



Report to CYP & FS Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 27 June 2017

Report of: Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, People Services Portfolio

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 2016/17
- 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, People Services Portfolio

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 2016 to March 2017 and sits in the context of changes within adoption services over recent 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 five 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; 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 ran for placements Local Authorities make between 8 July 2015 and 31 July 2016. The grant was 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.

2.1.6 In October 2016 a 'fair access limit' was introduced to the Adoption Support Fund with the exception for a small number of children and families where there is the provision for an exception to the 'fair access limit'. There is additional funding for these children, but only where a local authority agrees to provide match funding. The Government additional contribution will have a maximum limit of £30k (including the £5k fair access limit).

2.1.7 In November 2016 the criteria for claiming Interagency Fees was amended, claims for the grant can only be made for placements that meet at least one of the following criteria:

- children who, at 1st November 2016, have waited 18 months or longer to be placed with a family (this means 18 months or longer from the point of entering care)
- children who are in a sibling group placed in a family, where at least one child has waited 18 months or longer for their placement at 1st November 2016

Placements where the child reaches the 18-month threshold after 1 November 2016 are no longer eligible for the grant.

- 2.1.8 In February 2017 it was announced that from April 2017, there will be two separate Fair Access Limits in relation to the Adoption Support Fund. A £5,000 limit per child for therapy and a separate limit of up to £2,500 per child for children who require a specialist assessment. The match funding approach will apply to both limits.

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 51 children were adopted during 2016/2017; this equates to around 1 in 5 children leaving care through adoption. At the end of the year 36 children were in placement with their adoptive families but did not have the adoption order in place.
- 2.2.3 In regard to the assessment of adopters, 26 new adopters have been approved during 2016/17. This overall number includes both couples and single adopters.
- 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 has used 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 and there have been recent revisions to this contract with each local authority contributing to the regional consortium. 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.
- 2.2.6 The structure of the regional adoption 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 is on-going consultation around the final 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 It is anticipated that the South Regional Adoption Agency will be launched in April 2018.
- 2.2.8 A sub-regional strategic and operational project board is in place and meet on a monthly basis. A project manager is based within Doncaster Children's Trust and is coordinating the work streams within the sub region. There is on-going work within Sheffield with identified leads in key areas such as finance, performance, legal and HR.
- 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. During the financial year 2016/17 Sheffield City Council claimed and received £345,974 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) an appropriate 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 also 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.
- 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. 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 The use of Early Permanence Placements (EPP) continues and these placements 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 the adopters who are also temporarily approved as foster carers. 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 £140,000 in relation to children who have been placed for adoption with other Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This is a reduction on previous years due to a change in the criteria. Sheffield City Council spending on interagency fees for the financial year is £489,300. fees.
- 2.2.19 The funding in relation to Interagency fees ceased on 31st March 2017. The costs for Interagency placement again sit with local authorities and will 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
2015/16	62	40	1	2	75
2016/17	76	51	5	3	51

In relation to SHOBPA, the figure for 12/13, 13/14, 14/15 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 monthly panel prioritisation meetings to ensure timely decision making in relation to SHOBPA decisions and adoption panel submissions.

2.3.4 During 2016/17 there were two placements that disrupted (a siblings group of 2 and a single child who was placed with their sibling), 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. One disruption meeting has been commissioned independently and the outcome of this will be used to inform practice and enable the agency to implement the lessons learned. A disruption meeting has not been commissioned as yet in relation to the other child as there are on-going assessments.

2.3.5 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.

2.3.6 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.

2.3.7 Adoption Panels held each month

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

2.3.9 A total of 24 panels were held during 2016/17. Additional panels have been convened during two of the months due the number of links required during those months.

2.3.11 The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for 2016/17 has been Christine Bennett, 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 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 51 children were adopted in 2016/17 with an in-year average of 438 days between entering care and being matched to an adoptive family (2015/16 A1 was 520 days); this gives a three year average of 499 days which remains over the three year target as set by the DfE of 426 days. We remain over the in-year target of 426 days however we have significantly reduced the overall average number of days and anticipate that this target will be met at the end of 2017/18. This has not been achieved due to a small number of children's

timescales exceeding the average number of days due to their individual needs. 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 All 51 children adopted are included in A2 with an average of 223 days between placement order and matching with prospective adopters; this should mean a three year average of 275 days. There has been a reduction in the in-year average from 289 days and for the three year calculation from 282 days.

2.4.6 The reports below outline the adoption scorecard outturns and projections for A1 and A2



Adoption Scorecard -
Outturns (170604 v1 F)

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. We have continued to make improvements in the A1 indicator and with further work being undertaken to ensure that we have achieved the thresholds set during 2017/18. 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.

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