
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 19th November 2014

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services

Annual Report of the Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service 2013/14

Purpose of Report

1. To present the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee with the annual report of Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service for 2013/14.

Background

2. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain an adoption service including arrangements for the provision of adoption support services and an inter-country adoption service.
3. Dudley's adoption service arranges for the adoption of children and in doing so provides recruitment, assessment, training and support services to prospective and approved adopters. The Service offers advice to childcare social workers in matters pertaining to adoption and works in partnership with social workers to identify a suitable placement for children looked after by Dudley Council for whom adoption is considered to be in the best interest of those individual children. The adoption support service assesses and provides support to all those affected by adoption and the service facilitates contact and information exchange between birth families, adoptive parents and their children.
4. The adoption service also commissions support services to represent and support birth parents where adoption is proposed or has taken place and counselling for individuals who have been adopted.
5. Local Authority adoption services are subject to inspection by Ofsted under the **Single Inspection Framework of Services for Children in Need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers**. The inspection framework focuses on the effectiveness of Local Authority Services and arrangements to help and protect children, the experiences and progress of children looked after, including adoption, fostering, the use of residential care, and children who return

home. Specifically in relation to adoption performance Authorities are judged against the following criteria:-

- Suitable adoptive families are identified without delay for all children for whom adoption is in their best interests.
- The recruitment and assessment arrangements are aligned with National systems and enable potential adopters to consider and be considered for a wide range of children for whom they may provide a home.
- Children are able to develop safe and secure relationships with their adoptive family that persist over time.
- When support is needed, children, young people, families and carers are able to access it for as long as is needed, throughout their childhood and beyond.

Following the inspection the adoption service will be given a key judgement in its own right of either outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate.

The Service was last inspected in November 2010. The overall judgement following that inspection of the Service was good.

6. Adoption services in Dudley are provided by a dedicated team of adoption social workers, adoption support workers, and a marketing officer which is shared with the other three Black Country Borough's plus administrative staff. The team is managed by a service manager and assistant team manager. In addition the service benefits from the support of a clinical psychologist provided as part of our in-house clinical psychology service for Looked after Children.
7. The Government is continuing with a focus on Adoption Reforms that are aimed at simplifying the adoption system in order to encourage more people to adopt and to make sure children are placed swiftly within an adoptive families where this is in their best interest. More recent initiatives include the following:-
 - Plans to introduce an adoption support fund to help adoptive families to access high quality support services.
 - Making sure from 2015 employed adopters are entitled to same pay and leave as birth parents.
 - Providing funding to the Voluntary Sector and Local Authorities to help them expand and recruit more adopters.
 - Working with Local Authorities and the Voluntary Sector through the Adoption Leadership Board chaired by Sir Martin Narey to reduce delay and to recruit more adopters.

- Making sure children adopted from care get the attention they need at school by extending the Pupil Premium, giving them priority in school admissions, and giving access to early education from age 2 to children adopted from care.
8. Performance thresholds identified by the Government under their adoption score card initiative remain challenging for us. The first performance threshold in the score card A1 measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children who have been adopted. The target for the 2013-2016 average is 14 months. A2 measures the average time between a Local Authority received court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. The target for the 2013-2016 average is 4 months and A3 measures the number and percentage of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The scorecards allow Local Authority and other adoption agencies to monitor their own performance and compare it with that of others.
 9. Attached at Appendix 1 is the annual report of the Dudley Adoption Service which outlines all of the services which are provided by the team together with performance and activity levels plus service development for the year 2013/14.

Finance

10. The 2013/14 Revised Revenue Budget for the Adoption Service was a total of £1,255,500. This figure is inclusive of staffing costs, but excludes any departmental administrative recharges.

Law

11. The Adoption Children Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain an adoption service including arrangements for the provision of adoption support services and an inter-country adoption service.

Equality Impact

12. The maintenance and development of a comprehensive adoption service contributes to improving outcomes for looked after children by providing stable, secure and safe care. It assists the Council in discharging its Corporate Parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they develop secure attachments and have experience of family life where they are unable to live with their birth families.

Recommendations

13. Children's Services Scrutiny Committee receive and makes comments where appropriate to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services on the annual report of Dudley's adoption service 2013/14.



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