

<b>Report title</b>	Adoption Annual Report	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Paul Sweet Children and Young People	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Emma Bennett, Director for Children's Services	
<b>Originating service</b>	Looked After Children	
<b>Accountable employee(s)</b>	Dawn Deans Tel Email	Senior Social Work Manager 01902 550842 daw.deans@wolverhampton.gov.uk
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Children in Care Council 20 August 2018	

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**Recommendation(s) for action or decision:**

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive, observe and provide feedback on the City of Wolverhampton Council Adoption Service Annual Report for 2017-2018.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 This report provides a description of the structure, aims and duties of The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Service and details the performance during April 2017 and March 2018. The statutory regulations require that elected members should be informed of the Adoption Agency's activity on a regular basis.
- 1.2 This report also includes information about the progress made towards City of Wolverhampton forming a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

## **2.0 Background.**

- 2.1 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Service Annual Report, which is attached see appendix one highlights the performance of the service.
- 2.2 The report was presented to the Children in Care Council on 20 August 2018 and their comments are set out in Appendix Two.
- 2.3 The Adoption Service is responsible for:
  - The recruitment of a sufficient pool of adopters from a range of backgrounds, and the assessment and training of prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of children.
  - The identification of children for whom the possible plan is adoption and to work alongside the children's social workers to match children with their adoptive families and ensure permanence is achieved without drift and delay;
  - The provision of an effective and efficient Adoption Panel which is conducted in accordance with the regulations;
  - The provision of a comprehensive range of support services to children, birth families and adoptive parents;
  - The provision in the disclosure of information and facilitating contact for adopted adults and birth families.

## **3.0 The National Agenda**

- 3.1 In 2012, the Government launched an Adoption Reform Programme, it focused concern regarding the length of time taken for children to be placed for adoption. This resulted in a raft of reforms and measures being implemented to increase and speed up adoption. The most recent legislation the Children and Social Work Act 2017 came into effect in May 2017 and includes the following;
- 3.2 Improving decision making, and support for looked after and previously looked after children in England and Wales, including adopted children;
- 3.3 Enabling better learning about effective approaches to child protection and the wider provision of children's social care in England;

- 3.4 Enabling the establishment of a new regulatory regime specifically for social work profession in England.
- 3.5 The key changes in relation to services for adopted children is the Virtual School Head's charge to make advice and information available to parents. The act includes the provision for improving understanding among Designated Teachers in maintained schools and academies and any other person the authority considers appropriate, for promoting the educational achievement of relevant children.

#### **4 The Adoption service objectives, Recruitment and Assessment of adopters**

- 4.1 Prospective adopters are recruited to meet the placement needs of children with a care plan of adoption. Adoption in the Black Country Consortium's (ABC) (branded as Adoption@Heart since September 2017;) recruitment strategy endeavours to recruit adopters for older children, who may have experienced neglect and or abuse and now need a permanent adoptive home; sibling groups and those of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) group. Enquiries are equally shared with ABC consortium members; Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall.
- 4.2 During April 2017-2018 36 referrals were received which converted to 12 adopter approvals; significantly lower than previous years. Eight cases were on hold for a variety of reasons and a further eight enquirers withdrew for a number of reasons. The process has been changed and it is anticipated the number will increase. Please refer to page 11 in the Adoption Annual report for a table that outlines the progress of referrals.
- 4.3 The Adoption Leadership Board identifies that nationally, adopter approvals timeliness is improving, however it highlights that adopter approvals have decreased over the last two years. There is a recognised shortfall now between the numbers of children for whom adoption is the plan and the numbers of available adopters. The national Adoption Leadership Board is considering ways of addressing this short fall.

#### **5.0 Early Permanence**

- 5.1 Early permanence is an umbrella term which includes both Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning placements. Both schemes enable a child in care to be placed with foster carers who are ready and willing to adopt them later if the courts decide they cannot live with their birth family. It is intended to speed up a child's journey through care and minimise the disruption of repeated moves to different families. In 2017-2018 the City of Wolverhampton made three early permanence placements. Nationally one percent of children equalling 300 were achieved via early permanence placements.

#### **6.0 Permanency via Adoption**

- 6.1 To pursue permanence in a timely manner, permanence planning is embedded in practice and provides oversight and scrutiny in care planning options for children. The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Service continues to be creative in family finding activity; permission was granted by senior leaders to work collaboratively with Ricochet production company working in partnership with Channel 4 who filmed a series of

adoption activity events. Wolverhampton secured parental permission to feature two harder to place, older children. There was one successful match and viewers witnessed the emerging relationship during the programme. Additionally, discussions took place between a social worker and adopters attending the event regarding a child that was not featured. The link was presented to the Adoption panel in February 2018.

- 6.2 Children requiring a “Should Be Placed for Adoption Decision” continue to make a steady presence in the adoption arena. The Agency Decision Maker sits twice a month but is also able make emergency decisions as necessary and when required. Due to the increase in the demands for decisions the Director of Children’s Services, Emma Bennett who is the main Decision Maker; shares the responsibility with Dawn Williams, Head of Safeguarding.
- 6.3 The City of Wolverhampton linked 41 children for adoption during 2017-2018; please refer to page 15 that outlines links for the year.

## **7.0 Adoption Scorecard**

- 7.1 Adoption Scorecards have been published by the Department for Education on an annual basis since 2012. They measure local authorities’ performance against two key indicators.
- 7.2 The **A1** indicator measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children who have been adopted. A low number of days represents a good performance.
- 7.3 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. A low number of days represents a good performance.
- 7.4 The City of Wolverhampton’s A1 Indicator equates to 624 days (this is a further year on year decrease of 48 days from 2013-2016) against a target of 426 days, against an English year average of 520. The three-year trend sees an improvement from 2013-2016 to 2014-2017 and the one-year trend sees an improvement from 2016 to 2017.
- 7.5 Wolverhampton’s A2 indicator is 225 days (a further year on year decrease of 18 days from 2013-2016) against a target of 121 days and an English average of 220. The three-year trend shows an improvement from 2013-2016 to 2014-2017 which was shorter than 2013-2016 and the one-year trend improvement from 2016 to 2017 was shorter than in 2016-2017.
- 7.6 Despite a significant improvement in performance year on year, Wolverhampton’s adoption scorecard for 2014-2017 continues to be rated ‘double red’ for A1 and A2 indicators.
- 7.7 No local authority in England has met the over ambitious government 426-day target, therefore Wolverhampton is not an outlier in this area. The Adoption Leadership Boards alongside CoramBAAF are canvassing Central Government and the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the 426day target.

- 7.8 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team has always been ambitious about adoption. The use of a three-year average for the scorecard indicator presents a challenge for the authority, and Wolverhampton constantly balances the need for swift placement 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.
- 7.9 Black children and children of mixed ethnicity appear to be slightly over-represented in the looked after children population. Children of Asian ethnicity are slightly under represented. In Wolverhampton 2014-2017, 40 children or 16 percent of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children leaving care were adopted compared to an England average of just eight percent.
- 7.10 Wolverhampton continues to pursue adoption for children aged five years and older. In 2014-2017, 40 children, or nine percent of children leaving care to adoption compared to an England average of five percent.
- 7.11 A yearly conversation with Ofsted explores the adoption scorecard and they recognise Wolverhampton's ambition and note the year on year improvement.

## **8.0 Interagency Placements**

- 8.1 Five interagency placements were made with City of Wolverhampton adopters which included a sibling group of two children and three single children; resulting in £88,000, interagency fee being recouped. All five placements had links with children from the ABC consortium.

## **9.0 Disruption of Adoptive Placements**

- 9.1 There has been one adoption disruption in 2017-2018 involving an older child. A Disruption meeting has been held and learning identified and will be shared at joint Adoption panel training in September 2018.

## **10.0 Adoption Order**

- 10.1 There were 40 adoption orders granted in 2017-2018, see page 17 of the Annual Adoption Agency Report. There were 163 adoptions in 2013-2016 compared to 160 (24%) 2014-2017 which shows a steady performance. The reduction in adoption orders this year is in part due to an increased number of birth parents contesting the adoption order which results in extending court timescales causing a number of adoption orders to be granted post March 2018.

## **11.0 Panel Business**

- 11.1 The City of Wolverhampton panel met on 24 occasions during 2017-2018, with at least two opportunities a month for adoption matters to be heard. There is great flexibility within the panel system to enable emergency matters to be heard, as and when directed by the courts. This means that children do not wait and matters are dealt with in a timely manner.

## **12.0 Rescinds**

- 12.1 There have been 16 plans of adoption for this period rescinded. Six children have been placed with their birth families, under Placement with Parents Regulations. Five children had their plans rescinded in favour of long-term fostering arrangements. It is anticipated that the remaining children in this group will either return home or have a plan for long term fostering. This cohort is made up of older children, many of whom are to be placed as a sibling group, some with complex health needs.

## **13.0 Adoption support services**

- 13.1 Adoptive families, adopted adults or birth relatives can ask for an assessment of need at any time after the adoption.
- 13.2 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was established by the Government in May 2015 as they became aware that access to therapeutic support following adoption was required.
- 13.3 Children who require specialist assessments are now eligible for a separate amount up to £2,500. The level of demand for the ASF has been far higher than anticipated and so to address this the Department for Education introduced a fair access limit of £5,000 per child. Since May 2015, the average spend per child has been around £3,500 for City of Wolverhampton ASF applications.
- 13.4 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Support Service has undertaken 26 post approvals Assessment of Need assessments during 2017-2018. We also undertake three-six monthly reviews and a final 12month adoption support review. During this year the Adoption team has made 43 successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund. The total approved funding is £127,000

## **14.0 Additional Functions of the Adoption Team**

- 14.1 In addition to the functions outlined above, the Adoption Team continue to offer services;
- Post adoption contact,
  - support for birth family members - pre- adoption
  - Notified adoption service, for e.g. step parents
  - Inter-country adoption service
  - Voluntary relinquishments

## **15.0 Financial implications**

- 15.1 The total approved budget for the Adoption Service for 2017-2018 was £4.4 million, the actual outturn for the year was £3.9 million resulting in an underspend of £500,000.
- 15.2 Any costs associated with the Adoption Service were contained within the budget above.

- 15.3 There are no other direct financial implications as a result of this report.  
[NM/04092018/T]

## **16.0 Legal implications**

- 16.1 The relevant legislation is set out in the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.  
[TC/11092018/Q]

## **17.0 Equalities implications**

- 17.1 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption Team seeks to recruit and purchase adopters who are able to 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.

## **18.0 Environmental implications**

- 18.1 There are no environmental implications

## **19.0 Human resources implications**

- 19.1 Regionalisation will no longer have human resources implications as it is likely the Regional Adoption Agency will be hosted by the City of Wolverhampton. Human resources are being considered as part of the development of Adoption@Heart model in relation to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council and Sandwell Children's Trust.

## **20.0 Corporate Landlord implications**

- 20.1 There are no Corporate Landlord implications.

## **21.0 Appendices**

- 21.1 Appendix One - City of Wolverhampton Adoption Annual report
- 21.2 Appendix Two - Comments from the Children in Care Council