

Agenda item:

Title of meeting: ECYP Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 28 January 2013

Subject: Adoption Report

Report From: Children's Social Care & Safeguarding

Report by: Kate Freeman, Looked After Children Commissioning Manager

1. Current Context

1.1. Currently the looked after children population in Portsmouth is relatively stable. In the period 01 April 2011 to end of November 2012 the looked after children population has dropped 6.4%, from a high 326 to the current 305. However the last twelve months from the end of November 2011 to end of November 2012 there has been an increase of 2.3% from 298 to the current 305. The number of adoptions completed by Portsmouth has also remained relatively stable.

1.2. Portsmouth City Council Adoption Scorecards

In March 2012, the Government published their Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay. The main purpose of the plan is to avoid delay for children and prospective adopters and to increase the number of children for whom adoption is achieved where they are unable to return to live with their parents or within their extended families.

1.2.1. The first adoption scorecards for each local authority were published on 11 May 2012. The key indicators measure:

- The average time it takes for a child to be adopted from the date of entering local authority care
- The average time it takes a local authority to match a child once the court has agreed adoption is the appropriate plan.

The previous statistical release on looked after children in October 2011 reported Portsmouth the 4th best nationally for timeliness of placement following decision that adoption was in a child's best interests.

1.2.2. Portsmouth performs well within the current scorecard measures of time taken from court authority to place for adoption, to matching the child with a suitable adoptive parent, at almost half the national average performance timeframe.

1.2.3. For the second key indicator of timelines, from entering care, to being placed within an adoptive family, Portsmouth is over the national average. Further analysis of this indicates the reason being largely due to a small cohort of older children with complex placement needs who by nature of these took longer to suitably place. In line with the Government Action Plan, Portsmouth City Council sees adoption as a first choice for children

who cannot remain within their families and believe that all children irrespective of complex needs deserve a full opportunity to be adopted.

1.2.4. On the 2008 to 2011 scorecard seven children with high numbers under A1 caused the Portsmouth figure to be in excess of the national average. It was not the case that moderately high numbers across the board caused the issues. In the 2009 to 2012 scorecard eight children with high numbers under A1 occasioned the same issue.

1.2.5. There is emphasis with the Government Action Plan regarding concerns about the delays in placement for black children where the perceived emphasis is on obtaining a perfect ethnic match. This has not been an issue that has caused delay for children placed by Portsmouth Adoptive Service.

To achieve the right match for children with their adoptive parents we work closely with our neighbouring local authorities to ensure we have a range of adopters to meet children's needs.

2. Number of children with a decision for Adoption, Adoption Orders, Special Guardianship Order and Residence Order

2.1. Table 1 represents the number of children per year where a decision has been made that Adoption would be in their best interest.

Year	Number of children with an Agency Decision for adoption made in the year
2010/11	20
2011/12	36
2012/13 to date	16

Table 1 - Adoption Decisions made 2010-13

2.2. There has been a consistent picture in the use of Adoption Orders as can be seen in Table 2. In tandem with this Table 2 outlines an increasing trend in other permanency options of Residence Order and Special Guardianship Order use as a permanency route for children and young people leaving the care system.

Whilst this is undoubtedly positive for children and young people, this is not without financial support packages to carer's in many cases giving rise to budget pressures.

Order	Years		
	10/11	11/12	12/13
Adoption Order	14	16	15
SGO	10	13	18
Residence Order	10	15	19
TOTAL	34	44	52

Table 2 - Orders & Type 2010-13

- 2.3. The percentage of our children leaving care who were adopted in 2011/12 was 11% which compares with both our statistical neighbours and England who had rates of 17% and 12% respectively. This lower percentage can be linked to our higher rates of children who are supported to independence or placed via Special Guardianship Orders or Residence Orders.
- 2.4. One hundred and thirty children ceased to be looked after during the year ending March 2012.

Number of children/young people	Reason	%
15 children	Adopted	11%
40 children	Returned home to parents/relatives	31%
10 children	Residence Order granted	8%
12 children	Special Guardianship Order granted	10%
25 young people	Moved to independent living	19%
28 young people	Moved on for other reasons including custody/supported accommodation/adult services etc.	21%

Table 3 - Reasons for Children/Young People Ceasing to be LAC 2012

- 2.5. Table 4 below outlines the number of adoptive families and placements subsequently created for 2011-13. The majority of these are adopters who live outside of the city and for the 0-5 age range, although from 2012 onwards we are also recruiting more Portsmouth adopters.

Year	Household	Numbers of placements
2011/12	18	22 placements
2012/13 (to date)	15	21 placements

Table 4 - Numbers of Adopters Recruited 2011-13

- 2.6. Although we are rarely able to place Portsmouth children with adopters living in Portsmouth, we can sell adoptive placements to other local authorities and as such strive to meet our in-house budget targets; last year we generated £56,208,00 income. In line with the needs of children and adopter preferences there is also a need to buy placements from other authorities and agencies.
- 2.7. In line with pressures on the number of adopters needed for children with an adoption plan and also the type of adopters needed for example those willing to take siblings, older children and those with additional needs or medical uncertainties relating to their future, we have recently reconfigured arrangements within our adoption service to increase the focus on family finding and are looking at ways to continually improve joint working opportunities with other authorities.