

**Agenda Item No. 9**

**Good Health Select Committee – Thursday 26 January 2006**

**Report of the Director of Children's Services**

**Update on Performance on BV163 and PAF Indicator C23 – the Number of Looked After Children Adopted**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To update Good Health Select Committee on performance on BV163 and PAF indicator C23 – The Number of Looked After Children Adopted.

**Background**

2. PAF Indicator C23 measures performance on the numbers of looked after children adopted during the year as a percentage of the number of children looked after at 31 March who had been looked after for 6 months or more on that day. This latter figure excludes unaccompanied asylum seeking children and children receiving respite placements. The indicator relates to the number of adoption orders granted.
3. For most children the best place to grow up is with their birth parents. Where this is not possible society has a clear responsibility to provide children with stability and permanence in their lives. The Government believes that more can and should be done to promote the wider use of adoption to achieve permanent and substitute family placements as this offers the only legally secure placement for children unable to return to their birth families.
4. Dudley Local Authority is an approved adoption agency and this function is discharged by the Directorate of Children's Services.
5. The assessment and identification of children requiring adoptive placements is undertaken by the fieldwork teams. When children are referred a thorough assessment of need will be carried out and typically where the child's welfare and safety would be compromised by remaining or returning to their birth family this is done within a legal framework of care proceedings.

6. There are a small number of children where the birth parent will request adoption and historically this was a prevailing feature of adoption work. However this is no longer the case and the vast majority of children requiring an adoptive placement have entered the care system because of abuse and neglect and parents inability to provide a stable home. There are therefore fewer babies and young children requiring placements and more children with challenging behaviours as a result of early life experiences. Most adoptive placements are made in respect of children under 10.
7. The age and needs profile of children requiring placements has changed considerably with the consequent implications and requirements of prospective adopters.
8. The Children's Social Care Division has a dedicated Adoption Team consisting of a Team Manager, Assistant Team Manager, Senior Practitioner and 5 social workers, 3 undertaking post adoption support work. The team is involved in the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, training, matching of children with prospective adopters and post adoption support and birth record counselling.
9. The Directorate has an established Adoption Panel which is chaired by an independent person. The Panel makes recommendations as to whether adoption is in the best interests of a particular child, approval of adopters and matches between child and adopters. These recommendations are approved by the agency decision maker who is the Assistant Director Children's Social Care.
10. Performance on PAF C23 has been a source of concern and the authority has achieved a 2 band rating with the actual numbers of children being adopted ranging from 15 in 2000/1, 18 in 2001/2 and 2002/3 and 13 in 2004/5. However performance on the complimentary indicators of the number of children placed for adoption within 12 months of the best interest decision and placement stability are good and in the highest bands and compare well with our comparator groups.
11. The factors which influence this indicator are:
  - The numbers of looked after children, which have risen in the denominator from 377 in 2000/1 to 402 in quarter 3 2005/6
  - The relatively small cohort of children who have a best interest decision
  - The disproportionate effect of sibling groups on the indicator

- Ethnicity of children
- Complexity of needs
- Staff recruitment and retention –
  - At the time of the Adoption Inspection in 2004 which was reported to this Committee the Permanent Placement Team had only 2 staff due to vacancies and illness which impacted severely on homefinding activity

12. To address performance the following actions have been put in place:

- The staffing position has shown improvement with only 1.0 staff vacancies
- The team has been refocused to concentrate solely on adoption activity. 2 new posts have been created and located within the fostering team to focus on permanent fostering
- A tracking process has been put in place to ensure that there is no delay in notifying children with a plan for adoption to the Adoption Team and that an action plan is put in place to monitor activity. A permanency planning meeting is held following the child's second looked after review
- All cases are tracked through supervision with targeted action to achieve orders
- Dudley is a partner in Adoption in the Black Country with Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell and Dudley manages a marketing officer on behalf of the Consortium to promote awareness of adoption and recruit carers
- Adoption in the Black Country has led to shared pre-adoption training which avoids delays for prospective adopters and has also led to sharing of applicants enhancing our ability to match children with adopters within the sub-region
- Enhanced post adoption support through the establishment of 2 posts
- Dudley was the first authority in the region to undergo Adoption and Children Act training which has been disseminated to staff through a series of workshops prior to full implementation in December 2005

### **Current Performance**

14. The current position is as follows:

- To date 16 adoption orders have been made this year

- 9 children placed with adopters have lodged their applications to adopt and it is probable that these orders will be made before 31 March 2006
- 7 additional children placed with adopters
- 7 children matched and introductions to placements commenced
- The year end target is 23 adoption orders granted which in light of the activity detailed above should be achieved which will give us a performance indicator value of 6% which would place us in a 3 banding
- The numbers of approved adopters are 23

### **Finance**

15. The budget allocation for the adoption service is £679,640. This is in addition to the provision of assessment and care management services within the fieldwork section of the Division and the additional legal recharges in relation to care proceedings.
16. The dedicated staff within the Adoption Team is 8 full time equivalent staff and a Marketing Officer (for whom the costs are shared with the Black Country Borough).

### **Law**

17. The legislative framework for this area of work is the Children Act 1989, The Children Act 2004 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

### **Equality**

18. The provision of services to children in need and vulnerable children contributes to improving outcomes and life chances for children so that they are not disadvantaged by their family, social and economic circumstances. Services support children so that they have safe and secure attachments, placements and environments which enable them to achieve independence, economic well-being and that they contribute to the development and sustainability of their communities.

### **Recommendations**

19. That Members note the contents of the report.



John Freeman  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Pauline Sharratt  
Telephone: 01384 815807  
Email: [pauline.sharratt@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:pauline.sharratt@dudley.gov.uk)