

**CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L**

ANNUAL ADOPTION AGENCY REPORT

APRIL 2016 – MARCH 2017

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Introduction

This report details the performance of the City of Wolverhampton Adoption Service in the year April 2016 to March 2017. The statutory regulations require that Elected Members should be informed of the Adoption Agency's activity on a regular basis. This annual report provides information that will assist Elected Members in respect of their responsibilities as corporate parents for looked after children.

The Adoption Service is located within the People Directorate of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Adoption Service recruits, trains and supports adoptive parents, locates external adopters, places children for adoption, undertakes LAC statutory functions and provides adoption support services to adoptees and adoptive families.

Adoption Inspection

All Adoption Services became regulated in 2003, under the Care Standards Act 2000 and were subject to inspections against National Minimum Standards. The inspecting Authority is OFSTED.

OFSTED inspected Wolverhampton Adoption Service in January 2016. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the agency's compliance with the adoption regulations and National Minimum Standards. The inspectors identified many areas of strength in the adoption service and they judged the service as Good.

Ofsted reported that; Good use is made of adoption to achieve permanence for those children for whom it is the right solution. This includes older children and those with complex needs regardless of their ethnic identity. The timeliness of court proceedings, and matching and placing children with adoptive families is improving (OFSTED 2017).

The National Agenda-Adoption Reforms

In 2012, the Government launched an Adoption Reform Programme in response to the fact that in 2011 the lowest numbers of adoptions were made despite the numbers of children under 5 in care rising sharply. It also 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 these include:

- An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay, March 2012, which introduced the Adoption Scorecard.
- Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes, January 2013 which introduced the National Adoption helpline; First4Adoption and a six months two stage process for assessing adopters.
- The Adoption Leadership Board was launched in April 2014.
- Children and Families Act 2014; introduced care proceedings limited to 26 weeks apart from exceptional cases, promotes Fostering for Adoption, repeal of due consideration to ethnicity in placing children in England, and adopter led matching with access to adoption registers.
- Regionalising Adoption, June 2015. Outlined how the development of Regional Adoption Agencies will create a wider pool of adopters who could

potentially meet the needs of child/ren for whom they were considering adoption and adoption support would be easily accessible, additionally the Government aspired to develop a system with a spirit of innovation and excellence at its heart.

- Adoption: A Vision for Change policy paper 2016 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.
- The Education and Adoption Act 2016; measures in the Act allow the Government to require local authorities to make arrangements for their adoption functions to be carried out by another adoption agency, allowing for regional approaches. Adoption functions include:
 - (a) the recruitment of persons as prospective adopters;
 - (b) the assessment of prospective adopters' suitability to adopt a child;
 - (c) the approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt a child;
 - (d) decisions as to whether a particular child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter;
 - (e) the provision of adoption support services.

Regionalising Adoption Agencies

In November 2015, six Local Authority partners - Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin and their five Local Authority Adoption Agencies, together with Voluntary Adoption Agency, Adoption Focus, were accepted by the Department for Education (DfE) as an early adopter project to work together to design and develop a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

Regional Adoption Agencies are expected to deliver all adoption recruitment, matching and support functions. The DfE provided funding to assist in the setting up and establishment of the RAA and practical support from a coach and policy information to achieve the programme's aims.

As a result of the scoping exercise Adoption@Heart was developed. Having considered Adoption@Heart design principles, feedback from stakeholder engagement workshops it is planned 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 support service.

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.

In February 2017 Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin made the decision to withdraw from Adoption @Heart RAA. Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton LA's remain committed along with VAA partners; Adoption Focus, Adoption UK and After Adoption to the operating and delivery model. Work continues in progressing a series of work streams to develop the model and is on track to launch in July 2018.

Regional and local developments

Adoption Leadership Boards

The West Midlands Adoption Leadership Board continued to be chaired by Tony Oakman (Strategic Director People Services at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council) until January 2017 when John Gregg (Director Children Services at Coventry) took over. The board is made up of senior leaders from the 14 local authorities that make up the West Midlands region.

The ALB is a 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:

- Children for whom adoption is the best way of achieving permanence are adopted without unnecessary delay;
- There are enough prospective adopters to provide homes for all the children approved to be adopted;
- Adoptions do not breakdown through the right adoption support being readily available to all people who need it.

The data at April 2017 identified there has been a 25% decrease of Placement Orders from 2013-2014 and 2015-2016. The fall was typically linked to the Supreme Court judgement Re B and Re BS. A key issue in both cases was proportionality in permanency decision making where an overarching phrase when considering permanence options in adoption 'is nothing else will do'. The decline in placement orders coincided with a rise in SGO's.

Adopt West Mids

Adopt West Mids. (AWM's) remains a strong regional consortium, which offers training, peer learning and development. Adopt West Mids. is made up of adoption strategic and operational managers. It developed to support adoption agencies locally.

'AWM's funding has been agreed to 31 March 2018, during which time the proposal for a wider Permanence Hub is being developed by the regional Adoption Leadership Board. AWM's work continues to focus on commissioning & facilitating specialist training for both adoption/LAC social work staff, and also events for adopters. Peer support networks are also continuing and meet on a bi-monthly basis.

Black Country Consortium (Adoption in the Black Country and Adoption focus) (ABC&AF)

Wolverhampton continues to be a part of the ABC&AF consortium with Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall local authorities and Adoption Focus a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), looking at joint initiatives in adoption. This consortium has continued to work collaboratively over the last twelve months.

The original remit of Adoption Black Country (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 and Voluntary Adoption Agency.

ABC has continued to jointly purchase services from Adoption U.K. for example 12 monthly memberships for all approved adopters and from After Adoption who undertakes birth record counselling on our behalf.

Adoption Focus appointed a family finder who continued to liaise with ABC consortium to ensure that links are made quickly within the consortium. It resulted in six links being made during April 2016- March 2017.

Team structure

SENIOR SOCIAL WORKER MANAGER

Family Finding & Adoption Support ADOPT 1 **Social Worker Unit Manager**

Social Workers x 5
Family Support Worker x 1

Adoption Social Work Team ADOPT 2 **Social Worker Unit Manager**

Social Worker x 5
Family Support Worker x 1

Recruitment and Assessment ADOPT 3 **Social Worker Unit Manager**

Social Worker x 4
Family Support Worker x 1

Unit Administrators x 2

Adoption Panel Advisor x 1
Panel administrator x 1

The Adoption Team

Since 2014 Wolverhampton Adoption Team has been reconfigured into three units with a recruitment and assessment unit, a family finding and adoption support unit, and a LAC adoption unit co-located in the adoption team.

We are enthusiastic about this model and believe it improves the timeliness and outcomes for children, and also improves the quality of the service. It has developed a shared understanding about adoption among social workers including transitioning children to adoptive placements, therapeutic support, and supporting children's educational issues. We are able to offer support early and establish a close working relationship between the three units for the benefit of adoptive families.

There have been on going challenges recruiting permanent Social Work Unit Managers to ADOPT 2 and 3, in part due to uncertainty regarding the delivery model of the regional adoption agency, however recruitment continues to seek to address this.

An interim Senior Social Work Manager left the service in September 2016 and was replaced by the Social Work Unit Manager in Adopt 1 on a six months secondment.

Staff training

Wolverhampton LAC service remains committed to providing good quality training for all adoption staff, with a range of internal and external provision as well as mandatory and specialist training. Quarterly staff briefings and an annual social work conference are part of a workforce development plan.

The current service design enables adoption staff to develop expertise regarding the impact of attachment, loss and separation and trauma for adopted children. Training events have included Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Therapeutic Life Story Work, Assessment and Analysis Training and Restorative Practice Training which is being delivered across Wolverhampton Children and Young People (CYP) service.

Training by AWM has been offered to the wider CYP service in order to develop a greater understanding and whole service approach, for example life story work training has enhanced understanding about the importance of acquiring information to inform life story work and expanded skills in explaining care plans to children.

The Adoption service objectives

Recruitment and Assessment of adopters

Prospective adopters are recruited to meet the placement needs of children with a care plan of adoption. Adoption in the Black Country & Adoption Focus (ABC&AF) consortium's 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 minority ethnic groups where children require adoptive parents who can reflect or promote their heritage. ABC&AF also accept prospective adopters who fall outside this category. The enquiries are equally shared throughout the four local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agency.

Our consortium centralised front door service and the central recruitment website is essential however this simply is not enough; ABC&AF go further delivering a concierge support approach with an individually named personal contact to every new enquirer/perspective adopter. Through a digital cluster program (that has been nationally recognised as a leader and innovator within the adoption sector) within three minutes regardless of the time of day a personal messaging conversation (non-automated) is held with the enquirer to answer any questions that they may have. This digital cluster program demonstrates the innovative ways adopters can engage with us for example, through regular Vlogging, live video question and answer sessions, adopter lead blogging and Adoption Info Event Live (an adoption info event simultaneously delivered over social media).

Prospective adopters do not have to wait for a significant amount of time to attend an information event. ABC&AF have hosted 33 info events during the last year and two surgery sessions; where appointments are pre-booked for those who have already been to an information event. On average, prospective adopters have to wait a maximum of 10 days to attend an event.

We hold information events within ABC&AF region to enable prospective adopters to access local events, for this reason events are held at targeted venues around the Black Country (and wider) to maximise recruitment from targeted groups. Information events are held on all nights of the week (except Fridays) to ensure that those individuals who work shift patterns or non 'regular office hours' etc are able to attend. Our analysis has also identified a need for more weekend information events which has resulted in the new information event schedule having one weekend event per month.

Previous analysis by an external agency identified that recruiting adopters from the Black Country alone will not be able to provide sufficiency to the Local Authorities and a wide recruitment campaign is required. Recruitment from outside the Black Country boundaries has continued to grow rising to 39% in 2016-2017 and includes new areas, such as Tamworth.

Additionally ABC&AF continue to use media partners Free Radio using Freewind/Mid-morning and afternoons/early drive slots and Signal 107 plus traditional large outdoor poster billboards and smaller target poster sites have been used to support traditional press adverts (in a range of publications linked to the location of the Information Event e.g. Shropshire Star, Dudley News, Bromsgrove Observer, etc).

Adoption Recruitment and Assessment Unit

The two-stage recruitment and approval process is embedded and tracked in terms of impact and timeliness. A stage one worker undertakes all initial visits and tracks references and medical checks etc. up until stage two. This model was trialled in 2016 and there was a significant improvement in progressing adopters during stage one and two with an 89 day reduction within timescales.

ABC jointly trains adopters via online training and three days group training. The program has been jointly devised and includes early life trauma, loss, attachment, abuse, adoption parenting 'parenting plus', post adoption contact, post adoption

support and guest speakers. The adopter's feedback on training is very positive and they report feeling better prepared for the journey to adoption.

Wolverhampton continued to utilise an Independent Agency Social Work Assessment Consultancy (SWACS) to complete Stage two Prospective Adopter Reports (PAR's). The adopters are also allocated a Wolverhampton Supervising Social Worker who visits them three times during the assessment phase and attends adoption panel. The PAR reports remain of a consistently high quality, timely and were commented on by OFSTED; 'PAR's that were seen by inspectors were of a consistently high quality, however the panel process acknowledged variability which has resulted in taking action to strengthen quality assurance processes' (OFSTED 2017).

During 2016-2017 55 initial assessments were undertaken.

There have been 28 approvals of prospective adopters during 2016-2017. This represents an increase and surpasses the sufficiency strategy target for the year set at 25 approvals.

There were twenty families waiting to be linked as at 31 March 2017:

One approval was an inter country adoption.

Three adopters were on hold for a variety of reasons.

Three adopters with three foster children placed are waiting for placement orders.

Former foster carers adopting a sibling group of two and another child were exploring an extension so the link was placed on hold.

One set of adopters who were linked with an external local authority for a sibling group of two.

Three adopters with a preference for a girl 0-2.

Two adopters to be linked at April Adoption Panel.

One adopter to be linked at May Adoption Panel.

One placement with a sibling group placed under Placement with Parent regulations.

Four mainstream adopters approved not yet linked.

Early Permanency Placements were an initiative subject to the Children and Families Act (2014). Wolverhampton has made four early permanence placements via Foster for Adoption (FFA)/ Concurrency placements during April 2016 to March 2017. Two children have been adopted by their dual approved carers, a third is awaiting a celebration hearing date and one child was rehabilitated home to parents.

The rehabilitation home resulted in a complaint. A root and branch investigation was undertaken followed by the development of an action plan which identifies a number of remedial actions including; Early Permanence Placements (EPP) training to be delivered across the CYP services. Additionally EPP training to be delivered to Prospective Adopters who consider the option and Prospective Adopter Reports

identify whether Prospective Adopters are to be dually approved for Concurrency or FFA.

The Government is keen for adoption to develop an adopter led approach where adopters can take part in considering links; Adopter's profiles are placed on the ABC&AF work share system upon approval if no link has been identified. Adopters are encouraged to register on Adoption Link (Link Maker) so they can consider children profiled. It is a statutory responsibility that when Adopters have been waited 90 days they will be featured on the Adoption Register; Adoption Match. In 2016-2017 five sets of adopters were placed on the Adoption Match register.

Wolverhampton deregistered one set of adopters that had been approved who were unsuccessful in linking due in part to the adopters living in Wolverhampton.

Family Finding

Early Permanency planning is embedded and provides oversight and scrutiny of permanence options for children. There are a range of activities that support the policy; the Senior Social Work Manager for Adoption attends a weekly admission to care panel, this enables cases to be tracked and allocated as 'early alerts'. This is followed by Care Planning Tracking Meetings that monitor activity and Family Finders regularly attend permanency planning meetings that are coordinated with cases where there is a possibility of a care plan of adoption. Family Finding Meetings on a monthly basis enable cases to be discussed and early in house matches proposed.

There is a drive to eliminate delay in the family courts and to conclude care cases within 26 weeks, Wolverhampton is demonstrating improvement and have concluded cases on average at 26.7 weeks compared with a national average of 28.1 Weeks.

The Adoption and Fostering service trialled a system of permanency clinics on a monthly basis where children's social workers could book a slot to discuss the available permanency options which also included connected persons /special guardianship order carers. The clinics were not well attended so they have been abandoned in favour of visiting CIN/CP units to discuss permanency options and panel requirements.

Wolverhampton linked 45 children for adoption during 2016-2017:

Linked with in house adopters	23
Linked with ABC&AF adopters	6
Linked via Link Maker	16
BAME	14
Single children	29
Sibling groups of two	8
Children open to Disability team	2
Aged over 5	10
0-2	17
Female	10
Male	35

Wolverhampton continues to pursue adoption for what would be considered harder to place children. Continuing to secure appropriate adoptive placements may take longer given the ages and circumstances of many of the children. Ofsted judged that 'Wolverhampton achieves permanence through adoption for more 'harder to place' children than similar local authorities' (OFSTED 2017).

A Family Support Worker (FSW) assists in progressing family finding actions taking photographs, filming DVD's and completing a child's profile. Where we are unable to match children with Wolverhampton or ABC&AF adopters the FSW will refer the children to Adoption Match (Adoption Register) and Adoption Link (Link Maker) web based family finding services that approved adopters can view once a Placement Order is granted.

We continue to utilise five free places in Children Who Wait magazine publicised by Adoption UK for hard to place children, however this medium has not yielded any links.

Wolverhampton Adoption Team attended four Coram BAAF exchange events in London, Leeds, Manchester and Walsall. We feature the profiles of children who have been waiting for a lengthy period or who are likely to prove more difficult to match.

Wolverhampton attended three ABC&AF Exchange events held in Birmingham where a sibling group were discussed and subsequently linked post March 2017.

During 2016-2017 Wolverhampton attended two activity days held across the region where we took six children, while there was interest, no links progressed following sharing of information in the form of Child Permanence Reports (CPR's) and PAR's.

A new family finding activity has been developed; 'blind viewings' where adopters get the chance to observe children at play. An older child was observed and the adopters decided not to proceed following a Child Appreciation Day (CAD). A sibling group of two were observed and have been successfully linked and placed in their adoptive family.

The partnership with ABC&AF consortium enables children to be placed locally without the risk of being placed in the local authority in which they were born. There are significant advantages for children and families as adoption support can be delivered locally. We placed six children with ABC&AF adopters.

Prior to a family being identified, Family Support Workers (FSW's) begin 'moving on work' with older children who have a plan of adoption. The work is child centred and individualised. The work along with Life Story Books was judged by OFSTED as being; 'sensitive, purposeful and child centred' OFSTED 2017. During 2016-2017 two FSW's completed moving on work with seven single children and five sibling groups.

Adoption Support consultations continue to be undertaken with prospective adopters with harder to place children. This work is preventative in nature as it serves to support new adoptive placements by meeting with adopters prior and during introductions and following placement. The outcome of the support is that adopters feel more confident, have a greater understanding of therapeutic parenting and feel

supported so are willing to apply for the adoption order sooner. During 2016-2017 Adoption Support social workers' worked with adopters with nine single children and four sibling groups.

The Government made funds available that would allow local authorities to claim an interagency fee for hard to place children whose plan is for adoption. This ceased in October 2016. During 2016-2017 Wolverhampton received ££458,000.

There have been three adoption disruptions pre adoption order in 2016-2017 involving a sibling group of two children who were aged five and six years old and a single female child aged three years old.

In 2014 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. All of the above were features of the sibling group's background and experience. Although extensive support was provided the adoptive parents were unable to maintain the placement and the children were subsequently returned to local authority care and placed with foster carers. Subsequent care planning has ratified a plan of long term fostering for the children.

The single female child was placed with City of Wolverhampton adopters and they sought to end the placement in the first week, she settled remarkably well with a newly recruited foster carer. The child's social worker has provided therapeutic support and we have recommenced family finding.

Disruption meetings have been held in respect of both disruptions and an action plan devised which includes; ensuring the Child Permanence Report is fully updated prior to case responsibility transferring to the LAC Adoption SW team; minutes of CAD's to accurately reflect the discussions and if an identified "match" is made shortly after the transfer of case responsibility to the LAC Adoption SW Team the previous SW who has updated the CPR should be involved in the visit to prospective adopters as he/she is the person who knows the child. The disruption minutes and action plan will be shared with the adoption panel to benefit practice.

Adoption Order

Forty-six Adoption Orders have been granted during this reporting period, this is a decrease on the previous year. The delay 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 2017.

Single children	24
Sibling groups of two	8
sibling groups of three	2
Children open to Disability team	2
BAME	4
Aged over 5	13
Female	19
Male	27

OFSTED recommended that we ensure that once children are placed for adoption, there is no unnecessary delay in applying for the adoption order. We have had historical cases where extensive adoption support was required due to children's challenging behaviour in adoption placement. This caused adopters delaying applying for the adoption order and it resulted in three children waiting three years to secure permanence via an Adoption Order.

We have found that where harder to place children are placed with adoption support provision identified early on in the placement, adopters have lodged their application in a timely manner. Wolverhampton adoption team provides a preventative adoptive support service pre-order by way of consultations for children deemed harder to place; we have evidence that adopters feel supported, confident and contained and willing to lodge their adoption application despite experiencing challenging behaviour or disturbance following transition.

Additional Functions of the Adoption Team

In addition to the functions outlined above, the Adoption Team continue to offer services;

- Support for birth family members - pre-adoption.
- Notified adoption service, for e.g. step parents.
- Inter-country adoption service.
- Voluntary relinquishments.

Adoption scorecard

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.

A1 indicator measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children who have been adopted.

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.

In 2014 a new indicator was introduced; A10. 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).

Despite a significant improvement in performance year on year, for 2013-2016 Wolverhampton was rated 'double red' for A1 and A2 indicator.

A1 Indicator – 672 days (decrease of 62 days from 2012-2015) against a target of 426 days.

A2 indicator – 242 days (decrease of 21 days from 2012-2015) against a target of 121 days.

Average days for the A2 indicator have decreased although not at the same rate as the A1 indicator.

	2011/14	Target	% of Target	2012/15	Target	% of Target	2013/16	Target	% of Target
A1	873	547	159.60%	734	487	150.72%	672	428	156.78%
A2	294	152	193.42%	263	121	217.36%	242	121	208.26%

There were 135 adoptions in 2012-2015 compared to 163 in 2013-2016. This is another large increase that shows that whilst the time taken for a child to be adopted decreases the number of children being adopted have increased.

In Wolverhampton 2013-2016 45 or 16% of BAME children leaving care were adopted compared to an England average of just 9%.

Wolverhampton continues to pursue adoption for children aged five years and older. In 2013-2016 35 or (8%) were adopted compared to an England average of 5%.

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. OFSTED judged; although the average length of time taken between children becoming looked after and moving into their adoptive families is above the national average, there is an improving picture (OFSTED 2017).

Adoption support services

- Research shows that there are factors which influence the success of an adoptive placement;
- Timeliness – the speed with which a child finds their way to their stable and long term family;
- Quality of care – the ability of the carer to adequately meet the needs of the child; and stability – whether the placement endures over the long term.

Wolverhampton Adoption Team recognises that adopted children and their families need to be able to access appropriate and sensitive adoption support at any time in their lives. OFSTED inspectors highlighted that adopters valued the support and responsiveness of the adoption team (OFSTED 2017).

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. Funding has been confirmed until 2020.

Wolverhampton has undertaken 34 Assessment of Need assessments and applied for 30 therapeutic packages. Services have included Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service Assessments, Circle of Security therapeutic parenting course;

therapeutic life story work and psychotherapy. Three monthly reviews are undertaken to identify family satisfaction and clinical outcomes. Adoption support social workers supported in excess of 60 children during 2016-2017 and three birth children. OFSTED commented that children and families receive good post adoption support (OFSTED 2017).

The Adoption Team commissioned a therapeutic parenting programme based on the Circle of Security model which ran for eight weeks and was attended by five adoptive parents and was very successful in extending their understanding regarding impact of abuse while developing greater awareness about attachment and barriers to implementing therapeutic parenting. The feedback from adopters was very positive, with one commenting 'it was very helpful, understanding the concept of attachment on the circle and it helped me to think where my child was and where I am on the circle as I parent him'. Wolverhampton runs an adoption support group open to adopters who have accessed the Circle of Security Parenting Programme on a monthly basis where adopters can share highlights and challenges of parenting in a safe reflective environment.

The post adoption contact (PAC) coordinator manages in excess of 400 post adoption contacts which results in over 600 exchange arrangements. Additionally the following activities have taken place over the last year:

- Supporting and advising eighty plus birth parents writing post adoption contact letters.
- Informing five adopters regarding birth family deaths/terminal illness.
- Reinstating ten Post Adoption Contact arrangements that had ceased.
- Liaising with Solicitors for three cases where Post Adoption Contact had ceased.
- Liaising with other Local Authority's (LA's) in respect of six children regarding placement breakdowns.
- Liaising with other LA's with regards to setting up PAC agreements with new siblings.
- Arranging initial direct contact for six children.
- Liaising with adopter and recovery worker for birth parent re: contact issues.
- Tracing birth parents.

Wolverhampton has provided an annual newsletter to adopters outlining training, contact issues and testimonials from adoptive parents outlining accessing adoption support services.

ABC&AF are expected to provide five training sessions annually; Wolverhampton delivered a 'Telling' Training session to consortium members during 2016-2017, this training is always popular and adopters benefit from understanding the importance of discussing adoption, barriers to telling and practical suggestions to ensure it is on-going.

Commissioned Adoption Support Services

Additional adoption support services are commissioned from Adoption UK and After Adoption. Adoption UK run local support groups on a bi-monthly basis, the meetings

schedule speakers and presentations and a time to socialise. Adopters are also able to access Adoption UK training workshops and a lending library.

After Adoption continue to provide services on behalf of Wolverhampton. The organisation supports intermediary services, counselling, and helping adopted adults to trace their birth family. Additionally they also offer independent counselling to all birth parents where the plan is adoption for their child. After Adoption provided services to adopted persons, adopters, birth parents and relatives totalling fifty-eight in the period 2016-2017.

Service User Type	Allocations
Adopted person	16
Adopter	2
Adoptive family <18	1
Birth father (historical intermediary service)	1
Birth mother (historical intermediary service)	4
Birth siblings historical intermediary service	5
Current birth father	5
current birth mother	20
Birth relative (current)	2
Birth relative (historic)	1
birth parents referred together	1
total	58

After Adoption continue to run 'Breaking the Cycle' (BtC). BtC 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. Five birth mothers have attended BtC; one accessed additional counselling, one has been supported to remain in employment, all five birth parents made significant progress and have not become pregnant or had further children removed.

In partnership with ABC 'After Adoption' is commissioned to deliver 'Safebase' twice per year within the Black Country. Two families attended locally and a third one in Luton. A further two families were referred and accessed a MIMS assessment but failed to attend the programme.

Adoption and Adoption & Permanency Panel

The Wolverhampton Adoption and the Adoption & Permanence Panel considers approvals of prospective adopters, Family and Friends carers and match /link of adoptive and long term fostering placements. This is working within the terms of Wolverhampton Permanence Policy. It will also consider Family and Friends fostering arrangements.

The Adoption & Permanence Panel complies with 2002 Childrens Act, Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013; Fostering Regulations 2011; Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England)(Miscellaneous) regulations 2013 and guidance relevant to both adoption and fostering. Panel members from the Central list with both adoption and fostering experience make up the Permanence Panel.

There has been a 50% increase in the use of the Adoption and Permanency Panel during this financial year, with two panels a month there is increased capacity and availability of slots for matches and approvals to ensure we have positive outcomes for the LAC population.

Panel membership

The Panel continues to function well supported by its committed members and support staff. We currently have eighteen panel members on the central list who can sit on both the Adoption and the Fostering panels. We have two panel Chairs and four Vice Chairs. There is a further need to increase the number of men on the panel and other people who are representative of the community we serve. We have one person who was a Looked After Child, and a newly appointed Family and Friends foster carer. On every panel, there should be a social worker representative, and this could be an independent social worker or social workers from within the agency. During this year, we have lost a few long standing social workers and so have struggled on occasions to be quorate for panel business. There is a concerted effort to recruit more social workers from within the agency to support the panels and to widen their knowledge base.

Panel Business

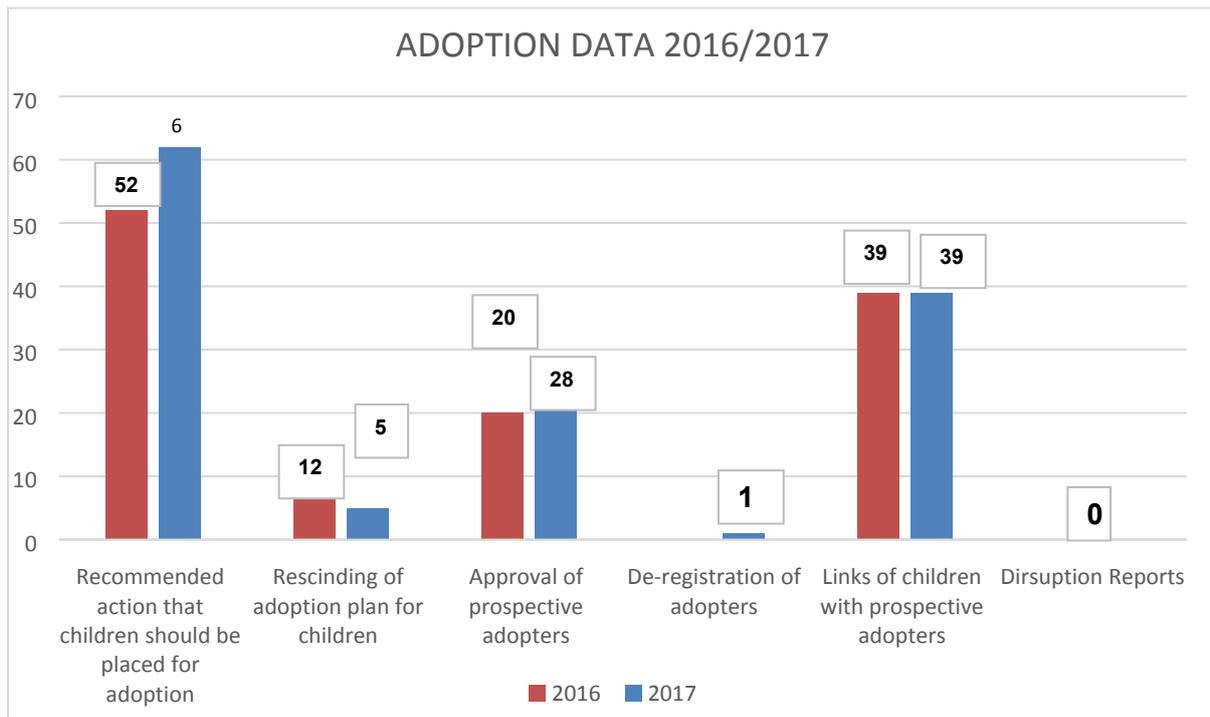
Panel met on twenty-nine occasions during 2016-2017, with at least three opportunities a month for adoption matters to be heard. There is great flexibility within the panel system to enable emergency matters to be heard, as and when directed by the courts.

The panels no longer use paper documents and have been paperless for the past two years. Panel members have adjusted to the electronic system with ease, despite the initial concerns from individual members. The site used to store the documents is secure and accessible by only those invited to view the site. It is a progressive site that gives panel members access to the learning hub, and other links of relevance to adoption and fostering matters outside the department. The site is to be upgraded in July 2017.

We have been creative in our use of technology and have used Skype to enable matters to be heard when either social workers or adopters have not been able to

attend adoption panel This has prevented further delay for the child in terms of matching, and for the adopters.

Panel members had their first Away Day in January 2017. This was very well received as it gave panel members the opportunity to meet colleagues and look at some aspects of the policies and procedures that affect their work. This is part of the annual training that all panel members must undertake, and will be an on-going feature for the panels going forward.



Adopter approval

There have been twenty-eight approvals of prospective adopters in this reporting period. This is more than the previous year. Of these one family was approved as concurrent carers.

There are currently 20 families waiting to be matched. Of those families four are foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care.

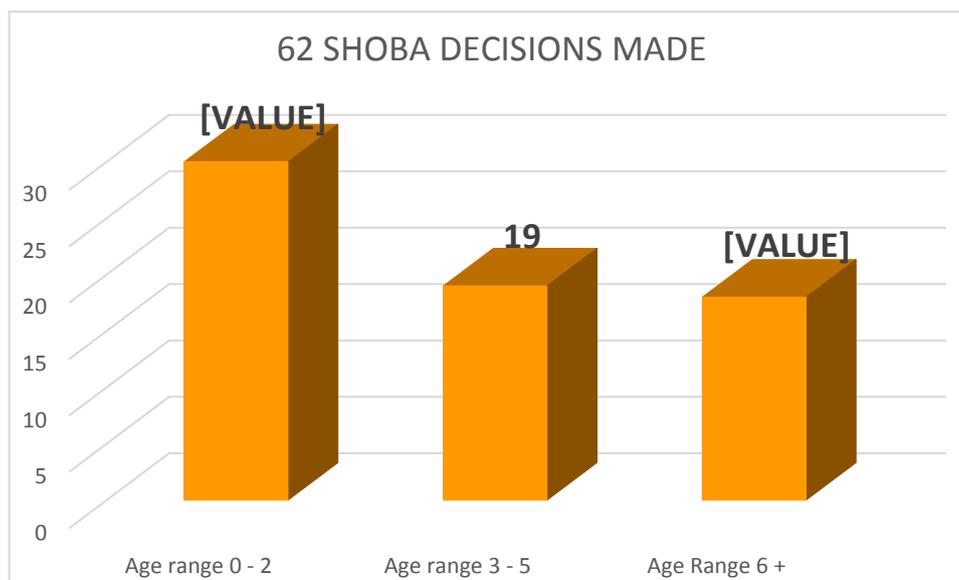
There are Two Asian and one dual heritage Asian families currently waiting. This year three children of Asian or Asian dual heritage background have become subject to a plan of adoption in Wolverhampton. This compares to no children last year and up to eight in the previous years. Thus, these families 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.

Should Be Placed for Adoption decisions

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 to make emergency decisions as necessary and when required.

There has been a slight increase in the number of children for whom Wolverhampton is pursuing a plan of adoption. The highest percentage of children who should be placed for adoption is in the age 0-2 age range, which accounts for 45% as depicted in the table below.

This reporting period has also seen an increase in older children with a plan of adoption from four children in 2015-16 to eighteen. Most of these children are placed in foster placements and have been with the same carers for some time. The ‘carer’ adoption according to research is on the increase and has many benefits for the children. Berry and Barth’s (1990) research sees that children are less likely to experience disruption than children in non-foster parent adoption. The children also remain in an environment within and out of the home that is familiar to them to name but a few. There is also the fact that children in this placement should have a shorter time to permanency than other types of adoption.



Breakdown of should Be Placed for Adoption Decisions:

White British	46
Black British	6
Asian/White	4
Mixed BC/WE	7
White European	1
Asian	3

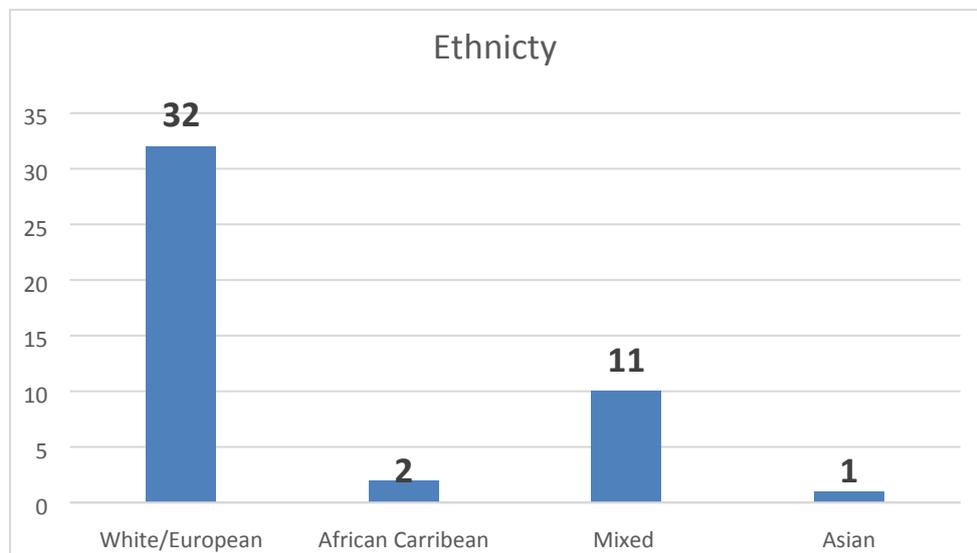
There has also been an increase in the number of children with disabilities who have a plan of adoption. Of the sixty-seven children within this cohort three children who should be placed for adoption were referred from the Children with Disabilities Team.

Rescinds

There has been a significant decrease in the number of children who have had their plans for adoption rescinded with five rescinded plans of adoption. For one group of children, a sibling group of four their plan is long term fostering which will now mean that the sibling group will not be separated. The other rescinded plan was for a child with complex health needs. For all children who had become subject to placement order significant family finding had taken place prior to considering a change of plan. For most children, a change of plan to permanent long term fostering enabled children to be permanently fostered with their current carers.

Matches of children with prospective adopters

During this reporting period April 2016 to March 2017, forty-five children were matched with prospective adopters compared with sixty seven in the preceding year.



14 of the 45 children were of BAME (black and minority ethnic) background. This equates to 30% of children matched. Of these children 4% were Black and one was Asian.

Panel aims for the forthcoming year:

- To continue to provide an effective service to the looked after population of Wolverhampton.
- To work in partnership with other members of the RAA to affect the programme of assimilation/integration with our partners at Heart of England.
- To increase the number of social workers who to sit on the panel.

Complaints/compliments

Wolverhampton Adoption Team received eight complaints. Two complaints related to one case that has received multiple complaints following the granting of a placement order. One complaint was related to contact, others related to life story work and one followed a disruption. There have been no complaints received by Panel during this period.

Wolverhampton Adoption Team received nineteen compliments during 2016-2017. Adopters complimented family finders, children LAC adoption social workers, supervising social workers and adoption support social workers, they commented on the support, professionalism and dedication of workers.

Strategic issues and future service development

- Wolverhampton remains committed to adoption as a positive permanence choice for children who cannot be cared for by their birth relatives. The service welcomes the Governments challenge around timeliness for children who have a plan of adoption, it is known that timeliness; the speed with which a child finds their way to their stable and long term family is an indicator for positive outcomes for children who are placed for adoption.
- Wolverhampton Adoption Team's objective will be to secure children's permanence in a timely manner once children are placed in adoptive placements.
- Annex A's will be completed by ten weeks of placement when adopters can lodge their adoption order application and ten days following the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in fostering families in order to secure timely permanency.
- Increase the recruitment of adopters who can consider offering Early Permanence Placements to children either through concurrency or foster to adopt.
- Improve recruitment of adopters willing to adopt children deemed harder to place; including older children, children with disabilities and Black and minority ethnic children and boys.
- Introduction of chemistry visits prior to linking.
- As part of the workforce strategy the adoption service will ensure that staff has access to training and development to ensure that the government Vision for Adoption is fully implemented.
- Wolverhampton will continue to lead the development of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and continue to work with partner agencies in respect of developing the operating model and service delivery.

Regionalising the service is consistent with the Government agenda and will widen the pool of adopters for Wolverhampton's looked after children and will enable us to provide a regional adoption support service which will continue to be accessible and responsive to the needs of adopters.

Furthermore the Government aspires to develop a system with a spirit of innovation and excellence at its heart; we have an opportunity to co design, streamline and enhance adoption services across the region.

Dawn Deans

Senior Social Work Manager for Wolverhampton Adoption Service.

July 2017