

## ADOPTION & PERMANENCY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW:

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor David Simmonds
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Deputy Leader and Education & Children's Services
<b>Officer Contact</b>	Gill Oswell, Central Services
<b>Papers with report</b>	Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee Final Report

### HEADLINE INFORMATION

<b>Purpose of report</b>	To receive the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee report on the review on Adoption & Permanency for Looked After Children
<b>Contribution to our plans and strategies</b>	Putting residents first, keeping children safe and supporting children to leave care to permanence without delay.
<b>Financial Cost</b>	There are no direct cost implications arising from this report.
<b>Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s)</b>	Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	N/A

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Welcomes the attached report of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee on Adoption & Permanency for Looked After Children and the work carried out by officers of the Adoption & Permanence Team .
2. Accepts the recommendations of the Policy Overview Committee as reflected below:

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

- i) That the local arrangements for concurrent fostering and adoption approvals are strengthened taking advantage of statutory changes as soon as they are available.
- ii) The criteria for recruiting adopters should reflect statutory requirements and that Hillingdon applicants should be welcomed and approved on the basis only of their suitability to offer a permanent home to a child. Local processes to improve the efficiency of the approval process will continue to be strengthened to take advantage

of changes in regulatory framework as soon as they are available and any improvements possible ahead of statutory change will be made.

iii) The recruitment and attraction campaign for prospective adopters is improved by developing a range of approaches targeted at finding adopters who will meet the needs of harder to place children. This will include developing a recruitment website which is attractive to prospective adopters and gives good quality information to encourage them to offer a loving home to children who are waiting.

iv) That the proposed changes in Panel processes are implemented once regulatory changes are in place.

v) That a Hillingdon Scorecard for Adoption is developed and is used to report to the Adoption Panel, Corporate Parenting Board and as a management tool to monitor the progress of these proposals. The Hillingdon scorecard would be amended to meet any new statutory or regulatory changes.

vi)

a) That Hillingdon approved adopters should be routinely offered for exchange where there are no matched local children within 2 months of approval.

b) Funds gained from Interagency fees should be used to purchase adopters whose offer matches for any child waiting who is not matched with Hillingdon adopters. This should happen within one month of Hillingdon's Agency Decision Maker approving adoption as their plan.

c) That where children are not matched with Adopters within 3 months, their names will be placed on the Adoption register.

vii) Taking account of the Norgrove Family Justice Review, processes are reviewed to ensure that robust care plans minimising the need for expert witnesses and the assessment of Connected Persons delaying Care Proceedings, are devised.

viii) That the local arrangements for tracking the Permanence planning of all Looked After Children be strengthened and a regular management review of children's progress is implemented.

ix) That family finding for children waiting is focused on attracting offers for children who are harder to match with waiting carers by the use of short films of them, the development of Adoption Activity days or any other useful methods.

x) That arrangements to clarify the role of identity in matching children with prospective adopters are put in place with training provided for all staff involved in this work to ensure that children are matched without unnecessary delay wherever possible.

xi) The viability assessment of prospective Special Guardians be completed by the child's social worker before the Final Hearing of Care Proceedings unless directed otherwise by a court. The criteria for Special Guardians should be no less than that for Adopters.

xii) That a protocol is developed with local health & education partners to improve their offer to adopters offering priority access to support for adopted children in line with recommendations from the Action Plan for Adoption.

**xiii) That parallel permanency planning be undertaken for a Child to ensure that there was no delay in finding a permanent home.**

## **INFORMATION**

### **Reasons for recommendation**

The aim of the review was to look at the Adoption and Permanence arrangements in Hillingdon and to examine their effectiveness in terms of ensuring that all Hillingdon children that need a substitute permanent home are placed to meet their needs, within acceptable timescales.

### **Alternative options considered / risk management**

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend one or more of the Committee's recommendations.

### **Supporting Information**

In November 2011 the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee agreed to undertake a review of Adoption & Permanency for Looked After Children.

The terms of reference of the review were as follows:

- To review the overall position of legal permanence options for children including Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)
- To explore the performance of LB Hillingdon against the national trends
- To discover obstacles to placing children for permanence in the context of national and local issues
- To review the value of recruiting local adopters to ensure that a "traded market" of adopters is economically viable to ensure faster matching of children to suitable placements
- To explore issues of matching in securing permanence for children against their dimensions of need in order to secure stability and longevity of placements.
- To explore barriers in the assessment of prospective adopters taking account of the program to reform Adoption announced in December 2011.
- To review the associated costs of securing permanence for looked after children against the relative costs of them remaining looked after.
- To review the arrangements for post adoption support and the contribution to securing stability for children who achieve legal permanence against the likely costs of them returning to care.
- To make recommendations to Cabinet based on the outcome of this review.

The review looked at the issues in relation to providing stable permanent homes as an outcome for Children who are looked after by the Borough.

The review took place between November 2011 and April 2012 and received evidence from the Council's Service Manager for Children's Resources, a Social Work Consultant, Three Adoptive parents, this Authority's Adoption Panel Chairman and the Panel's Legal Adviser.

The review focused on looking at the effectiveness of Adoption & Permanence arrangements in Hillingdon with a view to ensuring that all Hillingdon children that need a substitute permanent home are placed to meet their needs, within acceptable timescale.

## **Government Review on Adoption**

The Narey review, which was commissioned in 2011 set up an expert working group comprising of key partners from across the adoption sector to help redesign and speed up the adoption process.

The review covered the process from the initial assessment, with a view to moving swiftly to a position where a pool of adoptive parents who were about to meet the needs of children awaiting adoption.

The working group developed a set of reform proposals, which would build on existing best practice and a revised assessment form to be published by the British Association for Adoption & Fostering. Following on from the reforms, the Government produced an Action Plan for Adoption in March 2012, which contains the most urgent changes needed to the adoption system. Further consultation will take place later in 2012 on the regulatory changes that will come into force in early 2013.

## **Financial Implications**

None.

## **EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES**

### **What will be the effect of the recommendation?**

The recommendations will enable the adoption process in Hillingdon to move forward to reflect the agenda being set nationally with likely statutory changes that will be brought forward following the Government review of Adoption.

## **Consultation Carried Out or Required**

The Committee took evidence from a range of witnesses as described in the review report.

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Corporate Finance**

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and confirms that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations set out above.

### **Legal**

There are no legal implications arising out of this report save to note that under the Council's Constitution, Cabinet has the appropriate powers to adopt recommendations proposed at the outset of this report.

The statutory authority for adopting the recommendations will be by virtue of Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which makes provision for 'a general power of competence' for local authorities in England. The 'power' gives local authorities the power to do anything an individual can do unless specifically prohibited by law. This includes the power to act in the interest of their communities.

The recommendations seek to put Hillingdon's residents first by allowing Looked After Children to leave care to loving stable homes, improving services for Looked After Children and keeping Hillingdon's resident children healthy and safe.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL