

# **Meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

**Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2014 at 6.00pm  
In Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

## **Agenda - Public Session (Meeting open to the public and press)**

1. Apologies for absence.
2. To report the names of any substitute Members serving for this meeting.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct.
4. To confirm as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2014.
5. Medium Term Financial Strategy
6. Annual Report of the Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service 2013/14
7. Fostering Service Annual Report
8. To answer questions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 11.8 (if any)



**Director of Corporate Resources  
Dated: 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2014**

**Distribution:****Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee:**

Councillor Mottram (Chair)

Councillor Cooper (Vice Chair)

Councillors Attwood, Bradley, Casey, Islam, Jones, Marrey, C Perks, Scott-Dow and one vacancy; Mrs Ward and Reverend Wickens; Mr Qadus and Mr Tinsley.

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**Minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

**Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2014 at 6 p.m.**  
**In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley**

**Present:**

Councillor M Mottram (Chair)  
Councillor I Cooper (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors N Barlow, P Bradley, K Casey, Z Islam, I Marrey, C Perks, R Scott – Dow and M Wood

**Officers:**

D Channings (Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services – Lead Officer), P Sharratt (Interim Director of Children's Services), H Powell (Divisional Lead – Additional Educational Needs), J Broadmeadow (Divisional Lead – Safeguarding), J Prashar (Divisional Lead - Looked After Children), S Hearne (Special Educational Needs Team Manager) – all Directorate of Children's Services and R Sanders (Assistant Principal Officer – Democratic Services)

**Also in attendance**

R Clayton (Independent Chair of the Children and Adults Safeguarding Boards) – for agenda item no 7

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9      **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Billingham and Simms, Mrs Ward and Reverend Wickens.

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10     **Substitution**

It was reported that Councillors Barlow and Wood were serving in place of Councillors Billingham and Simms, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

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11     **Declarations of Interest**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, the following interests were declared:-

Declarations of non-pecuniary interest in agenda items numbered 6 and 7 were made by the following Members for the reasons indicated below:

Councillor Attwood – Member of the Management Committee of the Sycamore Centre (a short stay Special school).

Councillor Cooper – Governor of Caslon Primary School and a Member of its Finance Committee.

Councillor Marrey – Member of the governing body of a special school and the parent of a pupil with special educational needs.

Councillor Mottram – Governor of Christchurch Primary School

Councillor Wood – Chair of the Finance Committee of the Halesbury school and Vice-Chair of the Trustees of the People's Fields Trust, which oversees the Halesbury and Sutton schools.

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12      **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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13      **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – Invitation to attend meetings**

The Committee considered a report of the Lead Officer and Director of Corporate Resources on an invitation for Members formerly co-opted to the Committee to attend by invitation for the remainder of the current municipal year.

Resolved

That the non-statutory former co-optees to the Committee, namely Mrs Coulter, Mr Lynch or Mr Nesbitt, Mr Ridley, Ms Sinden and Mr Taylor be invited to attend meetings and participate for the remainder of the current municipal year.

(Ms Sinden thereupon joined the meeting. Apologies for absence had been received from Mrs Coulter, Mr Lynch and Mr Ridley. A declaration of interest in items 6 and 7 on the agenda was made by Ms Sinden in view of her employment in the Specialist Early Years Service).

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14      **Special Educational Needs Reforms 2014**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Children's Services summarising the key changes made with regard to children with special educational needs and their families under the Children and Families Act, 2014, which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2014.

The changes made under the legislation provided for the following:

- The introduction of a revised Code of Practice, to which all local authorities, schools, academies, Pupil Referral Units, early years providers and the National Health Services were required to have regard to whenever decisions were taken relating to children with special educational needs and disabilities;
- A requirement on health services and local authorities to jointly commission and plan services for children, young people and families, which placed a duty on local authorities to ensure that children, their parents and young people were involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision and for local authorities and other agencies to cooperate reciprocally in identifying, assessing and determining provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities;
- Replacing Statements of Special Educational Needs (Statements) with a single assessment process through an Education, Health and Care Plan (Plans) to provide statutory protection comparable with those inherent in a Statement for young people who were in education or training up to the age of 25. Assessments were required to be made where it is considered special educational provision is necessary to be made. Education Health and Care Plans were to be designed to specify how services would be delivered as part of a whole package explaining how best to achieve outcomes sought for the child or young person across education, health and social care. (The preparatory work undertaken in conjunction with other services and agencies in the development of the Plan was indicated in the report.)
- Obliging the local authority to publish a Local offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available for children and young people in their area who have special educational needs or disabilities, those not the subject of Plans. The Dudley Local Offer had been published.
- Giving parents of young people the right to a personal budget for their support, the entitlement to be available once the local authority had completed the assessment and confirmed that a Plan would be prepared. Parents were also enabled to request a personal budget during a statutory review of a Plan. It was indicated in the report that the relevant disciplines within the Council were working with the Dudley Council for Voluntary Service on the process for supporting the use of personal budgets.

The report also indicated the training on the above issues that had already taken place and was currently being arranged for the autumn term and the advice and support offered by the Dudley Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service which assisted parents, children and young people in making informed choices and educational decisions.

In presenting the item, the Divisional Lead Officer – Additional Educational Needs discussed the differences between statementing and Education, Health and Care Plan (Plan) systems and the procedures involved with the latter in comparison with statementing. He also drew attention to the change in the age range provided for under the new arrangements. In expanding on the Local Offer the Divisional Lead Officer pointed out that the Offer could extend beyond Borough boundaries.

The Special Educational Needs Team Manager then explained how the preparatory work on the model Plan had been undertaken with the involvement of the relevant agencies of health and social care. Parents of children with special educational needs and Head Teachers had been engaged. In the preparation, endeavours had been made to anticipate where difficulties could arise. Schools had been fully informed of how they could access the Plans. The Local Offer had been launched and publicised heavily. The issue of personal budgets was complex and not progressed as far as would have been wished but the Council was working with partner agencies to resolve the matter.

Questions were then asked by Members, in respect of which the responses indicated were given by the Divisional Lead Officer and the Special Educational Needs Team Manager:

Question

Response

With the "one stop shop", how are organisations being brought together and have changes been enacted or are proposed to improve joint working

Structures have been changed to some extent. A Special Educational Needs Partnership Board has been created with strategic involvement of the three agencies concerned. The practical expectation was that the Special Educational Needs (SEN) team within Children's Services would work closely with officers in Social Care and Health. SEN was less familiar with the commissioning processes of other agencies. While there had always been good operational working with other agencies, the new structure was providing the opportunity for greater joint discussion and this had led to a number of areas of work where there had been gaps identified and action taken to remedy them.

How was it envisaged that Parent Partnerships would work in the coming months and were teething problems anticipated in the context of the changes in the age range. Would there be an increase in funding to help in coping. What is planned with regard to reviews and ongoing discussions.

Were there early indications of the demand for personal budgets.

How many children will be the subject of Education, Health and Care Plans (Plans) in comparison with those statemented. Previously, Children's Services had taken responsibility for the issue of Statements, how would new arrangements work and who who would be responsible for them.

Work on the Early Support Scheme was in progress with the relevant officers to ensure that the Scheme fed in to the Plan. SEN were mindful of the way in which the Early Years Team operated.

There was no direct increase in Parent Partnership funding but there was additional New Burdens Grant funding for the next two years to support the changeover to the new system.

The response from parents had been mixed with some welcoming the prospect, some unclear about it and others having questioned why personal budgets had been provided for. The view of the professionals was that provision had enabled choice. There was not yet an indication of demand but the situation should become clearer in November/December.

The number of statemented children had reduced to 1554 from approximately 1700 in two years. This figure represented 3.6% of the Dudley pupil population compared with the national statementing rate of 2.8%. Most statements would be transferred on to Plans but not all. All would be subject to a transfer review. The guidance from the Department for Education had arrived only in late August and the next step would be to leaflet parents of statemented pupils with the new arrangements. The expectation was that all children in special schools would transfer to Plans. If a mainstream school had the resources to deal with the pupil's difficulties, there was no need for a Plan. Parents were able to speak to the school and the Case Officer. There were also a number of independent supporters to support children through the process.

How long will the Plan process take to complete

20 weeks against 26 weeks for statementing.

Were personal budgets to be assessed on the needs of the child

The degree of need for the child would be considered. Provision would be included in the Plan. Parents would be entitled to challenge.

What would be the situation should funding for a statemented child be withdrawn.

Statements are tiered in terms of complexity and the number of hours of support. Schools now receive delegated funding for support that equates to a 20 hours or less statement.

What would be the situation should a child with autism be excluded from a mainstream school. (the point was made by the questioner that an autistic child is more likely to be excluded than a child without that condition)

The Pupil Access Team review any permanent exclusion. If a child has autism, he or she is likely to be deemed to have a disability and it would be unlawful for the child to be discriminated against for reasons of that disability.

Is Dudley in a position to meet the changes

Yes

The Chair suggested that Members might wish to undertake visits as appropriate or have conversations with officers and parents' forums, so as to expand upon their knowledge in the area of special educational needs. He also indicated that training for officers was to be undertaken in the autumn and suggested that Members wishing to engage contact the Interim Director of Children's Services.

Resolved

- (1) That the report and the comments made, as recorded above, be noted.
  - (2) That arrangements be made for the position on the special educational needs reforms to be reviewed at a later stage.
  - (3) That the Head of Old Park school be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss how the changes are unfolding.
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**The Annual Report of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board 2013/14**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Children's Services under cover of which was appended the Annual Report of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB) for 2013/14.

Also appended to the covering report were papers setting out the statutory and legislative context for the DSCB, the DSCB Executive Summary for 2013/14 and the DSCB Business Plan and Work Programme for 2013-15. The core objectives of the DSCB and the scope of its role in respect of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children were set out in paragraph 4 of the covering report.

The covering report indicated the statutory status of the Board and its core objectives under the relevant legislation, together with the scope of the Board. The role included safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the three broad areas of activity of identifying and preventing maltreatment, or impairment of health or development to ensure that children grew up in circumstances consistent with safe and effective care, and to undertake proactive work with the aim of targeting particular vulnerable groups and responsive work to protect children who were at risk or at risk of suffering harm. The Board had recently been restructured to secure improved participation and leadership by partner agencies and operated through a substructure with five sub groups currently in place.

The covering report noted that there were around 300 children during 2013/14 the subject of a Child Protection Plan, all of whom were allocated to a social care key worker. All cases were reviewed independently by a Review Unit. One Serious Case review had been published, this about a child death in 2011. The Council had been judged adequate in the last Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding in 2011. The report also referred to the 5 key priorities in safeguarding and confirmed that an extensive training programme was in operation.

The Independent Chair of the Board, Roger Clayton, attended the meeting to present and discuss the Annual Report. In so doing, he explained his own biographical details and summarised the role of the Board as being strategic with regard to the agencies concerned, with particular regard to communication and co-ordination and meeting challenges. One of the problems historically had been that agencies and professionals had tended to work somewhat in isolation and the Board aspired to bring them together and to encourage debate and for agencies to challenge each other on existing perceptions where necessary. A summary of safeguarding and child protection activity for 2013/14 was set out on page 8 of the Annual Report.

In response to a question to him regarding monitoring and evaluation, in the light of this being identified as a weak area of compliance in the Annual Report, the Board Chair replied that arrangements were in transition but that partner agencies now had far greater responsibility with the four areas the Board covered being charged with particular areas of responsibility which would enable each partner to make a better contribution and therefore improve matters.

The Divisional Lead - Safeguarding and Review then amplified the specifics of the Business Plan, indicating the current position with regard to key priorities of the Board. In this connection she referred to progress on improved agency working to ensure that multi agency structures were consistent, so that agencies worked more adhesively and effectively to mitigate harm to children. Training was now communal between agencies on social care issues.

In the area of child sexual exploitation, Dudley was working with the West Midlands Strategy Group in connection with a national screening assessment toolkit and a number of training and raising awareness events had taken place. Assessments were currently being embedded to improve awareness and to ensure Members of the Council worked within the community so that the Council was better informed on issues.

In the discussion that ensued, concern was expressed by the invitee at the impact on reporting child safety issues in consequence of the reduction in staffing at Children's Centres. She also raised questions regarding the identification of children at risk and what happened when a child made a disclosure about risk, indicating that in her capacity as a teacher no child had made a disclosure to her and expressing the view that such disclosures were more likely to be made to other bodies, e.g. Child Line. The Interim Director of Children's Services acknowledged that the social care aspect of Children's Centres needed to be broadened and that the Directorate was seeking to engage will all partners and assess how Children's Centres could be improved. There was a commitment to further support the voice of the child: to this end the relevant website had been relaunched although there was work to be done to make it more user friendly and a Child Participation Group had been set up.

The Divisional Lead emphasised the importance of training on a multi agency basis to ensure that each agency knew what to do. The Board Chair pointed out that the reconstructed Board structure was still very new but that a foremost role was to find out the best ways of engaging with children and it was now involving children directly.

In response to a question on the direction the Board was moving in with regard to multi agency safeguarding and the timescale, the Board Chair confirmed that the format had to be the right one for Dudley and include the facility for child sexual abuse and domestic abuse but that the timescale had not yet been determined.

In relation to multi agency working, a Member commented on the attendance figures on page 30 of the Annual Report and suggested that a substitute facility should be available when the nominated person was unable to attend. The Divisional Lead replied that the new Board structure provided for shared responsibility and ownership of priorities and there was therefore no option but to attend.

In seeking an assurance that a grooming culture as instanced in Rochdale and Rotherham could not happen in Dudley, the Board Chair stated that the possibility could not be eradicated and that more work needed to be done. Workforces needed to be ready and aware and to know what to do in a particular situation. Lessons needed to be learned from previous mistakes and while there had been successes after the event in terms of prosecution of perpetrators, prevention before the event should be the real aim. He also reflected that the arrest ratio and the prosecution ratio were not records to be proud of.

A comment was made by a Member that there was a view in the Muslim community that there was a conspiracy against them in so far as child sexual grooming was concerned. The Board Director considered that there was a need to accept shared responsibility to address the issue and that there was an over reliance on professionals to respond. In this regard and in acknowledging that grooming was not common to one particular community, he considered that all communities had an important role to play as these were where victims and perpetrators lived.

On the issue of raising awareness, attention was drawn to the usefulness of Chatback. Reference was made by the Chair to the Member training event on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2014 at which a film on child sexual exploitation was to be shown. He encouraged all Members of the Committee to attend if they had not already seen the film at the workshop held on 24<sup>th</sup> September. The Divisional Lead reported that hotels in the Dudley area were participating in an initiative to combat child sexual exploitation in their premises and this had led to a successful prosecution. Councillor Perks referred to an event she was arranging within the community on safeguarding.

A paper summarising the key findings of the Alexis Jay report into Child Sexual exploitation in Rotherham was circulated.

Resolved

- (1) That the Annual Report of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board 2013/14 be received.
  - (2) That the observations and comments of the Chair of the Board be received and the comments made at the meeting ,including those referred to above, be noted.
  - (3) That consideration be given to a further workshop on child sexual exploitation being held later in the year.
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The meeting ended at 7.45 p.m.

CHAIR

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**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 19<sup>th</sup> 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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Pauline Sharratt  
Interim Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Jane Prashar  
Divisional Lead for Looked after Children  
Telephone: 01384 815803  
Email: [Jane.prashar@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.prashar@dudley.gov.uk)



# Dudley Adoption Service Annual Report



**1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014**

**Dudley Adoption Service Mission Statement;**

*To find and support lifelong adoptive families for Dudley's 'Looked After Children' whose needs can be best met through adoption.*

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    - 3.2 Assessing adoptive families
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- 1. Setting the scene – adoption service statutory duties**

This report is to update the Directorate of Children's Services, highlighting the successes and challenges that the service is seeking to address.

## **Service Overview**

The Adoption Service provides a comprehensive range of adoption services to carry out the responsibilities of the Directorate in its role as an Adoption Agency. The service offers specialist advice, skills and information on adoption and permanency matters to children's social workers and others in the Directorate.

Family finding social workers assist Care Management colleagues in managing skilled transitions of children into carefully matched adoptive placements. They provide initial assessment to inform the agency's acceptance of an application to adopt and then undertake comprehensive assessment using the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Prospective Adopters Report format to enable the Adoption Panel to assess suitability to adopt. They also provide counselling of all individuals wishing to adopt, and for birth parents who are considering relinquishing a child to adoption. In addition the service provides support, advice and activity in relation to non -agency (step parent) adoptions which can include an inter-country element.

Our adoption support service assesses and provides tailor-made support to all those affected by adoption, prioritising families at risk of breakdown where children are under 18 years of age. Close working links are established with universal and specialist provisions in the borough. Dudley Adoption Service remains responsible for all its former 'Looked After children' (LAC) placed with adopters for a 3 year period after the making of an Adoption Order and Adoption Support Plans are in place for these families to cater for their particular needs. Other adoptive families approved by neighbouring boroughs or by Voluntary Adoption Agencies, resident within the borough become eligible for service post 3 years. Increasing emphasis is being placed on early notification of these placements to assist prediction of future service needs. The adoption support social workers facilitate a small number of face-to-face contacts with birth relatives and all adoption staff service the Letterbox Service that enables safe exchange of news between growing numbers of birth families and adoptive parents, and their children.

Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) consortium service level agreements are in place to provide effective adoption services to all affected by adoption. **Adoption UK**, an independent non profit making adopter lead organisation provides a range of support services including adopter support groups at venues in the Black Country. Other services include Family Support Services that maximise peer support and the Piece of Cake post placement training programme.

**After Adoption** provides a dedicated independent service to birth parents of children where adoption is proposed or has taken place. It also undertakes all adult related adoption work for Dudley residents to tracing adopted relatives or access to their adoption records with an Intermediary Service, to support all parties to reconnect in a well managed safe way.

A regular newsletter enables adopters to remain informed and self selected the services that most support their family's current needs.

Initial counselling interviews for those individuals adopted pre 1976 is provided by the Dudley Adoption Service.

The promotion of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) as a permanence option for LAC who are in stable family placements is high on the Directorate's current agenda in addressing escalating LAC numbers. The Assistant Team Manager provides information packs and surgery sessions for interested parties. The support needs of this group are becoming more apparent and will require further investment if this option is to be promoted to many stable permanent families.

## **2. Profile of adoption service staff group**

<b>Management Team</b>	
37hr	Adoption Service Manager-Ofsted Registered Manager
37hr	Assistant Team Manager (Adoption support and SGO lead)

<b>Family finding for children, recruitment and assessment of future adoptive parent/s and duty work</b>	
37hr	Senior Practitioner
37hr	Social Worker
30hr	Social Worker
30hr	Social Worker
18.5hr	Social Worker
18.5hr	Social Worker

12.5	Social Worker
37 hr	Fixed term contract social worker 1yr post (Adoption Reform Grant)

<b>Adoption support and contact including letterbox and duty work</b>	
37hr	Adoption Support Social Worker
22.5hr	Adoption Support Social Worker
37 hr	Fixed term contract social worker 1yr post (Adoption Reform Grant)
22.5 hr	Clinical Psychologist
4hr	Sessional social worker- letterbox contact
37 hr	Adoption Lifeworker from January 2013 (12 secondment contract extended)

<b>Administrative support</b>	
37 hr	Senior Admin Assistant / Panel administrator
37 hr	Senior Admin Assistant / Panel administrator
37hr	Admin Assistant /Letterbox Assistant

NB all financial means testing for Adoption allowance, SGO and Residence Order (RO) are completed by the senior admin assistants, in addition to specialist adoption panel administrative roles.

<b>Adoption in the Black Country Consortium (ABC)- Recruitment and Marketing Service</b>	
37 hr	Marketing and Recruitment Officer (Part funded by Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Walsall) - Managed and administrative support from DMBC Adoption Service.

<b>Sessional Social Work Staff</b>	
3 independent Social Workers ( HCPC registered) Completing adopter assessment work, non agency adoption court reports and adoption support work	

### **3. Service Activity Levels**

During the review period the service was involved in the following activities to meet the Directorates responsibilities as an Adoption Agency

#### **3.1 Children's case progression**

**Number of children accepted for adoption from 1.4.2013 to 31.3.2014**

<b>2013-14</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	<b>40</b>
2011-12	36
2010-11	47

**Ethnicity of children accepted for adoption from 1.4.2013 and 31.3.2014**

Asian/British	0
White/ Asian British	3
White/Black British	7
White/British	32
White British other	3

**Number of children placed with approved adopter/s from 1.4.2013 to 31.3.2014**

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>40 children matched (37 placed before 1<sup>st</sup> April)</b>
<b>Number placed within 8 months of court orders (Scorecard A2 criteria)</b>	<b>15 of 37</b>

<b>2012-13</b>	<b>27</b>
2011-12	27
2010-11	14

**Scorecard performance indicators.**

	<b>1<sup>st</sup> scorecard</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> scorecard</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> scorecard</b>
Number of children with plan of adoption on 1.4.2014	35	70	79
Number of children subject to legal order to place on 1.4.2014	Not Avail	Not avail	72
A1 indicator ; Average time from LAC entry to joining adoptive family	651days	639 days	723 days
A2 indicator :average time from legal order to matching with approved adopter	220 days	213 days	246 Days

- **this is a cumulative total over a 3 yr period**
- **Data for this year submitted late due to relocation of service**

**Proportion of children placed with in 21 months**

2011 – 2014 new target	Official data not available
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2010 – 2013 Dudley Scorecard	44%
2008-11 Dudley Scorecard	52%

\* This is a cumulative total over a 3 year period.

### Number of children placed through inter-agency arrangements

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>19 children in 15 families 10 VAA ( 3 sib pairs) 5 LA single</b>
2012-13	14 children in 7 placements
2011-12	9 children in 6 placements
2010-11	13 children in 10 placements

### Number of children adopted from LAC from 1.4.2013 to 31.3.2014

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Placed &lt; 14 mths of Placement Order</b>	<b>18 (75%)</b>
2012-13	30
2011-12	19
2010-11	21

### Percentage of children leaving LAC through adoption 1.4.2013 to 31.3.2104

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>14.8%</b>
2012-13	18.6%
2011-12	14%
2008-11	11% (Average scorecard data)
Percentage of children leaving LAC through SG0 2013-2014	<b>5.6%</b>



**Care Management Team distribution;**

Dudley North and Team 4	12
Halesowen	6
Brierley Hill	6
Children's disability team	0

**Ethnicity of children adopted:**

Asian/British	0
White/ Asian British	3
White/Black British	2
White/British	17
Any other Mixed Heritage	2

**Ages of children at adoption order for the review period: 24**

Under 12 months	0
Before 2 <sup>nd</sup> birthday	5 ( 2 previous year)
2 – 5yrs	14
Child 5 +	5

This included 5 sibling pairs

**Adoptive placements disrupted during the review pre Adoption Order:**

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>1</b>
2012-2013	1

2011-2012	0
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**Number of children withdrawn from the Adoption List from 1.4.2013 to 31.3.2014**

Permanent fostering	13
Rehabilitation programme to birth family	1
Special Guardianship	1

<b>Number of children for who an allowance is provided to their adoptive parents 2013- 2014</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>75</b>
2011-2012	68

**Special Guardianship Activity**

**Total Number of children's placements where SGO allowances are provided**

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>39</b>
2011-2012	22
2010-2011	19

**3.2 ASSESSING ADOPTIVE PARENT/S**

**Adults enquiries to adopt**

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>58</b>
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<b>2013-2014 Redirected to Adoption in the Black Country as DMBC address</b>	<b>11</b>
2012-2013	78
2012-2013 Redirected to Adoption in the Black Country as DMBC address	23
2011-2012	85
2011-2012 Redirected to Adoption in the Black Country as DMBC address	39

### **Outcome of enquiries**

Initial assessments completed	33 (Previous year 28)
Accepted application	11 (previous year 14)
Withdrew during home study assessment	1 previous year 3)
Intercountry adoption enquiry	0

### **Applications approved as suitable to adopt**

<b>2013- 2014</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>31.3.2014 current Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments</b>	<b>9</b>
2012-13	14
2011-12	13
<b>Time taken to complete suitability</b>	8 months or < 5 8- 12 months 4 12 months + 6
<b>Time taken to match with child once approved 2013-14</b>	0 -3 months 4 3 -6 months 7 6 – 9 months 1

**Diversity of individual approved adopter;**

White British individual	27
Asian British individual	2
White Black British individual	1
Mixed heritage individual	1

**Adopter/s relationship status**

<b>Single adopter ( female )</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Same gender partnerships (female)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Heterosexual partnerships</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Including former foster carer families</b>	<b>2</b>

**Approved Adopter/s waiting for match as of 1st April 2014**

<b>1.4.2014</b>	<b>7</b>
1.4.2013	5
1.4.2012	3

**Dudley Adoptive families matched with LAC child originating outside of Dudley area**

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	<b>0</b>

2011-12	2
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**Approved adopters who withdrew from their adoption assessment in agreement with the agency during the review period**

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2012-13</b>	<b>0</b>
2011-12	4

### 3.3 Adoption Support Enquiries/Requests from adoptive parents with dependent children

<b>Service request</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>
Contact issues needing SW allocation	8	15	11
Life story / Telling	6	*2	1*
Emotional and educational difficulties	21	14	17
Request for financial assistance	3	2	2
Request for review of records	25	15	14
Enquiries from birth parents/adoptive parents about letterbox including change of address, follow ups etc	125	93	55*

\* single lead person has provided continuity for this service

### 3.4 Adoption support work for adults affected by adoption

<b>Service request</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>
Self referral-pregnant mothers	1	0	1
Adopted adults; records access, link to adopted relatives	50	43	21*
Birth records Schedule 2 (pre 1976) done in house	11	5	7
Non agency notice of intent received	0	5	5
Non agency adoption orders granted	1	3	1

\* Duty Social Worker sign posting to After Adoption by Duty Social Worker

### 3.5 Development in Life Story work

Statistics from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. The areas of work are still being developed.

<b>Life story consultations to date</b>	45
<b>Attended by social workers</b>	18
<b>Attended by young person's advisors</b>	6
<b>Work with adoptive parents</b>	6
<b>Work with foster carers</b>	6
<b>Life story books completed on historic cases</b>	3
<b>Life story books completed so far</b>	9
<b>Life story books currently being completed</b>	7

## **4. Current issues for the Dudley Adoption Agency**

### **4.1 Timeliness of children moving onto adoption**

Adoption remains high on the government's reform agenda, with the priority to reduce the time each child will spend "in care" before settling into an adoptive family. There is growing scientific evidence that the emotional experiences of each child in the first 3 years of life form the foundations for the all future social and emotional development. Greater understanding of how the young child's brain develops and the critical impact of the attentive and responsive parent/s in launching maximum neurological pathways that enable engagement social relationships and learning opportunities, so the need to resolve the uncertainty for children who experience adversity in their family of origin has become more widely understood and prioritised. This has been particularly significant in understanding the pervasive impact of neglect on children's long term outcomes.

The government is introducing legislative change to develop new options for permanence, and earlier placement with the family that will adopt. At the same legal reforms are driving a 26 week case schedule for care cases decision making. The impact of this is younger children being referred to the adoption service, with the chance for placement at a much younger age. This year **5** children completed their legal adoption before their **2<sup>nd</sup>** birthday and a greater proportion of the matches were for children under the age of 2 years. Whilst there are younger children ready to place with

approved adopters, the particular family circumstances of adversity have the potential to include many aspects of developmental risk; including the long term impact of exposure to drug and alcohol during pre-birth. Often there is absence of paternity information. Nationally there is an overrepresentation of birth parents that have a learning disability or deeply entrenched psychological difficulties that will require intensive long term therapy. There is growing concern about the experience of birth parents who can experience repeat adoption care planning of their children. A new initiative called **“Breaking the cycle”** is being piloted across the Black Country, led by After Adoption to assist to some birth parents to change to avoid recurrence.

During the review period the service placed **37** children in **30** adoptive families, an significant increase on the previous year. A further **3** children were matched but with legal challenges pending in court. These children subsequently joined Dudley approved adoptive families later in April. Time taken to match once legal orders were made has decreased with **15** of the **37** children joining their new adoptive family’s in less than **8** months (the A2 scorecard target for 2010-2013). Of the **24** children whose adoption was legally completed during this review period **10** of **24** were matched in less than **8** months. The **Adoption Scorecard A1 indicator** measures **every day** the child is “in care” before joining an adoptive family and evaluates performance of all care planning processes to move through to permanence through adoption. The government was disappointed at release of the second scorecard for the period 2010 – 2013 to see that their plans for reform were not materialising as rapidly as anticipated, with a greater majority of local authorities including Dudley taking a longer time on both A1 and A2 targets. One concern was the delay in time between the scorecard publication and current performance with many adoption agencies reporting an increasing placement activity. Dudley participated in the voluntary national data collection on a quarterly basis to provide current details. The Associate of Director’s for Children’s Services executive summary report provided comprehensive information on geographical national variation of numbers of children in who had legal orders, waiting for an adoptive family. It also confirmed the experiences of staff that competition for good placements was extremely intense across the West Midlands region. This demonstrated that the West Midlands had the second highest density of children waiting for adoption in the England and Wales. The publication of the Adoption Maps enabled us to see who had an excess of approved adopters waiting, which informed interagency working with 4 new local authority adoption teams. We have maintained strong working relationships with 2 Voluntary Adoption Agencies in the West Midlands Region and are now seeking to develop one of these relationships into a more formalised partnership to increase our sufficiency of placements for Dudley LAC.

Whilst we have made significant improvements in placing a greater number of children with approved adopter/s and the time taken to do this is decreasing. Whilst we aim for



greater improvement against this A2 target it is clear that for single younger children particularly where a sibling already has a care plan of adoption that they will experience a much reduced overall time from day 1 of care to adoption. **6** children entered care and were placed with their adoptive family in less than **9** months from the start of care. Research into adoption outcomes support the very low risk of adoption for children who join their adoptive family in the first 18 months of life. We are acutely aware through case tracking of children who wait for extensive periods of time including those adopted by their former foster carer/s. Often this will follow repeated national family finding. The impact for the child of continuity of parent figure can bring many positives but we are looking for life long commitment and there is a need for risk assessment of the birth parents potential to disrupt the permanent family. The identity of the foster carer is often known to the birth family and these dynamics are extremely difficult to manage safely with social media. On occasions the adoption service and child's social work will be strongly opposed to these plans. We provide adoption preparation training, and specific assessment that informs the support plan for all foster carers who seek to adopt. Work is ongoing to revise procedures to ensure consistency and understanding of the long term risks that must be balanced against the gains from continuous parenting figure. We are also preparing for the new demands of Fostering for Adoption (where an approved adopter/s will be approved temporarily to foster pending the outcome of court legal processes).

A number of children whose data is included in this review had extensive family finding over a number of years. Referred to as legacy cases, these will have a significant impact on scorecard, but we remained strongly committed to securing adoption for the child or children. The time taken before acceptance for adoption has been considerable for a number of children adopted this year. Sadly other care options have broken down e.g. connected other placements or placement with parent breakdown at late stages. There may also be added time where the adoption plan cannot be progressed due to court directed sibling reassessment or foster home placement changes. There has been increasing legal challenge of Placement Order and Adoption Order applications and this is reflected in the reduced total of Adoption Orders this year and delay in placing some children with their matched family whilst legal contest is resolved.

Waiting approved adopter/s have become more aware of the ability to choose and to take younger children are more aware of the impact of delay and neglect on long term outcomes. The result has been that it has become even more competitive to secure a match leaving increasing numbers of children in the **3 – 7 age** range with few opportunities to join an adoptive family. This situation has been particularly exasperated for sibling pairs. It is therefore pleasing to note the placement of **6** sibling groups with Dudley approved adopters. Of these sibling groups **5** had at least one child of school age and all were able to benefit from support of our clinical psychologist to consider the

impact of their early life experiences and prepare parenting strategies. **3** sibling pairs were placed with families approved through a Voluntary Adoption Agency, with other local authorities providing placements only for single children. There continues to be a gender bias in adoption placement with male single children over **3** yrs of age often not be identified a placement and their care plans subsequently being changed after extensive searches. During the review period **17** male children were matched including **3** sibling placements with **2** male children all with Dudley approved adoptive parents. It is hoped that with increasing adopter approvals this pattern may shift and research into same sex partnerships seeking to adopt has shown very successful outcomes for male children.

In January 2014 we were able to bring added social work capacity through the use of Adoption Reform Grant appointing **2** experienced full time social workers; **1** to family finding and **1** for adoption and SGO support. The service has made some improvements in timeliness of placement for children whilst maintaining its low rate of disruption. We continue to aim to place within **2** hours travel time of Dudley to ensure comprehensive support. The progress made will be reflected in improvement against the scorecard indicators.

#### **4.2 Assessing adoptive families**

During the review period **15** adopter families were approved. The target had been for **17** and **3** narrowly missed completion for unavoidable circumstances. All **3** assessments subsequently gained suitability decisions. Capacity of the adoption service staff to meet the combined needs of family finding and preparing adoptive parents has been a constraining factor on our performance. This is a pattern reflected in regional adoption service teams with the increasing use of independent assessing staff to complete the work and this year the Adoption Reform Grant (**ARG**) enabled a new initiative to be progressed. .

At the same time government reform implemented **Stage 1** and **Stage 2** process with target times for assessment set at **6 months**. All agencies were also expected to improve performance by at least **20%** in this area. From 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013 to 31st March 2014 the 4 Black Country Adoption Services through **Adoption in the Black Country (ABC)** created a **5<sup>th</sup> Virtual Team** lead by a manager working with a number of social work agencies and independent assessors to increase approval capacity. This new opportunity provided Dudley with **3** approved adopter/s. Timescales have improved for adopter assessments with an average time now being **10** months. **5** assessments were completed in **8** or less months. Of the **6** families taking longer than **12** months, delays can be accounted for by complex medical assessment and requests from the applicants to take a slower pace through assessments.

The Dudley Adoption Service social workers have strongly indicated their wish to have mixed caseloads of family finding and adoption assessment. It is our shared belief that the continuity of social worker who assessed the adoptive parent/s contributes to making effective matches for Dudley LAC children, using the knowledge from assessment and through a known person staying alongside the family as they start to parent through adoption. Where we have used an independent assessor a linkworker is appointed to support from point of approval and through into adoptive family life.

Progress has been made in the timeliness of completing adopter assessments with the new processes for **Stage 1 and 2** becoming more securely established over the year, with strong administrative tracking in place to avoid agency led drift. We have been fortunate to benefit from the councils online Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) system which has significantly reduced time during this review period. As with many adoption agencies concern was expressed about capacity to complete the adoption medical assessments in the new timescales. Where complex medical assessment is needed, we will delay preparation training until outcomes are resolved. Candidates will be informed of the reasons for any delays. At times candidates have expressed concerns about the rapid pace of assessments and target setting. We seek to be responsive to the need of each applicant recognising the enormity of the life change that adoptive parenting will bring.

During the review period **33** initial assessments were completed. These reports are provided to the individuals to ensure they are factually accurate and show the assessment of their potential for the adoptive parenting tasks. Where a decision to not accept an application is made, clear reasons for this and suggestions to strengthen a future approach to us or another adoption agency are provided. We have seen a number of prospective adopter/s taking the suggested course of action before successfully returning and completing their adoption journey with the agency.

This year in conjunction with **ABC** we launched an on line training programme, a first in the UK. This has been well received and is overseen by the administrative support worker at **ABC**. All applicants attend the **ABC 3 day** preparation training held monthly and in practice many Dudley applicants are completing this programme before starting stage 2. During the review period social work staff attended up to **2** Information Events per month. A number of new venues and formats were trialled.

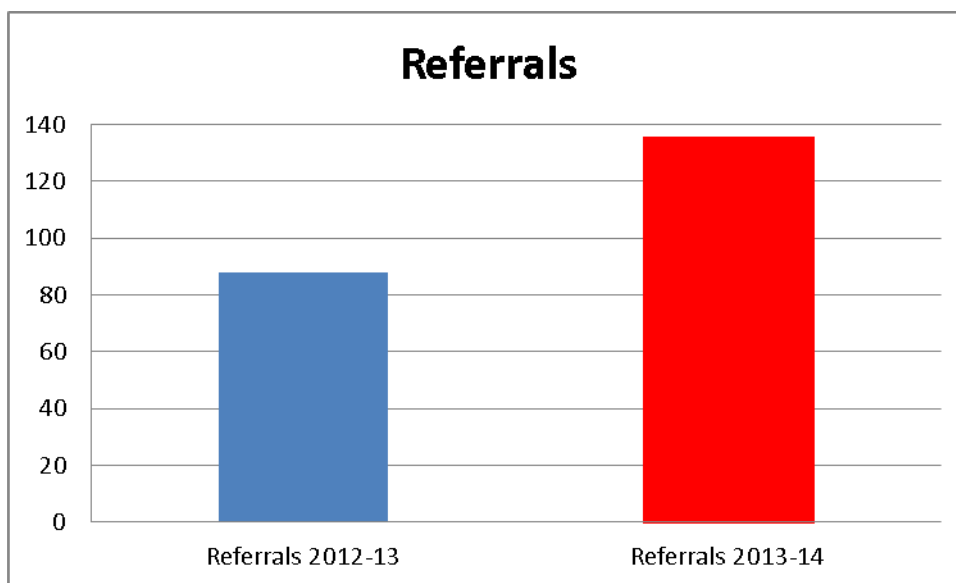
#### **4.3 Adoption in the Black Country Recruitment Activity**

[www.adoptionblackcountry.org](http://www.adoptionblackcountry.org)

We have continued to witness the expansion of internet based resources in the adoption field and in particular this year the increased engagement through social media channels. The **ABC** social media marketing activity has facilitated easier

synergies with the national adoption gateway and also significant organisations such as BAAF, Adoption UK, etc's marketing activity. The national gateway has had little effect (neither positive nor negative) on **ABC** recruitment delivering just **6** clicks through from their info site. The **ABC** website has been refreshed to make it more user friendly and easier to access from phone and tablets and continues to be the most effective point of contact with over **90%** on enquiries coming through this route. **ABC** web address score very highly on all Google searches and is enhanced by specific geotargeted Google Adword/adverts.

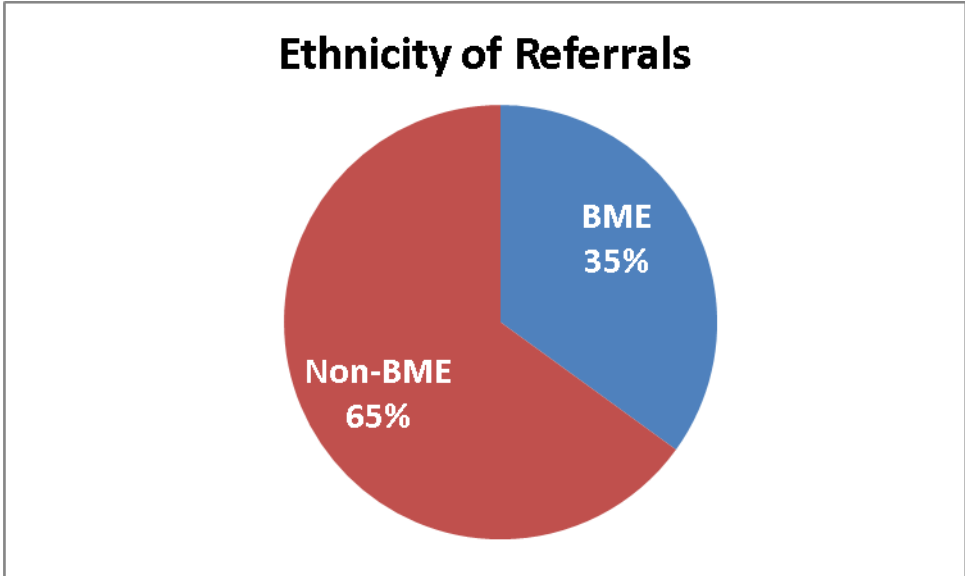
Marketing activity has significantly increased in this period and we have seen growth in referrals by **54.5%** compared to the previous year.



The marketing approach of directing enquiries to an information event is again a reason for this growth. We have seen information events increase from **13** in 2012/13 to **19** in 2013/14. We all have customer retention processes in place to initiate follow up to strong candidates at a later date.

Dudley Adoption Duty receives a high level of interest from Dudley Borough residents and **ABC** arrangements ensure this potential resource is used to best advantage for the regions young children waiting for adoption. **ABC** enables Black Country residents to be allocated to the agency best placed to match with waiting LAC children. We are also recruiting from neighbouring areas to the Black Country which equated to **26%** of enquiries in 2012 - 2013 and decreased slightly to **18%** this year. We aim to ensure the privacy of new family life and offer effective support by placing all Dudley children outside of the borough, but within the West Midlands. The Dudley Borough has traditionally been the area of greatest recruitment for adopters into **ABC** this has increased from **25%** of all referrals in 2012 – 2013 to **32%** in this year.

Engagement with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups was still significantly higher than the Black Country demographic with **35%** of adoption referrals from minority groups. We continue to seek to reach out to applicants who can parent a child of White Black British Ethnicity and are performing very strongly in attracting adopters for children of White and Asian heritage.



Adoption in the Black Country now has in place an on-line training tool which **74** adopters have successfully used. This tool which support the governmental position of an adopter led process empowers the prospective adopters to undertake the training at a time and place that is convenient to them. The on-line training is broken down into 'bite-size' modules that can be accessed at anytime and from various platforms (be it a mobile phone, tablet, laptop or PC). Prospective adopters have provided positive feedback about the on line training and some initial issues have now been ironed out with a new enhanced version anticipated later in 2014.

Adoption in the Black Country hosted its first Adoption Activity Day in July 2013, again using Adoption Reform Grant (ARG) investment. 3 Dudley children were secured matches through this adopter led initiative. Learning from the event will inform the next event scheduled for April 2015 in partnership with Staffordshire and Adopt West Midlands.

**4.4 Support opportunities for adoptive parents**

During the review period adopter/s were kept informed of opportunities to attend a range of training and support events at times that suited their families unique needs. This was through the tri annual newsletter, fliers and through contact with service staff. New adoptive families were also signposted to adoptive parenting courses available

through the service and these included in adoption support plans at matching panels. During the review period **8** families attended the **Safebase** course provided through a service level agreement with ABC consortium, which includes a specific assessment of each family using MIMIS, a Theraplay technique. In addition 1 adoptive family was identified a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) based parenting programme, in their home location. Where families are facing extreme challenges an adoption support assessment will be completed to inform on a multi- agency approach to supporting the family.

**ADOPT** parenting programme ran a 16 week programme across the Black Country Dudley Adoption Service staff have become very “attachment and trauma focussed “ in their approach to work with adopted families. This reflects the specialist education and responses from adoptive parents that this approach seems to offer most progress to adoptive families. There are ongoing arrangements for staff consultation with our Clinical Psychologist, and this can include pre matching discussions with the identified family to ensure their understanding of how a child’s early life coping strategies may re surface during transition to adoptive family life.

There are strong connections with colleagues in health in supporting schools to develop their skills in making school days be manageable for children with additional emotional needs. Theraplay introductions sessions have been provided to adoptive parents in addition a number of interventions. There have been some super conferences with key note speakers including Dan Hughes and Joy Rees and a number of adopter/s have been supported to attend.

Service levels agreements provide adoption support services from **Adoption UK** an adopter led charity. This includes Adoption Uk membership, providing access to the online community support; adoption support magazine and invites to participate in local adopter led groups at 3 venues across the Black Country region. The Adoption UK annual fun day is always oversubscribed and it is seen as a way of supporting children to know they are not the only child who is adopted. We use Adoption Uk’s advertising magazine and online site to reach approved adopters waiting for a match.

Through the **ABC** consortium, Dudley also makes use of the many adoption support service provide by After Adoption Birmingham. This includes support to family members whose children are adopted through their Birth Ties Service. Acutely aware that some parents will experience adoption planning for more a succession of children Dudley provided anonymous data that informed the successful bid to deliver the innovative “Breaking the Cycle” programme commencing Autumn 2014.

After Adoption has been developing increasing opportunities for adopted children to meet others and the take up from Dudley young people has been very strong. This has

included participation in the Steering Group, and photographic courses, African Drumming workshops and its teens group programme. **After Adoption** also runs residential camps that bring adoptive children together and we have sponsored 6 children during the last year to attend.

The publicity of adoptive family life and the governments drive to ensure speedier adoption of the right children has resulted finally in investment into adoption support service and an exciting new range of services have emerged through the Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) arena that can benefit the children who experience adoption. It also ensures we hear the voice of the child with a recent event attending by 2 team members show casing Adoption Support young people services over the last year.

#### **4.5 New arrangements for psychological support service to adoptive families**

In August 2013 the Dudley Looked After and Adopted Children's Psychology Services (LAAC) was transferred from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to sit within Dudley Children's Services. Adoptive parents who had received support through the specialist clinical psychologist formerly attached to Dudley Adoption Service were deeply distressed on hearing that commissioning arrangements were under review and an active campaign was influential in bringing the new service to fruition. Whilst there are some operational issues to resolve for the new service, for the adoption social work staff this has provided even closer working links and use of specialist consultation has increased further and has proved highly effective. The service continues to evolve and recognises it can effectively reach out to more people through educating the child care services through specialist training and consultation to underpin their work, as it has effectively achieved with the Adoption Service Staff. During a **9** month period the LAAC Psychology Service provided consultation to inform care planning and intervention for **37** children with up to **3** sessions from the Adoption Service. Clinical Psychology staff has also provided training events for Adoption UK ABC Network and for the Adoption Service on attachment and trauma topics. There is an exciting opportunity during the next 12 months to finalise the service level pathways with mainstream CAMHS and then deliver intensive therapeutic services locally. This will provide a specialist clinical service to meet the specific needs of adoptive children, their families and the professionals involved in their care. Proposed activities include Nurturing Attachment Groups (targeting families with a school age child) and sibling assessment training for social workers, in addition to the Theraplay Practise Share.

The government is currently considering how best to provide adoption support that involves intensive therapeutic support through personal budgets and Dudley Adoption Service in partnership with colleagues in Dudley LAAC Psychology Service is participating in informative activities to seek to influence future service delivery.

#### **4.6 Contact after adoption- Letterbox**

Dudley adoption service promotes the exchange of information between adoptive parents and birth family members for all new adoptive placements and maintains those for historic adoptions. This totals over **450** arrangements, with approximately **30%** involving a responding letter from a birth family member to the adoptive family. During the review period we have had the consistency of management of many of these exchanges by a consistent dedicated social worker for at least one morning each week. This has resulted in a decrease in the need for allocation of letterbox matters freeing up time for more complex adoption support assessment work.

With the high volume of exchanges taking place we guarantee annual exchange with prompts to adopter/s to ensure this occurs. In teenage years adoptees will become aware of the exchange of news and their views may influence the need for review. A complex issue that is frequently being managed is maintaining letterbox between siblings that are in foster carer or are adults in the community connected to birth family networks. Where requested by any party we will review the arrangements to ensure they continue to meet the primary needs of the adoptive child or young person. This is an important area of work for our adoption support social workers and can evolve into much greater need for support service work.

The issue of social networking use has resulted in the decision to not exchange photographs in the majority of letterbox exchanges to prioritise the child's needs for privacy in adoption. The service would like to develop more capacity to consistently manage this aspect of our work. Letterbox is not a static need and information provided can have significant implications for 3 parties of the adoption triangle. We need to develop procedures to give options to adopted young adults about managing contacts from birth family members arising from post commencement legislation. We will be updating literature and agreements to ensure this reflect the current challenges and benefits of secure news exchange.

#### **4.6 Lifework for adopted children**

Since January 2013 the adoption service has benefited from a dedicated Adoption Life Worker Post. It is a national minimum standard that every child has a Life Story book and later life letter at the point of their adoption celebration ceremony. Statistics are provided for the work completed during the year and there has been an impact with decrease in referrals from adopters to duty to seek amendments or notify that these essential items have not been provided. The Adoption Service staff all attended training on Life Work lead by a specialist trainer and consultant in this area, whose model for this work is now strongly established within our work. There has been stronger emphasis on writing the reasons for adoption for the child at the matching stage of



placement planning with family finders supporting child's social workers to complete this. These materials are more likely to be missing where the child has experienced changes of social worker. Very occasionally the adoption service social worker will be allocated to address this deficit by writing later life letters or enhancing a Lifebook, but our capacity is over committed. Sessions held for care management staff have been well received with greater insight into what will benefit the adoptive family in the future. Explanations are most effectively written by the social worker who prepares the Childs Permanence Report, having directly known the birth family and advocated adoption in the court arena. We have found that often our contact supervisors are best placed to capture early photos and memories and we include them at Life Appreciation Meetings wherever possible to give a balanced insight into each parent's relationship with the child.

This development has also assisted in focusing on the need for child centred narratives for children age 3+ as they progress into an adoptive family. Preparation for the first Activity Day also made us all reconsider the needs of the child for preparation to ensure their emotional needs are responded to as we seek to establish them in an adoptive family. There is emphasis on being open about adoption status from the onset of an adoptive family placement. This is easier if there are child friendly materials ready for use by the adopter. We work hard to ensure there are photos of birth family members, especially parents in Lifebooks. Take up from adopters to attend the Telling About Adoption courses remains consistently high.

We are aware that we are still not fully compliant and with an increasing number of children being placed for adoption at younger ages there is a need to secure this post as a permanent provision as it is scheduled to end in December 2014. This will ensure this essential aspect of identity work is actively promoted for the benefit of the children who need to know the answers to "why was I adopted".

#### **4.8 Adoption panel**

The adoption panel continues to meet at least once each month to consider matches of children and the approval of new adoptive families. We welcome the participation of prospective adopters at discussions about their suitability and matching, and this is sensitively managed, but not compulsory. Panel training has been through a number of short workshops sessions this year. One session was on alternative permanence options so panel understood what might happen if adoption plan is removed e.g. SGO. We also reflected on panel decision making and the subsequent impact of court activity for a number of specific cases. There is acknowledgement that panel does identify risk issues. In addition we have been working towards a paper free panel. Whilst many obstacles exist we are committed to competing this during the next year. The panel moved into a new venue in April 2014 as part of the councils estate management

programme and now meets in a Children's Centre. On occasions additional panel time is needed the panel members respond quickly to the need to convene to avoid delay.

The Panel is chaired by an Independent Adoption Specialist, who brings extensive adoption and fostering expertise to the role of panel chair. Panel seeks to achieve the need to be welcoming to participating whilst at the same time being vigorous in ensuring it is fulfilling its duties. The panel chair person has attended a number of regional events including one on the new report formats for children and is a member of the Regional Independent Chairs Group.

During the year there was a change to the Adoption Agency Medical Advisor with the Consultant Community Paediatrician returning to fulfil this crucial role. We are appreciative of the flexibility to meet with prospective adopters to inform on specific medical issues at short notice.

We also saw the resignation of our independent social worker in December 2013 and were delighted to appoint a DMBC care management team manager into panel in April 2014 to meet the panel requirements for specialist child care and adoption skills and add capacity to the central list.

The educational psychology input to panel activities has been very constructive especially as we match increasing numbers of children in reception year with known complex needs. Panels role is an independent vetting of decision making, so knowledge from this specialism is particularly beneficial with all the changes to provision of additional support criteria and adoptive placements requiring school transfer unto a new local authority area.

#### **4.9 Developments in Special Guardianship**

Special Guardianship surgeries, held by the Assistant Team Manager continue to be well attended and interest remains high in this permanence route. **9** children became the subject of SGO orders in the review period; of which **8** were formerly Looked After child by connected other (family and friends) placements. The remaining child became the subject of an SGO granted to his former foster carers. Processes are in place to prepare the support plans and financial arrangements for these permanence placements. There are many challenges in progressing the initial interest into completion of the legal orders and increased tracking activities will seek to address to add pressure to complete the necessary case and legal work to make this a reality, .

In each case a support plan is agreed and will include a financial support package; the addition of social work time through the ARG has been targeted to assist with support plans to seek to increase use of this option. The co-location of the adoption and fostering team ensures that the best adoption support strategies can be considered for

SGO support, including consultation and parenting courses. There is a need to further develop services for managing complex issues of post order contact and parenting the child with trauma and attachment issues to support more orders being secured.

## 5. Summary

- 2013-2014 was a very active and successful year for Dudley Adoption Service with very strong performance in placing children into well prepared adoptive families carefully and more quickly
- We performed especially well in making sibling placements with Dudley approved families. All included at least one school age child.
- We slightly increased the numbers of approved families available and all matches were to a Dudley LAC child.
- Every child placed for adoption will have a letterbox exchange between their adoptive parent/s and birth family members. A consistent worker has reduced the need for allocation to the adoption support staff over the last 12 months freeing up time for families in crisis. This needs to be sustained as we add this years new 37 families into the long term service provision
- We maintained an increasingly high number of complex letterbox exchanges and provided intensive support to a number of adoptive families experiencing acute difficulties.
- The close working arrangements of Adoption in the Black Country ensured an effective consistent high quality reception for future adoptive parents delivering a substantial increase in enquiries to seek to adopt.
- Through **ABC** we are able to provide a unique online training programme and intensive training without delay, making sure adoption suitability is achieved more quickly.
- Dudley adoption service continues to work at and beyond capacity with a highly motivated staff group with a range of expertise in adoption work. The appointment of 2 additional social workers has contributed to improvement in performance and lifted the teams' moral.
- Media coverage of adoption is beneficial and the message is that we need to recruit, educate and support adoptive parents to meet the real needs of the children waiting for adoption. We have children waiting for this resource and want to support new families on their life journey with their adopted child.

- Adoption Scorecards have had the impact of ensuring that every stage of care planning is under scrutiny and strong tracking mechanisms put in place to identify patterns and make improvements for each child who can benefit from early adoption placement.
- Adoption is most effective with pre school children where there is time to form an emotional safe haven that is the base of all future relationships and it is positive that legal orders were made for an increasing number of under 2 year olds.
- Adoption can provide a highly effective early intervention service for a small number of young children originating in families where deeply entrenched difficulties remain highly resistant to change. The right children are being sought adoption in this locality and we are making improvements in placing them at the earliest opportunity to ensure maximum benefit for all parties.
- The Dudley Adoption Service is fortunate to be able to draw upon the expertise of the in house clinical psychology consultants to actively prepare and support new adoptive families, intervening early to redress potential issues. These unique arrangements also support families in acute crisis at any stage of their adoption journey.
- The Dudley Adoption Service continues to offer new initiatives to develop to meet the ever complex needs of today's adoptive families. These are well publicised and take up from adoptive parents and young people is high.
- The Dudley Adoption Service moved to Mary Steven's Park in April 2014 and staff are adjusting to the new demands of this venue and opportunities to work in more agile ways. Arrangements are in place to ensure that birth parents letters to their children in their adoptive families continue to be exchanged effectively.

Helen Maybee  
Adoption Service Manager

Indarjit Gill-Johal  
Assistant Team Manager



**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

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

**Fostering Service Annual Report**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To present the annual report on the Fostering Service in Dudley for 2013/14 to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

**Background**

2. Local Authorities are required under the Children Act 1989 Section 17 (6) as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to provide accommodation for children in need who require it as a result of:
  - there being no person with parental responsibility for them
  - their being lost or abandoned
  - their carers being prevented (for whatever reason) from providing them with suitable accommodation
3. The Fostering Service in Dudley provides a comprehensive range of fostering provision working closely with the Social Work Teams to secure appropriate placements for looked after children. The Service also provides family finding for children who require permanent foster placements, recruits, train and supervises mainstream foster carers and Family and Friends foster carers and facilitates carers support groups and groups for young people in care and birth children of families who provide fostering.
4. The service delivers a specialist foster care therapeutic treatment programme known as Flipside. Flipside is an intensive placement option for a small number of children. It provides an evidence based intervention which has been nationally evaluated.
5. The fostering service is subject to inspection by OfSTED under the **Single Inspection Framework for the inspection of children in need of help, protection; children looked after and care leavers**. The fostering service is included within the key

judgement that OfSTED makes in relation to the experiences of children looked after and achieving permanence. Specific criteria that we are judged against is:

- Children live in stable placements where they are helped to build positive relationships and maintain contact with their family and friends where this remains in their best interest.
- Permanent homes are found for children and young people with out unnecessary delay.
- Their needs are met and they live with their brothers and sisters if that is assessed as being in their best interests.
- They do not experience placement moves unless they are part of a return home or in accordance with their plans for their future.
- They develop safe and secure relationships with adults that persist over time.
- When support is needed children, young people and families are able to access it for as long as it is needed, throughout their childhood and beyond.

The fostering service was last inspected in October 2012 this was a stand alone inspection and it was judged to be adequate.

6. The Government has maintained its focus on improving services for looked after children with a focus on ensuring that all looked after children receive high quality care, particularly in relation to stability and quality of long term foster placements. In order to achieve this they are promoting and supporting Local Authorities in providing foster carers with appropriate training and support and active monitoring of the stability of foster placements provided by Local Authorities. To support children and young people who have left care they have required Local Authorities to implement the so called 'staying put' arrangements that will enable young people 18 and over, up until the age of 21 to have the possibility of staying with their foster carers.
7. Attached at Appendix 1 is the annual report of the Fostering Service which details levels of service, placement activity, key achievements and future developments for the service.

## **Finance**

8. The total funding for 2013/14 for the Fostering Service is as follows:

	<u>Revised Revenue Budget</u>	<u>Other Income</u>	<u>Grant Income</u>	<u>Total Funding</u>
Internal Fostering Service (including Price Street)	899,600	0	0	<b>899,600</b>

Fostering Allowances	4,901,400	0	0	<b>4,901,400</b>
Treatment Foster Care	738,700	121,400	0	<b>860,100</b>
Intensive Evidence Based Programme Grant (KEEP/MTFC/Sector Advisor). Figure is based on actual funding spent during 2013/14.	0	0	155,785	<b>155,785</b>
Independent Fostering Agencies	9,565,3000	0	0	<b>9,565,300</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,105,000</b>	<b>121,400</b>	<b>155,785</b>	<b>16,382,185</b>

Budgets reflected above do not include departmental administrative recharges.

### **Law**

9. The law relating the Local Authority's duty to provide foster care services is governed by the Children Act 1989 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

### **Equality Impact**

10. The provision of a fostering service contributes to the provision of stable, secure and safe care for children looked after in order that they can achieve good life chance outcomes. 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 receive the support, care and security that we would wish for our own children.

### **Recommendations**

11. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee receive and make comments where appropriate to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services on the annual report of the Fostering Service.

Pauline Sharratt  
Interim Director of Children's Services



Contact Officer: Jane Prashar  
Divisional Lead for Looked after Children  
Telephone: 01384 815803  
Email: [jane.prahshar@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:jane.prahshar@dudley.gov.uk)

**ANNUAL REPORT  
TO:  
THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**April 2014**

***The operation of the Fostering Service and the work of the Fostering Panel  
2013-2014***

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- To report on the activities of the Fostering Service during 2013/2014
- To review the work of the Fostering Panel
- To identify priorities for 2014/15

**BACKGROUND**

Local Authorities are required under the Children Act 1989 Section 17 (6) as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to provide accommodation for children in need who require it as a result of:

- There being no person with parental responsibility for them
- Their being lost or abandoned
- Their care is being prevented for whatever reason from providing them with suitable accommodation

All Fostering Services are governed by the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011. This framework outlines the minimum requirements and standards with which a Fostering Service is expected to comply and against which they are inspected by Ofsted under the new single inspection framework, *The Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers* (April 2014)

The Dudley Fostering Service was last inspected in October 2012 and was given an 'Adequate' judgement.

**EVALUATION OF PROGRESS 2013/2014**

**Placements/Matching**

Nationally the numbers of Looked After children are increasing and this trend has been reflected in Dudley. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 there were 757 children Looked After, with year on year growth reflecting a 39% increase since March 2009 (543 children Looked After). The majority of looked after children within Dudley are accommodated with foster carers with only a small number of children placed in residential settings.

As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 we also had 100 children who will not be returning home, for whom permanency through long term fostering has been identified as the Care Plan. These children need to be matched to existing carers or new families found for them. At the end of the year, two additional staff were appointed to concentrate on this aspect of our work and a new policy framework has been devised to ensure that

these children are either matched to their existing carers or have families found for them in a timely manner (12 month time frame). There are also a significant number of young people in foster care for whom alternatives such as Special Guardianship or a Residence Order may be an appropriate outcome rather than remaining looked after. The Service will aim to promote alternative care with these carers as appropriate.

In addition, we have a number of young people who are approaching their 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday for whom remaining with their former Foster Carers is a matter of choice and which we would wish to support. To this end in collaboration with the 14+ Team we have currently completed a new framework to ensure they can 'Stay Put' incorporating a consistent approach to young people in a variety of situations. In the short term however this is likely to have an impact on the availability of some carers to take further placements until these young people have moved on.

The service whilst it has attracted new carers over the year has not been able to grow at a pace which can sufficiently meet the increased demand for placements. Therefore to ensure effective matching and maintain good placement stability 277 children have had to be placed externally with 236 placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and 37 placed in residential provision. An additional 2 children were placed in residential schools, one child was placed for a residential assessment and one young person was placed in a secure unit.

Dudley along with 6 other Regional Authorities is part of a Fostering Framework Agreement in relation to placements. There are over 40 independent providers signed up to the agreement, which in effect set a pricing structure for the commissioning of independent fostering placements. The placements are procured on a spot purchase basis and dependent on availability, allows the Authority to select placements appropriate to individual need against a pre-arranged price. When the framework went live in April 2011 the Directorate saved almost £259,000 by transferring costs to the cheaper rates offered on existing placements. At the outset we had 119 external placements, we now have 242. Since the contract commenced there have been no increases in the charging for placements offered by providers within the framework therefore this is continuing to provide significant savings to the Authority.

The increased demand for placements is not restricted to Dudley, with many local authorities finding themselves with a lack of sufficient placements within internal resources. In Dudley we have had a significant demand for specialist placements for large sibling groups and we have identified through our analysis of the Looked After children population that there have been specific pressure points within the looked after children population with regard to new admissions. The largest demand this year for placements has come from the need for placements for children aged 0-4.

## **Flipside**

The Fostering Service continues to provide a therapeutic approach to fostering through Flipside who provide placements for a number of highly complex young people within the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care Model (MTFC) and in addition support a large number of mainstream and family and Friends carers through the highly successful Keeping Foster Carers Trained and Support Programmes (KEEP) (See App 1.1). Both of these programme are highly regarded evidence based interventions which have been promoted by the DfE for 10 years. Dudley was an early adopter of both of these successful programmes.

KEEP is a 16 session Positive Parenting Training Programme (20 weeks KEEP Safe) aimed at Mainstream Foster Carers and Family and Friends Carers in order to improve their skills and resilience when looking after challenging children. The

programmes are based on Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory and Brain Science and delivers core principles through providing carers with a training group that offers them both practical skills and support. The main aim of this is to provide foster carers with the confidence to use new behaviour management strategies to bring about behavioural change for children and young people.

### **Family and Friends Fostering**

The approval of Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers is increasingly seen as a placement of choice for many children. Clearly if children can secure placements within their wider family and friends networks this has significant benefits for them. Panel approved 30 Family and Friends households during this year with a further 20 partially completed at the year end.

Many requests for the assessments of Family and Friends Carers are directed through Care Proceedings by the courts. The Fostering Service has had to adjust to new Court timetables for Care Proceedings. This has meant the sourcing of assessors at an earlier stage in the process. Additionally, the Courts are insisting on shorter timescales for completion of them, which is not in line with the Fostering Regulations (16 weeks) and causes additional pressures.

Dudley provides ongoing support and training to Family and Friends Carers as well as remuneration which is on a par with mainstream carers (without a fee element) and is also in line with national policy direction in relation to equity of treatment for Family and Friends Carers.

To ensure that our decision making processes around Initial Viability Assessments are as realistic and as comprehensive as possible, a high level of liaison between the Fostering Service and the fieldwork Social Work teams is required to ensure the application of National Minimum Standards to Family and Friends situations.

### **Recruitment**

The Service works diligently to recruit new carers and has an annual recruitment plan. All new mainstream carers are offered a fee on full approval in line with all Local Authorities in the West Midlands and Independent Fostering Agencies which makes the Service more competitive in terms of its ability to attract carers.

This Fostering Service had 13 carers approved at Panel during this year and aims to recruit a further 20 during 2014-2015. We do have a loyal though aging profile of Foster Carers, many of whom are likely to retire in the next 2-3 years which is a cause for concern.

Indeed 16 caring households were deregistered this year due mainly to resignation (9) and retirement (3) with one set of carers becoming adopters and another moving to an IFA. Two further carers were deregistered due to failing to meeting the Fostering Standards.

Currently 2 Supervising Fostering Social Workers take the lead on recruitment of Foster Carers with the remainder of the Team offering support at recruitment events which are held regularly throughout the year. We annually participate in the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) publicity campaign 'Fostering Fortnight'.

Effective recruitment of carers will remain a challenge for the Service in the year ahead.

### **Training**

The Fostering Service has focussed on ways to improve the number of carers undertaking the Children's Workforce Development Standards (now Training and Development Standards) As of 31 March 2014, a further 94 individual carers had completed their Children's Development Standards course. This figure includes Family and Friends carers.

Training is an important facet of the support that Dudley offers to its Foster Carers. A comprehensive programme of mandatory training to meet the National Minimum Standards 2011 is delivered in addition to specific training which particular carers may require to undertake their particular responsibilities.

Furthermore when assessments are undertaken prior to approval a plan is in place to ensure that work is completed during the assessment that will contribute to the T&D standards portfolio following approval ensuring that the standards are completed in a timely manner (within the prescribed time frame). We still however have some carers who have been approved for some years who have not managed to complete their portfolios.

### **Placement Planning/Delegated Authority**

The Fostering Service continues to arrange initial Placement Planning Meetings within 5 days of a child being placed (in an emergency placement) and also promotes the completion of the Delegated Authority process. Delegated Authority is part of the Placement Agreement Meeting which aims to provide clarity over the areas of responsibility for a Looked After child and attempts to 'normalise' the placement experience for them. The Delegated Authority is thereafter reviewed within the Looked After Children's review process at 6 monthly intervals.

### **Foster Carer Reviews**

The review process implemented in 2011 continues to work well and is seen as a robust way of assuring the quality of placements. It was particularly recognised as an area of good practice by Ofsted in the last inspection. During 2013-2014 227 reviews were independently chaired, however the Service is significantly under resourced in terms of IRO capacity to chair these reviews and many have to be chaired by through sourcing external provision. Unless capacity increases there is a risk that reviews may not be undertaken within the required time frame thereby leading to a breach of the regulations.

Within the review process children and young people are actively involved in providing feedback about the placements they live in and the care they receive and this is seen as integral to decision making about their care.

All first reviews are presented to Fostering Panel (14) as are reviews following Concerns or Allegations (2). A further 46 reviews were presented to the Quality Assurance meeting which is held bi-monthly

The Independent Reviewing Officer for Fostering prepares an annual report for the Fostering Service summarising the emergent practice issues arising from the reviews she chairs (this year a total of 85).

### **Black Country Collaborative Working**

Work has commenced with the Black Country Authorities (Walsall, Wolverhampton, and Sandwell) in relation to Skills to Foster training which is working well and pools resources.

Proposals were made around joint marketing and recruitment which would develop a Black Country brand around fostering similar to the one which is already in place with regard to adoption in the Black Country. Regrettably little progress has been made primarily due to variable commitment across the Black Country Authorities. Clarification is being sought regarding the level of commitment that can be secured from the 4 Assistant Directors of the Black Country Authorities to determine if this is something to which we still want to commit resources.

## **Conclusions**

There are currently a number of challenges faced by the Fostering Service:

- the continuing rise in the number of Looked After children and the pressure on placements as a result;
- the aging profile of our existing Foster Carers;
- the continuing demand for assessments of Family and Friends (Connected Person) often within short time frames;
- Matching and family finding for a significant number of children requiring permanent fostering.
- The shortfall in IRO capacity to undertake Foster Carer Reviews leading to the risk that reviews will go out of time and breach the Regulations
- Completion of the outstanding Training and Development Standards for all historically approved carers.

## **Action Plan For 2014/15**

- Develop and implement a recruitment strategy for permanent carers and address the needs of those children requiring permanency in long term fostering placements through the provision of placements.
- Promote the take up of Special Guardianship Orders/Residence Orders with those Foster Carers and young people for whom this is an appropriate permanency option
- Provide a consistent response to those young people reaching 18yrs of age who wish to remain with their former foster carers through implementing the new 'Staying Put' policy framework.
- Recruit 20 new mainstream Foster Carers for all age ranges.
- Continue to provide a full range of Multi Dimensional Treatment programmes and deliver the KEEP safe programme for carers of adolescents and KEEP for carers of younger aged children 3-6yrs
- Continue to promote treatment foster care through leading on and acting as mentor in developing MTFC across the 'Black Country' locality.
- Develop our activities to capture the 'voice of the child' more effectively and continue to work with the Children in Care Council in the development of our service.
- Improve activities to identify themes from Foster Carer Reviews to influence service delivery and improve outcomes for young people in foster care.
- Continue to aim for closer collaborative working across the region seeking opportunities through the Fostering Consortium for joint training, joined up services and joint recruitment

- Keep under review the allocation of roles and responsibilities within the Service to ensure that the allocation of resources is targeted effectively and the identification of future resource requirements is identified.
- Seek additional IRO resources to ensure that all Foster Carer Reviews are conducted within the statutory time frame.

**Signed:**

Fostering Service Manager ..... Date

Fostering Panel Chair ..... Date

## KEEP – Annual Report 2013-2014

In the last 12 months of running KEEP as part of the Dudley Fostering Training resource, there has been a significant amount of progress and there continues to be extremely positive feedback about its effectiveness from both the carers who participate and the Social Workers who support them.

KEEP is a 16 session Positive Parenting Training Programme (20 weeks KEEP Safe) based around principles set out by Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (i.e. FLIPSIDE) however is aimed at Mainstream Foster Carers and Family and Friends Carers in order to improve their skills and resilience when looking after challenging children. This programme is based on Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory and Brain Science and is delivers these principles by providing carers with a training group that offers them both practical skills and support. The main aim of this is to provide foster carers with the confidence to use new behaviour management strategies in order to implement positive behaviour change for children and young people.

Since April 2013 KEEP Standard (5-12 years) has run two complete programmes (groups 10 and 11) and is preparing to run the third group (group 12) in October/November 2014. Groups 10 and 11 were comprised of 9 carers each, 8 of which being Family and Friends and 10 Mainstream. Referrals for group 12 are high and it is hoped that it will contain 9-10 carers, to date 7 are Family and Friends Placements and 3 are Mainstream.

Early 2012, Dudley was successful in receiving a further grant directly from the Department for Education to enable the development and expansion of KEEP. This bid was successful due to the excellent reputation that Dudley has for the effective implementation of both MTFC and KEEP. As a result of the new period of DfE funding, we are now offering a complete package of KEEP support. KEEP Safe (12 – 18 years) has delivered four, full, 20 week programmes. There have been 36 carers through the Safe programme, 11 of which were Family and Friends and 25 Mainstream. KEEP-P (3 – 6 years) has also delivered four complete 16 week groups. There have been 24 carers through in total. From a National perspective, Dudley is the only Local Authority UK wide to be successfully implementing all three adaptations of the KEEP Programme, which is a huge complement to the hard work of the Fostering Service, KEEP Facilitators and the carers who have been involved.

In terms of sustainability of these referrals, currently we have a waiting list for each adaptation of KEEP and the forecast is that there will be a further KEEP Safe group running from September 2014, a further KEEP-P group running from September 2014 and a further KEEP Standard from October/November 2014.

Within our Supervising Social Work team, we have developed a skills base of KEEP facilitation and expertise. Two staff are trained to deliver all three KEEP Programmes (one of which is a fully accredited Licensed Trainer and Consultant for KEEP Standard and KEEP Safe), one member of staff is trained in KEEP-P, one additional member (Assistant Team Manager) to



deliver KEEP Standard (as a back up) and one member of staff trained in both KEEP Standard and KEEP Safe.

As part of the DfE monies, funding was available to support the accreditation of two facilitators in each of the models. Dudley in the last 12 months has been successful in accrediting KEEP staff in each of the models they deliver. From March 2014 Dudley has 2 staff fully accredited in KEEP Standard, two staff fully accredited in KEEP Safe and Dudley were proud to boast the full accreditation of a KEEP-P facilitator. This was a first both Nationally and Internationally, which continues to demonstrate the high level of service Dudley provides; this dedication continues to be recognised throughout the KEEP world. Currently an application is being processed for our second fully accredited KEEP-P Facilitator. Confirmation of this application is anticipated early July 2014.

At this stage, Dudley will be the only Local Authority in the UK to have two staff accredited in every KEEP model. Accreditation in these models is valid for 12 months; therefore post March 2015 planning is required around the ability to meet the continued accreditation costs per facilitator. Until this date however, costs are covered by the DfE allowance.

Resulting from the bid to expand KEEP, Dudley developed a central role in the formation of the Black Country Consortium. Through this, our neighbouring authorities, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton continue to be supported in the implementation of KEEP Standard. Due to the experience Dudley has, we have taken a directive role and there continues to be a Local Steering Group at a strategic level and an operational level (attended by KEEP Facilitators) within which we have developed our ability to work in partnership with other agencies to sustain the KEEP intervention. The consortium has now reached a point in its planning where neighbouring sites are looking to Dudley to provide support with their expansion of each of the KEEP models. This planning is in its infancy and negotiations will continue in the coming months.

KEEP is primarily an Evidence Based Programme and Dudley continues to be part of an ongoing National Research programme to effectively evidence the benefits and impact of KEEP for both children and carers. Dudley Facilitators continue to be actively involved in the collection of intake and post intervention data which is included into National statistics, but also contributes to our own Service Evaluation. Qualitative evidence has frequently reported the success of KEEP in Dudley, however, our statistical project reports continue to demonstrate that for all models, KEEP has significantly reduced the number of challenging behaviours presented by children and young people, significantly reduced the levels of stress reported by carers, significantly improved the positive and pro-social qualities displayed by children and young people and significantly reduced the use of potentially negligent parenting styles in favour of more positive strategies. These results are not only shown directly post intervention, but are also sustained both 6 and 12 months post KEEP. Dudley's next composite project report is due in August 2014 and it is expected that trends will continue to demonstrate

significant change. It continues to be an ongoing yet important challenge for facilitators to collect this information, strengthen the evidence around KEEP and the results it delivers for both young people and their families.

Finally, due to the positive approach Dudley has to KEEP and the high quality of carers that have been through the programme, the KEEP Team were enlisted by the DfE to be part of a National KEEP promotional film to progress interest in KEEP both Nationally and Internationally. Several KEEP carers and staff were involved in this project and their engagement was greatly appreciated. The feedback that our carers gave was viewed as extremely positive and their stories feature heavily in the KEEP DVD. This DVD was produced by Whitewood and Flemming and was officially launched in Dudley on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014. The event was attended by Colin Waterman (Director of the National Implementation Service for Evidence Based Interventions), Pauline Sharratt (Acting Director of Children's Services), John Polychronakis (Chief Executive) Cllr. Tim Crumpton, Jane Prashar (Acting Assistant Director) and other service managers involved in the implementation of KEEP and Fostering Services. The KEEP Film was received very positively by all and feedback clearly highlighted KEEP as a demonstration of excellent practice, not just by the carers involved, but the hard work and dedication of the facilitators who make the support and training package a success.

M Moss  
Service Manager  
Flipside Therapeutic Programme