



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 5 NOVEMBER 2018**

LEICESTERSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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 for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. The Annual Report is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for the Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory responsibilities related to adoption.
3. Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards all Fostering Services and Adoption Agencies are required to provide one half year and one annual report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding their activity and work.

Background

4. The County Council operates an integrated Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service. This arrangement has been in operation since April 2015 following a service review. The adoption service, which includes services for Rutland, is called the Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency (the Adoption Agency).

Summary of the Report

5. The service recognises that it operates within a difficult market, with adopter recruitment across the country being difficult and the number of children requiring adopter homes increasing. As such, ambitious priorities and targets were set in the following areas:
 - Adopter recruitment
 - Quality and timely assessments of prospective adopters
 - Timely matching and placement
 - Adopter support.
6. A range of work has been completed over 2017/18, the highlights of which are:-

- The decision to resume active recruitment of adopters rather than only assess those who 'spontaneously' present was made in April 2017
 - An ambitious marketing and recruitment plan was agreed and implemented, resulting in the successful recruitment of adopters and matching of children
 - An increased adoption support offer including increased birth records counselling, increased therapeutic capacity and the introduction of a support worker who makes contact at specific times, post placement, to review the support plan and the adoption support needs of the family.
7. Performance over 2017-18 has been strong. 324 adopter enquiries were received and 130 households attended one of six open evenings (78% improvement from the previous reporting period). The targeted recruitment campaign for hard to place had 22 enquiries.
 8. 93 families requested an initial visit and 57 families started the stage one assessment process. 18 adopter households were approved (compared to 10 in the previous year).
 9. 39 children presented to the Agency Decision Maker and 90% met with National Minimum Standard timescales. Those outside the timescale were due to deferment for technical reasons acceptable under the regulations.
 10. The 2017-18 performance overview (Adoption Scorecard) is as follows:
 - A1. Leicestershire Adoption Agency's average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family for 2016-2018 is 413.4 days. This represents a reduction in the time children are waiting in Leicestershire. The average time for the period 2015-2017 was 466 days, and the England average is 520. A low score is good.
 - A2. The average time between Leicestershire receiving court authority to place a child and Leicestershire Adoption agency deciding upon a match to an adoptive family is 162 days. This is an improvement of 33 days compared to last year's figures when the average time was 195 days. The England average is 220 days.
 - A3. Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adopted family currently stands at 66% - again this is an improvement compared to last year's figures which were 65%. This is significantly better than the England 3 year average of 53%.
 11. Measurements against 'Adopters' indicate that Leicestershire adopters wait for less time than the England average before being matched after approval (73% compared to 74%), although this is only a marginal difference. In summary, consistently across all indicators, Leicestershire presents as performing better than the three year average for England.

Resource Implications

12. The Adoption Team makes a significant contribution to Leicestershire's sufficiency duty by ensuring those children with adoption plans or who are likely to have adoption plans are prepared for adoption and are matched to their forever families in a timely way. Because of this work, children spend less time in care, reducing placement and other resource costs for the authority.

Conclusion

13. The Adoption Service has achieved significant success in 2017/18, particularly in relation to the recruitment of Adopters and the performance against the national adoption scorecard. The Department remains focused on the recruitment of adopters as a key priority over the forthcoming year.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

14. None

Equality and Human Rights Implications

15. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from the report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency Annual Report 2017/18

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Leicestershire & Rutland Adoption Agency Annual Report 2017 – 2018



Introduction

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.

This report is therefore issued by the Leicestershire & Rutland Adoption Agency.

Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards 25.6 all Adoption Agencies are required to provide one six month and one annual report to the Executive¹ regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel.

This report is the annual statutory report to 31st March 2018.

Executive Summary

The Adoption Service has continued to recruit potential adopters and has seen an increase in the number of adopter enquiries and attendance at open evenings. In the period between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018 324 adopter enquiries were received. 130 adopter households attended one of the 6 open evenings held during this period. 93 households requested an Initial visit and 57 households started the Stage one process. This represents an increase of 78.1% in attendance at an open evening from the previous reporting period. It should be noted that there had been no active recruitment of adopters the previous financial year due to the national shortage of children being granted Placement Orders and an increasing amount of adopters waiting for children. The decision to begin actively recruiting was made in April 2017 and the above figures reflect a successful recruitment campaign.

In relation to Leicestershire's performance marked against the Adoption Scorecard the Agency continues to provide a good service to children and adopters within our service:

- A1. Leicestershire Adoption Agency's average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family for 2016-2018 is 413.4 days. This represents a reduction in time children are waiting in Leicestershire. The average time for the period 2015-2017 was 466 days. The England average is 520. This is a positive position for Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency.
- A2. The average time between Leicestershire receiving court authority to place a child and Leicestershire Adoption agency deciding upon a match to an adoptive family is 162 days. This is an improvement of 33

¹ The Executive in Leicestershire is the Lead Member and Scrutiny Members

days compared to last year's figures when the average time was 195 days. The England average is 220 days. This is also positive.

- A3. Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adopted family currently stands at 65% - again this is an improvement compared to last year's figures which were 66%. This is significantly better than the England 3 year average of 53%

Measurements against 'Adopters' indicate that Leicestershire adopters wait for less time than the England average before being matched after approval (73% compared to 74%), although this is only a marginal difference.

In summary, consistently across all indicators, Leicestershire present as performing better than the three year average for England.

Leicestershire remains in line with the England average for placing children over 5 years old. Leicestershire continues to have ambitious plans of adoption for older children with 7 children over the age over 5 at the point of approval for adoption. Leicestershire ran a specific targeted recruitment campaign for harder to place children between 19th April and 18th May 2018 which resulted in 22 enquiries specifically for hard to place children and hopes to see a number of these families through to approval.

In relation to early permanence, the Children's Decision Making Panel commenced in January 2018. The primary function of this Panel is to ensure proactive care planning. Representatives from the Adoption Team are part of this panel and play an active role in contributing to early permanence decisions and tracking children to ensure that any drift is identified early. The presence of the Adoption Team at this panel also ensures that adoption remains on the agenda and is considered for older children who have historically been considered 'too old'. Also, sibling groups, particularly where there is an older child, have not routinely been considered for a plan of adoption together in the past. The Adoption team is driving forward ambitious plans and saw the successful placement of a number of traditionally 'hard to place' children including: a 10 year old with their 5 year old sibling, a 5 year old with their 1 year old and sibling and a sibling group of 2, aged 5 and 4 who have experienced significant neglect and were not placed into foster care until after the end of proceedings.

Children with complex health needs or disabilities remain an area that continues to be challenging in relation to the recruitment of adopters. However, 4 children are now

in their adoptive placement after their foster carers have successfully been assessed as adopters for them, evidencing that these children are able to integrate well into family life with the right level of support.

Leicestershire recognises the need to recruit a broader range of ethnic adoptive families to meet the needs of children within Leicestershire and has actively pursued this. 2 Asian adoptive households have been approved this financial year with a further 10 having entered into the assessment process. And 4 children with ethnicities other than White British were placed with adopters during 2017-2018. These have been through interagency matches.

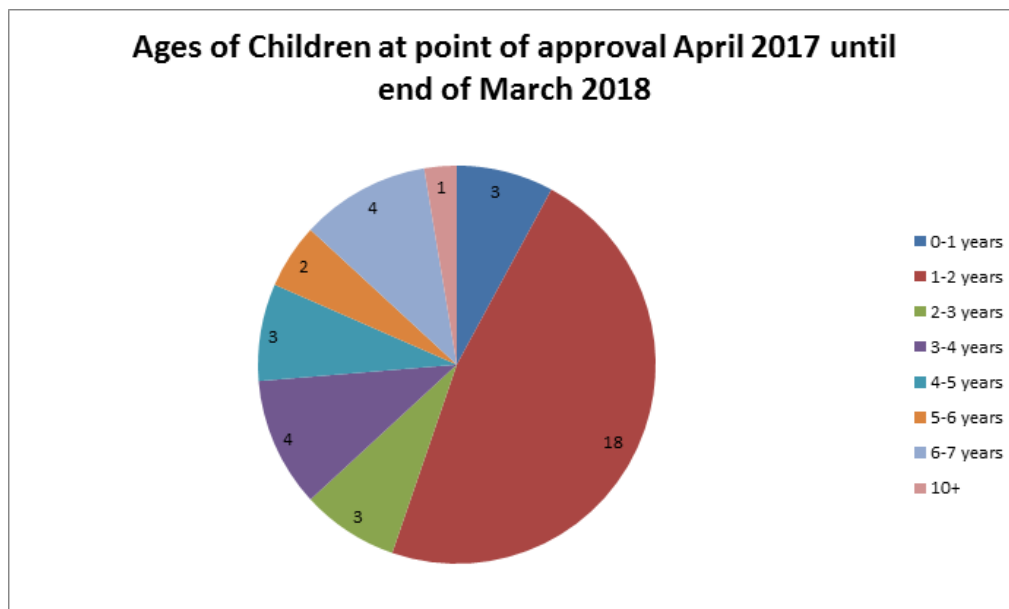
Leicestershire has actively engaged in the Regional Home Finding meetings where representatives from Lincolnshire, Leicester City and 3 Voluntary Agencies meet monthly to identify prospective matches for 'hard to place' children. Leicestershire started chairing and administration of these meetings in December 2017 in order to ensure consistency of chair, oversight of performance and improved communication. The meetings now run more effectively with a clear agenda and participation from all who attend. Two matches have been made through this meeting for Leicestershire children.

Year to 31st March 2018 relating to Adoption Plans

Adoption Plans

1. 16 adoption panels were held
2. In this period 39 children were presented to the Agency Decision Maker for an adoption plan
3. Of the 39 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 were 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



Year to 31st March 2018 relating to Children Placed and Adopted

- 30 adoption orders were finalised for children in this period. Four of these children were from Rutland and 10 were interagency placements
- 18 adopters were approved in this period compared to 10 the previous year. 5 of these approvals were child specific. 16 were White/British and 2 were Asian/Indian
- 36 children were placed with their prospective adopters during this period. 34 of these children have been Leicestershire children and 2 children from Rutland
- 16 children were placed with Leicestershire County Council approved adopters, and 20 via the inter-agency process
- 7 sibling groups placed – 5 sets of 2 sibling groups, 2 sets of 3 sibling group
- At the 31st March 2018 there were 33 children awaiting an adoption placement, although a link had been identified for 15.

Link Maker is used by Leicestershire as a successful means to secure adoption matches, however, adopters can access it prior to approval which has resulted in some adopters being assessed by the agency forming an early link with children outside of Leicestershire and therefore not being available for children waiting within the service. This has impacted on the number of Leicestershire children waiting adoption.

For those children without a link identified there is routine consideration at the Regional Home Finding meeting and referral to the National Adoption Register. Options such as Activity Days and Exchange days are also considered.

Themes arising for children waiting the longest include:

- Unknown future health needs/ life-limiting conditions
- Low adoption options for siblings groups of older children and an increase in the amount of adopters being approved for babies.

Year to 31st March 2018 relating to Adoption Approvals

To be approved as an adopter, the prospective adopter attends training and works with a social worker to determine whether he or she is suitable to become an adoptive parent. This assessment and relevant checks (police, health and references) are presented to an adoption panel, which makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) as to whether the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child. Once this process has been completed and the ADM reaches a positive decision, the applicant is approved as an adopter.

- During this period 18 adopter households were approved, 3 completed within the six month timescale, 4 were fast tracked and 1 asked to a break before continuing to Stage 2.
- 18 adopters were approved in this period compared to 10 the previous year. 5 of these approvals were child specific. 16 were white/British and 2 were Asian /Indian
- As of 1st April 2018, the Agency had 13 adopter households waiting. All of these adopters will be matched to children requiring a forever family during 2018-19. These adopters have profiles on Link Maker and are referred to National Adoption Register if they choose so. Whilst they are waiting they receive ongoing support from a social worker.

The recruiting of adopters is reviewed quarterly to ensure that we remain clear about the needs of our children and that we recruit to these needs. To this purpose, the Adoption Agency uses the pre-proceedings and adoption tracker to determine demand, as well as national and comparator authority data, patterns and trends.

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

Year to 31st March 2018 relating to Quality of Reports

1. Adoption plans were agreed for 39 children during this period. A further 3 children were considered. Adoption plans for these children have not as yet been agreed. 1 plan of the 3 changed from adoption as the permanence plan. Of the 39 children whose plans were agreed, there was a significant portion for which further information was required before a decision could be made. Therefore for these children, their plan had to be considered on more than 1 occasion and sometimes up to 3 occasions. In addition some CPRs have been read more than once because required amendments have been completed and returned before family finding can commence. The quality of the reports was variable as advised by the Agency Decision Maker. Practice sessions for childcare social workers to improve the quality of the reports were held and will be rolled out again. A team manager's quality assurance tool is in place.

The quality of reports has remained an area of on-going concern. In September 2018 a pilot scheme is being launched where family finding social workers will be responsible for the completion of CPR's for those children who are entering PLO and are likely to have a care plan of adoption. The pilot is being run for children in the Charnwood and Melton area initially and if successful will be rolled out across the county in early 2019. Success of the pilot will be measured by the quality of reports that are fit for the purpose for family finding at the first presentation of children to ADM, amongst other measures.

Year to 31st March 2018 relating to Children Waiting for Adoption

1. At the 31st March 2018 there were 33 children awaiting an adoption placement, although a link had been identified for 15 of them
2. Family finding is being actively pursued with placements being sought via the National Adoption Register, the local East Midlands Adoption Consortium and Link Maker. At the point of an ADM decision being given to agree a care plan of adoption, children are profiled by members of the Permanence Team and are then, if appropriate, an anonymous profile is placed on Link Maker. The full profile is released at the point that a Placement Order is granted by the court. Leicestershire always seeks to place with their own adopters initially - if this is not successful a search within the East Midlands Consortium is progressed with a national search only being completed if no suitable adopters are identified after this point. This is to promote local children placed locally, to improve access to support services and for continuity of care.

Leicestershire is clear that matches between children and adopters should be based on the adopters' ability to meet the needs of the child and is a child centred and child led process. We have been successful in matching and have not needed to regularly participate in national exchange days or adoption activity days having only one child attend throughout. Children must be referred to the National Adoption Register if they have not had a placement identified 90 days after ADM. This can cause some difficulties if the Placement Order has not been granted. Adopters are referred 90 days post approval but have the option to opt.

3. On 31st March 2018 the Adoption Agency had 20 adopter applicants in stage one and a further 25 in stage two of the assessment process. Leicestershire has a target of approving 50 adopters during 2018-2019 as set out in the Adoption and Permanence Strategy 2018-2012.
4. In this period the Agency successfully matched 2 children referred by Rutland County Council.
5. No children were placed under *Foster for Adoption* protocols during this period.

Evidence from the children's tracker suggests that *Foster for Adoption* placements are not considered at an early stage in permanency planning, this is now challenged during the CDM process. The permanence pilot scheme will also be able to look at those children who may be appropriate for this early permanency and this has been identified as a key consideration in the Permanence Team workflow that is being drafted. There are currently 2 approved adoptive households willing to provide this type of placement. The training that prospective adopters receive as part of stage 2 does have a session on *Foster for Adoption* and often involves an adopter who has adopted a child through this process. Following a market event to discuss opportunities within the private and voluntary section, this is sufficiency issues will be further developed during 2018.

Leicestershire
**Fostering
& Adoption**



Year to 31st March 2018 relating to Adoption Disruptions

There has been no adoption disruption during this period. Adoption disruptions are when the placement ends prior to the Adoption Order being granted. Adoption social workers remain involved with the family through to the granting of the Order and the subsequent Celebration Hearing.

In the case of adopters struggling with the behaviour of their children, the adoption team is available to provide intense support based on therapeutic techniques. All the permanent family finding social workers have been trained in level 1 Theraplay and also have access to a fully qualified play therapist that is based within the service. In addition to this, during 2017-18 Leicestershire sought to strengthen working relationships with CORAM and CAMHS resulting in increased consultation available to workers to help inform support provision.

Year to 31st March 2018 relating to Post Adoption Support

Pre and post adoption support is provided in a number of ways within Leicestershire for a number of reasons, such as, to help our adopters parent in a way that takes into consideration the trauma their children have suffered or the impact that that care has had on their child's health and development.

1. Pre and post adoption support is provided in a number of ways within Leicestershire. The adoption social worker offers support up to three years post Adoption Order, especially in cases where adoption breakdown or disruption is a threat. We also have a dedicated support worker who makes contact with the adopter at 6 weeks post placement. This point is when research suggests that 'post placement depression' can become evident. The support worker is Theraplay (level 1) trained, if necessary, she can remain involved to support managing behaviour and completing direct work with children. After this the support worker makes contact at certain points over a three year period to ensure parents remain reflective of their children's needs, are reminded of their training and the support network within Leicestershire. Positive feedback has been received from adopters about the support they have received through this process, such as:

'We really enjoyed your visit and we felt very, very supported by you coming over. It was so lovely of you to focus on how me and L have adapted to becoming parents as obviously a lot of the visits we have are focused on little man. We both felt you were very informative and approachable, and we know

that if we needed you, you would be there. It's a great service and adds to the excellent service we have received from the team throughout our process'

- The team also has a full time post support social worker who works with families therapeutically using Theraplay and DDP techniques that support attachment and positive parenting. Where necessary, the social worker completes assessments of need for those families requiring more specialist therapy and will submit applications to the Adoption Support Fund for funding. Where the need presents as complicated, CAMHS or CORAM advice is sought.
2. After this 3 year period, locality led support is available to families in need or 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. A qualified therapist is due to start in September 2018. Although she will be based in the post adoption support team – her role is to work with those cases identified from by the locality social work team and she will be able to offer bespoke therapeutic support to those families.
 3. The Adoption Team has a vision that all post adoption support remains within the Adoption Service. A multi-agency plan and vision has been presented to Senior Management and an implementation plan has been agreed to achieve this. The estimate go live date is April-June 2019.
 4. In relation to communication, quarterly newsletters are sent to all adopters (containing real journey stories, information about support including access to support groups within the community) as are invitations to two social gatherings through the year.
 5. By 31st March 2018, Leicestershire drew down £209,763 of the Adoption Support Fund to pay for direct interventions for adopted children and their families in Leicestershire. This is a decrease in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year as that was £366,544. It should be noted that there was a back log of applications waiting arising from demand and staffing vacancies. The back log was cleared in May 2018. It is therefore anticipated that there will be an increase in this amount in the financial year 18-19.

Leicestershire has a Service Level Agreement in place with CAMHS who provide a consultation service to workers and adopters. Leicestershire has also developed a stronger working relationship with CORAM and has been able to refer adopters to the Adoption Support Gateway, where adopters have been able to see a principle therapist who has been able to offer advice and support on the most appropriate type of therapy. Leicestershire has referred 25 families to this service with positive feedback, such as:

'The process with Coram has been excellent in terms of structure of the process throughout, including actioning appointments and timely follow up from them. The consultations themselves gain from a clear structure from the outset by clearly defining the aims of the meeting and ensuring that as many of them are met by the end. This helps to maximise the outputs of the consultation, so in our case we've felt like we've gotten a lot from the meetings including valuable strategies to take away and put in place at home straight away. The value of the strategies has been seen almost immediately.

To be completely honest, as we had no post adoption support up until this point and have been regularly at breaking point as a family for a number of years now, so without the intervention of the Adoption Support Gateway I'm not how we would have continued. We're still at breaking point now but at least have the hope that a positive family future may be ahead due the excellent support we now have.'

6. 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.
7. Birth Parents are routinely offered support prior to the adoption of their children. This support is offered through a leaflet provided at the point of ADM ratifying a care plan of adoption. The Permanence Team has a protocol of any such requests being presented to Permanence panel where an application for an independent person will provide this service. During 2017-18 only one request for support was received from a birth parent.
8. A full time Birth Records Counsellor (BRC) post was appointed to in January 2018. The role is undertaken by 2 people. The waiting list has reduced dramatically since these appointments and positive feedback has been received. At the point of the BRC worker starting there were 51 adopted adults waiting to have access to their birth records. The worker and team manager quickly identified those cases where the adult had been adopted before 1975

and ensured that their records were shared in a timely and sensitive manner due to the age of the adoptee and the nature of the adoption.

The waiting list has now been reduced to 12 new cases - all of those on the previous waiting list have seen their records. There is an average of 3 months between making the initial enquiry and adopted adults being seen by the Birth Records Counsellor. Feedback is generally positive, such as:

'I can't believe how busy we seem to have been and how quickly the time has passed since we last saw you on 28/2/18.

We were both so thrilled to be able to update you on that day with the progress that we had already made and were so grateful for you giving up the whole afternoon when I know you must be so busy with other things apart from your work.

We both felt that you understood what we were going through, and made the whole process so easy and painless.

It's lovely to meet someone like yourself that is able to understand the emotions that one goes through in these circumstances'

9. 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 Local Authorities we signpost adoptees who request this service to third sector agencies.

The Post Adoption Support Team liaises with the Virtual School and training is jointly offered to schools, particularly around attachment issues for adopted children and how to successfully manage these in the school setting. One main conference is hosted by the Virtual School each year, to which education providers, adopters and parents are invited. As a result of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the duties of Virtual Schools (VS) were extended to support the education of previously looked after children. Leicestershire VS offers advice and information to schools and settings, parents or anyone else assessed as being appropriate by the Virtual School so long as the child is of statutory school age and resident in Leicestershire. In the first two weeks of the 2018 autumn term senior VS officers responded to 24 phone calls and junior 22 telephone calls relating to the education of previously looked after children.

In addition the VS delivers training to schools and adoptive parents on attachment and trauma-informed practice and speak at local adoption and SGO network meetings. Training to schools has been well-received and it has supported schools to amend practice to take into account the needs of individual children who were previously in care and have experienced childhood trauma.

10. The demand for Post Adoption Support continues to grow in all areas. Leicestershire introduced a Therapeutic Support Policy and Budget two years ago that can be accessed to support children in care, prior to adoption. Each child can have an initial payment of up to £450, with a further £450 being available if required. Permanence Panel has a role in monitoring applications and the progress of any therapy commissioned. Annually, the budget of £50k is spent on commissioned services.
11. The Local Authority remains committed to supporting those children who require further support to ensure that any additional needs are appropriately considered. In the financial year 2017-2018 Leicestershire county Council paid £800,900 to 74 adoptive households in the form of adoption allowances. During 2018-19, allowance rates and decisions will be reviewed to ensure that priority children are well supported within their adopted homes.
12. The Adoption Agency continues to send out quarterly newsletters that contain information to encourage families to self-help and to attend adoption support groups, and to make use of the Virtual School where schools require advice and support. In addition to this, the Newsletter is designed to help adopted families feel connected and to make 'reaching out' easier. The newsletter will highlight adoption events sponsored by the Adoption Agency, to encourage sharing and support amongst families who have experience and knowledge.

About the Permanence Team

The role of the Permanence Team is to undertake all family finding for children who need permanence via the adoption route. They also family find for adopters post approval and support adopters through the placing and supporting children through to Adoption Order. This work also includes family finding for long term fostered children.

In addition to day-to-day operations, the team is very committed to ongoing developmental projects such as:

- Life Appreciation Days
- Permanence planning of children in long term foster care, including early identification
- Further embedding of the Signs of Safety methodology in their practice.
- Increased involvement in the completion of *sibling together or apart* assessments
- The use of *Theraplay* and *Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy* principles to ensure that the Permanence Team can appropriately support adopters to understand the needs of our children and parent them therapeutically.

- The introduction of an Adoption Support Worker who will offer regular contact with adopters post the final order for three years, to ensure the adoption support plan remains appropriate and to help adopters implement their training and link with support networks.

Adoption Panel

Adoption Panels operate to meet the needs of children looked after by the Local Authority, their birth parents or guardians and those who may wish to adopt a child. Panels therefore, perform an important role in assisting the Adoption Agency to reach the best possible decision in respect of:

- Whether a child should be placed for adoption
- The suitability of prospective adopters or the termination of approval of a prospective adopter; and
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a specific prospective adopter/s.

The Adoption Panel's members come with a variety of skills and experiences, and make recommendations after thoughtful scrutiny of relevant paperwork and lengthy discussions with social workers coming to panel. The Panels operate with transparency and have the best interest of the child at the core of all decisions. An overview of the Panel is provided below:

- There are 11 independent Panel members consisting of 2 males and 9 females. All are White British except 1 male. There is one panel chair and one vice chair
- A panel training session for adoption panel members is booked for October 2018. Business meetings between panel chair, panel advisor and the Service Manager take place every 4 months
- There has been a decrease of 3 panel members since 2017 as members have left for varying reasons, not related to the Agency
- 18 Adoption panels were held during this reporting period
- Panel member's annual reviews are completed by the panel advisor and panel chair.

Panel will contribute to analysis of the pilot scheme. They have identified that they would value training in completion of CPRs and this will be included in the next training day in October 2018.

Rutland Arrangements

We continue to provide adoption services for Rutland County Council under a Service Level Agreement. The Service Level Agreement has been reviewed and agreed from April 2018.

During the reporting period, 2 Rutland children were matched with adopters by this agency.

The Team Manager meets with the Rutland County Council nominated officer to review performance.

Statement by the Agency Decision Maker, Helen Gronhaug

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. Since March 2016, ADM has sat as a Permanence Panel member which enhances the overview of children's permanence planning across the authority. Annual ADM reporting has been combined with annual reporting of Permanence Panel.

ADM continues to provide detailed quality assurance feedback for individual CPRs presented at the point of an adoption plan decision. Further presentations to provide feedback on areas for further development to improve quality of CPRs have been delivered by ADM and Service Manager for Adoption to locality service managers and team managers. There is a need to strengthen the quality assurance function provided by team managers in order to reduce the level of detail of feedback given by ADM. Further work to improve the quality of CPRs is being progressed with the help of the Practice Excellence Team. Furthermore in preparation for the Loughborough CPR pilot, data is being compiled of those CPR's which are of sufficient to make the adoption plan decision ad those which require further information for this or amendments so that they are fit for family finding purposes.

In the year 2016-17, ADM children's plans data highlighted a much greater proportion of children being put forward for adoption from the Loughborough area compared to the other 3 localities and Disabled Children's Service. This year 50 % of children considered by ADM were from the Loughborough area, with 26% from North West Leicestershire; 12% from Bassett Street and Hinckley localities respectively and no plans from Disabled Children's Service. Further analysis is needed to understand the reasons for this difference and whether it is consistent with other work measures between localities.

There have been some ambitious adoption plans presented. Matches for 7 sibling groups have been agreed in this period. Further work to ensure consistency across localities is needed in consideration of adoption plans for children who might be considered harder to place, specifically older children or children with disabilities. The work of Permanence Panel in considering permanence plans of long term foster care for children will offer further insight in this regard.

Care planning of sibling groups remains an area for development to ensure issues of "Together or Apart" are considered at the outset of a child's journey. This should

ensure that information gathering is purposeful from the start of care planning and provides a robust evidence base for decision making. A planning aid is near completion.

No Fostering for Adoption arrangements have been presented to ADM in this period for consideration. This suggests profile raising is needed to ensure practitioners are aware of the duty local authorities are under to consider this as an option at the outset of proceedings.

There is further work needed to ensure matching reports evidence the strengths and vulnerabilities within the match being proposed. While 26 children were presented for a match, for a portion of these children, further information was required before the match was agreed. For 1 child, this match was not agreed within this reporting period. On another occasion, it was necessary to clarify whether a child could have been placed with their older adopted sibling before the match presented could be agreed. This illustrates that requests made by ADM at the point of agreeing an adoption plan, are not always followed up.

Support planning remains an area for improvement to ensure all that is known about the child and adopters' needs are reflected in a support plan. There is a need to be as explicit as possible about the impact of the children's health development and lived experience (acknowledging the impact of neglect and trauma) on short and long term needs and thus what capacity is implied for the adopters. With the developments in the Agency's Adoption Support Offer, it is hoped there will be more robust and responsive support plans presented as practitioners become more familiar with the support work available.

There have been 3 adoption approvals considered by ADM within this period where substantial further work has been required before a decision was made. On one occasion this followed a previous deferral by Fostering Panel. This further work related to the evidence presented about applicants' capacity to meet the particular needs of adopted children. Other assessments which present complexities and challenges are second time adopters or where foster carers are being assessed for a child already placed with them.

In terms of Panel functioning, there is a need to ensure their quality assurance function is more robustly carried out. For example, there have been occasions when Panel have identified further work that is fundamental to applicants' suitability to adopt and yet Panel recommended approval. Panel need to evidence their oversight and consideration in situations where further work has been previously been identified but left outstanding

It has been recognised that Adoption Panel has not had access to a legal advisor for some time. This has previously been raised with Legal Services to ensure Panel papers are scrutinised and there is legal oversight on all cases presented to Panel, even if a legal advisor is unable to routinely attend. However to date no regular service is available

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 local authorities and 3 Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) since August 2017.

The Regionalisation of Adoption

“It is a core proposition of the Department of Education’s Regionalization Program that adoption services need to be delivered at greater scale through the creation of a single pool of children and adopters within each region. However, the East Midlands region covers an area of considerable size, and is very diverse, and services still need to be accessible to children and adopters within a reasonable distance. .. Learning from the development of the EMRAA project to date, and from other projects, indicates that there is a need to align services across local authorities prior to integration Based on the outputs of the operational work streams, the Project Team will prepare a service description and a project plan for each of the following deliverables:

- Adopter Assessment
- Home finding and Matching
- Childrens Permanence Teams

The project team will provide regular updates to the sub regional PGB regarding progress against the project plan.”

Business Case for Establishing the RAA Pilot in LLLR,
Prepared by the RAAPT

The Leicestershire Adoption Agency has been part of the Regionalisation Adoption Agency Programme and has been pro-active in redesigning and aligning service provision to ensure practice is child centred and is embedded in the future vision. To this end, practice leads continue to engage and contribute to RAA work stream programs and will be making changes to align current practice to best practice identified in these work streams. Key developments in Leicestershire to achieve alignment across the region include:

- Regional Home Finding meetings
- Designing one ‘front door’ for marketing
- Introduction of Permanence Teams
- Integrating all adoption services in Leicestershire
- Improving *Foster for Adoption* availability.

The Adoption Agency has not received agreement to fully integrate with services across Lincolnshire, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, but remain committed to

contributing to the planning processes and to making the best end decision for children of Leicestershire, evidencing that timely and good matches can be made for children.

OFSTED Inspection

The Ofsted inspection during November 2016 identified that the Adoption Agency is 'good' with assessments of prospective adopters and our matches between adopters and children were timely and appropriate.

The Agency had already completed a self-assessment and had identified that our Post Adoption Support offer needed to be more robust and Ofsted echoed this finding.

The Adoption Agency response to Ofsted findings has been detailed above, which includes the Cabinet agreement to growth and expansion of the adoption support provision.

Officers in charge

The service is overseen by Service Manager, Michelle Robinson who reports directly to the Head of Service, Nicci Collins, and the Assistant Director Sharon Cooke.

Statement of Purpose

The Statement of purpose was reviewed and uploaded to the public facing Leicestershire County Council Website in January 2017 and will be reviewed annually.

Complaints

In the last financial year, 3 stage 1 complaints were received in relation to the Adoption Service. One of these was in relation to the adoption process and minutes of a meeting not being available, one was in relation to the adoption process but was specific to a locality team and the other in relation to a decision relating to funding to an adoptive family. None of these progressed to Stage 2 and was resolved satisfactorily. This is an increase of one complaint compared to the last financial year.

Key message from Service Manager, Michelle Robinson

“Adoption has been a key part of the Government Agenda since 2012 and has seen significant change.

There is a significant drive to increase the amount of children who are able to achieve early permanency. Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency are committed to ensuring that all children who are not able to remain safely within their birth family should have adoption considered as part of their care planning. A further priority for Leicestershire is to improve the quality of Child Permanence Reports to ensure that it is fit for purpose for its primary audience - the adopted adult. This will be driven via the introduction of an early permanency pilot scheme which goes live on 3rd September 2018.

Leicestershire continues to work pro-actively with other Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies within the Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies

process as Leicestershire remains committed to the needs of our children and ensuring that they continue to receive a high quality service.”

Michelle Robinson

Service Manager – Permanency

September 2018

Annexe A