



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 13 JUNE 2016**

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

**LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND ADOPTION AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT
1ST APRIL 2015 TO 31ST MARCH 2016**

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with an update on the activity and performance of the adoption agency.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory and regulated responsibilities relating to adoption and has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Rutland County Council.
3. This report is therefore issued by the Leicestershire & Rutland Adoption Agency.
4. Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards 25.6 all Adoption Agencies are required to provide one six month and one annual report to the Executive regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel.
5. This report is the annual version to 31st March 2016.

Executive Summary:

6. 52 adoption orders were finalised for children in this period. 44 Leicestershire children; 8 Rutland children.
7. 39 adopters were approved in this period. All are white British.
8. 66 children have been placed with their prospective adopters during this period.
9. 41 children were adopted by Leicestershire County Council approved adopters, 11 via the inter-agency process.
10. 6 sibling groups placed – 3 sets of twins, three sets of triplets.
11. At the 31st March 2016 there were 18 children awaiting an adoption placement.

12. Operating in the adoption arena continues to be challenging. Nationally there is a reduction in placement orders granted by courts. The recent Queen's Speech announcement on adoption will seek to rectify this and other delays which lead to some children not receiving the 'forever family' they deserve.

13. During the last half of 2015, the LCC Post Adoption Support offer has not delivered the quality or level of service we would like. However, on applying a clear, objective based action plan (January 2016) and a cohesive policy using the Adoption Support Fund, the agency has significantly improved service delivery. This continues to be positive work in progress.

Background – Year to 31st March 2016

Adoption Plans

14. Nineteen adoption panels were held during this period.

15. In this period 51 children were presented to the Agency Decision Maker for an adoption plan.

16. 39 adopters were approved in this period. All are white British.

17. Of the 51 children considered by the Agency Decision Maker, 90% met the National Minimum Standard timescale of coming to panel within two months of adoption being agreed as the plan. Those out with the timescale are due to deferment for technical reasons acceptable under the regulations. The requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 were fully met.

Chart 1 – Ages of children at point of approval for adoption

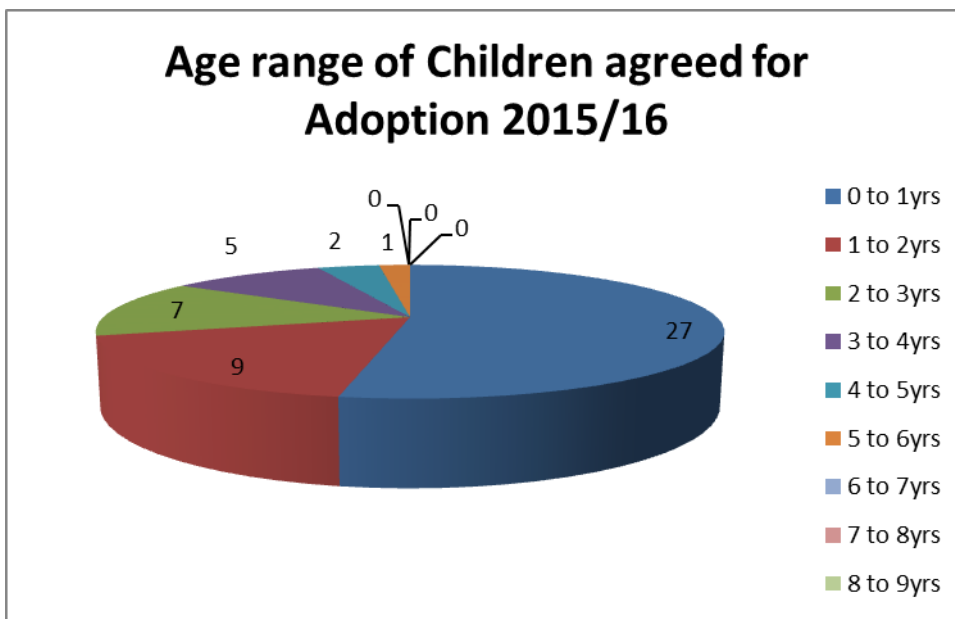
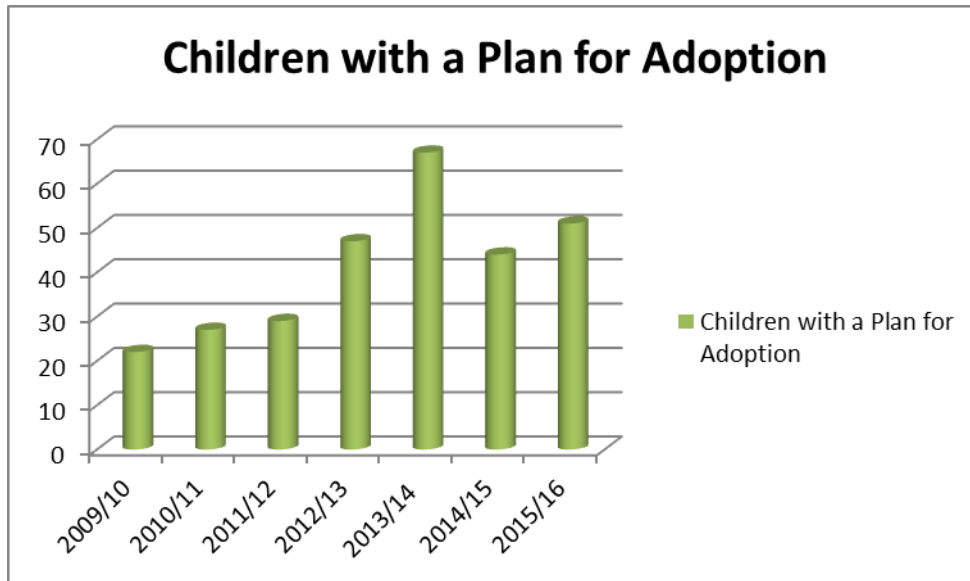


Chart 2 – 7 year comparison of children with plan for adoption



Performance

Children Placed and Adopted

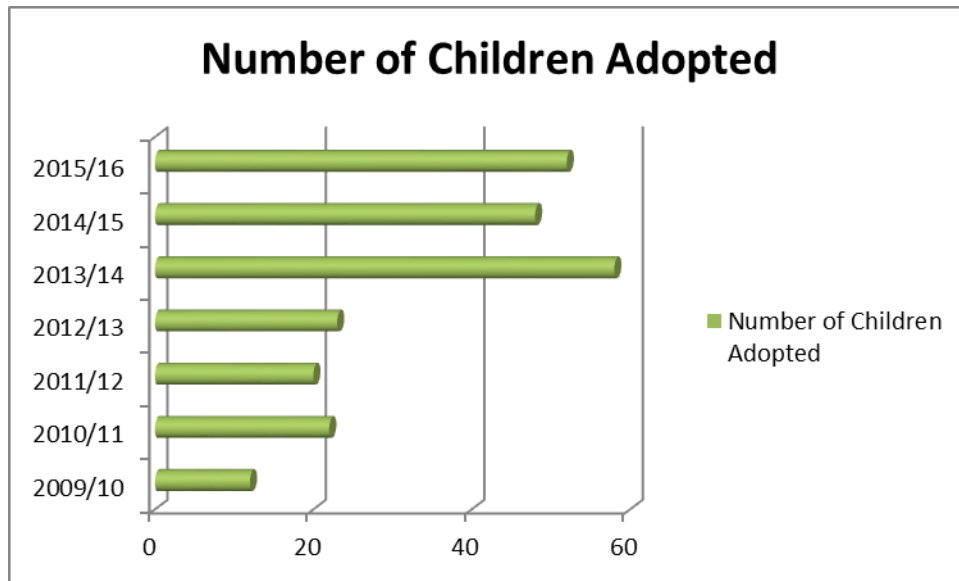
18.66 children have been placed with their prospective adopters during this period; (60 LCC & 6 Rutland Children). 4 were an inter-agency adoption.

19.52 adoption orders were finalised for children in this period. 44 Leicestershire children; 8 Rutland children. This is an 8.3% increase year on year.

20.41 children were adopted by Leicestershire County Council approved adopters, 11 via the inter-agency process.

21.6 sibling groups placed – 3 sets of twins, three sets of triplets.

Chart 3 – 7 year comparison of children adopted



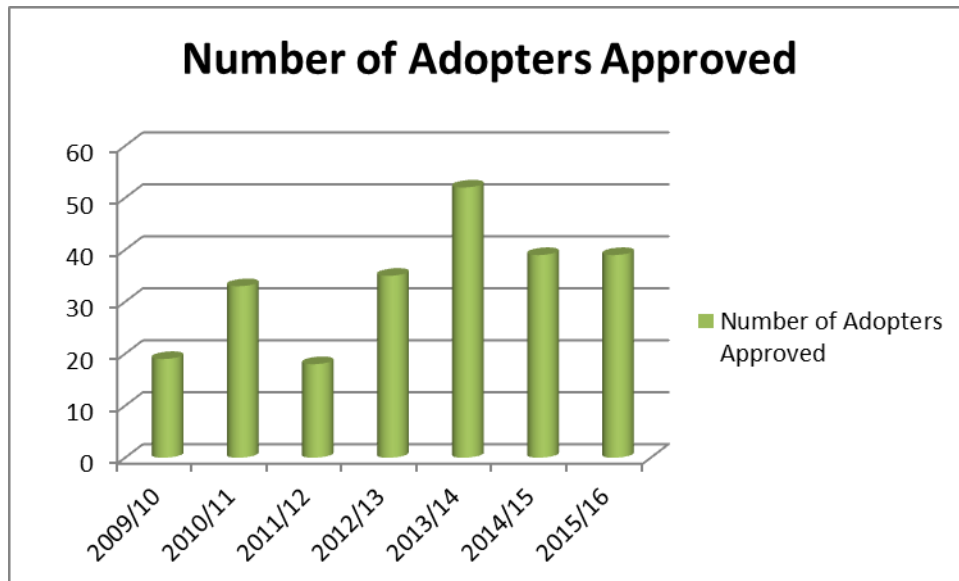
Adoption Approvals

22. During this period 39 adopter households were approved, all completed within the six month timescale.
23. This is in spite of a freeze on recruiting new adopters initiated in April 2015. All of the 39 adopters approved had already entered the approvals process by this date, or were specifically recruited for a specific child. This evidences our ethical recruitment of adopter policy.

The freeze on recruiting adopters is reviewed quarterly. The next review is July 2016.

24. 39 sets of adopters approved in this period are White/British.
25. As of 1st April 2016, we have 21 adopter households waiting. 15 of these adopters we plan to match to children requiring a forever family in 16/17, the remaining 6 will be advertised nationally for inter-agency adoption.

Chart 4 – 7 year comparison of adopters approved



26. The requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 were fully met for all assessments.

Adoption Scorecard

27. Leicestershire's adoption scorecard results for the three year period to 31st March 2015 are:

- i. Indicator 1: The length of time a child spends in care before being placed with his/her adopters is 546 days.
- ii. *This is an improvement of 37 days on the 2014 scorecard figure (Our in year figure to 31st March 2016 is 442 days).*
- iii. Indicator 2: The length of time between court granting a placement order and the Agency Decision Maker agreeing a placement match is 209 days.
- iv. This is an improvement of 4 days on the 2014 scorecard figure (*Our in year figure to 31st March 2016 is 168 days*).

28. The all England average for Indicator 1 is 593 days. The all England average for Indicator 2 is 223 days.

29. Notwithstanding the DfE target for indicator 2 being 121 days this adoption agency remains in the top quartile for performance (England and Wales). The DfE target for Indicator 2 was missed by 88 days.

30. One of the risks of the 121 day target is that it creates a disincentive to local authorities embarking on 'ambitious' adoption plans such as a recent success with a sibling group of three boys. In practice, we will seek to manage such plans closely to ensure children do not miss out on forever families because of L&RCC's requirement to meet governmental targets. This work will be done in localities and the Adoption Team.

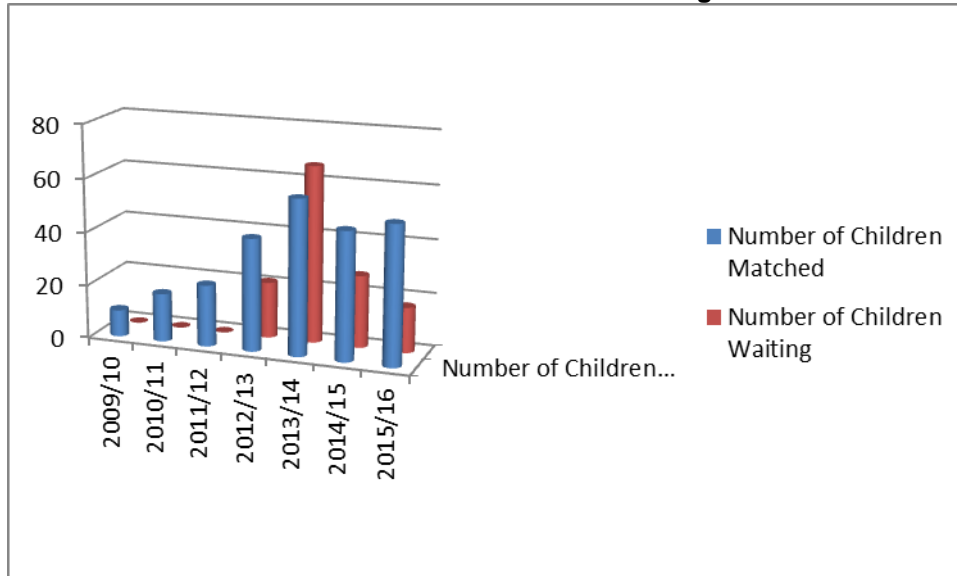
Quality of Reports

31. 46 child permanence reports were considered by the Agency Decision Maker during this period. The quality of the reports was variable as advised by the Agency Decision Maker. Training for all childcare social workers to improve the quality of the reports is available including a team manager's quality assurance tool. A recognisable improvement is being made.
32. 39 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

33. At the 31st March 2016 there were 18 children awaiting an adoption placement.
34. Family finding is being actively pursued with placements being sought via the National Adoption Register, the local East Midlands Adoption Consortium and specialist advertising including SEN magazines and children featured in advertising journals (be My Parent) etc. Children have also attended the adoption activity days and the national exchange days.
35. We are also revisiting the list of 90 or so would be adopters who have contacted the agency since we closed recruitment in April 2015.
36. In this period we successfully matched 8 children referred by Rutland County Council.
37. 5 children were placed under Foster For Adoption protocols. Twins in one case, and triplets in another.

Chart 5 below clearly shows that our aim to reduce children waiting well below the level of those matched is bearing fruit. This is due to our conscientious adopter recruitment policy which has at its core the aim to recruit specific families for specific children.

Chart 5 – Number of children matched vs. those waiting.

Adoption Disruptions

There have been 2 adoption disruptions during this period. In each case, the children returned to the care of the local authority.

Post Adoption Support

38. Pre and post adoption support is provided in a number of ways within LCC. The adoption social worker offers support up to three years post adoption order, especially in cases where adoption breakdown or disruption is a threat.
39. 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.
40. During the last half of 2015, the LCC Post Adoption Support offer has not delivered the quality or level of service we would like. However, on applying a clear, objective based action plan and a cohesive policy using the Adoption Support Fund, the agency has significantly improved said service delivery. This continues to be work in progress.
41. In spring 2016 we will launch our ‘whole service’ approach to post adoption support. This proposal is due to begin the governance process on 27th May 2016.
42. The Adoption Support Fund, a centralised granting process administered by the DfE, which seeks to pay for therapeutic interventions in order to prevent adoption breakdown, went live on the 1st May 2015.
43. To 31st March 2016, LCC has drawn down over £400,000 of Adoption Support Fund to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire.

Statement by the Agency Decision Maker, Helen Gronhaug

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. Certain 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 urgently 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.

An ADM Action Plan has been developed & updated to promote clarity about the status that work required by the ADM when such decisions are being given.

The independent position of the ADM allows for a valuable opportunity to gain an over view 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 so that the learning loop is completed. Thematic learning will be drawn from the 4 gateways of ADM decision making – children's adoption plans; adoption and fostering panels as well as foster carer reviews. A system to escalate and track individual children's cases is being developed where ADM highlights practice/ process issues. The ADM quality assurance function is being further strengthened by greater collaboration with the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit, particularly the IRO challenge meeting with AD. ADM membership on the newly formed permanence panel will further develop the ADM's QA function.

The Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies

44. 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.
45. 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.
46. Furthermore, a series of meetings of the Directorial Governance Board began on 1st February 2016 to set out terms of reference for command and control at the highest levels in each authority area.
47. Lead Members in all authorities affected are being fully involved and consulted.

Resource Implications

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

Conclusions

49. The Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency continues to operate well in a challenging environment.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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Equality and Human Rights Implications

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

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