

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

**Agenda
Item No.**

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive for People

**to
Cabinet
on**

10th January 2017

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Children's Services

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

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 Adoption Service, January – December 2016 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 May 2016, the adoption service was inspected and was deemed overall to be good. This was part of a wider social care framework inspection.

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

Both of these areas are better than the national average, and timescales for both continue to fall. Southend has an on-going commitment to finding adoptive families for our children and the small numbers included in the figure, does mean that it is hard to judge levels from one year to the next.

Of those children placed since April 2016, who will begin to be reported as part of future scorecards the average time between Placement Order and Matching with adopters has reduced from 117 days to 110 and between entering care and being placed for adoption, from 329 to 324. This should therefore begin to show in the 2017 scorecard, although with several sibling groups 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 The grant funding which was available for the past few years to support adoption ceased in March 2016. During 2015 however there were two new grant funding streams introduced nationally for Post Adoption Support and one year funding for some specific categories of inter-agency fee. The adoption support fund will continue into 2017 but with reduced capacity, but the interagency support at this time will cease apart from one very specific category where there is over 18 month delay in placing a child which will continue until the end of March 2017.

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 an interim adoption report. This report came in September 2016.
- 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.

Southend continue to be financially successful in reaching its income generation target set of £170,000 per annum. Difficulties in securing health services for adoption in a timely manner and the cessation of the inter agency support fund will have a financial impact in 2017/18. The amount of this impact is hard to assess at this stage.

In addition, the national changes to Regional Adoption Agencies could have a further impact on income generation dependent on the model ultimately agreed by Adopt East.

The national drop in the number of adopters coming forward and the courts preference to place through other permanency options such as Special Guardianship could eventually impact on the services ability to sell adopters through national forums.

In addition the number of children being referred over the past 12 months has doubled, meaning that it may be necessary to place more children through the national adoption register, particularly where they cannot be placed in a local family. Both of the above two points will impact on income versus expenditure in future years.

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.

Further legal issues may arise in the coming year dependent on the outcome of the Adopt East negotiations and the agreed delivery model.

6.4 People Implications

With the changes in 2016/17 through the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies, it is unclear at this stage as to how adoption services will be delivered in future years and the Governance of this. This will become clearer over the next year.

The success of Southend through the national adoption register has meant a large increase in the demand for post adoption work given the increase in numbers of children being placed for adoption in Southend. The adoption service is a small service and additional capacity is now required to enable post adoption services to be developed as required. Any additional capacity should ultimately be self-funding through the adoption support fund grants, although funding from this is being reduced and there is no long term commitment from the government to maintain this funding stream..

6.5 Property Implications

None at this time however should Adopt East at any stage decide on an actual hub rather than a virtual one, this may have implications for property in the future.

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. The adopters' voice is also fully a part of negotiations regarding Adopt East and they sit as Board members.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The adoption service works within the new Adopt East boundaries 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 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. A full risk assessment will need to be undertaken once the Adopt East delivery model and governance structure is decided upon to ensure that the changes do not have a negative impact on Southend children or their families.

6.9 Value for Money

The Southend adoption service will achieve an estimated income generation of over £250,000 in 2016/17, however it is unclear at this time as to the possibility of achieving this in future years, given the changes proposed in adoption service delivery.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. **Background Papers**

CMT briefing paper (attached) October 2016

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Adoption Service Annual report 2016

Appendix 2: Updated Statement of Purpose December 2016