



Corporate Parenting Board

30th September 2015

Report title	Adoption agency interim report
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Families
Wards affected	All
Accountable director	Linda Sanders, People
Originating service	Children and Family Support
Accountable employee(s)	Tel Louise Haughton 01902 553010 Email louise.haughton@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	The report has not been considered at any other meetings.

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive, observe and provide feedback on the Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service annual report.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report details the work of Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service in the year April 2014 to March 2015.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to provide updated information in relation to adoption both nationally and locally. It includes legislative and practice changes, and how these have impacted on those affected by adoption in Wolverhampton.

2.0 Background

2.1 Adoption Reform Agenda

- 2.1.1 The adoption reform agenda has been on-going since the latter part of 2011 and as well as the introduction of new legislation three papers have been released.
- 2.1.2 An action plan for adoption: tackling delay, March 2012, further action on adoption: finding more loving homes, January 2013 and regionalising adoption, June 2015.
- 2.1.3 The adoption leadership board was launched in April 2014
- 2.1.4 The Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) is a new national board with a remit to drive significant improvements in the performance of the adoption system in England. It has a particular focus on supporting and challenging the adoption system to maximise the likelihood that:
 - I. children for whom adoption is the best way of achieving permanence are adopted without unnecessary delay;
 - II. there are enough prospective adopters to provide homes for all the children approved to be adopted; and
 - III. adoptions do not break down through the right adoption support being readily available to all people who need it. (ALB core brief 2014)
- 2.1.5 The adoption Leadership board is chaired by Sir Martin Narey and it's members include senior figures from the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the Local Government Association, the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, University of Bristol – Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies and Adoption UK.
- 2.1.6 Following this regional adoption leadership boards were launched. More about the regional adoption leadership board's role is outlined later in this report.
- 2.1.7 Regionalising adoption, June 2015

- 2.1.8 Regionalising adoption is the most recent DfE paper and outlines the government's plans to reduce the number of adoption agencies across England. It is argued that fewer adoption agencies would achieve more economies of scale and would allow quicker matching for children. It is anticipated that local authorities will have a wider pool of adopters who could potentially meet the needs of a child for whom they were considering adoption.
- 2.1.9 Wolverhampton is currently in discussions with the other agencies in the region to discuss how partnerships could be strengthened to meet the requirements of the regionalisation agenda.

2.2 Adoption Reform Grant

- 2.2.1 2014/2015 saw a second round of smaller grants to local authorities to enable continued improvement of adoption services. The aim of the grant was to further reduce the time taken to place children for adoption. The timely and efficient recruitment, assessment and approval of more adopters were deemed to be a key element in reducing delay for children
- 2.2.2 It was again agreed by Senior Officers and Members that this would be spent on adoption services both internally and through Adoption in the Black Country (ABC). The usage of the previous grant had been successful in facilitating the approval of more adopters and in significantly decreasing the time taken to place children for adoption.
- 2.2.3 It is evident from the data within this report that the grant enabled the adoption service to maintain growth in approvals of prospective adopters, to place higher number of children for adoption and to further reduce the time taken to place children for adoption.
- 2.2.4 The grant was used to increase resources including two social workers to family find for children who had a plan of adoption. These social workers were tasked with placing the large number of children who has been waiting (known as legacy cases) for adoption within the year therefore significantly reducing the numbers of those children waiting with an active plan of adoption.
- 2.2.5 One part-time social worker provided backfill to enable continued development of early permanence work e.g. fostering for adoption and concurrent planning. This was to allow the business of the team to continue whilst a social worker continued to work on imbedding early permanence through fostering for adoption and concurrent planning. The grant also funded on-going partnership and membership fee to Coram Adoption Agency to support the development of concurrent planning.
- 2.2.6 The grant was also used to support independent assessments of prospective adopters. This allowed Wolverhampton to continue to approve much larger numbers of adopters without increasing staffing.

- 2.2.7 It is likely that the commissioning of independent assessments will cease to take place on a large scale as ABC and adoption focus move towards strengthening the current partnership in line with the regionalising adoption agenda.
- 2.2.8 The grant was also used to feature harder to place children externally. The adoption team spent this allocation in an innovative way and were early up takers in utilising the Adoption Links website. Adoption Links is a web based family finding service that works in a similar way to publications like “Be my Parent” or “Children who Wait”. The clear advantage to this site was the reduced timescale between publicising a child’s profile and adopters being able to see the profile and register an interest. The adoption team found that multiple potential matches were being identified within 24 hours for harder to place children; many of these went on to become successful matches.
- 2.2.9 Increased resources were added to the ABC marketing budget which resulted in referrals increasing by 100%. Wolverhampton paid a quarter share of increased staffing to ABC to support the increased admin and marketing activity. The administrator also facilitated both stage one and two preparations training for prospective adopters.

2.3 Regional and local developments

2.3.1 Adoption Leadership Boards

- 2.3.2 The West Midlands adoption leadership board is chaired by Tony Oakman (Strategic Director People Services at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council). The board is made up of senior leaders from the 14 local authorities that make up the West Midlands region.

2.3.4 Adopt West Mids

- 2.3.5 Adopt West Mids remains a strong regional consortium, which offers mentoring, training, peer learning and development and a database exchange for children and families. Adopt West Mids has also facilitated four Activity days in conjunction with British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) during this reporting period.

- 2.3.6 Adopt West Mids is made up of adoption operational managers, it’s role and purpose is however in flux , Adopt West Mids is likely to be viewed and utilised as the delivery arm of the regional adoption leadership board.

2.3.7 Black Country Consortium (Adoption in the Black Country and Adoption focus) ABC

- 2.3.8 Wolverhampton continues to be a part of this consortium looking at joint initiatives in adoption. This consortium has continued to work collaboratively over the last twelve months.

- 2.3.9 ABC has continued to jointly purchase services from both Adoption U.K. and from After Adoption, as detailed below.

- 2.3.10 The original remit of ABC was to recruit adopters for older children, sibling groups and those of minority ethnic groups. However, although all promotional materials and campaigns still reflect this, enquiries are also accepted from potential adopters who fall outside this category. The enquiries are equally shared throughout the four local authorities.
- 2.3.11 During the previous reporting period a scoping exercise was commissioned by the ABC. This piece of work was undertaken by Core Assets and BAAF following a tendering process; with a view to considering future development of the ABC Consortium.
- 2.3.12 After giving consideration to the options available, the consortium members favoured an opportunity to expand ABC by adding a fifth partner from the voluntary adoption agency sector. A successful bid for an innovation grant of £300,000 was awarded to Adoption Focus who utilised the grant to become the fifth partner of ABC. ABC was re-branded as ABC and Adoption Focus and the new Consortium was launched in October 2014. The purpose of this partnership was to further increase the pool of adopters available to children in the Black Country. Adoption Focus and ABC now jointly recruit, train and support prospective adopters with a view to increasing Adoption Focus adopter approval. These families will have Black Country children placed with them.
- 2.3.13 Adoption Focus have recently appointed a family finder who keeps a data base of all children waiting for adoption in the Black Country, all children in the pipeline in the Black Country and all adopters available in ABC and Adoption Focus. The role of this family finder is to ensure that links are made quickly within the consortium. This has already resulted in more matches being made within the consortium.
- 2.3.14 As stated above, ABC and adoption focus along with other local authorities in the area is currently considering how it might change to meet the requirements of the regionalising adoption agenda.

2.4 Case Law

- 2.4.1 In 2014 a judgement was passed by Mr Justice Munby (President of the Family Division of the High Court of England and Wales) that significantly changed the adoption landscape across the country. Re B (June 2013) and B-S (Sept 2013) challenged the robust nature of adoption plans and decision making both in relation to social work reports and court judgments. As a direct result local authorities began to see the numbers of placement order being granted decreases and by November 2014 it was reported that nationally placement orders had decreased by 54%.
- 2.4.2 Mr Justice Munby has since has emphasised in other court judgements Re CW (Nov 2014) and Re R (Dec 2014) the importance of adoption. Mr Justice Munby stated that "Where adoption is in the child's best interests, local authorities must not shy away from seeking, nor courts from making, care orders with a plan for adoption, placement orders and adoption orders.

- 2.4.3 In 2014/2015 Wolverhampton saw placement orders decrease from 71 the previous year to 51. This was not considered to be a significant decrease as the amount of placement orders granted 2013/2014 had peaked at a level higher than would be expected year on year.

2.5 Team restructure

- 2.5.1 As part of a wider restructure in June 2014 the adoption service was reconfigured into three units. A recruitment and assessment unit, a family finding and adoption support unit, and a children's unit for children with a plan of adoption. This placed all of the professionals involved in placing children for adoption and supporting those placements within the same team. As a result the team has been able to improve efficiency and place children for adoption in shorter timescales. Adoption specific training has also been provided to all social workers. This has led to a more co-ordinated response to adoption support, with all social workers involved working more closely together and sharing the same approach. As a result local adopters have valued the support offered by the service and have been confident to make their adoption applications earlier.

2.6 Adopter approval

- 2.6.1 Wolverhampton Adoption Team has continued to imbed the stage one and stage two adoption processes. The process is fully integrated in the council's electronic system which enables the production of performance and case tracking tools.
- 2.6.2 The stage one and stage two processes have faced some difficulties both locally and nationally with regards to the completion of statutory checks in stage one. In particular the waiting time for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks in the West Midlands has been up to four months. As a result adopters have not been able to progress to stage two within two months of stage one beginning.
- 2.6.3 The West Midlands Police Constabulary has now employed more staff to undertake DBS's and an improvement have been noticed in this area.
- 2.6.4 Wolverhampton Adoption Service continues to provide stage one and stage two training in conjunction with ABC. Stage one training is web based and provides the foundation for face to face training in stage two.
- 2.6.5 Stage two is three day's face to face training that is delivered on a monthly basis.
- 2.6.6 ABC and Adoption Focus have developed material to support the recruitment of foster to adopt carers. This includes information about fostering to adopt being provided at information events and during preparation training.

2.7 Adoption support services

- 2.7.1 Wolverhampton Adoption Service continue to ensure the provision reflects the Adoption Support Regulations 2005, having the equivalent of one and a half social workers who

are dedicated to the work of adoption support and one part time post adoption contact co-ordinator.

- 2.7.2 On 11 September 2013 the Government announced that £19.3 million of post adoption support would be made available to adoptive families following a pilot of the adoption support fund. Ten local authorities piloted the scheme. The scheme was deemed to be successful and the fund was launched nationally on 1st May 2015. The fund will initially be available for one year and will be evaluated. The government has indicated that it is committed to the adoption support fund long term.
- 2.7.3 The adoption support fund is a sum of money that is held centrally. Local authorities can make applications to the fund on behalf of adopters for a range of therapeutic services following an adoption support assessment.
- 2.7.4 The adoption support fund will pay for therapeutic services such as, more complex assessment where required e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) assessment, multidisciplinary assessment including education and health, cognitive and neuropsychological assessment, other mental health assessment, therapeutic parenting courses, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Non Violent Resistance, Theraplay, filial therapy, art therapy, dance therapy and drama therapy. The fund will not pay for practical support or activities.
- 2.7.5 The adoption team have so far completed thirteen adoption support assessment and have made seven applications to the adoption support fund on behalf of adoptees and their families. The applications have been made on behalf of a variety of families many of whom were already receiving an adoption support service. Some of these families have not yet adopted and the fund has allowed them to make their application to adopt confident in the knowledge that the finance has been secured to provide for the on-going therapeutic needs of their family. Other families adopted many years ago and have found that their children have required therapeutic support at various stages of their development.
- 2.7.6 The adoption team is currently able to offer the circle of security parenting programme and theraplay internally. The adoption team is also investing in adoption support by training staff in Non-violent resistance (NVR offers a child-focused approach that rebuilds the relationship through de-escalation, acceptance and reconciliation, allowing the child's needs to be met through the love and care of unconditional positive regard) and DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy- integrative method of psychotherapy developed for the treatment of children and young people who manifest serious psychological problems associated with complex trauma and serious failure to establish secure patterns of attachment).
- 2.7.7 Wolverhampton City Council continues to work in partnership with the other Black Country Authorities i.e. 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.

- 2.7.8 In relation to Adoption U.K. the partnership agreement has been reviewed within this period to ensure we are purchasing an effective support package which meets the needs of approved adopters and prospective adopters.
- 2.7.9 All prospective adopters continue to receive 12 months free membership to Adoption UK, unless they choose to opt out of this. All prospective adopters will be offered the support of a buddy (adoptive parent mentor or parent consultant) who reflects their own situation. This support will be offered either at the point of being linked to a child or at any point during placement.
- 2.7.10 All prospective adopters will be invited to attend the Adoption Support Group run by Adoption UK on a bi-monthly basis. Adoption UK is keen to ensure the success of this support group and have structured the meetings more formally to include speakers and presentations that are pre planned. This has been helpful and social workers can encourage adopters to attend relevant support groups. These meetings are held in Walsall and Halesowen. This offers adopters the opportunity of meeting with other adopters at a group run by adopters themselves. Adopters are also able to access Adoption UK training workshops.
- 2.7.11 After Adoption continues to provide services on behalf of ABC. The first is an existing service which provides support to adopted adults, adopted children and birth relatives. The organisation supports intermediary services, counselling, and helping adopted adults to trace their birth family.
- 2.7.12 After Adoption also offers independent counselling to all birth parents where there is a plan of adoption for their child.
- 2.7.13 This year, After Adoption secured a grant to run Breaking the Cycle. Breaking the Cycle provides intensive one-to-one and group support to birth mothers in the Black Country (Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Walsall, and Dudley) who have lost at least one child to adoption. Birth mothers receive an initial assessment. Following this there are six group work sessions focusing on change, concentrating on building self-esteem whilst supporting positive life choices to break repetitive cycles. For women who want to have future children there are further sessions on nurturing parenting. At the end of the programme birth mothers can continue to attend support groups with other women who have completed the programme.
- 2.7.14 In partnership with ABC After Adoption is commissioned to deliver Safebase twice per year within the Black Country. This is a parenting programme which includes an initial Marscak Interaction Method (MIMS assessment). The feedback from adopters who have attended is very positive. After Adoption deliver Safebase across the country and Wolverhampton can utilise these courses for the prospective adopters of children who are placed out of the area. This has worked particularly well and has enabled the adoption team to be confident that prospective adopters caring for Wolverhampton children with more complex needs have a basic knowledge of attachment and therapeutic parenting.

2.7.15 In addition to this, the Black Country Consortium has implemented a post approval training programme. This now consists of four/five workshops each year. 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 include: Introducing Theraplay, Attachment, Helping Adopters to tell their adopted children of their adoption and background, Social Networking Implications for Adopters, contact, Education workshop for adopters and Understanding the Impact of Early Trauma.

2.8 Family Finding

2.8.1 The data contained in this report will include how performance relating to family finding is improving. In 2014 /2015 Wolverhampton placed a record number of children for adoption, many of whom were part of sibling groups to be placed together.

2.8.2 With the government emphasis on improving the timeliness of children to be placed for adoption, this is an area which has been given priority within the team. To this effect bi-monthly family finding meetings with individual family finders to monitor and action family finding activity continued to take place. Six weekly care planning tracking meetings with social worker and their line managers also took place to ensure that plans were progressed for children with a plan of adoption. Social care workers complete profiles, photographs and DVD's as soon as the local authority has a possible plan of adoption. Social care workers also follow up potential links for the Consortium, the Adoption Register or Adoption Links to enable a prompt exchange of paperwork. Wolverhampton Social Care Workers in the adoption team have attended a photography course at Wolverhampton College to enhance the quality of photographs and DVD's of our children which are used when publishing both internally and externally. High specification digital cameras are used to achieve good quality photographs of children.

2.8.3 Wolverhampton attended the majority of Adoption Register exchange days across England and Wales and featured harder to place children at those events.

2.8.4 Wolverhampton has also been proactive in enabling children to attend Adoption Activity Days' held across the region where appropriate. This is an event where children and approved adopters take time to enjoy each other's company having fun at a planned activity day. The percentage of children matched at activity days has increased across the region. Wolverhampton has used the events to give prospective adopters who have already expressed an interest in a child or children with more complex needs the opportunity to meet the child or children in question. This has often reassured adopters with regards to their ability to meet the child's needs and a match has been progressed to panel. It was reported that the ABC and Staffordshire event held in April 2015 received an "exceptional amount of positive feedback from adopters and foster carers on the day, and there was a very good atmosphere". Wolverhampton had an Afro-Caribbean sibling group and an older single child in attendance. A number of families registered an interest in the older child.

2.9 Panel membership

- 2.9.1 The Panel continues to function well supported by its committed members and support staff.
- 2.9.2 The professional advisor to panel Lorna Carr has continued to increase panel membership with the establishment of a central list of panel members. Lorna has also further developed the permanency panel to incorporate general fostering and adoption matters once a month. This has increased panel availability for both fostering and adoption.

2.10 Functions of the adoption team

- 2.10.1 In addition to the functions outlined above, Wolverhampton Adoption Service continues to offer services in all areas of adoption with the main functions being, approval and support of prospective adopters through to adoption orders being granted, notified adoptions, voluntary relinquishments, inter country adoptions and family finding.

2.11 Adoption Inspection

- 2.11.1 The Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted in October 2012. The inspectors were impressed with the overall improvements to the service in Wolverhampton and rated the local authority as Good.
- 2.11.2 Due to change in inspection framework the Adoption Agency will no longer be inspected separately, but as part of a Children's Services Inspection. A separate rating will be issued, as part of this overall inspection.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

3.1 Adoption scorecard

- 3.1.1 The DfE has produced a range of comparative data used to measure timeliness for children with a plan of adoption over a three year period. In December 2014, the Adoption Scorecard Data for 2011-2014 was published.
- 3.1.2 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. Wolverhampton had taken an average of 872 days compared to a national average of 628 days. 872 was however a 19% decrease from the previous year.
- 3.1.3 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. Wolverhampton had taken 294 days compared with a national average of 217 days.

- 3.1.4 A detailed scorecard analysis was produced that evidenced the adoption team were making improvements year on year. It also highlighted some areas of good practice against the other indicators. (appendix One)
- 3.1.5 In 2014 the A10 indicator was introduced. This measures the average time between a child entering care and being placed with their prospective adopters adjusted for foster carer adoptions (where times for children who are adopted by their foster carers are stopped at the date children were placed with their foster carers). Wolverhampton had taken an average of 522 days compared to national average 525 days.
- 3.1.6 Wolverhampton remains committed to supporting foster carers to adopt children who have been in their care for a significant amount of time and where this is in the child's best interests.
- 3.1.7 Adoptions increased by almost 40% in Wolverhampton to 106 in 2011-2014 with 50 adoptions taking place in 2013/14. 19% of children who left care were adopted compared with an England average of 14%.
- 3.1.8 Wolverhampton also continues to pursue adoption for children who would be considered as harder to place including those from BME backgrounds and those aged five years or older. In Wolverhampton 15% of BME children leaving care were adopted compared to an England average of just 8%. Also in Wolverhampton 10% of children aged 5 or over leaving care were adopted compared with just 5% nationally.
- 3.1.9 The data for this reporting period as seen below will evidence continued improvements with regards to timeliness for children that will in due course be evident in the adoption scorecard.

3.2 Number of children adopted and timeliness

- 3.2.1 53 children were adopted in 2014/2015. This compares with 50 in 2013/2014 and 35 the year before.
- 3.2.2 The average time taken to place children as measured by the A1 indicator was 522 days. This was below the scorecard target of 547 days.
- 3.2.3 The average time taken to place children as measured by the A2 indicator was 241 days. This was significantly above the scorecard target of 152 days. It should however be noted that the national average for 2011 – 2014 was 216 days and it has since increased. 241 represented a slight increase in timeliness against this indicator for Wolverhampton compared to the previous year.

3.3 Panel Business

- 3.3.1 Panel met on 18 occasions during 2014/2015. It was apparent that two panels would be required most months in order to service the needs of the adoption team. This was due to the increased numbers of matches and adopter approvals.
- 3.3.2 There are also procedures in place for convening emergency panels when required.
- 3.3.3 Children requiring a “should be placed for adoption decision” are not presented to panel as they proceed straight to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker sits twice a month but is also able make emergency decisions when required.

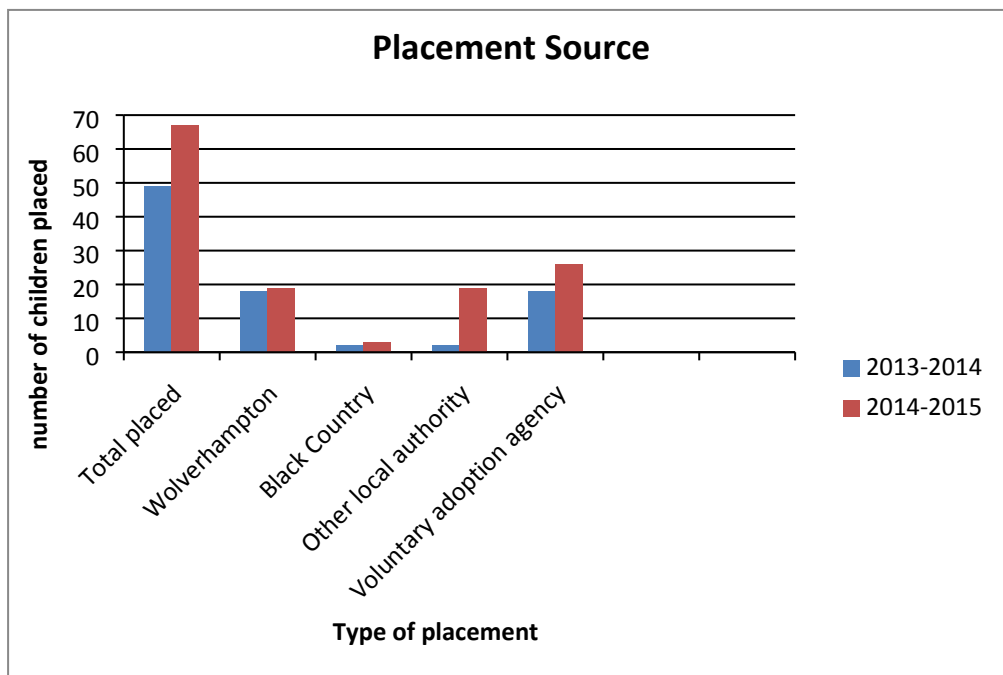
Recommendation that children should be placed for adoption	Rescinding of adoption plan for children	Approval of prospective adopters	De-registration of adopters	Links of children with prospective adopters	Disruption reports
51 (85)	22 (29)	25 (30)	1 (2)	76 (49)	0 (0)

3.4 Adopter approval

- 3.4.1 There have been 25 approvals of prospective adopters so far in this reporting period. This is less than the previous year. A further four families were taken to panel before the end of March. Of these; two families were approved as concurrent carers and one family wished to be considered as foster to adopt carers if an appropriate match became available.
- 3.4.2 ABC (adoption in the Black Country) continues to experience a growth in numbers of enquiries and subsequent referrals. The implementation of the two stage process has however posed some threats with regards to progressing enquires in a timely manner. Statutory checks are now conducted in stage one. There have been lengthy delays in receiving some of the checks; DBS's have taken up to four months to be processed. The escalation procedures have been used but this did not result in DBS's being completed speedily. The delay in stage one has caused lower numbers of prospective adopters to be approved than was anticipated.
- 3.4.3 There are currently 12 families waiting to be matched.
- 3.4.4 There are five Asian and one dual heritage White/Asian family currently waiting. This year just two children of Asian or Asian dual heritage background have become subject to a plan of adoption in Wolverhampton. This compares to eight in the previous year. As

a result these families have waited longer than anticipated for a link. Family finding has been active on their behalf and they have been advised to attend national exchange days. They have also been featured on the Adoption Register and Adoption Links.

- 3.4.5 Wolverhampton currently does not have any children waiting who would be a match for the prospective adopters waiting. It is anticipated that a number of the adopters will be matched with children from other local authorities in the region who do have children waiting.



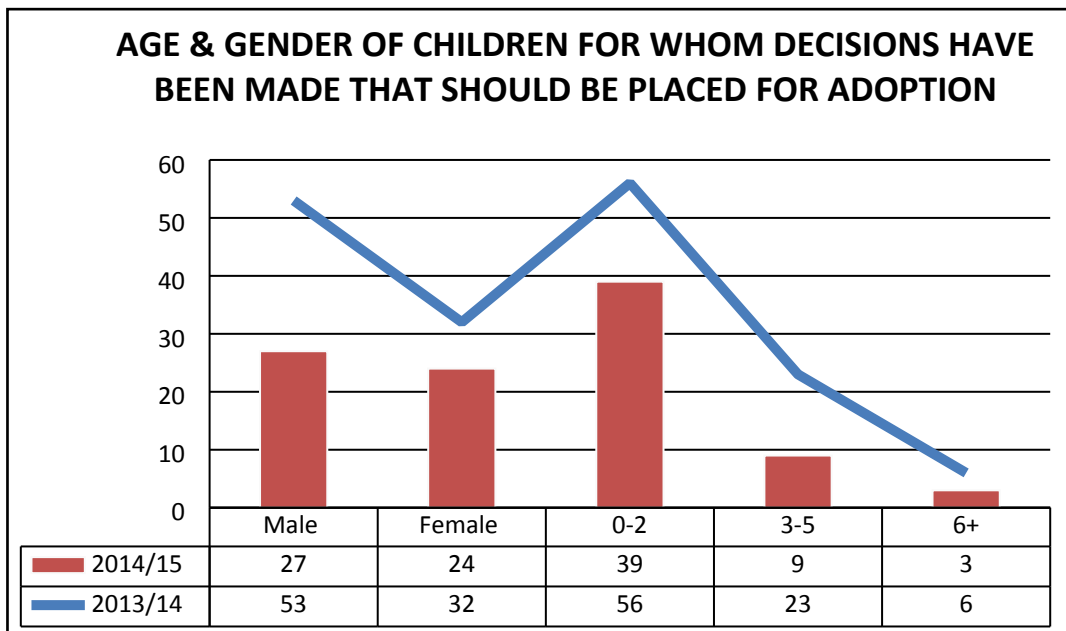
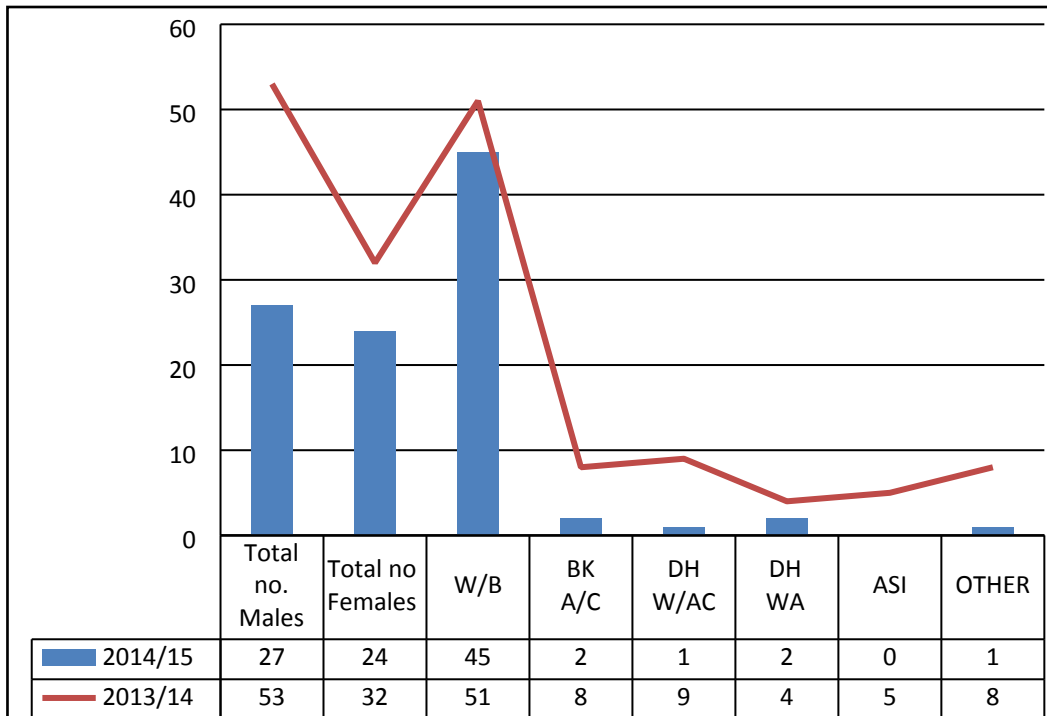
- 3.4.6 Following the levelling of interagency placement fees all adoption agencies are required to charge the same for providing a prospective adoption placement. For one child the cost is £27,000. The increased resources from the Adoption Reform Grant has provided some support for the purchasing of interagency placements.

3.5 Children's decisions

- 3.5.1 In the last reporting year 85 children were considered as children who should be placed for adoption (SBPFA) compared with 63 the preceding year. In 14 of these cases placement orders were not subsequently made by the courts. In this reporting period 51 children have had SBPFA decisions agreed; of these ten were not granted placement orders.
- 3.5.2 There has been a dip in the number of children for whom Wolverhampton is pursuing a plan of adoption. It is however acknowledge that the number of children for whom SBPA decisions were made in 2013/2014 was unusually high. Wolverhampton's decline was not in line with the national trend of around 50% highlighted above.

- 3.5.3 Of the 51 children 24 were female and 27 male.
- 3.5.4 In terms of age 39 children were aged naught to two, nine children were aged three to five and three children were six plus years of age.
- 3.5.5 Of the 51 children 45 children were White British. Three were Black British, three were dual heritage and one was White British European.
- 3.5.6 This equates to 76% of children being aged naught to two compared with 65 % in the previous year and 12% of children with a plan of adoption being from BME backgrounds. There had been concerns in the previous two years that children from BME backgrounds were over represented. This figure is now within expected parameters.
- 3.5.7 It is also helpful to look at the number of sibling groups included in this chart. 41% of the children were to be placed as part of a sibling group. This figure is slightly below the national picture of 49%.
- 3.5.8 Of these children there were:-
- Two sibling groups of three
 - Seven sibling groups of two
 - It was planned for three children to join older siblings in adoptive placements.
- 3.5.9 Given it is often harder to place children who are older, part of sibling groups and children who are of a BME background, the decrease in these figures should result in further improvements in timeliness for children with a plan of adoption in 2015/2016.
- 3.5.10 In addition a significantly larger group of children continued to have their plans changed from adoption this year. This was partly due to the large numbers of children for whom placement orders were not granted between 2013 and 2015. Some of these children were children for whom the local authority had not been able to secure an adoption placement and an alternative plan of permanence was been agreed. This cohort is made up predominantly of older children, many of whom are to be placed as a sibling group, and some with complex health needs. For all children who had become subject to a placement order significant family finding had taken place prior to considering a change of plan. For the majority of those children a change of plan to permanent fostering enabled children to be permanently fostered with their current carers.

Ethnicity of children for whom a SBPFA decision was made

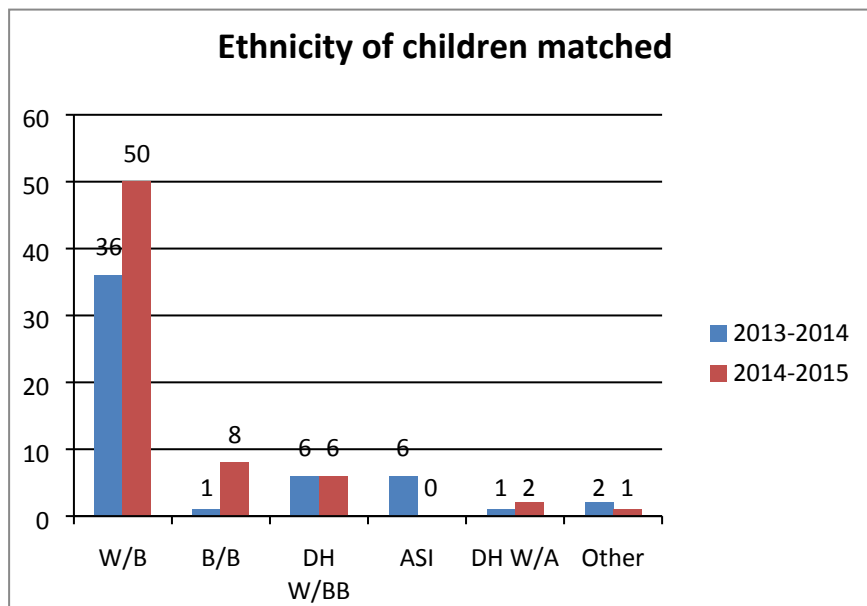


3.6 Matches of children with prospective adopters

3.6.1 During this reporting period from April 2014 to March 2015, 67 children were matched with prospective adopters compared with 49 the preceding year.

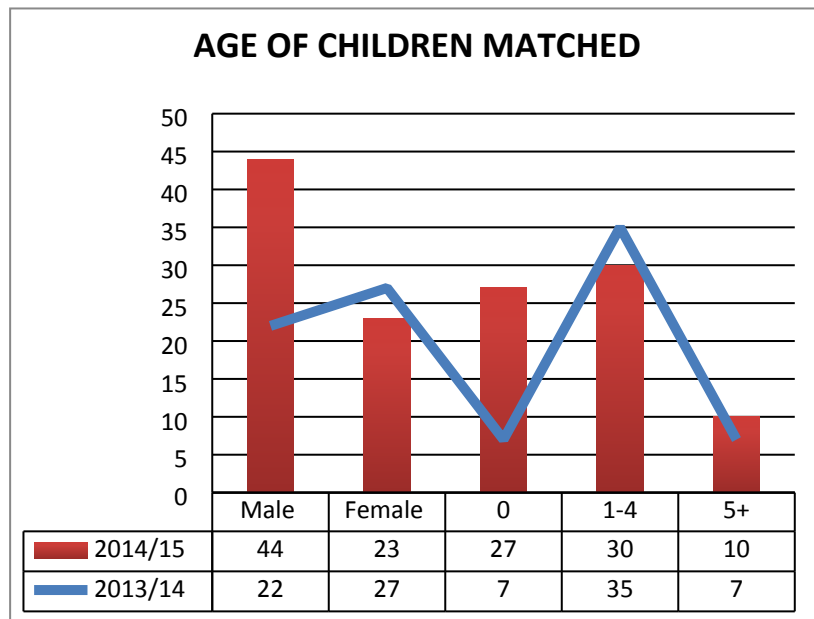
3.6.2 36 of the 67 children matched at panel were part of a sibling group.

3.6.3 When considering the ethnicity of the children matched, 17 of the 67 children were of BME (black and minority ethnic) background. This equates to 25% of children matched. Of these children 12% were Black. Black children were therefore over represented when compared to Wolverhampton's demographic of Black children which is 8%.



3.6.4 Of the 67 children; 27 were matched before the age of one. This compares with just seven the preceding year. There are well documented benefits to placing children as young as possible including less chance of adoption breakdown and increased emotional wellbeing for children. Wolverhampton has taken a number of steps to increase the possibility of children being placed with adopters early when they cannot be cared for within their birth family. This has included the development of systems to enable tracking and early family finding for children who become subject to a plan of adoption.

3.6.5 Ten of the children matched were boys over the age of five.



- 3.6.6 37 of the 67 children were placed within four months of a placement order which equated to 54%. A further six were placed within the previous A2 target of five months. The majority of children who waited more than four months were part of a sibling group, in five cases the children had complex health needs and in one case the child had received therapeutic support from CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services) for a significant period of time which prevented the case being progressed.
- 3.6.7 80% of children who have become subject to a placement order in this reporting year have been linked within four months.
- 3.6.8 2014 to 2015 has seen the adoption service experience even more success with placing both sibling groups and older children. This may be a result of both the national media coverage of adoption and localised targeted recruitment for adopters of sibling groups and older children.
- 3.6.9 The adoption team has therefore been able to place all of the children for whom adoption was deemed to remain appropriate and had been waiting 12 months or more in this reporting period. Of the children waiting with an active plan of adoption at the end of this reporting period there were just four for whom placements had not been identified.
- 3.6.10 It is therefore anticipated that the adoption service will enter 2015/2016 in a good position to meet the national target for the A2 indicator.
- 3.6.11 This has partly been achieved through the extra resources provided to the family finding unit in the form of two social workers funded by the adoption reform grant.

3.7 Complaints

3.7.1 There have been no complaints received by panel during this period.

3.8 Strategic issues and forward plans

3.8.1 Wolverhampton remains committed to adoption as a positive permanence choice for children who cannot be cared for by their birth relatives. The service has welcomed the governments challenge around timeliness for children who have a plan of adoption, it is well accepted that age at placement is one predictor impacting on positive outcomes for children who are placed for adoption. Wolverhampton is therefore committed to continuing to improve timeliness for children.

3.8.2 The adoption service has begun to strengthen relations and offer support to locality teams resulting in earlier family finding for children. It is hoped that as new processes are further imbedded, this will provide opportunities for closer working during pre-birth assessments to ensure options for early permanence are fully explored where this is appropriate.

3.8.3 A key feature of the adoption services improvement plan is to increase the recruitment of adopters who can consider offering early permanence options to children either through concurrent planning or foster to adopt.

3.8.4 The adoption service has demonstrated the ability to embrace new ways of working in order to improve outcomes for children. It is expected that closer working within the region as described above will lend itself to ensuring that children are matched without delay with adopters who are able to meet their long term needs.

3.8.5 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.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 The approved budget for 2014/15 for the Adoption Service was £2.7 million. ,

4.2 The Council was also awarded an Adoption Reform grant allocation of £249,000 for 2014/15.

4.3 The Adoption Reform grant has enabled the Council to increase its staffing resources, marketing budget and capacity for inter-agency placements. A grant has not been awarded for 2015/2016.

4.4 The Adoption Reform Grant funded independent assessments of prospective adopters over a two year period. This enable the significant increase in adopter approvals, the

adoption service will face some pressures with regards to maintaining these numbers without the adoption reforms grant.

- 4.5 The government has made funds available in 2015/16 that will allow the Council to claim back the inter-agency fee when placements are made for harder to place children (sibling groups, children of BME background and children over the age of five). It is estimated that potentially the Council would be able to claim £500,000 from this fund, assuming that the fund remains available at the time of submitting a claim.

[NM/23092015/Q]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 There have been some significant changes to regulations under the Adoption Reform Agenda and the Children and Families Act 2014 – this Act received Royal Assent in March 2014.

- 5.2 The key areas addressed in this legislation are listed below

- 5.2.1 Contact between prescribed persons and adopted person's relatives

This provision allows for relatives of adoptees to access the adoption records of a deceased relative and undertake a search for birth relatives. The adoption team have this far received 1 request of this nature from the daughter of an adoptee.

- 5.2.2 Early placement of looked after children with prospective adopters

This places a duty on the local authority to consider placing a child with foster to adopt carers in cases where the child's plan is likely to become one of permanence.

Workshops have been delivered to Consultant social workers explaining this duty in the context of permanency planning. In 2014/2015 two concurrent placements were made. From this the adoption team have gained experience around supporting concurrent/foster to adopt carers through the uncertainties of the court process successfully.

- 5.2.3 Repeal of requirement to give due consideration to ethnicity: England

- 5.2.4 Recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters

This allows the Secretary of State to direct local authorities to make arrangements for the recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters to be carried out on their behalf by one or more adoption agencies.

- 5.2.5 Adoption support services: personal budgets

Where adoption support services are agreed the local authority must make provision for the payment of personal budgets if asked to do so by the recipient of the services. Wolverhampton has not yet received any requests for personal budgets.

5.2.6 Adoption support services: duty to provide information

This places a duty to provide information about adoption support services to any family who has or is interested in adoption a child.

The team has developed an adoption passport that contains all required information and is given to prospective adopters or adopters on all initial visits.

5.2.7 The Adoption and Children Act Register

This made the provision for approved prospective adopters to be able to search the adoption register themselves in order to identify possible matches.

The National Adoption Register does not yet have the functionality to allow adopters to search. This is still in development.

5.2.8 Contact: post-adoption

This strengthened the rights of birth relative, adoptees, adopters and other significant individual's to obtain a contact order from the courts after an adoption order has been made.

The adoption team is not aware of any applications being made to the court for a contact order in respect of children who were placed by Wolverhampton Local Authority

- 5.3 A further piece of legislation is currently proposed within the Education and Adoption Bill 2015. This would enact powers, for the Secretary of State to direct one or more local authorities in England to make arrangements for all or some of their functions to be carried out by one of those local authorities, or through one or more other adoption agencies. TC/22092015/Q

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 Wolverhampton 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.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no environmental implications

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 At the end of March 2015 the adoption service lost 2.5 posts funded by the Adoption Reform Grant. These extra posts had enabled the service to deliver the targets set for the year. It should however be noted that there are currently much fewer children waiting with a plan of adoption and extra resources are not required in the family finding area.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 There are no background papers attached.