



Annual report on the Adoption Service in York: **April 2011 - March 2012**

Background

The Adoption National Minimum Standard 25.6 require that the Executive side of the local authority:

- receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months;
- monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users;
- satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration

This report sets out a summary of the work of the Adoption Service for the period April 2011 and March 2012. The attached Appendices provide data on activity over this period.

Overview

Adoption work within the agency is located within two main areas; within child care teams who complete the necessary internal and legal processes when adoption is identified as a suitable option for a child; and within the family placement team where adoption social workers assess an individual's suitability to be approved as an adopter and help children's social workers identify a suitable adoptive family for a child.

City of York has always been a high performing adoption agency, and is ranked in the top local authorities nationally for its performance in respect of % of children adopted from the looked after children's population. York also performs well in respect of placing a high percentage of children with a prospective adoptive family within 12 months of the plan for adoption being agreed, and in having a low rate of these placements disrupting before an Adoption Order is made. These three indicators taken together are indicative

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of a concerted approach to the active planning for adoption, consistent support to prospective adopters and prompt completion of the process.

During this period there has been considerable government interest and comment on adoption services. This has focused on concern about the decrease in the number of adoption orders being made over recent years and requests to local authorities to increase the use of adoption for looked after children and to increase the speed at which adoption plans are made and implemented.

York continues to be an active member of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium. Membership of the Consortium has worked to York's advantage in that, unlike most other local authorities in the region, York is too small geographically to place children from York with adopters in York, without compromising the anonymity of a placement. York therefore places children across the region (and beyond, where necessary) and recruits adopters for use by other local authorities.

The Yorkshire Adoption Consortium moved to a new working model in this financial year. There is now a payment between agencies, at a reduced rate (£8758) of the nationally set inter-agency fee (£13138), when a child is placed with a family approved by another local authority in the Consortium. A match for a child with a family approved by a local authority outside of the Consortium is charged at the nationally set inter-agency fee rate. A match for a child with a family approved by a Voluntary Adoption Agency is charged at a fee of £27,000. City of York's use of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium is documented in the balance sheet of April 2012 (Appendix 3).

Alongside the planning for children needing adoptive families and the recruitment, training and support of prospective adopters, the adoption social workers in the family placement team provide adoption support to families living in the City. These can be families approved by York, or families approved by other adoption agencies, with children placed by other local authorities. Three years after the making of an adoption order, York becomes responsible for addressing any adoption support needs these families may have.

There is a close working relationship with colleagues in CAMHS and with After Adoption Yorkshire. The adoption workers also run regular 'drop in' events for adoptive parents and children, which offers an opportunity for adopters to meet each other and build up support networks and for informal training and advice. In some instances adoptive families will need more intensive social work support and are therefore referred onto the long term social work service units.

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The adoption workers within the family placement team also manage the post box service which facilitates indirect contact between adopted children and their birth families, without compromising the anonymity of the adoptive family.

Consultation: What children and adopters say about the service and how they contribute to its development.

The majority of children placed are under the age of 6 and their understanding of the adoption service will be in relation to their experience with their social worker and foster carers who act as their advocates. The views of older children adopted in York are usually gleaned via their link with After Adoption Yorkshire or CAMHS. This feedback is used to develop services. Family placement workers liaise closely with social work colleagues in finding suitable families for children whose plan is adoption. The feedback from these worker and manager is that this input is positive in achieving good outcomes for children.

Prospective adopters provide feedback on all stages of the process, from initial enquiry to Panel; this is overwhelmingly positive, with many commenting on the high quality of the support they receive from their adoption worker. Adopters choose to return to the agency for approval for a second placement. Adopters voice appreciate often of support provided post placement and post order via support groups or individual interventions.

Adopters are involved in service development via the various support groups they attend. Feedback is also obtained from adopters accessing After Adoption Yorkshire. Issues arising are included in service development planning. Adopters contribute to running Preparation Groups for new applicants.

How we ensure that adoptive placements that will meet children's needs are provided

We recruit prospective adopters able to meet children's needs from within the City and make these families available to other local authorities in the local consortium. Due to York's geographical size we cannot usually place York children with York adopters. We pro-actively family find for all our children with plans for adoption, using families from within the consortium or available through the Adoption Register. We profile our children at national Exchange days. There is regular monitoring of the progress of family finding activity for all individual children with senior managers. All suitable families are explored for a potential match, those approved by VAA or well as other local authority adopters.

How children progress in their health, learning and emotional and social development.

All the children have a health action plan that is regularly reviewed and updated. Those of nursery or school age have a personal education plan. CAMHS provide input to foster carers preparing children to move to an adoptive placement. The children all have Life Story books to accompany them into their new families. There is close liaison with the prospective adopters' local authority to dovetail planning from placement through to adoption, to ensure that all services are in place to support the child. Adoption workers and the placing social worker offer ongoing support after placement.

How the adoption agency contributes to promoting good outcomes for children and young people.

Family finding meetings are set up as soon as the plan for adoption has been agreed after Panel so that there is no delay in seeking a suitable family for a child. The child's details are entered on the local Consortium database, and where appropriate, the Adoption Register to ensure access to all available families. The adoption team and the child's social worker work together to find a family, planning the placement and post placement support. The child's needs are carefully considered against identified prospective adopters to ensure the best possible match. A Life Appreciation Day is held to ensure that prospective adopters have all available information on a child before proceeding to Adoption Panel. The Panel closely scrutinise the proposed match to ensure that it is likely to meet the child's needs. There is close liaison with York based agencies to ensure good information gathering and effective transfer to key agencies in the prospective adopters' local authority.

How recruitment, assessment, training and supervision of adopters promotes positive outcomes for children and young people.

Though the number of approved adoptive families across the country has decreased, in York interest in adoption still remains strong. The service endeavours to avoid delay for those interested in adoption where ever possible and to ensure that they are fully informed of the challenges and rewards of adoption. Enquirers are sent an information pack within 5 days and are invited to an Information Evening which run at 2 monthly intervals. At this, further information is provided and opportunity for questions around individual circumstances. As the adoption family placement team is small, at times there may be a wait for an assessing social worker to be available. Enquirers are made aware of this at information evenings and given contact details of other agencies in the region that may be able to progress their interest more quickly.

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Those who wish to take their interest further have a home visit to explore their circumstances and gain more detailed information about children's needs. An initial assessment is made as to whether the enquirer has the potential to parent an adopted child and if positive, they are invited to make a formal application and attend a preparation course. Preparation courses are run jointly with North Yorkshire County Council, which offers a greater frequency of courses for applicants than would be possible otherwise. Following the course, an adoption social worker is allocated to undertake a comprehensive assessment with the family. The adoption team work to a 5 months timeframe to complete the assessment, known as the prospective adopter report (PAR), to present to Panel. If approved as a prospective adopter, work is undertaken to identify a child whose needs they are able to meet. Supervision and support is provided through the matching and placement process and on through to adoption order, and beyond. The positive working relationships established enable adopters to seek advice and support from the adoption team in parenting their children throughout their childhood.

How adopters are involved in matching and subsequent planning.

There are two major strands to this work; that involving adopters approved by City of York and that involving adopters approved by other agencies matched with City of York children. For adopters approved by City of York, the adoption worker will share all information supplied by a child's social worker and fully discuss with the adopters the degree of match with any considered child. After a meeting with a child's social worker to discuss a possible match, the York adoption worker will go through feedback from the meeting and analyse the information provided with the adopter to enable the adopter to arrive at a considered decision as to whether or not they will proceed to a match. The adoption worker will accompany them to meetings about the child and fully discuss issues arising from this with them. The prospective adopters will be accompanied by their adoption worker to a matching panel and supported throughout the panel process. If a match agreed the adopters will be central to all discussions regarding placement planning. When a child placed they will be fully involved in reviews for the child through to the granting of an adoption order.

For adopters approved by other agencies, they will be given all information about a child, invited to a Life Appreciation Day, invited to attend the Adoption Panel considering the match and thereafter fully involved in the planning process as outlined above.

Management for the Adoption Service

The adoption team consists of 2.5 social workers and a Practice Manager. The Practice Manager oversees the day to day running of the service and takes a lead in family finding alongside the child's social worker. The Service Manager Family Placement line manages the Practice Manager and has overall responsibility for the adoption service

The social workers in the adoption team undertake all aspects of mainstream adoption work: recruiting families; matching and placing children; family finding jointly with child's social workers; supporting adoptive families from placement of a child through to the making of an Adoption Order, and beyond where needed; running a post box service.

The adoption workers are fully involved in service development via regular team meetings and service development sessions. Feedback from children's social workers is used to further develop services.

The Adoption Panels meets every 2 or 3 weeks to consider plans for adoption, approval of adopters and matches for children. It also provides an oversight and quality assurance of the work presented to panel. Panel received regular feedback at each panel meeting regarding the progress of cases considered in the previous 6 and 12 months.

The Agency Decision Maker receives the recommendations of the Panel and then makes the decision regarding agreeing (or not) plans, approvals and matches. The Assistant Director Children's Services acts as the Agency Decision Maker.

There are good operational links in place between the Practice Manager adoption and the Children's Front door service, where requests for assessments for adoption support are received and also with the children's social work teams who complete any ongoing work with a family following an assessment.

A Service level Agreement is in place with After Adoption Yorkshire, a voluntary adoption agency who provide support to all those effected by adoption, focussed in the main with Birth Relatives and in providing specialist counselling and intermediary work for adopted adults.

A Service Level Agreement is also in place with the Yorkshire Adoption Society to provide advice and assessment work relating to Inter-country adopters.

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Plans for improvement and development.

- Written consultation with adopters to inform service development.
- An evaluation of Life Appreciation Days to ensure consistent approach for all children.
- Work to ensure data systems updated for all monitoring purposes and that analysis of data informs adoption service planning.

Recommendation

The Executive notes the information about the adoption agency in the financial year 2011-2012

Mary McKelvey

Service Manager

June 2012.

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Appendix 1 : Children

Outcomes for Children in period:	Number of children
Plan for Adoption Agreed	12
Placed for Adoption	11
Adoption Orders were made	13
Placement Disrupted	1
Awaiting Placement as at 31 st March 2012	17
Placed but not yet Adopted as at 31 st March 2012	10

Of the 11 children matched in this period:	Number of children
Matched with families approved by a local authority that is a member of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium	7
Matched with a family approved by a local authority that is not a member of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium.	2
Matched with a family approved by a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA).	2

Of the children not yet placed:	Number of children
Aged 2 years or younger	2
Aged 3 – 5 years	7
Aged 6 years and over	8
Sibling groups of 2	3
Boys	8
Girls	9
Length of time waiting since plan approved	
Less than 6 months	2
6 months –12 months	6
12- 18 months	9
Over 18 months	0
Children where plan of adoption has been withdrawn in period	6

- The children placed or adopted during this period are not necessarily the same as those with plans were approved during the same period; a child's plan for adoption or placement may have been approved in a previous financial year.

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- There was 1 disruption of an adoptive placement (before an adoption order was made) during this period. The national average rate of disruptions is in the region of 20%. City of York's rate was 9%.

Appendix 2: Adopters

Approved	Number of households
Approved during 2011-2012	6
Matched during 2011-2012	8
With children placed at 31/3/12 but not yet adopted	4
Approved, awaiting match as of 31/3/12	6

- Of the 8 prospective adoptive families matched with children in this period, all were matched with children from within the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium.

Applicants	Number of households
Assessment in progress as of 31/3/12	7
Applications awaiting allocation as of 31/3/12	9

Appendix 3: Consortium placements made between 1/4/11 to 31/3/12

Agency	Number of families with placements	Number of children placed
Barnsley	3	6
Bradford	0	3
Calderdale	3	3
Doncaster	4	6
East Riding	4	1
Hull	7	4
Kirklees	1	3
Leeds	2	3
NE Lincs	4	1
North Lincs	3	8
North Yorks	1	0
Sheffield	2	1
Wakefield	1	1
York	4	5
Total Placements Made	39	45

Appendix 4: The adoption process for a child who is Looked After:

1. The government target is to reach a decision as to the plan for a child within 5 months of the child becomes looked after and to review this plan at regular intervals.
2. If the child's proposed plan becomes adoption, comprehensive reports are created about the child's history and needs and are presented to an adoption panel. The government target is that panels consider these plans within 2 months of the proposed plan being agreed by a Child Care Review.
3. Following the panel recommendation, the Agency Decision Maker makes a decision about whether adoption should be the plan for a child. For children who are the subject of legal proceedings, an application will also be made for a Placement Order.
4. The government target is that a child should be placed with a new family within 6 months of the decision in 3 above. For children under 6 months and whose birth parents have requested adoption, a new family should be found within 3 months. Searches for suitable families are made through the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium, other adoption agencies and through the national adoption register.
5. When a family is identified and the "match" has been recommended by the adoption panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker, the child is placed for adoption.
6. At a point chosen by the adopters, an application is made to court for an adoption order. There is no target for the time between placement and adoption order, as adopters need to feel they and their new child have had time to adjust and can apply for the order with confidence.

Appendix 5: The adoption process for adopters

1. A phone call/ letter/email is sent to the agency expressing an interest in adoption.
2. An information pack is sent out. The Government target is that these should be received within 5 days. The information pack sets out the legal and policy requirements and describes the process of training and assessment through to an adoption order being made. Dates of

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information evenings are attached with an invitation to attend. The majority of enquirers chose not pursue their interest beyond this general enquiry stage.

3. Attendance at an information evening. The information provided during these meetings builds on that contained the information pack and provides opportunity for questions around individual circumstances. The Government target is that enquirers should be offered an information evening within 2 months of their enquiry.
4. Those who wish to take their interest further complete and return an 'expression of Interest' form.
5. A home visit is undertaken by an adoption social worker to further information about the enquirers circumstances and impart more detailed information about the needs of adopted children.
6. If the assessment from the home visit is that the enquirer has the potential to become an adoptive parent and they wish to proceed, the enquirer makes a formal application to the agency.
7. The applicant then attends a preparation course.
8. Following this, an adoption social worker is allocated to complete an in-depth assessment of the applicant's suitability to adopt.
9. The assessing social worker will complete a report which will be presented to the adoption panel. The government target is that the report should be presented to the panel within 6 weeks of its completion and within 8 months of the formal application.
10. If approved as a prospective adopter, work is undertaken to identify a child whose needs they are able to meet. There is no target timescale for this stage but it is clearly in the interests of all concerned for this to be achieved as soon as possible. A search is made within the region through the regional consortium and nationally through the national adoption register to identify a child.
11. A match with a child is agreed by the child's adoption panel and the child is subsequently placed for adoption with the family.

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12. At a point chosen by them, the adopter(s) will apply to court for an adoption order. There is no target for the time between placement and adoption order