

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

7 NOVEMBER 2016

**LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND ADOPTION AGENCY
STATUTORY QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT: FOR THE
PERIOD 1 APRIL 2016 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2016**

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

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to bring to the Committee's attention the activity of the Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency during the period 1 April 2016 to 30 September 2016.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. This report is issued by the Leicestershire & Rutland Adoption Agency.
3. 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.
4. The annual report for the period ending 31st March 2016 was considered by Children and Families Overview Scrutiny Committee on 13th June 2016.

Executive Summary

5. 21 adoption orders were finalised for children in this period. 21 Leicestershire children; 0 Rutland children.
6. 18 children were adopted by Leicestershire County Council approved adopters, 3 via the inter-agency process.
7. 16 children have been placed with their prospective adopters during this period.
8. 2 sibling groups have been placed including 1 set of twins.
9. 5 adopters were approved in this period: all are white British.
10. There are 18 approved adopters and 29 children awaiting an adoption placement.

Background

11. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Service. It undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering. This report is from the Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service. Leicestershire County Council is also 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.

Current Position

12. Adoption Plans:

- 6 adoption panels were held during this period;
- In this period 19 children were presented to the Agency Decision Maker for an adoption plan;
- 5 adopters were approved in this period. All are white British;
- Of the 19 children considered by the Agency Decision Maker, 17 met the National Minimum Standard timescale of coming to panel within two months of adoption being agreed as the plan. Those out of 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.

13. Performance - Children Placed and Adopted:

- 16 children have been placed with their prospective adopters during this period; (14 LCC & 0 Rutland Children) - 2 were an inter-agency adoption;
- 21 adoption orders were finalised for children in this period (21 Leicestershire children; 0 Rutland children) ;
- 18 children were adopted by Leicestershire County Council approved adopters, 3 via the inter-agency process;
- 2 sibling groups placed – 1 set of twins.

14. Performance - Adoption Approvals:

- During this period 5 adopter households were approved, 4 households were completed within the six month timescale;
- The freeze on recruiting adopters was reviewed in July 2016, where it was decided to commence recruitment;
- 5 sets of adopters approved in this period are White/British;
- As of 30th September 2016, there are 18 adopter households waiting;
- The requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 were fully met for all assessments.

15. Performance - Adoption Scorecard:

- Leicestershire's adoption scorecard results are:

	Indicator	LCC April-Sept 2016	LCC three year period to 31 st March 2015 are	National
1	The length of time a child spends in care before being placed with his/her adopters	422	546	593
2	The length of time between court granting a placement order and the Agency Decision Maker agreeing a placement match	168	209	233

- 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.

16. Quality of Reports:

- 19 child permanence reports were considered by the Agency Decision Maker during this period;
- 5 Prospective Adopters Reports were presented to the Adoption Panel during this period. The Panel felt they were all good and raised only minor issues.

17. Children Waiting for Adoption:

- At the 30th September 2016 there were 29 children awaiting an adoption placement;
- 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;
- The service is also revisiting the list of 90 or so would be adopters who have contacted the agency since we closed recruitment in April 2015;
- 1 child was placed under Foster-For-Adoption protocols.

18. Adoption Disruptions:

- There have been 2 adoption disruptions during this period. In each case, the children returned to the care of the local authority;
- There are currently have 2 children working to re-unification home.

19. Post Adoption Support:

- 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;

- 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;
- Therapeutic support is also available through 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. This went live on the 1st May 2015;
- To 30th September 2016, LCC has drawn down over £700,000 of Adoption Support Fund to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire;
- Some of the most complex cases may be co-worked by the Locality Team with support from the Post Adoption Support Worker. In such cases an assessment will be conducted and an application may be made for appropriate therapeutic services through the Adoption Support Fund;
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) offers services to our adopted children and meets regularly with practitioners in the Adoption Team to provide advice. This arrangement works well and the Adoption Team value this support;
- The demand for Post Adoption Support continues to grow in all areas, however, the Adoption Support Fund has recently capped the level of support available through the Fund and a requirement for local authority match funding should the support package exceed the cap;
- Birth Parents are routinely offered support prior to the adoption of their children. Post Adoption Support still requires further work. This will be enhanced with the addition of two new workers in spring 2016;
- Birth Records Counselling was assessed as good in the last Ofsted Inspection, although the service is dealing with a couple of delayed responses to Birth Records Counselling;
- Intermediary services where adopted children are supported to find and meet their birth parents are not carried out in house in Leicestershire. Some initial advice may be given but as with other LA's we signpost adoptees who request this service to third sector agencies;
- The Post Adoption Support Team liaises with education. We offer training to schools particularly around attachment issues for adopted children and how to successfully manage these in the school setting;
- Under the new 2016 offer the team will provide specialised training for approved adopters and workers as required.

20. Permanence Team:

- The current role of the team is to undertake all family finding for children who need permanence via the adoption route. This allows the assessing social workers to focus on assessing prospective adopters, placing and supporting children through to Adoption Order;
- This work also includes family finding for long term fostered children;
- During the reported period the team have completed a number of developmental projects, many of which have been designed to improve practice as well as improving our corporate image;

- Training has been designed and facilitated to a number of audiences, including locality teams and foster carers. The training has included Child Permanence Report (CPR) training to address the quality of CPR's as well as introducing a new template;
- In addition to day to day operations, the team is very committed to ongoing developmental projects such as the introduction of Life Appreciation Days; processes for the permanence planning of children in Long Term Foster Care; and, further embedding of the Signs of Safety methodology in our practice;

21. 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.

22. East Midlands Adoption Consortium (EMAC):

- The Adoption Agency of Leicestershire and Rutland continues to be a member of EMAC. Central government is keen to see the success of such arrangements and so we have made a commitment to this group of 9 LA's and 3 Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA);
- The project team of for the 'Regionalisation of Adoption' in the midlands has put forward the following proposed models:

- ✓ **Single LA** – A local authority is authorised to provide services on behalf of other LA's. The services can be delivered directly by the hosting authority or commissioned from another body on behalf of the RAA e.g. Adopt Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead hosts services for four LAs
 - ✓ **Joint Venture** - A joint venture between LAs creating a new public sector owned entity such as a Local Authority Trading Company. Arrangements are set up under the Teckal Exemption and give certain freedoms around charging and borrowing. Ownership is retained by the partners.
 - ✓ **New VAA led** - The RAA is created in the form of a new Voluntary adoption Agency to which delivers services in scope on behalf of the LA Adoption Agencies
 - ✓ **Existing VAA led** - LAs involved in the RAA commission an existing VAA to deliver the services in scope on their behalf.
- There is now a proposal to progress regionalisation through a staged approach of pilot programs. This proposal is currently under development.
 - Directors of Children's Services meet regularly to review plans for the regionalisation of adoption and have identified priority areas to underpin future decision making. These include financial modelling (that regionalisation will not cost local authorities more); ICT/HR implications and cost, and outcomes for children are good or better.

23. Developments:

- It is recognised that adoption has been a central part of government policy in recent years and that the future will present many opportunities and some challenges. The current developmental challenges for the Adoption Team include:
 - (i). Improved tracking of cases for early identification;
 - (ii). Improved communication with locality teams to track cases and prevent delay;
 - (iii). Improved performance for hard to match/place children;
 - (iv). Consistent decision making for adoption support through Placement and Resource Panel;
 - (v). Updated procedures/guidance for post adoption support.

24. Frameworki:

- The modernisation process work continues to bring the work of the adoption service on to the electronic record system. Assessment processes are now up and running with the plan for family finding having been live since August 2016. These processes are currently in User Acceptance Stage. Once family finding processes go live, the Adoption Service will be up and running on Frameworki from point of initial enquiry, through assessment, matching processes, post placement support and finally the granting of the Adoption Order.

25. Statement of Purpose:

- The Statement of purpose was reviewed and uploaded to the public facing LCC Website in January 2016 and will be reviewed annually.

26. Rutland Arrangements:

- We continue to provide adoption services for Rutland County Council under a Service Level Agreement. The Service Level Agreement was due for review in September 2014. A meeting was held where it was agreed that whilst Rutland reviewed their service level agreement with ourselves, we would continue to provide a service in the interim.
- During the reporting period, 8 Rutland children were matched with adopters by this agency.

27. Adoption Panel:

- There is one panel chair and two vice chairs;
- 3 Social Work representatives and 18 Independent panel members were recruited to the Central List;
- All appointees attended panel member training which was provided by the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF);
- This will ensure consistency in panels and improve quality assurance.
- Efforts to recruit a diverse panel were successful and there will be good representation from minority groups including BME and LGBT.

28. Financial Implications

Fostering & Adoption summary 2015/16						
Parent Code	Parent Code Narrative	Cost Centre	Cost Centre Narrative	Annual Budget	Actual YTD	Variance
*147	C&FS Fostering & Adoption	1482	Project & Support Team	0	939	939
		1483	Child Placement Commissioning	599,309	602,373	3,064
		1484	Assessment Team	1,104,948	1,139,506	34,558
		1485	Team around the Child	552,966	601,460	48,494
		1502	Permanence Team	0	0	0
		1508	Placement Support Team	0	0	0
		1510	Connected Team	0	5,764	5,764
	C&FS Fostering & Adoption Total			2,257,223	2,350,043	92,820
*155	C&FS Operational Placements	1486	Adoption Inter-Agency Fees	108,000	-185,013	-293,013
		1487	SGO & Residents Allowance	1,419,500	1,734,224	314,724
		1511	Adoption Team	539,550	753,132	213,582
		1512	Fostering Budget	3,314,000	3,144,445	-169,555
			C&FS Operational Placements Total			5,381,050
				7,638,273	7,796,830	158,557

- Budget overspend is solely attributable to fees paid to LCC foster carers, adopters, and recipients of Special Guardianship allowance.
- The service has been successful in 'selling' adopter households, hence the income on this budget line.

29. Conclusion

Adoption has been a key part of the Government Agenda since 2012 and has seen significant change. Adoption is an integral part of our emotional permanence strategy

for Looked After Children and we continue to perform well, both in terms of quality provision and timeliness of provision, to find new families. The growing demand for adoption support is placing increasing demand on the team, both in relation to completion of Adoption Support assessments and application, reducing the ability of the workers to engage directly with families and staff across the service to offer advice. CAMHS offers services to our adopted children and meets regularly with practitioners in the Adoption Team to provide advice. This arrangement works well and the Adoption Team value this support.

The recent Education and Adoption bill proposes further changes most notably the need for Adoption Agencies and Local Authorities to devise regionalised plans, based on working together in order to improve services delivered to children and adopters. We will continue to attend the EMAC meetings where this matter will be discussed and plans prepared, thereafter reporting separately as required.

Officer(s) to Contact

Paul Meredith
 Director
Paul.Meredith@leics.gov.uk
 Tel: 0116 3057441

Sharon Cooke
 Assistant Director
Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk
 Tel: 0116 3055479

Nicci Collins
 Head of Strategy
Nicci.Collins@leics.gov.uk
 Tel: 0116 3054504

Joss Longman
 Service Manager
Joss.Longman@leics.gov.uk
 Tel: 0116 3053288

30. Equality and Human Rights Implications

Adoption is a regulated activity subject to statutory requirements and court oversight. The child permanency plan is scrutinized by the court and subject to the Guardian ad Litem's (GAL) oversight. The GAL is a person the court appoints to investigate what solutions would be in the best interests of a child.