

TITLE OF REPORT: Gateshead Council Adoption Service Annual Report

REPORT OF: Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director Care Wellbeing and Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the activity of the Adoption Service for the year ending March 2019.

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.
2. This report will cover activities and developments from April 2018 to December 2018 as the adoption team moved to Adopt North East on 1 December 2018.
3. The report also provides details of the numbers of children successfully adopted between April 2018 to March 2019 with an accompanying breakdown in terms of age and gender as we continue to monitor this information.

Policy Context

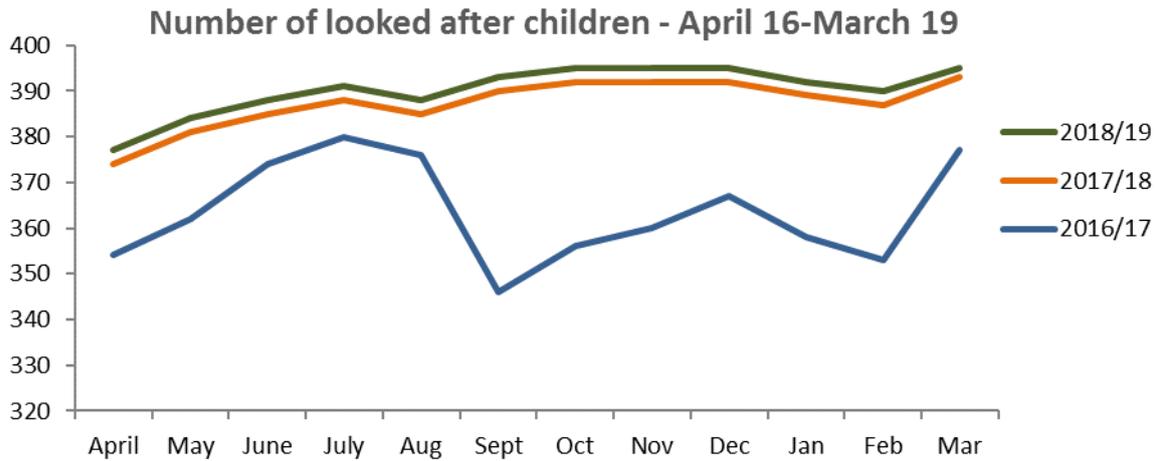
4. The publication in January 2016 of the Department for Education document 'Vision for Change', outlined an expectation for local authorities to move to a system by 2020 whereby adopter recruitment, matching and support will be delivered on a regional basis by a single organisation
5. The rationale 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.
6. Work in relation to the establishing a Regional Adoption Agency – Adopt North East (Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland and South Tyneside) has been ongoing for two years and went live on 1 December 2018.

National Statistics

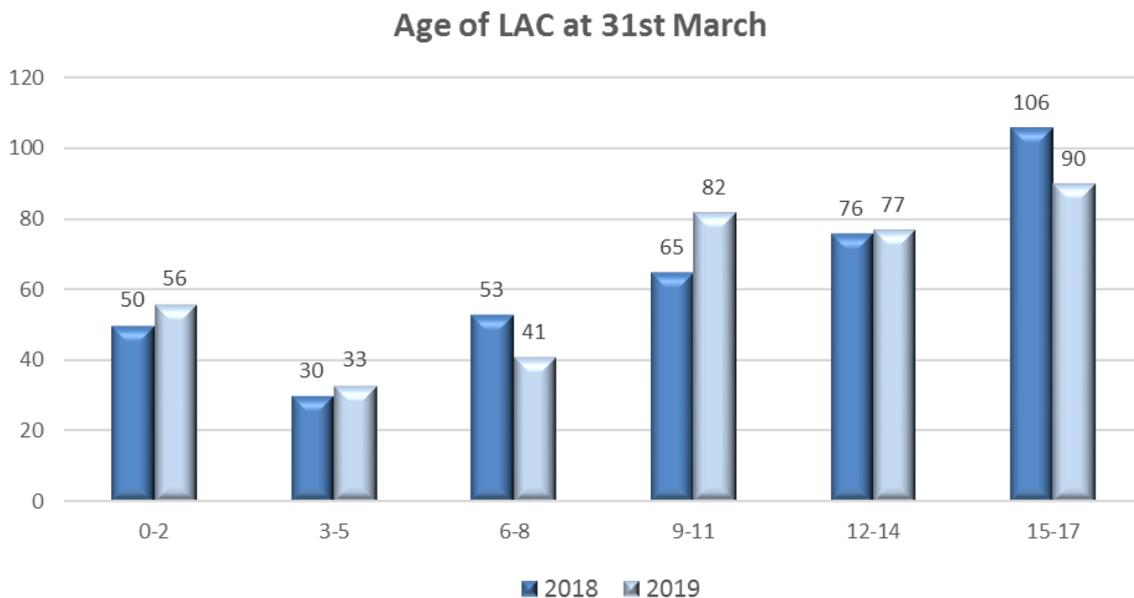
7. In May 2019 the National Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) published data gathered from local authority adoption agencies in England. The purpose of this research is to identify current trends in adoption and to provide estimates as to the future numbers of children likely to require adoptive placements and the number of adoptive families potentially available to meet that need.
8. In 2017/18 there were 3,820 adoptions; a decrease of 13% compared to 2016/17 when there were 4,370 adoptions.
9. Quarterly data suggests that there were 2,470 children adopted in the first three quarters of 2018/19; 65% of the total children adopted in 2017/18.
10. The number of new Placement Orders has fallen from 920 in quarter 2 in 2018/19 to 850 in quarter 3 2018/19; a decrease of 8%.
11. There has been an increase of 1.9% in the number of children waiting with a placement order and not yet placed with an adoptive family. Increasing from 2,700 in September to 2,750 as at December 2018. Over the same period, there has been an increase in the number of children waiting 18 months or more (34% to 39%).
12. Registrations to become an adopter have increased from 800 in quarter 2 to 920 in quarter 3; an increase of 15%. The number of families approved for adoption has also increased from 670 in quarter 2 2018/19 to 780 in quarter 3 2018/19; an increase of 16%.
13. However, latest national data suggest adopter timeliness for local authorities has stalled. In the third quarter of 2018/19, 31% of approvals made by local authorities were made within 6 months of registration, this has remained the same as 2017/18.
14. Timeliness of matches for local authorities has improved. 38% of matches were made within 3 months of approval in the first three quarters of 2018/19 compared to 31% in 2017/18.

Gateshead Information

15. Over the last year the number of Looked After Children (LAC) in Gateshead has ranged from 377 at its lowest to 395 at its highest. As at March 2019, the Gateshead Looked After rate per 10,000 children was 95.5, the latest available comparator data shows the North East average at 95, statistical neighbours were 91 and the England average was 64.



16. When comparing ages of our LAC to March 2018, we have seen a 23% reduction in our 6-8-year olds and a 15% reduction in our 15-17year olds. The age group that has seen the largest increase (26%) was our 9-11year olds. Our 0-8-year olds make up 34% of our LAC population.

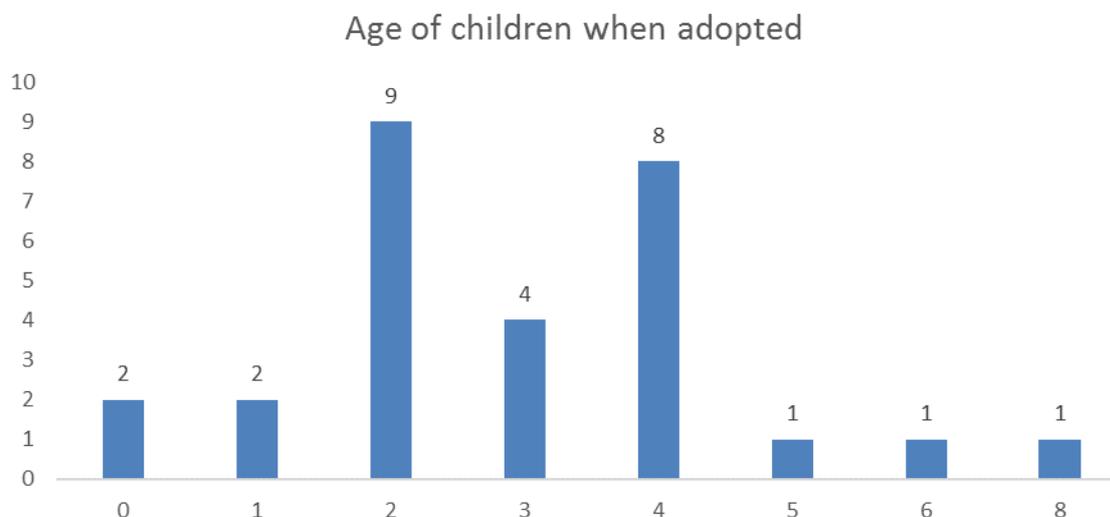


17. For the last three years, we have seen a decrease in the numbers of children with Placement Order. As at 31 March 2017 8.2% (31/377) of our LAC had a Placement Order granted, as at 31 March 2018 this reduced to 7.6% (30/393) and at 31 March 2019 decreased again to 7.1% (27/390).

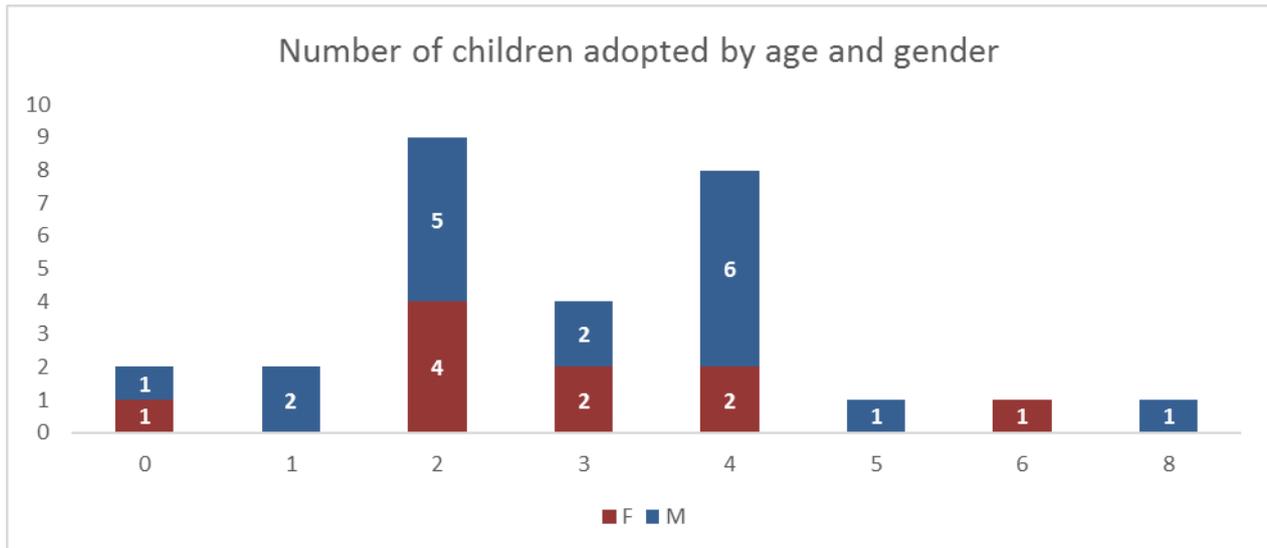
Our Performance April 2018 - March 2019

Children Adopted

18. Throughout April 2018-March 2019, **28** children placed for adoption by Gateshead Council had been successfully adopted (an increase from 25 in 2017/18), and a further **15** children were also in placement with their adoptive families, awaiting hearings for Adoption Orders. In addition, a further **10** children have had a Placement Order granted and are waiting for a match.
19. 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.
20. Of the **28** children adopted during the year 2018/19
- **10** were girls and
 - **18** were boys
 - **18** children were placed individually, and
 - **10** children were part of a sibling group (5 groups of 2 children).
21. As in previous years, the average age of children adopted in Gateshead is three years old.



22. In 2016/17 all our adopted children were aged four and under, in 2017/18 this reduced and 75% of our adopted children were aged four or under, the oldest child adopted in this year was aged eight. Whilst the majority (89%) of our adopted children are aged four or under, we continue to find adoptive placements for children up to the age of eight.



23. Of the 28 adoptions that took place during April 2018 to March 2019, 13 (46%) 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 25 adoptions of which 18 (72%) were in timescale.
24. Where cases were out of timescale during the year April 18 to March 19 the Service was able to identify the reasons, factors that attributed to cases going out of timescale include:
- Delays in DBS checks that affected a sibling group of three.
 - Delays in family finding when trying to place siblings together.
 - Challenges around potential links not progressing due to adopters withdrawing.
 - External family finding undertaken to reflect the child's cultural background.
 - Family finding was delayed until professionals were clearer about possible development delays. When the child was matched, the birth mother lodged an appeal and introductions were delayed.
 - Delay in twins being placed and adopted together following concerns of FASD.
 - Demonstrating developmental delay which resulted in genetic testing and further assessments. Potential adopters withdrew from process and child was adopted by foster carers

Adopters Approved

25. Within the period April 2018 to November 2018 Gateshead Council Adoption Panel recommended approval for **14** prospective adoptive families recruited and assessed by the Adoption Team. This is higher than the **13** approved in the previous full year.

| Quarter | Apr-June 18 | Jul-Sept 18 | Oct-Dec 18 | Jan-March 18 |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| Number of families approved | 3 | 5 | 6 | RAA |

26. Most of the families (**12**) were couples but this cohort also included **2** same sex couples and **2** single adopters.

Matches

27. During April 2018 to November 2018 Gateshead Adoption Panel considered matches for 12 children with their prospective adoptive families.

| Matches per quarter | Apr-June 18 | Jul-Sept 18 | Oct-Dec 18 | Jan-March 18 | Total |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------|-------|
| Total | 2 | 5 | 5 | RAA | 12 |

Adopter Recruitment

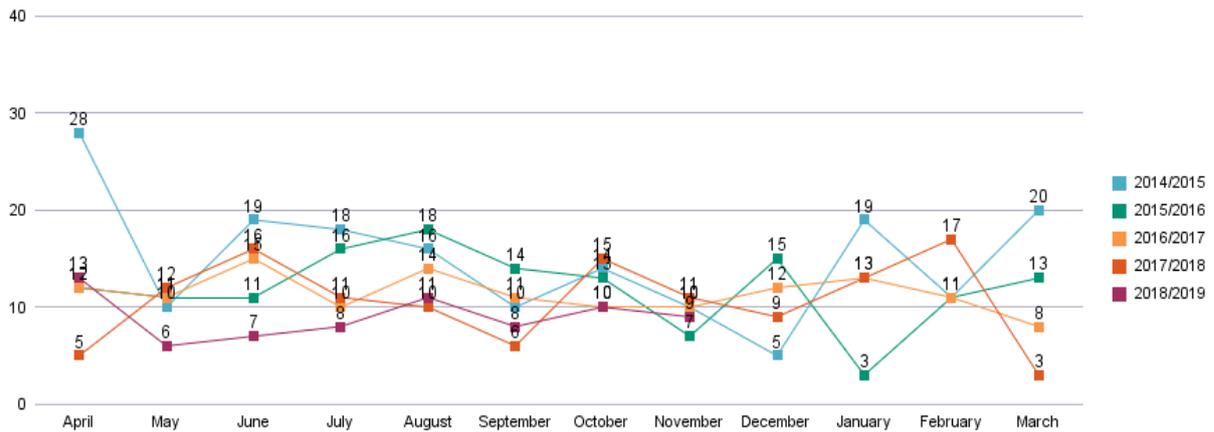
28. The adoption service continued to utilise various methods to recruit adopters during the past year including:

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

29. With the planned transfer to a Regional Adoption Agency it was agreed that no high-profile campaigns would be carried out. The focus was to continue the above activities which were at a lower cost, or free of charge in order to maintain a steady flow of enquiries

30. The graph below provides information on the trends in adoption enquiries for the past six years. The enquiry level for 2018/2019 maintained stable until the transfer to Adopt North East in December. The continuation of the activity generated enough enquiries to recruit new adoptive families.

Adoption Enquiries by Month



31. Since the transfer of the function to Adopt North East the Marketing and Recruitment Officer (Fostering) has maintained links with North Tyneside Council (lead for adopter recruitment) in order to ensure that Gateshead Council continues to support recruitment of adopters from within the Gateshead area. This will continue to ensure that those interested in adopting still receive information via our channels available and we recruit adoptive families within Gateshead.

Adoption Panel

32. The adoption panel had a consistent membership during this period, made up of both independent panel members and internal staff. This gave a consistent approach to panel business, with appropriate challenge being made when necessary. The panel continued to function until March 2019 to enable the new panel to be recruited to in Adopt North East

Early Permanence

33. The Early Permanence Group (EPG) continues to review and oversee admissions into care, long term matches, and all children with exit order plans monthly, to ensure there is no drift and delay in planning for permanence. The service director continues to oversee adoption plans at the Permanence Review Group. Arrangements for children going through the adoption process have been enhanced with a regional approach through the establishment of the Regional Adoption Agency which went live in December 2018. There are monthly meetings with the manager for the family finding service within Adopt North East, which ensures profiles of children are shared at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation

34. It is requested that the Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the performance of the adoption service in 2018/19 and notes the changes in the service delivery.

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