

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Parenting Board

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011

Executive Member for Children Families & Learning: Mike Carr

Executive Director of Children, Families and Learning: Gill Rollings

Date: 10 November 2011

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with
 - (a) information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service during the year April 2010 to March 2011 and plans for the year 2011/12;
 - (b) the Statement of Purpose for Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2011/12;
 - (c) the Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2011/12.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
 - (a) Note the information relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service.
 - (b) Formally approve the Statement of Purpose
 - (c) Agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.

IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

3. It is over the financial threshold (£75,000)
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards
Non Key

DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is
Non-urgent
Urgent report

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

5. The Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services were brought into force on 30th April 2003.
6. One of the requirements of the Regulations and National Minimum Standards is that each adoption service should produce a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide to the Adoption Service. There are clear guidelines about what should be included in these documents.
7. The Regulations also require that, in the case of a local authority, the Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members and that it is reviewed, updated and modified at least annually.

ACTIVITY OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE from April 2010 – March 2011

8. A summary of the main areas of activity during the year is as follows:

Number of enquires received	59
Number of requests for initial visits	22
Number of applications	5
Number of adopters approved	4
Number of children whose adoption plans were approved	22
Number of children matched with adoptive families	20
Number of adoption orders made	23

9. The level of activity relating to adoption plans and placements of children has increased throughout the year, due to the sharp increase in the number of children looked after. The number of children with adoption plans approved by Family Placement Panel during 2010/11 was 22. A summary of the profiles of these children is given below.
10. In terms of age, of the 22 children:
 - 8 were under the age of 2 years
 - 11 were aged between 2 years and 5 years
 - 3 were over the age of 5 years
 - the youngest child was 16 months old and the oldest was 8 years.
11. In terms of whether the children needed to be placed with siblings:
 - 17 of the 22 children were single children
 - there was 1 sibling group of 2 children
 - there was 1 sibling group of 3 children

12. In terms of the ethnicity of the children, 20 were White British and 2 were of mixed ethnicity.
13. The outcomes achieved for these 22 children are as follows:
 - 10 children have been adopted
 - 3 children have been placed for adoption but not yet adopted
 - 3 children are currently matched with prospective adopters but not yet placed
 - 6 children where family finding is still in progress.

These figures illustrate that the Adoption Service is performing well and achieving very positive outcomes for children.

PLANS AND ISSUES FOR 2011/12

14. Although the adoption team has been settled throughout most of 2010/11, there will again be significant change. One member of the team has retired and two other team members are moving to new posts in other local authorities. At the time of writing we have recruited to a part-time post and a full time post. The new staff members will take up their new roles from the end of 2011. A final year student will also take up post in Nov 2011 until April 2012.
15. The initial visits to prospective adopters have decreased since April 2011.
16. A preparation group took place in October 2011 for 4 couples. Places were offered to neighbouring authorities and Stockton sent 4 couples, allowing us to run the group.
17. In the past year there has been an increase in the workload of the Adoption Service. Evidence from the past 2 years shows an increasing upward trend of children who have adoption plans. This is evidenced in Middlesbrough in that we have had 18 plans approved at Family Placement Panel since April 2011.
18. Due to the decrease in adopters approved by Middlesbrough, we are having to consider adopters approved by other agencies. The number of approved adopters is decreasing nationally and we are all competing for a smaller pool of potential matches. This means that the main issue for the Adoption Service in the year ahead will be to maintain the high standard of service when taking into account a substantial increase in workload. It also has financial implications for the service.
19. Middlesbrough currently has 31 children for whom the plan is adoption and who are waiting for, but have not been matched with adopters. Of these children, 8 are single children, 10 comprise 5 sets of sibling groups of 2, 9 children comprise 3 sets of sibling groups of 3 and there is one sibling group of 4. Middlesbrough will need to purchase approved adopters from other agencies in order to place these children. The cost this will incur varies considerably, depending on the provider, for example: one child can be placed with a local authority adopter at a cost of £13,138 and 4 siblings placed with a voluntary agency in London would cost £56,760. The age and developmental difficulties of some of the children waiting will also impact on costs, the ability to match and on the time to seek the best adopters. The latter point will also impact on Middlesbrough's performance in the new league table system of government reporting.

20. In the circumstances, the capacity to develop new services will be limited; however we have introduced a mentoring scheme for prospective and newly approved adopters. This means that people in assessment will be linked with adopters who have already had children placed, so that experience can be shared and support offered when necessary. To date this is working well.
21. The service will continue to develop post adoption services, working closely with After Adoption (an independent agency).
22. The service will also encourage birth families to maintain contact with their children and contribute to the Child Permanence report. An adoption team worker will offer to visit all birth families where the plan is for adoption and explain about the processes, contact and Post Box arrangements, and to assist the children's social worker in gathering valuable information for the children's records.
23. We have been proactively researching potential areas of advertising including magazines, TV, radio and involving approved adopters in our recruitment strategy.
24. On the 31 October, 2011 National league tables were published in respect of adoption. The league tables indicate the percentage of Looked After Children who were adopted over a given period and the percentage of those, within the same period, that were adopted within 12 months of the plan for adoption being agreed. Taking these figures into account, Middlesbrough is placed 46th out of over 150 local authorities, therefore within a 'green' rating in respect of Ofsted.
25. As with many such reporting systems, percentages can appear to represent dramatic peaks and troughs in outcomes for children and young people, when in reality, the cohort is such that the number of children being described is very low. There are other indicators which may imply that there have been considerable delays in placing children for adoption, when the reality is that they were placed only a month outside of the 12 month 'measure' and for good and child focused reasons – for example, awaiting the outcome of an assessment of adopters in order to be placed with a sibling.
26. Middlesbrough continues to strive to achieve excellent outcomes for its children via adoption and to improve performance in this area. There are significant challenges ahead, as earlier detail has indicated, but these challenges are being addressed, in the first instance by working with Barnardo's (in their partnership with CORAM) on the 'Better Paths Project'. This project is funded by the DfE and is aimed at reducing delay within adoption. An outcome of the work will be available by Spring 2012 and will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board via the next annual report of the Adoption Service.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CHILDREN'S GUIDE FOR 2011/12

27. The Statement of Purpose for 2011/12 for Middlesbrough Adoption Service is attached as Appendix 1. As required by Regulations, this document contains information about:
 - the principles, aims, objectives and functions of the Adoption Service
 - organisational structure
 - management and staffing details

- the services and facilities provided
- a summary of the procedures and processes used by the Service in relation to recruitment, assessment, and approval of prospective adopters
- details of monitoring systems
- a summary of the complaints procedure and
- contact details for Ofsted.

28. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2011/12 is attached as Appendix 2. The content of this document is also set out in Regulations. The guide will be presented to the Children in Care Council (CICC) for their comments.
29. Both documents must be updated annually and are now being presented to Corporate Parenting Board for the 8th annual review.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

30. All social care services are delivered within a framework of anti-discriminatory practice and there are no specific issues arising from the information presented within this report.

OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT

31. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

32. 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

33. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
- (a) Note the information relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service.
 - (b) Formally approve the Statement of Purpose for 2011/12.
 - (c) Agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.

REASONS

34. This recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
- (a) The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide to the Adoption Service are documents which are required under Regulations 2 and 3 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003
 - (b) The review and updating of these documents is required under Regulation 4 of the same regulations.

- (c) Formal approval of the Statement of Purpose is required under standard 1.2 of the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

35. No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

AUTHOR: Lynn Woodhouse, Family Placement Manager
TEL NO: 01642 201960

*Address: Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre, Cargo Fleet Lane,
Middlesbrough, TS3 8PE*

Website: <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk>