

Adoption Service

Annual Report

April 2010 – March 2011



www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/adoption

Introduction

The Adoption Team delivers statutory functions in relation to the adoption and support of Milton Keynes children and the recruitment of prospective adopters under the Children's Act 2002 & 2005 and amended legislation and regulations. The team cover pre and post adoption support work, Special Guardianship and Residence Order placements, family contacts and work with adults and families who have experienced adoption.



Purpose of the Adoption Service

- To recruit, train and assess those interested in becoming adopters.
- To find potential adoptive parents for children where their care plans are permanence through adoption.
- To approve potential adopters and match them with children whose plan for adoption has been agreed at Milton Keynes Adoption Panel.
- Support adoptive families through to adoption to ensure placements remain stable and to minimise adoption placement break down.
- To provide a Post Adoption service to adoptive families, children who are adopted and birth families.
- To assist adults to trace their birth families and to offer counselling when required
- To assess step-parent adoption applications (non-agency adoption applications).
- To provide a post adoption contact service for each adopted child and their family of origin, both direct, and indirect.
- To counsel/support a birth parent, who may wish to relinquish their child for adoption.
- To work with other local authorities, and voluntary adoption agencies, in order to secure the best possible outcomes for children requiring permanency through adoption.

Staffing

Staff numbers have remained stable during this period. However the management of the team has undergone significant change, as both the Deputy and Team Managers left their posts in 2010. An interim team manager was appointed in July 2011 and in December 2011 the Deputy Manager became the Acting Team Manager on an interim basis.

One Senior Practitioner has retired and two members of staff reduced their hours. Work flow has increased so it has been difficult to undertake and process cases within expected time scales. However the team has managed to achieve their goals in respect of the number of children placed for adoption.

Professional development in regard to staffing remains a priority and attendance at relevant training courses when ever possible has been achieved. The adoption team and adoption panel members have an annual training day and will continue to share such expertise.

The adoption team, which covers general adoption and adoption support work, consists of (March 2011):

- 1 Full time Team Manager (vacant)
- 1 Full time Deputy Manager (Acting up as Team Manager)
- 3 Full time Social Workers
- 5 Part time Social Workers
- 1 Part time Social Work Assistant
- 1 Full time Social Work Assistant
- 1 Part time Recruitment and Retention Officer.

These posts equate to 12 full time Social work practitioners.

Service Standards

To ensure that the adoption team meets the needs of the people we serve in an equal, fair, transparent and anti-discriminatory manner.

A commitment to identify secure and permanent families for children who are unable to live with their family of origin.

Children needing permanency

There has been a significant nationwide increase of numbers of children entering the care system for which permanent homes are needed during this review period. This experience has been mirrored in Milton Keynes and these include an increase in the number of groups of siblings with complex needs.

Adoption Panel

All adoption agencies, whether local authority or voluntary adoption agency, are required to have an Adoption and Permanence Panel as laid down by Regulation 3(1) of the Adoption Agencies Regulations (AAR), 2005.

The panel meets once every three weeks, making a total of 17 panels per calendar year and considers the approval of prospective adopters and proposed matches with children freed for adoption. The panel is chaired independently by Claire Samson. The panel makes a recommendation to the agency decision maker, Alastair Gibbons, Assistant Director Specialist Services in Milton Keynes Council.

Panel membership is set by regulations and includes people with experience of adoption and an elected member. Within this period the Panel consisted of 11 members inclusive of an Independent Chair and Advisor.



Panel Activity 2010/2011

Figures as at 31 st March	2009	2010	2011
Cases presented	49	53	84
Adopters approved	9	5	7
Children placed with adopters	15	11	19
Children recommended for adoption	16	22	32
Children recommended for permanent fostering	3	6	14
Disruption Reports	3	0	3
Adoption deferred	0	2	2
Review of adoption plan	3	7	7
Ethnicity of children presented for recommendation to be placed for adoption			
A1 White British	31		
B2 White/Black African	1		

The above data shows an overall increase in the adoption team's activity during the period 2010 – 2011. It is pleasing to note the significant increase in children placed with adoptive families.

National Indicator Performance

NI 61: Timeliness of placements of looked after children for adoption following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption	Number that met timescale
The percentage of looked after children adopted during the year 2010 - 2011 who were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that they should be placed for adoption	7 out of 10 (70%) 2010/2011 target – (75%)

Our 2010/2011 target was 75% of children being placed in adoptive placements within 12 months of the decision that they should be placed for adoption. We managed to place 70% of children within this timescale, (7/10).

Reasons for not achieving 75% are that it takes longer to place sibling groups and some of the children are placed in adoptive placements but their adopters have not yet applied to the court for the adoption order or are awaiting a court date. We are confident that we will achieve this in 2011/2012 thus our new target for the coming year is 80%.

MKC Adoption Agency is regulated and inspected by Ofsted. Our last inspection was in 2009 and we achieved a 'Good' rating.

Post Adoption Work 2010/2011

Under section 3(2) (b) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, local authorities have a duty to include the provision of adoption support services. Within the adoption team, there are five workers who have specific responsibility for adoption support. They are responsible for undertaking:

- Assessments of need, as prescribed in the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005.
- Formulating, amending and reviewing adoption support plans, and attending post placement child care reviews.
- Working with families in crisis, and placements that have disrupted. Co-working with other professionals i.e. social care staff, CAMHS, and education.
- Negotiating packages of adoption support with other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies, and supporting adopters who are approved through Milton Keynes Council, with regard to inter-agency adoption support plans.
- Direct work with children - contacts and life story work.
- Involvement in the assessment and provision of financial support to adoptive families.
- Providing information and signposting - including providing access to records for professionals who are seeking information on behalf of children adopted through Milton Keynes, living in other areas.
- Organising a suitable ongoing training programme.
- Provision of birth records and counselling to adopted adults and their relatives.
- Overseeing Milton Keynes contact service register (please see below).
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The post adoption service worked with **134** families in 2010/2011 that have had children from Milton Keynes placed with them, including providing additional direct support to 27 families.

Contact Service

Contact arrangements between a child and their birth family, are usually agreed before an adoption order is granted, with the frequency and type of contact set out in a signed agreement. They are regularly reviewed in light of a child's needs over time. Milton Keynes Council offers letterbox and direct contacts to families. All such agreements are held via our contact service register.

Letterbox contact is the exchange of written information, such as birthday cards, newsletters, and, where appropriate, photographs. Direct contact is face-to-face contact between the adoptive family and the child's birth family, which might be annually or several times a year.

There are currently **235** children on Milton Keynes Council Adoption Contact Register (of which 24 children have direct face to face contact, with 17 contacts undertaken during the year). Once young people reach the age of 18, the young person is contacted to ascertain whether they wish for the contact service to continue. There are currently 12 young adults still engaged with the service.

Commissioned Post Adoption Support Services

St Francis Children's Society (SFCS) was re-commissioned to run the Open Door Service for a further 2 years from April 2010. The service has been in operation since 2001. The service level agreement includes, working with birth parents or relatives where a child is to be or has been

made the subject of an Adoption Order, a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order. SFCS worked with 44 families in 2010/2011.

The Open Door service provides independent support, advice and counselling to birth relatives who reside in Milton Keynes. The service is offered to any birth relative; this includes birth parent(s), grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings.

The Post Adoption Centre (PAC) based in London, was re-commissioned to run an adoption support service for a further 2 years from April 2010. They have worked with 28 families in 2010/2011. They provide an advice line, information and support to anyone affected by adoption, as well as training courses and counselling sessions for adoptive families.

PACT provides an overseas adoption service and has been commissioned again in 2011 to provide such services. Although we do not use them regularly they have overseen and supported 2 adoptions in 2010/2011.

Adoption Information and Intermediary Services

Section 98 of the Children's and Adoption Act 2002 provides a framework for Adoption Agencies, in respect of their provision of an intermediary service for adopted adults and their families.

Between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011, there were 28 new referrals for adopted adults and birth relatives of adopted people seeking information surrounding the circumstances of their adoption and possible reunion with birth family members or adopted relatives. The overall referral rate has declined slightly over recent years– (see below).

Summary

Year	Referrals
2007/2008	40
2008/2009	38
2009/2010	36
2010/2011	28

Relinquishing birth parents

During the period 2010/2011 two referrals were received from birth mothers, requesting that their unborn child be relinquished for adoption. Both children went on to be successfully placed for adoption.

Step Parent Adoptions

During the period there were no enquiries about step-parent adoption.

Costs

The total budget for 2010 – 2011 was £1,526,316. Final figures for this period showed an overspend of £98,000. The budget was set with an expected income of £48,000 to be raised by Milton Keynes offering our approved adopters to other local authorities. In this period no adopters were 'sold'.

The costs of supporting adoptive placements increased as 19 children were placed in 2010/2011 with adoptive families. This is an increase of 8 children from 2009/2010.

An increase in children being placed and the on-going costs for children already placed under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) resulted in an over spend of £41,000. SGO allowance cost for the year 2010/2011 amounted to £286,065.

Residence Order payments amounted to £165,554 in 2010/2011; there were no additional placements during this period. This cost is a reduction of £969 from last year. There were no increases to adoption allowances, R.O and SGO allowances in 2010/2011.

Total cost summary

Expenditure category 2010/2011	Amount £
Overall adoption costs	1,624,316
SGO maintenance payments	286,065
Residence Order Payments	165,554

Special Guardianship Orders

Special guardianship is an order made by the court that places a child or a young person to live with someone permanently and gives legal status for non parents who will care for that child or young person in a long term secure placement. The Local Authority pays an allowance to the carers which can last until the child reaches 18.

We have a specialist Special Guardianship worker whose role is to assess and support those who wish to care for a child via the making of a special guardianship order.

There have been 60 children who have become subject to Special Guardianship Orders granted in Milton Keynes since 2006. On average 15 - 20 families are receiving support and advice at any one time. We support these families by offering support in regard to:

- Offering training
- Arranging family contacts
- Advice regarding a child's behaviour and emotional needs
- General support and guidance/signposting
- Provision of financial assistance
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During 2010/2011, 11 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) were granted in respect of 8 children in care (CIC) and 3 other children.

Overall 60 children are being offered support and guidance from Milton Keynes Council which comprises 41 former children in care and 19 other children.

YEAR	Children placed with adopters	Children adopted	Special Guardianship - CIC	Special Guardianship - other
10 - 11	19	10	8	3
09-10	11	14	7	0
08- 09	14	16	8	8
07- 08	12	15	6	7
06 - 07	14	18	12	1

Residence Orders

A residence order (RO) is an order from the court to say who the child should live with. A court can order a joint residence order, which is an order to say that the child shall spend time with both parents. A residence order usually expires when the young person reaches the age of 16, but in some exceptional circumstances the order can last until the young person is 18. Residence Orders have steadily decreased over the last 5 years.

Engagement with Service Users

We continue to seek evaluation on our adoption training courses. Overall the feedback is positive and from this we have redesigned the style of training, to embrace current adoption legislation and good practices. We have a wider range of guest speakers and training tools to offer to adopters, such as DVD's and reading materials that we can loan out. Existing adopters join staff to train prospective adopters and all adopters are able to contribute to an adoption newsletter.

June 2010 saw the first of our 6 monthly newsletters which covered training and articles of interest to adopters. We received positive feedback and we intend to deliver the newsletter every six months to help us communicate more effectively with adoptive families.

We have also introduced a series of support groups which are designed for adults who have experienced adoption. This is a joint venture with NORCAP who are an organisation that supports adults affected by adoption.

Achievements in 2010/11

- Increased amount of adoptive assessments placed before the Adoption Panel.
- Increased the number of children placed with adoptive families.
- Introduced of an adoption newsletter.
- Effective targeted advertising has led to increased enquiries from prospective adopters.
- Gradual increase during the year in potential adopters attending the adoption preparation courses which now run three times a year.
- Increase in the web hits seen on the MK Adoption web site.
- An increased range of training opportunities for adopters and special guardians.
- An opportunity for families with a SGO to obtain time limited and focused support from children's social care.
- A duty service that runs all day.
- Evaluations of training and assessment processes being implemented to improve services.



Areas for development 2011/2012

National Minimum Standards - Adoption Regulations and Guidance 2011 come in to force from 1st April 2011. These will need to be fully implemented and will pose a challenge to the service to ensure compliance. Developing a streamlined Adoption Panel which has a 'central list' of members at its core to ensure cases are heard in a timely and effective manner is one of the changes we will be implementing in 2011.

Special Guardianship/Family and Friends Care – By the 30th September 2011 Local Authorities will be required to publish Standards and Guidance setting out their approach towards promoting and supporting such placements.

Family Justice Review – Adoption processes may be changed as a result of some of the recommendations within this review, especially in regard to Adoption Panels no longer being required to decide whether adoption is in a child's best interests.

ICS/Electronic recording – ICS is being implemented in Adoption in 2011.

Review of all adoption, SGO, and RO allowances – These will be reviewed in a systematic way using an effective IT system.

Staffing – To maintain a stable and efficient workforce led by a performance and outcomes driven management team.

Support Groups – We will organise support groups for adopters and special guardians.

Placement of children - We aim to place more children within our own consortium area. This is when local authorities and adoption agencies work together to share resources and to place children effectively. Our current consortium area comprises Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and St Francis, a Voluntary Adoption Agency. We also remain committed to using the National Adoption Register and other Local Authorities to source good adoptive placements for children.

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www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/adoption



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