

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 25 FEBRUARY 2013

REPORT ON: ADOPTION SERVICE PLAN 2013 - 2016

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 81-2013

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides the proposed Adoption Service Plan 2013 – 2016, (Appendix 1). The local authority is required to prepare and publish a plan for the provision of the adoption service in its area under Section 4 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the content of the report and approves the plan.

2.2 To note the Adoption Service Plan builds on existing good practice and provides a clear framework for service development focused on improving positive outcomes for Dundee's children.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 ADOPTION SERVICE PLAN 2013 - 2016

4.1 The local authority is required to prepare and publish a plan for the provision of the adoption service in its area under Section 4 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007.

4.2 This is a new statutory requirement and thus the first such plan to be published by Dundee City Council.

4.3 The local authority is required to review the plan periodically. This plan is intended to last for three years and will be reviewed in line with the review of the Integrated Children's Services plan.

4.4 Key outcomes from the Adoption Service Plan will be reflected in Dundee City Council's Integrated Children's Services Plan 2013 – 2016.

4.5 The Scottish Government have indicated an expectation that the local authority should take account of its response to the Care and Permanence Planning for Looked after Children in Scotland 2011 report in the Adoption Service Plan. The Plan needs to set out how the local authority intends to engage in the process of implementation.

4.6 The Scottish Government have indicated an expectation that the Adoption Service Plan will also set out how the local authority intends to use the National Adoption Register for Scotland.

4.7 Dundee City Council's Adoption Service Plan addresses the expectations of the Government.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Equality Impact Assessment. There are no major issues.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/>

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

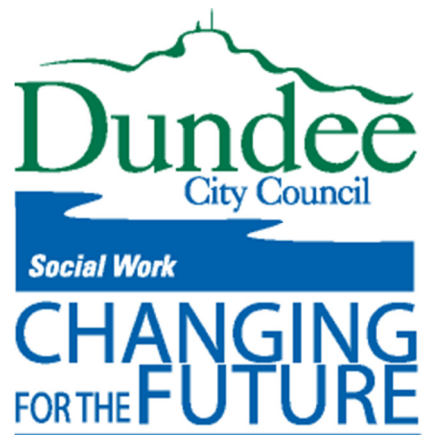
The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and Head of Democratic and Legal services have been consulted in preparation of this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Adoption Service Plan.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

DATE: 05/02/13



**DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL
ADOPTION SERVICE PLAN
2013 – 2016**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Under Section 4 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, the local authority is required to prepare and publish a plan for the provision of the adoption service in its area. The local authority must consult the relevant Health Board and any voluntary agencies which either represents the interests of people who use or are likely to use the adoption service or which provide adoption services.
- 1.2 Consultation has taken place with key partners in the voluntary sector and Tayside Health Board via the Strategic Planning Group.
- 1.3 This adoption plan outlines:
- The range and needs of children requiring adoption;
 - The recruitment, preparation and approval of adopters;
 - The range of processes involved in permanence planning, including the functions and administration of adoption and permanence panels and Agency Decision Makers;
 - The support available to adoptive families, adopted children, adopted adults and others affected by adoption both prior to and post adoption.
 - The training and development required by staff and panel members delivering adoption services.
- 1.4 A detailed adoption service improvement plan is appended.

2.0 Underpinning principles

Dundee City Council strongly supports adoption as a means of providing children with the lifelong security and stability they need in order to develop as resilient, health, happy and well-adjusted individuals.

We believe that:

- The child should always be at the centre of decision-making and that their views and wishes should be taken into account
- Planning should also take into account the views of the child's extended birth family so far as these are consistent with the best interests of the child
- Consideration must be given to the child's racial, cultural, ethnic, religious and language needs
- Decisions in relation to a child's long term needs must be made on the basis of clear evidence, robust assessment and within a timescale that takes full account of the needs of the child
- The lifelong needs of adopted children and the pre and post support needs of adoptive families must be considered in the decision-making processes for children.
- Planning should take into account the support needs of the child's extended birth family.
- Sufficient numbers of adoptive families need to be available to meet the needs of children identified as requiring adoptive placements.

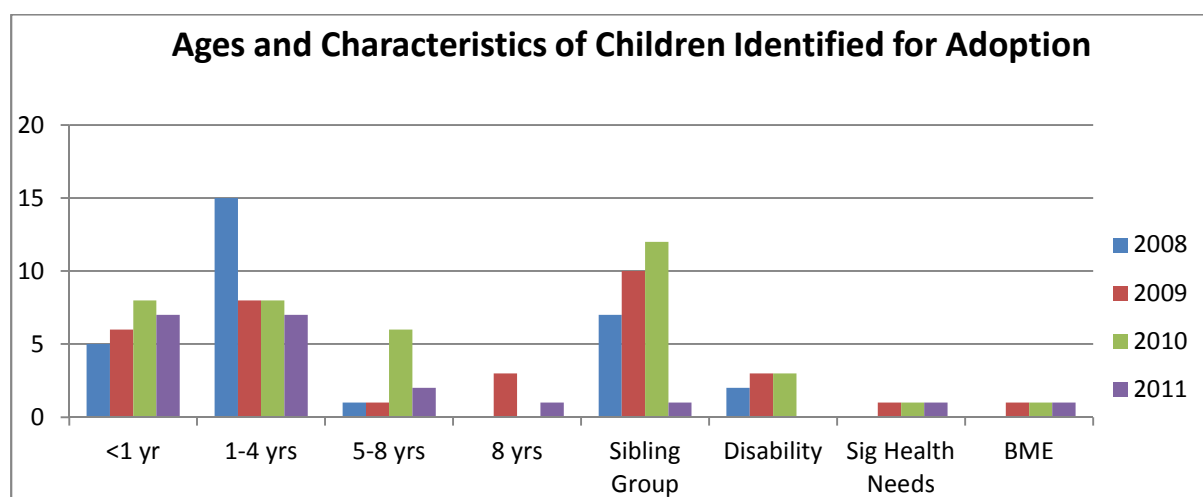
- Professionals working with children, birth families and adoptive families should be confident and competent in their roles.
- Participation with adopted children, adopters and birth families is key to the development of the service.

3.0 The range and needs of children requiring adoption

3.1 Government statistics show the number of children who are looked after and accommodated away from birth families has risen every year since 1993. Children are being accommodated at increasingly younger ages and staying in care longer. The numbers of children affected by chronic parental alcohol and substance misuse are increasing. Such national trends are a strong indicator that the numbers of children and young people requiring permanent substitute care, including adoption, are likely to continue to increase for the foreseeable future.

3.2 The national picture is clearly reflected within Dundee; the numbers of children Looked After and Accommodated have risen from 355 in 2007 to 496 in 2011; a 40% increase. During the same period, perhaps surprisingly, the numbers of children who have been identified as requiring permanent substitute care have remained relatively stable at between 39 – 45 per year (of whom an average of 20 per year were identified for adoption). It is anticipated that improvements in early and effective care planning for children, which take account of emerging evidence from research, will see these numbers rise. There are some indications of this beginning to happen, with a sharp increase to 81 children being identified as requiring permanent substitute care in 2012.

3.3 The ages and characteristics of children identified for adoption have fluctuated but overall show an increase in the numbers of older children and sibling groups whilst the numbers of pre-school children have remained high.



- 3.4 Historically, adoption has often been viewed as a realistic option only for younger children, and those without complex health needs. Where children were part of a large sibling group of 3 or more, adoption has been considered achievable only by splitting the children up. Over recent years Dundee has aspired to achieve adoption for a wider range of children and has had some success in doing so, making use of a range of creative recruitment and family finding activities. However, there remains much room for improvement ; those children for whom adoption was originally identified but not achieved over the past 5 years, were predominantly aged 5+ years, were part of a sibling group of 3 or more or who had a significant disability.
- 3.5 On the basis of current statistics and projected growth it would be reasonable to expect that an average of 30 adoption placements will be required each year in the following 3 years. It is unlikely that all of these will be able to be found in-house and a number are likely to require intensive recruitment or family finding activities to secure placements. Service planning must take these factors into consideration.
- 3.6 Whilst adoption will often be the preferred option in terms of offering lifelong security and stability this is not achieved for all children. A number of factors will influence outcomes: well-evidenced and robust permanence plans need to be made and implemented timeously; numbers of suitable prospective adopters must be assessed and approved; supports, including practical and financial supports, need to be available to children and prospective families to make adoption a viable option and legal processes need to support child-focused and early decision-making.

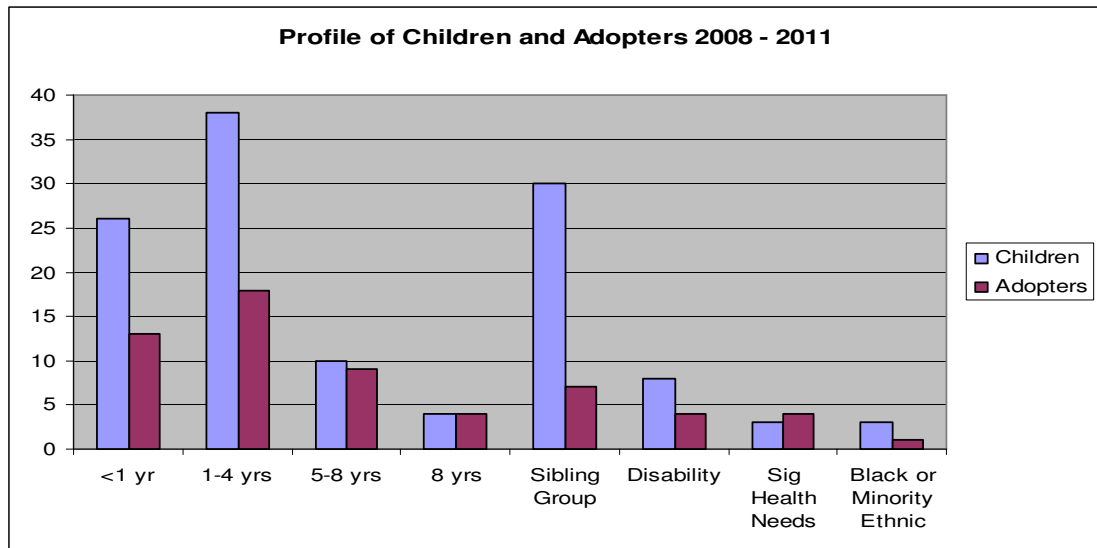
4.0 Recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters

- 4.1 Dundee City Council social Work Department has a dedicated Recruitment Group, which includes foster carers and adopters, who are responsible for structuring and implementing the combined recruitment programme for both fostering and adoption. Recruitment activities have included multi-media campaigns on TV, newspapers and radio, leaflet drops, awareness-raising at community events and participation in national events such as National Fostering Fortnight and National Adoption Week.

Dundee City Council Family Placement Service also has a dedicated website which provides general information about fostering and adoption within Dundee. The internet is increasingly used as the first point of contact between those interested in fostering and adoption and the local authority.

Data is collected on the placement needs of children and young people requiring foster or adoptive placements. Information is also collected on enquirers responding to recruitment activities, those currently undergoing assessment and approved families awaiting placements. This is used to inform and implement recruitment strategies and family finding activities, which are reviewed quarterly.

- 4.2 The Adoption & Permanent Fostering Resource Team, based with the Council's Family Placement Service, has capacity to assess, approve and support a maximum of 18 new adopters or permanent foster carers per year. The average number of new approvals in the past 5 years has been 11.
- 4.3 In addition to the shortfall in actual numbers of adoptive families there has also been a significant mismatch in the approval categories of adopters and the profiles of children needing placements as demonstrated in the chart below. No Dundee adopters were approved in 2008 or 2010 – 11 for a child over the age of 5 years. The expansion of the numbers and range of adopters recruited by Dundee is a key area for service improvement.



- 4.4 Amongst other factors this has led to an increased reliance on seeking adoptive placements from external resources. Of 69 children matched with adopters during the period 2008 – 11, 45% were placed with adopters approved by external agencies. There are significant initial costs in securing such placements which need to be taken account of in service planning.
- 4.5 Dundee has a well-established practice of taking a proactive and creative approach to seeking adoptive families for children when unable to meet this need within its own resources. Dundee is a founder member of the North East Resource Sharing Consortium and secured placements for 9 harder to place children between 2005 -2009. More recently Scotland's Adoption Register has become a source of identifying links between children and adoptive families; 18 children have been referred and matches secured for 5, with a further 5 involved in active links. Dundee also makes regular use of specialist publications, such as Be My Parent and Scottish Children Waiting to profile children; has been involved in Adoption Exchange Days during 2012 and in 2010/11 engaged in a targeted recruitment project with Scottish Adoption aimed at securing a placement for a specific sibling group using the national press.
- 4.6 Notwithstanding the proposals for increasing the numbers of Dundee approved adopters, it is acknowledged that there will always be a need to secure some adoptive placements externally and it is Dundee City Council's intention to continue to make use of all existing resources to identify such placements without delay for children. Where an appropriate in-house link cannot be identified within 4 weeks, children will be referred to Scotland's Adoption Register. Where an appropriate link is not secured for approved adopters within 3 months of approval they will be asked if they wish to be referred to the Register.
- 4.7 Whilst the Adoption Service Plan mainly relates to children accommodated by the Council there is a legal requirement for the local authority to assess the suitability of applicants who wish to provide adoptive placements to children from outwith the UK. These are known as intercountry adoptions. The Council must assess applicants in accordance with the requirements of the specific country from which the applicants wish to adopt and may levy a charge to the applicants for undertaking this assessment. Historically Dundee has been requested to undertake very few such assessments and only 1 in the past 5 years.

- 4.8 The local authority is also required to submit a court report, upon request, on applicants who wish to adopt a child under Section 19, Adoption & Children (Scotland) Act 2007. This relates to step parents or relatives of a child who apply to adopt the child. The child must have lived with the applicant(s) for at least a year and the local authority must have sufficient opportunities to see the child with the applicant(s) and prepare a report for the adoption hearing. Requests for such reports average 2 per year.

5.0 Permanence planning processes

- 5.1 Dundee City Council has a strong commitment to ensuring that robust, early and effective plans are made for children and young people who cannot live at home. These plans must be made on the basis of sound assessment of the child's needs and progressed within timescales which meet these needs.

The council has well-established operating procedures in place which detail the expectations on all parties in relation to permanence planning. These include the expectation that long-term plans for children who are accommodated will be considered at a Looked After Child Review no later than 6 months from the date of accommodation and that permanence reports will be presented to the Adoption & Permanence Panel within 12 weeks of a LAAC Review decision to pursue a plan for permanence. These procedures are in the process of being reviewed and an update will be completed by April 2013.

- 5.2 Adherence to the timescales noted above are monitored on an individual case basis by Team Managers, Service Managers and the Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering and flagged up where drift is occurring. Overall recording of permanence timescales is undertaken via a database system for recording permanence statistics. Quarterly reports are provided for the Children's Services Management Team and also feed into the Permanence Action Plan.
- 5.3 The Permanence Action Plan was established in 2008 and is reviewed annually. It provides quantitative and qualitative information in relation to all aspects of permanence planning, from care planning decision making to family finding activities and legal processes. In essence it is the service improvement plan for adoption and permanence.

- 5.4 A recent review has been undertaken of the Adoption & Permanence Panels, including the composition and structure of panel membership, induction and training needs of panels, and administrative processes. The volume of business referred to the panels has increased steadily over the past 10 years resulting in additional panels being established and several new members recruited over the past 12 months. From January 2013 weekly Adoption & Permanence Panels will be in place, each of which will include council employees and independent members with knowledge about adoption. These include a number of adopters.

There is a statutory requirement for a Legal Adviser and a Medical Adviser to be appointed to the Panels and to either provide written advice or to attend panel meetings to provide such advice. In practice the advisers to Dundee's panels do both. The expanding number of cases requiring advice coupled with the additional panel meetings are stretching the resources of the Medical and Legal Advisers and discussions are on-going in relation to how this can best be managed in future. Quarterly meetings are scheduled with both Medical and Legal Advisers to consider service improvements.

5.5 Dundee currently has 2 agency decision makers drawn from within Strategy, Performance and Support Services who consider all permanence plans for children which have been presented to the Panel, all applicants to adopt and all matches between adopters and children. At present there is one decision maker for Adoption & Permanence Panel and another for Fostering Panel but each will deputise for the other when required. At least 1 additional agency decision maker is required to manage the extra panels scheduled and enquiries are currently underway to identify a suitable person.

5.6 Once a child has been confirmed by the agency decision maker as requiring permanence they are referred to the Family Finding Group. This group currently consists of members of the Family Placement Service but there are plans underway to expand the membership of this group to include workers or managers from the locality children and families teams.

The Family Finding Group meets monthly with the case responsible workers for children who require permanent placements and identifies potential links. The group also offers advice and practical assistance with family finding activities for children who cannot be placed within Dundee's own resources. This group monitors timescales for progressing these activities to ensure no unnecessary delays for children. It is hoped that the remit of the group can be expanded to include greater direct assistance in relation to family finding but this will be dependent on additional resources/staff time being made available.

5.7 Delays in progressing plans for children through the Children's Hearing and court systems are a further concern. Whilst there are limits to what the local authority can do to address any delays which occur within these systems, there are actions that can be taken to ensure that reports are submitted in good order and within required timescales. A new system is to be put in place by January 2013 to track legal processes.

6.0 Adoption support

6.1 The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 placed increased requirements on local authorities to provide adoption support services to a range of people affected by adoption, including adopted children and adults, birth parents and extended birth family and adoptive families. Adoption support may include financial support to adopters, support groups, counselling and mediation, therapeutic services to adopted children, training, records searches and intermediary services.

6.2 In accordance with legislation, Dundee reviewed and revised its adoption allowance scheme in 2010. The aim of the scheme was to open up the possibility of adoption as an option for children with complex needs or particular issues which required greater expenditure than adopters could realistically afford given their financial circumstances. This was to include foster carers who wished to offer adoption to children for whom they were currently caring. At the present time 47 children are in receipt of an adoption allowance, with 9 of these having been provided under the revised scheme.

The scheme will be reviewed during 2013.

6.3 Dundee currently provides a range of adoption services, either directly or through commissioned services. These include:

- Adoption support groups to adoptive families facilitated by adoption resource workers
- Letterbox contact between adoptive families and birth families facilitated by designated adoption support worker
- Search and intermediary services provided by Birthlink.
- Adoption counselling, search and intermediary services provided by adoption support worker
- Direct support to adoptive families by adoption resource worker at least up to the point of an adoption order being granted
- Adopters newsletter
- Training opportunities for adopters
- Child psychotherapy and consultation to carers/adopters, commissioned from Barnardos
- Adoption UK membership for 12 months post-placement for adoptive families
- Individual counselling and support to birth families
- Direct contact between children and members of the birth family, including siblings.

6.4 There is an expectation that all children who are identified for adoption will have an adoption support plan drawn up at the point of being presented to the Adoption & Permanence Panel. This plan is drawn up in consultation with representatives from education and health and any funding or resource implications are agreed by the respective agencies prior to presenting the plan to Panel. The adoption support plan is then reviewed at the point of matching with an adoptive family. A support plan is also drawn up and reviewed in respect of adoptive families.

For the majority of young people with additional education support needs, those needs would be met adequately and efficiently as required by the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 as amended through a staged intervention process.

6.5 It is acknowledged that the support services currently offered to birth families, in particular birth parents, may not meet their needs as comprehensively as would be wished. In part, this is because birth parents frequently are not in agreement with the plans for their child, thus may have a relatively poor working relationship with Social Work Department and can find it difficult to request or accept support from the agency who they consider is responsible for them losing the care of their child. Options are being explored with voluntary organisations to commission additional support services for birth families.

7.0 Training and development for staff and panel members

7.1 All Adoption & Permanence Panel members receive an induction pack and induction training, providing essential information on the statutory framework in respect of adoption, permanence and looked after children, the roles and responsibilities of the panel and professionals involved in permanence planning and the national care standards.

7.2 Panel training is provided on an on-going basis, minimum 3 times a year with a focus on legislative changes, good practice guidance and research outcomes. This training is provided alongside staff, carers or panel members from neighbouring authorities if appropriate.

7.3 The Panel Chair or Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering attends the BAAF Panel Chair Forum, which is held 3 times a year and provides regular feedback to staff and panel members on relevant developments.

- 7.4 Dundee has made a significant commitment over the past 4 years to ensuring that front line staff and managers are knowledgeable and skilled in preparing assessments of children's needs based on a sound understanding of attachment, child development and resilience building. A core training programme was initiated in 2008 on child-centred assessment and care planning and rolled out throughout Children's Services. A programme of additional training on permanence planning has been provided at least annually since 2007.
- 7.5 In 2010 Dundee commissioned BAAF to deliver a series of training days on permanence planning. A small group of Dundee's Children's Services operational staff and Learning and Workforce Development staff received appropriate training and support to enable them to jointly deliver the training alongside BAAF in the first 6 months and thereafter to deliver the programme on a rolling basis. Initially delivery of the training was focused on Children's Services but was then extended to other Social Work staff. This training will continue to be delivered as part of core training at least 4 times a year. It is anticipated that this will be extended further to other key stakeholders, such as Education and Health over the next 3 years.
- 7.6 Family placement staff have accessed training relevant training on assessing gay and lesbian carers, black and minority ethnic carers and single carers as part of the drive to increase the range of people who may be approved as adopters and permanent carers. The service improvement plan and team development plans will inform future training and development provision.

8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1 Dundee provides a professional and supportive adoption service, which is subject to self-evaluation and external scrutiny by the Care Inspectorate on an annual basis. Care Inspectorate reports over the past 6 years have graded the service as either Good or Very Good.
- 8.2 The service operates within a context of increasing demands, changes to legislation and policy and research information which informs developing good practice. Dundee acknowledges that there is a need to ensure greater responsiveness to the views of service users and key stakeholders in service provision and delivery. Specific improvements are outlined in the appended Service Improvement Plan.
- 8.3 The Adoption Service Plan is consistent with the desired outcomes for Dundee's children as detailed in Dundee City Council's Integrated Children's Services Plan 2013 – 16.
- 8.4 The local authority is obliged to review its plan from time to time. This plan is intended to last for three years and will be reviewed in line with the review of the Integrated Children's Services plan.

ADOPTION SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2013 - 16

DESIRED OUTCOME	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS	ACTION TO BE TAKEN	LEAD OFFICER AND SUPPORTING OFFICERS	TARGET/TIMESCALE
<p>Children are provided with care that promotes healthy, active and achieving lives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who require permanence planning are identified early. • Children who require permanence have robust care plans. • Care plans are progressed within timescales that meet the child's developmental and health needs. • Adoptive families are provided with adequate support to meet the needs of the adopted child. • Adoptive families are actively involved in service development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete comprehensive assessments and care plans for all children within 6 months of accommodation. • Consider permanence decisions at LAAC Reviews no later than 6 months after child accommodated. • Complete permanence reports within 12 weeks of LAAC Review decision for permanence. • Establish permanence monitoring systems and produce quarterly reports for consideration and action by Children's Services Management Team. • Review Permanence Action Plan to annually by Children's Services Extended Management Team. 	<p>Team Managers/Review Team</p> <p>Team Managers/Review Team</p> <p>Team Managers/Service Managers</p> <p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering/Senior Officer Information</p> <p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering/Children's Services Management Team</p>	<p>December 2013</p> <p>December 2013</p> <p>December 2013</p> <p>April 2013</p> <p>April 2013 and thereafter annually</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete review of Adoption and Permanence Panel. • Agree practice standards for permanence, including quality assurance and work prioritisation. • Develop quality assurance tools in permanence planning for use by staff, Adoption and Permanence Panel, agency decision makers. • Complete annual self-assessment returns for Care Inspectorate, progress service improvement plan arising from this and aim for excellence in inspection reports. • Ensure adoption support plans are in place for all children identified for adoption. • Review adoption allowance scheme. 	<p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering</p> <p>Children's Services Management Team</p> <p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering/Team Managers</p> <p>Service Manager, Resources/Senior officer, Adoption & Fostering</p> <p>Social Workers/Team Managers</p> <p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering/Section Leader, Welfare Rights</p>	<p>March 2013</p> <p>September 2013</p> <p>September 2013</p> <p>December 2013</p> <p>December 2013</p> <p>December 2013</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate management information in respect of adoption support services and publish an annual report. • Ensure adopters are represented on Adoption and Permanence Panel, service working groups, consultations. 	<p>Adoption Support Worker</p> <p>December 2013</p> <p>Team Manager, Adoption & Permanence Resource Team/Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering</p> <p>December 2013</p>
Children will feel safe, nurtured and included	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people have the opportunity to live with their family for life as early as possible and with minimum disruption prior to adoption • Extended family are fully explored as potential permanent carers • A confident and skilled workforce progress plans to effectively meet children's needs • The numbers and range of adoptive families will be sufficient to meet the needs of children requiring adoption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete genograms for all families, including contact details prior to/soon after children being accommodated. • Undertake family meetings/full exploration of all known extended family prior to/immediately after children being accommodated. • Provide permanence planning training to all Children's Services staff. • Review adoption and permanence procedures to be reviewed. 	<p>Social Workers/Team Managers</p> <p>September 2013</p> <p>Team Managers/Review Team</p> <p>September 2013</p> <p>Learning & Workforce Development/Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering</p> <p>December 2014</p> <p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering</p> <p>September 2013</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish recruitment strategy for adopters to be established. Explore joint recruitment activities within local partnerships and with neighbouring councils. Ensure links with prospective adopters are progressed without undue delay. Refer children to North East Consortium, Adoption Register and other family finding fora immediately if no potential links identified in-house. 	<p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering/Recruitment Group</p> <p>Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering</p> <p>Team Managers/Family Finding Group</p> <p>Social Workers/Family Finding Group</p>	<p>September 2013</p> <p>December 2013</p> <p>September 2013</p> <p>September 2013</p>
Children and birth families are respected and included	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birth parents' understand the processes involved in permanence planning for their child. Birth families are fully involved in planning for their child. Birth families are provided with advice and support in relation to permanence planning and adoption. The views of children and birth families are taken into account in service development and delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure birth parents are invited to attend Adoption Panels, or to express their views in an alternative way. Ensure all birth parents are provided with permanence reports relating to their child. Ensure children and young people are invited to attend Adoption panel to express their views wherever appropriate. 	<p>Social Workers</p> <p>Social Workers</p> <p>Social Workers</p>	<p>June 2013</p> <p>June 2013</p> <p>June 2013</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop adoption support services for birth parents in partnership with voluntary organisations. • Establish system for collation of children and birth family views – annual reports to be produced. 	<p>Adoption Support Worker/Locality Service Manager</p> <p>Adoption Support Worker</p>	<p>December 2013</p> <p>September 2013</p>
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