

## Foreword

As Councillors, we understand the importance of our role as corporate parents. We want to ensure, as any parent would, that children in our care receive the best possible services to meet their individual needs.

We were hugely impressed by the levels of commitment shown by the professionals working in this field to giving CLA in Derby the support, care and attention that they need.

After carefully considering all of the evidence presented to us the review concludes with recommendations which we hope will improve the Adoption Timescales in Derby City Council, support our staff and most importantly have a positive impact on the Children who come into our care.

I would like to sincerely thank all those who attended our evidence gathering sessions as witnesses for their time and thoughtful contributions. I also wish to extend my thanks to Councillors Bailey, Whitby and Winter who listened to, questioned and reviewed the evidence gathered over several intensive days in March and April.

**Councillor S. Bolton, Chair of Children and Young People  
Commission 2011-2012**

## Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 22 January the Children and Young People Commission discussed their topic review choice for the municipal year 2011/12. After a lengthy debate, the Commission chose to look at 'How can the Timescale for Adoption at Derby City Council be improved?'
- 1.2 The Commission agreed that the work would be carried out across the full Commission and the Corporate Parenting Sub-Commission's work programmes to reduce the demand on Member's time and to ensure the work is completed by the end of the Municipal Year.
- 1.3 National Government had highlighted the need for timeliness in the adoption process and had emphasised the detrimental impact delays in the process had upon Children's Lives.
- 1.4 Members of the Children and Young People Commission were concerned about the increasing numbers of children in care. Foremost it was recognised that adoption provided children with a secure loving family which was felt most beneficial to the child's life chances.
- 1.5 Secondly, the commission recognised that reducing the number of Children in the Council's care would help to reduce the highly significant costs to the Council.
- 1.6 The Commission's review had 2 central aims
  - To establish whether the timescales for adoption can be reduced
  - To ensure that this would have a positive impact upon the children cared for by Derby City Council
- 1.7 The Commission believed that any time which could be saved by shortening the timescales for adoption would have positive outcomes for the Child, the adoptive parent and the Council, however, they decided that they wanted to ensure that any recommendations that may be made to improve timescales would have a positive impact on the child.

# Methodology

- 2.1 Four Members of the Children and Young People Commission agreed to form a 'review team' and to carry out the evidence gathering for the review, namely; Councillors Bailey, Bolton, Winter and Whitby.
- 2.2 The review team received background evidence packs in early March which set out information on
- Derby City Council's Web Pages on Adoption
  - Adoption Tracking – the process for tracking potential adoptive children through the system
  - Adoption Care Planning
  - Children in Care data and Performance Summary
  - Inter Agency Adoption fees
  - Adoption Activity day Information
  - Recruitment Activity for Adoption
  - Blueprint for Speeding up Adoption – BBC Article
  - Local Authorities to have Scorecards for Adoption – BBC Article
  - Government's Action Plan for Adoption

All of these documents are available on the following link [CMIS TBC]

- 2.3 Invitations to interview were delivered to and accepted by the following Professionals, Council Officers and people involved in the adoption process. All of the witnesses had a direct involvement with the adoption process in Derby.
- 2.4
- Mark Barratt – Director Specialist Services
  - Elene Constantinou – Head of Service Children In Care and Registered Services
  - Lisa Davies – Adoption Social Worker
  - Jayne Seymour – Adoption Social Worker
  - Louise Jones – Children in Care Adoption Social Worker
  - Susan Reddington – Adoptive Parent
  - Meg Staples – Independent Adoption Panel Chair
- 2.6 The Group decided not to pursue attempts to interview a service user due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the review.
- 2.7 The Commission members requested some generic background information.

## Interviews

- 3.1 The interviews were held on 19 March 2012. Follow up interviews with Mark Barratt and Elene Constantinou were held on 19 April.
- 3.2 Each of the interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. They formed the main evidence for the conclusions and recommendations at the end of the review. Witnesses were interviewed individually and in groups.
- 3.3 The interviewees were asked initially to give a brief overview of their work/experience. The review team then questioned them on their work and their professional views on the adoption processes in Derby City Council.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1 The review team met immediately following the interviews to summarise their findings and to begin to think about the recommendations they may make.
- 4.2 The review team met again on 2 May to develop their conclusions and recommendations.
- 4.3 The recommendations were approved at the Board meeting on 26 June 2012 and are therefore those of the Board and not just the review team.

### 4.4 **Statement**

The commission agreed the following statement

‘We would like to formally recognise the work that is being done across the adoption service by hardworking and dedicated staff.

Achievements are excellent especially in relation to the numbers of children who are placed in secure, positive placements and also in the stability of placements post adoption.

We recognise that all the work is being done in a climate where the numbers of children being taken into care has increased dramatically in recent times.’

### 4.5 **Urgent Recommendations**

The Commission felt that the following issues should be addressed as a matter of urgency:

### 4.6 Management issues

- 1) Social Workers levels of TOIL and holidays that are not taken should be reduced as quickly as possible and should be

- managed closely.
- 2) Case load management needs to be improved (to ensure case loads are shared equally and aren't too heavy) and there after requires careful monitoring.
  - 3) Supervision needs to be tightened for inexperienced social workers attending adoption panels.
  - 4) Management should ensure that maternity cover is in place immediately when a permanent member of staff goes on maternity leave.

#### 4.7 Court Procedures

- 1) Social workers should explore family trees as extensively as possible to ensure there are no family members who may be able to take on responsibilities for a child prior to a case coming to court.
- 2) In order to maximise a child's chances of adoption the Commission will ask the Court to consider reducing the timescales they ask social workers to search for a sibling group placement.

#### 4.8 Adoption Panels

- 1) Adoption panels should be arranged to meet demand. A months notice should be provided to the medical advisors of additional panels.

#### 4.9 Resources

- 1) More social Workers are needed in the adoption service.

#### 4.10 **Longer term aims/improvements** Paperwork

- 1) Every effort should be made to reduce paperwork and duplication of work to save time.

#### 4.11 Consortia arrangements

- 1) A report on the East Midlands Consortium and how it works should be brought to a future Children and Young People Commission Meeting.

#### 4.12 Adoption Activity days

- 1) The Commission are highly supportive of adoption activity days and would welcome more.

#### 4.13 CORAM/Harrow model

- 1) The Commission asked that the Cabinet Member explores the CORAM/Harrow model of placing a child who may be adopted with potential adoptive parents in a fostering arrangement as has been done in the Harrow/CORAM partnership.