adoptive placement.
- (e) The most recent year shows a slightly different picture but this is accounted for by the time it can take to conclude court proceedings and other parts of the adoption process. In spite of this however, 13 of the 22 children are placed for adoption or adopted.

## **(8) Plans and developments for 2006/7**

- (a) As stated above, the Adoption Service is currently short of staff. The transfer of the supervision and support of long-term fostering placements is almost complete but other demands are increasing and therefore workloads for the team are heavy. The work on Permanence Planning meetings and the review of adoption allowances will continue. However until the staffing situation improves, the scope for other new developments is limited.
- (b) One development which will be implemented is a support group for adopters who are waiting for a placement. This type of group runs successfully in the Tyneside/Wearside area as a joint venture between several different agencies and this is the model that will be used here. We will be working in partnership with Stockton, Redcar & Cleveland and Hartlepool Council Adoption Services. The sessions will be held 4 times a year and will offer a mixture of information and support. The first session will be held on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2006 and will be organised by Middlesbrough.
- (c) Given the workload pressures, it is particularly important that our recruitment is appropriately targeted and that we recruit adopters who will meet the needs of the children who are coming forward for adoption. The study referred to in the previous section has enabled us to say that in a 'typical' year:
- we will need adoptive placements for 20 children
  - 8 of these children will be under the age of 2
  - 9 of these children will be aged 2 – 5
  - 3 of these children will be over the age of 5
  - 10 of these children will be single children
  - 10 of these children will part of a sibling group of 2 or 3 children
  - 17 of these children will be of white British ethnicity
  - 3 of these children will be from the black or minority ethnic community
- (d) Having reviewed the profile of adopters who are waiting for placements and those who are currently being assessed, it is clear that we have a good supply of adopters for children under the age of 2 years. Therefore, for the remainder of the year, our priority will be to recruit adopters for children over the age of 2. People who make enquiries about adoption will be given a clear message to this effect in the written material that they receive and this will be reinforced by staff during any subsequent phone calls or visits.
- (e) In late autumn, we will run a targeted recruitment campaign to coincide with National Adoption Week, with the aim of emphasising our need for adopters for children over the age of 2. The timing of this will enable us to benefit from the nationwide television coverage that National Adoption Week receives, and also means that some of the assessment work currently in process will have been completed. The preparation group planned for January/February 2007 will be targeted at adopters for children in this age group and we are aiming to run a group with at least 3 prospective adopters.
- (f) In terms of the method of recruitment, our approach of a 'drip-feed' of various types of publicity and information will continue. In response to the fact that enquiries made as a result of internet publicity are increasing significantly, we will increase

our use of this method, including expanding the amount of information available from the Council's website.

- (g) Middlesbrough has traditionally needed to use inter-agency placements for some of the children who need adoptive placements and it is expected that this will continue. The fact that Middlesbrough is a small geographical area means that some children cannot be placed within the Middlesbrough area due to contact and family issues. Although we are willing and able to recruit families from within about 50 miles of Middlesbrough, there are several other adoption agencies who cover the same area. Internet publicity may prove useful in this respect, as it does not have any geographical boundaries.
- (h) Middlesbrough Adoption Service will be inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in October 2006 and any requirements which arise from this inspection will be addressed in an action plan which will be incorporated into our plans for the year.

Judy Yelder  
Family Placement Development Officer  
August 2006

Karen Curran  
Permanence Team Manager (Temporary)