
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 13th September 2012

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Annual Report of the Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service 2011/12

Purpose of Report

1. To present the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee with the annual report of Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service for 2011/12.

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 to ensure that the services meeting the national minimum stated for Local Authority adoption services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Children's Act 2002 and the Adoption Service Regulations 2005. The service was last inspected in November 2010. The overall Judgement for 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 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 which is funded from the Children and Adolescence Mental Health Grant.
7. In March 2011 the government published an action plan for adoption 'tackling delay' which sets out the governments actions to reform the system so that children needing adoption are placed with a permanent family more quickly. In addition in chapter 3 of the plan adoption score cards for all Local Authority were published. The score cards set out performance and provide a basis for authorities to assess their own performance, compare it with other Local Authorities and to inform discussions with partners including the courts- see Appendix 1. In June the Department for Education published amendments to the statutory guidance on adoption to reflect the changes to be implemented by the adoption agencies (panel and consequential amendments) regulations 2012 which will come into force on the 1st September 2012.
8. The primary change made by the regulations is that adoption panels will no longer be involved in the agencies process of deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption when the court will be involved in the decision. Panel will still be required to consider places and make recommendations where the child's parents consent for the child to be placed for adoption. Where the child's parents are not prepared to consent, where proceedings are ongoing or where the child has no parents, the case must be directed to the agency decision maker who is the Assistant Director, Children & Families.
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 2011/12.

Finance

10. The Local Authority Adoption Service budget for 2011/12 was £1,058,800. The current 2012/13 budget is £1,164,300; this is inclusive of staffing costs, but excludes any departmental administrative recharges.

Law

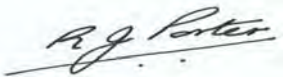
11. The Adoption Children Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain an adoption service including arrangements for the provision of adoption support services and an inter-country adoption service.

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 disadvantaged by being in care and that they achieve 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 2011/12.



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