

Corporate Parenting Board

22 March 2018

Report title	Adoption Agency Interim Report
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Young People
Wards affected	All
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Children and Young People
Originating service	Children and Young People
Accountable employee(s)	Dawn Deans 01902 550842 Email: dawn.deans@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	The report has not been considered at any other meetings.

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to consider and provide feedback on the City of Wolverhampton Council Adoption Agency Interim Report.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report details the work of the City of Wolverhampton Adoption Service from April 2017 to October 2017.
- 1.2 The purpose of the interim report is to provide updated information in relation to adoption locally.

2.0 Background

2.1 Adoption Reform Agenda

- 2.2 In July 2015 the Government published its paper in relation to Regionalising Adoption, which sets out its proposal to move to regional adoption agencies which they believed would help to: speed up matching and markedly improve the life chances of neglected and damaged children, improve adopter recruitment and adoption support and reduce costs.
- 2.3 City of Wolverhampton Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council joined together to form the Adoption@Heart Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).
- 2.4 The Adoption@Heart model proposes the new service will deliver services from function based teams which would enable staff to prioritise one area of work which will in turn increase productivity and reduce the unit costs associated with adopter recruitment & assessment, family finding and support services.
- 2.5 The launch for Adoption@Heart 'front door- 'Recruitment and Assessment service launched 1 March 2018 and the workstream has been developing the Adoption@Heart website and adopter preparation training in anticipation. The Adoption@Heart Regional Adoption Agency will launch later in the year.

3.0 Panel Business

- 3.1 Below are the number of adopters approved and the number of children matched with prospective adopters between April 2017 and October 2017:

Approval of Prospective adopters	Matches of children with prospective adopters
7	19

4.0 Adopter Approval

- 4.1 Nationally there has been a fall in adopters waiting because of a contraction in adopter recruitment by local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies in response to the lower number of placement orders being granted, however the City of Wolverhampton have not experienced a reduction in the number of placement orders. The adoption in the

Black Country Consortium has maintained its activity 15 referrals to City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team.

- 4.2 Initial visits were undertaken, however the conversion rate to progress applications has reduced for a variety of reasons including; adopter or family illness, bereavement, house moves and change of job. A number of prospective adopters requested they were placed on hold as they did not want us to request references from employers when they had recently started a new job.
- 4.3 With regard to the number of matches considered by Adoption Panel the process of considering financial support to foster carers who express an interest to adopt has been amended. Foster carers are required to complete a financial assessment form which is assessed by the Welfare Rights team. We have had six foster carers express an interest in adopting the child/ren they care for. However, a number of foster carers have been reluctant to complete a financial assessment form and this has significantly delayed the process. In extra ordinary circumstances (e.g. harder to place, whether owing to age, a sibling group needing to be placed together or having other special needs) discretionary payments can be authorised via the Resource Allocation Panel. This is informed by assessments and support plans. This process will avoid foster carers being approved and/or being linked with children then delaying the process of applying for an adoption order while finances are finalised, this has caused significant delay in seven cases.
- 4.4 During this period there were seven adopter approvals. This is on a par with our Adoption Black Country consortium partners, although a reduction for City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team.
- 4.5 Wolverhampton Adoption Team have continued to improve on early permanency placements, there has been three early permanence placements via Foster for Adoption/ concurrency during April 2017 to October 2017. This is an area of practice that City of Wolverhampton continue to progress. Research shows that there are three factors which influence the success of a placement: timeliness – the speed with which a child finds their way to their stable and long-term family; quality of care – the ability of the carer to adequately meet the needs of the child; and stability – whether the placement endures over the long term. It is the adopters who hold the risk if the placement is not permanent; and early permanence placements can limit delay and secures good outcomes for children, whether they are rehabilitated home, or they are adopted.

5.0 Links of children with prospective adopters

- 5.1 There have been 19 links during this reporting period.
- 5.2 The A1 indicator measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family children who have been adopted with a target set by Government of 426 days.

- 5.3 The A2 indicator measures the 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. The current target is four months 121 days.
- 5.4 10 out of the 19 children met the A1 indicator. There are children who are 'outliers'; where it has taken longer to progress to an adoption placement, there can be a variety of reasons why the A1 indicator is not met as discussed below;

Child A	Date became LAC	Should Be Placed For Adoption Decision	Placement Order granted	Date matched	Date placed for adoption	A 1 indicator	A2 indicator
	07/09/2015	08/02/2016	15/03/2017	14/06/2017	28/06/2017.	660	191

Child A became a Looked After Child and a number of viability assessments were undertaken that resulted in the 26 weeks court timetable being extended. This resulted in the A1 indicator being 660 days however Child A met the A2 indicator and was linked in 91 days.

- 5.5 Five out of the 19 children aged between five months – eight months old met both the A1 and A2 indicator which equates to 27%. Court proceedings concluded in a timely manner and suitable adopters were identified, albeit one child was adopted with in house adopters.
- 5.6 12 out of the 19 children met the A2 indicator and were placed within four months (121) of a placement order which equates to 64 per cent.
- 5.7 Three of the 19 children linked at panel were part of a sibling group of two.
- 5.8 Of the 19 children matched, seven were over the age of five, equating to 37 per cent, this remains above the national average of eight per cent. One young person was aged 15 years and her sibling aged 10 years were subsequently linked for adoption with their foster carers. Another child aged seven had a plan of open adoption.
- 5.9 When considering the ethnicity of the children matched, seven of the 19 children were of black and minority ethnic (BAME) background. This equates to 37 per cent of children matched. This remains above the national average of 5 per cent.
- 5.10 The City of Wolverhampton continue to successfully place harder to place children however they may take longer to link due to their complexities.
- 5.11 Eight children matched were placed with adopters approved by Wolverhampton; this includes two children who were linked with their foster carers, one linked with a previous

connected person and two in early permanence placements. The remainder were placed with adopters approved by other local authorities or voluntary agencies.

- 5.12 Two interagency placements were made with City of Wolverhampton adopters; a sibling group of two children and a single child; resulting in £70.000 interagency fee being recouped.

6.0 Children's Decisions

- 6.1 There has been two "Should be Placed for Adoption" (SBPFA) decisions made during this reporting period.
- 6.2 During this period four SBPFA decisions were rescinded.

7.0 Adoption Support

- 7.1 Wolverhampton Adoption Team recognises that adopted children and their families need to be able to access appropriate and sensitive adoption support at any time in their lives. Prior to an adoptive family being identified, Family Support Workers begin working with harder to place children including older children, sibling groups, and children with complex histories preparing them for a move to an adoptive placement.
- 7.2 The work considers the child's relationship with their biological parents, helps them to understand they are not in foster care because they were bad or naughty, as well as helping the child understand the difference between foster care and adoption. In addition to this, the work explores different types of families and takes into consideration the wishes of the child and the type of family they want. The work has proven to be very successful.
- 7.3 During April 2017 and October 2017 moving on work has been undertaken with nine single children and two sibling groups.
- 7.4 Adoption Support consultations are undertaken with prospective adopters where children meet a range of indicators including those that are aged three and over, those that have complex needs and sibling groups. Consultations include exploring a child's past experiences, consider how they communicate anxiety and distress, and explore the adopters understanding of attachment based parenting. This has also contributed to a significant number of older children being placed in adoptive placements that remain intact.
- 7.5 During this period there has been one disruption; where a child was placed for adoption and the placement ended prior to the granting of an adoption order. The child was placed at the age of seven following extensive moving on work. The child remained in placement for five months. The care plan included a plan of annual open adoption with birth mother and grandmother. The child communicated her distress via challenging behaviour, and although adoption support was in place, the adoptive parents struggled to keep her safe

and following a section 47 investigation it concluded she should leave the placement. The child is now in a settled foster placement where her emotional needs are being met.

- 7.6 During April 2017 and October 2017 thirteen adoption support consultations were undertaken with four single children and two sibling groups.
- 7.7 18 assessment of need assessments have been undertaken since April 2017- October 2017. 19 adoption support fund applications have been made. Adoption support fund applications have funded the following provision; Therapeutic Life Story work, Occupational Therapy, Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Sustain specialist assessment and therapy, Creative play therapy, Family therapy, Psychotherapy, Circle of Security Parenting programme, Safebase parenting programme, and Developmental Dyadic Psychotherapy.
- 7.8 In October 2016 the Government introduced The Fair Access Limit (FAL), which requires Local Authorities to share the costs of therapeutic support with adopters above £5,000, through a match-funding approach. This measure was introduced because demand for support is more than double the level forecast. To date the City of Wolverhampton have matched funded £800.
- 7.9 Currently, the average claim made for individual funding for Wolverhampton is in the region of £4,000.
- 7.10 The post adoption contact (PAC) coordinator manages more than 400 letter box exchange arrangements and provides support to birth families in writing and by reading letters to provide good written contact for children.
- 7.11 The assumption that the traditional 'closed' model of adoption is compatible with the welfare interests of the child is being challenged. Research has indicated that adoption arrangements which accommodate a degree of ongoing involvement from members of the child's birth family have been viewed as successful.
- 7.12 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team have several direct contact cases between siblings who have been adopted and support is offered to adopters in setting up the initial contact and they then facilitate it between themselves thereafter. There have been three cases of open adoption with birth relatives.
- 7.13 While the trend in adoption is moving to open adoption, it is apparent that adopters are not yet prepared emotionally for the challenges of direct contact. All three cases have involved interagency placements and the preparation by external agencies has been woeful. There have been discussions how to include this in adopter preparation training for the RAA.
- 7.14 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team continues to work in partnership with Adoption in the Black Country (ABC) incorporating Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley to purchase adoption support packages from Adoption U.K. and After Adoption enabling us

to work in partnership with these organisations. These support packages provide services to adopters, adopted children, adopted adults and birth family members.

- 7.15 All Wolverhampton approved adopters continue to receive 12 months free membership to Adoption UK. Additionally, local adopters who access adoption support are also provided with 12 months membership. Adopters are invited to attend the Adoption Support Group run by Adoption UK on a bi-monthly basis, access training and a lending library.
- 7.16 Complementary to the support offered through Adoption UK the City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team run an adoption support group, this is a group made up of adopters who have attended the Circle of Security parenting programme that is run annually by the adoption team. This keeps adopters linked to the City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team and we can offer additional support in a timely manner as the group meets monthly.
- 7.17 ABC deliver a post approval training programme, the workshops are available to approved adopters who are waiting for a placement, those who have had a child placed, or those who have adopted. The workshops have included an education workshop for adopters, telling workshop and sensory integration.

8.0 Strategic issues and forward plans

- 8.1. The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team will continue to progress links in a timely manner and endeavour to improve the A1 and A2 indicator. Wolverhampton Adoption Team continue to balance the need for timely placements with not giving up on finding families for older children and children with complex needs. There are occasions where timescales have been sacrificed in the interest of placing older children, sibling groups and children with complex needs.
- 8.2 The number of adopter approvals has reduced; while prospective adopters continue to express an interest in adoption attending information events, it has proven a challenge to convert the activity into prospective adopter assessments for a variety of reasons. This is an area we continue to monitor.
- 8.3 As the regionalising agenda is progressed it will be important to ensure that the team continues to build on previous success. This will include further improving timeliness, recruiting more adopters who will consider concurrency and foster to adopt and remaining ambitious for harder to place children to ensure they are offered the opportunities they deserve and adoption support is provided to families when needed.
- 8.4 The Adoption Service has demonstrated the ability to embrace new ways of working in order to improve outcomes for children. The model for Adoption@Heart with the *golden thread* of adoption support is similar to Wolverhampton's model and we will continue to practice in this manner in preparation for moving into the RAA.
- 8.5 The Government has committed to funding essential therapeutic support to adoptive placements until 2020; the challenge for Wolverhampton Adoption Team will be to

provide further opportunities to increase the skill of the workforce so the previously undisclosed level of demand will be met in the future.

9.0 Financial implications

- 9.1 The total approved budget for the Adoption Service is £4.5 million.
- 9.2 The Adoption Support Fund has been available for the Council to utilise since 2015, the funding will continue to be available until 2020. An additional £1 million has been made available for 2017-2018, taking the total fund to £29 million for local authorities to benefit from. Individual allocations are not granted, claims are submitted to the Department of Education for each individual case.
- 9.3 Since 2016-2017 a match funding fair access limits approach was introduced which asked local authorities to share the costs of support over and above the fair access limits through a match funded approach due to the scale of demand for the fund. The fair access limit is up to £5,000 for therapy.
- 9.4 Currently, the average claim made for individual funding for Wolverhampton is in the region of £4,000.
- 9.5 Should therapeutic services cost over the fair access fund limits in the future then the Council will have to contribute towards these costs. Should this arise then the budget would need to be identified from within the Adoption Service.
[NM/08032018/F]

10.0 Legal implications

- 10.1 There have been no legislative changes in this reporting period.

The relevant legislation is contained in the body of the report.

There are no legal implication arising from the report.
[TC/07032018/U]

11.0 Equalities implications

- 11.1 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team seeks to recruit and purchase adopters who can meet the needs of a diverse range of children. This includes children of different black and minority ethnic groups, both young and older children, male and female children. This is reflected within the recruitment strategy and all new policies have been subject to an equalities analysis.

12.0 Environmental implications

- 12.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

13.0 Human resources implications

- 13.1 Regionalisation will have human resources implications but the extent of these is not known at present. Human resources will be considered as part of the scoping exercise.

14.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 14.1 There are no direct corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

15.0 Schedule of background papers

- 15.1 There are no background papers related to this report.