

Executive Report

National Changes in Adoption Policy and the Adoption Action Plan

Decision to be taken by: Assistant City Mayor, Children,
Young People and Schools

Decision to be taken: 31 October 2012

Lead Director: Rachel Dickinson, Strategic Director
Education and Children's Services Department

CYP Scrutiny Commission: 19th September 2012

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Mark Tingley, Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption Service
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1. Decision Summary:

1. To note the contents of this report.
2. To note and approve the Adoption Action Plan.

2. Why it is needed:

2.1 Leicester has a strong track record of placing children for adoption and has always performed well in this area. For example, in 2011-12, 16% of Leicester's total looked after children population were either adopted or made subject of a special guardianship order, which placed Leicester in the top 25% of all authorities nationally. The councils positive and proactive approach to permanence planning and outcomes for looked after children was also viewed as a strength in Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection, carried out in December 2011.

2.2 There has been much recent media publicity about adoption and the Government's concern about process and timescales. This led to the Government issuing "*An Action Plan for Adoption – Tackling Delay*", with the overall aim of speeding up the adoption process.

2.3 The Government has recently issued an Adoption Score Card, which demonstrates the Government's more assertive approach to improving adoption timescales. There are two key thresholds in the score card:

- I. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family. The initial threshold set by the Government was for authorities to achieve this in 639 days – or 21 months. Leicester City missed this by one day. This indicator will become markedly more challenging because the threshold will fall to 14 months by 2014.

It is important to view this performance in context, with court delays being one of the primary factors impacting on threshold time scales. However, all adoption performance will remain under scrutiny and a cross service action plan is in place to address how Leicester City can meet and improve the on the adoption needs of children in line with the Government requirements. (appendix 1).

II. The second indicator is the average time between an authority receiving Court permission to place a child and the authority matching with an adoptive family. This threshold is set at 213 days – or 7 months – and Leicester exceeded this target (146 days).

2.4 This direction of travel has been further emphasised by the government since it is their intention to consider formal intervention for those Local Authorities in the bottom 10% of adoption performance. Meeting the thresholds set by the government will be challenging for local authorities for two key reasons. One is in relation to authorities experiencing an increase in the numbers of looked after children. As LAC numbers increase, so the percentage of LAC who are adopted will fall, even if there are more children being adopted. The second issue is in relation to social work capacity and demand as a result of the outcome of the recent Family Justice Review. This review concluded that care proceedings must be completed within 26 weeks instead of 40 weeks and this together with the reducing adoption timescales means that work will have to be completed prior to the commencement of proceedings as opposed to during proceedings. This will impact on the capacity of social workers and places additional pressures on an already very stretched service.

2.5 Timescales for adoption have now been included as one of the City Mayor's priorities for the coming year. This needs to be considered in conjunction with the context of the Family Justice Review outcome and planning developments and are integral to the Local Adoption Improvement Plan (Appendix 4)

2.6 An Adoption Stakeholder Group has now been established in response to the announcement of the Government's intention to implement a set of measures designed to speed up the process of securing children with adoptive families. (Appendix 5).

3. Options:

N/A

4. Tell us how this issue has been externally scrutinised as well as internally?

This is a report about Central Government policy changes. Compliance will be monitored through the new Ofsted Inspection Framework for looked After Children.

The Adoption Action Plan will be scrutinised through the Improving outcomes for looked After Children Project Board.

5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

The costs of maintaining a child in a residential placement or with foster carers are substantial. Any delays in placing a child for adoption therefore means the Council continues to incur these costs against a budget which is already under pressure from the increase in number of LAC.

Martin Judson, Head of Finance

5.2 Legal implications

This report is in line with the recommendations as set out by the Family Justice Review. The report underpins the relevant duties upon the Local Authority which are stipulated in the Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 in that it reinforces the need to prevent delay and promote the child's welfare which is considered to be paramount.

Pretty Patel, Team Leader/Solicitor

5.3 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

Climate Change:

This report does not contain any significant climate change implications and therefore should not have a detrimental effect on the Council's climate change targets.

Helen Lansdown, Senior Environmental Consultant - Sustainable Procurement

6. Background information and other papers:

"An Action Plan for Adoption" – Department for Education March 2012

7. Summary of appendices:

Appendix 1 - Summary of Government Plan Tackling delay

Appendix 2- The government Action Plan and Scorecards

Appendix 3 Government Implementation plan

Appendix 4 – Leicester city Adoption Improvement Plan

Appendix 5- Stakeholders Group Terms of Reference.

8. Is this a confidential report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No, all of the information is in the public domain.

9. Is this a "key decision"?

No, the report is for information only.

APPENDIX 1

The Government's Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay

Summary

The Government's Action Plan for Adoption, is a document and makes reference to the concerns government has about the adoption process and a range of proposals, which are, in many cases, still undeveloped. The action plan draws on recommendations contained in the Family Justice Review and links to the work of the 'Expert Working Group' on adoption and its' report, "Redesigning Adoption". This report summarises the main points of the Government's concerns below and provides summaries of the key areas of the proposals in Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

Background

1. Fall in adoption figures

- 1.1 In the year 2010-2011 only 3,050 children in England were adopted. Over the last ten years the overall numbers have gradually fallen. Currently there are approximately 16,000 children in care who are under the age of five years. The vast majority of looked after children nationally are placed in foster care and this is the picture locally.
- 1.2 The Government did not set this fall in the context of legal changes that had occurred over the same period. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced Special Guardianship Orders; a provision sitting between Adoption Orders and Residence Orders in a tariff of provision which can provide legal permanence for looked after children. In a significant number of cases, particularly for children living in kinship placements, special guardianship is a more appropriate order and is often therefore chosen in preference to adoption since this type of order became available in 2006. In October 2011 the Association of Directors of Children's Service published figures which showed that when Adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders are added together there has in fact been a year on year rise in legal permanence for looked after children; rising by 27% in the five years since 2006. Therefore, the issues concerning the fall in adoption figures is a complex area and cannot be taken in isolation or over-simplified.

2. Delay in Adoption

- 2.1 There are many ways in which performance in the area of adoption could be improved and delay is a significant issue. The Family Justice review published its findings in November 2011. It found that the average time care proceedings take nationally in the County Court to be resolved is over 60 weeks. Linked to this, it takes a child 2 years, 7 months to be adopted. In some areas the delays are longer and Leicester is amongst the slowest to resolve care proceedings.
- 2.2 The Government therefore targeted the legal system, drawing upon recommendations from the Family Justice Review. A bar of 26 weeks for all but the

most exceptional care proceedings has now been set. This is likely to have far reaching impacts on the conduct of such cases and in particular the instruction of expert witnesses and scheduling of proceedings, including timescales for written court reports / statements.

More recently the Government has published scorecards identifying which local authorities failed to meet the threshold timescales. There were two thresholds:

1. Children coming into care moving into their adoptive placement (639 days).
2. The time taken from court authority to moving in (213 days).

Leicester missed the first threshold by one day and was well within the second threshold. Of more concern is the planned reduction in timescales from 21 months (639 days) to 14 months (426 days) in 2014. Timescales for adoption have now been included as one of the City Mayor's priorities for the coming year.

Ensuring continued improvement is a cross service responsibility and requires changes in process and accountability at key stages of a child's journey through care to adoption. Work has begun to address how Leicester will achieve these new requirements and this is not without considerable challenge. This is consolidated in an Action Plan.

(See Action Plan)

3. Panels

- 3.1 At present adoption panels have three primary functions in recommending: adoption plans for children; adopter approvals and matches for children with adopters. The Family Justice Review recommended that the role of panels in recommending a child's adoption plan be approved is removed, because of concerns that this was a duplication of the court's work and risks adding delay. This function will now cease as of 1st September of this year. Measures are in place to ensure on-going the quality assurance function of the panel is not compromised.
- 3.2 Matching children with adopters is also seen to be a potential cause of delay. Delays arise primarily for two reasons: a delay in the local authority obtaining authority to place the child, because the court has not made a Placement Order, without which, it is illegal to place a child for adoption; secondly, a serious shortage of adopters. The National Adoption Register provides a national mechanism for holding and linking the details of approved adopters with children waiting to be matched. When the Government's Action Plan was launched there were approximately 2000 children on the NAR and only 325 approved adopters, at the same time there were 80 sibling groups of 3 or more children and only 3 adopters approved to take a sibling group of three. The scale of the challenge facing the Government and local authorities is therefore immense.
- 3.3 The explanation is a matter capacity and demand. If there are 5 children waiting for adoption for every approved adopter that there are delays arising from the difficulties in finding adopters. The Government is also concerned about the difficulties in matching. Most adopters want children who are as young as possible and preferably pre-school. Many adopters will not consider children who are from different ethnic, linguistic or religious backgrounds to themselves, but government

cites research that shows that trans-racial placements are no less successful than “same race” placements. Research by Professor Elaine Farmer¹ showed that family finding for placements of similar ethnicity caused delay in 70% of the BME children who experienced delay. Other research quoted, ² showed a 20% reduction in the chances of being adopted for every year of delay.

3.4 Disabled children are also disproportionately affected by delay in matching. Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) are responsible for approximately 20% of the adoption placements nationally. VAAs often focus their recruitment on adopters that local authorities find hard to recruit, or for children who are hard to place, such as disabled children or sibling groups. VAAs recruit adopters, who are then “sold” (the cost of their assessment is invoiced to local authorities). Local authorities are however often reluctant to purchase VAA placements because of their budgetary constraints. The VAA charge for one child placed with a VAA approved adopter is £27,000, for two children the cost is £44,194, for three, £61,000 (2011 – 2012 rates). The Leicester City Adoption Service budget is £177,700 for such placements; therefore the use of ‘inter-agency’ placements has to be carefully targeted at those children who are most difficult to place for adoption. The Government intends to look at local authority commissioning arrangements for such placements.

3.5 The direct placement of children with adopters and concurrent schemes are seen as a way of speeding up adoptions. There have been a number of concurrent projects around the country with varying degrees of success. At present there are legal restrictions on the ability of local authorities to be able to place children directly with adopters when they come in to care (rather than after first placing with foster carers). Adopters have to be jointly approved as foster carers to place a child (without a Placement Order) and there can follow very difficult challenges for the prospective adopters. In these circumstances, what if the court does not subsequently make an adoption order, or if the child is rehabilitated home? The Government intends to look at making regulatory changes to make such placements more achievable.

4. Recruitment of adopters

4.1 The Government has been highly critical of ways in which adopters are recruited and the speed within which this process occurs. The current National Minimum Standards require adopters to be prepared and assessed within 8 months. For this to be achieved there can be no element of waiting, for an ‘Initial Visit’, for allocation of a place on ‘Preparation Training’, for allocation of an assessing social worker, or delay in a slot on the adoption approval panel.

4.2 The Government intends to streamline the process into two stages: ‘Pre-qualification’ and then ‘full assessment’. The first stage will involve on-line work, be adopter led and last 2 months and the second stage will last 4 months. Changes in the National Minimum Standards will be required to reflect this change.

¹ Farmer, E.; Dance, C.; Beecham, J.; E. and Ouwejan, D. (2010) An investigation of family finding and matching in adoption – briefing paper.

² Selwyn et al (2006)

- 4.3 The Government has been concerned about the way and manner with which people who are interested in adopting are handled. They consider that the arrangements are confusing, with for example prospective adopters not being aware of being able to choose which agency to approach and use. They are concerned about reports that agencies are slow in responding, or put off people by their attitude. The intention is to introduce a 'National Gateway' to provide clear information and guidance to prospective adopters (in addition to existing individual agency processes).
- 4.4 Improvements in post adoption support are also seen to be important. The Government believes that it is crucial that prospective adopters are fully aware of what support they will receive after a child is placed with them into the future. This is considered to be a measure that will improve recruitment, but also the stability of adoptive placements. The Government has been less specific about changes in this area, but wishes to focus attention on access to CAMHS, parenting skills training, reforms to the tax and benefits system and an "Adoption Passport" guaranteeing levels of post adoption support. Within the area of recruitment the Government is seeking to pool learning about marketing and how best to recruit adopters for children with specific needs.

5. System Improvement

- 5.1 Key Performance Indicators do not currently give a clear picture as to the performance of local authorities and the court process. The view is held that Ofsted inspections of adoption services are insufficiently rigorous, leading to too many 'Outstanding' adoption agencies, where the focus is perhaps more on quality than quantity and timescales.
- 5.2 The Government is therefore shifting the focus from the current partial performance monitoring, to monitor the 'child's journey' to adoption. The measures are therefore to be focussed on what happens at the different stages from the point the child first comes into care and how long each stage takes. The Government wishes to expose under-performing local authorities and to do this will be introducing 'Scorecards', these will also be helpful to prospective adopters in choosing which agency to approach, if they want a quick and efficient service.

6. Adoption Activity Days

- 6.1 Adoption Activity Days are an American idea, to enable matching of harder to place children. The AAD is an event, rather like a party, where children waiting for adoption attend, with the emphasis on enjoying themselves. They are prepared for the day by being aware that adults will be in attendance who wants to adopt. The adults are approved adopters and are given profiles of the children, which helps to guide them to spend time with children they feel drawn to. The project is being evaluated by Manchester Metropolitan University.

7. Adoption Stakeholders Group

- 7.1 The Adoption Stakeholder Group was established in response to the announcement the government's intention to implement a set of measures designed to speed up the process of securing children with adoptive families. The request for a round table discussion that brought together a range of professionals to discuss and consider how this principles can be delivered and how best practice for finding adoptive families for children, can be supported. The group has now been established in Leicester City and will play a key role in ensuring that the Council is effectively discharging its duty. The group will ensure partners are fulfilling their part in the adoption process. Terms of Reference for the group are detailed in Appendix 5.

The Action Plan for Adoption – Tackling Delay can be found at:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/a/an%20action%20plan%20for%20adoption.pdf>

The working Group's Report on Redesigning Adoption can be found at:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/w/working%20groups%20report%20on%20redesigning%20adoption.pdf>

The Family Justice Review – Final Report can be found at:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/moj/2011/family-justice-review-final-report.pdf>

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August 2012

APPENDIX 2

Government's Adoption Action Plan

<u>Chapter / Theme</u>	<u>Proposal</u>
Chapter 1 – Finding Children Loving Homes without Delay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for social workers enabling them to make timely and robust decisions in the best interests of children. • Move social workers away from a culture of defensive compliance to one of more freedom to use their professional expertise and judgement (Munro Review) • College of Social Work set up in 2012 to set standards for social work training and improve social work professional development. • ‘Step up to Social Work’ set up to provide a ‘fast track’ into social work for those from other professional fields, providing MA in Social Work in 18 not 24 months. • Pilot of ‘Social Work Practices’ whereby organisations led by social workers can perform local authority functions, including adoption work (provided they are registered as Voluntary Adoption Agencies - VAAs).* <i>More detail to be provided in the ‘summer children in care publication’.</i> • Further details, following more government consideration, on how best to equip the children in care work force – further reform proposals to follow.* • Universities to be asked to urgently ensure that Universities address attachment theory and neuroscience research in social work training. • Judicial College to include attachment theory, neuroscience research and impact of delay in its’ training for all family judges (from the Family Justice Review FJR). Also Prof Harriet Ward to provide authoritative guidance to summarise relevant research. • Accepted FJR recommendation that Adoption Panel’s role in recommending adoption as in the child’s best interests be removed. Seen as a duplication of the court’s role leading to delay. • Working group to further consider the role of adoption panels.* • Enhanced monitoring of local authority performance to target delay. • A more open consideration of trans-racial placements where carers can meet the (heritage) needs of the child. • Regulatory requirement for local authorities to refer children to the National Adoption Register (NAR) within three months (already required by Statutory Guidance). • Regulatory requirement for all adoption agencies (includes Local Authorities) to refer adopters to the NAR within three months of their approval. • Possible regulatory requirement to keep information on the child up to date?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the effectiveness of local authority arrangements for commissioning VAA placements. • Legislative changes to make it easier for adopters to be 'dual-approved' also as foster carers to facilitate direct / concurrent placements of children in advance of the resolution of other case considerations i.e.) rehabilitation, placement with relatives, full care orders, placement orders etc. • * = <i>More detail to be provided in the government's 'summer children in care publication'</i>
Chapter 2 – Valuing Prospective Adopters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two stage training (2 months) and assessment (4 months) for prospective adopters. • Changes to NMS and Regulations to implement the above (consultation later in 2012) • New streamlined PAR (Prospective Adopter's Report) to be piloted. • New 'National Gateway' providing a single point of enquiry for adopters to obtain clear unambiguous information on adoption. • Improvements in adoption support, including guarantee of minimum levels of support, under-pinning an "Adoption Passport". • Better focus on the marketing and recruitment of prospective adopters, by sharing existing marketing tools and resources (possibly within adoption consortia).
Chapter 3 – System Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rigorous inspections (new framework introduced 1st April 2012) • New legislation to require care proceedings is completed within 6 months in all except exceptional cases (Family Justice Review recommendation). • New Adoption Scorecards, publishing key performance indicators for local authorities in adoption timescales. (See Appendix 3) • Scorecards to focus on three key indicators: the experience for the child in terms of average timescales, secondly the experience for the adopter and thirdly the speed and effectiveness of family finding following a court deciding that adoption is the best option. • Scorecards to include additional information such as an indicator of the timeliness of the local family justice system. • The intention is to use Scorecards to focus attention on improving timescales in adoption, but also to provide evidence for the need for Government to intervene directly, for example by expecting local authorities to outsource all or part of their adoption service to higher performing local authority or Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

APPENDIX 2

Adoption Scorecard

Key Measurement:

Local authority performance will be averaged out over rolling three year periods i.e.) 2010-2013, 2011-2014 etc.

Children

1. Average time between the child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family. (Days)
2. 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)
3. Number and percentage of children who wait longer than 19 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

Thresholds for children

- The initial performance threshold (2010-13) for the child's journey (see 1 above) will be 21 months.
- The threshold will fall to 14 months by 2014 (2013 -16).

Comparators for children

- Trend improvement per local authority between each year.
- England 3 year average.
- Distance from the 2010 – 2013 performance threshold.

Prospective Adopters

1. Time taken from registration of interest to decision of suitability to adopt (Days)
2. Time taken from receipt of application form to decision of suitability to adopt (Days)
3. Time taken from decision of suitability to adopt to matching with child (Days)

Comparators for Adopters

- Local authority 3 year average (2008 – 2011)
- England 3 year average (2008 – 2011)

Related performance indicators

- Adoptions from care (number adopted and percentage leaving care who are adopted)
- Number and percentage of children for whom permanence decisions has changed away from adoption.
- Adoptions of children from 'ethnic minority backgrounds' (number adopted and percentage of BME children leaving care who are adopted)
- Adoptions of children aged 5 years or over (number adopted and percentage of children aged 5 years or over who are adopted).
- Average length of care proceedings locally (Weeks).
- Number of children awaiting adoption (as at 31/03/11)
- Number of approved prospective adopters (as at 31/03/11)

APPENDIX 3

Implementation (simplified)

	2012			2013			
	March-June	July-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-March	April-June	July-Sept	Oct-Dec
Adoption and Children in Care Reform	Adoption Action Plan	Strategy Document on children in care and adoption	Consultation on changes to secondary legislation	Government response to consultation	Making and laying of regulations	New Regulations in force	
	Further work on adoption support, national gateway, workforce development, role of VAAs						
New accountability measures	New Ofsted inspection framework in force		Statistical first release of data on children in care and adoptions		New combined LAC inspections begin		
	Publish new adoption scorecards		Updated performance tables and scorecards				
	Conversations with Las and further diagnosis as necessary	Performance thresholds on child's journey set from 2012 and raised incrementally over the next four years					Data on journey timeliness available from autumn 2014
Family Justice Review	Implementing the FJR recommendations, including the 6 month time limit						
		Remove adoption panel function where court scrutinises					
Safeguarding	Social Work Reform Board progress report		Chief Social Worker appointed				

Summer strategy document on children in care and adoption will identify further specific actions.

Primary legislation to reduce delay in matching to be introduced to Parliament as early as suitably possible.

Appendix 4 Leicester Improvement Adoption Action Plan

OUTCOME: Minimising delay and improving efficiency in fieldwork systems & processes				
RATIONALE: Meeting FJR Obligations (26 Weeks) – Responding To Government’s Action Plan – Improving Outcomes Of LAC				
Rationale	Objective	Actions	Leads	Update
Reduce number of days taken for children to be placed for adoption.	Ensure that in all but exceptional cases the time taken from initial Interim Care Order to placement for adoption takes less than 14 months	Publicise and provide briefings to all relevant staff of the requirements of the Government’s Scorecards & Action Plan.	CON, MT, SD	
		In consultation with Social Care and Safeguarding staff, devise an adoption timeline to meet timescale requirements.	CON, MT, SD	
		Briefing and discussions with Legal Services about Government’s Scorecards & Action Plan and how better to minimise delays in Care Proceedings.	MT, SD	
		Consolidate the Lac improving outcomes work streams care proceedings and care planning.	AS	
		Implement a training and development initiative for NQSW with emphasis on adoption.		
For the LA to be compliant with the outcome of the Family Justice Review and in doing so improve outcomes for children.	To improve Fieldwork systems and processes in order to ensure care proceedings are completed in 26 weeks and children are placed for adoption in less than 14 months.	Analysis of whether pre-birth assessments, including ‘expert’ assessments, would impact positively on timescales. (Research suggests not, as courts order new assessments regardless).	Family Justice Review Group	
		Training on assessments and how to frame “no further assessment” conclusions.		
		Legal planning meeting agenda is being revised.		
		Dedicated resource for chairing Legal Planning meetings to be considered.		
		Minutes of Legal Planning meetings to be sent to IRO’s and IC’s routinely.		

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		Data collection of numbers of Legal Planning Meetings, how many results in applications.		
		Identification/Tracking/Scrutiny/ oversight of cases coming into CCT's and going into proceedings immediately.		
		Family Group Meeting is held of all families on the outset or pre-proceedings.		
		Genograms / family trees to be compiled at the start of assessments as a matter of routine.		
		Information we already have to be used more effectively to identify family members.		
		Consideration to be given to having a 'principle' statement about what the Local Authority will do if parents refuse to allow us to contact family members		
		Training for all staff, including experienced staff, on court work and pre-proceedings processes		
		Social workers to be encouraged to feel confident about their assessments and to be able to put their views across		
		Joint work, shadowing opportunities, court skills training and report writing skills training to be a matter of routine		
		Data required about LPMs, pre-proceedings meetings, numbers of care applications, timescales for completion and outcomes		

Appendix 4 Leicester Improvement Adoption Action Plan

OUTCOME: Successful Marketing Of The Adoption Services East Midlands				
RATIONALE: Ensure Supply Of Prospective Adopters Are Available For Leicester's LAC Subject To An Adoption Plan				
Rationale	Objective	Actions	Leads	Update
Ensure an adequate supply of prospective adopters to meet demand for placements for children subject to an Adoption Plan.	Recruitment targeted outside Leicester area	Re-brand and trade mark service following disaggregation	Complete	N/A
		Complete redesign of website ensure remains updated	Complete SD/MT/Paul Morley(PM)	N/A
		New adoption brochure and leaflet	Complete	N/A
	Maintain efficient recruitment of sufficient numbers of suitable adopters	Combined advertising with fostering service	On-going MT/SD/PM	December 2012
		Joint recruitment events with fostering	On-going MT/SD/PM	December 2012
		A3 Posters – use to boost profile if needed i.e. (NAW)	MT/SD/PM (as required)	
		Large Posters (NAW)	Media and Marketing / MT/SD	December 2012
		Timing of publicity to coincide with NAW	SD/PM	December 2012
	Ensure effectiveness of publicity and targeting	Monitor public response to advertising through referral information.	SD	October 2012
		Maintain marketing and publicity campaign	MT	On-going

Appendix 4 Leicester Improvement Adoption Action Plan

OUTCOME: Recruitment, Preparation and Assessment maximum number of Adopters				
RATIONALE: LA To Comply With NMS For Adoption And Statutory Obligations				
Rationale	Objective	Actions	Leads	Update
Ensure prospective adopters are prepared and assessed in line with NMS for adoption and statutory obligations.	Recruitment of prospective adopters with minimum delay and thorough preparation and assessment	Maintain frequency of meetings at the same level as when part of the Joint Arr.	SD	
		Team Manager / unqualified staff to lead information evenings	SD	
		Respond to requests for IVs arising from Information Evening within 4 weeks of Information Evening.	SD	
		Begin to train and prepare unqualified staff to undertake initial visits.	SD	
		Maintain frequency of Preparation Training Groups at the same level as when part of the JA.	SD	
		When announced by Government, redesign preparation process to reflect "Pre-Qualification" (Stage 1) and "Assessment" (Stage 2) 2 and 4 months respectively.	MT/SD	TBC
		Agency Adviser to continue to record PAR assessment timescales.	MT	

Appendix 4 Leicester Improvement Adoption Action Plan

OUTCOME: Performance and Quality Assurance of the Adoption Process				
RATIONALE: Children & Young People's Plan, NMS + Regulations, FJR And Compliance With Government's Action Plan				
Rationale	Objective	Actions	Leads	Review Date
Monitor performance against Government Action Plan expectations and timescales.	Ensure children process through the care proceedings without unnecessary delay.	Develop systems for timescale tracking of children's cases through court.	Sue Welford Steve Bond Sonia Grant Lorraine White MT	
		Briefing sessions to all SCS Divisional staff on measures to be taken to reduce timescales (Pre-Proceedings, during and post proceedings)	MT/SD/BB/SG	
		CPR QA process	MT/KD/SG/SB/DS	December 2012
	Ensure children are matched and placed speedily with adopters	Review with the Adoption Team whether there are any potential improvements to be made to the entire matching process	MT / SD	
		Consider whether additional funds should be added to the Inter-agency placement budget	CON / MT	
	Ensure cross partnership ownership and responsibility for adoption performance	Agree reporting and governance arrangements for the Adoption stakeholders group.		

Appendix 5

Adoption Stakeholder Group

Terms of Reference

Aims and Principles of the Adoption Stakeholder Group

The Adoption Stakeholder Group was established in response to the government's intention to implement a set of measures designed to speed up the process of securing children with adoptive families and for local authorities and partners to discuss best practice in finding adoptive families for children.

The group will play a key role in ensuring that the Council is effectively discharging its duties. This is within the context of meeting the requirements of the Family Justice Review. To achieve this, partners need to be aligned and engaged in fulfilling their part in the adoption process.

The main aims of the Adoption Stakeholder Group are to ensure improved and timely outcomes for looked after children who have a plan for adoption:

- Ensuring progress against the Government's Adoption Plan in reducing the timescales for children who need to be adopted;
- Supporting the work of the Looked After Children Project Board;
- Monitoring the implementation of the Leicester Adoption Action Plan;
- Working in partnership to understand and address issues arising from the development of adoption processes and expectations;
- Respond to consultation processes and report back to the Government;
- Ensuring children and families are consulted and influence decisions and plans that affect them;
- Contribute to Local, Regional and National initiatives.

To achieve this, the Group will ensure services are in place to:

- Match children to adoptive placements that will meet their assessed needs;
- Work with children, young people, families and prospective adopters to resolve any problems they may experience;
- Work with other agencies to ensure the children's plans are progressed as quickly as it is reasonable and safe to do so;
- Ensure children, young people, families and prospective adopters have access to on-going support when they need it;
- To receive regular reports on the provision of adoption timescales and other data as required;
- Listen to the views of children, young people, families and prospective adopters and ensure they influence policy plans and practice;
- Respect and promote the cultural identity of children, young people, families and prospective adopters.

Frequency of Stakeholders Group Meetings and Membership

The group will meet every two months. The agenda, minutes and any relevant papers will be circulated prior to the meeting.

The Strategic Director for Education and Children's Services will chair the meeting.

Membership will consist of:

- Strategic Director, Education and Children's Services Department
- Director, Children's Social Care & Safeguarding Division
- Senior Representative Judiciary
- Head of Service Children's Resources
- Head of Service Children's Fieldwork
- Service Manager, CAFCASS
- Service Manager, Fostering & Adoption
- Team Manager Adoption
- Team Manager, Children & Families Support Team
- Representative from City Council Legal Services
- Representative independent Family Solicitor
- Adoption Panel Chair
- Service Manager Child Protection and Proceedings
- Adoption Panel member
- Social Work Practitioners (Adoption & Fieldwork)

Roles and Responsibilities of Adoption Stakeholder Group Members

- To attend all meetings of the Adoption Stakeholders Group and represent their service areas;
- To promote and champion the work of the Adoption Stakeholder Group within their own service areas and across partnerships;
- To hold own services to account for the quality and progression of the adoption plan.

Governance

The work of the Adoption Stakeholder Group is one element of the "Improvements to Care Planning" work stream, which is accountable to the Looked After Children Project Board within the Children's Social Care & Safeguarding Division in the Council.

Overall governance of the Leicester Adoption Action Plan is provided by the Looked After Children project Board. The challenge and scrutiny to adoption performance and progress provided by the Adoption Stakeholder Group will inform the Adoption Action Plan, with the advantage of a partnership approach in sharing good practice and removing barriers to performance.

APPENDIX 6

ADOPTION PERFORMANCE

ADOPTION ORDERS MADE FROM APRIL 2012 - MARCH 2013	
Date Adoption order made	Number of children
18 th April 2012	1
27 th April 2012	1
9 th May 2012	1
11 th May 2012	3
26 th July 2012	1
2 nd August 2012	2

ADOPTION APPLICATIONS LODGED AND AWAITING COURT DATE	
Date of hearing, if known:	Number of children
26 th July 2012 (lodged)	2
30 th August 2012 (hearing)	1
4 th September 2012 (hearing)	1
21 st September 2012 (hearing)	1
27 th September 2012 (hearing)	1

DECISION MADE TO APPLY FOR ADOPTION ORDER – ACTION NEEDED (Where LAC Review has agreed Adoption Application can now be made, but additional reports are awaited, prior to the application being lodged)	
Action needed	Number of children
Placed (IAP) 16-11-11ROA 04-05-12 decision to make app taken awaiting annex report by social to accompany the adoption application	3
Placed 31-03-12 awaiting annex A from	1
Annex A awaited from	1

CHILDREN IN ADOPTION PLACEMENTS, WHERE ADOPTION ORDER WILL BE MADE IN DUE COURSE matched and placed – (LAC Review recommendation to make application to be made in due course)

Placement Date	Number of children
4 th February 2012	1
11 th April 2012	1
16 th April 2012	1
21 st May 2012	2
28 th May 2012	1
25 th June 2012	1
27 th June 2012	2
12 th July 2012	1
6 th July 2012	1
1 st August 2012	1
13 th August 2012	1
To be placed August 2012	3
To be placed 16 th August 2012	1
17 th August 2012	1

To date 9 Adoption Orders have been made this year

6 Applications are awaiting court dates.

18 children are placed for adoption and are waiting for a recommendation to apply for Adoption Orders.

Numbers per year are taken from 1st April to 31st March .It is unlikely that all adoption processes will be completed by 31st March 2013, but this good performance is predicted for this year.

**NUMBERS OF ADOPTION ORDERS MADE ANNUALLY IN RELATION TO LEICESTER CITY CHILDREN 2001 - 2012
(FIGURES RELATE TO THE FINANCIAL YEAR)**

Date	Number of children
2001-02	33
2002-03	41
2003-04	33
2004-05	33
2005-06	28
2006-07	25
2007-08	28
2008-09	24
2009-10	17
2010-11	26
2011-12	22

The National Indicator for adoption is C23. Number of children adopted (or made subject to a Special Guardianship Order) in a year as a % of the number of Looked after Children.

Last year Leicester City achieved a figure of 16%, placing it in the top 25% of local authorities. The three year average was 11%, which ranks Leicester as 77th of all local authorities. The significant increase in the numbers of looked after children over recent months will potentially affect this performance, although it should be noted that the Government's Adoption Scorecards are now being used to measure performance, with a greater emphasis on timescales in adoption.