



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: NOVEMBER 2025**

LEICESTERSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

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

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with the Annual report into Leicestershire's Adoption agency for the period March 2024 to March 2025.

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 an annual report for the Lead Member for Children and Families and Director, and an annual report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
3. This report provides information about the Adoption Service's work during 2024-25 with an overview of activity and achievements over 2024 and 2025. The report also continues the recommendations for future activity in this area of work
4. A copy of the full annual report is appended to this report.

Background

5. 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.
6. 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; and,
 - Adopted adults.

7. The Adoption Service is led by the Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering and Adoption, 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

8. 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.
9. This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, and North Lincolnshire Council. Northampton Children's Trust joined the partnership in January 2022. Lincolnshire County Council remains acting as host for the arrangement.
10. The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14 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.
11. Through working in partnership, the Service continues 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.
12. The vision of the Partnership 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; and,
 - Family Adoption Links, local authorities and VAAs work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters.
13. The Adoption Score card presents the performance data for Local Authorities over a three-year trend 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; and,

- A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child.
14. Against all three key performance indicators the three-year trend data remains relatively stable. Against two of three indicators, the one-year trend data for 2023/24 is highlighting an increase in the number of days in comparison to the previous year.
 15. Whilst most children have their permanence achieved in a timely manner, there have been a small number of children whose plans have been delayed. Detailed consideration of information regarding individual children is routinely completed by managers and the Service Manager. All children who have agreement to a national search for adopters are subject to a case discussion between the Service manager, team manager and social worker every three months to ensure that the care plan remains appropriate and that any delay is understood and challenged where necessary.
 16. Improved data collection means that all children are tracked from the point of Pack A request. Monthly Improvement Cycle Meetings ensure that any drift and delay is identified, challenged and rectified. Pack As are the documents to complete if the Service believes that the plan for the child is likely to be adoption.
 17. 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 the Council and adopter applicants, meaning prospective adopters want to work with the Service and where possible to adopt children from the area. There has been an increase in the number of adopters who receive a positive Qualifying Determination (approval by the Agency Decision maker to be approved adopters) without the requirement of extra work.
 - The Permanence Team – work alongside colleagues in Family Safeguarding 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.
 - 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.

2024-2025 Achievements highlights:

18. The Service is proud of the following achievements:
- Continuing to be part of Family Adoption Links and to be involved in developing a high quality service to children and adopters;
 - Promoting Staying in Touch, which enable children to have agreed arrangements for a level of contact, both direct and indirect, with birth families and developing successful sibling events;
 - Staff have continued to work creatively and effectively to support children and families across Leicestershire and move children to their adoptive families;
 - In April 2024 Leicestershire's Children and Family Services Department was inspected by Ofsted and received a judgement of Outstanding. Inspectors commented positively about the Adoption Service stating: *'When a decision has been taken that adoption is the right plan for permanence, planning is highly effective. Leicestershire is part of a regional adoption agency (Family Adoption Links) and liaison between social workers and the regional adoption agency is effective, which helps to ensure that family finding happens quickly. When adoption is agreed, the child and their adopters are extremely well supported through their adoption journey. A range of support, including specialist therapeutic support, is swiftly put in place to sustain adoptive placements. This means that most children thrive with their new family.'*

2024-2025 performance overview

Adopter Recruitment

19. In 2024/25, 45 Initial Visits were completed, 29 of which resulted in a Stage 1 start compared to 2023/24 when 44 Initial Visits were completed, 21 of which resulted in a Stage 1 start. During this period 25 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, compared to 14 during the previous fiscal year.
20. Leicestershire County Council hold adoption panels once or twice per month in response to service requirements. During the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025, panel met on 21 occasions hearing a total number of 51 cases. This is an increase on the previous year (1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024) when panel met on 18 occasions, hearing 49 cases and looking at the year prior to this it seems there is a continued upward trajectory.
21. 25 applications and 24 matches were presented to panel during this period, as well as one withdrawal and one retrospective approval of a Scottish adopter for the purposes of a match. One application was a negative recommendation which was supported by panel and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker as a qualifying determination.

Permanency Planning for children

22. At the end of March 2025, there were a total of 33 children with a Placement Order who have not yet been placed with their adoptive families. This is broken down into 23 male children and 10 females. Within this there are nine sibling

groups of two. Nine of these children have links with prospective adopters. Four children have a change of care plan decision, and we are in the process of applying for a revocation of the Placement Order. One child is remaining with his foster carer under the auspices of a Special Guardianship Order, one child is remaining with their foster carer on a long-term basis, the other two children will remain on a Care Order but in different fostering placements. This is due to the complexities around their physical and emotional needs.

23. There are currently 20 children which the Service is actively family finding for, this includes 10 children whose additional needs (health and arising from trauma experiences) make the process of identifying adopters more difficult. This includes groups sibling groups 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

24. To 31 March 2025, Leicestershire has drawn down £1,622,481.01 from the Adoption, Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) 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 (£1,651,340.16) and represents support to 547 families, up from 505 in 2023/24. 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 2025/26:

25. The following targets have been set for 2025/26:
 - i. 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. This will include being involved in the Peer review and also focussing on improving the Early Permanence offer and developing Staying in Touch practices further. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager by March 2026.
 - ii. Continued focus on the key performance indicators related to the assessment and recruitment of adopters, identify barriers to recruitment and learn from areas of good practice. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Assessment Team manager by March 2026.
 - iii. Focus on timeliness for children by further developing the understanding of children's journey through care to the point of Best Interest Decision and increasing awareness of Early Permanence within Safeguarding Teams. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers by March 2026.
 - iv. To continue to develop the management of panel, ensuring that panel members are appropriately trained to continue to meet the needs of the Service to provide robust scrutiny of the agency. This target is to be

completed by the Service Manager, Panel Advisor and Panel Chairs by March 2026.

- v. Continue to invest in developing processes to strengthen feedback and how these influences change and development. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and FAL Marketing officer by March 2026.
- vi. To continue to develop the service offered to birth parents/first family members, including continued contact, if appropriate, after adoption through the Keeping in Touch agenda. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers by March 2026.
- vii. To provide bespoke training and support opportunities to Special Guardians and the children that they care for. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Post Order Team Manager by March 2026.
- viii. To continue to drive the promotion of direct contact for children after adoption. This will include ensuring that all prospective adopters understand the importance of continued relationships with their first family and that appropriate support is given during the initial stages of setting this up. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers by March 2026.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. None

Equality Implications

- 27. 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.
- 28. 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 - including relevant research, data, Quality Assurance activity and engagement with children, young people and families.

Human Rights Implications

29. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Appendices

30. Leicestershire Adoption Agency Annual Report 2024-25

Officers to Contact

Sharon Cooke
Assistant Director, Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care
Tel. No.
Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

James Thurston
Head of Service, Children in Care, Care Leavers, Adoption and Fostering
Tel. No. 0116 3059084
James.Thurston@leics.gov.uk

Michelle Robinson
Service Manager, Adoption
Tel. No. 0116 3050448
Michelle.Robinson@leics.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank