



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**  
**COMMITTEE: 9 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**ADOPTION REFORM**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG**  
**PEOPLE'S SERVICE**

**Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the national direction for Adoption and the County Council's progress toward these ambitions.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. A previous report was provided to the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 November 2012 which introduced the national reform agenda and provided information about the performance of the County Council's adoption service.
3. In common with almost all local authorities the County Council provides an adoption service that recruits potential adopters, assesses their suitability and matches them with suitable children who are in the County Council's care. The County Council's adoption service is delivered in partnership with Rutland County Council. The service is highly regulated and bound by National Minimum Standards.

**Background**

4. In 2012 the coalition government published a major report called 'Tackling Delay' and in January 2013 they published another major report called 'Finding more Loving Families'. Both these reports reinforced that the adoption of children is a key reform priority. The coalition government went on to publish a set of regulations in July 2013. These new regulations are essentially about ensuring adoption recruitment is more speedy and has no unnecessary barriers to its progress. In underscoring the importance of adoption the coalition government allocated significant resources to pressing through reform, Leicestershire received a total of £54,500 in specific grant for 2012/13 which has risen to £1.21m in 2013/14. It unlikely that funding will continue after the current financial year. The grant is expected to ensure that Local Authorities achieve:

- a) Adopters assessed in 6 months
  - b) More adopters than children waiting
  - c) Partnership work with Voluntary Agencies to increase placements
  - d) Less Children waiting for adoption
  - e) Less children waiting a long time for adoption
  - f) More complex children and siblings having an adoption opportunity.
5. The County Council is inspected by Ofsted every 3 years to ensure it is compliant with legislation, regulation and national minimum standards. Ofsted completed this inspection in July 2013 and at the time of writing their inspection report had not been received. If the report is received from Ofsted in time an oral update can be provided to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 9 September 2013.
  6. Nationally adoption reform is being progressed in parallel with the reform of court processes for children coming into care led by the Ministry of Justice. The critical feature of both of these policies is the considerable increase in the pace of both processes and practice.
  7. The objective is to seek to ensure children who may come into care because they are subject to court processes or who as a result of these processes will require to be adopted arrive in the family they will grow up in, as soon as possible. The headline is that where court processes are commenced these will take a maximum of 26 weeks and if at the end the child requires a permanent or adoptive alternative family, this will be delivered without delay. To measure this objective nationally the coalition government have introduced a published scorecard.
  8. The Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Service scorecard is attached as Appendix A. This Adoption Scorecard 2009-2012 shows that children in Leicestershire wait a shorter time than children in other Local Authorities to be placed for adoption and court processes for adoption are speedier than some other authorities. Attached at Appendix B is Leicestershire's annual return to the DFE which shows that 42 children were placed for adoption in 2012 (19 adopted); and approved 35 prospective adopters in 2012/13 which was double that of 2011/12.
  9. All Local Authorities should have reviewed their adoption service and Leicestershire & Rutland Adoption Service is no exception to this. To aid this, the service commissioned two recent peer reviews. Both are external agencies that specialise in Adoption and are recognised experts nationally. The first peer review was completed in May 2013 by Core Assets who concentrated on the performance of the service in 2012 and experiences of prospective adopters. The second peer review was completed in June 2013 by Coram East Midlands Adoption Service who concentrated on the social work and legal practice. They scrutinised ten children's journeys over the last two years and their findings were helpful to inform the reform of the service locally.

### **Proposals/Options**

10. In order to ensure that Leicestershire & Rutland Adoption service is meeting the requirements of the national changes and the local maxim that services should be prompt, consistent, of high quality and cost efficient the Children and Young Peoples Department are:
  - a) Changing and speeding up our court work
  - b) Training social care and legal staff to work within the new court process
  - c) Measuring the number of weeks court processes are taking for all children
  - d) Reviewing and redeploying our adoption team to ensure they can respond in a more prompt and consistent manner to prospective adopters
  - e) Aligning the locality social care teams and adoption teams processes to increase the speed of children's placement with prospective adopters
  - f) Engaging with the alternative providers to potentially buy adoptive placements and consider alternative post adoption support

### **Consultations**

11. Consultations with service users, parents/carers, and potential adopters are a high priority along with partner agencies and internal partners. An example of this was in the recent Core Assets peer review where adopters were interviewed and positive about their experiences.

### **Resource Implications**

12. Grant funding of £1.21m has been made available to Leicestershire for delivery of adoption reform in 13/14 which has been allocated in accordance with the priority actions agreed by the Children and Young People's Departmental Management Team. The grant has two elements one is ring-fenced to actions that will reduce the back log of children awaiting adoption, the second element is much less prescribed.
13. There is no indication of further funding for 2014/15, any changes to processes will need to be delivered within the resources in the approved Medium Term Financial Strategy.
14. The Director of Resources has been consulted on this report.

### **Conclusions**

15. Children and Young Peoples Department are progressing the national reforms locally and are on track to meet the objectives of placing children for adoption, sooner, younger, with their siblings and with complex needs.

**Equal Opportunities Implications**

16. The Adoption Agency strives to find appropriate families for all looked after children who have a plan for adoption, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender or any disability. The Equality Impact Assessment that was completed in April 2011 and will be updated in the course of this work programme.

**Background Papers**

17. Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Report of the Director of Children and young Peoples Services – Performance Report on Adoption Service dated 19 November 2012

**Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

18. None.

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**List of Appendices**

Appendix A Leicestershire Adoption Scorecard 2012

Appendix B Leicestershire Adoption Scorecard 2012/2013