

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

...Start your journey with
Gateshead Council

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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.



A Douglas.

Councillor Angela Douglas
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People



Allison Elliott

Allison Elliott
Acting Strategic Director Care, Wellbeing and Learning

The Children

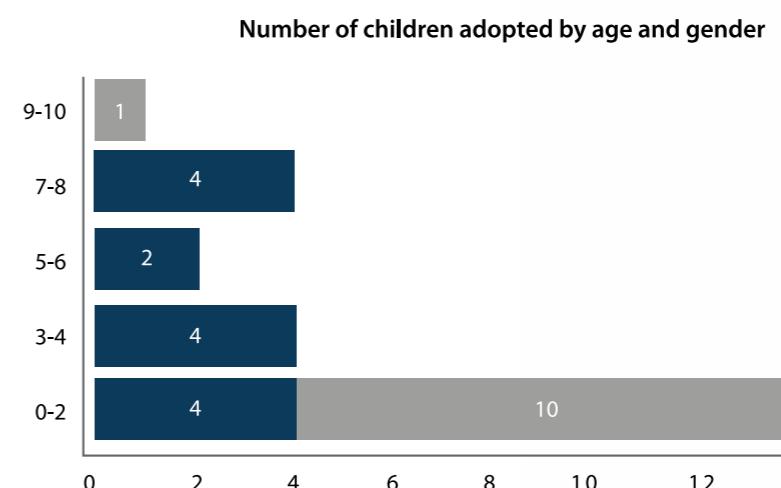
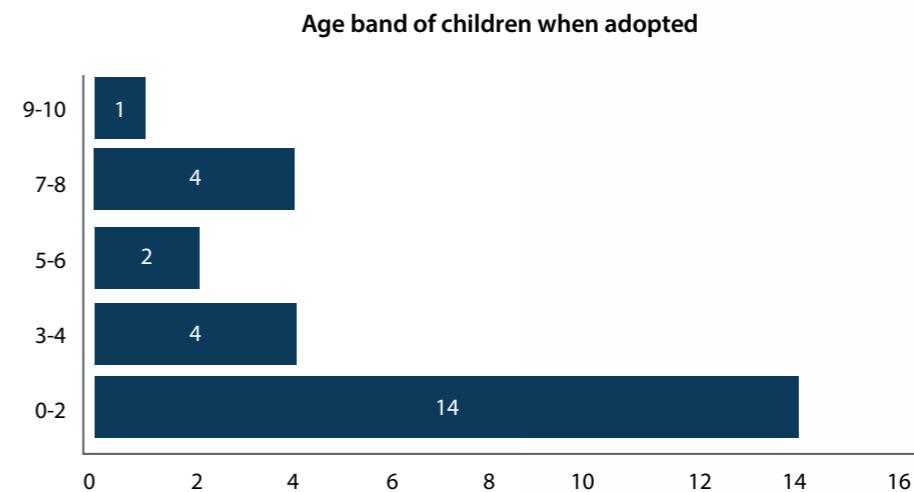
Our results

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.

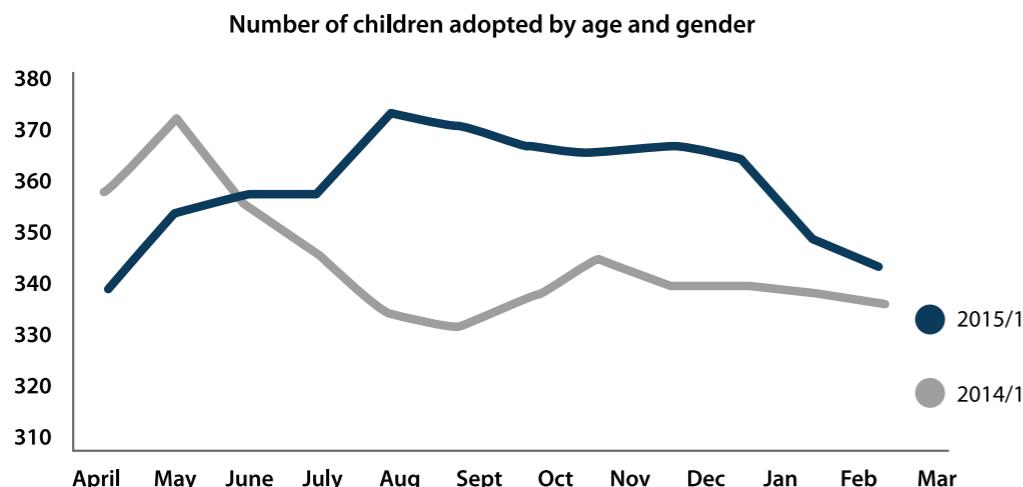
“ Adoption performance is good. Children are identified at an early stage when adoption is being considered as part of their plan for permanence and their parallel plans are effectively tracked to minimise delays. Recruitment practice is robust and the majority of assessments are completed within timescales. 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.

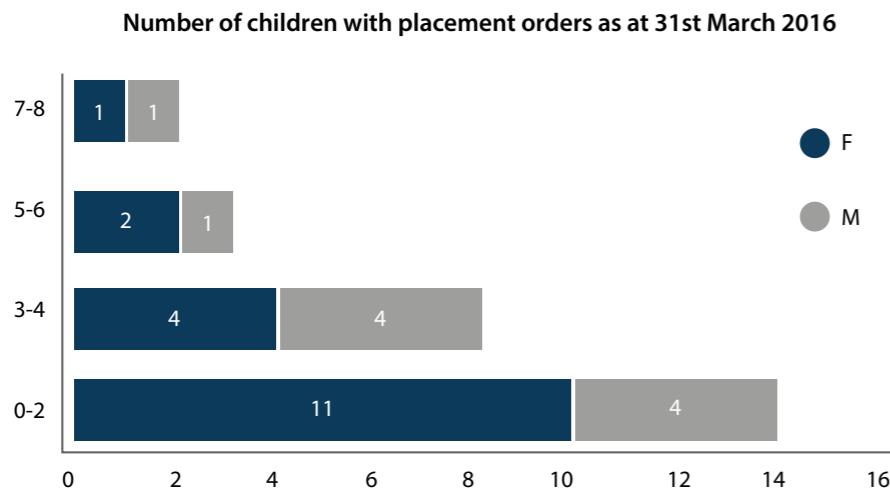
It would therefore seem sensible to plan our recruitment strategy to meet a minimum need for **23** placements but to also have contingency plans in place to increase activity if required.

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 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.

“ 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.

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.

Adopter Recruitment

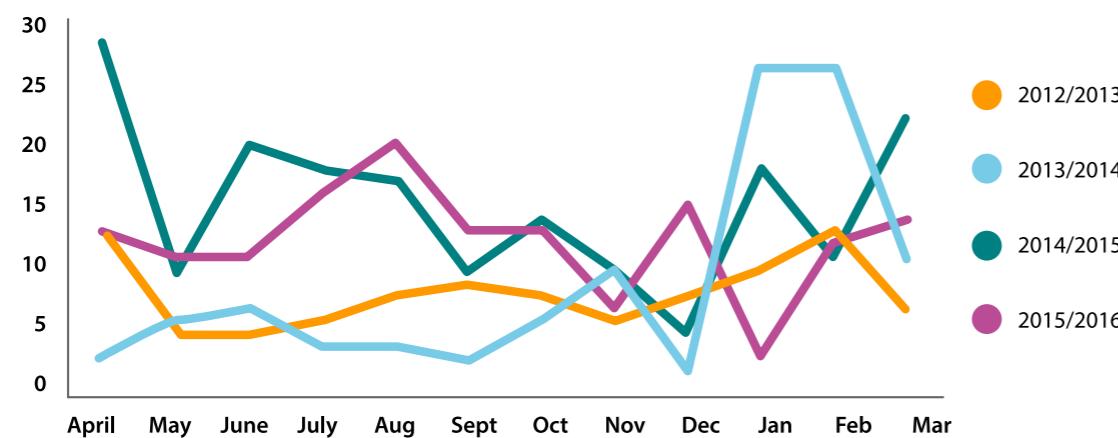
The recruitment strategy for 2015-16 aimed to recruit sufficient adoptive families to meet the needs of children to be placed for adoption locally. Where capacity allows the adoption service will also recruit prospective adopters who can meet the needs of children regionally and nationally.

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
TOTAL	98	108	183	148	537



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

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.

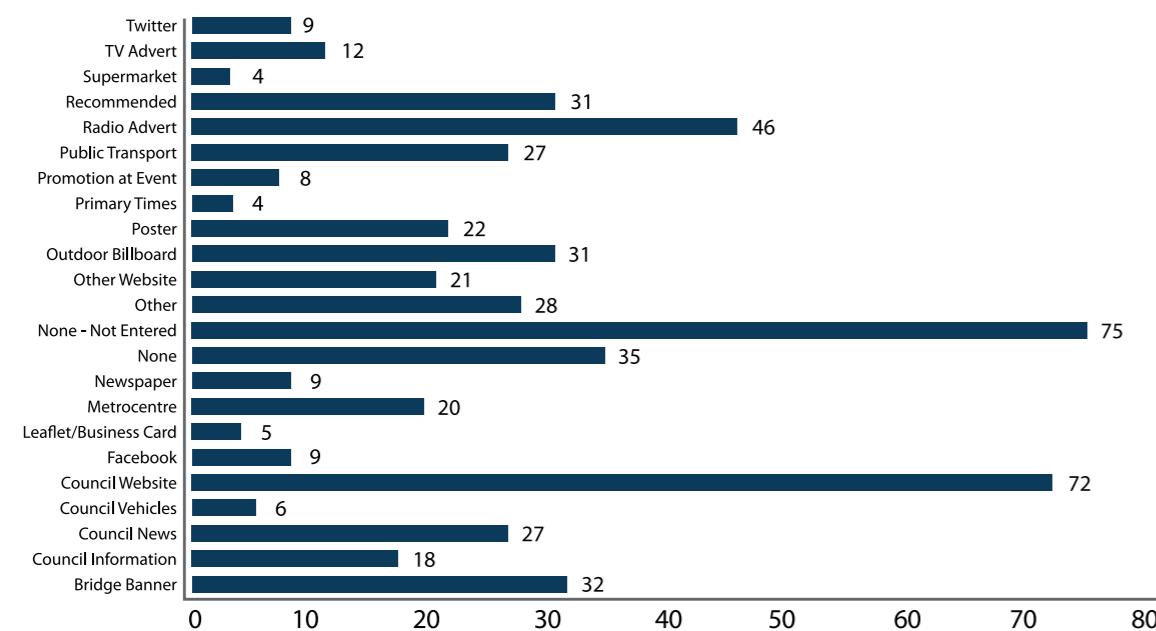
In order to monitor the effectiveness of our recruitment activity we routinely ask all our enquirers which of our promotional materials they have seen. The table on the following page shows all of the promotional materials which have been seen and used by enquirers during 2015/16.

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.

