

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

**Agenda
Item No.**

Report of Corporate Director for People

**to
Cabinet
on
6th January 2015**

Report prepared by: Diane Keens, Group Manager,
Placements Resources and John O'Loughlin, Head of
Children's Services

**Adoption Service Annual Report and updated
Statement of Purpose**

People Scrutiny Committee

Executive Councillor: Councillor Anne Jones

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the activities of the Adoption Service, January – December 2014 and to review the updated Statement of Purpose in line with Standard 18.3 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Annual Report, as at appendix 1, is noted.
- 2.2 That the updated Statement of Purpose, as at appendix 2, is approved.

3. Background

- 3.1 The provision, standards and operations of the adoption service is governed by:
- The Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 (updated 2005);
 - The Adoption Agencies regulations 2005 (updated 2013 & 2014);
 - The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (amendment) regulations 2011;
 - The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential amendments) Regulations 2012;
 - The Adoption Minimum Standards 2011.

3.2 National Minimum Standard 25.6 states that the Executive side of the Local Authority should:

- a) receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the agency twice a year;
- b) monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users;
- c) satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

3.3 National Minimum Standard 18.3 required that that the Executive side of the Local Authority formally approves the Statement of Purpose and reviews it at least annually.

3.4 In January 2012, the adoption service was inspected and was deemed overall to be good. Future inspections will be as part of a wider social care framework.

3.5 In May 2012 the Government introduced an Adoption scorecard to more transparently monitor adoption standards across the country. Southend's performance against the scorecard continues to improve.

3.5 Southend continues to be better than the national average in all areas in particular in:

- Average time between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family
- Average time between Placement Order and matching

Although both of these areas are better than the national average, they both rose slightly between the 2012 and 2013 scorecards. This is due to Southend's ongoing commitment to finding adoptive families for our children and the small numbers included in the figure.

Of those children placed since April 2014, who will begin to be reported as part of future scorecards the average time between Placement Order and Matching with adopters has reduced from 220 days to 180 and between entering care and being placed for adoption, from 569 to 380. This should therefore begin to show in the 2015 scorecard, although with 2 sibling groups of 3 for whom we have now successfully identified adoption placements we may still not reach an overall average as low as we would like.

3.7 From 1st September 2012 new regulations came into force in relation to Preferred Option decisions. These are no longer presented to the full adoption panel. It is now the sole responsibility of the Agency Decision Maker in consultation with the adoption medical advisor, independent panel advisor and legal representative. Southend has reviewed its processes to ensure it is compliant with this new requirement. The Southend Adoption Decision Maker is John O'Loughlin, Head of Children's Services.

- 3.8 The Council has in 2014/15 received a further grant to support the work of adoption. This was for £157,750. The purpose of this grant was to recognise the programmes of change underway in the area of adoption.

4. Other Options

- 4.1 There are no other options presented as it is a statutory requirement to present a report to the Executive twice yearly and to update the Statement of Purpose annually.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 The Annual Report provides one of the two reports required each year. The second report takes the form of the Adoption Consortium report. This report came in June 2014.

- 5.1 The Adoption Statement of Purpose has been updated and requires cabinet approval.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

The Annual Report sets out the framework for the work of the Adoption Service. It provides evidence of the annual activity which directly supports the delivery of the Corporate Priority to 'Improve Outcomes for Vulnerable Children'.

- 6.2 Financial Implications

If the service does not work efficiently in recruitment and family finding, there could be a financial impact in the purchasing of adoptive families through the National Adoption register at a cost of £27,000 per placement. In 2014, due to Havering leaving the Partners in Adoption consortium, decisions were made that the remaining partners would join additional consortiums and would become a full fee paying consortium. The impact of this will be much clearer in 2015.

The Council has received a one off grant to further support the work of adoption of £157,750 for 2014/15.

- 6.3 Legal Implications

It is a statutory requirement to present a report to the Executive twice yearly and to update the Statement of Purpose annually.

- 6.4 People Implications

2 new fixed term posts in children's services have been created using the adoption grant to support government priorities to assess more adopters and ensure a reduction in delay for children awaiting adoption.

6.5 Property Implications

None

6.6 Consultation

Consultation with adoptive and birth families and with adopted children about the work and delivery of the service takes place on a regular basis.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The adoption service works within the Partners in Adoption Consortium which covers a diverse geographical area and enables a wider choice of families for Looked after Children in Southend being placed for adoption. We have during 2014 joined in addition the East Anglian Adoption Consortium to widen this choice. Sufficiency planning has identified the need to target families for children from Eastern European countries as well as those willing to adopt children with additional needs and those who are older at the point of placement.

6.8 Risk Assessment

No significant risks identified.

6.9 Value for Money

The Southend adoption service will achieve an estimated income generation of over £177,500 in 2014/15.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. Background Papers

None

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Adoption Service Annual report 2014

Appendix 2: Updated Statement of Purpose December 2014