



Report to CYP & FS Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 14 March 2016

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

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|---|----------|
| 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 2014/15
- An Action Plan for Adoption: tackling delay
- Further Action for Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes
- 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

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 This report will provide an overview of the main developments and priorities relating to the Adoption Service during the period April 2015 to February 2016 and sits in the context of changes within adoption services over the last four years.

2. The National Adoption Agenda and Sheffield Adoption Service

2.1 National Agenda

- 2.1.1 Adoption has seen a number of central government initiatives and policy changes over the last four years aimed to improving timeliness of adoption assessments and performance in relation to Adoption Scorecard.
- 2.1.2 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) became available nationwide in May 2015 following a pilot run with 10 local authorities. The intention of the Adoption Support Fund is to provide greater access to services for adopted children who often have complex needs. The ASF is available for children up to and including the age of 18 (or 25 with an Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health & Care Plan) who have been placed with their adoptive family and were previously in Local Authority care in England (or from Local Authority care in Wales but living in England).
- 2.1.3 In June 2015 the Department for Education published a Regionalising Adoption paper which set out the proposals to move to regional adoption agencies with the intention of speeding up matching and 'markedly improving the life chances of neglected and damaged children; improve adopter recruitment and adoption support; and reduce costs'. The Department for Education supports local authorities in the regionalisation agenda. Further Action for Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes set out that fewer organisations recruiting and assessing adopters were needed with most of them operating at a much greater scale. Since that time there has been a growth in regional consortia and more collaborative working relationships between local authorities. The Regionalising Adoption paper strives for these steps to become more innovative and on a larger scale and sets down that by the end of this Parliament they want to see all local authorities being part of regional agencies. It also sets out that the pace of change is to be accelerated to ensure those children, for whom adoption is the right

path, are given the best chance of finding a loving, forever family as quickly as possible.

2.1.4 In July 2015 The Department for Education (DfE) implemented a £30 million scheme to reimburse the money Local Authorities spend on inter-agency fees for the following categories of 'hard-to-place' children:

- children who waited 18 months or longer to be placed with a family
- children who are aged five or older at the time they are placed with a family
- children who are in a sibling group of two or more children, and are placed with a family as siblings
- black or minority ethnic children
- disabled children

The scheme runs for placements Local Authorities make between 8 July 2015 and 31 July 2016. The grant is intended to encourage Local Authorities to consider all possible matches for across the whole country for children who are 'hard to place' with a family.

2.1.5 In January 2016 Nicky Morgan, Education Secretary announced an additional £200 million investment in the adoption system over the next four years. This investment was implemented due to the number of adoptions and the number of children being placed falling. In addition this funding will support the development of regional adoption agencies, strengthen voluntary adoption agencies and increase the number of adoptions for harder to place children by continuing to pay the inter-agency fee and to increase funding for the Adoption Support Fund each year.

2.2 Sheffield Response

2.2.1 Sheffield has continued to take a number of actions to ensure that the agency has the ability to meet the challenges ahead in improving timeliness, respond to the regionalisation agenda and improve adoption support provision. This has been balanced with continuing to ensure quality for each child and maintain the number of children being placed for adoption. Regular tracking meetings take place on each of the fieldwork sites and these utilise the adoption milestones forms to enable tracking and monitoring of individual cases and in turn inform performance monitoring and projections in relation to the Adoption Scorecard.

2.2.2 As of 29th February 2016 65 children have been adopted and a further 36 children are placed with adoptive families but do not as yet have the Adoption Order in place.

2.2.3 In regard to the assessment of adopters, 34 new adopters have been approved as of 29th February 2016. One family was not approved at panel and the applicants have taken this decision to the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism). This will be heard in May 2016. Two further families have been deferred from panel, with

further information having been requested, these cases will be again heard at panel.

- 2.2.4 The Adoption Service continues to work in partnership with Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium. The Consortium consists of 15 local authorities across the region and a number of voluntary adoption agencies. The Consortium continues to use 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 regionalisation agenda will reframe this contract. The purpose of this is to improve the quality of service for children and adopters through faster delivery, sharing best practice, development of processes, for example early permanence placements and improved performance management and data reporting.
- 2.2.5 The Yorkshire and Humber region submitted a Regionalisation expression of interest to the Department of Education in September 2015; the proposal includes the development of a centre of excellence, providing a specialist facility for clinical and therapeutic interventions, a centre of 'permanence' learning and focal point for advice and support. This was accepted. The aims identified in the expression of interest are to place more children in a more timely way, recruit more of the right families for the children waiting, and prepare those families consistently and to a high standard across the region.
- 2.2.6 The structure of the regional bid is for three sub-regional adoption agencies with a central coordinating regional framework which will be jointly owned by local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies. Within the South region which includes Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham there are on-going consultation around the constitution of a regional adoption agency however it is anticipated that Doncaster Children's Trust will be utilised as a vehicle for change due to their unique position as an existing Children's Trust and the adoption service being delivered as a voluntary adoption agency.
- 2.2.7 A regional transitional plan is due for submission to the Department for Education by the 31st March 2016 which will set out the aims and objectives for the regional adoption agency over the next two years; this will also include timescales for delivery.
- 2.2.8 A sub-regional project board is in place and meets on a monthly basis. A project lead has been appointed who will undertake a presentation across the sub-region to elected members regarding the regional plan to enable a final decision is made about the model for implementation.
- 2.2.9 Sheffield Adoption Service has accessed the adoption support fund to support the delivery of adoption support to families where therapeutic support is required. Up to December 2015 Sheffield City Council has claimed and received £180,445, which is expenditure that is committed or incurred in respect of therapeutic intervention.

- 2.2.10 The Adoption Support Fund has a list of approved providers nationwide. The Yorkshire and Humber Consortium also completed a tendering process and there is a local list of providers.
- 2.2.11 The application process involves a FACT (Families, Adopters and Carers Team) assessment which focusses on the adoption support needs of the therapeutic needs of the children. Where therapeutic needs are identified either by the worker or the adopters (but agreed by the worker) a provider is approached and an application submitted to the Adoption Support Fund, work does not commence until approval is granted from the Fund and applications are approved or declined in a timely manner. Application can now be made for funding prior to an Adoption order being made to ensure that any package of support is in place from the point of placement. Funding for additional Multi-Agency Psychological Support (MAPS) for children with a plan of adoption has been agreed for a further 12 months; this includes advice and consultations for professionals in the linking process and for adopters in relation to the specific needs of individual children, delivery of training to adopters and staff and programmed group work intervention.
- 2.2.12 Sheffield Adoption Service has applied for funding for a number of groups run for children and adopters as well as individual work with children adopters. The types of support that come under the remit of the Adoption Support Fund include training for adoptive parents (e.g. therapeutic parenting courses), further complex assessments, direct work for children including drama therapy, dyadic developmental psychotherapy and therapeutic life story work. In addition to these applications we have sought funding for four workers to complete the level one course run by the Theraplay Institute in April 2016. The Adoption Support Fund is available until 2020.
- 2.2.13 The Family, Adopters and Carers Team (FACT) continue to provide extensive support to families. This support includes direct work with children and their families, Theraplay group work and individual sessions. The group work is a ten week Theraplay programme which is delivered twice a year. Theraplay is aimed at promoting the attachment between adopters and their children. The provision delivered by FACT also includes children who have been placed on alternative permanence court orders, for example, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's). There is on-going consultation with adopters to further enhance the service provision.
- 2.2.14 Robust tracking and monitoring systems continue to be developed and reviewed in regard to children that have an adoption plan or a permanence plan. This includes city wide tracking meetings at each area site and agency prioritisation meetings that include the medical advisors to the local authority. There is on-going work with Fieldwork Service Managers to improve the timeliness of adoption with the aim of a positive impact on the Adoption Scorecard.
- 2.2.15 Work has been undertaken to enable the use of Early Permanence Placements (EPP) can be used for children where the local authority's permanence plan is likely to be adoption but where other

outcomes such as rehabilitation to birth family are still under consideration.

- 2.2.16 In such cases, the Local Authority will place the child with foster carers who are also temporarily approved as adopters. The carers may be dually approved as foster carers and adopters from the outset or might be approved prospective adopters who have been temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child under Regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 ("2010 Regulations").
- 2.2.17 Early Permanency Placements are without doubt more risky for adopters. Some prospective adoptive parents positively choose this as a possible route to adoption. There are a number of advantages of EPP for children which are linked to the stability of the one placement for the child for the duration of care proceedings and then if adoption is agreed by the courts, for life.
- 2.2.18 In relation to inter agency fees in respect of adoption placements Sheffield City Council has submitted claims for £410,000 in relation to children who have been placed for adoption with other Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.
- 2.2.19 For the current financial year it is projected that a further claim of £135,000 will be submitted with a total claim for the inter-agency adoption fee: grant for local authorities of £545,000 for 2015/16.
- 2.2.20 Once the funding ceases these costs will again sit with local authorities and impact on spending in relation to adoption provision moving forward. Having access to the fund has meant that we are able to look at all potential adoptive families whether they have been assessed by the local authority or not in a relatively short timescale.

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 |
| 2013/14 | 165 | 101 | 15 | 0 | 53 |
| 2014/15 | 136 | 57 | 18 | 0 | 43 |

In relation to SHOBPA, the 136 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 figures outlined above include 2 relinquished babies, where SHOBPA decisions have been made. Both of these children have been placed with our EPP (Early Permanence placements) carers, this has enabled an early decision to be made and adoption applications have been submitted following ADM at linking panel.
- 2.3.4 The monthly panel prioritisation meetings to ensure timely decision making in relation to SHOBPA decisions and adoption panel submissions.
- 2.3.5 During the current year there has been one placement that disrupted (a siblings group of 2), in line with procedures where an agency adoptive placement breaks down prior to the granting of an Adoption Order, a Disruption Meeting must be held to identify the reasons for the breakdown and to inform lessons learned from the events surrounding the breakdown. This has been commissioned independently and we are currently awaiting the analysis in relation to disruption. The outcome of this will be used to inform practice and enable the agency to implement the lessons learned.
- 2.3.6 The service has two well established adoption panels which aim to meet monthly. Both panels have the same independent chair who has significant knowledge and experience of adoption issues. All panels have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members.
- 2.3.7 A dedicated Agency Advisor has been in place since February 2013. 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.

2.3.8 Adoption Panels held each month

| Month | Number of Panels | Link | Approval |
|----------------|------------------|------|----------|
| April 2015 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| May 2015 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| June 2015 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| July 2015 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| August 2015 | 2 | 8 | 2 |
| September 2015 | 3 | 10 | 3 |
| October 2015 | 2 | 7 | 2 |
| November 2015 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| December 2015 | 2 | 9 | 0 |
| January 2016 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| February 2016 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| March 2016 | 1 | 4 | 0 |

2.3.7 A total of 22 panels have been held to date this year, in September 2015 an additional panel was put in place due to the high demand. In February 2016 only one panel took place each month due to a reduction in demand. One panel will sit in March 2016.

2.3.8 It is expected that at the end of March 2016, 59 links will have been approved and presented to panel. This includes a number of sibling groups, and older children, 23 of these are interagency links.

2.3.9 From April 2015 – February 2016 the Agency Decision Makers (ADM) have been Jon Banwell, Assistant Director, Provider Services, Trevor Owen, Head of Safeguarding Children Service and Debbie Mercer, Assistant Director, Fieldwork. Trevor Owen undertakes the ADM role in regard to SHOBPA's on a monthly basis. Trevor Owen is due to retire at the end of March 2016 and a replacement is currently being identified. 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 and is supported by advice from the Agency Advisor.

2.4 Adoption Scorecard

2.4.1 The two main indicators in the adoption scorecard are both published as a three year average. The Adoption Leadership Board has continued to collect information on a quarterly basis; however, adoption scorecard indicators have not been published for any adoptions since March 2014.

- 2.4.2 Indicator A1 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days).
- 2.4.3 65 children have so far been adopted in 2015/16 with an average of 519 days between entering care and being matched to an adoptive family; this should mean a three year average of around 543 days which is very close to the projection of 540 days set in July 2015. Going forward the DfE threshold for this indicator is 426 days, we expect to achieve this performance each year from 2016/17 onwards, however, as this indicator is calculated by performance over a three year period we don't expect to achieve the DfE target until March 2019.
- 2.4.4 Indicator A2 – Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days).
- 2.4.5 So far 62 children have been adopted and are included in this indicator for 2015/16 with an average of 289 days between placement order and matching with prospective adopters; this should mean a three year average of around 282 days which is very close to the projection of 280 days set in July 2015. Going forward the DfE threshold for this indicator is 121 days, we expect to achieve this performance each year from 2016/17 onwards, however, as this indicator is calculated over a three year period we don't expect to achieve the DfE target until March 2019.
- 2.4.6 The reports below outline the adoption scorecard outturns and projections for A1 and A2



Adoption Scorecard -
Outturns and Projecti

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

- 3.1 Sheffield continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to permanence placements for children through adoption. 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 Local Authority's most important corporate parent responsibilities.
- 3.2 The Local Authority has responded to the Government's changes and initiatives for adoption and continues to do so. The Local Authority 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 asked to note the contents of the report and provide challenge to the service in respect of service activity.