

# CORPORATE PARENTING SUB OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

Monday, 16 January 2017 at 1.30 pm in the Bridges Room - Civic Centre

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From the Acting Chief Executive, Mike Barker

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Item	Business				
1	<b>Apologies</b>				
2	<b>Minutes</b> (Pages 5 - 12)  The Committee is asked to approve as a correct record the minutes of the last meeting held on 10 October 2016				
3	<b>Education of Looked After Children - REALAC Virtual School Annual Report</b> (Pages 13 - 32)  Report of Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning				
4	<b>Adoption Annual Report</b> (Pages 33 - 48)  Report of Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning				
5	<b>Missing From Care Annual Report</b> (Pages 49 - 60)  Report of Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning				
6	<b>Exclusion of Press and Public</b>  The Committee may wish to pass a resolution to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds indicated:  <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Item</th><th>Paragraphs of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>7</td><td>1</td></tr></tbody></table>	Item	Paragraphs of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972	7	1
Item	Paragraphs of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972				
7	1				

Contact: Rosalyn Patterson - email: [rosalynpatterson@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:rosalynpatterson@gateshead.gov.uk),  
Tel: 0191 433 2088, Date: Friday, 6 January 2017

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**EXEMPT AGENDA**

**7 Regulation 44 Report (Pages 61 - 66)**

Report of Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning

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**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**CORPORATE PARENTING SUB OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING**

**Monday, 10 October 2016**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)  
Councillor(s): S Green, J Adams, B Clelland and  
E McMaster

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS** John Wilkinson and Jeremy Cripps

**CP7 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simcox and co-opted members Sasha Ban and Ann Page.

**CP8 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

**CP9 YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRESENTATION - 'TOTAL RESPECT'**

The Committee received a presentation from young people on the work of the Regional Children in Care Council. The Regional Children in Care Council identified a number of campaign areas including; housing, life skills, money, employment and training.

The young people informed the Committee that the average care leaver on benefits is left with £21 a week for food. The Committee worked in groups to create meal plans on a budget.

During feedback it was noted that there is an expectation that foster carers would help teach young people in their care life skills such as cookery and budgeting.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the information presented.

**CP10 HEALTH OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee received the annual report on the work of the Looked After Children and Young People Health Team in 2015-16.

Key activity over the last year includes the work of the Designated Doctor, Dr Helen

Palmer, in identifying children who have evidence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Work has been ongoing to ensure children becoming looked after have Initial Health Assessment's, of the 180 notifications received over the year, 172 had their Initial Health Assessment's completed, 47% of which were completed within 28 days. It was also reported that 85.9% of the 313 Review Health Assessment's carried out were completed within 28 days of their due date.

It was noted that work is ongoing to ensure care leavers receive their Leaving Care Health Passports, this identifies any health needs. In terms of statistical returns there was a high percentage had health assessments, dental appointments and immunisations. Overall this was above national, regional and previous year's figures, although it was noted that dental appointments dipped due to reporting after 1<sup>st</sup> April, however there are no concerns regarding looked after children's access to dental services.

Work continues around the development of the Expanding Minds Improving Lives project and within that looked after children have been identified as a priority group. In terms of drug and alcohol services there were 42 referrals received, this is an increase on the previous year figures, however it was acknowledged that the previous year's data was limited. The majority of referrals were for nicotine, cannabis and alcohol. It was reported that there were 59 looked after children contacts into sexual health services, these contacts were for contraception, pregnancy testing and STI screening.

It was noted that Dr Palmer is a member of the Adoption Panel, 52 medicals were undertaken during the year and 27 matches were made, this is an increase on the previous year. Dr Palmer also attended 10 Foster Panels over the last year and it was reported that there was a fall in the number of adult medicals requiring medical advice compared to the previous year.

Training has been provided to foster carers, including specific training on caring for children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Looked after children's health needs were also included in safeguarding training to GP's and A&E obstetric and paediatric staff.

The Clinical Commissioning Group has invested additional resources into the team, with a Specialist Nurse and part time administrator being appointed. The Designated Nurse LAC, Linda Hubbucks, is now Designated Nurse in the CCG and will have a strategic role covering Newcastle and Gateshead. The position on the team has been replaced by a Named Nurse LAC. Work is ongoing to develop RAG rating for young people, in relation to their health needs, to prepare them for independence and support their transition to leaving care. The RAG rating will tie in with the young person's pathway plans and will profile their individual needs. In addition, there is work continuing on the development of a database to record and analyse health needs. This will help the team to profile the total population of Gateshead.

It was noted that during the current year further development and monitoring of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire process will be undertaken as well as improving timeframes for Initial Health Assessments. It was reported that Dr Palmer will be retiring at the end of 2016 so contingency planning is underway.

Dr Palmer spoke to the Committee about her work on identifying looked after children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It was reported that this has become apparent through fostering concerns. The only clinic in the country to deal with the disorder is in Southampton, which would be robust psychological testing over a number of days. It was felt that this would not be appropriate to the children diagnosed within Gateshead, therefore training has been provided on how to diagnose the disorder through the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. A pathway has been drawn which fulfils international criteria. There is a lot of work ongoing to identify affected children in Gateshead, for example looking at how they have come into care. It is important to identify early in order to prevent secondary diseases occurring, in addition many are not mature enough to leave care at 18 therefore this needs to be taken into account during pathway planning.

It was acknowledged that this has increased since 2015 with one third of looked after children having that disability, therefore a lot of training has been delivered, for example to foster carers. It was also recognised that there is a huge stigma attached to Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and now expectant mothers are being advised that no amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.

It was questioned whether this was the findings of a conclusive study. It was noted that this has been through diagnosis and also has been exemplified through an increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, with more complex needs and worse outcomes for children and young people. It was confirmed that training is in place for foster carers and schools are visited after diagnosis.

It was queried whether there was any scope in health authorities coming together to develop a specialist unit in a more central location in the country. It was acknowledged that there needs to be a local resource as there are too many children, with approximately 500 within Gateshead's population. It was noted that the clinic in Southampton would only take children with evidence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, however this can be diagnosed locally anyway, it is also felt that it would be too stressful for children.

It was questioned how these learning difficulties can definitely be attributable to Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder when learning difficulties can be for a number of reasons and include a lot of contributory factors. It was noted that there has been a vast increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder and this is one of the causes. It was reported that there are 600-800 children and young people in Gateshead and Newcastle who do not have typical Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and the wider parameters need to be examined.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Committee be noted.

## **CP11 FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee received a report on the work of the Fostering Service over the last 12 months. During the year the number of looked after children peaked at 376, but

has now dropped back to 340. It was reported that over the last year the Fostering Service has worked on providing a range of placements, approving a cohort of adopters, there has also been some de-registrations of foster carers due to retirement or change of circumstances.

In terms of the number of referrals it was confirmed that 62% of placements were needed on the same day, 6% were needed for the following date and 24% were planned placements. It was recognised that the majority were made on the same day in crisis situations.

It was noted that 42 sibling groups were referred, one of which was a group of five. It was acknowledged that it is unlikely that there would be an available foster carer to take all five siblings, typically the most a foster carer could take would be a sibling group of three. The team would look at each case individually and in each case it would be expected that contact would remain between the sibling group.

During the year there was an average of 20 enquiries per month from potential foster carers. It was reported that the conversion rate from enquiries to approval is approximately 11% nationally, however over the last year this dropped to 8% in Gateshead. It was acknowledged that there is a complex process before panel and work is ongoing to increase the conversion rate. A recruitment and retention strategy is in place to promote the service, there has been publicity through the Council's website, Council News, bridge banners, posters and radio adverts.

Service development will continue around the Staying Put scheme which allows young people aged 18 and over to remain in their fostering placements. It was noted however that this reduces the number of foster placements available, therefore the service will ensure there is a robust recruitment strategy in place.

It was questioned how the service ensures the retention of foster carers. It was noted that this is done through payment for skills and ongoing professional development to keep foster carers as upskilled as possible. It was confirmed that work is ongoing to increase the availability of complex teenage placements by ensuring foster carers have the skills to manage these young people. It was also pointed out that Gateshead is above target in terms of placement stability and the service is continuing to strive towards ensuring good standards continue. It was reported that the aim is to recruit 30 new sets of foster carers every year, and that both formal and informal support will be provided by using experienced foster carers to buddy newly recruited carers.

It was queried whether any of the foster carers move from the Council into private agencies. It was confirmed that this does not normally happen, however the Council does receive a number of foster carers moving from private agencies. It was confirmed that this year there has been 24 foster carers de-registered, however 25 have been recruited, and there were no foster carers who left to go to other agencies. Committee was advised that the Council offers whole family support and a competitive package which ensures that foster carers feel valued.

It was questioned whether there is a focus on training foster carers in relation to young people leaving care. It was confirmed that this is part of young people's care

plan and pathway, which is monitored by Independent Reviewing Officers, and foster carers must show delivery of independent living and development skills.

The point was made that recruitment of foster carers from the BME community is low. It was acknowledged that the service is linking in with local groups to increase recruitment, however, because there is a small number of looked after children from the BME community it is about making sure foster carers have placements. It was confirmed that there are good links with the Jewish community made through the recruitment strategy.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Committee be noted.

## **CP12 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW**

The Committee received a report on performance during the first six months of 2016/17. It was reported that the number of looked after children peaked at 378 in July and currently there are 352. The rate per 10,000 in Gateshead remains higher than the national rate of 60 per 10,000, although figures have remained stable for a number of years.

In terms of age and gender of looked after children this has also remained stable, although there has been some fluctuation in relation to 0-2 year olds and 9-11 year olds. It was noted that the majority of young people are under a Care Order, 56%. It was also noted that placement stability is good, with only 2.1% of looked after children who had three or more placement moves. In addition, 86.3% of children who have been looked after for more than two and a half years have lived in the same placement for at least two years, this is compared to the national average of 67%.

It was reported that out of borough placements have increased to 41% which equates to 151 children and young people. Of this figure, 84% are placed within the region. It was noted that four looked after children are placed in Barnet for religious and cultural reasons. The majority are in foster placements and of those a small number are in independent placements, 22 are placed with relatives and family friends.

Committee was advised that all LAC Reviews are currently within timescale. By the end of September 11 adoptions took place and 12 Special Guardianships.

It was recognised that there is an increased focus on care leavers, during 2016-17 there will be 149 young people aged between 17 and 21. It was noted that only four are in unsuitable accommodation, three are in custody and one young person is in hospital sectioned under the Mental Health Act. In terms of care leavers not in employment, education or training (NEET) there is a whole Council support to get them apprenticeship ready.

It was reported that the Mind of My Own (MOMO) app continues to be used by looked after children. Both independent and informal advocacy continues to be provided to young people.

Committee was advised that the Celebration of Achievement Awards Night will be held on 27 October at the Lancastrian Suite.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the contents of the report.

### **CP13 CASE STUDY - OUT OF BOROUGH PLACEMENTS**

The Committee received a report on the number of out of Borough placements. It was reported that there is a contract framework with other local authorities for the provision of residential beds from Independent Fostering Agencies. Provision is monitored and evaluated by the commissioning team within the Council. They oversee to ensure performance is to standard and offer quality assurance prior to any agency being added to an approved providers list.

It was noted that an annual check is carried out on all providers to look at issues such as; health and safety, financial viability, safeguarding, equality and diversity and Ofsted inspection rating. This ensures that any independent fostering agency is operating within legislation and is compliant and best value for the Council.

It was reported that, as at the end of September, there was 114 looked after children placed outside of Gateshead, either with foster carers, connected people or independent fostering agencies. It was noted that the majority are placed within the region to ensure accessibility into Gateshead for reasons such as education.

It was questioned whether the children placed outside of Gateshead are continued to be monitored. It was confirmed that Social Workers must still do the same level of visits and the Independent Reviewing Officer will still hold the same reviews, there is also additional work for those placed far away.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the contents of the report.

### **CP14 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with the indicated paragraphs of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

### **CP15 REGULATION 44 REPORT**

The Committee received a report on the Ofsted inspection outcomes and regulation 44 independent visits carried out in the Council's children's homes. The reports written as a result of the visits are circulated to the Service Director, Social Work, Care Wellbeing and Learning, Service Manager for Looked After Children and the Registered Manager of each Home.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted.



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**TITLE OF REPORT:** Education of Looked After Children – REALAC Virtual School Annual Report

**REPORT OF:** Interim Strategic Director Care, Wellbeing and Learning

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of recent work by the Virtual School.

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#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To update the Committee and provide a progress report on the work of the Virtual School.

#### **Background**

2. Attached to this summary is the annual report 2015/16 of the Virtual School. The report covers service provision and activities undertaken to support the education of looked after children. It includes detailed information on:
  - Achievement data
  - Personal Education Plans
  - Support from Education Psychology
  - Pathways to Work for LAC
3. Officers will make a brief presentation to the Committee, drawing attention to some of the main features of the report.

#### **Recommendations**

5. The Corporate Parenting OSC is asked to:
  - Consider and comment on the attached annual report.

**CONTACT:** Ann Muxworthy

**EXT:** 8609

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## VIRTUAL SCHOOL (REALAC)

Report to Corporate Parenting  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

January 2017



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## 1. LAC School Population

The following tables provide an overview of the numbers of Gateshead LAC across a number of key stages, school and educational settings, LAC ethnicity and out of borough data where this has been available.

### LAC School Population

The following tables provide an overview of the numbers of Gateshead LAC across a number of key stages, school and educational settings, and out of borough data where this has been available.

#### LAC Numbers in and out of borough per statutory age

Current Year Group	November 2014	July 2015	July 2016
Year 11	44	45	35
Year 10	30	32	26
Year 9	24	24	23
Year 8	15	19	25
Year 7	23	22	12
Year 6	14	9	24
Year 5	17	19	20
Year 4	22	22	14
Year 3	19	14	24
Year 2	15	18	20
Year 1	18	16	17
Reception	11	15	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>244</b>

*(Figures taken from REALAC, EMIS and Care First July 2016)*

The largest number of LAC within the secondary sector is in Year 11 with 35 LAC in 2016. LAC at Key Stage 4 are the most challenging of all LAC year groups in terms of behaviour

and the risk of fixed term and permanent exclusion. The challenges and demands this places and continues to place on service delivery is significant. Last year's Year 11 cohort dominated a substantial amount of service resource due to the complexity of need and corresponding support that was required in response to issues relating to behaviour, managed moves/admissions to new schools, alternative provision and potential permanent exclusion.

Years 9, 10 and 11 LAC cohorts are large in number which is significant due to the critical stage this age range represents in the educational pathway. LAC in Year 9 will be making important decisions about curriculum choices which will impact upon their future, those in Year 10 will be embarking upon GCSE study and Year 11 LAC will be preparing for final exams.

### LAC Numbers per Gateshead Secondary Schools

School	Gateshead LAC Years 7-13	LAC – attending Gateshead schools from other Local Authorities	Total No Of LAC Gateshead & Other Local Authorities
Cardinal Hume	4	2	6
Thorp	8	5	13
Emmanuel College	4	0	4
Heworth	11	0	11
Joseph Swan	12	1	13
Kingsmeadow	7	2	9
Lord Lawson	6	0	6
St Thomas More	11	5	16
Thomas Hepburn	8	1	9
Whickham	3	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>94</b>

*(Figures taken from REALAC, EMIS and Care First July 2016)*

Overall the number of Gateshead LAC, including LAC from other Local Authorities attending Gateshead secondary schools, went down since the beginning of the 2015-16 academic year from 97 to 94. The school with the largest total of Looked after Children combined (Gateshead and non Gateshead) is St Thomas More with 16 whilst the lowest is Emmanuel College which has 4.

REALAC also has a role in supporting other Local Authority LAC who attend Gateshead schools. There was a slight drop in the number of non Gateshead LAC attending Gateshead schools in 2015-16 when figures were at 22, to 20 in 2014-15 this year.

## 2 LAC Educated out of Borough

Out of borough	Nos of LAC
Primary	12
Secondary	23
Special	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>

*(Figures taken from REALAC July 2016)*

There is a significant number of Gateshead LAC being educated out of borough, (23% of the total Gateshead LAC population)

### LAC Educated out of borough across all key stages

Key Stage	Total
Early Years (EY, N & R)	0
Key Stage 1 (Year 1 & 2)	5
Key Stage 2 (Year 3, 4, 5 & 6)	11
Key Stage 3 (Year 7, 8 & 9)	23
Key Stage 4 (Year 10 & 11)	10
Key Stage 5 (Year 12 & 13 HE)	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>

### LAC Educated out of Borough according to setting

<b>Number of out of borough Educational Settings</b>	
<b>Primary</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Primary Special</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Secondary (including middle)</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Secondary Special</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

*(Figures taken from REALAC July 2016)*

The 56 Gateshead LAC educated out of borough is spread across 44 settings, of which 41% are special schools.

### **3. LAC & SEN**

The following tables provide data relating to LAC with SEN, across a number of key stages and year groups.

#### **LAC with Single Plan/Statements**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Single Plan/Statement</b>
<b>Rec</b>	0
<b>1</b>	0
<b>2</b>	1
<b>3</b>	6
<b>4</b>	4
<b>5</b>	3
<b>6</b>	6
<b>7</b>	4
<b>8</b>	4
<b>9</b>	2
<b>10</b>	11

11	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>

#### **Breakdown of SEN by Category**

<b>Breakdown of LAC</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>
<b>Attention Control Difficulties (SEMH)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Disruptive &amp; Disturbing Behaviour (SEMH)</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Physical Disability (PD)</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Speech, Language &amp; Comms Needs (SLCN)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Visual Impairment (VI)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>

(Figures as of November 2016)

The table above shows the SEND category breakdown for Looked after Children with Single/Plan/Statement, the biggest cohort is children who come under the category of Disruptive & Disturbing Behaviour of which there are 23.

#### **4. LAC School Attendance**

Attendance figures are drawn down to the Virtual school on a termly basis from EMIS and via school information requests. LAC who achieve 100% attendance are rewarded with a certificate and a voucher from REALAC. Where low attendance is identified as an emerging issue this is picked up in the PEP or reported by social workers and this is then followed up by REALAC officers.

As there has been a problem with the links between Emis and the schools we are unable to give yearly attendance figures for 2015/16.

At present we can confirm that 33 Looked after Children have achieved 100% Attendance for 2015/16.

## 5. Achievement and Attainment

The following is a breakdown per key stage of LAC achievement at the end of each key stage.

### Key Stage 1

Gateshead Year 2 Cohort was 21 Students, below is a table showing results of their Key Stage 1 tests and a comparison with All of Gateshead and Nationally.

Key Stage 1 SATS Results			
% Achieving Expected Level	LAC	All Gateshead	National
Writing	52%	69%	65%
Reading	57%	77%	74%
Maths	57%	74%	73%
Writing, Reading and Maths	48%	64%	60%

### Evaluation.

A new set of KS1 national curriculum tests replaces the previous tests and tasks. The new tests consist of the following

- 2 English reading Papers
- 2 English grammar, punctuation and spelling Papers
- 2 mathematics Papers

The tests are Graded as making Greater Depth, Expected Level, below Expected.

The cohort was 21 in 2015/16, this is higher than in 2014/15 when it was only 15.

12 Children were SEN – 57% of the cohort.

11 children gained the expected level in writing

12 children gained the expected level in reading

12 children gained the expected level in maths

10 children gained the expected level in Writing, Reading & Maths

Gateshead schools results were higher than the National Average in all subjects.

As these tests are taking place for the first time and are of a much higher standard we are unable to do a comparison with previous years. We will not know until the 2016/17 results are published how good or bad this years results are.

National looked after Children results for 2015/16 are not published until March 2017 so at present we are unable to do a comparison with our own but we are confident as in previous years that we will be above the National average for Looked after Children.

### Key Stage 2 (SATs Results)

Gateshead Year 6 Cohort was 21 Students, below is a table showing results of their SATs tests and a comparison with All of Gateshead and Nationally.

<b>Key Stage 2 SATS Results</b>			
<b>% Achieving Expected Level</b>	<b>LAC</b>	<b>All Gateshead</b>	<b>National</b>
<b>Writing</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>74%</b>
<b>Reading</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>Maths</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>Writing, Reading and Maths</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>72%</b>

### Evaluation.

The new SATS are marked differently to previous years where a Level 4 was seen as making Expected Level, they are now marked out of a 120, anyone achieving a score of 100 or above is classed as being at Expected Level, 99 or below is classed as not meeting Expected Level. The children sat a series of tests for each subject to gain their score, the exception to that is in Writing where it is graded through Teacher Assessments.

The cohort was 21 in 2015/16, this is much higher than in 2014/15 when it was only 9.

8 Children were SEN – 36% of the cohort.

15 children gained the expected level in writing

13 children gained the expected level in reading

9 children gained the expected level in maths

13 children gained the expected level in Grammar, Punctuation & Spelling

5 children gained the expected level in Writing, Reading & Maths

Gateshead schools results were higher than the National Average in all subjects.

Gateshead Looked after Children were below the national average which was to be expected but in some subjects there was only a slight difference.

Writing – National Average was 74%, Gateshead looked after Children achieved 71%, only a 3% difference and deemed close to the national average.

Reading - National Average was 66%, Gateshead looked after Children achieved 62%, only a 4% difference and also close to the national average.

Grammar, Punctuation & Spelling - National Average was 72%, Gateshead looked after Children achieved 62% a 10% difference.

Maths – National Average 70%, Gateshead looked after Children achieved 43%, this was the biggest gap with a 27% difference. Schools felt that the paper had greater challenge in reasoning and this may be why this group scored lower in the maths.

Writing, Reading & Maths – National Average was 53%, Gateshead LAC achieved 29%, the major reason for the 24% difference is because of the lower percentage achieved in Maths.

**As these tests are taking place for the first time and are of a much higher standard we are unable to do a comparison with previous years. We will not know until the 2016/17 results are published how good or bad this years results are.**

National looked after Children results for 2015/16 are not published until March 2017 so at present we are unable to do a comparison with our own but we are confident as in previous years that we will be above the National average for Looked after Children.

#### **Key Stage 4 (GCSE Results)**

**Gateshead's Looked after Children Year 11 Cohort was 37 Children, below is a table showing Provisional Results for their GCSE/Equivalent Results.**

<b>37 Looked after Children</b>	<b>No of Children</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>5 A*-C</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>5 A* - G</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>5A*-C inc M&amp;E</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1 A*-G</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>SEN</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>57</b>

**Evaluation:**

18% of the cohort attend Special Schools and were not expected to make 5A\*-C because of SEN needs.

14% of the cohort attend PRU's as a result of being at risk of permanent exclusion.

100% of Looked after Children who sat exams gained at least 1 GCSE.

5 Looked after children did not take any GCSE's, 2 of these were working at Entry Level and attending Hilltop and 3 refused to take any examinations.

**The Table below gives a comparison with the results from 2014/15**

	<b>2014/15 Cohort (43)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>2015/16 Cohort (37)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>5 A*-C</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>5 A* - G</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>5A*-C inc M&amp;E</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1 A*-G</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>SEN</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>57</b>

The cohort for this year had a significantly higher ratio of SEN children rising from 44% in 2015 to 57% in 2016.

5 A\*-C including English & Maths – this is similar to 2014/15 results with a 1% difference in 2016.

5 A\*-C – this has reduced from 27% in 2015 to 22% in 2016 due to a significantly higher SEN cohort which has increased by 13% from 44% in 2015 to 57% in 2016.

5 A\*-G – there has been a significant increase rising from 40% achieving this in 2015 to 68% in 2016

1 A\*-G – this is another category where there has been a significant improvement with 73% achieving this in 2015 rising to 86% in 2016

Please note

All figures are collated from information received direct from the schools. This is to be used only as a guide, official figures will not be available until end of 2016.

National Looked after Children figures will not be published until March 2017.

## 6. Post 16 Progression, Higher Education & NEET

The following table provides an overview of the destinations of students progressing into year 12, 13 and post y13.

### LAC Progression Routes 2015 - 16

Cohorts	2015 cohort (provisional data from Connexions/REALAC as of 22/09/15)			2016 Cohort (provisional data as of 01/11/16)		
	Y12 (46)	Y13 (34)	Y14 (19)	Y12 (36)	Y13 (46)	Y14 (34)
<b>6<sup>th</sup> form</b>	11	7		8	12	1
<b>College</b>	14	12	2	16	11	8
<b>Study Programme/ Traineeship</b>	7	5	1	3	2	
<b>Apprenticeship</b>	3	2	1	6	3	
<b>NEET</b>	7	5	6	2	11	14
<b>University</b>	n/a	n/a	6	n/a	n/a	2
<b>Princes Trust/personal Development Programme</b>	3			1	1	1
<b>Work (eg without accredited training or part time)</b>		1			4	4
<b>Not available</b>	1 health concerns	1 teenage parent	2 Teenage parents		1 teenage parent	3 (2 teenage parent + 1 FT SEN care home)
<b>Other</b>		1 custody	1 custody		1 custody	1 custody

## 7. NEET & Higher Education

On-going work to develop efficient systems of reducing and preventing LAC NEET is in progress. A joint monthly meeting with Social Care and Connexions has been reinstated to identify and plan work with young people who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET.

The numbers of LAC progressing to higher education remains very low and is an area of concern. REALAC continues to work with the North East Raising Aspirations Partnership, to try to improve young people's knowledge and experience of university. It is most likely that some LAC engage with HE at a later stage but there are no figures at present to capture this.

## 8. Work Experience

### Background

The Pathways2Work (P2W) project aims to support Looked After Young People aged 15 - 18 in gaining work experience during their school/college holidays within a real working environment. This opportunity is also open to students who require work experience for entry onto university courses. A young person can work for a period of one day to several weeks. They are supported to help identify the correct type of placement suitable to their needs.

The P2W Co-ordinator works in partnership with Social Care and foster carers to help give all young people access to quality work experience and help to prepare for the experience. They are financially supported via an expenses payment of £10 a day, which covers any reasonable travel/lunch costs that they may incur. The young person is expected to take responsibility for the completion of their timesheet, diary and feedback sheet to help them reflect on their time there and recognise the skills employer's look for.

### Pathways2Work Data

#### Pathways2Work Participation (April 2014- Oct16)

Half Term	No of participants 2014	Total days 2014	No of participants 2015	Total days 2015	No of participants 2016	Total days 2016
February	N/A	N/A	7	27	7	25
Easter	1	5	3	18	4	27
May/June	0	0	1	3	3	12
Summer	3	21	14	90	14	117
October	3	9	8	38	5	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>198</b>

Weekly work experience to support education	1	5	1	9	1 organised to start Nov 16	
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### Pathways2Work Drop out rates (Feb 2016 – Oct 16)

Applied, but pre-cancelled	14	2 – went on holiday instead 1 – one YP cancelled as he had secured an apprenticeship 10 - applied but then changed their mind 1 – got a part time job
Drop outs other than for illness	2	1 - Did one day only, stating it was boring. This was in engineering, where due to health & safety the experience was mainly shadowing staff 1 – did one day only – not what he thought it would be

### Types of Placement

In 2016, examples of placements included: Childcare, Surveying, Legal Services, Motor Vehicle, Hospitality, Engineering, Travel, Civil Engineering, Horticulture, Animal Care, Leisure, Catering, Elderly Care, Customer Service, Admin, Joinery, ICT, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Health & Safety, HR, Retail within a Bridal Outfitters, Construction.

1 young person also did some volunteering with the Summer Reading Challenge, which was supported by Pathways 2 Work.

### Evaluation and Feedback

- 1 student, whose placement was in travel & tourism, secured an apprenticeship within the travel industry.
- 1 student was offered a part time job as a direct result of his work experience
- 1 student was offered an apprenticeship within the council. This was after gaining several weeks of work experience with external companies, plus a week within the department that offered the apprenticeship.
- 1 student completed 4 weeks of work experience within 2 separate departments within the council and delivered his feedback via a powerpoint presentation to the service director and 3 other members of staff.

### Feedback comments

Examples of replies to the question “What have you enjoyed” or any other comments

- “Meeting new people and children and learning them how to make new things. Playing with the children in the art area”.
- “New experiences, making new skills”
- “Repairing a 1.5 ton digger”

- “Learning how to manage bookings/customer requests/enquiries. Dealing with customers directly”.
- “Being able to improve my confidence and initiative in dealing with customer enquiries without help”
- “I have enjoyed everything”

## 9. Choices

REALAC continues to sign up to the Choices programme, which is part of the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership.

‘Choices’ is a targeted programme designed to introduce the idea of Higher Education and help to raise the aspirations of looked after children.

The programme has traditionally been targeted at year 10 & year 11 students and in 2015, sessions were introduced for year 8 & 9.

- Each of the Year 10/11 sessions had an academic taster combined with a specific area of university eg ‘Student Finance’, Student Accommodation’. There was also a session specifically for Foster Carers, which aimed to increase their awareness of HE and the support available for looked after young people. The sessions are ran by student reps, many of whom were previously looked after children, which helps as the participants can relate to the reps’ life story and personal situation.
- The year 8 & 9 session was a Foster Family Fun Day, timed around Halloween and the theme was Zombie Apocalypse Part II. The emphasis was on STEM and creative subjects, giving the students experience of building their own rocket, designing their own alien and learning about the science behind surviving and thriving in different environments.

### Choices LAC Participation

Choices Programme	Number of participants (who attended at least 1 session) sept 2013/aug 14	Number of participants (who attended at least 1 session) sept 2014/aug 15	Number of participants who attended at least 1 session 2016
Year 7,8 & 9 (plus siblings)	NA	2	3
Year 10&11	1	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>

We also invited the Choices Together co-ordinator to the REALAC Market Place event to try to increase the Foster Carer’s awareness about the programme, which will hopefully then increase the number of participants in the future.

## 10. Pupil Premium Grant 2015-16

Following discussions with the Children and Young People Portfolio meeting and Schools Forum, the following information was prepared for schools. This is to inform them of the arrangements for the distribution of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) for Looked After Children (LAC) for financial year 2015-16 and the role of your school in ensuring that payments are received by school for each individual LAC entitled to the funding.

In March 2016, each school (maintained and non-maintained but not private schools) will receive a payment broken down as follows:

£300 paid for each term.

£500 paid based on 2 completed Personal Education Plans over a 12 month period (statutory requirement) received into the Realac/Virtual School

£500 to be retained by Realac/Virtual School to be used for additional support to both Individual Looked after Children and their schools

It is expected that schools will use this funding to:-

- directly support the achievement and attainment of LAC
- close the attainment and progress gap between LAC and their peers
- support underlying issues and interventions for LAC who are at risk of exclusion, non- attendance and other issues that may affect learning

All social workers and designated teachers must follow the Gateshead PEP processes in ensuring each LAC has an up to date quality PEP. REALAC will monitor and compile an accurate list of qualifying schools for Finance in accordance with the above expectations.

## 11. Personal Education Plans

The following table shows our analysis of completed PEPS:

Looked after data as of 8<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Total LAC 364 with 47 under 3's who do not require a PEP.

Primary Out Of Borough		Primary In Borough		Total LAC
PEPs In Date	PEPs Out of Date	PEPs In Date	PEPs Out of Date	Primary
17	5	65	48	135

Secondary Out of Borough		Secondary In Borough		Total LAC
PEPs in Date	PEPs Out of Date	PEPs In Date	PEPs Out of Date	Secondary & KS5
19	32	50	81	184

36	37	115	129	317
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Overall PEPs taken place for Primary and Secondary in and out of borough	48%
Overall PEPs not completed for Primary and Secondary in and out of borough	52%

## **Challenges**

- To work with social workers to initiate PEPS within reasonable timescales in order for school to be prepared for the meeting.
- Working in partnership with out of borough schools to support Gateshead's PEP process.
- Years 12 and 13 have a high number of uncompleted PEPS. This is due to the large numbers who are in different learning provisions other than school and rely heavily on social workers keeping REALAC informed of PEP meetings taking place.
- There is reluctance from colleges and other providers to lead on PEPS or to send them back if they have been completed.

## **Support:**

- Termly email reminders to schools to send PEPS back to REALAC .
- PEP Training continues to be offered to schools and social workers.
- PEP Training x3 per year for Foster carers and social workers continue to be well attended.
- Termly data produced to monitor the PEPS.
- Continue to support and challenge schools to meet the needs of the Looked After Child through the PEP.
- Priority is given to attend as many PEP meetings as possible.

## **12. Support Worker post**

Tony Nicholson joined the REALAC team in June 2016, in the role of Support Worker. This is a dual role, which also sees him working with the Behaviour Support Team. Tony has a background in Education and Residential social work, Education Welfare, pastoral care and social inclusion. Tony is mentoring young people and working with Foster Carers and other professionals to promote the values of education.

## **13. Educational Psychology input into REALAC Team**

- Attachment and Learning Training sessions for Foster Carers via Catherine Hardman (Organisational Development). Initial session delivered 13.9.16. This was attended by foster carers. Feedback through evaluation forms was very positive. This training is delivered twice a year.
- Casework with three looked after children within Gateshead Schools. This involvement was negotiated between schools and the REALAC team.
- Joint work with manager from foster care team linked to a concern raised by a carer with regard to how school was responding to a young person's needs. This led to two training sessions within the school which were positively evaluated. A letter from the carer to the REALAC team confirmed that things were much more positive for the young person at school following the input.

- Currently working on piloting a therapeutic group intervention within a primary school. The intervention is focused around a looked after child and is based on theraplay principles which encompass the importance of nurture, relationships and the value of play. The group will run post Christmas and following evaluation there are plans that it will be made available to other schools.
- Support and supervision of trainee Educational Psychologist project with the aim of developing a document to enhance current practice in supporting successful transition to secondary for looked after children. The finished document will be based on a resilience model and is due to be completed during spring term 2017.
- Liaison with fellow Educational Psychologists to gather information about looked after children in the school that they cover, with particular regard to those children who are bring supported through SEN systems. This information is then used, along with other information available through PEPs etc to inform REALAC involvement and intervention.

#### **14. Recommendations**

That this report and its detail is received and updates the council on REALACs current work to support looked after pupils, their achievements and the ongoing challenges we continue to address.



**Corporate Parenting  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
16 January 2017**

**TITLE OF REPORT: Gateshead Council Adoption Service Annual Report**

**REPORT OF: Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report summarises the activity of the Adoption Service for the year ending March 2016 with particular reference to proposed developments in adoption.

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**Background**

1. The Adoption Service produces an annual report of its activities and key developments to cover each financial year, 1 April to 31 March. A copy of the most recent annual report produced by the Service covering the year April 2015 – March 2016 is attached. This report is freely available to the public via the Council's website pages on adoption.
2. The report for April 2016 – March 2017 is due to be completed in early summer 2017.
3. The 2015/16 annual report provides details of the numbers of children successfully adopted during that period with an accompanying breakdown in terms of age and gender. There was an increase in the number of children matched to their adopters in comparison to the previous year, with a high proportion of children being matched to adopters recruited and assessed by Gateshead Adoption Team.
4. For the current year, April 2016 to the time of writing this report, 17 children have been successfully adopted with adoption hearings pending for a further four children. A further 14 children are also placed with their adoptive families awaiting adoption and the Service is currently family finding for 10 children.
5. The annual report for 2015/16 highlights some of the factors that had a bearing on both family finding and adopter recruitment during that year, such as the reduction in the number of Placement Orders for adoption that were granted by the courts.
6. The Service has been fairly consistent with regard to the number of enquiries in relation to adoption that it has attracted and an analysis of the figures from the past four years suggests that we have maintained our ability to attract enquiries from prospective adopters from across the whole of the north-east region.

7. The report also incorporates several positive comments from the recent Ofsted report of March 2016 in relation to various aspects of the adoption process and the support provided by the Service to adoptive families, both before and after the granting of the Adoption Order.
8. Feedback from adopters at various stages of the process continues to be positive. The level of adoption placement breakdowns of children placed by the Service continues to be extremely low, a rate of no more than one a year, and usually involving children with very complex needs and challenging behaviours.
9. Requests for adoption support from families continue to increase, partly as a reflection of the more complex needs and backgrounds of children being placed for adoption and increased public awareness of new initiatives such as the national Adoption Support Fund.
10. At the time of writing this report the pressure and demand on the Adoption Support Fund has been so great that a 'cap' of £5,000 per child/family has recently been introduced with local authorities expected to meet the costs for anything over this level or to match-fund.

### **Policy Context**

11. The 2015/16 report draws attention to some of the proposed changes for the way adoption services could be delivered in the future. The publication in January 2016 of the Department for Education document 'Vision for Change', outlines an expectation for local authorities to move to a system by 2020 whereby adopter recruitment, matching and support will be delivered on a regional basis by a single organisation. Local authorities were also expected to demonstrate that they had plans in place by 2017 to evidence that locally they are working constructively towards achieving such an outcome.
12. The rationale is that operating at this larger scale will overcome the current challenges in the adoption system, lead to improved adopter recruitment, speed up the process of matching children with adoptive families and enable the provision of better adoption support across the region.
13. In the north-east region, five local authorities (Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton) and all the local voluntary agencies in the region have combined to set up a Regional Adoption Agency project Group (Tees Valley). This group has already undertaken some initial scoping and consultation and hopes to have an established Regional Adoption Agency for the Tees Valley area up and running at the earliest by the autumn of 2017.
14. The five local authorities of Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland and South Tyneside in conjunction with all the existing voluntary agencies in the region (ARC Adoption NE; After Adoption; Barnardos; and Durham Family Welfare) have also expressed an interest in working collaboratively together as a project group for the north of the region.

15. Newcastle Council is the lead agency for the latter group, and following the provision of a small grant for funding the work of the group and some consultative input from the DfE, this group is currently in the process of undertaking initial work in relation to the viability of establishing a Regional Adoption Agency – Adopt North East.
16. A board which includes Senior Officers from each of the local authorities and voluntary agencies has been established to oversee the work of the project. The board is assisted in its work by a project team and the project work will also be underpinned by input from a variety of work streams which will involve key stakeholders e.g. operational staff from each local authority and key agencies; adoptive parents etc.
17. The work streams will look at a range of issues pertinent to the establishment of a RAA such as the adoption journey for adopters and children; communication and engagement; business models; legal advice; finance; IT and performance; workforce and HR issues.
18. The group is currently exploring different delivery models for a new adoption agency, which could involve, for example, an agency delivered by one local authority on behalf of others, a joint venture between local authorities, or between local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies. The work plan for the project board over the next few months is intended to encapsulate the following:
  - Awareness raising with key stakeholders
  - Formation and start of work stream groups to look at various aspects e.g. adoption journey, finance, IT, performance, workforce and HR, legal requirements.
  - Consultation and engagement with key stakeholders.
  - Analysis of feedback from consultation and work streams.
  - Options appraisals leading to a recommended delivery model.
  - Decisions by relevant parties in relation to proposed models.

### **Recommendation**

It is requested that the Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the performance of the adoption service in 2015/6 and notes the implications for the service of future proposals to changes in the service delivery.

CONTACT: Elaine Devaney

EXTENSION: 2704

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Thinking about adoption, but not sure where to start...

...Start your journey with Gateshead Council



**Adoption Service**

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Civic Centre  
Gateshead NE8 1HH

Telephone: 0191 433 6388  
Email: [adoptionandfostering@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:adoptionandfostering@gateshead.gov.uk)  
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June 2016

# Adoption Service

## Annual Report

**adopt** with Gateshead



# Introduction

It gives us great pleasure to introduce Gateshead Council's 2015/16 Adoption Service Annual Report. As Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Acting Strategic Director Care, Wellbeing and Learning in Gateshead we hold the responsibility to ensure that children requiring adoption receive good quality services which will support them. Giving children the best start in life is one of the four main priorities of the Council's Plan for 2014-2017. One of the key priorities is to maximise available placement choices for children who can no longer live with their birth family by recruiting a wide range of prospective adoptive families.

Achieving positive outcomes for children and effective support for all those affected by adoption is a crucial component of the work of the service and integral to the strategic vision for Gateshead, Vision 2030, which sets out targets for the improvement of the lives for all Gateshead residents.

We are highly committed in Gateshead to achieving the best outcomes for our children and young people and we know that, for some children, the best way to achieve this is through providing new forever families for them. For many, this is through being adopted. We continue to be proud of our record in this area but will always strive to further improve the support we offer to children, adoptive parents and birth families.

This Annual Report highlights the progress in adoption services over the past year and describes the work we do as an Adoption Agency.

The Adoption Service continues to operate in an environment where major procedural and legislative reform is being proposed. A key challenge for the Service is to address these changes as they arise, review and update policies and procedures and implement any necessary improvements.

We look forward to the challenges for the coming year and building on the existing work of the service in order to continue to improve the outcomes for children and families.

We would like to thank all the members of the Adoption Panel for their commitment during the past year and all the staff, from within the Council and other organisations, for their continued hard work in making adoption a positive outcome for many children in Gateshead.



*Angela Douglas*

**Councillor Angela Douglas**  
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People



*Allison Elliott*

**Allison Elliott**  
Acting Strategic Director Care, Wellbeing and Learning

# The Children

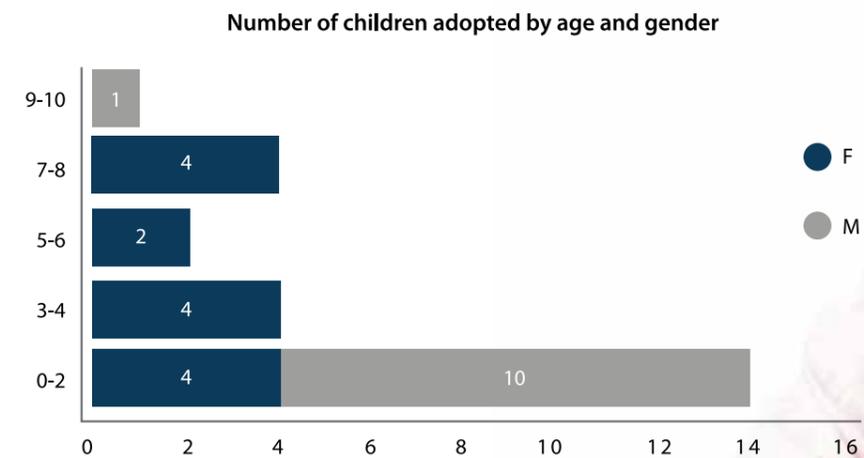
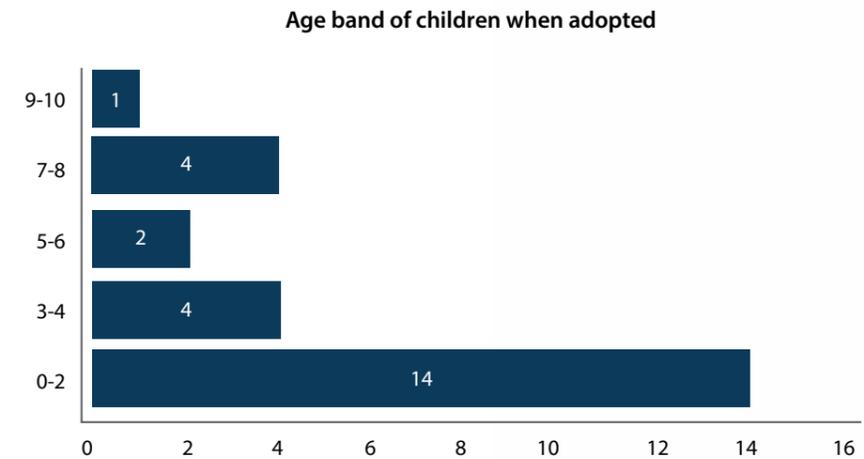
## Our results

At the year ending March 2016 **25** children placed for adoption by Gateshead Council had been adopted, a further **16** children were currently placed awaiting their adoption, and the team were actively family finding for adoptive families for a further **11** children. For some of these children the Service had already identified that it would need to look outside of its own internal resources, given the children's specific needs or a requirement to geographically place outside the north-east.

Of the **25** children adopted during the year 2015/16

- **11** were boys and **14** were girls.
- **23** children were placed individually and **2** children were part of a sibling group.

The ages of the children adopted are illustrated below.



In 2013/14 and 2014/15 there were slightly more boys than girls adopted; however this year there were slightly more girls.

80% of children were aged 6 or below at the date of their adoption, with 56% aged 2 or under. However, as in previous years, the Adoption Service has also been successful in achieving adoptions for a small number of older and more complex children.

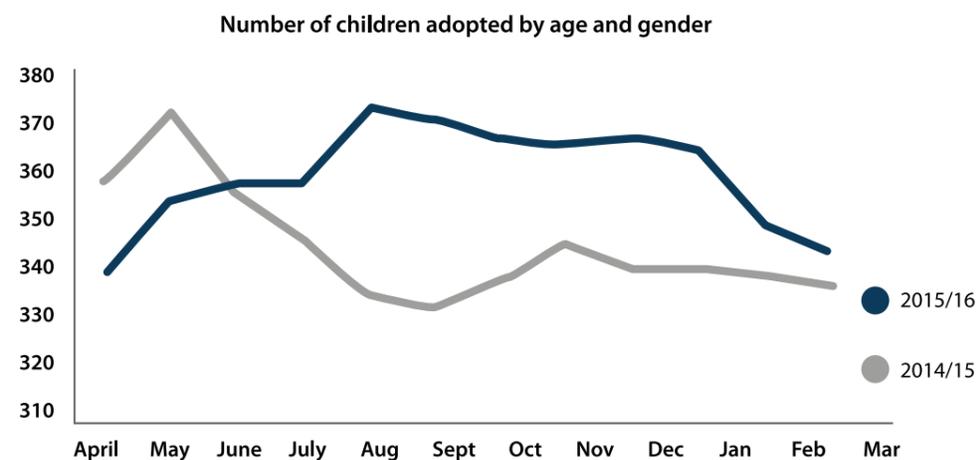
Adoption panel considered **27** matches of children with prospective adopters during the year 2015/16 compared to **22** in the previous year. Some of these 27 children went onto be adopted in 2015/16 whilst others are still awaiting the final legal order to be granted. Of these 27 children around **22** were matched with adopters assessed and approved by Gateshead and **5** were placed with adopters assessed by external agencies. This proportion is similar to our performance for the previous two years.

“ Adoption performance is good. Children are identified at an early stage when adoption is being considered as part of their plan for permanence and their parallel plans are effectively tracked to minimise delays. Recruitment practice is robust and the majority of assessments are completed within timescales. Good links exist with regional partners and agencies, which broadens the potential links for children. Children are well matched with adopters and effective ongoing support promotes stability, which adoptive families highly value. ”

*Quote from Ofsted Inspection Report - 11 March 2016*

Over the last year the number of Looked After Children in Gateshead has ranged from 340 at its lowest to 372 at its highest. We saw a peak of 372 Looked After Children in August 2015; this figure decreased over the following five months, then fell quite sharply to 343 for our 2016 year end figure.

As evident in the graph below the number of Looked After Children was higher during 2015/16 compared to 2014/15.



At 31 March 2015 there were 337 Looked After Children of which 23 had a Placement order granted (6.8%)

At 31 March 2016 there were 343 children of which 28 had a placement order granted (8.2%)

The reduction in the percentage of Looked After Children in 2015 and the number having placement orders granted had a corresponding effect on both adopter recruitment that year and the number of adoptions achieved in the following year.

If we take an average of the last two years as a benchmark for the number of Looked After Children who might require adoption then one could estimate that at the very most 10% of our Looked After Children may need adoptive placements. However, one would also need to monitor these figures on a regular basis to see if trends change.

**For comparison,**

- if we predict that 10% of our Looked After Children will need adopting then we would need to recruit adopters for 34 children.
- if we predict that the figure is nearer to 7 or 8% then we would need to recruit adopters for between 23 to 27 children respectively.

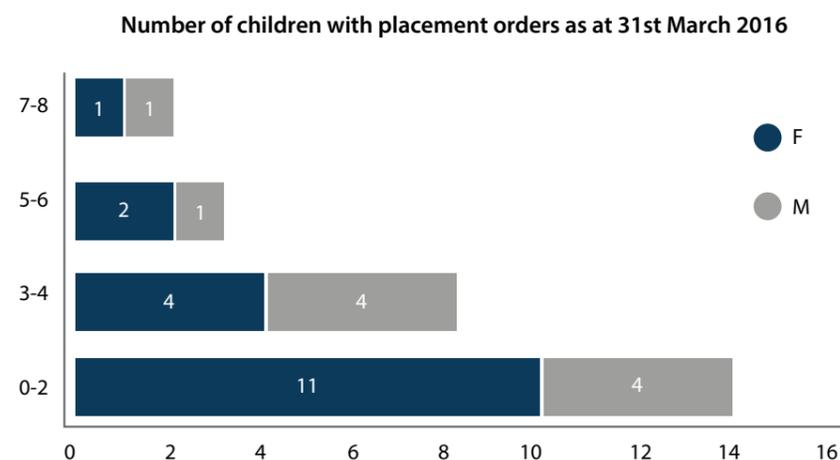
It would therefore seem sensible to plan our recruitment strategy to meet a minimum need for **23** placements but to also have contingency plans in place to increase activity if required.

Recruitment will need to centre mainly on prospective adopters able to consider young children and sibling groups. There will also be a need to recruit a small number of prospective adoptive families able to offer placements to older children and children with very complex developmental and health issues.

For the previous three years the Service has provided two-thirds of the families for Gateshead children requiring adoption from within its own internal resources. In order to maximise the placement choices for children the Service would wish to continue to work towards an increase in the number of options available in the forthcoming year.

To date the Service has also made effective use of a government grant which is currently available and reimburses agencies for the costs of an interagency placement providing certain criteria are met. To date, this provision has enabled us to recoup £97,000 in total, the costs of interagency placements for four children, which include one BME child, an older girl and a sibling group of 2 children respectively. At the time of writing this report it is unclear whether or not the government intends to extend the grant provision beyond the original deadline of 6th July 2016. However, it is anticipated that two further grant applications will be made before then in respect of 2 sibling groups who are shortly to be matched and placed with their prospective adopters.

Adopters for whom no suitable matches can be identified with Gateshead children within 3 months of their approval will continue to be encouraged and supported in their consideration of appropriate and suitable links with children from other agencies, which is not only of benefit to children elsewhere in the region waiting for adoption but also assists the Service to offset some of its costs in purchasing placements for children whose needs cannot be met via our own resources.



At the time of writing this report the level of family finding being undertaken within the Service has increased since year end March 2016. The Service is currently in the process of identifying prospective adoptive families for **18** children and has advance notice in respect of a further **16** children whose cases are currently in court proceedings and depending on the outcome may require adoptive placements. Whilst we anticipate that it will be possible to meet a significant proportion of this demand from within our own resources it will still be imperative to consider external options and to actively recruit further families in order to maximise placement choice for children.

“Children are well matched with suitable adopters. Where it is in the interests of children, further time is taken to find the right family. There are no undue delays..... The Service has a good record for placing older children and for placing brothers and sisters together.”

*Ofsted inspection report March 2016*

## Adopters

Within the year April 2015 to March 2016 Gateshead Council Adoption Panel recommended approval for **12** prospective adoptive families recruited and assessed by the Adoption Team. This is a decrease on the previous year's number of **22** families. This drop in figures corresponds to the reduction in the number of Looked After Children being granted Placement Orders and subsequently needing an adoptive placement referred to earlier in this report. Given the agency already had sufficient numbers of adopters approved and waiting for placements, the recruitment of further adoptive families seeking to adopt children aged between of 0-2 was temporarily suspended for a short period of time. The age range of children requiring adoption at this time was much higher and consequently our efforts went towards prioritising those applications and assessments from prospective adopters who had indicated their interest at the outset in taking a slightly older child or a sibling group.

It is pleasing to see that two sets of adopters approved during the year were “second time adopters” i.e. adopters who had previously adopted a child via Gateshead Council and subsequently applied to us to adopt again.

In the same period the Adoption Panel considered matches for **27** children with their prospective adoptive families. This figure includes **19** children placed individually and **4** groups of siblings. The children ranged in age from two months to 9 years.

A substantial majority of the children, **22** to be precise, were matched with adopters recruited and assessed by Gateshead Adoption Service. These figures also include three foster carer families who had expressed an interest in adopting children they were looking after.

The current assessment process is a two stage process with the expectation that the first stage is completed within two months and the second part within four months. The majority of assessments are completed as near to timescales as possible but in the main where the Service has been unable to meet these deadlines this has generally been due to awaiting the return of essential information from other agencies such as police and health checks.

“Prospective adopters are well informed about adoption through information evenings and the pre-approval training prepares them well. The majority of the assessments are timely, robust and child centred with clear analysis supporting the recommendations. Where a few delays occur, there are viable reasons that are recorded and these delays are not due to lack of urgency by the service.”

*Ofsted inspection report - March 2016.*

At the date of writing this report the Service currently has **11** prospective adoptive families under assessment and a further **12** adoptive families already approved and awaiting placements. There are links already in progress for a number of these adopters and it is anticipated that several Gateshead children requiring adoption will be matched and placed with their adoptive families in the next few months.

# Adopter Recruitment

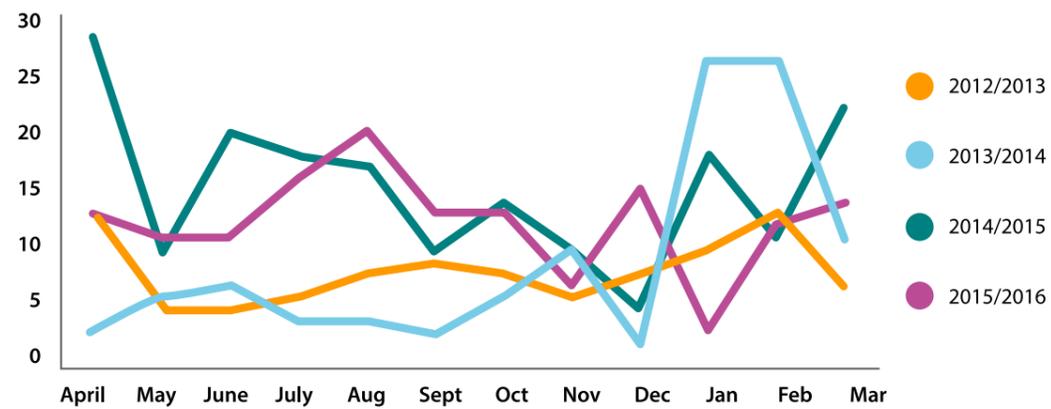
The recruitment strategy for 2015-16 aimed to recruit sufficient adoptive families to meet the needs of children to be placed for adoption locally. Where capacity allows the adoption service will also recruit prospective adopters who can meet the needs of children regionally and nationally.

A key aim of our strategy during the past year has been to strengthen the Adoption brand into the wider community and this was achieved through various activities including:

- Radio campaigns
- Regional outdoor (billboard) advertising
- Public Transport advertising

The graph below provides a visual representation of the enquiry rate and shows the impact of continuing marketing activities.

Adoption Enquiries by Month



The table on the following page highlights the spread of enquiries since April 2012. There has been a slight decrease in the overall number of enquiries since last year (19%) but as this still constitutes a higher level than years 2012/13 and 2013/14. During the early part of 2016 the service has noticed an increase in referrals from neighbouring local authorities who are not currently recruiting adopters.

## Enquiries by month - Prospective Adopters

ENQUIRIES BY MONTH	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
April	13	3	28	13	57
May	5	6	10	11	32
June	5	7	20	11	43
July	6	4	18	16	44
August	8	4	17	20	49
September	9	3	10	13	35
October	8	6	14	13	41
November	6	10	10	7	33
December	8	2	5	15	30
January	10	26	18	3	57
February	13	26	11	12	62
March	7	11	22	14	54
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>537</b>



Out of **148** enquiries we issued **19** registrations of interest forms. This represents a conversion rate of 12.8%; which equates to nearly 1 in every 8 enquiries progressing to the stage of being invited to register an application. This is a good outcome and response rate as we are aware that a high proportion of enquirers approach a number of agencies before finally deciding on which agency to register their interest with.

“ Thanks so much for your prompt reply and for arranging for information pack to be sent to us. ”

*Email from enquirer - July 2015.*

“ Hello, I was looking for information on Adoption. The initial “If you are thinking about adoption but not sure where to start ... you have come to the right place” was so comforting. Such a small sentence means so much when you are unsure where to go for advice. Thank you. ”

*Email from enquirer in relation to recruitment materials - December 2015.*

The table on the following page evidences the spread of the enquiries received by the Service during the year 2015/16. Given that one of the service aims is to offer an assessment to potential adopters within a fifty mile radius we will continue to promote Gateshead Council across a broad geographical area in order to attract prospective adopters from outside the Council boundaries.

This is particularly pertinent as there are occasions when the Service needs to identify options for children requiring placements outside the immediate Gateshead area. Our figures indicate that our approach to recruitment continues to attract a good level of enquiries from both Gateshead and surrounding areas.

### Enquiries by Area - Prospective Adopters

ENQUIRIES BY AREA	2012/2013	%	2013/2014	%	2014/2015	%	2015/2016	%	TOTAL
County Durham	2	2.04	5	4.63	16	8.74	9	6.08	<b>32</b>
Cumbria					1	0.55	1	0.68	<b>2</b>
Gateshead	49	50.00	53	49.07	101	55.19	55	37.16	<b>258</b>
Hartlepool					1	0.55			<b>1</b>
Newcastle Upon Tyne	4	4.08	4	3.70	10	5.46	13	8.78	<b>31</b>
North Tyneside	3	3.06	3	2.78	15	8.20	11	7.43	<b>31</b>
Northumberland	3	3.06	6	5.56	1	0.55	12	8.11	<b>22</b>
Redcar and Cleveland					1	0.55	1	0.68	<b>2</b>
Slough					1	0.55			<b>1</b>
South Gloucestershire			1	0.93					<b>1</b>
South Tyneside	10	10.20	9	8.33	7	3.83	10	6.76	<b>36</b>
Sunderland	3	3.06	6	5.56	13	7.10	15	10.14	<b>37</b>
Not Recorded	24	24.49	21	19.44	16	8.74	21	14.19	<b>82</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>537</b>

Whilst the majority of enquiries continue to come from within the Gateshead area it can be seen that there has been an 18% decrease in enquiries from within Gateshead compared to the previous year which equates to the overall decrease in enquiry figures since 2014/15.

Recruitment from outside the area will continue but in order to ensure that we have sufficient adopters from within our own area we will also continue to target Gateshead residents in future recruitment and marketing, making full use of “Free of charge” tools such as Council News, Council Website, Council Info and Gateshead Now.

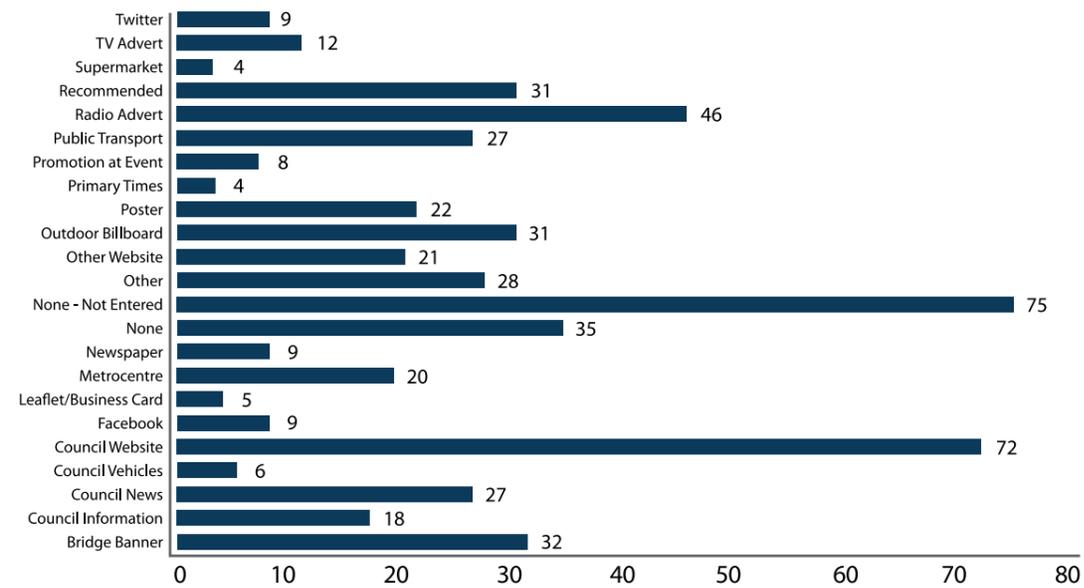
In order to monitor the effectiveness of our recruitment activity we routinely ask all our enquirers which of our promotional materials they have seen. The table on the following page shows all of the promotional materials which have been seen and used by enquirers during 2015/16.

The top six channels cited are:

- Council Website
- Radio Adverts
- Bridge Banners
- Billboards
- Public Transport & Council News



## Promotional Materials



31 individuals commented that they came to us “by word of mouth” and indicated that Gateshead Council had been recommended to them by friends, colleagues or professionals. Further feedback also indicates that a large proportion of enquirers have found the sections on adoption on the Council website very informative and helpful. This feedback will also be utilised to help inform and improve our communication and recruitment plans for the year ahead.

The service will continue with its wide range of recruitment activities to ensure that we attract sufficient new adoptive families for children requiring adoptive placements. An outline plan for the year has been devised which maximises the use of “free of charge” marketing tools as well as delivering joint “paid for” campaigns with the Fostering Service, where appropriate. The ongoing monitoring of adopters under assessment and children requiring adoptive families will continue to take place in order to inform future plans and make changes where necessary.

“ There is a coherent recruitment strategy for adopters based on an analysis of the likely predicted numbers, needs and profiles of children. Marketing activities are effective and interest and enquiries have increased. Adopters report very positively on their initial contact with the service and the quality of information and welcome they receive. ”

*Ofsted Inspection Report - March 2016*

## Family finding for children

The service continues to utilise a wide range of family finding methods for children such as the Adoption Register, Adoption Link, Be my Parent, Parents for children and national voluntary sector resources such as It’s All About Me. Members of the team will also continue to be involved in regional family finding events and meetings such as Activity days and as required will host our own “You, Me, Us” profiling events.

“ Family finding is purposeful with a dedicated worker pursuing options and links for children through a range of contacts, the national adoption register and regional information sharing... There is effective use of, and prompt referrals made to, the National Adoption Register to initiate nationwide family finding. In the last 12 months, seven children and eight adopters have been referred for national family finding.... The majority of children were matched successfully locally and within the wider region. ”

*Ofsted inspection report - March 2016.*



## Foster for Adoption

We have incorporated information about Fostering for Adoption into all our information and publicity for prospective adopters and into their preparation training. Fostering for Adoption will not be suitable for all adopters so this is an aspect that would be robustly explored with prospective adopters both during the assessment process and following approval. Effective links are also in place with the Fostering Service to provide additional input and training with regard to the fostering requirements for prospective adopters who might be interested in offering such placements.

Since the implementation of Fostering for Adoption the Service has been able to offer a small number of Foster for Adoption placements. The background circumstances of each placement have been very different and the experience of the adopters involved to date has been varied, partly as a result of requirements of the courts in relation to some of the more recent cases.

A focus group involving three of our four Foster to Adopt families was held in September 2015 with the intention of obtaining feedback about their experience in order to help identify what works well, any points of learning and potential adjustments to current processes to better help support adopters and children.

“ It was a fantastic opportunity to meet the child when they are only days old and be a part of their life from such an early stage. ”

*Adopter - focus group September 2015.*

The majority of the feedback was positive and highlighted the positive support that the adopters felt they had received from both the Adoption and Fostering Services. The financial support provided was especially appreciated by the families who needed this. Following on from this meeting the Service has taken forward some of the suggestions such as the provision of training and support for extended members of the family who might be involved and crucial to an adoptive placement e.g. Grandparents.

“ Fostering to adopt is a relatively new initiative that is successfully achieving permanence through adoption for children. One fostering-to-adopt couple spoke positively of how they were able to care for a new-born baby through early medical treatments in hospital. The baby had the opportunity to form early attachments from birth... This is a very positive start and the Service is actively promoting this initiative as part of the options for adoption in all recruitment activity. ”

*Ofsted inspection report - March 2016.*

## Adoption Support

In 2015-16 the government invested £19.3 million towards the creation of the National Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The fund came into operation on 1st May 2015 and is intended to be used for payments for therapeutic interventions to help support adoptive families. Recent announcements have confirmed that the ASF will continue to operate with increased funding every year until 2020, following which it is hoped plans will be in place to ensure its future sustainability.

Since implementation the remit of the fund has developed and changed over time and proposals are now in place to further extend the scope of the Fund to also include Special Guardians of children who were previously Looked After. This will create additional work for the agency which will have implications in terms of current processes and capacity for dealing with a likely increase in the number of applications and requests for support.

To date the Adoption Service has made six successful applications to the Fund, with further applications currently in the pipeline. It is anticipated that the level of our applications to the ASF will continue to rise in the year ahead as both professional and public awareness of the Fund grows and the number of requests for adoption support received by the Service continues to increase.

In addition, we will continue to review and consider what changes can be made in terms of our existing service provision and development to help us enhance the “Gateshead adoption support offer”.

We already have in place a well-established support group and the facility to offer a parenting skills group course for adopters.

We will also continue to run our annual “Summer Fun Day” for adopters in July each year. This day provides a great opportunity for adopted children and their parents to get together and enjoy fun activities and an excellent informal support opportunity as adoption social workers are available on the day.

The service has also maintained its involvement in local initiatives, such as the Sage Music Project, which not only provides support to adopters, but helps children’s development and attachment through the use of music, and we will continue to be involved in any future discussions with the project in relation to further project development.

We also continue to work alongside other adoption agencies in the region to run a monthly “Waiting Adopters Group”. This group provides support to approved adopters who are waiting to be matched with a child or children. These groups are generally well attended by Gateshead adopters alongside staff from the Adoption Team.

Our post adoption contact post-box is currently dealing with 443 different contact arrangements each year, an increase of 48 on the previous year figures. As well as dealing with an increased number of contacts our input and support to birth family members affected by adoption and adopters requiring support post adoption is also increasing.



We have experienced an increase in the level of referrals from families who are resident in Gateshead but who adopted children via other adoption agencies, once that agency's statutory responsibility for providing support has ceased. Our existing Service Level agreement with After Adoption currently enables us to pass on a small number of adoption support and access to birth record cases and to offer families requiring a support service the option of input that is independent of the local authority, thus adding capacity and flexibility to our adoption support offer.

“ Arrangements to support children and adopters pre and post adoption are effective and responsive. Timely assessments are completed to identify needs and tailor support packages. Adopters are well informed of their entitlements and the availability of the Adoption Support Fund. Adopters spoken with valued the support they receive and the difference it made to their confidence, relationships with children, understanding of attachment patterns and the improved stability in the family. In the last 12 months the service supported 31 families. A further 57 families are receiving assessed financial support. ”

*Ofsted inspection report - March 2016.*

“ Just to thank you all for the training, events and support we have received. We have found each and every one of you to be caring and professional. ”

*Letter from adopters - March 2016*

## Disruptions, adopters withdrawing, changes of plan for children

During 2015/16 the Service experienced one significant adoption placement breakdown of a child it had placed with adopters. This involved a child with very complex needs which became more apparent and intensified following their placement in their adoptive family. A case review and disruption meeting was undertaken by an experienced independent social worker in August 2015 in order to help identify any points of learning and practice development.

“ There are minimal disruptions, with one break down in 2014-15. This demonstrates the quality of matches for children and the post-adoption support available. The potential lessons from a review of the disrupted placement have been reflected on by the service and the Adoption panel ”

*Ofsted inspection report - March 2016.*

For the year 2015/16 two prospective adoptive families where the agency had accepted Registrations of Interest were unable to be progressed beyond Stage One of the assessment process. In both cases this was because of major health issues which would not be conducive to the security and stability of a successful adoptive placement.

During the year 2015-2016 the plan for adoption was unable to be achieved for some children and their plan subsequently changed to long-term fostering.

“ For a small number of children (six) where extensive national searches have not found potential adopters, action has been taken to secure permanence through long-term fostering, in three cases with their existing foster carers. ”

*Ofsted Inspection report - March 2016.*



## Complaints and compliments

For the year 2015/16 the Council's Complaints section has a record of **one** formal complaint from a birth parent in relation to post adoption letterbox contact which was not upheld and a record of two lower level issues dealt with internally by the Service. One concerned the non-acceptance of an expression of interest in adoption and the other a lack of support from the agency, the latter being partially upheld.

In addition the Complaints Section also has a record of **12** compliments for the same period received from a variety of sources including enquirers, adopters going through the assessment process or those who have successfully adopted. Some of these comments have already been incorporated into earlier sections of this report.

“ We really appreciate all the amazing support you have given us during our adoption journey. You have been so professional and honest whilst also being caring and we have felt prepared for all stages of the process and also the different findings. We have felt you have been so easy to talk to and we always felt we could open up to you and obtain support. We will miss you and can't thank you enough. You really are a special person. ”

*Letter from adopters - March 2016*

“ For all your time and support through matching panel and the introduction week, we cannot thank you enough. Knowing you were always at the end of the phone or email and then talking to you about our little joy, we couldn't have wished for a better support worker. And we are over the moon with our son - he is ACE! ”

*Letter from adopters- August 2015*



## Central List membership for Adoption Panel - April 2015 to March 2016

Ian Gates, Independent Chair

Councillor Peter Mole

Paul Forbes, Social Worker, Barnardo's (Vice Chair)

Neil Carr, Foster Carer

Karen Wilson, Social Worker Fostering Team

Debbie Wilkinson, Team Manager, Safeguarding and Planning Team

Janet Dugdale, Team Manager, Safeguarding and Planning Team

Jill Smith, Clinical Psychologist

Ingrid Ford, Life story Adviser, Durham County Council (left 2015)

Ann Forster, Adopter (joined November 2015)

Sharon Jones, Adopter (joined February 2016)

### Medical Adviser and Panel member

Dr Helen Palmer

### Panel Advisers

Janice Cook, Legal Services

Anne Roberts, Adoption Team Manager

### Panel Administrator

Sonia Forster

Whilst Ingrid Ford has had to resign from the Central List and the Panel has lost valuable input in terms of the life story perspective, we have been very fortunate in that two experienced adopters have subsequently expressed an interest in joining our Central List. This was an area where the agency had identified that it lacked representation at Panel meetings and had taken some steps to address this.

“ The adoption panel is suitably robust and carefully considers recommendations for approvals and the quality of matching children with adopters. The agency decision maker makes timely decisions and, where required, pursues additional information to inform well-considered decisions for children. ”

*Ofsted report - March 2016.*

# Adoption Service Quality Assurance Framework

The Adoption Service has a robust quality assurance system in place to ensure that feedback is received at various stages of the adoption process. All feedback is collated and used to inform service planning. The table below outlines each stage of the quality assurance process:

ADOPTION SERVICE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK		
Stage	Mechanism	Person completing assessment
1.	Training Evaluation Form	Completed by prospective adopter following attendance at training
2.	End of Stage 1 meeting with Team Manager	Discussion led by Team Manager and outcome agreed
3.	Quality Assurance Visit (Pre Adoption Panel)	Adoption Team Manager or Senior Practitioner
4.	Adoption Panel Attendance Feedback Form	Adopter and Child's Social Worker
5.	Satisfaction Survey completed following adoption order	Adopter and Child's Social Worker

During the past year the majority of the feedback received through these processes has been extremely positive.

In summary the key themes are:

- Training sessions are well organised, facilitated and enjoyed by attendees; they are also a great opportunity to discuss issues with other people in the same situation.
- The end of Stage 1 meetings and the Quality Assurance Visits highlight that prospective adopters have had a positive journey so far. They value the recruitment process and support they have received from their worker. Prospective adopters often comment that they have found the experience very positive and friendly, with all staff making them feel relaxed and comfortable.
- Attendance at panel is also often seen as a positive experience from both the perspective of the prospective adopter(s) and the child's social worker. Feedback indicates that the atmosphere is friendly; the panel members are welcoming, attentive and professional.
- The satisfaction surveys indicate that satisfaction levels of both approved adopters and children's social workers are high with the majority of respondents saying that the service provided is either "Excellent" or "Good".



## Key Issues and aims for the year ahead

Abuse, domestic violence and parental substance and alcohol misuse are significant issues in the background of many children requiring adoption. These trends have implications not only for family finding in that the needs of children are likely to be more complex and may mean they might be more difficult to place because of the higher level of special needs, health issues, and aspects such as foetal alcohol syndrome, but they will also be of relevance for the immediate and future support that families caring for such children will require.

In 2016/17 the key issues for the Adoption Service will be to:

- To build on our successful marketing approach and continue to recruit potential adopters from within a 50 mile radius of Gateshead. This activity will remain fluid in order to respond to the ever-changing needs of the service. Activities will be delivered in consultation with the Council's Communication Team. The service will maximise the use of all appropriate Council Communication channels, both internal and external, to achieve value for money. This will be supplemented by appropriate high level marketing activity throughout the region to attract as many prospective adopters to Gateshead.
- Increase the numbers of potential adopters wanting to adopt older children and sibling groups.
- Meeting the increasing demand for post adoption support as children with more complex needs are placed for adoption. To continue to develop and enhance the existing post adoption support that is on offer through more effective use of the Adoption Support Fund.
- To assist the agency in its response and development of new processes, procedures and support services as a result of the extension of the Adoption Support Fund to include Special Guardians.
- To explore opportunities for continued collaborative working with other Local Authorities and voluntary adoption agencies in order to maximise placement choices for children
- To consider creative options for family finding and build on new initiatives and arrangements with other agencies to generate a larger pool of available adopters and facilitate family finding
- Continued development of "fostering to adopt" opportunities to reduce delay for children being placed in permanent alternative families.
- Managing the changes and the requirements of the ongoing Adoption Reform agenda, and the implications of new proposals contained in the recently published DfE document, "Vision for Change," which requires local authorities to move to a system by 2020 where adopter recruitment, matching and adoption support are all delivered on a regional basis and to have plans in place by 2017 to evidence that they are working towards this outcome.
- Continued development of our performance and monitoring systems in order to effectively analyse outcomes and areas for future service development.

## Conclusion

2015/16 has been a successful year for the service. **25** children have been successfully adopted. We have maintained a good level of recruitment of prospective adopters, placed several children for adoption with a low level of placement breakdown, continued to offer and develop our adoption support offer and built on new initiatives such as fostering to adopt. In addition, the Service achieved a good outcome and was the recipient of several positive comments in the recent Ofsted Inspection report.





**CORPORATE PARENTING  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
16 January 2017**

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Missing from Care Episodes and child sexual exploitation for Children and Young People Looked After by Gateshead Council

**REPORT OF:** Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides an updated summary of missing from care episodes from December 2015 to November 2016 and an update regarding protection and monitoring of child sexual exploitation.

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**1. Background**

Young people who go “missing” from the care of the Council whether from foster care or residential care, do so for many often complex reasons which cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances and their experience within the Looked After system.

**2. Policy Context**

Gateshead Council has clear procedures regarding missing children and young people which incorporate a joint protocol between Northumbria Police and Children’s Social Care. The procedures and data systems form part of the Local Safeguarding Children Board’s (LSCB’s) oversight of arrangements. A designated officer is a legal requirement for each Local Authority. This remit is delegated to Service Manager Looked After Children.

**3. Definition of Missing from Care**

***“A Looked After young person is considered missing if he/she is absent from her place of residence without authority.” Children can be reported missing within 30 minutes to 3 hours from their anticipated return time.***

To identify the type of missing activity there are three main categories of missing episodes outlined in the missing children and young people procedure, ‘Absent’, ‘Missing’ and ‘Absconder’. In addition a missing strategy for each young person may be different depending upon the management of assessed risks relating to the young person.

## **Absent**

Absent - "A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk."

The 'absent' category should comprise cases in which people are not presently where they are supposed to be and there is no apparent risk. 'Absent' cases should not be ignored, and must be monitored over periods of time with consideration given to escalating to 'missing' if there is a change to the circumstances that has increased the level of risk.

Some police forces in the country formally record episodes of "absent" episodes and provide a different response to these cases than episodes where people are reported "missing". This process was introduced following revised guidance for police forces from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in 2013. Northumbria Police decided that it was too much of a risk to consider introducing the 'Absent' Category in 2013 as this would delay taking a missing report in relation to those individuals considered most at risk of serious harm and CSE. However, given the great deal of progress they have made in relation to the identification and management of risk in particular in relation to CSE, they have now adopted the 'Absent' category as per national guidance.

Some children absent themselves for a short period and then return and during their absence their whereabouts are known or they have made contact. Sometimes children stay out longer than agreed, either on purpose or accidentally, and may be testing boundaries, but do not jeopardise their wellbeing. This kind of boundary testing is within the range of normal teenage behaviour and not necessarily considered a risk.

Whether the absence is careless or deliberate, if there is no apparent risk for their immediate safety, or that of the public, it may fall within the absent category. The assessment of the carer is initially that they are safe but are away from home without permission. It is still important that staff/ carers record these incidences (as absent, not missing episodes), in case the level of risk changes and decisions are auditable. Absent episodes must be carefully monitored however as the child may subsequently go missing.

If a child's whereabouts are known then they cannot be 'missing'. For example, in some circumstances young people staying with a friend without prior agreement may not be 'at risk' and it would be inappropriate to flag this event as a missing from care incident or report it to the police.

In situations where a child is absent without permission the first response may be that providers of their care along with any relevant staff from their responsible authority, which could include the child's social worker, should act as a responsible parent and take all practical steps to establish the child's location and to ensure that they return to their placement without delay.

A child or young person who is not where they are expected to be absent should be classified as absent if the criteria below apply:

- They have deliberately or carelessly absented themselves

- They are likely to return of their own accord or they are staying with others known to them
- They are likely to be easily located
- They are unlikely to suffer or cause significant harm whilst absent

The carer or residential staff member should record any information gained on the whereabouts of the young person whilst absent, and this should be shared as appropriate with the police. Where the person remains absent, and the carer/ staff feels the individual may be at risk of harm then a report should be made to the police.

### **Missing**

Missing - "Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another."

A child is categorised as missing when their location or reason for absence is unknown **and/ or** there is cause for concern for the child because of their vulnerability or there is a potential danger to the public.

A child or young person who is absent should be classified as missing if one or more of the criteria below apply:

- There is identified or imminent risk of the child or young person being exposed to significant harm
- The child or young person poses a risk of significant harm to others
- There are suspicious circumstances
- The absence is out of character or unusual behaviour
- There are indications that the child has already come to harm
- There are indications that the episode is not a deliberate or careless act
- There are indications that the child or young person
- Is not expected to return within reasonable time limits
- Is not staying at homes of others known to them
- Will not be easily located

A child or young person in this category must be reported to the police.

### **Absconder**

An absconder is a child or young person who is absent from a placement without the permission of the responsible person and who is subject to a legal order or requirement resulting from the criminal justice process or a secure order made in either civil or criminal proceedings.

A child or young person in this category must be reported to the Police as soon as possible and treated as a wanted person. The Police must be made aware of the particular order under which the child has been placed in the residence and the expiry date of the order.

#### 4. Risk Assessment

In assessing the significance of any child's absence a risk assessment must be undertaken. The service has developed a screening assessment tool based which is completed by the care team and if there are persistent missing episodes this is presented to the Multi agency Sexual Exploitation Trafficking meeting.

Where a child is missing, relevant staff from Local Authority and Police, must consider the above definitions and take into consideration the child's care plan and factors listed below, when assessing risk:

- The legal status of the person in care (e.g. Emergency Protection Order, Full or Interim Care Order, remanded, curfew conditions etc.)
- Previous behaviour patterns. (Such as a history of absence and quick return)
- The child's state of mind/perceived risk. (Is child likely to self-harm or commit suicide? Does child see risks in a balanced way?)
- Group behaviour at the time of the absence
- Whether the young person is perceived as running to someone or running from a situation
- Any physical or learning disabilities the child may have which increase the risk to them
- Is the child vulnerable due to age or infirmity or any other factor?
- Is the child suspected to be the victim of a significant crime in progress, e.g. abduction?
- Are there family /relationship problems or recent history of family conflict, including domestic abuse
- Does the missing person have any physical illness, disability or mental health problems?
- Are they in the company of a person who may cause them harm?
- Do they require essential medication which is not likely to be available?
- Is there ongoing bullying or harassment, e.g. racial, sexual, homophobic or local community concerns and/or cultural issues?
- Do they pose a threat of harm to others?
- Is there drug or alcohol dependency or substance misuse?
- Any other particular circumstances at the time of the incident influencing the risk assessment?

It is important that the assessment of risk is a dynamic process and should be re-considered and challenged at every point during a child or young person's absence. As a minimum requirement when a child is missing the risk assessment should be reviewed every eight hours and the level of prevailing risk agreed by carers and other professionals responsible for that young person's health safety and wellbeing.

## Categories of risk

### **HIGH**

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the child or young person is in danger through their own vulnerability or may have been the victim of a serious crime, or

The risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public are in danger.

### **MEDIUM**

The risk posed is likely to place the child or young person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.

### **LOW**

There is no apparent threat of danger to either the child or young person or the public. The key messages from research regarding young people Missing from Care over the last five years indicated the need for a regional approach and highlighted that:

- Few young people leave their local area
- Many stay with friends known to them/relatives, less than a third or a quarter sleep rough
- Most common reasons for running away are conflict with parents/step parents and carers and wanting to spend time with friends and partners
- Young people who runaway are more likely to be absent from school through refusal to attend or exclusion
- Young people are at as much risk whether they are missing for the first time or on any subsequent occasions
- Young people who go missing place are often very vulnerable and place themselves at risk and are exposed to violence, victimisation, sexual exploitation and involvement in crime

## **5. Overall data**

There were 875 missing episodes in total between December 2015 and November 2016, of which 511 (58%) were looked after children. This represents an increase in the total number of missing episodes compared to 2014-2015 (865) and also an increase in terms of the number of missing from care episodes

In January 2016 Northumbria Police began to differentiate between a “missing” episode and an “absent” episode. The figures shown below include those reported as missing and absent. Given that the new recording system was introduced three quarters of the way through the financial year it would not make sense to differentiate. Future data reports will however record by category and will demonstrate how the introduction of the “Absent” category impacts on the missing data.

There is a difference between the number of missing/absent episodes each month and the number of missing/absent individuals as some people will have more than one episode. Each month the number of individual young people in total and individual Looked After Children reported missing varies and is different from the number of missing episodes.

Over the last 12 months young people who have been recorded as missing from care have in the majority of cases returned fairly quickly to their placements. Young people who are persistent in being absent without permission, often leave their placements because of conflict primarily due to boundary setting, for example around coming in times or refusal to allow them to undertake activities which are not felt to be consistent with promoting their welfare. Some young people have links with others in other placements and are absent from their placements together. Social workers and staff are familiar with these young people, their contacts, likely whereabouts and they usually return later that day, rarely are young people in the care of the Council missing overnight or more than 24 hours.

A small minority of missing episodes of Looked After Children are for more than a 24-hour period. They are young people who are in the older age group and who have had very complex needs and backgrounds. Clear procedures are in place to manage these longer episodes.

Between December 2015 and November 2016 there were 103 episodes where a young person was missing or absent for over 24 hours. The majority of those young people were missing from care and is a large increase from the previous year where there were 66 episodes and a further increase from 2013-2014 where there were only 44 episodes lasting 24 hours or more.

#### Dec 2015-Nov 2016 data

Month	Total episodes	Number of individuals	Episodes over 24 hours	LAC MFC episodes	Number of individual LAC
December	76	44	13	42 (55%)	19
January	54	23	10	40 (74%)	10
February	65	25	9	49 (75%)	10
March	67	45	6	35 (52%)	17
April	76	47	16	50 (66%)	22
May	68	41	11	44 (65%)	19
June	57	32	4	35 (61%)	13
July	73	39	6	44 (60%)	15
August	58	35	10	33 (57%)	13
September	100	50	5	48 (48%)	19
October	104	48	0	55 (53%)	15
November	77	50	13	36 (47%)	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>875</b>		<b>103</b>	<b>511 (58%)</b>	

Month	Placement young person reported missing from (number of episodes)					Total
	Gateshead residential		Other residential (out of borough, private)	Foster care		
	1	2		Gateshead	Out of borough	
December	3	9	4	12	14	42
January	9	18	10	3	0	40
February	16	28	2	2	1	49
March	11	7	3	7	7	35
April	8		17	21	4	50
May	13		7	16	8	44
June	18		2	10	5	35
July	18		10	8	8	44
August	14		9	6	4	33
September	22		8	10	8	48
October	18		15	13	9	55
November	6		7	20	3	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>511</b>

Key issues to note:

- In December 2015 there were 13 episodes where a young person was missing for over 24 hours and four of those young people were missing from local authority care.
- In January 2016 there were 10 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and eight of them were looked after children
- In February 2016 there were 9 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and all of them were looked after children
- In March 2016 there were 9 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and 5 of them were looked after children.
- In April 2016 there were 21 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and 10 of them were looked after children.
- In May 2016 there were 11 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and all of them were looked after children.
- In June 2016 there were 5 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and 3 of those young people were missing from local authority care.
- In July 2016 there were 8 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and 4 of those were looked after children.
- In August 2016 there were 10 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and all of them were looked after children
- In September 2016 there were 8 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and 4 of those young people were missing from local authority care.
- In October 2016 there were 3 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and none of those were looked after children
- In November 2016 there were 18 episodes that lasted over 24 hours and 7 of those were looked after children.

## **6. Other relevant information**

### **MSET**

In addition to being reviewed and monitored by their own social workers and care team, children who go missing regular from care are also monitored by the LSCB Missing, Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Sub Group (MSET). The MSET is a multi-agency group chaired by the police and meets monthly, discussing individual cases where there are concerns around missing from home/care and or Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and/or Human Trafficking. MSET processes have recently been reviewed and strengthened, based on good practice from other areas, and a robust risk assessment and monitoring framework is in place for those cases of concern. In 2015-2016 there were 43 young people discussed at the MSET, which is a decrease from the previous year. To date 34 young people have been discussed in 2016-2017

Individual social workers attend the meeting to present the case, share information and receive information from other agencies. A diversion plan is then put in place to address and manage the presenting risks and concerns. Representatives from children's homes and fostering homes are members of MSET, in addition to the Service Managers for LAC, Safeguarding and R&A/EDT. The team manager of the LAC & Young People's Team and Team Manager of the Fostering Team are also members to ensure that information from the meetings is disseminated appropriately.

In addition to discussing individual cases, MSET meetings also focus on wider areas of intelligence in Gateshead and other areas locally, for example known CSE "hot spots" in the borough or issues raised in MSET meetings elsewhere within the Northumbria Police force area. This information is then disseminated as appropriate so that professionals are alert to particular issues of concern

### **Return interviews**

When a child is reported missing from home or care for the second or subsequent time in a six month period or for a single episode lasting longer than 24 hours they are offered an Independent Return Interview. These interviews are undertaken by Youth Workers or a specialist CSE worker from the Children's Society's SCARPA project. The outcome of the return interview is shared with the young person's social worker, the police and any other relevant professionals. In cases where a Gateshead child is looked after and placed out of borough the information is also shared with the hosting local authority.

## **7. Case Scenario**

The following outlines a typical response to a young person missing from children's home:

- Child A, a female aged 15 years is placed in Children's home under a Care Order.
- The young person leaves the building with permission at 6:30 to return at agreed time of 10:00pm. She does not return at this time. She has a history

of coming home late and has occasionally stayed out overnight and classified as missing.

- Staff allowed her an hour before reporting her missing to the police. This had been agreed by the care team and formed part of her risk assessment. The police wanted to class her as absent rather than missing, however as she was vulnerable and at risk of CSE the staff ensured that the police classed her as missing. They informed EDT of the missing episode, shared the Missing from Care details and gave them the police log number.
- Parents were informed and advised to inform staff should she arrive there.
- She had not returned to the placement by 8am the following day and further telephone calls were made to the police in order that intelligence is shared and to maximise locating the young person.
- Police make a visit to the children's home at to gather further information from staff and young people
- Police continue to make searches of the local area and places where the young person may be. Regular contact is maintained between parties.
- The girl returns of her own accord after 22 hours. All parties are informed of her safe.
- On return to the children's home the young person is spoken to by staff to ensure she is ok, to establish reasons for the missing episode. She is unwilling to say where she has been, other than to say she was safe and had stayed at a friend's.
- Police make a safe and well visit to the young person.
- An Independent Return Interview in line with LSCB Missing from Care Procedures takes place, however no further information is shared about who she had been with.
- The staff and social worker meet review the risks and agree actions.
- The young person has two further similar episodes in a 3 week period and her name is discussed at the MSET meeting, scrutinising the plan and considering the risk assessment.

## **8. Child Sexual exploitation**

The service monitors the risks of child sexual exploitation very carefully. Currently there are 12 young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation which is a similar figure this time last year, including 1 males and 11 females aged 14 years plus.

Processes have been developed to monitor and review these young people to ensure they are categorised appropriately and receive the right support and interventions, which include interventions to minimise risk, disrupt activity and develop incentives and sanctions. The plans are also scrutinised within the MSET meeting.

There is also an escalation process with senior management of the children and families service and the police to ensure further scrutiny is undertaken.

There is a comprehensive training programme for staff and foster carers to ensure all professionals working with young people at risk of CSE have the knowledge and skills to support and educate the young people

## 9. Sanctuary South

An innovation bid was submitted to the Home Office to enable Northumbria Police and safeguarding partners to build on the key learning from Operation Sanctuary by establishing two multi-agency operational teams, one covering the North of the force and the other the South, to tackle child exploitation, vulnerability and modern day slavery. Operation Sanctuary North has been running since April 2015 and Sanctuary South has been live since Monday 4th April 2016.

Sanctuary South is based in Washington and covers the three local authorities in the South of the Northumbria area, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside. The investigative and intelligence teams are based in Washington Police Station and the multi – agency team is based in a non-police premises at ‘The Hub’, Crowther Industrial Estate, Washington. The intention of co-location within a hub arrangement is to bring together children and adult social care services, health, the police and a broad range of third sector organisations including Bright Futures, Changing Lives and Barnados. In keeping with the significant benefits achieved from the approach taken by Operation Sanctuary North, social workers and police conduct joint visits to victims to facilitate active engagement and access to specialist services at the earliest opportunity. The multi – agency team will adopt a non-police led victim strategy involving social services and the voluntary sector to secure on-going trust and confidence with potential complainants. This is a Northumbria Police led multi agency team operation to target the criminal behaviour of those who commit sexual offences against vulnerable women and children.

The Police team is structured as follows:

- Detective Inspector Claire Wheatley
- Victim Team of 1 x D/Sgt and 4 x DC
- Investigation Team of 3 x D/Sgt and 15 x DC
- Intelligence Cell of 1 x D/Sgt, 1 x DC, 1x PC
- 1 x Analyst and 1 x Researcher
- Missing from Home Coordinator of 1 x Sergeant

This Police investment will be supported by partner resources working alongside the Police Victim Team within a Victim’s Hub. The partner resources are structured as follows:

- 1 x Senior Practitioner Children – Sunderland
- 1 x Social worker Children – Sunderland
- 0.5 x Adult Social worker – Sunderland.
- 1x Social Worker Children – Gateshead
- 0.5 Adult Social worker – Gateshead
- 1x Social worker Children – South Tyneside
- 0.5 Social worker Adult – South Tyneside
- 1 x Changing Lives Outreach Worker
- 2 x Bright Futures Outreach Workers
- 1 x Barnardo’s Family Therapist, Northumbria area, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside.

The funding for these posts will be reviewed in April 2017 and it is hoped this resource will be supported by the police and partner agencies.

## **10. Practice developments**

Northumbria police now have 3 dedicated Missing from Home Coordinators with a remit to improve the police response when someone is reported missing, and to work strategically with partners to reduce the numbers of children and young people reported missing from care. The coordinator from the Central area works closely with the Service Director- Social Work, Children and Families, the LSCB Business Manager, the Local authority Children's Home and Private Children's Homes within Gateshead.

The LSCB Business Manager has continued to work closely with the SCARPA project of the Children's Society as part of their work to establish a "hub and spoke" model following a number of years of successful work in Newcastle. The worker provides training to partner agency staff in statutory services, including social workers, residential staff and foster carers, on sexual exploitation and provide case-based advice to frontline staff.

There has also been the development of a strategic MSET group which the operational MSET group also reports. This group is developing further awareness and strategic plans linking resources to the CSE focus developing multi agency information and training.

The LSCB continues to receive written reports three times a year on children who go missing from home and care and are at risk of sexual exploitation.

The local authority continues to work to develop a system to capture and share accurate and meaningful information on missing from care episodes with the LSCB.

The local authority will continue to work with the LSCB to strengthen work to protect those young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation

## **11. Recommendation**

It is requested that the Looked After Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to receive an annual report on missing from care issues within Learning and Children.

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