

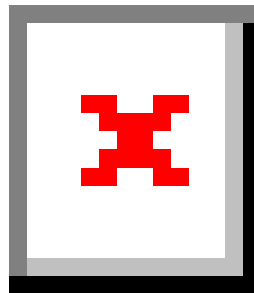
**TITLE OF REPORT:** Adoption Report 2022/2023

**REPORT OF:** Victoria Mckay, Practice Lead Safeguarding and Care Planning.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides a summary of the work undertaken for children with plans of adoption within Gateshead Local Authority.



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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the practice and delivery of adoption services in Gateshead Council.

### **Background**

2. The Local Authority is 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.

## **Adoption in Gateshead 2022 – 2023**

### **Background**

5. 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.
6. Adopt North East, the Regional Adoption Agency responsible for adoption services on behalf of Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Council. This regional adoption agency has been created in response to the legal requirement that the authorities regionalise their adoption services. Adopt North East replaced the council's own adoption team in December 2018.
7. 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.
8. All decisions about adoption are ratified by Laurie Thompson, Practice Lead and/or the Assistant Strategic Director for Children and Families and the Family Court makes the ultimate decision if a child should be placed for adoption by the making of a Placement Order. The child is then freed for adoption and can be matched with adopters who thereafter can apply for an Adoption Order once the child has been in their care for ten weeks or more.
9. Until the Adoption Order has been made, the child remains the responsibility of the local authority and is deemed a Cared for Child.
10. 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 regards to that child being cared for by someone in their birth family network.

## **Performance**

11. The reporting period 2022/2023 represents the fourth full year of operation by Adopt North East.
12. Performance information for 2022/2023 evidences a consistent level of demand for forever families. This is consistent with the partnership's higher than national average children in care population. Unfortunately, over the year such robust demand for adoptive placements has not been matched by stable or increasing supply of available adopters. In 2022/2023 outturn represents the lowest number of applications to adopt received by the agency since it started. The links between adoption, cost of living crisis, employment and lifestyle changes since COVID19 has undoubtedly suppressed interest in adopting.
13. The reporting period between 01.04.2022 to 31.03.2023 summaries Adopt North East overall performance:
  - Match 103 children
  - Placed 103 children, 19 of which were Early Permanence Placements
  - Supported 105 children to be adopted
  - Received 366 contacts about becoming and adopter
  - Approved 59 adopters

## **Statistical Information specific to Gateshead**

14. 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 2020/2021, 2021/22, 2022/23. Gateshead is the second highest referring Local Authority to Adopt North East.

Year	The number of children with a plan of adoption referred by Gateshead's Safeguarding and Care Planning Service to Adopt North East
2020 - 2021	21
2021 - 2022	25
2022 - 2023	28

15. Table 2: The number of children for whom a Placement Order was made in, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23. Gateshead is the second highest Local Authority from the five Local Authorities in partnership with Adopt North East.

Year	The number of children for whom a Placement Order was made
2020 - 2021	27
2021 - 2022	25

16. Table 3: The number of children matched with adopters in, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23. Gateshead is the second highest Local Authority from the five Local Authorities in partnership with Adopt North East

Year	The number of children matched with adopters
2020 - 2021	20
2021 – 2022	21
2022 – 2023	29

17. In 2022/2023 the number of children with a plan of adoption reversed was one. The reason for reversal was that maternal grandparents presented late (at the Final Hearing) expressing a wish to care for their grandchild. The plan for this child was a Care Order and for further assessments of grandparents. This evidences that Gateshead is actively reviewing permanency decisions in the best interests of children.

18. In 2022/2023, there have been 6 children placed in Foster to Adopt or Early Permanence placements. Gateshead is the highest Local Authority from the five Local Authorities in partnership with Adopt North East.

19. When a child who has been placed with an adoptive family needs to be removed as the adoptive family no longer wish to care for them or the adopters are struggling to meet the needs of the child and the local authority intervene and remove the child, this is referred to as an adoption breakdown. In Gateshead there has been 1 adoption breakdown's in 2022/2023. Fortunately for the child, their previous foster carers were available, and the child was returned to their care. The foster carers daughter is currently being assessed as adoptive parents for the child. This evidences that assessments of the child's needs and matching processes have been thorough and accurate.

### **Peer Review**

20. In 2022/2023 Adopt North East commissioned a Peer Review from the Local Government Association (LGA).

21. In November 2022, a small team of experts in adoption led by an experienced ex-Director of Children's Services spent three days with Adopt North East and partners.

22. Findings from peer team found strong adoption services with some areas of development. Strong workforce with improving performance with developments of showing a shared culture across the wider partnership. There was nine formal recommendations all of which were accepted by the

agency and have been embedded into their Self Assessment and forward strategic plan.

### **Recommendations**

23. It is recommended that Corporate Parenting Board Members:

- (i) note and comment on the information provided in the report

#### **CONTACT:**

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