



# Corporate Parenting Board

6 January 2016

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

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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 Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service interim report.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 This report details the work of Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service in the year April 2015 to September 2015.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to provide updated information in relation to adoption locally.

## **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 (ALB) was launched in April 2014.
- 2.1.4 The ALB is a new national board with a remit to drive significant improvements in the performance of the adoption system in England.
- 2.1.7 Regionalising adoption, June 2015 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.
- 2.1.8 Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell, Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire and Adoption Focus (a voluntary adoption agency) submitted a regionalisation proposal to access funds with the purpose of developing a single sub-regional adoption service. The group have been successful in securing £100,000 from the Department of Education (DfE) to scope the best possible means of delivering a single adoption service in line with the regionalising adoption agenda.
- 2.1.9 All six Local Authorities and adoption focus are committed to creating a single Black Country and Adoption Focus adoption service that can increase sufficiency for all of the children in the region.
- 2.1.10 It is anticipated that any new model will build on the existing ABC (adoption in the Black Country) and Adoption Focus model. Recruitment and assessment, family finding and adoption support are the three main areas that are likely to be delivered through a regional adoption service.

## 2.2 Panel Business

2.2.1 Below are the number of adopters approved and the number of children matched with prospective adopters between April 2015 and September 2015. The figures in brackets are the same figures for the full year April 2015- March 2015.

Approval of Prospective adopters	Matches of children with prospective adopters
9 (25)	21 (67)

## 2.3 Adopter approval

- 2.3.1 There have been nine approvals of prospective adopters in the first half of the current financial year. It is expected that a further 14 adopters will be approved by April 2015. This will represent a small decrease in the approval of prospective adopters.
- 2.3.2 ABC (Adoption in the Black Country) has experienced a levelling off of referrals in this financial year. Fewer of these referrals have converted to approved prospective adopters across all four Local Authorities. Over the two preceding years ABC successfully recruited much larger numbers of adopters with enquiries increasing by over 100%. There are a number of factors that could have influenced the recent trend. For example it is known that the number of prospective adopters waiting nationally increased significantly in the last reporting period to over 3,000, with a large number of prospective adopters waiting over 12 months. It is possible that potential adopters are aware of the long waiting periods and are choosing not to begin the process at present.
- 2.3.3 There are currently 14 families waiting to be linked. Of the 14 families six links are being progressed with children from Wolverhampton who have plans of adoption.
- 2.3.4 There are six Asian families currently waiting. In the last two years just two children of Asian or Asian dual heritage background have become subject to a plan of adoption in Wolverhampton. They were placed for adoption with foster carers. This compares to eight in the previous year. As a result, these families have waited longer than anticipated for a link. Two other families have very precise matching criteria and Wolverhampton have not yet been able to identify a match. Family finding has been active on their behalf and they have been advised to attend national exchange days. They have also been featured on Adoption Links which is a national adoption data base, the National Adoption Register and Adopt West Mids.

## 2.4 Links of children with prospective adopters

- 2.4.1 During the last reporting period April 2013 to March 2014, 67 children were matched with prospective adopters. In the first six months of this reporting year 21 matches were approved by the agency decision maker.
- 2.4.2 Seven of the 21 children matched at panel were part of a sibling group.

- 2.4.3 When considering the ethnicity of the children matched, four of the 21 children were of BME (black and minority ethnic) background. This equates to 19% of children matched. This remains above the England average of 8%.
- 2.4.4 Of the 21 children linked seven were over three, with six of these being boys over the age of five.
- 2.4.5 11 of the 21 children were placed within four months of a placement order which equated to 52%. Six of children who waited more than four months were adopted by their foster carers. In the remaining four cases the children had complex or unknown 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.
- 2.4.6 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.
- 2.4.7 100% of children who have become subject to a placement order in this reporting year have been matched within four months.
- 2.4.8 There are however six children who became subject to placement orders in the last reporting year who have not been matched within four months. Two are part of a harder to place sibling group, two are subject to an application by their foster carers to adopt and two children were matched within timescales but the placements did not go ahead.
- 2.4.9 There has been one adoption disruption in this reporting period. This is the first in three years and Wolverhampton remains well below average with regards to adoption disruptions.
- 2.4.10 14 of the children matched were placed with adopters approved by Wolverhampton; the remainder were placed with adopters approved by other Local Authorities or voluntary agencies.

## **2.5 Children's decisions**

- 2.5.1 There has in this reporting period been a significant decrease in the number of "Should be Placed for Adoption" (SBPFA) decisions made, and the number of placement orders made. This is very much in line with the national trend and could be contributed to a number of factors.
- 2.5.6 In the last reporting year 51 children were considered as children who should be placed for adoption. In the first half of this reporting period 21 children have had plans of adoption agreed; of these four have not been granted placement orders.
- 2.5.7 8 placement orders were made in the first half of this reporting period. It is expected that a higher number of placement orders will be made between October 2015 and March

2016. The adoption pipeline suggest that approximately 20 placement orders will be granted by April 2016.

- 2.5.8 As outlined in the previous annual adoption report, 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 decreased and by November 2014 it was reported that nationally placement orders had decreased by 54%.
- 2.5.9 Of the 21 children 11 children were White British. One was Black British Caribbean. Three were dual heritage, White British Black Caribbean. Two were dual heritage, White British Asian. Three were White British Other and one was Black African other.
- 2.5.10 This equates to 48% of children with a plan of adoption being from BME backgrounds. The annual adoption report 2014/2015 found that just 12% of children who became subject to a SBPFA decision were from BME backgrounds. There has been a large variation in the percentage of children becoming subject to a SBPFA decision over recent years. This figure had moved from 14% in 2011 to 32% in 2012 to 59% in 2013.
- 2.5.11 Of the 21 children 10 were female and 11 male.
- 2.5.12 12 children were aged 0-2 and nine children were aged 3-5. This equates to 57% of children who become subject to a SBPFA decision being aged 0-2. This compares with 76% in the previous reporting period.
- 2.5.13 No children aged over six became subject to a SBPFA decision in the first half of this reporting period.
- 2.5.14 It should be noted that much smaller numbers of children are represented in this report compared with previous years and small variances can appear much more substantial when measuring smaller data sets.

### **3.0 Strategic issues and forward plans**

- 3.1.1 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.
- 3.1.2 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. This has been echoed by the government who have set a soft target of doubling such placements in 2016/1017.

- 3.1.4 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.
- 3.1.5 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 2015/16 for the Adoption Service is £2.8 million. ,
- 4.2 The government has made an allocation available for 2015/16 that will allow the Council to claim back the inter-agency fee when placements are made for harder to place children such as sibling groups, children of BME background and children over the age of five. The allocation is available to all Local Authorities in the Country to claim against on a first come first served basis.
- 4.3 The fund became available in July 2015. No children were who met the criteria were placed between July 2015 and September 2015 but it is anticipated that claims will be made for the remainder of the current financial year.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the Council will be eligible to claim in the region of £350,000 from the allocation set aside by the government should funds still be available at the time when the placement is made.

[NM/15122015/K]

#### **5.0 Legal implications**

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

[RC/11122015/O]

#### **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 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.

## **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.