

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director of Children's Services

to  
Cabinet

on  
22<sup>nd</sup> September 2015

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Services &

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## 6<sup>th</sup> Month mid-year Adoption Report

Department for People Scrutiny Committee – Executive Councillor:  
Councillor Anne Jones

*A Part 1 Public Agenda Item*

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### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the activities of the Southend Adoption Service between January and June 2015

### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report be noted and agreed.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The provision, standards and operations of the adoption service is governed by:
- The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2005(amend 2013 & 2014)
  - The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (amendment) Regulations 2011 and the
  - Adoption National 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
  - 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 Since 1999 the mid-year adoption report has been based on the Partners in Adoption Consortium annual report. However this consortium ceased in April 2014 and therefore this years report is based on the work of the Southend Adoption Service in the first 6 months of 2015.

#### **4. Other Options**

- 4.1 The functions undertaken by the adoption agency are statutory requirements. Since April 2014, Southend has been a member of the East Anglian Adoption Consortium, following the ending of the Partners in Adoption Consortium. This consortium is much larger than the previous consortium and includes several large County Councils including Essex & Suffolk as well as several voluntary adoption agencies.
- 4.2 Southend continue working with other neighbouring authorities and the East Anglian Consortium as a whole to identify areas of work with which joint initiatives can be undertaken.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 5.1 This report shows the activities of the Southend Adoption service in the first 6 months of 2015.

#### **6. Corporate Implications**

- 6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

The mid-year report sets out the framework for the work of the adoption agency/service. It directly supports the delivery of the Corporate Priority to 'improve outcomes for vulnerable children'.

- 6.2 Financial Implications

The Partners in Adoption Consortium was a no fee consortium and therefore on its cessation we had concerns over the financial impact that this would have on Southend given that all external placements would in future cost £27K per placement. However in addition, any placements made with Southend adopters by other local authorities brings income into the Council, given that the local authority placing the child will pay for the adoption placement to cover costs of the recruitment, training support etc. This is a nationally agreed fee for all adoption placements, which local authorities have to pay.

At the end of 2014/15, we were for the first time able to assess the impact of this. During 2014/15, the Adoption Service spent £122,800 on inter-agency placements for adopters outside of the Borough. However £308,125 was raised by outside local authorities using Southend adopters meaning a net gain of £182,325. Taking into account the core budget of £85,650 available for such expenditure the total saving was £267,975.

The adoption service has successfully brought in income for the past three years by finding and recruiting potential adopters that are then subsequently used by other local authorities, and it is hoped that this will continue. There are however several changes over the coming two years which may impact on this.

Adoption grant funding ceases in March 2016. Southend has funded additional adoption posts during that time to support the recruitment of adopters and should these posts end it will limit the ability of the service to manage this level of income generation.

In addition due to changes in the Court's direction, during 2014/15 the percentage of Placement Orders granted nationally dropped by 50% and between the third quarter 2013 and the same period in 2014, the percentage of children adopted dropped by 52% nationally. This has led to an increase in the numbers of adopters available nationally and therefore a decline in the number of inter-agency placements.

In May 2015 the Government introduced a Post Adoption Support Fund, initially for 12 months and due to the innovative and therapeutic work undertaken by the team, at the point of this report Southend has already been able to access over £5K from the fund. There is at this stage no guarantee whether this will continue into 2016/17, however it is likely that local authority budgets will be top sliced in future years to fund this, should it continue.

A Business case is currently being completed to ensure that Southend is able to meet the statutory requirements set in respect of adoption and are at the forefront of practice both for adoption and post adoption services in the coming year and beyond.

### 6.3 Legal Implications

None

### 6.4 People Implications

None

### 6.5 Property Implications

None

### 6.6 Consultation

The adoption service was inspected by OFSTED in January 2012 and adopters and prospective adopters were also consulted at that time by Inspectors. The outcome of the inspection was reported to Cabinet in March 2012. Further consultation took place in late spring 2012 with regards to post adoption support and it was following this consultation that Southend, with the agreement of their partner agencies, set up a local post adoption support group which has been very well attended. Regular feedback is requested from adoptive families to ensure that services continue to meet their needs and are adaptive to the changing horizon of adoption.

Due to changes in adoption legislation during 2013 & 2014, on-going consultation has been undertaken to ensure that new procedures not only meet the legislative

changes but meet the needs of those families approaching Southend for adoption.

#### 6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The Eastern Regions Consortium covers a diverse geographical area and enables a wider choice of families for Looked after Children in Southend-on-Sea being placed for adoption. Every effort is made to match children and adopters in relation to culture, ethnicity and religion, but such factors are only one element of the matching process and do not take priority over the overall ability of a prospective adopter to meet the needs of a child.

Since January 2015, The Southend adoption service has approved 20 new adoptive households and has matched 12 Southend children with adoptive parents.

Southend currently has no children with Placement Orders awaiting adoption.

One severely disabled child was placed for adoption at the beginning of 2014/15 with an inter-agency carer. Sadly this placement was later deemed not in the child's best interest and the child was removed back into foster care. She began to thrive back in foster care and a new adoptive placement was being sought, but subsequently some months later she sadly died from her disability.

#### 6.8 Risk Assessment

The Consortium arrangement reduces the risk of not finding suitable adoptive families for children.

#### 6.9 Value for Money

Effective quality assurance supports value for money within the service. The East Anglian Adoption Consortium arrangement gives Southend-on-Sea a wider choice of families.

The Consortium also looks at shared services such as Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Parties.

In June 2015 the Government published a consultation document on "Regionalising Adoption" which looks at the potential for creating regional adoption services. This is currently in early consultation stages, but could have a massive impact on adoption services over the coming years should it progress as part of the Education and Adoption Bill. At this stage it is unclear exactly how the government envisages these new services functioning, but they see the amalgamation of services as being both cost effective and efficient use of resources.

#### 6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. **Background Papers**

i) Regionalising adoption June 2015, DFE

8. **Appendices**

None

