

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

**Agenda
Item No.**

Report of Corporate Director for People

**to
Cabinet
on
7th January 2014**

Report prepared by: Diane Keens, Group Manager,
Placements and Resources and Sue Hadley, Head of
Children's Services

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

Scrutiny Committee – People

Executive Councillor: Councillor James Courtenay

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the activities of the Adoption Service, January – December 2013 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);
 - 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 requires 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 judged overall to be good.
- 3.5 In May 2012 the Government published an Adoption scorecard to monitor adoption standards across the country in a more transparent way. Appendix 3 outlines the detail of Southend's performance as at September 2013.
- 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

Performance continues to improve and of those children placed since April 2013, the average time between Placement Order and Matching with adopters has reduced from 220 days to 95 and between entering care and being placed for adoption, from 639 to 569. This will show in the 2014 scorecard.

- 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 Sue Hadley, Head of Children's Services.
- 3.8 The Council has received a one off ring fenced grant to further support the work of adoption. This is £ 493,412.00 for 2013-15, of which £177,500 must be spent in the 2013/14 tax year. The purpose of this grant is as follows;
- Diagnostic work to identify gaps or systems weaknesses which are hindering improvements in adoption outcomes
 - System redesign to remove delay

- Design and implementation of robust case management arrangements based on effective management information to reduce drift and delay
- Development of social work capacity in permanency planning
- Peer review, challenge and support

The challenge of concurrent planning for children will be the main area of focus in Southend. This process involves approving some adopters as both adoptive parents and foster carers in order to enable a child to be placed at a much earlier stage under Fostering regulations, and then to remain under Adoption Regulations should the primary plan become adoption.

This will make Southend one of only a handful of local authorities outside of London to operate a concurrent planning project and potentially, it will enable the placement of some of our older children who do not usually attract adoptive parents. An interim report assessing the feasibility of the project is now complete and identifies that this will be of limited value to the local authority for our own children, but may be a positive method of income generation. This will be looked at further and developed into a clear project plan over the next 6 months.

4. Other Options

- 4.1 There are no other options 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 This Annual Report provides one of the two reports required each year. The second report takes the form of the Adoption Consortium report which was last presented on 18th June 2013.
- 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 and within the Partners in Adoption Consortium, 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.

The Council has received a one off ring fenced grant to further support the work of adoption. £ 493,412.00 2013-15 (£177,500 must be spent in the 2013/14 tax

year). A detailed spend profile for this grant has been developed with the support of finance colleagues.

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

The adoption service moved to the Civic Centre on 10th November 2012. The service is now, for the first time, located with the other child care teams and no longer has the additional costs of maintaining a sub office. This move has proved very successful.

6.6 Consultation

Consultation with adoptive and birth families and more recently 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. Sufficiency planning has identified the need to recruit 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 and this is included in the service plan.

6.8 Risk Assessment

No significant risks identified.

6.9 Value for Money

The Southend adoption service has achieved income generation of nearly £100K in the first 6 months of the year with an estimated income for 2013/14 of around £177K.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. Background Papers

None

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Adoption Service Annual report 2013

Appendix 2: Updated Statement of Purpose December 2013

Appendix 3: Adoption Scorecard October 2013