

TITLE OF REPORT: Adoption Report 2020/2021

REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Children, Adults and Families

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Board on the attached report:

Background

2. The Local Authority are responsible for securing permanency for those children who, for reasons of their safety and welfare are unable to live within their birth families and whose needs are such that adoption has been judged to be the best permanency option for those children.

- Policy Background:
- 1989 Children Act
- Adoption Acts 2002, 2014 & 2017
- Public Law Outline (2014)
- Children & Families Act (2014)

Proposal

3. It is proposed that the local authority continue to work towards adoption as the best outcome for some children for whom we act as corporate parents.

Recommendations

4. The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to consider this report and make any recommendations for action as judged necessary.

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Adoption in Gateshead 2020 – 2021

Adoption is the legal process in which the parental responsibility (PR) for a child is transferred from their birth parent or other persons with PR to the adopters. Gateshead council, in common with the five other regional local authorities (Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside and South Tyneside) are required to use the services of Adopt North East, the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to recruit, assess and approve adopters for the children for whom a plan of adoption has been made.

Adopt North East (ANE) replaced the council's own adoption team in December 2019.

The Safeguarding and Care Planning Service is responsible for intervening to safeguard children, assessing families, and making decisions about whether adoption is the most suitable plan for permanency if the child cannot be cared for safely and appropriately within their family of birth. All decisions about adoption are ratified by the Assistant Strategic Director for Children and Families and the Family Court makes the ultimate decision if a child should be adopted, by the making of a Placement Order. The child is then freed for adoption and may be matched then placed with adopters who thereafter can apply for an Adoption Order once the child has been in their care for ten weeks or more. Until the Adoption Order has been made, the child remains the responsibility of the local authority and is classed as a Looked after Child.

In making the decision about whether the child should be adopted, social workers and the courts must satisfy themselves that "nothing else will do" and that all avenues have been explored with regard to that child being cared for by someone in their birth family network.

In the last 12 months (01/10/2020 – 30/09/2021) the average number of days between a child entering the care of the local authority and moving in with an adoptive family is 358.

It is clearly in the child's best interests to minimise the time spent waiting in foster care and decisions are taken as soon as possible but with proper regard to assessing birth family thoroughly and ensuring all due processes are firmly adhered to.

Of the 93 children who ceased to be Looked After in the last 12 months (01/10/2020 -30/09/2021) eight were adopted (9%).

Babies and children under the age of three are most likely to have a plan of adoption and this is because of a number of reasons, most commonly that adopters overwhelmingly choose to adopt younger children. Older children are more likely to retain allegiance to their birth parents or, because of the trauma they have suffered by being in their parent's care, have attachment difficulties and display behaviour associated with childhood trauma.

Currently in Gateshead, older children who have a plan of adoption also have younger siblings. For example, one seven-year-old is currently in an adoptive placement alongside her four-year-old sister. Ten-year-old and one-year-old siblings are currently awaiting adopters to be found who can take them as a sibling group.

Statistical Information:

Table 1: The number of children with a plan of adoption referred by Gateshead's Safeguarding and Care Planning Service to Adopt North East in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021:

Year	The number of children with a plan of adoption referred by Gateshead's Safeguarding and Care Planning Service to Adopt North East
2019 - 2020	22
2020 - 2021	21

Table 2: The number of children for whom a Placement Order was made in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021:

Year	The number of children for whom a Placement Order was made
2019 - 2020	20
2020 - 2021	27

Table 3: The number of children matched with adopters in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021:

Year	The number of children matched with adopters
2019 - 2020	16
2020 - 2021	20

Table 4: The number of children matched with non ANE adopters in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021:

Year	The number of children matched with non ANE adopters
2019 - 2020	2
2020 - 2021	4

The Regional Adoption Agency has not achieved sufficiency of adopters which leads to children being placed outside of the region by other adoption agencies nationally. Those children for whom local adopters cannot be sourced are usually older children, those in sibling groups and those who have additional needs or health problems. This incurs additional expense for the local authority; each single child placed with 'interagency adopters' costs around £35,000 with any subsequent siblings at an additional £17,000.

Table 5: The number of children who have been adopted (Adoption Orders Made) in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021:

Year	The number of children who have been adopted (Adoption Orders Made)
2019 - 2020	21
2020 - 2021	24

Gateshead saw a small rise in the number of children for whom Adoption Orders were made between 2019/20 and 2020/21. The transition between the council's adoption team to that of the Regional Adoption Agency may have had an impact on numbers in 2019/20. It is also of note that early concerns about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon access to family courts for Adoption Orders did not materialise and the courts worked hard to maintain this element of their work.

In the last 12 months (01/10/2020 – 30/09/2021) Gateshead has seen 28 children adopted. Two children (4%) have a disability.

Twenty-eight children have been waiting for adoption in the last 12 months, while a decision to reverse the adoption plan for one child has been made. In 2020/2021 the number of children with a plan of adoption reversed was three. The reasons for reversal were that either a Placement Order was not made by the court (one child) or that the child's needs changed subsequent to the decision being made (two children.) This evidences that Gateshead is actively reviewing permanency decisions in the best interests of children.

As of September 2021, there were 8 children placed in Foster to Adopt or Early Permanence placements. The twenty-eight children waiting for adoption includes those children in Early Permanence placements.

There have been no disruptions (adoptive placement breakdowns) for any Gateshead children from 2019 to date. This evidences that assessments of the child's needs and matching processes have been thorough and accurate.