

APPENDIX 1



Moray Council

Adoption Plan

Review: - November 2013
Next Review: - September 2016

Introduction

The Moray Council believes that children should be brought up by their birth families in a safe and enriching environment. Where this is not possible and a child's needs are best met through adoption the Council is committed to providing a comprehensive service to all of those affected.

Section 4 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 requires local authorities 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 represent the interests of people who use, or are likely to use, the adoption service or which provide adoption services. The draft plan was issued for consultation directly to key representatives within statutory and voluntary organisation and through the community planning partnership: no comments were received.

The Adoption Plan has been informed by: -

- (i) The recommendations of Care Commission / Care Inspectorate Inspections in February & May 2011.
- (ii) General feedback from, and specific consultation undertaken with, Adopters over an extended period of time.
- (iii) Analysis within the adoption team of the trends and needs of children and of prospective adopters.
- (iv) Reference to the draft Moray Children and Young Peoples Services Plan 2013-2016 and to the Single Outcome Agreement, agreed by the Community Planning Partnership www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file61066.pdf Moray Children and Young Peoples Services Plan

The aims of the adoption service are consistent with: -

National priorities and Outcomes: -

No 4 – our young people are successful learners, confident individuals and effective contributors

No 5 - seeking to ensure our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.

No 8 - improving life chances for children, young people and families at risk.

Community Planning priorities: -

No 2 - Ambitious and confident children and young people.

No 3 - living healthier, sustainable independent lives safeguarded from harm.

Council priorities reflected in the Integrated Children's Services plan: -

Corporate Parenting - Looked After children.

Equalities and Child protection.

The Objectives of the service, as reflected in this plan, are to: -

- Take forward the development of an effective adoption service not only within Moray but also across Scotland which through outcome based integrated processes ensure activities and actions are consistent with identified local and national need.
- Seek to provide adoptive families in Moray, for those children who require this form of permanence.
- Ensure practice is consistent with Getting it Right for Every Child.
- Ensure people interested in becoming adoptive parents (including those wishing to adopt a child from overseas) will be responded to promptly, given clear information about training, assessment, approval and support.
- Prepare and support adoptive families prior to and following a child's placement.
- Ensure that birth families will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process, and that they have access to adoption support services.
- Meet the needs of those whose lives are affected by adoption.

To achieve this The Moray Council will: -

- Ensure that the service provided to children, adoptive families, birth parents and families meets the legislative requirements and the National Care Standards for adoption agencies.
- Operate the service within Moray Council's Equality policies;
- Consult on the quality of the service and use feedback to inform development.
- Work with Local Integrated Assessment Processes in place in Moray to ensure that children who require adoption have their views actively taken into account and their needs fully assessed.
- Use Moray's matching criteria to select a family with attention to the child's individual needs including religion and ethnic and cultural background.
- Work with the Scottish Adoption Register, and will continue its membership of the North East of Scotland placement Consortium. Membership of the North East of Scotland placement Consortium will be reviewed on an annual basis given developments with the Scottish Adoption Register and changes within the Consortium.
- Where appropriate feature a child in either "Scottish Children Waiting" or the BAAF journal "Be My Parent".
- Seek to assess and approve prospective adoptive parents who will be able to meet the placement needs of children from Moray who require adoptive families. If it is not appropriate to place Moray children locally we will seek to match children from elsewhere in Scotland.
- Prepare, assess, train and support prospective adoptive parents.
- Prepare reports for Moray's Permanence Panel: any other Agency's Permanence Panel and reports for court.

- Provide post adoption support to adoptive parents and to those who have been adopted, our aim is that this would include a range of provision including access to individual counselling.
- Support arrangements for contact both before and after adoption consistent with the assessed needs of the child.
- Provide an adoption support service for adopted adults seeking information about their history.
- Provide a service to birth parents and birth families both before and after the adoption.
- Ensure that the workforce is appropriately skilled trained and managed.

Current provision

The different elements of the adoption service that Moray Council currently provides are: -

- Information leaflets for those expressing an interest in adoption
http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_41390.html
- Initial contact and as appropriate home visits for those expressing an interest in adoption. For details contact the **Team Secretary on 01343 563568.**
- Adoption Preparation groups for those invited to pursue their interest in becoming prospective adopters
http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_41393.html
- The undertaking of adoption assessments
http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_41399.html
- Family finding for children requiring adoption, both from within and outwith Moray
http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_41397.html
- Post adoption support for those effected by adoption
http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_41396.html

For information about: -

- The Adoption Allowance Scheme
- The Post Adoption Letterbox Scheme
- Information for Birth Parents
- Information on Birth Records Counselling and Adoption Support

Please contact: -

Pat Robertson, Social Worker at pat.robertson@moray.gov.uk

Sarah Akehurst, Social Worker at sarah.akehurst@moray.gov.uk

Information about those above listed services can be accessed through The Moray Council website or the links indicated.

This Adoption Plan outlines: -

1. Information relating to the numbers of children who have required adoption.
2. The preparation, assessment, approval and training of adopters.
3. The remit of the Permanence Monitoring and Development Group
4. The Functions and Administration of the Permanence Panel and Agency Decision Maker
5. Support available to adoptive families, adoptive children, adopted adults and others affected by adoption, both prior to and post adoption.
6. The training and development required by staff and panel members delivering adoption services.
7. Use of ICT in – Service Delivery and development.

The local authority is obliged to review its adoption services plan. For consistency in approach review of this plan will be consistent with the timing of review of Moray Council's Integrated Children's Services Plan. Following this revision, 2013, the next is due 2016. Key stakeholders will be consulted.

An annual report on adoption work will be completed by those workers who form the adoption team. It will be produced at the same time that Moray Council produces an Annual Report of the Permanence Panel which is in the last quarter of the financial year.

1. The range and needs of children requiring adoption

There has been a significant increase in numbers of children for whom adoptive families are required and this trend continues. Figures for 2008 - 2010 seem to have been influenced by the change in legislation, excepting that period of change, all other years have shown an increase, as indicated below. The figures listed reflect the number of children for whom adoption may be appropriate however subject to care planning their route to permanence may be achieved by other means.

2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
5	8	4	0	11	15	17

There are two main considerations affecting the numbers of children needing to be cared for in alternative families, preferably through adoption: -

- (i) The issues and needs of birth parents that negatively impact on those parents' ability to provide the care their child/ren require, to meet the child/ren's developmental needs.
- (ii) An increased emphasis on reducing drift which has resulted in improved assessment processes and Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time bound, (SMART), action plans which are outcome focussed which helps to identify children at risk at an earlier point.

Reference

http://www.scra.gov.uk/home/care_and_permanence_planning.cfm.

This report emphasises the need for analysis, evidence of analysis; SMART care planning; prevention of drift and children's needs being met with fewer changes in placement.

The implications of this are that increased numbers of children in Moray, and nationally, need adoptive families.

Placement options for Moray children requiring adoptive placements are affected by the geography of Moray and the fact that its 92,000 people live in 5/ 6 main centres.

Whether or not siblings are placed together is based on assessment of their needs. Currently the assessment tool more usually worked with to inform this assessment is the BAAF "together or apart": details and reference are contained within the Moray Looked after Child Manual. Outcome from assessment informs the ideal in terms of whether siblings should be together or apart, however options for placement also has impact. If there are too few adopters seeking to adopt a sibling group then those children remain together but in permanent foster care.

Increased numbers of Moray's children, requiring to be adopted, are placed with families that are out of Moray. Placement is based on assessment of the needs of those children's specific circumstances. More usually placements are made out of Moray where the geographical proximity to birth family is likely to be detrimental to the adoptive family. This will have been risk assessed at the appropriate stage in the planning process. In rare circumstance the specific needs of the child may result in placement being sought out of Moray.

The following statistical information is included to indicate those numbers that have applied within Moray.

Moray Children Placed within Moray

2008	4 with 3 families
2009	1 with 1 family
2010	5 with 4 families
2011	3 with 3 families.
2012	1 with 1 family
2013	0

Moray Children Placed with External Agencies/ Local Authorities

2008	8 children with 5 families
2009	1 child into 1 family
2010	3 children in 2 families
2011	3 children with 2 families
2012	4 children with 3 families
2013	3 children with 3 families

Children Placed By Other Agencies with Moray Adopters

2008/09	2 children with 2 families
2009/10	4 children with 3 families
2010/11	2 children with 1 family
2011/12	3 children with 3 families
2012/13	3 children with 3 families

Adoptive placements made in Moray by other local authorities do not have the same issues in terms of being at risk from birth family contact.

Separate from adoptive placements being actively made within Moray, there are families previously unknown to Moray, comprising parents and adoptive children who move into Moray. Many families do experience issues post adoption which requires support. For some the issues are significant and from 2008 to date there have been family breakdowns affecting 3 children who had come with their adoptive families to live in Moray. Each of these children then became Looked After Children under the supervision of the Moray Council. Each required specific out of area placements to meet their needs. Given the requirements of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and the resource implications, specific monitoring, of this source of need, will be reported within the annual adoption report and may influence future budget setting.

Intercountry Adoption

Moray Council has duties towards children who are being brought into the area from overseas, for the purpose of adoption. Moray provides the following: -

- information to prospective adopters
- adoption preparation training
- assessment of them as prospective adopters
- information to the Scottish Government

Prior to placement, depending on the country from which they intend to adopt, these prospective adopters require being reviewed either annually or bi-annually. The following links for current information should be accessed

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/partners-families/citizens-settled/children/#> or go to <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Moray Council charges prospective inter country adopters the full costs of producing Home Study Reports, presentation to the Permanence Panel and subsequent work required to achieve adoption.

Over a period of 10 years Intercountry Adoption assessments in Moray were undertaken by a Social Worker employed on a sessional basis who had the knowledge and skills required for that specialist area. In that 10 year period, there were 4 assessments resulting in 3 children being adopted: 1 set of prospective adopters withdrew.

Given the infrequency specific planning would be undertaken on a case by case basis.

2. Preparation, Assessment, Approval and training of Prospective Adopters

As indicated above given size, Moray Council has a particular difficulty making local adoption placements. As a result, most Moray children currently have to be placed with other local authorities or independent adoption agencies. Similarly the majority of adopters approved by the Moray Council are matched with children from other parts of Scotland. In consequence Moray Council Children & Families area team social workers and Adoption social workers are required to travel all over Scotland, including the islands.

It is the case that BAAF fees are both paid and received to facilitate placements, but the staff time and financial involvement in progressing such placement activity is significant. Staff time and financial involvement continues through LAC processes until the adoption is granted, and potentially longer if there are specific post adoption requirements to be met in the first three years following placement.

By January 2014 Moray will have a pool of 11 potential adopters either approved or recommended for approval. Of these prospective adoptive families three will consider sibling placements but only sibling placements up to the age of 4/5years and the other families are seeking a placement of a child as young as possible up to age 4.

Children who are awaiting adoptive placements generally have a significant level of need and this is the profile across Scotland. In the main there can be a mismatch of adopters waiting and profiles of children waiting to be matched.

Linking and matching processes require a high number of staff hours. Managing the expectations of prospective adopters and maintaining their level of knowledge and commitment whilst awaiting placement, also requires considerable staff time.

In order to manage this situation, within this plan and period of review ending 2016, the criteria for progressing adoption enquiries will be adjusted to encourage and prioritize applications from people who are willing to consider adopting: -

- (a) an older child e.g. those over 5 years of age
- (b) a child/ren with health and/or developmental needs which indicate future uncertainty
- (c) a sibling group where one of the children is of school age.

This would fit with the Scotland wide profile of children awaiting placement.

Adoption Enquiries

2008	18
2009	14
2010	14
2011	19
2012	29
2013	20

Adoption Preparation Groups

There has been 1 adoption preparation group each year since 2007, (2 in 2012) and the plan is to continue with one group per year subject to the priority criteria listed.

Each group comprises 6 full sessions. The training is based on the BAAF, Preparation to Adopt, material. Feedback from course participants is consistently positive. However social workers within the adoption team have developed these materials further in response to: -

- (i) Local placement needs and issues
- (ii) The requirement to enhance and “normalise” the understanding and impact of trauma, poor early parenting experiences and attachment for children and how these might impact on adopters seeking to meet children’s needs.

The local Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) has stated committed to participating in the preparation training and signposting to, or direct delivery of, post adoption support. A shared agenda is the need to be clear about the needs of the child/ren: the skills of parents and the match within these. A primary focus is not only attachment but also resilience.

Outcomes following Enquiry

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of participation in Prep	8	6	10	8	8	20	8
Number of Households	4	3	5	4	4	11	4
Number approved	3	3	3	3	2	6	8
Number Matched	3	3	3	3	2	3	1
Number of children placed	3	3	5	3	2	3	0
Counselled out / withdrawn	1	0	2	0	1	0	1
Not approved at Panel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assessment on hold	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Assessment in progress	0	0	0	0	1	0	2

Step-Parent and Relative Adoption

Step-parent adoption processes and assessments are the remit of Children and Families Area Teams rather than the Adoption Team. Social workers in the adoption team will offer support and advice and will work alongside area team staff when there is need. There is guidance and information available for Social Workers.

Reports are made directly to court, following request: these are not agency made placements.

3. The remit of the Permanence Monitoring and Development Group

The remit of the Permanence Monitoring and Development Group, PMDG, established in summer of 2011, is concerned with 2 of the original 5 Looked After Child Strategic Implementation Group themes: –

(i) Culture (care planning etc) refers to: -

- (a) The needs of children and young people being placed in foster and residential care in Moray
- (b) The timing of the processes that result in decisions being made about permanent care, including adoption.
- (c) Members of the team around the child being accountable/responsible for their part within those processes.
- (d) The numbers of alternative (family) placements needed by Moray's children.
- (e) Matching processes to ensure processes follow through to conclusion with little delay.

(ii) Workforce development

- (a) Training needs on a multiagency basis
- (b) Training concerned with: -

- Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009
- Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- Assessment tools and skills
- Evidence and recording
- Report writing
- Attendance at permanence panel
- Court skills
- Peer support/ opportunities for action learning sets

Membership of PMDG comprises the following: - (i) area team senior and area manager: (ii) placement services senior and manager: (iii) member of the training team: (iv) legal representative who is a member of the permanence panel: (v) Looked after child reviewing officer and (vi) corporate parenting and commissioning manager, with (vii) residential manager when required.

PMDG meets monthly and considers the needs of looked after children and young people and the needs of staff working with children and their families. PMDG members have access to: -

- (i) The register which has been jointly constructed by legal services and social work. This register details the children for whom recommendations have been made about permanence. It tracks the activities, and the timing of the activities, required to achieve permanence.
- (ii) The Children Looked After in Scotland (CLAS) statistics, used to consider which children have been accommodated for more than 6 months for whom no legal referral has been made. Access to these statistics supports members of PMDG to consider where there may be drift for children who are subject to home based supervision orders.

The purpose of the PMDG is to prevent drift and ensure children have secure and stable permanent care placements.

Within the service there has been recent restructuring which has introduced the development of continuing support teams. The focus for these teams is weighted to the needs of and permanence planning for Looked after children. Such a development will support the progression of knowledge and skills in this area of work which will result in well timed care planning for children and young people.

4. The Functions and Administration of the Permanence Panel and Agency Decision Maker

The functions and administration of Moray's fostering and permanence panels policies and procedures are reviewed annually. The panels consider the needs of increasing numbers of children needing both fostering and permanent placements and approval of prospective adopters and foster carers. The Permanence Panel constitution is consistent with legislative requirements - Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007; the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

Recommendations, made by the Panels relating to planning for children, including whether a child meets the criteria for an adoption allowance, and foster and adoptive carers, are considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The agency Decision Maker is so called because the Council is an adoption agency and as such is required to have a decision maker, hence agency decision maker.

Adoption support plans are a separate issue from adoption allowances and not the remit of the above process. Instead decisions relating to adoption support plans are the remit of: -

- (i) The Corporate Parenting and Commissioning Manager, or in absence the Continuing Support Manager AND
- (ii) The Placement Services Team Manager
With reference to the following dependent on issue
- (iii) The area manager for the child
- (iv) Relevant health representative and/or
- (v) Education representative

5. Adoption support and adoption support plans

Adoption is life changing and lifelong for all concerned. The Moray Council is committed to providing a range of ongoing supports.

Support prior to and post adoption is available to: -

- Adoptive families, adults and children
- Adopted children
- Adopted adults and others affected by adoption

The following indicate supports that will be available to those above listed however this is not an exhaustive list: -

- (a) Direct support from an identified Adoption Social Worker
- (b) Support Worker involvement
- (c) Access to Counselling Services

- (d) Support provided directly through the Moray Council's commissioning processes
- (e) Training opportunities
- (f) Letterbox Scheme
- (g) Adoption Counselling Service for adopted adults seeking information about their history.

The above indicates support generally available. Specific support will be assessed and agreed as part of a formal plan.

For the majority of young people with additional education support needs, those needs would be met adequately and efficiently [as required by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 as amended] through a staged intervention process. Processes and procedures are in place and senior management in Education and Social Care have participated in a number of meetings providing basic input on the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 legislation and requirements.

Senior management is committed to meeting needs consistent with duties within each set of legislation.

Where birth parents of adopted children continue to need support after their child has been placed for adoption, the responsibility generally will be the remit of the Children and Families Team. It is recognised that some parents are unable to work with the Agency which removed their child and placed them in permanent care. In these circumstances, other sources of support will be identified: the frequency of this will be recorded.

Where appropriate, for the needs of the child, Moray Council will support direct contact with birth relatives post adoption. Limits on this will be influenced by the location of the family following the initial three year period, defined in guidance. It remains Moray's contention that there should be National agreement that each authority should retain responsibility for facilitating contact beyond that three year period.

Once an adopted young person reaches the age of 16, they are entitled to seek information concerning their birth parents. Moray Council provides a birth records counselling service which can include a referral to Birthlink* for birth family searches.

Local authorities are required to retain the files of adopted people for 100 years.

Birth parents and relatives often seek information once their child achieves adulthood. Moray Council provides information and a support service; however birth relatives do not have a legal right to information about the adopted person. Where the whereabouts of the adopted person is known, they may be contacted to advise them that a relative wishes to make contact. Where their whereabouts are not known, **Birthlink*** (based in Edinburgh but

offering a National service at a charge to individuals) can provide a tracing service.

*Moray is not currently a member of Birthlink on the basis of the complexity of accessing the service in response to Moray's local need. Birthlink manages the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland, which enables adults involved in adoption to express their wishes about making contact with each other.

Adoption Allowances

Moray Council's Adoption Allowances Scheme was approved at Committee in December 2009.

Generally help is provided with legal expenses for the prospective adopters' application to the court to adopt. There is provision for some former foster carers to continue to receive remuneration for a period after they have adopted a child.

Post Adoption Letterbox Scheme

Moray Council has 28 arrangements within its Letterbox Scheme. This relates to the arrangements rather than the numbers of children, given arrangements do involve siblings. The Scheme was established in March 2007 and the letterbox arrangements have shown increase which is anticipated will continue to rise.

6. The training and development required by staff and panel members delivering adoption services.

Training for staff is informed by the work of the PMDG and issues as they arise with the implementation of the Looked After Child manual and the development of the continuing support teams. Panel members' training is commissioned from an independent provider: delivered twice each year and issues are identified by the panel members.

7. Use of ICT in Recording and Monitoring service delivery / developments

In terms of recording needs and resources in the coming years we have developed our Carefirst system to include a specific business object which records: -

- Request – for adoption support/ advice /etc
- Source of request
- Time taken for assessment
- Outcome of assessment
- Resources accessed
- Unmet need
- Budgetary demand and implications

This information will be used to inform: -

- (a) Training across targeted Council services, e.g. area teams and access points within the Council, this on the basis of assuming families will make contact at any point of entry to the Council, departments need to be alert to the requirements of the adoption legislation.
- (b) Service development
- (c) Budget setting

8. Conclusions

The demands made of the adoption service provided by The Moray Council continue to grow. In addition to family finding activities there is an increasing need for the provision of post adoption support. This is necessitated by the increasing complexity of children's needs. Moray.