



Report to CYP & FS Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 6th February 2014

Report of: Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families

Subject: Adoption Service

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Summary:

- Update on the Adoption Service in line with adoption services statutory regulations and guidance

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	x
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the report and its contents

Background Papers:

List any background documents (e.g. research studies, reports) used to write the report. Remember that by listing documents people could request a copy.

- Adoption Service Dataset 2012/13
- An Action Plan for Adoption: tackling delay
- Adoption Scorecard Data
- Yorkshire & Humber Adoption Consortium Reform Plan
- Yorkshire & Humber Adoption Consortium Performance Reports
- Adoption Passport: a support guide for adopters

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Director of Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families

Sheffield City Council Adoption Service

1. Introduction/Context

- 1.1 In line with statutory guidance and regulation, all Adoption Services have to report to the executive side of the local authority in regard to the outcomes of the adoption service. The Senior Leadership Team and other Boards within Children, Young Peoples and Families Service have received regular updates in relation to adoption performance.
- 1.2 Sheffield Adoption Service was subject to an Ofsted inspection in June 2011 and the overall judgement was 'good' with some outstanding features.
- 1.3 In light of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework for 'the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' adoption services are now incorporated in to the single framework inspection process.

2. The National Adoption Agenda and Sheffield Adoption Service

2.1 The National Agenda

- 2.1.1 In March 2012, the Department for Education published its 'Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay.' The report outlined what the government intended to do to accelerate the whole adoption process so that more children benefited from adoption and more rapidly. Adoption scorecards for each local authority were first published in May 2012.
- 2.1.2 In July 2012, the Prime Minister announced proposals for the earlier placement of children in need of adoption, promoting the wider use of concurrent planning, and introducing the concept of 'fostering for adoption'.
- 2.1.3 In January 2013, the National Adoption Gateway was launched by First4Adoption with its information telephone helpline going live. The DfE also published 'Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes' in January 2013. The document announced proposals for changes to the adopter recruitment process, and a number of changes to give approved adopters a more active role in the process of finding a child. It also announced a package of improvements to the support available to adoptive families,

including the launch of adoption passports from April 2013. Adoption passports are a guide to all adopters about the support and services that are available to them. Children who are adopted can have ongoing needs that both adopter and the child will benefit from post-adoption support. Local Authorities provide a range of support services for adopters and their children. Every adopter is entitled to advice about these services, and entitled to an assessment of your needs at any time.

2.1.4 A new format for recording adopter assessments was launched, in full, by BAAF in February 2013, ahead of the implementation of a new, shorter, 2 stage assessment process, the details of which were published by the DfE in the Spring 2013, for implementation in the July 2013. Stage 1 process was implemented in July 2013 with Stage 2 in September 2013.

2.1.5 The service has made the relevant changes to ensure this assessment process is fully implemented and this will be embedded over the forthcoming months.

2.2 **Sheffield Response**

2.2.1 Sheffield has taken a number of actions to ensure that the agency will be able to meet the challenges ahead in improving timeliness. This has been balanced with continuing to ensure quality for each child, whilst maintaining the current low level of placement disruption, and high numbers of children placed for adoption, in particularly the more challenging to place children. These being, older children, children with additional needs, children with complex emotional and behavioural issues or sibling groups.

2.2.2 As at 30.09.13 27 children have been adopted. In comparison to this position 12 months ago, this has increased by 9 children.

2.2.3 The service is continuing to place 'hard to place' children or provide additional support to adopters with children that are placed but not yet adopted. This has included for example, the recent adoptive placement of seven and nine year old boys, and eleven sibling groups.

2.2.4 In regard to the assessment of adopters, for 2012/13 the service approved 43 new adopters. As at 30.09.13, 17 adopters have been approved by the agency with this

figure hopefully increasing to 42 by the end of March 2014. The service is in the process of fully implementing the new stage 1 & 2 assessment process. Adopters that have been assessed under this new process will be presented at the Adoption Panel from February 2014 onwards.

- 2.2.5 The Adoption Service is working in partnership with Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium. This consists of 15 local authorities across the region. The Consortium is using funds, from the Adoption Reform Grant, at a regional and sub-regional level over a 3 year period using the regional adoption consortium contract and network as the framework. The purpose of this is to improve the quality of service for children and adopters through faster delivery, sharing best practice, and improved performance management and data reporting.
- 2.2.6 The 4 local authorities in the South Region (Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley, and Doncaster) have set up specific working groups to support the Adoption Reform initiatives and to improve further working partnerships. This has included sharing good practice, post adoption support and training and recruitment. SCC has been the lead authority in regard to the adoption preparation pack in light of the new Stage 1 & 2 assessment process. It is likely that Sheffield Adoption's Service training portfolio will be used as the benchmark due to the comprehensive package that has been developed and the sharing of this across the region.
- 2.2.7 The Consortium has developed a regional marketing campaign that will compliment marketing activity within each local authority. Information Evening dates across the sub region are being promoted by all the relevant LA's.
- 2.2.8 The service has implemented the new assessment process. This process is adopter led. The training programme for prospective adopters has been adapted to ensure it complies with the new assessment process and is continually evaluated to ensure the practice is within the appropriate timescale, value for money and offering the best opportunities for the prospective adopter.
- 2.2.9 The Adoption Reform Grant for 2012/13 has not been without its challenges. It has supported various activity within the service. Increased activity has taken place in regard to family finding. This has resulted in additional children being placed with VAA's or other LA approved adopters.

- 2.2.10 A number of additional posts have been temporarily created to support both the adoption service and fieldwork area teams. This has included the appointment of an Agency Advisor to Adoption Panel who also has been a consultant to staff, increase in the capacity of the Family Finders, additional social work capacity to ensure robust plans for children are being made in a timely way and increased management support.
- 2.2.11 The Theraplay research is underway with the investment in to this area of adoption support continuing. This will be influenced by the Theraplay research being undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University.
- 2.2.12 Robust tracking and monitoring systems are established and in place in regard to children that have an adoption plan or a permanence plan. This includes monthly tracking meetings at each area site and agency prioritisation meetings that include the medical advisors to the LA.
- 2.2.13 The Family, Adopters and Carers Team (FACT) continue to provide extensive support to families with the range of support services that are available to children and their families. This has been expanded to include children who have been placed on alternative permanence court orders, for example, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's). FACT is a well-established team that deliver innovative packages of support to families through varied approaches dependant on the assessment of need, for example, group work as well as individual work.

2.3 Statistics

- 2.3.1 Children made subject to a 'Should Be Placed for Adoption' (SHOBPA) decision and outcomes.

Year	Total no of children with SHOBPA	Children linked/placed with adopters	No of SHOBPA rescinds	No of children disrupted	No of children adopted
2008/09	48	41	9	0	55
2009/10	44	45	5	3	41
2010/11	55	37	7	2	45
2011/12	60	40	11	0	45
2012/13	102	40	15	0	50
30/09/13	107	41	6	0	27

In relation to SHOBPA, the 107 figure includes the children that are already placed with adopters.

2.3.2 Children may have SHOBPA decision/link/adoption in different years the figures above are taken as at end of March each year and will fluctuate throughout the year as the plan for children may change from adoption for various reasons, for example, family rehabilitation or Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) with extended family or foster carers, long term foster placement.

2.3.3 The service has two well established adoption panels which aim to meet monthly. Both panels have the same independent chair that has significant knowledge and experience of adoption issues. All panels have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members.

2.3.4 In February 2013 a dedicated Agency Advisor was appointed. This provides consistency across both panels and provides independence to the post. The Agency Advisor plays a key role in the quality assurance of all documents that are to be presented to panel and manages activity in regard to prioritisation of the panel agenda and SHOBPA decisions.

2.3.5 Adoption Panels held each month

April 2013	2
May 2013	1
June 2013	2
July 2013	2
August 2013	2
September 2013	1

2.3.6 From April – September 2013 the Agency Decision Makers (ADM) have been Jon Banwell, Assistant Director, Provider Services, Trevor Owen, Senior Manager, Safeguarding Children Service and Matthew Sampson, Interim Director, Children, Young People and Families. Trevor Owen undertakes the ADM role in regard to SHOBPA's on a monthly basis. From October 2013, Matthew Sampson has no longer been the ADM and this role is now undertaken by Debbie Mercer, Assistant Director, Fieldwork. The ADM's role is to consider the adoption panel's recommendation to make the final decision. The ADM is a nominated person within the adoption agency who has the legal responsibility to make an approval decision. In most circumstances this ADM accepts the adoption panel's recommendation.

3. What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

3.1 Children thrive in stable and loving families. Sometimes birth parents are unable to care for their children themselves. Getting the best possible care for these children is one of the LA's most important corporate parent responsibilities.

3.2 The LA has responded to the Government's Action Plan as outlined above in the main body of the report. The LA will continue to drive forward the adoption agenda to ensure that the child's journey is undertaken in a timely manner whilst ensuring the best outcome. The priority for all children is to secure permanence. Adoption is therefore a key and vital choice in any decision making that secures a child's future within a stable family environment.

4. Recommendation

4.1 The Committee are being asked to note the report and its contents.

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