

**LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND
ADOPTION AGENCY
ANNUAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND PERFORMANCE REPORT
1ST APRIL 2018
– 31ST MARCH 2019**





INTRODUCTION

Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory and regulated responsibilities relating to adoption. Until March 31st 2019 it had a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Rutland County Council. This Service Level Agreement ended on 31st March 2019 as Rutland moved their agreement to form an agreement with Lincolnshire 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 Executive regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel.

This report is the annual version to 31st March 2019.

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 353 adopter enquiries were received. 143 adopter households attended one of the 6 open evenings held during this period. 93 households requested an Initial visit and 49 households started the Stage one process. This represents an increase in the number of enquiries and attendance at an open evening but a slight decrease in the number of initial visits requested and stage one starts. We have aimed to provide better information at the beginning of the process to ensure that the right people at the right time are coming through the assessment process. The decrease in the number of people coming through to stage one does not reflect a decrease in the number of adopters approved this year which has in fact increased. There is a sensitive and thorough initial phase that allows potential adopters to understand the needs of adopted children, to reflect on their own circumstances and to help to determine if they are ready for this step. As such, fewer candidates may come through but those who do are better prepared for the adopter journey.

In relation to Leicestershire's performance marked against the Adoption Scorecard we continue 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 2015-2018 is 413 days. This represents a slight reduction in time children are waiting in Leicestershire. The average time for the period 2015-2018 was 413.4 days. The England average is 486. 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 153 days. The England average is 201 days. This is also positive. The average time was longer than it was in 2017 but this is due to difficulties in finding placements for 3 children with particular needs. Adoptive placements were found for 2 of these children with the third having a change of care plan.
- A3. Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adopted family currently stands at 65% - again this is an improvement compared to last years figures which were 64%. This is significantly better than the England 3-year average of 56%

Measurements against 'Adopters' indicate that Leicestershire adopters wait for less time than the England average before being matched after approval (62% compared to 69%).



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

Leicestershire remains in a strong position compared with national figures in relation to the 3-year average of adoptions from care during 2015 – 2018 with Leicestershire having 14% compared to the England average of 16%. Leicestershire has also performed strongly with securing adoptive placements for children from ethnic minority backgrounds 2015-2018. 14% compared with an England average of 7%.

The Adoption Agency continues to actively recruit and are continuously striving to recruit adopters for harder to place children such as older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities:

The Children's Decision-Making panel commenced in January 2018. Representatives from the Adoption Are are part of this panel and play an active role in contributing to early permanence decisions and tracking children to ensure that any potential drift is identified early and appropriate action taken. The presence of the Adoption Service at this panel also ensures that Adoption remains on the agenda and is considered for older children who have historically been considered too old. Sibling groups, particularly where there is an older child, have not routinely been considered for a plan of adoption together in the past. 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 with complex health needs or disabilities are now in their adoptive placement after their foster carers have successfully been assessed as adopters for them.

7 children with ethnicities other than White British were placed with adopters during 2018/2019. These have been through interagency matches. 5 adoptive households with ethnicities other than White British have been approved this financial year.

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. To date 5 placements have been identified through this process



BACKGROUND – YEAR TO 31ST MARCH 2019

Adoption Plans

1. Twenty-Three adoption panels were held during this period.
2. In this period 42 children were presented to the Agency Decision Maker for an adoption plan.
3. Of the 42 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.

Ages of children at point of approval April 2018 - March 2019

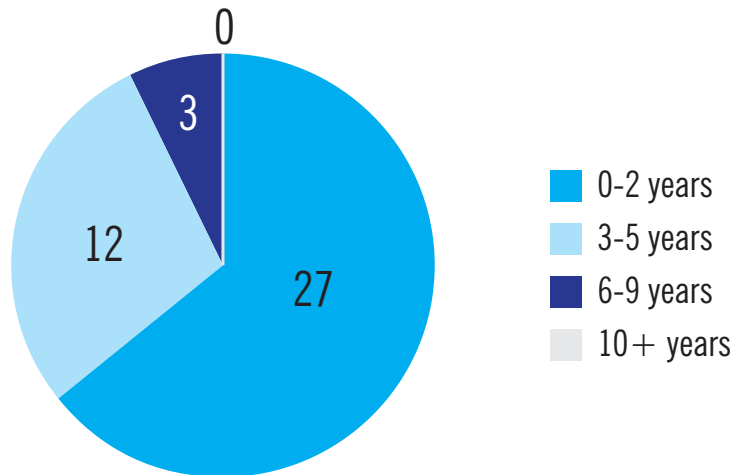


Chart 1 – Ages of children at point of approval for adoption

PERFORMANCE

Children Placed and Adopted

- 35 adoption orders were finalised for children in this period. Two of these children were from Rutland and 16 were interagency placements.
- 34 adopters were approved in this period compared to 33 the previous year. 2 of these approvals were child specific. 28 were White/British, 4 were Asian/Indian and 1 mixed Black African & White British household.
- 32 children have been placed with their prospective adopters during this period. 32 of these children have been Leicestershire children and 0 children from Rutland
- 20 children were placed with Leicestershire County Council approved adopters, and 12 via the inter-agency process.
- 4 sibling groups placed – all 4 sets were of 2 sibling groups
- At the 31st March 2019 there were 20 children awaiting an adoption placement. Although a link had been identified for 1. For those children without a link identified they are routinely taken to the Regional Home finding meeting, referred to the NAR. Options such as Activity Days and Exchange days are also considered. Themes arising for children waiting the longest consist of unknown future health needs/ life limiting conditions, low adoption options for siblings' groups of older children and an increase in the number of adopters being approved for babies. Of the children waiting there were 2 sets of sibling groups of 2 , one sibling group of 4 and a child with significant health complications. There has been a delay in the conclusion of court proceedings which has resulted in some children having a best interest decision of adoption but no Placement Order, for example for the sibling group of 4 a best interest decision was made in August 2018 but a final hearing not listed until August 2019. Children waiting are reviewed monthly by the Service Manager of the Adoption Service and a monthly report is provided to the Head of Service. Children who are experiencing avoidable delay are brought to the attention of the relevant Service Manager.
- 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. This is reviewed by attendance at CDM and cross referencing with the pre-proceeding's tracker and adoption tracker. Cases where delay or drift is identified are brought to the attention of the relevant Service Manager by the Adoption Service Manager. ADM also tracks children who should have been presented for a best interest decision and have not been. The Service Manager of the Adoption Service and ADM work closely together and meet weekly. We continue to see a rise in sibling groups with a best interest decision.
- 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 ourselves forming an early link with children outside of Leicestershire and therefore not being available for our children. As part of Leicestershire's alignment with Lincolnshire, Leicester City and Rutland our adopters are not restricted to searching within Leicestershire only initially as other authorities to do. This is to enable transparency between the L3R members and early matching of children within these areas.



Adoption Approvals

- During this period 35 adopter households were approved, 5 completed within the six-month timescale, 2 were fast tracked due to being second time adopters.
- 35 adopters were approved in this period compared to 33 the previous year. 9 of these approvals were child specific.
- As of 1st April 2019, we had 5 adopter households waiting. The longest waiting adopter was approved in December 2018 and was waiting for a specific age range and cultural background. All these adopters will be matched to children requiring a forever family in 19/20. These adopters have profiles on Linkmaker and are referred to NAR if they choose so. Whilst they are waiting they receive ongoing support from a social worker.

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

Quality of Reports

Adoption plans were agreed for 42 children during this period. However, a sibling group of 2 was subsequently changed to care plan of long term fostering and another child was placed with a relative under the auspice of a Special Guardianship Order. Of the children whose plan was agreed, there continues to be some challenges with the quality of the Child Permanence Records (CPR). Of those children who have been part of the pilot scheme, where family finding social workers are responsible for the completion of the CPRs rather than fieldwork social work who have a range of different pressures, there has been a noted improvement in the description of the child and the involvement of birth family. Workshops have been developed to further support social workers with the quality of other sections of the CPR that give the narrative of the child and families journey. There remains a mixed quality in relation to CPRs being completed by fieldwork social workers and there has continued to be occasions where best interest decisions have not been made because re-work has been required.

For those social workers involved in the pilot scheme their feedback was positive and we have also had positive feedback from birth family. Family Finders continue to develop their practice. The decision has been made to roll the pilot out, that is, the permanence function will transfer from all fieldwork social work teams to the Adoption Service in 2019.

There had initially been some concern about several children who had had CPRs completed but before presentation at ADM the care plan had changed to the child remaining with a birth relative. The Permanence Team Manager now has monthly meetings with fieldwork managers to discuss the cases and to track earlier any children whose care plan is likely to change and reduce the number of CPRs that require completion or full completion. For those children whose plan has been completed by the Adoption Service, it is uploaded onto the child's electronic records although this may not be in the format of a CPR. This ensures that all information is available should a child seek to access their records later.

Children Waiting for Adoption

1. At the 31st March 2019 there were 31 children awaiting an adoption placement although a link had been identified for 11 of them.
2. Family finding is being actively pursued with placements being sought via the National Adoption Register, the local East Midlands Regional Agency 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 seek to place with their own adopters initially - if this is not successful a search within the East Midlands Regional Agency is progressed with a national search only being completed if no suitable adopters are identified after this point. 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 three attended 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 not be referred.
3. In order to promote best matches for children Leicestershire County Council has removed the previously set cost of selling our adopters and bought it in line with other Local Authorities. This has had an impact on our business model and now requires that we sell 6 adopter households net per financial year.
4. On 31st March 2019 we 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 2019-2020 as set out in the Adoption and Permanence Strategy 2018-2012.
5. In this period, we successfully matched 2 children referred by Rutland County Council.
6. 6 children were placed under Foster for Adoption (FFA) protocols during this period in Leicestershire. All but one of these has gone on to be an adoptive placement, with one baby returning to his birth family at the end of court proceedings. There is currently 1 approved adoptive household willing to provide this type of placement. The training that prospective adopters receive as part of stage 2 does have a session on FFA and often involves an adopter who has adopted a child through this process. This is an area that will come under review for development in the upcoming months to ensure an appropriate strategy has been developed and is in place for April 2019.

Adoption Disruptions

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 Service 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 have access to a fully qualified play therapist who is based within the service.

There has been one adoption disruption during this period and a further 2 disruptions during introductions but before placement.

Post Adoption Support

1. Pre and post adoption support are provided in several ways within Leicestershire:

- A dedicated support worker contacts the adopter 6 weeks post placement. Research and the work of another regional authority suggests that at 6 weeks 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, and generally building the confidence and resilience of the adopter. The adoption support plan is reviewed, and any advice or further support is offered at this time. Positive feedback has been received from adopters about the support they have received that reflects this impact. This worker continues to make contact every 6 months for the first 3 years post placement.
- A qualified art therapist is now part of the team.
- The adoption social worker offers support up to three years post adoption order, especially in cases of complex need or where adoption breakdown or disruption is a threat.
- Leicestershire has also more recently begun to offer lifelong support to all adopters within Leicestershire. Previously adopters who were post 3 years of the granting of an Adoption Order had to refer in through First Response Children's Duty (Leicestershire's referral 'front door') if they needed support and were then allocated a worker in fieldwork teams. As safeguarding demand increased in these teams, complaints from adopters increased. Adopters can now contact the Adoption Team directly for support and will be given advice or allocated a worker for assessment, regardless of when the adoption order was granted. If there are other needs within the family, it may be that the family has two workers – one from the Fieldwork Team and one from the Adoption Team.
- There are also two post support social worker who work with families therapeutically using Theraplay and DDP techniques that support attachment and positive parenting. The social workers complete Assessment of Need for those families requiring more specialist therapy and will submit applications to the Adoption Support Fund for funding. Where the child's needs appear complicated and the Adoption Team is not certain of the appropriate therapy or treatment pathway, CAMHS offer a consultation session and provide clinical advice.
- The Adoption Team also works closely with voluntary agencies who over the year have provided independent assessments.
- During 2018-19 the Virtual School embraced its new duties to previously looked after children and receive daily calls from schools and adopters seeking advice (particularly around attachment needs and how to manage this successfully in school settings and at times, direct involvement through mediation is offered. Between 23rd August 2018 – 22nd July 2019 The Virtual school handled 198 phone calls, 111 emails and attended 14 meetings on behalf of 72 different children/families.
- The demand for post adoption support continues to grow in all areas. Leicestershire County Council has Therapeutic Support Budget that can be accessed to support children emotionally prior to adoption. Each child can have an initial payment of up to £450 with a further £450 being available if required. The Service Manager for Children in Care has a role in monitoring applications and the progress of any therapy commissioned, and the Head of the Virtual School monitors the use of Pupil Premium to support children emotionally.
- There is agreement for the introduction of two more role specific workers to the service – a social worker dedicated to the lifelong support of adoptive children placed as part of a sibling group or with complex health needs or disabilities, and the introduction of a dedicated life story and information sharing worker.



2. Quarterly newsletters are sent to all adopters as are invitations to two social gatherings through the year. The newsletters have received positive feedback.
3. To 31st March 2019, LCC has drawn down £338,302.72 of Adoption Support Fund to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is an increase in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£209,763). This increase was predicted at the time of reporting in 2018 as there had been a back log of applications waiting to be processed due to the worker responsible for the administration having maternity related issues. The back log was cleared in May 2018.
4. 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. She offers advice and support on the most appropriate type of therapy. Leicestershire has referred 25 families to this service, with positive feedback.
5. 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 also set up the First Family support group. This is where birth family can access support if they have been affected by the adoption of a child. This is run by our SGO support worker who is a qualified play therapist. There are currently 6 birth parents on the waiting list with 2 having been seen already.
6. A full-time job share Birth Records Counsellor (BRC) post continues to work very positively. Cases are allocated at point of referral. The waiting list has reduced dramatically over the year and positive feedback has been received. At the point of the BRC working starting (January 2018) there were 60 adopted adults waiting for their birth records. Some of these had been waiting since 2015. 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 Service no longer has a waiting list.

This service continues to receive high volumes of positive feedback –

“ Thank you for your research and support. From being scared of where I may have come from, to now being proud of who I am. . . ”

7. 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.





Permanence Team

The role of the 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. In July 2018 a Child Permanence pilot started. This involved Family Finding social workers co-working children with a potential plan of adoption with social workers from Charnwood and Melton fieldwork teams. The role of the Family Finder is to work closer with the children, their birth family and foster carer to complete the CPR. The aim of this pilot was to improve the quality of the CPR and the timeliness of plans being presented to ADM. To date (July 31st) the family finding team have worked with 42 children. 3 have been presented to ADM, a further 18 have concluded with a care plan other than adoption. There has been an improvement in the description of the child and involvement of birth family. Workshops have been developed to further support social workers with the quality of other sections of the CPR that give the narrative of the child and families journey.

The work of this team 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:

- Processes for the permanence planning of children in long term foster care
- The introduction of Life Appreciation Days for adopted children and,
- Further embedding of the Signs of Safety methodology in our practice.

The team is becoming more involved in the completion of Sibling Together or Apart assessments and a number of team members have undertaken Theraplay and DDP training to ensure that they can appropriately prepare and support adopters to understand the needs of our children and parent them therapeutically.

Statement by the Agency Decision Maker, Helen Gronhaug

The independent position of the ADM provides an over view of children's care planning and outcomes through consideration of adoption and fostering panel recommendations; children's adoption plans as well as foster carer reviews. This allows for the identification of practice and policy themes. This oversight of children's permanence planning is further enhanced through ADM's Permanence Panel membership.

Children's Adoption plans

The ADM has continued to provide detailed quality assurance feedback for individual CPRs presented at the point of an adoption plan decision. However, there continues to be a need for robust quality assurance prior to ADM consideration. It was hoped practice guidance sessions delivered by ADM and Service Manager for Adoption to locality service managers and team managers would improve the quality of CPRs. In practice, locality social workers find it difficult to devote the attention needed to complete this important work alongside submitting evidence for court proceedings. Birth family engagement in adoption planning can be challenging with practitioners who are case responsible for safeguarding and care proceedings. Furthermore while the individual case feedback provided by ADM was intended to model QA standards, in reality, it appears reliance has developed on this rather than responsibility for effective quality assurance being focussed further back in the workflow through team management oversight. One of the primary objectives of the ADM role Action Plan is to strengthen quality assurance at the right place at the right time and by the right role.

Data compiled as part of the CPR pilot has provided a baseline of those CPRs which are of sufficient to make the adoption plan decision and those which require further information for this or where amendments are required before they are fit for family finding purposes. The Permanence Team Manager is to ensure oversight of amendments required given amendments have not always been completed in a timely way.

The decision to roll out the CPR pilot model offers further scope to improve quality of CPRs with a smaller number of workers focussing on this work and developing their skill set. To fully realise the benefits of this model, it is essential that mechanisms are in place to guard against a disconnect between the social work team responsible for care planning and the permanence social worker responsible for providing a coherent narrative of this work. The pilot has given a clear message that regular communication is needed between the teams so that the locality team's knowledge of the child's lived experience translates into the CPR. Coordination of care planning and timetabling also needs to be tightened. Adoption plans have been submitted for ADM when Review of Arrangements and service manager oversight of final care planning are outstanding and/ or assessments are not concluded. The fact that the CPR forms the basis for a Placement Order application to court means it needs to be ready to evidence the rationale for an adoption plan shortly after ADM consideration. This can create challenges in meeting court timescales and a small number of CPRs have needed re-work before filing with court. I am working with the Permanence Team Manager on delivering practice development sessions and to harness lessons learnt from the pilot. This will need to be shared with locality fieldwork teams as this model rolls out county wide.

There has been an increase in occasions when ADM has been approached to review the decision of an adoption plan on the basis of further assessments agreed through court. This reflects a complex picture and one which has implications for volume of work.

While there have been some ambitious adoption plans presented, further work is needed to explore consistency across localities in consideration of adoption plans for children who might be considered harder to place, specifically older children or children with disabilities. Once adoption planning work transfers wholly to the Permanence Team, its manager will have a valuable overview of which children are being considered for a plan of adoption. The work of Permanence Panel in considering permanence plans of long term foster care for children will offer further insight in this regard and also with the development of the Permanence Scorecard.

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. I have worked with the Practice Excellence Team and the Sibling Assessment Planning Aid has received SMT approval. Work is now needed to ensure the message of early assessment of sibling relationships is shared with key partners in the judiciary with implications for contact proposals in court proceedings.

Fostering for Adoption

There were 4 approvals for Fostering for Adoption arrangements presented to ADM in this period which represents an increase from the previous reporting period before when no such placements were made. For individual 2 children, Foster for Adoption approval was used to avoid further placement moves prior to approval of matching for adoption. This indicates an improvement in considering Fostering for Adoption at each and every stage in a child’s journey. A further 2 children were placed with Inter –Agency adopters who were dually approved as foster carers on a fostering basis. This therefore did not come for ADM consideration.

1 child placed with adopters under Foster for Adoption arrangements was returned to birth family care. While it is recognised adopters bear the risk that a placement made under fostering regulations may not mean permanence with them via adoption is the outcome, this highlights the need for robust family network planning and assessments at early stages.





Adopter approvals

Of the approval presented to Adoption Panel, this year, Adoption Panel deferred 4 applications for further work. A further application was noted as a withdrawal after Panel has previously deferred for more information. ADM requested further information following Panel's recommendation on at least 13 applications. Approvals were subsequently agreed on 10 of these applications with 2 subsequent withdrawals and 1 application where re-submission to ADM remains outstanding. The outstanding work commonly related to applicants' understanding of adoptive parenting, child care experience, consideration to children already established within the family and questions around applicants' resilience and vulnerability of support network. 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.

While some assessments have been completed by in-house assessors, there have been some assessments completed by the same commissioned social workers which have been subject to repeated quality assurance. The role of the engagement social workers will be key in offering consultation and early quality assurance to assessors who are commissioned to complete such assessments. I have introduced quarterly reflective discussions with Panel Advisor, Panel Chair, Vice Chairs and Service Manager. These meetings offer an opportunity to understand any differences between Panel and ADM deliberations and drive practice development and appropriate scrutiny. The meetings provide a forum to explore factors which are fundamental to suitability to adopt or whether they relate to matching considerations. Panel's quality assurance function can therefore be more robustly carried out.

Adoption matches

Panel deferred 1 match for further work during this period. Panel need to evidence their oversight and consideration in situations where further work has been previously identified but has been left outstanding. E.g. CPRs which have been updated. This then means that there can be a delay in ADM decision making to ensure work has been completed. ADM requested a significant amount of information on at least proposed 7 matches before making a decision. On one occasion, this required a professionals meeting which I attended to clarify information before approving the match. Again the ADM Action Plan highlights a need for strengthened team manager quality assurance after ADM has agreed an adoption plan and through family finding stages to ensure identified work is completed in a timely way.

It has now been introduced that CPRs are passed to the Adoption Medical Advisor in advance of the medical consultation meeting with prospective adopters. This simple measure should further enhance the comprehensive counselling provided by the Medical Advisor and further strengthen adopters' preparation for meeting the needs of their adopted child in the short and longer term.

Improvement has been seen with some support plans being more individualised to the child. There has been a growing acknowledgement seen of 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. It remains an area for improvement to ensure all that is known about both the child and adopters' needs is reflected in a support plan. In particular, the needs of children who are already part of the adoptive family (by birth or through adoption) need to be consistently reflected in support plans. 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. Where ADM has made requirements for additions to the Adoption Support Plan, these are passed to the child's Independent Reviewing Officer for their oversight and monitoring.

Given more ambitious matches are being progressed, Panel and ADM would benefit from inclusion of a draft introductions plan. An information session with Panel is planned within 2 months before the inclusion of draft introductions into Panel papers.

It has been encouraging to see occasions when adopters matched with children who may be considered harder to place, have received early input from the Post Adoption Support Worker. The use of individualised Theraplay activities has provided a valuable bridge between foster carer and adopters to promote consistency and stability for the child and facilitate the transfer to adopters.

It has been recognised that Adoption Panel has not had access to a legal advisor for some time. However to date no regular service is available.

Disruptions

Learning from disruptions is vital to inform Panel and ADM practice and future decision making. It is hoped that the process for learning from disruptions will be developed to ensure Panel and ADM are included in lessons learnt.

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) and continue to work closely.

We have continued to be part of the Regionalisation Adoption Agency Programme and have been pro-active in ensuring that good practice that is child centred is embedded in the future vision Leicestershire has formed closer working relationships with Leicester City, Rutland and Lincolnshire and practice continues to be aligned across the agencies. This collaboration has seen the introduction of:

- Shared training program for adopters
- Introduction of Permanence Teams to Leicestershire
- Embedding of Family Finding meetings (Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Leicester, Rutland, Faith in Families and Coram), with the launch of a shared information sharing platform (for adult and child information) in July 2019
- Agreement on the number of adopters to be exchanged without charge was made in December 2019
- Creation of a shared website – Adoption East Midlands (<https://www.adoptioneastmidlands.org.uk/>)

Leicestershire has had one had a successful match through these meetings.

Developments

The Special Guardianship service was set up in March 2018 with a purpose of supporting Special Guardians for the first 3 years after the order is granted and offering advice, newsletters and events to all special guardians regardless of the date of order.

Within Leicestershire county council there are a total of 228 carers with Special Guardianship Orders granted in their favour. This can be for one or more children so the number of children on a SGO in LCC would be greater than this.

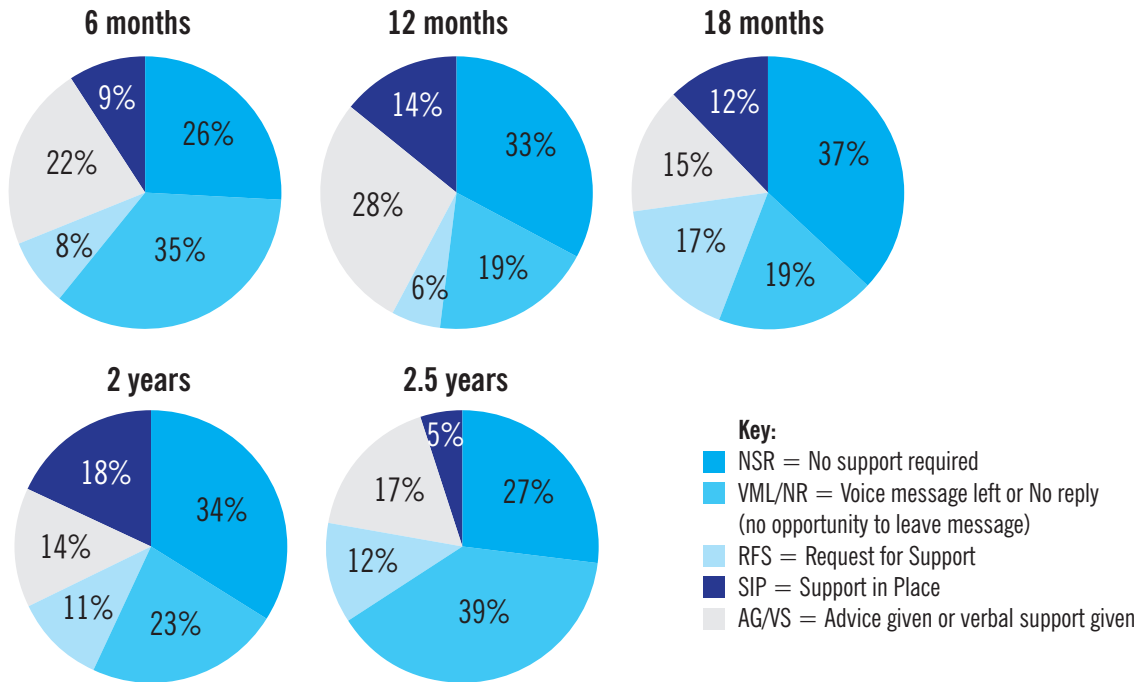
Of those 228 families, as of June 2019, 81 are within the 3-year post order support time period, they are made up of:

- 2016 – 21
- 2017 – 34
- 2018 – 23
- 2019 – 3

The Offer

- **Phone calls** - six monthly phone calls are made during the first 3 years to the special guardians to ascertain how the children and the care they are receiving is progressing. The support worker prompts conversation about the children’s development, behaviour, contact with parents and any concerns or worries that they may be experiencing, in order to identify any help the service may be able to offer or signpost to.

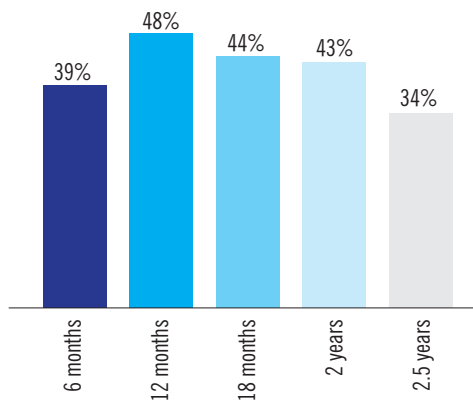
Below is an analysis of the 6 monthly phone calls:



Of the calls that resulted in no support required a significant amount voiced that they were comforted to know that this service was in place should they find themselves requiring assistance in any way.

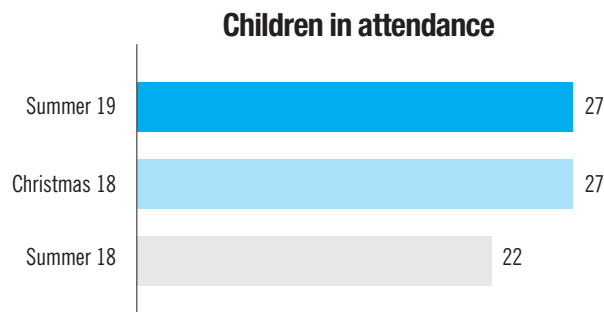
Of the calls made the following percentages show phone calls resulting in action either by giving verbal support, offering reassurance, advice regarding the SGO, techniques regarding behaviour management and reviewing support already in place.

Support requested or in place, advice and verbal support given



Our service is relatively new, so statistics derived from current information is likely to change as our service becomes more embedded and Special Guardians are more accustomed and at ease with it. However, it currently would seem to show that support requirements peak at 12 months after order and gradually decrease but with still quite a high percentage at around the 2.5 years - 6 months prior to end of formal support.

- **Events-** to date we have held two events – a summer event 2018, Christmas Party 2018 and we have arrangements for Summer Event 2019 with confirmed attendance and more expected on the day. Attendance and expected attendance for these events are detailed below:



Statement of Purpose

The Statement of purpose was reviewed and uploaded to the public facing LCC Website in January 2019 and will be reviewed annually.

Rutland Arrangements

We continued to provide adoption services for Rutland County Council under a Service Level Agreement up until 31st March 2019 when the Service Level Agreement ceased. During the reporting period, 2 Rutland children were matched with adopters by this agency.

Adoption Panel

1. We currently have 9 independent adoption panel members consisting of 3 males & 6 females. All are W/B except 1 male. There is one panel chair and one vice chair.
2. A panel training session for adoption panel members is to be booked for October 2019. Business meetings between panel chair, panel advisor and the service manager take place every 4 months
3. There has been a decrease of 3 panel members since 2018 as members have left for varying reasons.
4. 23 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.

National/local Political Implications

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 number of children who are able to achieve early permanency via fostering to adopt. This is an implicit feature of our assessment and training programme to ensure that all adopters are fully informed of the risks and benefits of offering such placements. We routinely ensure that adopters have the opportunity to hear from others who have offered this type of placement within their training.

Leicestershire continues to work pro-actively with other Local Authorities and VAA's 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

July 2019.



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