

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for People

to
Cabinet

on

20th September 2016

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Services &
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6th Month mid-year Adoption Report

**Department for People Scrutiny Committee – Executive Councillor:
Councillor James Courtenay**

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the activities of the Southend Adoption Service between January and June 2016

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:
- receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the agency
 - 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
 - satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

4. Other Options

- 4.1 The functions undertaken by the adoption agency are statutory requirements. In April 2014, Southend became a member of the East Anglian Adoption Consortium, following the ending of the Partners in Adoption Consortium. With however the new Regional Adoption Agency activity which was set up in 2015, this consortium ceased to exist and since that time, Southend has been a part of the activity of the Adopt East regional Adoption Agency.
- 4.2 The Adopt East Regional Adoption Agency activity consists of Southend, Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire, Luton and Adoption plus.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 This report shows the activities of the Southend Adoption service in the first 6 months of 2016.

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.

In 2015/16, although the number of children being placed nationally for adoption dropped, due to other grant activity by the government, supporting payments for some inter agency placements, Southend continued to be successful in providing adopters through the national register and thus bringing income into the authority, to counteract the placements purchased for Southend children. During 2015/16 the Adoption Service spent £177,000 on interagency placements, less the core budget of £85,650, leaving a spend of £91,350. The income generated however

was £254,701 leaving an income surplus of £163,350. For the past few years there has been an income target of £170,000 which was just missed.

The adoption service has successfully brought in income for the past four years by finding and recruiting potential adopters that are then subsequently used by other local authorities, and it is hoped that this will continue. This does have a longer term impact as it means an increased number of young people being brought into Southend who in the longer term require post adoption services and a business case is currently being prepared for an additional post adoption worker. Whilst initially this would be a cost to the authority, if the current Government post adoption fund continues, we are confident that the full cost of this post would be recovered through grant applications.

There continues nationally to be a drop in the number of children being placed for adoption, which continues to lead to an increase in the numbers of adopters available nationally and therefore a decline in the number of inter-agency placements.

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 May 2016 and adopters and prospective adopters were also consulted at that time by Inspectors. The outcome of the inspection was reported to Cabinet in July 2016 when adoption services were found to be good. Further consultation took place in early spring 2016 with regards to the Adopt East regional activity. 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.

Some adopter representatives attended the Regional conference regarding Adopt East and the way forward and several are now a part of the formal Adopter Voice consultation group, who are represented on the Adopt East Board.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Adopt East 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.

In the first 6 months of 2016, The Southend adoption service has approved 7 new adoptive households and has matched 13 Southend children with adoptive parents.

Another 7 children are due to be matched in the next 2 panels. The numbers of adopters coming forward nationally has continued to drop and there is no sign of this trend changing in the near future due to increased complication in court decision making processes.

6.8 Risk Assessment

Adopt East should continue to reduce the risk of not finding suitable adoptive families for children. Although not yet formally agreed as an adoption agency in its own right, considerable work has already been undertaken in ensuring joint registers for adopters and children to ensure the widest availability of placements both within the RAA and nationally.

6.9 Value for Money

Effective quality assurance supports value for money within the service. Adopt East gives Southend-on-Sea a wider choice of families.

The regional negotiations and planning also looks at shared services such as Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Parties.

Funding available for the Regional Adoption programme and reduced in 2016/17 and as such progress towards a fully shared service has slowed down.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. Background Papers

Regionalising adoption June 2015, DFE

8. Appendices

None