

Adoption Service Annual Report

April 2017 – March 2018

Introduction

It gives us immense pleasure to introduce Gateshead Council's 2017/18 Adoption Service Annual Report. As Cabinet Member for Children and Young People in Gateshead and Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning we hold the responsibility to ensure that children requiring adoption receive good quality services which will support them. Achieving positive outcomes for children and the provision of effective support for all those affected by adoption is a crucial component of the work of the Adoption Service and fits well within the strategic vision for Gateshead, Vision 2030, which sets out targets for the improvement of the lives of Gateshead residents.

This Annual Report provides a summary of the performance of the Adoption Service during the past year. It also includes analysis and comparative data for 2017/18, highlighting progress made over the past year and identifying potential areas for future development in the year ahead.

The Service continues to operate against a backdrop where major structural and procedural reform is being proposed. One of the key challenges for the Service in the forthcoming year will be to ensure the continuing provision of effective services for adoptive families and children requiring adoption, whilst also managing the impact of significant changes for both the Service and its staff.

The Adoption Team has always been committed to doing its best to secure positive outcomes for children and young people and for a small percentage of children, the most effective way to achieve this will be through the provision of new permanent families.

This year we will focus on:

- Building on our recruitment approach to attract potential adopters from within a 50-mile radius of Gateshead and increasing enquiries.
- Exploring opportunities for continued collaborative working with other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies in order to maximise placement choices for children.
- Meeting the increasing demand for post adoption support as children with more complex needs continue to be placed for adoption. We will continue to make effective use of the Adoption Support Fund for adopted children and for previously Looked After Children who are placed with Special Guardians.
- Continuing exploration and development of "fostering to adopt" opportunities to reduce delay for children.
- Continuing to manage the changes and the requirements of the Adoption Reform Agenda which requires local authorities to move to a system whereby adoption services are delivered on a regional basis by 2020. The development of the Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt North East) is scheduled to "go live" in December 2018.
- Mentoring our performance and systems to effectively analyse outcomes and identify potential areas for future service development.

We are extremely proud of the work carried out by the Adoption Service and would like to thank them, our Adoption Panel, Adoptive families as well as staff from within the council and other organisations for their continued dedication and hard work in making adoption a positive outcome for many children in Gateshead.

We thank you for everything you do ...every day.

**Councillor Gary Haley
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

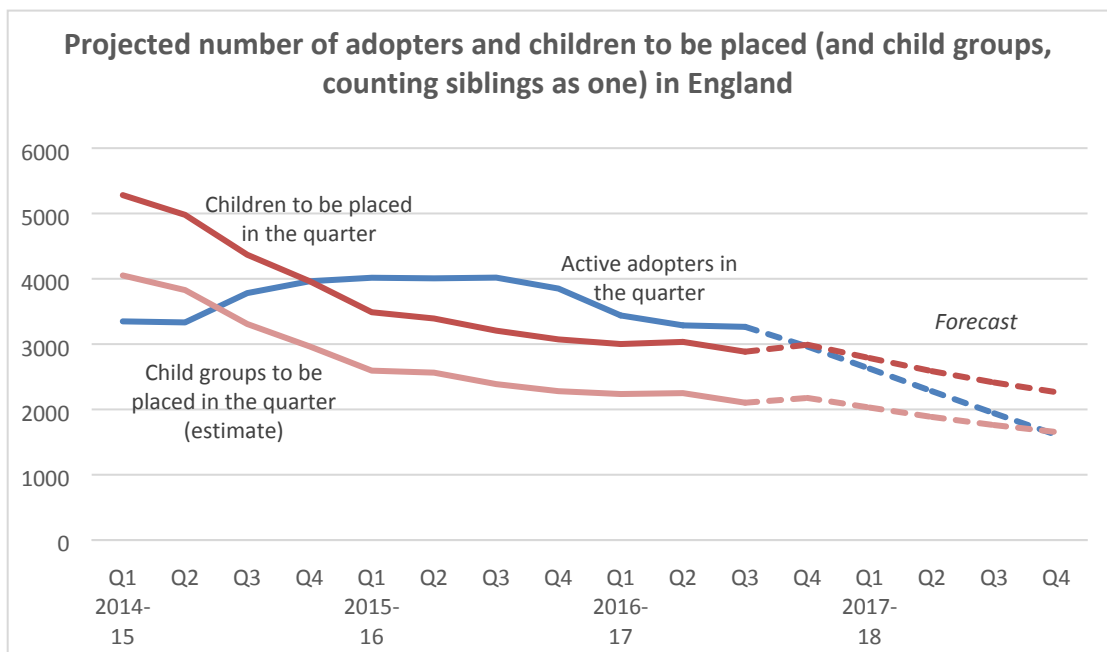
**Caroline O'Neill
Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning**

Background

In April 2018 the National Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) published data gathered from local authority adoption agencies in England. The purpose of this research is to identify current trends in adoption and to provide estimates as to the future numbers of children likely to require adoptive placements and the number of adoptive families potentially available to meet that need.

The number of looked after children who were adopted in 2017 decreased, continuing a decline we saw last year from a peak 5,360 in 2015. This fall was expected as since 2015 the number of looked after children with a placement order has decreased, as has the number of looked after children who were placed for adoption.

4,350 looked after children were adopted in 2017, down 8% on 2016 and down 19% of the peak of 5,360 in 2015. This fall follows a period of increasing numbers of looked after children being adopted since 2011.



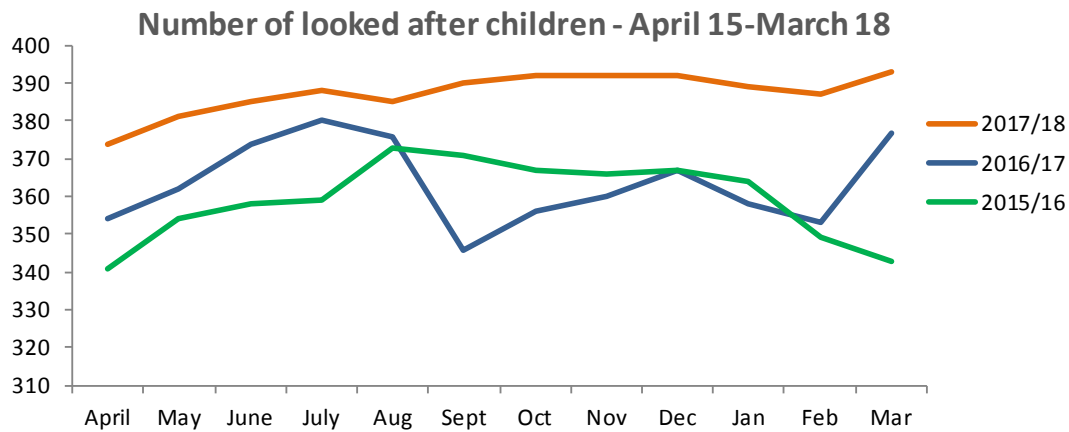
In reality only, a proportion of the 1654 children identified in the table above as “waiting” to be placed are actually waiting, as this overall figure includes children who have been matched to adoptive families and not yet placed, together with children who have previously been identified as requiring adoption but where the plan has subsequently changed.

Whilst a “surplus” of adopters might look like sufficiency, the numbers of adopters coming forward is also falling and consideration also needs to be given to the fact that collectively the families waiting may not be able to meet the needs of many of the children waiting, and this in turn represents a further challenge in relation to future adopter recruitment.

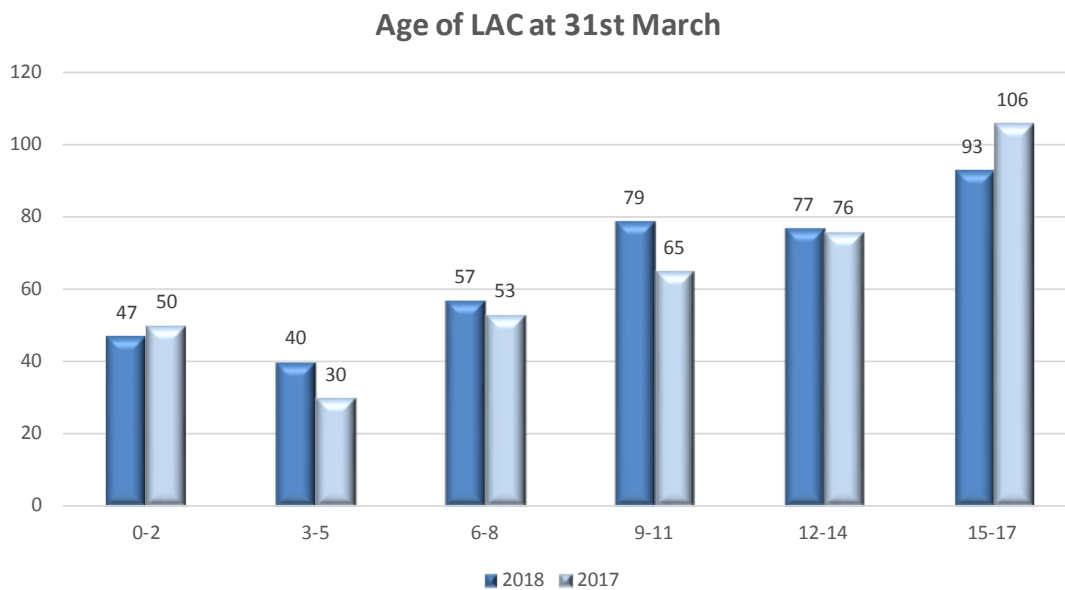
Data published shows that in September 2017 there were 870 children with a placement order and 680 approved adopters. This continues to demonstrate the need for more adopters to be recruited and approved in the future than is presently the case, not just by our Service, but by all agencies nationally.

Over the last year the number of Looked After Children (LAC) in Gateshead has ranged from 374 at its lowest to 393 at its highest. The Gateshead Looked After rate per 10,000

children is 98.2, higher than the regional rate of 92 and significantly higher than the national rate of 62 per 10,000.



When comparing ages of our LAC, with the exception of our 0-2 and 15-17 year olds we have seen an increase in each of our age bands. LAC aged 8 and under made up 37% of our LAC population as at 31st March 2018.



The number of Placement Orders granted has remained similar to last year. As at 31st March 2018 there were 393 Looked After Children of whom 30 had a placement order granted (7.6%). This compares to 31 out of 377 as at 31st March 2017.

Continuation of this trend together with increasing numbers of Looked After Children will undoubtedly have implications for effective adopter recruitment in the year ahead, coupled with the ongoing need for the Service to broaden the pool of available families by attracting more prospective adopters able and willing to consider older children, sibling groups, and children with more complex needs.

Our Performance April 2017 - March 2018

Children Adopted

Throughout April 2017 - March 2018, **25** children placed for adoption by Gateshead Council had been successfully adopted, and a further **16** children were also in placement with their adoptive families, awaiting hearings for adoption orders. In addition, members of the team were also actively family finding for a further **14** children.

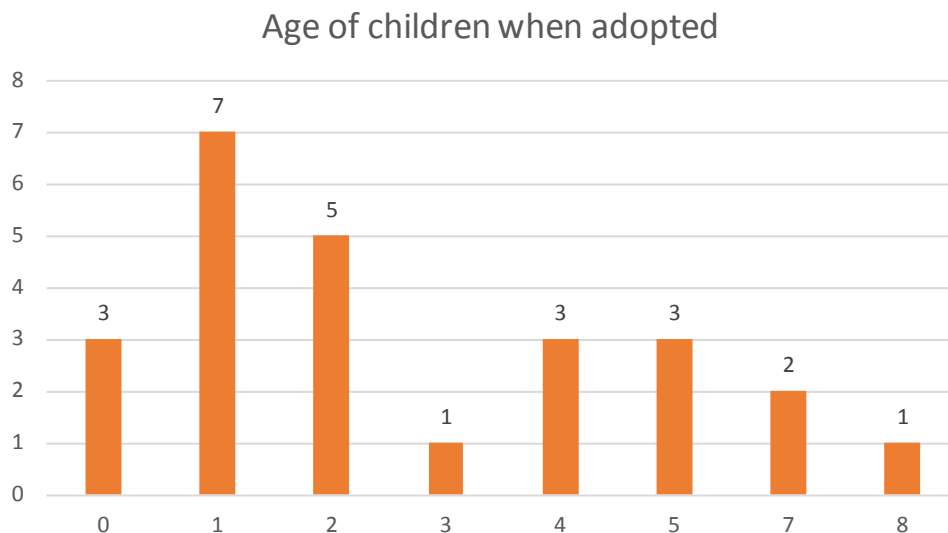
For some of this latter group the Service had already predicted that it would need to look outside of its own internal resources, given the children's specific needs or a requirement to place geographically outside the north-east.

Of the **25** children adopted during the year 2017/18

- **14** were girls **11** were boys.
- **14** children were placed individually and **11** children were part of a sibling group (4 groups of 2 children and 1 group of 3 children).

The average age at adoption in England for the year ending 31st March 2017 was 3 years 4 months, one month younger than in 2016.

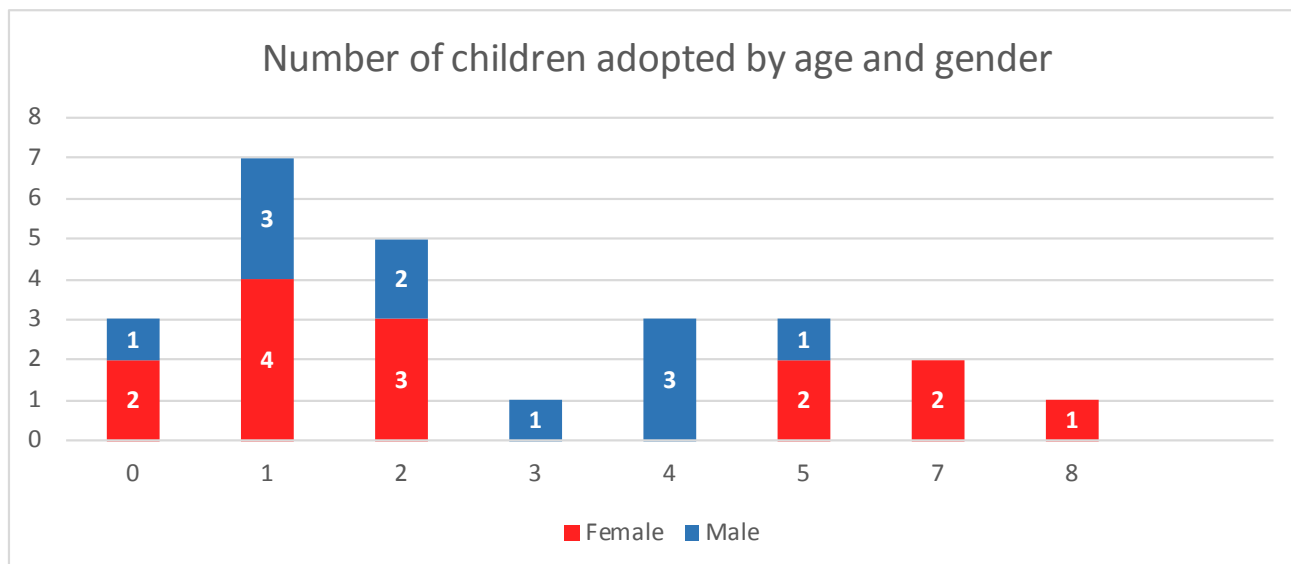
The average age of children adopted during the year was 3 years, 1 month.



Unlike in 2016/17 where all the children who were adopted were aged 4 and under, in 2017/18 this reduced to 75% of our adopted children were aged 4 or under, the oldest children adopted this year was aged 8.

Figures for England reveal that 51% (2,240) of children adopted during the year ending 31st March 2016 were boys and 49% (2,110) were girls.

14 girls were adopted in Gateshead in 2017/18, 11 boys were adopted.



For the year April 2017 to March 2018 **25** adoptions took place, of which **18** (72%) were within the best interest timescale of taking no more than twelve months between the date it was decided the child should be placed for adoption and the date their adoptive placement started. This is a decline in performance from the previous year where there were **23** adoptions of which **19 (82.6%)** were in timescale.

Where cases were out of timescale during the year April 17 to March 18 the Service was able to identify the reasons, such as children having very complex background needs which impacted significantly on family finding, e.g. a sibling group of 2 slightly older children where one child was identified with potential genetic risk and further assessment was undertaken to determine if siblings should be placed separately. A slightly older girl who presented with complex health needs and complexities in finding a suitable family for 2 slightly older boys where family finding was affected by safeguarding issues and the children needing to be placed outside of the North East. Protracted legal proceedings due to further assessment and parenting work.

Gateshead Key Indicators	Average time between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (days)		Average time between court authority and deciding on a match (days)		Number and percentage of children adopted from care	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18
	392	409	105	184	23 (14.3%)	25 (14.5%)

In relation to timescales for entering care and moving in with the adoptive family (14 months) again there has been an improvement in these figures from the previous year. For **16** of the **25** adopted children this timescale was achieved and for those outside of timescale the reasons are similar to those previously. In addition, in some cases the court process took much longer than anticipated to conclude and necessitated adjournments and/or additional requests for further assessments and reports. This was an improvement from the 2016/17 figure of **13** out of **23**.

Of the **25** children adopted from care in 2017/18 60% (**15**) were matched with adopters assessed and approved by Gateshead and **10** were placed with adopters assessed by external agencies.

For several years the Service has been able to provide at least two-thirds of the families for Gateshead children requiring adoption from within its own internal resources.

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, and to submit their details to the Adoption Register, which is not only of benefit to children elsewhere in the country waiting for adoption but also assists the Service to offset some of its costs in purchasing external placements for children when needs cannot be met via our own resources.

At the time of writing this report we currently have no families whose details are on the Register for whom there are no suitable in-house links.

Where we are unable to meet needs from within our own resources we will continue to proactively make use of external resources such as the Adoption Register to locate families for children. At the time of writing this report there are currently 1123 active children on the Register, of whom 71 are from the North-East region, including 4 children from Gateshead.

The level of family finding being undertaken within the Service has increased since year end March 2017 and the Service is currently in the process of attempting to identify prospective adoptive families for 20 children and also has advance notice in respect of a further 4 children whose cases are currently in court proceedings, or due to enter proceedings, and depending on the final outcome may potentially require adoptive placements.

Adopters Approved

Within the year April 2017 to March 2018 Gateshead Council Adoption Panel recommended approval for **13** prospective adoptive families recruited and assessed by the Adoption Team. This is a decrease on the previous year's figure and reflects the national difficulties in recruiting adopters.

Quarter	Apr-June 17	Jul-Sept 17	Oct 17-Dec 17	Jan-March 18
Number of families approved	3	5	2	3

The majority of the families (**9**) were couples but this cohort also included **2** same sex couples and **2** single adopters.

“Thank you will never be enough for making my dream come true. S is amazing and a lifelong ambition filled to be a mum at last.”

Adopters October 2017

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

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. Where the Service has been unable to meet this deadline, we have been able to identify the reason. In the main this has generally been due to our awaiting the return of essential information from other agencies, such as police and health checks, without which it is not possible to proceed. One adopter experienced a bereavement, and another requested that their completed assessment was delayed going to panel due to a health issue.

Quarter	Apr-June 17	Jul-Sept 17	Oct 17-Dec 17	Jan-March 18
Assessments completed				
Within Timescale	1	2	1	1
Outside Timescale	2	3	1	2
Reasons	1 delayed by staff/adopter holidays 1 delayed as awaiting return of checks and references	1 delayed by adopter having a bereavement 2 delayed as awaiting return of checks and references	1 delayed as awaiting return of checks and references	1 delayed going to panel at adopters request 1 delayed as awaiting return of checks and references

At the date of writing this report the Service currently has **8** prospective adoptive families under assessment, with a further **8** adoptive families already approved and awaiting placements. There are links already in progress for a number of these families, so it is anticipated that several Gateshead children currently requiring adoptive placements should be matched and placed with some of these families in the next few months.

"You have allowed us to find and become what we desired – a family! There aren't enough words to convey our thank you."

Adopter January 2018

Matches

During April 2017 to March 2018 Gateshead Adoption Panel considered matches for **28** children with their prospective adoptive families, two more than the previous year. This figure includes **15** children placed individually, **5** sets of sibling groups of two and **1** sibling group of three. Seven of the **28** children were adopted during the year April 2017 to March 2018 and a further **17** of these children are currently placed with their adoptive families, awaiting their adoption.

Matches per quarter	Apr-June 17	Jul-Sept 17	Oct 17-Dec 17	Jan-March 18	Total
Total	9	5	5	9	28
Individual children	4	1	2	4	11
Sibling Groups	5	4	3	5	17
Matched in house	8	3	3	7	21
Matched with external adopters	1	2	2	2	7

The overwhelming majority of the matches, 19, (68%), were made with adopters recruited and assessed by Gateshead Adoption Service. This performance is an improvement on our performance last year.

"I'd like to formally thank you for your hard work and support to myself and my husband for the duration of our adoption journey. We felt well informed throughout our assessment to adopt and our social worker continued to be a great support to us after we were matched to a child."

Adopters June 2017

The Service continues to consider holding Life Appreciation Events for children over the age of 3, children with complex needs and sibling groups in order to help inform the prospective adopters of the childrens' background and history and likely needs following placement.

The Service has also started to introduce 'Bump Into Meetings' which allows prospective adopters to meet the child or children they are considering from a distance to help inform decisions and also future support. An example of this is some potential adopters who were considering an older child and they went to his nursery where they were shown around as parents and in doing so were able to observe the child in class.

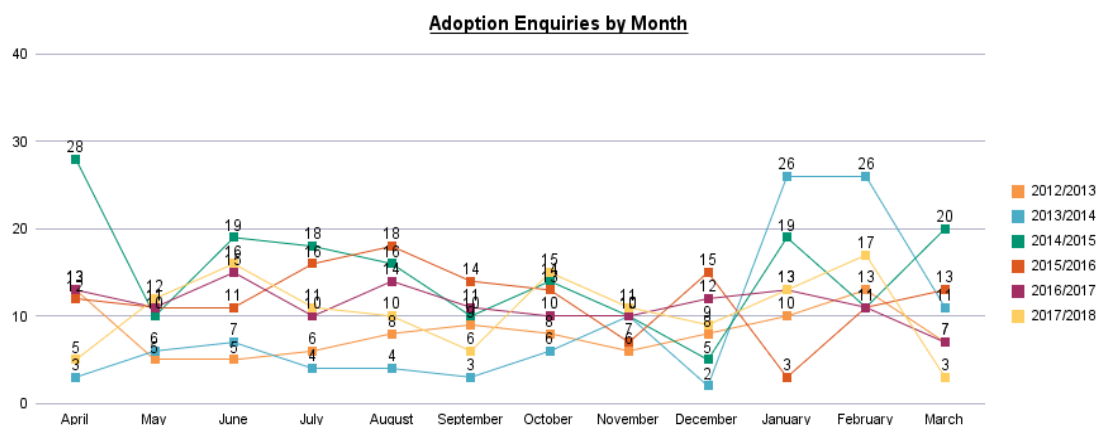
Adopter Recruitment

The Service has utilised various methods to recruit adopters during the past year including:

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

- Poster distribution to local community
- Social Media
- Metro Centre External advert
- Council News/Council Info/Gateshead Now/Plasma TV screens
- Council Website and other appropriate websites.

The graph below provides information on the trends in adoption enquiries for the past six years. The enquiry level for 2017/2018 has reduced by only 6.5% compared to 2016/17 but is still higher than the rates of 2012/13 and 2013/14. This reduction does not cause concern for the service but highlights the need to continually review the marketing approach in order not to lose our share of the market.



Whilst the number of enquiries decreased in 2017-18 compared to 2016-17, the service did see an increase in referrals from neighbouring authorities who have signposted prospective adopters to other authorities.

Table – Enquiries by Month

Enquiries by Month	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	Total
April	12	13	5	30
May	11	11	12	34
June	11	15	16	42
July	16	10	11	37
August	18	14	10	42
September	14	11	6	31
October	13	10	15	38
November	7	10	11	28
December	15	12	9	36
January	3	13	13	29
February	11	11	17	39
March	13	7	3	23
Total	144	137	128	409

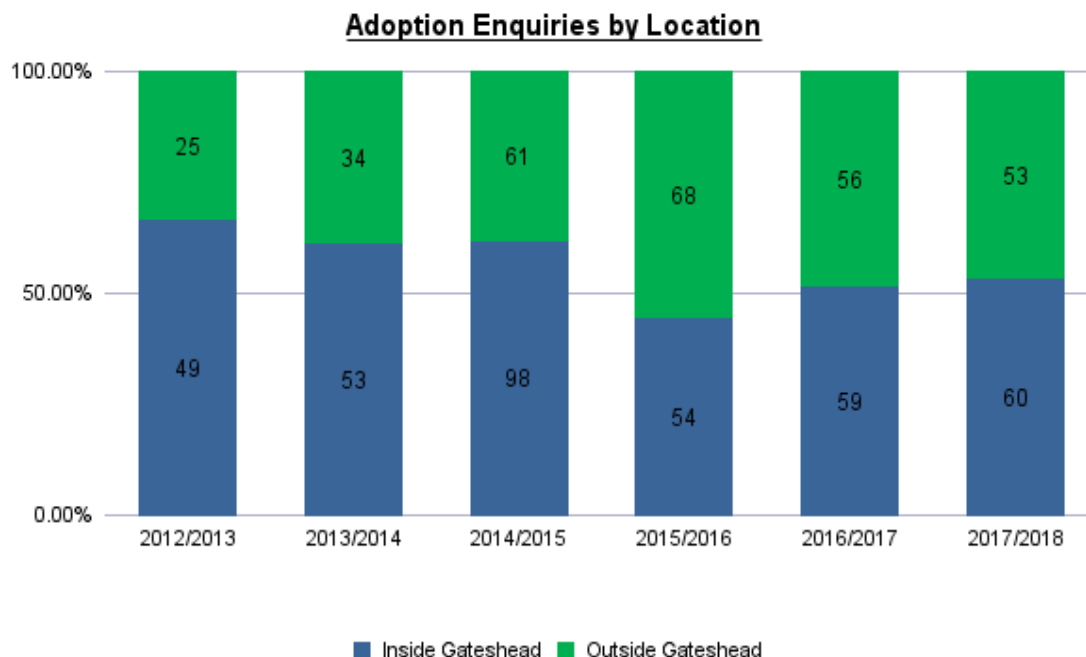
When looking more specifically at the numbers of enquiries we can see that throughout 2017/18 we experienced an increase in enquiries over six months of the year, saw a decrease in enquiries for five months of the year and maintained the level for one month of the year. Enquiry patterns fluctuate depending on marketing activity and we use this information to evaluate how effective our channels and campaigns are.

Out of **128** enquiries received in 2017/18 we issued **18** registrations of interest forms. This represents a conversion rate of **14.1%**; which equates to nearly 1 in every 7 enquiries progressing to the stage of being invited to register an application. This is a reasonable outcome given we know that a high proportion of enquirers will approach a number of agencies before finally deciding on which agency to register their interest with.

The table below evidences the origin of the enquiries received by the Service. 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 vicinity.

Table – Enquiries by Area

Enquiries by Area	2015/2016	%	2016/2017	%	2017/2018	%	Total	%
County Durham	7	4.83%	9	6.87%	11	8.94%	27	6.77%
Cumbria	1	0.69%					1	0.25%
Gateshead	55	37.93%	59	45.04%	60	48.78%	174	43.61%
Glasgow City			1	0.76%			1	0.25%
Hartlepool			1	0.76%			1	0.25%
Newcastle Upon Tyne	13	8.97%	16	12.21%	6	4.88%	35	8.77%
North Tyneside	9	6.21%	8	6.11%	8	6.50%	25	6.27%
Northumberland	12	8.28%	7	5.34%	13	10.57%	32	8.02%
Redcar and Cleveland	1	0.69%					1	0.25%
South Tyneside	10	6.90%	10	7.63%	6	4.88%	26	6.52%
Stockton-on-Tees			1	0.76%			1	0.25%
Sunderland	15	10.34%	3	2.29%	9	7.32%	27	6.77%
Not Recorded	22	15.17%	16	12.21%	10	8.13%	48	12.03%
Total	145	100%	131	100%	123	100%	399	100.00%



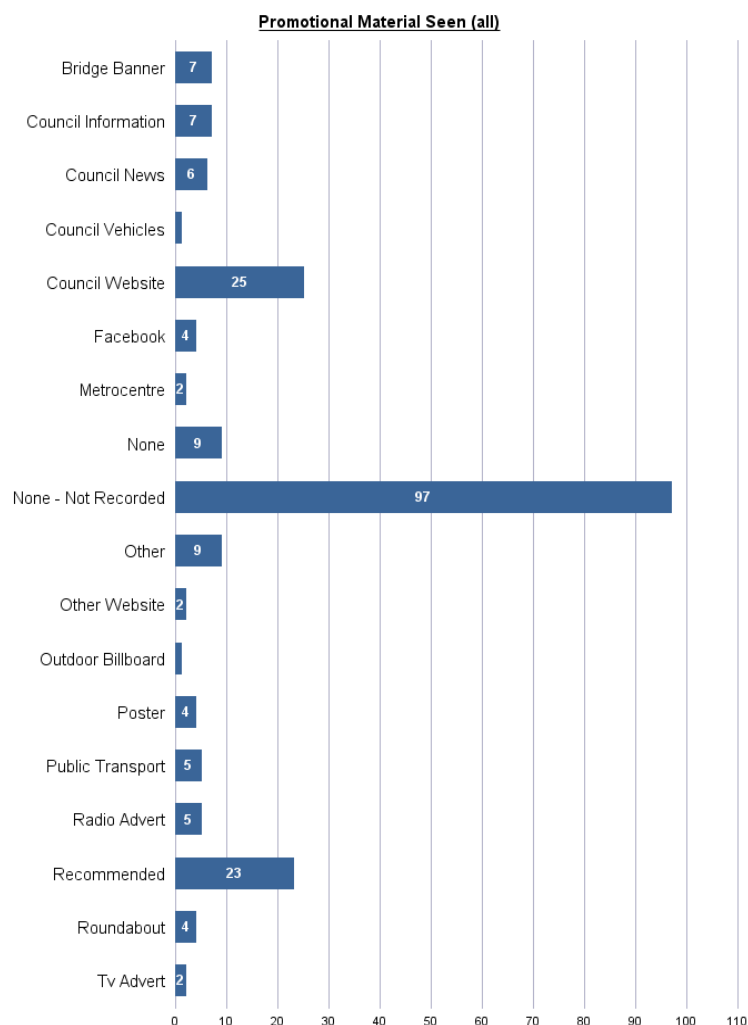
The highest number of enquiries have continued to come from within the Gateshead area (49 % in 2017/18 compared to 45% in 2016/17). We have also been able significantly increase our level of enquiries from County Durham, Northumberland and Sunderland, whilst maintaining enquiry level from North Tyneside. We have however, seen a decrease in enquiries from Newcastle and South Tyneside so these areas could be targeted more next year to ensure we maximise enquiries from those areas. We will ensure that the level of adopter recruitment from within the immediate locality is also maintained by continuing to make full and effective 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 below shows which promotional materials which have been seen by enquirers since 2012.

Overall, the top six channels cited are:

- Council Website
- Recommended
- Radio Adverts
- Bridge Banners
- Council News
- Billboard

Table - Promotional Materials



23 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 has held six information evenings and quarterly training sessions for prospective adopters in the past year and it would be our intention to maintain this level in the year ahead.

“Absolutely brilliant and great facilitation. Easy environment and a really nice informative atmosphere.”

Adopter April 2018

Family Finding for Children

The service will continue to utilise a wide range of family finding methods for children such as the Adoption Register, Be my Parent, Children who Wait and access national and voluntary sector resources as required. Members of the team will also continue to be involved in regional family finding events and meetings such as Activity days.

Future Family Finding

Based on a three year average of children on placement orders, assuming that the majority of those children will become adopted, then we can estimate that the number of children that may require adoption stands at 33 / 8% (August 2016/2017/2018).

However, these figures should be monitored on a regular basis to see if trends change.

For consideration

- If there were a 1% decrease, then we would need to recruit adopters for 29 children.
- If there were a 1% increase, then we would need to recruit adopters for 37 children.

It would therefore seem sensible to plan our recruitment strategy for the year ahead to meet a minimum need for **33** placements.

There will always be identified placement needs which simply could not be met from within our own resources and for which the agency will need to seek external placements from either regional or national partners.

Similarly, there will be the continuing need to monitor the level of recruitment of in-house adopters on a regular, ongoing basis and have suitable contingency plans in place to broaden the choice of suitable placements in the event that the agency experiences further rises in the number of placement orders and/or Looked After children for whom the plan may become adoption.

Recruitment of adopters in the year ahead will need to continue to focus on prospective adopters able to consider young children and young sibling groups, but given the trends suggested by the work of the ALB and the increasingly complex background of children being placed for adoption, the Service will need to continue marketing and recruitment activity to attract applicants who would be able to consider placements of older children and sibling groups, as well as very young children with complex developmental and health issues.

Foster for Adoption

We have incorporated information about Fostering for Adoption into all our information and publicity for prospective adopters. We promote Fostering for Adoption right from our first contact with potential adopters and it is discussed at Information Evenings, Initial Visits, Preparation training and during assessment. 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 seven 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

The Service currently has three Foster for Adoption placements and one of these is our first placement with an external agency.

'We met Susie within 24hours of her being born; we are the family she has known from birth. Our home is her home. She is settled and happy as part of our family. Our son Sam, adores her. Practically and emotionally she is our daughter, even if that is not yet legally the case.'

Foster for Adoption family June 2018

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 the inception of the Adoption Support Fund the Adoption Service has made many successful applications to the Fund.

Funding has been used to commission services such as therapeutic life-story work and counselling for adoptees, therapeutic parenting sessions for adoptive parents, and therapeutic respite and short-breaks for children in adoptive families.

Since implementation the remit of the fund has been further expanded and access to funding for therapy is now available to Special Guardians of children who were previously Looked After. The Service now has experience of successful applications to provide therapeutic life story work for children placed with Special Guardians.

The Service will continue to review and consider what changes can be made in terms of its existing service provision to help develop and enhance the current "Gateshead adoption support offer".

We continue to facilitate a parenting skills group course for adopters as and when required and 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 activities and provides an excellent informal support opportunity as adoption social workers are also available on the day.

In addition to information sessions and training for prospective and approved adopters, a group session specifically for extended family members of prospective adopters who were likely to provide support to placements is offered. The aim of these sessions is to provide information about the nature of adoption, the likely background factors for children requiring adoption and offer advice as to how family members can best help support their adopters. Our next session will be held in the Autumn.

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 using music. The Project has this year expanded to offer a further session for older children after school.

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 and offer further training to Adopters on specific themes or issues.

Our post-adoption contact post-box system currently manages **506** different contact agreements involving both adopters and birth families. Each separate contact agreement can include several individuals in addition to birth parents and adopters, e.g siblings, grandparents etc. Consequently, the amount of information involved in such exchanges, and people affected by post adoption contact who may need support, will vastly exceed this figure. Capacity to manage this will become more pertinent given the number of arrangements continues to rise each year, and currently is up by a further **39** agreements on the previous year's 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 also appears to be increasing. There has been a rise in the 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 it becomes the responsibility of the agency where they are residing.

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.

Disruptions, Adopters Withdrawing, Changes of Plan for Children.

The Service has not experienced any adoption disruptions in this year, however there is significant support being provided to two families experiencing difficulties with children.

Both families include children who were placed by Gateshead and are living out of the area. The children have complex needs which have become more apparent since their placement in their adoptive family. One of the children is now receiving support from Services in their home authority but we have been able to access funds to provide therapy through the Adoption Support Fund and have funded respite and additional support for the child to be able to access out of school activities.

The other child who is not yet legally adopted is also receiving therapy funded through the Adoption Support Fund and the Adopters themselves are engaging with additional support through their agency.

For the year 2017/18 five potential adoptive families withdrew from the process. Two approved adoptive families decided to withdraw due to no suitable match being identified for them. One family withdrew after attending stage one preparation training reaching the decision that adoption was not for them considering the needs of their birth child. The remaining two families could not be progressed beyond stage one due to issues in relation to statutory checks.

During the year 2017/2018 the plan for adoption was subsequently changed in respect of five children, where authority to place for adoption was not obtained or the plan became long-term fostering or placement with member of the extended birth family.

Complaints and Compliments

For the year 2017/18 the Council's Complaints section has one record of a formal complaint in relation to the Service which needed to be addressed. More positively, the Complaints Section has received 12 compliments from a variety of sources including social workers, applicants going through the process and those who have successfully adopted. A selection of some of these comments has been incorporated into various sections of this report.

"A big massive thank you for everything you have done for us. You have been amazing! We could not have asked for better support!"

Adopters October 2017

Central List Membership for Adoption Panel – April 2017 to March 2018

The following members of the Central List have attended at least one meeting of the Panel this year:

Ian Gates, Independent Chair

Paul Forbes, independent, (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Peter Mole - retired in April 2018

Karen Wilson, Social Worker, Fostering Team

Debbie Wilkinson, Team Manager, Safeguarding and Care Planning – until October 2017

Janet Dugdale, Team Manager, Safeguarding and Care Planning

Jill Smith, Clinical Psychologist – left June 2017

Ann Forster, Adopter

Sharon Jones, Adopter

New Panel Members:

Councillor Mary Foy

Emma McManus, Assistant Team Manager, Fostering Service

Dave Telfer, Social Worker, Safeguarding and Care Planning

Medical Adviser and Panel member:

Dr Carmen Howey

Panel Advisers:

Janice Cook, Angela Simmons-Mather/Legal Services

Debbie Wilkinson, Adoption Team Manager

Panel Administrator:

Sonia Forster until March 2018

Laura Ward

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.	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 most of the feedback received through these processes has been extremely positive. The comment below is reflective of the type of feedback received.

"The panel was well conducted and put us at ease while always professional. We were able to ask questions as well as the panel asking us. Thank you for making it a pleasant experience."

Adopters July 2017

Key Issues and Aims for the Year Ahead

In 2018/19 the key issues for the Adoption Service will be to:

- To build on our recruitment approach to attract potential adopters from within a 50-mile radius of Gateshead, and to increase the numbers of enquiries from potential adopters, particularly those who might wish to consider older or more complex children or sibling groups.
- To explore opportunities for continued collaborative working with other Local Authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to maximise placement choices for children.
- Meet the increasing demand for post adoption support as children with more complex needs continue to be placed for adoption. Continue to make effective use of the Adoption Support Fund for adopted children and also for previously Looked After Children who are placed with Special Guardians.
- Continued exploration and development of “fostering to adopt” opportunities to reduce delay for children.
- To continue to manage the changes and the requirements of the Adoption Reform agenda which requires local authorities to move to a system whereby adoption services are delivered on a regional basis by 2020. The development of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt North East is scheduled to ‘go live’ in December 2018.
- Continued monitoring of our performance and systems to effectively analyse outcomes and identify potential areas for future service development

Conclusion

The Service has achieved several positive outcomes during the past year. Twenty-five children have been successfully adopted and a number of children are currently placed with their adoptive families awaiting adoption. We managed to recruit a sufficient number of adopters to meet our needs during the year and placed several children for adoption with a low level of placement disruption. We continue to promote initiatives such as fostering to adopt when appropriate. The Service has also continued to develop its adoption support offer, making sensible use of the adoption support fund. Furthermore, members of the Service have played a full and constructive part in much of the regional work that has been undertaken by local authority and voluntary sector partners in respect of the development of the Regional Adoption Agency, (Adopt North East).