Leicestershire County Council

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 19TH JANUARY 2021

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE 2019-2020

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Annual Report of the Adoption Service, which evaluates the extent to which Leicestershire County Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to these children for the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory and regulated responsibilities relating to adoption. The main role of the Adoption and Permanence Service is to provide high quality adoptive placements, a range of adoption and special guardianship support and other permanency options, including profiling for long term placements for children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council and are unable to live with their birth families.

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 . To meet this requirement the Adoption Service submits a monthly report to the Lead Member for Children and Families and the Director of Children and Family Services and an annual report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. Adoption has been a key part of the Government Agenda since 2012 and has seen significant change. There continues to be a drive to increase the number of children who are able to achieve early permanency via fostering to adopt. This is an implicit feature of the assessment and training programme to ensure that all adopters are fully informed of the risks and benefits of offering such placements. The service routinely ensures that adopters have the opportunity to hear from others who have offered this type of placement within their training.

Background

5. Leicestershire County Council had operated a joint Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service since April 2015. In July 2019 the two functions were separated so that there were dedicated Fostering and Adoption Services.

6.   Adoption and Permanence Services are provided to birth parents, prospective and approved adopters, children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services ,children and Special Guardians who require therapeutic support and advice where the child lives permanently in Leicestershire and adopted adults.

7.   In September 2019, Leicestershire`s Children and Family Service was inspected by Ofsted. Whilst the Adoption Service was not subject to its own inspection the feedback for the service was exceptional. The overall judgement for services for children in care, was Good.

8.   This report should be read alongside the Care Placement Strategy and Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017-2021. These are dynamic strategies, geared towards supporting the recruitment of a diverse and confident mix of adoptive families, ensure enduring relationships and high-quality adoption support services.

Key Areas of Success

9.   The Adoption Score card presents the performance data for Local Authorities over a three year and one year trend. The three main key performance indicators are:

   • A10 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family
   • A2 - The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family
   • A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child

   Against all three key performance indicators the three year trend data remains stable and either better or similar to statistical neighbours. A10 and A2 improved against the previous three year trend data with the number of days reducing by 11 days and 10 days respectively and are both comparatively shorter timescales than statistical neighbours. A20 remained the same at 255 days which is similar to the statistical neighbour figure of 241 days.

10.   Leicestershire remains in line with Leicester City and Lincolnshire for placing children over five years old, having placed 18 between 2016-2019. As Leicestershire is joining Leicester City and Lincolnshire as part of the Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies it is promising that Leicestershire is performing equally as well. Leicestershire has also successfully placed a sibling group of four children, one of whom was over the age of five.
      A specific Facebook campaign for a sibling group of three resulted in over 100 enquiries and the progression to assessment for one family.

11.   Finding adoptive homes for children with complex health needs or disabilities remains a challenge. However, this remains a key focus and is routinely part of the Facebook campaigns seeking adopters for those harder to place children.

Leicestershire also uses activity days run by Coram BAAF[1] and exchange events to ensure children's profiles reach a wider audience. By using activity days children get the opportunity to meet adopters face to face and play, and vice versa. Exchange events allow the sharing of profiles with an adoption social worker being present; they are available to adopters who express an interest in a child and information can be shared. The children are not part of this process.

12. A pilot scheme was rolled out in September 2019, where the Permanence Team took over responsibility of completing Child Permanence Reports with a specific aim of involving birth family and improving the quality of reports. This was successful and is now a permanent service provision within the Permanence Team that covers all areas of the county. Monthly meetings are held with team managers of each fieldwork locality to ensure effective communication and tracking of cases.

   'The Child's Permanence Report is an essential tool that explains to the child their life story to date, enables a plan of adoption to be ratified and presented to court and supports adopters in understanding the child's early years.'

13. Leicestershire has continued to be actively engaged in the regional home finding meetings where representatives from Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Leicester City and three Voluntary Agencies meet monthly to identify prospective matches for hard to place children. The meetings are now taking place quarterly with exchange and activities planned for the months in between. Leicestershire continues to chair and administer these meetings. There has been limited success with finding adoptive placements for children within these meetings with matches being identified for five Leicestershire children.

14. There has only been one 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 emotional needs and as such, behaviour of their children, the Adoption Team is available to provide intense support based on therapeutic techniques. All the permanence family finding social workers have been trained in level 1 Theraplay; this is a therapy for children and families for building and enhancing attachment, self-esteem, joyful engagement and trust in others and also have access to a fully qualified play therapist who is based within the service

Key Areas for development

Against all three Adoption Scorecard indicators, the one year trend data for 2019 is highlighting an increase in the number of days in comparison to the previous year and therefore a decrease in the timeliness to achieve permanence. In addition, across all three indicators Leicestershire is performing lower than statistical neighbours.

Adoption Score	2018	2019	Statistical

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[1] CoramBAAF is an **independent membership organisation** for professionals, foster carers and adopters, and anyone else working with or looking after children in or from care, or adults who have been affected by adoption

Card			Neighbours
A10	228 days	425 days	344 days
A2	133 days	167 days	157 days
A20	187 days	316 days	235 days

The variance for the one year trend data has been explored and this has highlighted that there were five children who presented as being significant outliers in terms of increased number of days. The service is satisfied that for the five children, any delay was due to the complexity of need and how this impacted on ensuring the right match, such as significant disabilities of the children and ensuring that the children received the right therapeutic intervention prior to placing to support the success of the placement. The service will continue to have robust monitoring and oversight of the progression of children whose permanence plan is adoption and recognise that matching for children with additional complex needs may require more time, consideration and intervention.

Resource Implications

15.   None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

16.   None.

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

17.   These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children and young people whose best interest decision is permanence through adoption, including disabled children, older children and those from minority and harder to place groups. The Adoption Service has a diverse compliment of staff with good representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2019/20

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