



## Report to CYP & FS Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014

**Report of:** Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families

**Subject:** Adoption Service

**Author of Report:** Suzanne Whiteley, Adoption & Fostering Service Manager, Tel: 35155

**Summary:** Update on the Adoption Service in line with adoption services statutory regulations and guidance

**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	<b>x</b>
Other	

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

Note the report and its contents

**Background Papers:**

List any background documents (e.g. research studies, reports) used to write the report. Remember that by listing documents people could request a copy.

- Adoption Service Dataset 2013/14
- An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay
- Adoption Scorecard Data
- Yorkshire & Humber Adoption Consortium Reform Plan
- Yorkshire & Humber Adoption Consortium Performance Reports
- Adoption Passport: A Support Guide for Adopters

## **Report of the Director of Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families**

### **Sheffield City Council Adoption Service**

#### **1. Introduction/Context**

- 1.1 In line with statutory guidance and regulation, all Adoption Services have to report to the executive side of the Local Authority in regard to the outcomes of the Adoption Service. The Senior Leadership Team and other Boards within Children, Young Peoples and Families Service have received regular updates in relation to adoption performance.
- 1.2 The Ofsted Inspection Framework for 'the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers', fostering services are now incorporated in to the single framework inspection process.

#### **2. The National Adoption Agenda and Sheffield Adoption Service**

##### **2.1 The National Agenda**

- 2.1.1 In March 2012, the Department for Education published its 'Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay.' The report outlined what the Government intended to do to accelerate the whole adoption process so that more children benefited from adoption and more rapidly. Adoption scorecards for each Local Authority were first published in May 2012.
- 2.1.2 In July 2012, the Prime Minister announced proposals for the earlier placement of children in need of adoption, promoting the wider use of concurrent planning, and introducing the concept of 'fostering for adoption'.
- 2.1.3 In January 2013, the National Adoption Gateway was launched by First4Adoption with its information telephone helpline going live. The DfE also published 'Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes' in January 2013. The document announced proposals for changes to the adopter recruitment process, and a number of changes to give approved adopters a more active role in the process of finding a child. It also

announced a package of improvements to the support available to adoptive families, including the launch of adoption passports from April 2013. Adoption passports are a guide to all adopters about the support and services that are available to them. Children who are adopted can have ongoing needs that both adopter and the child will benefit from post-adoption support. Local Authorities provide a range of support services for adopters and their children. Every adopter is entitled to advice about these services, and entitled to an assessment of their needs at any time.

2.1.4 A new format for recording adopter assessments was launched, in full, by BAAF in February 2013, ahead of the implementation of a new, shorter, 2 stage assessment process, the details of which were published by the DfE in the Spring 2013, and implemented in the July 2013. Stage 1 process was implemented in July 2013 with Stage 2 in September 2013.

2.1.5 In November 2014 it was announced that new funding would become available, through the Adoption Support Fund, to help adoptive families to help their children to settle into their new homes. The Adoption Support Fund will be implemented in May 2015. The funding will be available for children up to and including the age of 18 (or 25 with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health and Care Plan) who have been adopted from care in England or adopted in Wales but living in England. Local Authorities will be able to submit applications for funding before an Adoption Order is made, so that any package of support from the time of placement can continue once the Adoption Order is made.

## 2.2 **Sheffield Response**

2.2.1 Sheffield has taken a number of actions to ensure that the agency has the ability to meet the challenges ahead in improving timeliness. This has been balanced with continuing to ensure quality for each child, whilst maintaining the current low level of placement disruption, and high numbers of children placed for adoption, in particularly the more challenging to place children. These being, older children, children with additional needs, children with complex emotional and behavioural issues or sibling groups.

2.2.2 As at 23 February 2015 34 children have been adopted. There are 44 children currently placed in their adoption placements but do not as yet have the Adoption Order in place.

2.2.3 The Service is continuing to place 'hard to place' children or provide additional support to adopters with children that are

placed but not yet adopted. This has included for example, the recent adoptive placement of seven and nine year old boys, and eleven sibling groups.

- 2.2.4 In regard to the assessment of adopters, 41 new adopters have been approved as of 23 February 2015. It is anticipated that this figure will stand at 45 new adopter approvals for 2014/5.
- 2.2.5 The Adoption Service is working in partnership with Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium. This consists of 15 Local Authorities across the region The Consortium is using funds, from the Adoption Reform Grant, at a regional and sub-regional level over a three year period using the Regional Adoption Consortium contract and network as the framework. The purpose of this is to improve the quality of service for children and adopters through faster delivery, sharing best practice, and improved performance management and data reporting.
- 2.2.6 The 4 Local Authorities in the South Region (Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley, and Doncaster) have set up specific working groups to support the Adoption Reform Initiatives and to improve further working partnerships. This has included sharing good practice, post adoption support and training and recruitment.
- 2.2.7 The Consortium has developed a regional marketing campaign that will compliment marketing activity within each local authority. Information evening dates across the sub region are being promoted by all the relevant Local Authorities.
- 2.2.8 The Service has 'rebranded' and this new image is used within marketing and recruitment alongside the regional approach. Various marketing activities will be undertaken the year and during Adoption Week (19 - 25 October 2015). The Marketing Strategy is currently being reviewed with the Communications Team.
- 2.2.9 The Adoption Reform Grant for 2013/14 has not been without its challenges. It has supported various activities within the Service. Increased activity has continued to take place in regard to family finding. This has resulted in additional children being placed with Voluntary Adoption Agencies or other Local Authority approved adopters.
- 2.2.10 A number of additional posts which were temporarily created to support both the Adoption Service and fieldwork area teams continue. This has included

- The appointment of an Agency Advisor to Adoption Panel who also has been a consultant to staff,
- Increase in the capacity of the Family Finders
- Additional social work capacity to ensure robust plans for children are being made in a timely way
- Increased management support.

2.2.11 Robust tracking and monitoring systems are established and in place in regard to children that have an adoption plan or a permanence plan. This includes monthly tracking meetings at each area site and agency prioritisation meetings that include the Medical Advisors to the Local Authority. Development of tracking and monitoring systems continue and work is being undertaken with Fieldwork Service Managers to further improve the timeliness of adoption with the aim of a positive impact on the Adoption Scorecard.

2.2.12 The Family, Adopters and Carers Team (FACT) continue to provide extensive support to families with the range of support services that are available to children and their families. This support includes direct work with children and their families, Theraplay group work and individual sessions; the group is a ten week Theraplay programme which is delivered twice a year. Theraplay is aimed at promoting the attachment between adopters and their children.

2.2.13 The provision delivered by FACT also includes children who have been placed on alternative permanence Court Orders, for example, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's).

2.2.14 FACT is a well-established team that deliver innovative packages of support to families through varied approaches dependant on the assessment of need, for example, group work as well as individual work.

2.2.15 The Service has undertaken a readiness exercise with the nominated Adoption Support Fund link for Sheffield. Areas of strength and development were identified including the development of systems for direct payments.

## 2.3 **Statistics**

2.3.1 Children made subject to a 'Should Be Placed for Adoption' (SHOBPA) decision and outcomes.

Year	Total no of children with SHOBPA	Children linked/placed with adopters	No of SHOBPA rescinds	No of children disrupted	No of children adopted
2008/09	48	41	9	0	55
2009/10	44	45	5	3	41
2010/11	55	37	7	2	45
2011/12	60	40	11	0	45
2012/13	102	40	15	0	50
2013/14	165	101	15	0	53

In relation to SHOBPA, the 165 figure includes the children that are already placed with adopters.

2.3.2 Children may have SHOBPA decision/link/adoption in different years the figures above are taken as at end of March each year and will fluctuate throughout the year as the plan for children may change from adoption for various reasons, for example, family rehabilitation or Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) with extended family or foster carers, long term foster placement.

2.3.3 The Service has two well established adoption panels which aim to meet monthly. Both panels have the same independent Chair that has significant knowledge and experience of adoption issues. All panels have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members.

2.3.4 In February 2013 a dedicated Agency Advisor was appointed. This provides consistency across both panels and provides independence to the post. The Agency Advisor plays a key role in the quality assurance of all documents that are to be presented to panel and manages activity in regard to prioritisation of the panel agenda and SHOBPA decisions.

2.3.5 Adoption Panels held each month

April 2014	1
May 2014	2
June 2014	2
July 2014	2
August 2014	1
September 2014	2

2.3.6 From April – September 2013 the Agency Decision Makers (ADM) have been Jon Banwell, Assistant Director, Provider Services, Trevor Owen, Senior Manager, Safeguarding Children Service and Debbie Mercer, Assistant Director, Fieldwork. Trevor Owen undertakes the ADM role in regard to SHOBPA's on a monthly basis. The ADM's role is to consider the adoption panel's recommendation to make the final decision. The ADM is a nominated person within the adoption

agency who has the legal responsibility to make an approval decision. In most circumstances this ADM accepts the adoption panel's recommendation and is supported by advice from the Agency Advisor.

## **2.4 Adoption Scorecard**

The two main indicators in the adoption scorecard are both published as a three year average.

2.4.1 Indicator A1 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days). Before March 2015, 47 children are identified to be adopted and if this happens as expected then the average for A1 will be 536 days in 2014/15. This will mean a three year average of around 566 days which falls outside of the 487 days threshold set by DfE for 2012-15.

2.4.2 Indicator A2 – 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 (days). By March 2015, 43 children are identified for this cohort and if this happens as expected then the average for A2 will be 300 days in 2014/15. This will mean a three year average of around 268 days which falls well outside of the 121 days threshold set by DfE for 2012-15 onwards. 1) See Appendices for Adoption Scorecard Update

## **3. What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?**

3.1 Sheffield continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to permanence placements for children through adoption. Children thrive in stable and loving families. Sometimes birth parents are unable to care for their children themselves. Getting the best possible care for these children is one of the LA's most important corporate parent responsibilities.

3.2 The LA has responded to the Government's Action Plan as outlined above in the main body of the report. The Local Authority will continue to drive forward the adoption agenda to ensure that the child's journey is undertaken in a timely manner whilst ensuring the best outcome. The priority for all children is to secure permanence. Adoption is therefore a key and vital choice in any decision making that secures a child's future within a stable family environment.

## **4. Recommendation**

4.1 The Committee are being asked to note the report and its contents.

## Appendices

1)

