

Leicester City Adoption Service Annual Report 2019-2020



Purpose

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the activity and performance of the Adoption Service from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

In addition, as an Adoption Service in England we are required to produce a written Statement of Purpose each year which sets out details of our services and how we will meet our commitment to providing high-quality care and support for our children, young people and adopters.

The Adoption Service Annual Report and the Statement of Purpose are available to all staff, prospective adopters, children and young people, parents and other professionals in a variety of formats. You can find the most up to date copy on our website www.leicester.gov.uk/adoption.

Summary

The Adoption Service are essential in supporting our delivery of high-quality care and support for our looked after children, allowing them to live and thrive in a family home.

The primary aim of the Adoption Service is to ensure that children, who are referred for an adoptive placement, are placed within a caring and supportive family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

Adopters will become the permanent family for a child who cannot, for whatever reason, return home. They will take on all the rights and responsibilities of a birth parent. They will give the child stability, love and security throughout their childhood and beyond.

The service allows our children and young people to live in safe, stable and appropriately matched families. Our aim for children who are cared for is that they will have a clear understanding of why they are looked after by the local authority, be given an opportunity to make sense of their experiences; knowing who is there to support them to achieve their goals and lead successful lives.

We are committed to supporting our adoption families and continue to develop our support offer. More information about the adoption service and the support offered can be found on our website www.leicester.gov.uk/adoption.

If you have any questions about the information contained in this Annual Report or the Statement of Purpose, please contact the adoption team on 0116 454 4550.

Family Adoption Links Adoption Agency

Leicester is working towards a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) in response to the Government paper issued in June 2015 called “Regionalising Adoption”.

The RAA partnership of Leicester, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Rutland was expanded in January 2020 to include North Lincolnshire, and there are plans for this arrangement to be formally launched in autumn 2020.

The RAA will operate separately from the broader East Midlands Adoption (EMA) grouping and will continue to engage with our bordering RAA’s to share learning and opportunities for further collaboration. Similarly, we will continue to engage with Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The aim is to deliver the benefits of a regional agency without disrupting arrangements that are already working well. The RAA will have a small central hub to coordinate those aspects of the work which will have a regional element, including initial contact from adopters, home-finding and data management.

A regional family finding hub is in place to more effectively find the best matches for children. Developments are underway for a regional marketing and recruitment strategy and a single website, with all enquiries being passed to local teams. By pooling performance information and data, the wider regional picture will allow us to plan more effectively, to deliver regional benefits for children and adopters.

Current Performance

The Department for education publishes adoption scorecards showing a range of measures, for every Local Authority, as an average performance over the preceding three years focussing on the timescales achieved for children involved in the adoption process. The scorecards allow local authorities to monitor their own performance and compare it with that of others. An England average is published, and trends are mapped, and targets are set. Performance thresholds make clear the government’s expectations for timeliness in the adoption system. The latest performance figures show:



A total of 27 Adoption Orders were made this year for Leicester's children which although lower than last year (38) is an improvement on previous years (22) and supports our commitment to high quality matches for adopters and children in adoptive placements.



A further 11 children are in adoption placements awaiting adoption orders from the court. There are currently 13 children with an identified match which will be progressed, and we are family finding for another 15 children.



Of the 27 children who were placed with families this year, 81% (22) were aged under 5, 33% (9) were from a BME group and 19% (5) were siblings.

Prospective Adopter Recruitment

The Adoption Service welcomes enquiries from people from all backgrounds, whether single, in a relationship, or married, and regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race or religion. There is no upper age limit for a prospective adopter's, however adopters need to be in good general health.

The Adoption Service has a well-defined recruitment strategy that aims to prioritise the recruitment of adopters who can best meet the needs of all children requiring adoption. Our recruitment strategy continues to prioritise applicants for siblings and children of dual heritage especially White/African Caribbean, White/African and of Caribbean and African heritage, and older children due to the national shortage of adopters for harder to place children. The strategy encourages exploration of Fostering for Adoption with applicants.

In addition to local advertising, Leicester is represented on the Adoption East Midlands website for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (L3R), which carries a searchable events calendar which signposts adopter enquirers to information events that are being held across L3R. A new website will be developed as part of Family Adoption Links.

The Adoption Service are members of New Family Social which has proved positive in terms of recruiting same sex adopters.

A weekday duty service is in place so that potential adopters can contact an experienced worker to discuss adoption. Recruitment criteria have been agreed, which provides consistency in information given to enquirers about our minimum expectations which need to be met for people to be able to be assessed as prospective adopters. Adoption applicants appreciate this level of expertise at the beginning of the process which has been evidenced by feedback from prospective adopters and adopters.

At the end of March 2020 there were 24 adopter households in assessment, and there have been 22 adopter households approved over the last year. Adopters have been drawn from a wide range of backgrounds, reflecting the diverse ethnic communities in Leicester.

An overview of the adoption recruitment process can be found in Appendix 1.

Prospective Adopter Assessment

The adoption assessment process is uniformly strong, and this is underpinned by quality assurance activity undertaken by the Team Manager and Adoption Panel. Analysis of applicants' personal histories, relationships and motivations for seeking to adopt children are evident and Adoption Workers evaluate the applicants' strengths and potential vulnerabilities. Statutory checks and references are undertaken and documented, and assessments are mostly completed within six months.

We have aligned the three-day Preparation Course which all applicants attend so that courses run across Family Adoption Links have the same content and as such applicants have the flexibility to attend the earliest course available. Leicester City and Leicestershire will run three courses each over the year, which is time and resource efficient and will further reduce any delay in the process.

We are developing a modular approach to the training and preparation of adopters and Leicester has developed a Family and Friends module. The aims of the course are to help family members and friends understand more about the adoption process and needs of adopted children. The feedback has been positive with participants feeling they had developed their understanding of the needs of adopted children and benefitted from a safe space in which to voice some of their apprehensions.

Adopter feedback is positive about their experience of the assessment process and the training provided. Whilst challenging, the process is thorough, and applicants state it gave them confidence and a good understanding of the needs of adopted children and the potential impact of this throughout their adoptive child's childhood.

'You were very child focused and committed in ensuring that the child gets the best opportunity to find his forever family. It was very apparent that you wanted and considered the child's best interest especially around his culture, heritage and religion.'

'When you have done your visit's, you have really listened to what the child was saying and getting their voice. I just wanted to let you know that all your hard work has not gone unnoticed.'

The Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker

Carer's assessments are presented to the Adoption Panel, which meets at least monthly. The Panel make recommendations to whether the adopters are approved or not. This then goes to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who formally considers the recommendation and decides whether the adoption should be recommended for approval and is in the child's best interests.

The Adoption Panel has an experienced chair and several long-standing members from a variety of fields of knowledge including 3 adopters and an adopted adult, who has birth children and adopted children. Other panel members have expertise in post adoption support, psychology, and child protection.

Panel decisions are completed by the Agency Decision Maker in a timely manner. The Adoption Panel quality assures all reports. Over the year panel members have undertaken training including transitions between placements.

Family Finding and Matching

All Leicester City adoption workers carry out family finding in addition to recruitment, training and assessment of adopters. This works well as workers can talk to adopters during assessment regarding specific children whose profiles are anonymous. A Childcare Support Worker assists social workers in the family finding by putting children on Link Maker,

assisting with profiling the children and attending matching meetings with Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Rutland.

Child Permanence Reports (CPR's) reflect the needs of the children with a plan of adoption. Internal audit activity has shown that CPR's are not of a consistently good quality, while some reports are excellent, the majority need amendments. These are quality assured at a Panel by the Adoption Team Manager and a Service Manager in the Child in Need Teams. This ensures that children's wishes, and feelings are captured.

The service is committed to finding permanence for harder to place children including older children and those with complex needs and reducing delays in the time it takes to family find and prepare both the prospective adoptive family and the children before placement.

Quality assurance from Panel has shown that matching reports are of a good standard, demonstrating the care taken in matching children. The needs of children are clearly identified, with thorough analysis of how adopters can meet these needs. Areas of potential vulnerability are less well defined, though support needs are identified and addressed through the provision of a clear support plan to appropriately meet children's needs.

Most of Leicester's children are placed with in-house adopters. Where we do not have an in-house or Family Adoption Link resource, we family find on Link Maker and then look nationwide. For some older children, we use Adoption Activity Days run by Coram BAAF. Over the past year, of the 27 children adopted, 10 were Inter Agency placements.

'I just wanted to say thanks for all of your work and support with our case, it really does not go unnoticed. The support worker goes above and beyond and the adoptive parents have been over the moon with her support.'

Transition Support

Adoption social workers are skilled in transition work with children and Transition Books are used for many of the children both prior to and during introductions. These books have proved invaluable especially when sibling groups are divided with children being placed in different placements. Where children are placed separately for adoption, contact is promoted between siblings, and the adoption team provide financial assistance to enable contact to take place where children are placed at a distance to one another to promote the children's identity.

Adopters receive support from the Children and Families Support Team (CFST) who provide post adoption support to all adoptive families and their children and may also be working with a child prior to placement and can continue this work post placement.

Adopters receive full information on children prior to placement and all are offered a consultation with the Agency Medical Advisor, a visit to the child's foster carer, nursery or school. Support workers from CFST also carry out visits to adopters, pre-placement where adopters are about to take on complex children. Advice is provided on possible issues and behavioural management techniques. Adopters are also able to attend a 3-day attachment course which is run twice per year. We have introduced a new therapeutic parenting module which is a one-day course and received very positive feedback from those attending.

Preventing Delay

Adoption social workers are allocated to every relinquished child as soon as the referral is made to adoption, in order that social workers can be guided by experienced adoption workers and cases are progressed speedily to adoption panel, and in appropriate cases Fostering for Adoption placements are secured.

Adoption Workers are allocated to a child at the point of Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision. Advice is also given to children's social workers on completion of siblings together or apart assessments in cases where there may be reasons for children being placed separately. The Adoption Manager or team member attend Legal Planning Meetings and Permanence Planning Meetings to support children at an early stage who have a plan of adoption.

Understanding of the child's life history and experiences

There is a commitment to providing Life Story Books and Later Life Letters of a high quality for adopted children. A tracking process has been developed to ensure that this work is carried out. Adoption workers quality assure the books before they are given to adopters. It is recognised that for older children it is important for them to have the books at the point of transition. Where this is not possible, adoption workers strive to produce a shortened book as a tool for adopters and the child to use immediately.

The Children and Families Support Team mentor staff with Life Story Book work, and Life Story Book training is provided for our staff. Additionally, the Contact Service produces "journey books" which record key events during supervised contact sessions, including photographs and handprints, which are provided to children who move on to permanence and their birth parents.

Moves are planned carefully, with a meeting to plan the timetabling. A Pause and Plan meeting halfway through ensures the plan can be refined if the children or adopters need more time, or more information or advice. Transition books are used with the children to help them understand the planned move.

Foster carers are offered training in preparing a child to move onto adoption, and a foster carer provides training to adopters on transitions, to enable them to see the foster carer as a partner to support the child. Foster carers assist with introductions, helping children who are adopted to develop secure attachments to their new parents. In the past three years there has been only one adoption breakdown which occurred five months in placement, before the making of an adoption order.

Post Adoption Support

Leicester's Adoption and Post Adoption Support continues to be provided by the Children and Families Support Team (CFST), a multi-professional team with a wide range of knowledge and skills around Theraplay, Play Therapy, Systemic approaches, attachment and therapeutic parenting.

Over the last 12 months, Adoption support has been provided to 27 children, young people, and their families and adults impacted by adoption. This support has been provided in a variety of diverse ways ranging from one off support, making Post Adoption assessments of need and providing longer term support and advice with queries relating to historic adoptions.

CFST offers a range of support to adopters both pre and post Order ranging from a dedicated duty system, one off visits to families through to longer term support, a bi-annual newsletter, Walk and Talk groups and coffee mornings.

CFST support the Adoption Preparation Days (along with birth parents, CAMHS, adopted adults and adopters) to ensure families have an awareness of the team and the support they provide to enable them to seek help at an earlier stage. In addition to this, the Team Manager also sits on Leicester's Adoption Panel, which can highlight support for families, ensuring smoother transitions prior to the making of the Adoption Order.

CFST has provided bespoke training sessions to schools of around 30% of the post adoption cases supported this year. This training has explored trauma, attachment and best ways to support children in school settings. There are 390 cases supported through the post-box contact service and 5 adopted children are supported with direct contact with their birth families.

The CFST support up to 4 birth parents every three with letter writing. Support services were provided to 11 birth parents through independent birth parent counselling.

As part of the post adoption support, applications are made to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) when required, alongside the therapeutic support that is provided by CFST. Over the past 12 months, Leicester has made 41 applications to the ASF where children and their adopted families are now in receipt of therapeutic support; enabling them to access several different therapeutic interventions including Theraplay, Play Therapy, Drama Therapy, Music Therapy, Crisis Intervention Therapy and Sensory Processing Interventions.

The last Ofsted's report for Leicester published in September 2017 stated 'Adoption support is a strength. Post- adoption support is timely, and creative, sensitive work helps families to meet challenges. Adoptive families benefit from a wide range of services, and the team makes good use of the adoption support fund.'

Overview of the Adoption process for potential adopters

1. Your initial contact with us

When you contact the Adoption Service, we will ask some questions in order to learn more about you and your personal circumstances, and we can answer any questions you may have. We will then send out an information pack if requested within 10 days.

2. Registration of Interest Form

If, after receiving further information via an Information Session followed by a home visit (Initial Visit) you wish to proceed, you will then need to complete the Registration of Interest Form (ROIF)

3. Call from a Recruitment Team social worker

Once the Recruitment Team receives your ROIF we will contact you within 5 days of receiving it and a social worker from the service will have a detailed discussion with you. We will then let you know if we can accept you into Stage One of the process.

4. Stage One

Statutory references and checks will be taken up. Stage One will usually be completed in 2 months but can be extended up to a maximum of 6 months. It will be very much an adopter led process and will move at your pace. If your application is not able to progress to Stage Two, the adoption team will inform you in writing of the reasons and if appropriate refer you on to other agencies if applicable.

5. Plan and agreement

During Stage One the service will draw up a Stage One Plan (agreement) and ask you to sign an agreement setting out what the Recruitment Team will provide, and it will detail what steps you need to take and what needs to happen for you to progress to Stage Two.

6. Stage Two

You will be allocated a worker to complete your adoption assessment following completion of a Stage Two Agreement form. The agreement will set out details of each visit (minimum of 6) and you will be given a provisional panel date for your approval. You will receive further information and training in both Stage One and Stage Two which will include Adoption Preparation Groups. As part of the course you will have the opportunity to speak to experienced adopters who share their knowledge of what it is really like to adopt a child. All this information is brought together in the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR).

7. Adoption Panel

This happens on completion of the adoption assessment. At the end of the assessment, your PAR is presented to the Adoption Panel, which meets at least monthly. Adopters are invited to attend. You will be given the panel's recommendation on the day. This then goes to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who formally considers the recommendation and decides within seven days.

8. Finding the right match

We work with you to identify the right child and we will complete a Matching Plan Agreement with you. How long you must wait depends on the needs of the children and what age and type of child you are best suited to. We try to place children as soon as possible and matches can take place as soon as a few weeks after approval but usually there is a wait of several months before a match is made. If you have not been matched within three months and with your agreement, your details will be referred to Link Maker which means potential matches for you could be made with children from across the country.

9. Matching Panel

The adoption panel considers the appropriateness of the match between yourselves and the child/children. It then makes a formal recommendation that the child can be placed with you and this is then subject to the Agency Decision Maker agreeing the match within seven days of the date of the panel. This process may be slightly different, if you have been matched with a child from another area, in which case you will attend the adoption panel in the area with responsibility for the child.

10. Introductions

Your child's placement is carefully planned and following a series of introductions they will move and become part of your family. Your social worker supports you as you get used to becoming an adoptive family. The local authority has a statutory duty to review the child's placement up until an adoption order is granted.

11. Adoption Order

Following the placement of a child, or children, the granting of the Adoption Order usually takes three to six months, although in some cases it can take longer.

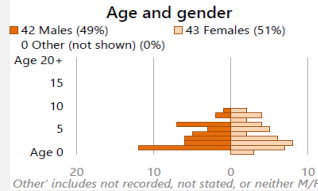
A printable version of the attached created for prospective adopter can be found on our website <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/adoption>.

Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT)

Children adopted, waiting to be adopted, or had an adoption decision reversed in the last 12 months from 02/04/2019 to 01/04/2020

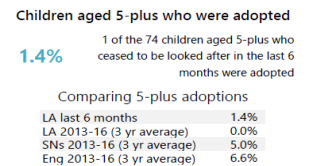
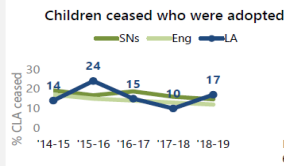
85 children

- 25 Child/ren adopted last 12 months
- 37 Child/ren waiting to be adopted
- 32 Child/ren waiting with placement order
- 22 Child/ren with decision reversed

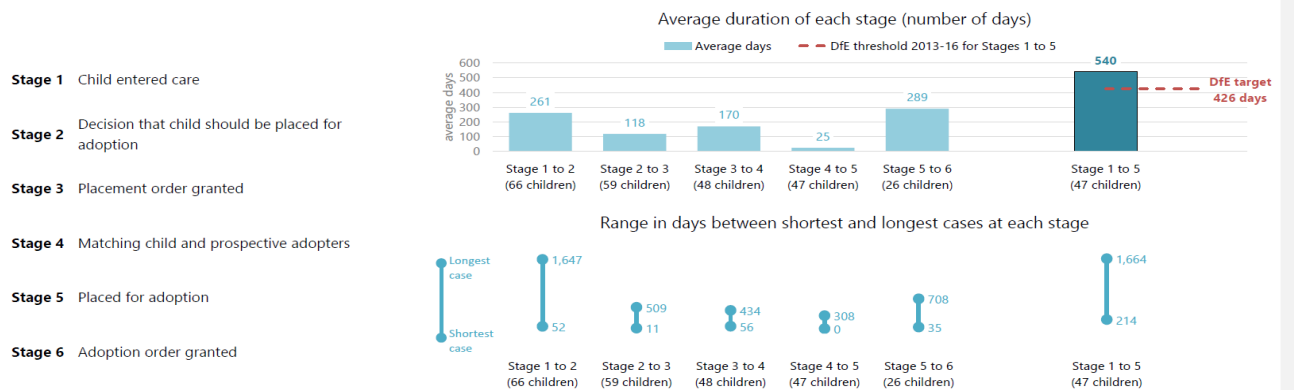


3 children (4%) with a disability

Of the 113 children who ceased to be looked after in the last 6 months, 4 was/were adopted (4%)



Timeliness of each stage of the adoption process



Developer Jean Mallo - Data to Intelligence project, 2018

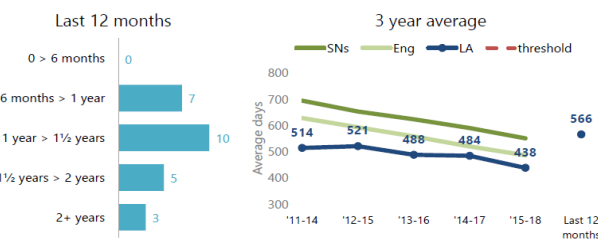
Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT)

Adoption benchmarking

from 02/04/2019 to 01/04/2020

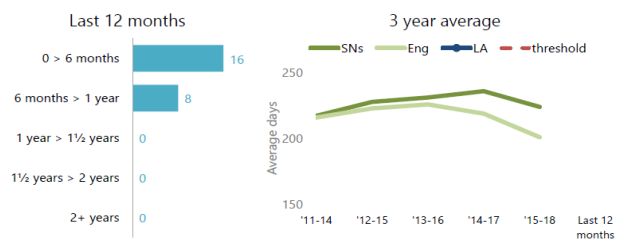
(A1) Time between entering care and placed with family for adopted children

566 days The average number of days from the date the child entered care to the date the child moved in with their adoptive family for adopted children



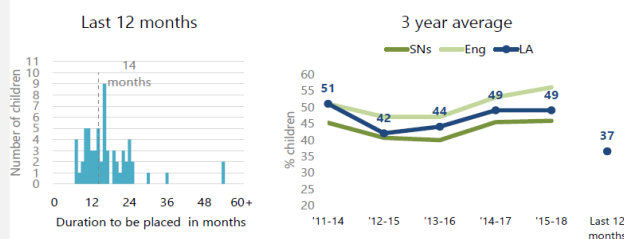
(A2) Time between placement order and deciding on a match

131 days The average number of days from the date of the placement order to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters



(A3) Time between entering care and placed for adoption

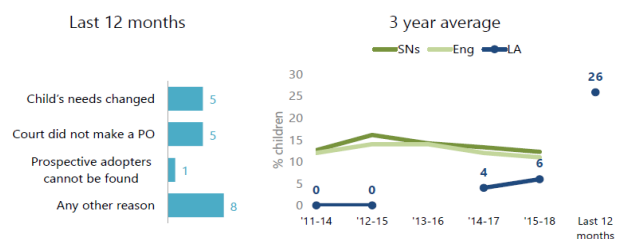
37% Children placed who waited less than the threshold between entering care and being placed for adoption (threshold: 14 months for 2013-16)



Developer Jean Mallo - Data to Intelligence project, 2018

(A5) Permanence decision changed away from adoption

26% Children where there was a decision that the child should no longer be placed for adoption



More Information

The Adoption Service maintains a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that support the management of the Service, the care of children and advice / guidance / protocols many of which can be found on our website www.leicester.gov.uk/adoption.

