



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE - 7 NOVEMBER 2023**

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

LEICESTERSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with an overview of the activity of the Adoption Agency from March 2022 to March 2023.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

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 standard the Adoption Service submits a monthly report to the Lead Member and Director and an annual report to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. The full report can be found at the appendix.

Background

4. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory and regulated responsibilities relating to adoption. The main roles 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. Adoption and Permanence Services are provided to:
 - Children who are to be adopted
 - 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
 - Adopted adults
5. The Adoption Service is led by the Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and the Virtual School and managed through a Service

Manager who has responsibility for the three teams that make up the adoption service, Assessment and Support, Permanence and Post-Order Support.

Summary of Report

6. Leicestershire County Council is part of the Family Adoption Links (FAL), a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020.
7. This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, North Lincolnshire Council. Northampton Children's Trust joined the partnership in January 2022. Lincolnshire County Council remains acting as host for the arrangement.
8. The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14th October 2020 and describes how FAL 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.
9. Through working in partnership, the service is starting to benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.
10. The vision of the RAA is that:
 - Children have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them
 - Matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children
 - Adopters receive a consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process
 - The same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region
 - Family Adoption Links, local authorities and VAAs work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters
11. Leicestershire continues to perform well against Department of Education score cards for the one and three year trend data. Against all of three indicators, the one year trend data for 2022/23 is highlighting a decrease in the number of days in comparison to the previous year and therefore, an increase in the timeliness to achieve permanence. The timeliness identified for one year trend data 2022/23 demonstrates that although timely matches are made for the majority of children, Leicestershire continues have a small cohort of children who wait longer for placements. This is in line with regional partners and statistical neighbours. The Service continues to be creative and ambitious in its permanency planning, including activity days, discovery events, specific social media campaigns, web site profiles, the increased use of video profiling. Further

development is being considered through the Family Adoption Links family finding workstream.

12. A range of work is completed by several teams within the service to ensure priorities and targets are met:
- The Recruitment Team - enhancing the overall recruitment and experience of prospective Adopters
 - The Assessment and Support Team – to engage with prospective adopters through their assessment and once approved to support adopters in matching them with a child and supporting them through to the granting of an Adoption Order. Assessments continue to be completed in house. This has had a positive impact on relationships between Leicestershire and adopter applicants and the service have seen an increase in the number of adopters who receive a positive Qualifying Determination without the requirement of extra work.
 - The Permanence Team – work alongside colleagues in locality teams to progress plans for children where adoption may be required. Permanence team social workers also undertake all family finding activity for children who need permanence via adoption. Staff sufficiency was a challenge during this period, resulting in the team being unable to take new referrals from the Locality Teams from November 2022, although Family Finding remained within the team. Recruitment has on the whole been successful with the team being able to fully operational from September 2023
 - The Post Adoption Support Team – work as part of a team around the family, offering support to the child and parents relating to the therapeutic needs of the adopted child and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
 - The Birth Records Counselling Team - providing services to adopted adults who wish to access their adoption information.

2022-23 Achievements highlights:

13. The Department continues to be part of Family Adoption Links and to be involved in developing a high quality service to children and adopters
14. The service has received a positive response to newsletters. Staff have continued to work safely and effectively to support children and families across Leicestershire and move children to their adoptive families. The service have also increased the support offer to adopters by using support workers creatively

2021-22 performance overview

Adopter Recruitment

15. In 2022/23 37 Initial Visits were completed, 25 of which resulted in an ROI (Registration of interest). During this period 19 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, two of which were deferred for

further work. 18 adopter households were approved in this period, compared to 25 the previous year.

16. 19 applications have been presented to Adoption Panel for approval. One application presented to panel had a different outcome. Of the 19 adopter households who were presented to panel, 17 were couples. Two of these couples were LGBTQ+. 17 out of the 19 households were White British. No adopters are recorded as having a registered disability, although one requested extra support due to dyslexia

Permanency Planning for children

17. At the end of March 2023, there were a total of 30 children with a Placement Order who have not yet been placed with their adoptive families. This is broken down into 16 male children and 14 females. Nine of these children have links with prospective adopters, five children are having links explored with their foster carers (this includes a sibling group of four whose carer was approved in January 2023, but the service has now been requested to reassess birth father) and a further single child is due to be placed with his sibling. and One further child is placed in long term foster care and the service is awaiting the revocation of the Placement Order.
18. The Service currently has 16 children which is actively family finding for. This includes nine children who are considered to be 'harder to place' as a result of their additional needs (health and arising from trauma experiences), which also includes three sibling groups one of three children and two of two children. All children waiting are discussed at local and regional family finding meetings, are profiled at Discovery and Exchange Events and have also been invited or attended the Regional Activity Day.

Adoption Support Fund

19. To 31 March 2023, Leicestershire has drawn down £852,432 from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is a slight decrease in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£862,468.48) and represents support to 414 families, up from 335 in 2021/22. The total amount of drawn down also includes top up applications where therapy is assessed as being needed to be continued once the initial therapeutic period has ended. Leicestershire has successfully trained workers therapeutically to ensure a better provision of services.

Overview of targets and priorities for 2023/24

20. The service has key targets and priorities for 2023/24:
- To 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 an 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. There will be a particular focus on those children who typically wait longer.
- To continue to develop the adoption panel, ensuring that that panel members are appropriately trained to continue to meet the needs of the service provide robust scrutiny of the agency.
- To increase the offer of support to adoptive families
- Continue to invest in developing processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development
- Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

21. None

Equality Implications

22. These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children with a care plan of adoption, including disabled children, young children and those from minority and harder to reach groups. The Adoption Service has a diverse compliment of staff with representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.
23. The Adoption Service has an Equality and Diversity Action Plan in place which ensures that all staff are enabled to feel safe and supported, in addition to working towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to tackling inequalities. This work includes relevant research, data analysis, Quality Assurance activity, and engagement with children, young people and families.

Human Rights Implications

24. There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Leicestershire Adoption Agency Annual Report 2022-23

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