

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 4 APRIL 2016**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

**LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND ADOPTION AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT
1ST OCTOBER – 31ST DECEMBER 2015**

Purpose of Report

1. To note the report and the activity of the Adoption Agency for the period 1st October – 31st December 2015..

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives quarterly reports from the Adoption Agency.

Background

3. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to adoption and has a Service Level Agreement with Rutland County Council. This report is therefore from the Leicestershire & Rutland Adoption Agency.
4. Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards (25.6) all Adoption Agencies are required to provide a six monthly report to the Executive¹ regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel. The next edition of this report will be the full year version in April 2016. In the interim, this Q3 report provides an update on performance and developments.

Performance

Adoption Plans

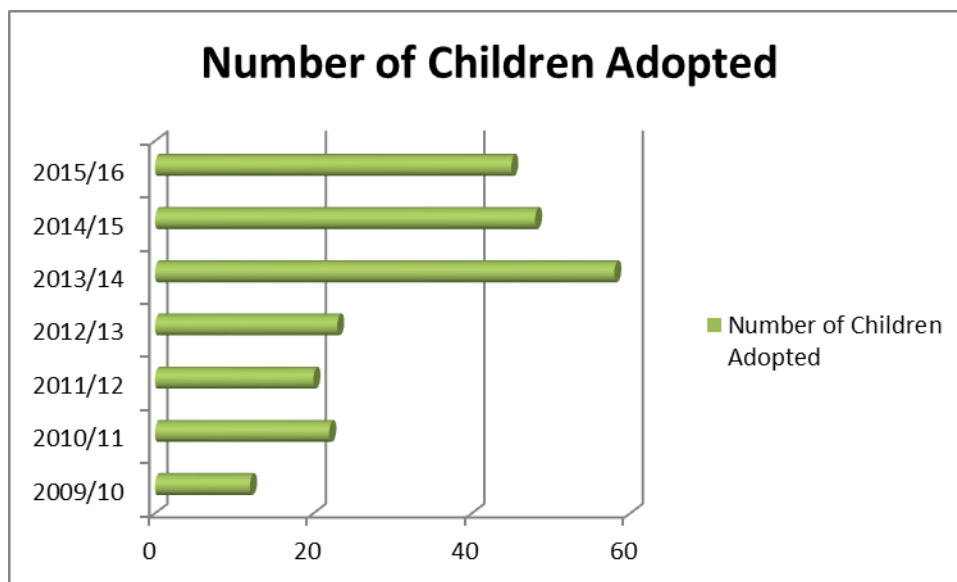
5. Five adoption panels were held during this period. 10 Leicestershire children were presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for an adoption plan. Of the 10 children considered by the Agency Decision Maker, 85% met the National Minimum Standard timescale of coming to panel within two months of adoption being agreed as the plan.
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- 10 adopters were approved in this period. All are white British.7. The requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 were fully met.

Children Placed and Adopted

- 14 children have been placed with their prospective adopters during this period; all of the prospective adopters were approved by this Agency.
- At the current rate of progress, it is anticipated that 45 children will be adopted by the end of Q4. This is directly related to the reduction in the number of children's adoption plans being commenced by the locality.
- Chart one shows the annual decline in children adopted from the 13/14 peak of 58.

Chart 1 - Year on year comparison of number of children placed for adoption.



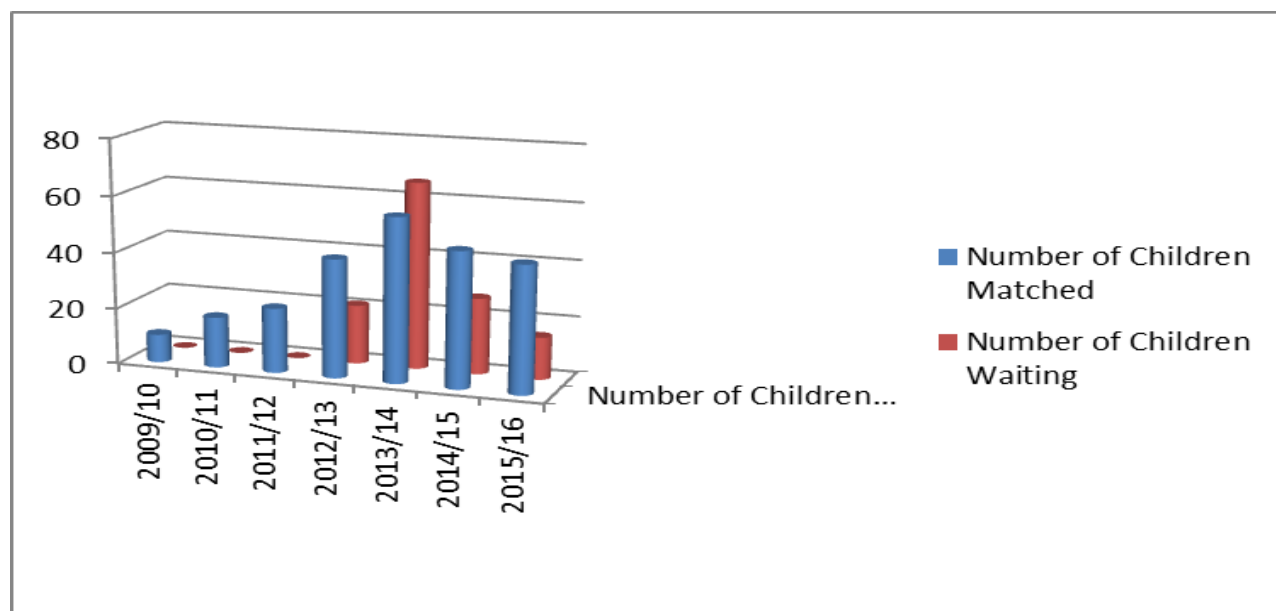
Quality of Reports

- 10 child permanence reports were considered by the Agency Decision Maker during this period. The quality of the reports was 'good' as advised by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 10 Prospective Adopters Reports were presented to the Adoption Panel during this period. Panel felt they were all good and raised only minor issues.

Children Waiting for Adoption

13. At the 31st December 2015 there were 12 children awaiting an adoption placement. One of these children has been matched to a prospective adopter, and active family finding is underway for the remaining 11.
14. It is projected that by the end of Q4, 45 children will have been matched with adopters.
15. The average time between a child entering care and being placed with a family is down from 15.9 months in Q2 to 9.8 months in Q3.
16. The average time taken for granting a placement order to matching a child with a prospective adopter is down from 6.3 months in Q2 to 3.03 months in Q3.
17. A comparison of numbers and time waiting over the past 7 years is set out in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2 – Year on Year comparison between children matched, and those waiting for a match.



Recruitment of Adopters

18. During Q3 there was a hold on recruiting prospective adopters in all but the most hard to place children's cases. This will continue into Q4 as we have 36 households waiting for a placement and a significant slowdown in the number of placement orders granted (see above).

Adoption Disruptions

19. There have been no adoption disruptions during this period (i.e. the breakdown of a placement before an Adoption Order is made).

Post Adoption Support

20. Pre and post adoption support is provided in a number of ways within LCC. The adoption team will support up to three years post adoption order, especially in cases where adoption breakdown or disruption is threatening.
21. After this 3 year period, locality led support is available to families at risk of adoption breakdown – this includes active intervention; signposting to support networks and providers; respite; and, accommodation of the child or children in the most extreme cases.
22. The team is actively working with applicants to the adoption support fund (ASF). Our full year projections are 25 applications, which will be the largest in the East Midlands. To date LCC has drawn down over £100,000 of support from this fund for adoptive families in the county.

The Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies

23. The government has indicated the need for regional adoption agencies by the end of the current parliament. Most of the local authorities with membership of the East Midlands Adoption Consortium have agreed to be an 'early adopter' of this proposed legislative intention.
24. A scoping exercise is underway among those involved to understand how a regional agency might work, what it would achieve, and the impact on service users.

Statement by Helen Gronhaug, Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

25. The ADM role has now been in place as a stand-alone post since August 2014. The time elapsed has given the opportunity to see how this role functions independently of case management hierarchy. Issues have arisen that would have been otherwise unlikely had the ADM role sat with a more senior manager such as Head of Service or Assistant Director as has previously been the case. Particular challenges have been highlighted in terms of accountability and governance of the ADM decision making. This has been particularly apparent where the ADM is considering children's care plans for adoption. Adoption Guidance 2013 requires the Local Authority to hold an urgent care-planning meeting if an adoption plan has not been agreed by the ADM. An ADM can require further work and clarification in order to make such a decision. However, there have been occasions where this work has not been completed as requested. There is a need for clarity about the status of work required by the ADM when such decisions are being given. This is therefore now under review.
26. The independent position of the ADM allows a valuable opportunity to gain an overview of children's care planning and outcomes through oversight of adoption and fostering panels; children's adoption plans as well as foster carer reviews. This allows for the identification of practice and policy themes. Work is underway to ensure such themes are harvested and fed into the Continuous Improvement Action Plan such that the 'learning loop' is completed. A system to escalate and track individual children's cases is also needed where the ADM

highlights practice/ process issues. ADM involvement in the newly proposed permanence panel will promote this.

Resource Implications

27. Consideration of the MTFS is incorporated in the annual budget setting exercise whereby the authority's plan to meet its sufficiency duty is financed.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

29. None.

Officer(s) to Contact

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Equality and Human Rights Implications

30. The Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency has been recently commended by Stonewall for its inclusive recruitment stance, particularly with regard to same sex adopters.