



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2
NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

LEICESTERSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

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 2020 – 31 March 2021.

Background

2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. The service became part of the Regional Adoption Agency (known as Family Adoption Links) on 14th October 2020. Family Adoption Links' primary aim is to provide enough good quality adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for permanency across the five Local Authority areas of Leicestershire, Leicester City, Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Rutland. Family Adoption Links manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.
6. The work of the Leicestershire County Council Adoption Service during the last year has inevitably been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The regulatory framework for adoption has been amended by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (Regulations) 2020 and Leicestershire has been

able to make some use of the relaxed regulations, in relation to conducting assessments and panels remotely.

7. 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.

Summary of Report

Key Areas of Success

8. There have been no disruptions for Leicestershire children in this period. One disruption has occurred of Leicestershire adopters with children from another Local Authority. 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 aimed at building and enhancing attachment, self-esteem, joyful engagement and trust in others and they also have access to a fully qualified play therapist who is based within the service.
9. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (Regulations) 2020 temporarily amended some of the regulatory requirements regarding adopter approvals, meaning that visits and panels could be undertaken remotely. Adopters have continued to access training, preparation and assessment in line with National Minimum Standards throughout the year despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.
10. The average number of days from placement to Adoption Order has decreased from the year before (387 days from 413 days). This remains above the national average.
11. Twenty-five children have been placed with their adoptive families during the year, the same number as the previous year, evidencing a continued drive to progress children's plans. Early identification of potential links and matches is carried out in internal family finding meetings. Children may also have anonymous profiles created to facilitate early linking with Leicestershire adopters as well as adopters across the Regional Adoption Agency. Regional family finding activity is in process, with regular matching meetings taking place. This is a developing area of practice but has already been successful in identifying matches for three Leicestershire children; the family finding work will continue to grow in the year ahead.
12. Positive developments are being made to mirror the Post Adoption support offer to those family members and children subject to a Special Guardianship Order; this is being progressed through the department's transformation programme, *Defining Children and Family Services for the Future*.

Key Areas for development

13. 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:
 - i) A10 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family
 - ii) A2 – The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family
 - iii) A20 – The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child.

14. The three-year trend data remains more positive with A20 highlighting a slight decrease in the length of time. However, A10 and A2 are both indicating an increase in time. The figures from statistical neighbours are not yet available for comparison.

15. The one-year trend data for 2020/21 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. Detailed consideration of information regarding individual children was completed by managers. This analysis reflects outliers in the data set – a small number of children who have waited longer to achieve permanence due to the complexity of their needs and matching requirements, as well as delays related to court proceedings.

16. The variance for the data has been explored and this has highlighted that there were seven children who presented as being significant outliers in terms of increased number of days. The service is satisfied that for these 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.

17. The seven children comprised of two sibling groups and have started to make progress through the adoption process. The sibling group of three males have an adoptive family identified who are ready to start introductions as soon as the court proceedings are complete. The oldest child in the female sibling group is now in placement with her adoptive family and the youngest two have a match identified.

18. 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.

2020-21 performance overview

Adopter Recruitment

19. Thirty-six Initial Visits were completed, 28 of which resulted in a Registration of Interest. During this period 23 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, six of which were deferred for further work.

Permanency Planning for children

20. In this period 40 children were subject to Best Interest Decisions (BID). 20 of those children are waiting for final court hearings where Placement Orders (PO) may be made to allow their placement with adoptive families. Two children with a BID from a previous year continue to wait for a PO, making a total of 22 children with a BID and no PO. Four children with a BID made in the year were also placed with their adoptive families within the reporting period.
21. Twenty-five children have been placed with their adoptive families during the year, the same number as the previous year.
22. Fifteen Adoption Orders were finalised in the year 2020/21, a decrease from the previous year when 31 orders were made.

Adoption Support Fund

23. To 31 March 2021, Leicestershire has drawn down £1,494,524.94 from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is a significant increase in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£499,478,28) and represents support to 251 families, up from 164 in 2019-20.

Overview of targets and priorities for 2021/22:

- Continue working and developing alongside colleagues in the Regional Adoption Agency, with specific and effective action plans agreed by operational leads and overseen by the Board.
- Focus on the key performance indicators related to the assessment and recruitment of adopters, identify barriers to improvement and learn from areas of good practice.
- Focus on timeliness for children by developing the understanding of children's journey through care to point of Best Interest Decision; developing early linking and matching processes; increasing the use of Fostering for Adoption where appropriate to meet children's needs.
- Develop the panel, ensuring that the central list meets the needs of the service and panels continue to provide robust scrutiny of the agency.
- Develop a service-wide action plan to ensure that operational managers invest in mutually beneficial activity to improve outcomes for children and adopters.
- Develop processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development.
- Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Leicestershire Adoption Agency Annual Report 2020-21.

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