

Corporate Parenting Board

16 March 2017

Report title	Adoption Service Interim Report	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Families	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People	
Originating service	Children and Young People	
Accountable employee(s)	Dawn Deans	Senior Social Work Manager - Adoption
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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. Consider the report and provide feedback on the Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service Interim Report.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide updated information in relation to adoption locally.
- 1.2 This report details the work of the City of Wolverhampton Adoption Service in the year April 2016 to January 2017.

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, at that time, the number of children waiting to be adopted exceeded the number of approved adopters, children waited far too long to be adopted, and too many adopted families were struggling without support. As well as the introduction of new legislation, four 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, Adoption; A Vision for Change.
- 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.
- 2.1.5 Regionalising Adoption, June 2015:
- 2.1.6 Regionalising Adoption, Department for Education (DfE) paper 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 for adoption and adoption support would be easily accessible, additionally the Government aspires to develop a system with a spirit of innovation and excellence at its heart.
- 2.1.7 Adoption: A Vision for Change; policy paper identifies how the Government wants to invest in the workforce with plans to equip the workforce with the professional skills and knowledge to navigate complex assessment, analysis and decision making and enable adoptive families to access the right support; reduce the time children wait to be adopted by speeding up matching by regionalising adoption services, developing a dynamic national system, free of bureaucratic barriers, which finds homes for those children who cannot be placed immediately within their region and provide high quality adoption

support to ensure every adoptive family has on going access to effective, multi-agency support.

- 2.1.8 Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell, Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire Local Authorities 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 funding 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 As a result of the scoping exercise Adoption@Heart has been developed.
- 2.1.10 Having considered Adoption@Heart design principles, feedback from stakeholder engagement workshops, it is planned that the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) will deliver services from function focused teams which will enable staff to focus on a specific area of work; Adopter Recruitment (adopter journey), Family Finding (child's journey) and Adoption and SGO support service.
- 2.1.11 The region covers a large geographic area, to maintain a locally accessible service presence it is envisaged a hub and spoke model will be planned. This model will include a hub centrally for the delivery of core services and various spoke locations across the region which will offer workspaces; they could be co-located within children's services. A proposal of a LA Hosted operating model is yet to be determined by each of the Local Authorities.

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 2016 and January 2017.

Approval of Prospective adopters	Matches of children with prospective adopters
23	32

2.3 Adopter Approval

- 2.3.1 There have been 23 approvals of prospective adopters in the current financial year. It is expected that a further eight adopters will be approved by March 2017. This represents an increase in the approval of prospective adopters and surpasses the sufficiency target for the year set at 25 approvals.
- 2.3.2 Adoption in the Black Country and Adoption Focus (ABC and AF) consortium current referral trends are down by 12% compared to last year. This is due in part to two information evenings being cancelled recently. An extra event has been arranged to rectify this. Furthermore there has been a significant fall in the marketing budget that is held against Adoption in the Black Country from £79,000 last year to £38,500 this year.

However, the returns on Investment are stronger this year even though overall numbers are down.

- 2.3.3 There are currently ten families waiting to be linked. Of the ten families two links are being progressed with external children and eight families will be considered for either children from Wolverhampton who have plans of adoption or external children.
- 2.3.4 Last year we reported that we had six Asian families waiting for a link. Three families have subsequently been linked with children from Wolverhampton who had a plan of adoption, one set of adopters withdrew, consequently we have two Asian adopters currently waiting. One set of adopters have recently undergone Fostering for Adoption training and they are considering an older external child. We have four Asian children with a plan of adoption so we envisage further placements will be made.
- 2.3.5 Fostering for Adoption is perhaps the newest initiative subject to the Children and Families Bill (2013). Initiatives to support early permanence are already showing positive results in limiting delay and securing better outcomes for children. Wolverhampton Adoption Team have continued to improve on early permanency placements, there have been three early permanence placements via Foster for Adoption/concurrency made from April 2016 to date, we have another placement identified therefore this will equal the number of placements we made last year.

2.4 Links of children with prospective adopters

- 2.4.1 There have been 32 links during this reporting period.
- 2.4.2 Five of the 32 children linked at panel were part of a sibling group.
- 2.4.3 When considering the ethnicity of the children matched, eleven of the 32 children were of black and minority ethnic (BME) background. This equates to 14% of children matched. This remains above the national average of 5%.
- 2.4.4 Of the 32 children matched, ten were over the age of five. This equates to 7%, this is slightly lower compared to the national average of 8%.
- 2.4.5 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.
- 2.4.6 17 out of the 32 children were placed within four months of a placement order which equates to 53%. Another three children were placed a week later. Six children who have a placement order have not been linked within four months and they include one child aged six who has experienced an adoption disruption, a sibling group of three and a sibling group of two who are subject to an application by their foster carers to adopt where the foster carers have experienced extended health issues, resulting in a delay in assessing their suitability. Additionally 12 children remain within timescales of 121 days.

- 2.4.7 There has been two adoption disruptions pre order in this reporting period involving a sibling group of two children who were aged five and six years old and a single female child aged three years old.
- 2.4.8 Julia Selwyn undertook research called Beyond the Adoption Order and identified factors that are associated with disruptions. These include child related factors such as older age at placement and behaviour difficulties, birth family factors such as child maltreatment and domestic violence, and system related factors such as delay and lack of support to adoptive families. Some studies have identified multiple previous placements. All the above were features of the sibling group's background and experience. Although adoption support was engaged throughout the placement the adoptive parents were unable to maintain the placement and the children were subsequently removed and placed in foster care where they are flourishing. The single female child was placed with City of Wolverhampton adopters and they sought to end the placement in the first week due to her level of distress and their lack of understanding regarding loss and grief, she too has settled remarkably well with a newly recruited foster carer.
- 2.4.9 16 children matched were placed with adopters approved by Wolverhampton; this includes three children who were adopted by their foster carers and involved two children with disabilities. The remainder were placed with adopters approved by other local authorities or voluntary agencies.
- 2.4.10 In August 2015 the Government made a grant available to local authorities in England for the purposes of reimbursing eligible expenditure under the Adoption Inter-Agency Fee Grant, for hard to place children whose plan is adoption. Eligibility criteria included; children who have been waiting for 18 months or more since coming into care at the time of placement, who are aged five or over at the time of placement, who are in a sibling group of two or more and placed as siblings at the time of placement, children who are from a BME background and children who are disabled. The grant continued until November 2016 when the criteria changed to include children who have been waiting for 18 months or more since coming into care by 1 November 2016.
- 2.4.11 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption team has placed over 50% of children through inter agency placements for several years. The fund however, has allowed the City of Wolverhampton Council to continue to make these placements in financially challenging times. Since April 2016 the City of Wolverhampton Adoption team has claimed £415,000 from the interagency fee grant. It is not clear at this stage if the interagency grant will continue past March 2017.

2.5 Children's Decisions

- 2.5.1 There has been 52 "Should be Placed for Adoption" (SBPFA) decisions made during this reporting period.

- 2.5.2 During this period five SBPFA decisions were rescinded, four comprised a sibling group of four where the court did not grant placement orders and another child whose care plan was changed to long term fostering due to significant health needs.
- 2.5.3 Of the 52 children, 35 children were White British; four were Black British Caribbean; eight were dual heritage; White British/ Black Caribbean. One is dual heritage, White/British Asian and three Asian and one White European child.
- 2.5.4 Of the 52 children, 34 were male and 18 were female.
- 2.5.5 26 children were aged nought to two, and 16 children were aged three to five.
- 2.5.6 The number of children aged over six that became subject to a SBPFA decision was ten with the oldest child aged 13.
- 2.5.7 45 placement orders have been made in this reporting period. There are 23 children with SBPFA that could convert into Placement Orders.
- 2.5.8 30 Adoption Orders have been granted during this reporting period, this is a decrease on previous years. The delay is in part due to an increased number of birth parents contesting the Adoption Order, which results in extending court timescales. Additionally, some adoptive parents are reluctant to lodge their application at ten weeks due to difficulties in placement, for example challenging behaviour. However, the growth in adoption support is leading some adopters with older children to lodge in a timely manner.

3.0 Adoption Support

- 3.1.1 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.
- 3.1.2 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 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. The feedback from Independent Reviewing Officer's and external agencies has been very positive with a request by one agency for a copy of the programme that has been devised.
- 3.1.3 During 2016-2017 moving on work has been undertaken with 12 single children and three sibling groups.
- 3.1.4 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.

- 3.1.5 During 2016-2017 13 Adoption support consultations with seven single children and five sibling groups took place.
- 3.1.6. In total the City of Wolverhampton Adoption team is providing adoption support to 56 looked after children (LAC)/ adopted children and 77 adopters and three birth children.
- 3.1.7 22 Assessment of need assessments have been undertaken since April 2016. 21 adoption support fund applications have been made with total value of £82,000 claimed. Adoption support fund applications have funded the following provision; Therapeutic Life Story work, Occupational Therapy, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Sustain+specialist assessment and therapy, Creative play therapy, Filial therapy, Family therapy, Psychotherapy, Circle of Security Parenting programme, Safebase parenting programme, and Dyadic Development Psychotherapy (DDP).
3. 1.8 In October 2016 the Government introduced The Fair Access Limit (FAL), which requires local authorities to share the costs of therapeutic support above £5,000, through a match-funding approach. This measure was introduced because demand for support is more than double the level forecast.
- 3.1.9 In line with good practice the City of Wolverhampton Adoption team does not operate an adoption support waiting list, with phone enquires requesting adoption support responded to and a home visit arranged and an assessment of need completed within 15 days of the visit. Additionally, we are invited to attend Wolverhampton CAMHS professional meetings for children who are adopted and reside or have a General Practitioner (GP) in Wolverhampton.
- 3.1.10 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption team is currently able to offer a therapeutic parenting programme; The Circle of Security and Theraplay as well as Non-violent resistance therapeutic support (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).
- 3.1.11 Six social workers have attended a four day DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) it is an 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. The training enables social workers in the three adoption units to provide consistent messages when exploring children's behaviour, making meaning of it and guiding intervention.

- 3.1.12 The post adoption contact (PAC) co-ordinator manages in excess of 389 letter box exchange arrangements and provides support to birth families in writing and by reading letters to provide good written contact for children.
- 3.1.13 Maintaining contact with siblings is reported by children to be one of their highest priorities. Sibling contact can help a child maintain their identity and promote self-esteem. With that in mind the PAC co-ordinator is developing setting up contact between siblings adopted by different adoptive parents.
- 3.1.14 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption team have recently experienced the first 'open' contact adoption where we organised therapeutic support to the adoptive parents and birth parents prior to the initial meeting and the therapist will coordinate and facilitate the first three contact sessions followed by an annual review.
- 3.1.15 The City of Wolverhampton Adoption team has provided an annual newsletter informing adopters about pupil premium, access to consortium training, the adoption support fund and the Governments plans for Regional Adoption Agencies.
- 3.1.16 City of Wolverhampton Adoption team continues to work in partnership with the other Black Country Local Authorities 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.
- 3.1.17 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. All Wolverhampton approved adopters continue to receive 12 months free membership to Adoption UK, unless they choose to opt out of this, 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.
- 3.1.18 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 we run annually. 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.
- 3.1.19 ABC and AF also deliver a post approval training programme consisting of four to 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 an education workshop for adopters and sensory integration, a telling workshop and a training session incorporating attachment issues.

4.0 Strategic issues and forward plans

- 4.1.1 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.
- 4.1.2 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. The City of Wolverhampton Adoption team is therefore committed to continuing to improve timeliness for children.
- 4.1.3 A key feature of the Adoption Service's 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 placement 2016-2017.
- 4.1.4 The Adoption Service has demonstrated the ability to embrace new ways of working 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.
- 4.1.5 The Government has committed to funding essential therapeutic support to adoptive placements until 2020; the challenge for Adoption@Heart 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.
- 4.1.6 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.

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 The approved budget for 2016-17 for the City of Wolverhampton Adoption Service is £2.4 million.
- 5.2 The Government made funds available that would allow the local authority to claim 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), however the criteria has now changed so relates to fewer children we can claim the interagency fee. Furthermore, we remain unclear how long this grant will continue. It is projected that City

of Wolverhampton Council will receive £318,000 for 2016-17 for inter-agency grant claims.

- 5.3 The Adoption Support Fund became available in 2015. Funding is continued until 2020. To date we have received £97,000 from the Adoption Support Fund. Consequently, with the introduction of the Fair Access Fund of £5,000 this could result in the City of Wolverhampton Council having to contribute to the cost of funding essential therapeutic support. Any costs associated with this will be found from within existing budgets within the Adoption Service.

[NM/02032017/Q]

6.0 Legal implications

- 6.1 There have been no legislative changes in this reporting period. The relevant legislation is contained within the body of the report.

TC/02032017/E

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 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.

8.0 Environmental implications

- 8.1 There are no environmental implications.

9.0 Human resources implications

- 9.1 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.

10.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 10.1 There are no corporate landlord implications.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

- 11.1 There are no background papers attached.