

Title of meeting: Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care

Subject: Bi-annual Adoption Panel Activity Report

Date of meeting: Thursday 7th July, 2016

Report from: Sarah Newman - Deputy Director of Children's Services,
Children's Social Care

Report by: Jackie Clark - Service Leader Adoption

Wards affected: None

1. Requested by:

1.1. It is required by Standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 for Local Authority Adoption Services that the executive receives a six-monthly written report outlining the management and performance of the adoption agency.

2. Purpose

2.1. The previous report was prepared in September 2015. This report will update the Lead Member on Portsmouth Adoption Agency's end of year activity and ongoing development in accordance with the government's Adoption Reform Programme introduced in 2012.

3. Background

3.1. Practices in adoption continue to receive government attention to promote stable, permanent care arrangements for children unable to be cared for by their birth families. In the DFE paper *Adoption - A Vision For Change* the government outlined expectations for improved practices through regionalised agencies - with Local Authorities combining services with the voluntary sector. Grants have been made available for local authorities to develop these agencies and Portsmouth, Southampton, Isle of Wight and Hampshire are working with the voluntary sector to explore delivery models that build on best practices locally.

4. Areas that are doing well

4.1. Since the introduction of the national adoption scorecards in 2013, the Portsmouth Adoption Service has made improvements in securing adoptive placements for an increasing number of Looked After Children in line with government led timescales (Appendix 1, table 2). The number of children placed with Portsmouth approved adoptive families has increased. General feedback from our adoptive families is that we know our children and our adopters well.

- 4.2. Portsmouth is successfully securing adoptive placements for children with 'complex needs' eg a sibling group of three with a birth history of substance misuse; children with lifelong health and disability issues; and a number of older children with emotional and behavioural issues. Our family finding social workers work closely with consortium partners and nationally to identify the most appropriate adoptive families for our children.
- 4.3. Our performance figures have steadily increased - a total of 88 children have been adopted over the past three years and only three of those placements have disrupted, suggesting the assessment and matching practices for children and adults remain rigorous and robust. (appendix 1, table 1) To support adoptive families, Portsmouth has taken advantage of the Adoption Support Fund released in May 2015 to secure some bespoke support packages for adoptive families and a total of £87,000 has been granted to 11 families. Of the 29 children linked with prospective adoptive families this year, 22 of them were linked with Portsmouth approved families.
- 4.4. Six of the seven children who were placed with other agencies had complex needs and therefore the inter-agency placement fees were reimbursed by the (temporary) Government Fund which was introduced in July 2015.
- 4.5. The Adoption Team has recently taken on the support of Special Guardianship families as their support needs are aligned with adoptive families given they are providing a permanent family for a child/children who cannot live with birth parents.
- 4.6. There are opportunities for approved Portsmouth adopters to be matched with children from other local authorities and this year there have been 6 Portsmouth adoptive families linked with a total of 8 children.

5. Areas to watch

- 5.1. Portsmouth has approved 23 prospective adoptive families this year, which is a reduction from last year but is in line with a national trend in the fall in number of prospective adoptive families coming forward and being approved.
- 5.2. There are currently 12 children waiting for adoptive families. These children include siblings age 6 and 8 years old; 2 children aged 6 plus; 5 children aged 3 plus with health and development needs and emotional and behavioural issues.
- 5.3. We are now providing a support service to an average of 80 adoptive families at any point in time. This includes an average of Portsmouth has approximately 10 adoptive families transferring from other local authorities requesting support per year.

6. Areas of development

- 6.1. In 2016 the Government introduced the expectation to develop regional adoption agencies. Portsmouth are working with Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Southampton local authorities and three voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) - Barnardo's,

Parents and Children Together and Adoption UK to develop a regional agency A regional agency would provide the following benefits for Portsmouth:

- The removal of competition for adoptive families
- Pooling together of resources, skills and experience to enhance good practice that will promote wider access to a range of adoptive families for children
- Greater range of adoption support and reduction of the risk of disruption for adoptive families parenting children with very complex issues.

6.2 Initially, the Government indicated substantial financial grants would be made available to areas exploring the development of Regional Adoption Agencies so as to secure system and structural changes. Unfortunately, these funds have not been realised and only limited financial support is being made available. This will limit the work we are able to do across the region and may mean a revision of local plans - aligning practices and procedures rather than significant structure changes.

7. Recommendations

7.1. To note the progression of Regional Adoption Agency.

7.2. To note the performance of Portsmouth Adoption Agency in terms of :

- Reducing waiting times for children being placed in permanent homes.
- Sustained numbers of children for adoption in contrast to the national picture.

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Signed by (Director)

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Adoption Activity 2011 - 2016	Appendix 1
Adoption panel Chair bi-annual report	Appendix 2

Appendix 1

Adoption activity 2011 – 2016 - table 1

Year	No. of children adopted in court	No. of children's plans for adoption agreed	No of placement orders	No. of children linked with adoptive family for adoption	No. of prospective adoptive families approved
2010/11	14	21	-	15	11
2011/12	16	42	-	13	18
2012/13 *	13	30	-	26	20
2013/14	27	41	31	35	37
2014/15	34	29	27	31	32
2015/16	27	41	41	29	23

*Govt Adoption Reform

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PERFORMANCE TABLES - ADOPTION SCORECARD
The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted - table 2

Latest data 2015

A low number represents high performance

Rank	LA Code	LA Name	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2013, 2014 and 2015 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (days)
	970	England	593	628	647	636
104	851	Portsmouth	644	666	856	743

Special Guardianship Orders- table 3

2013	2014	27
2014	2015	13
2015	2016	13

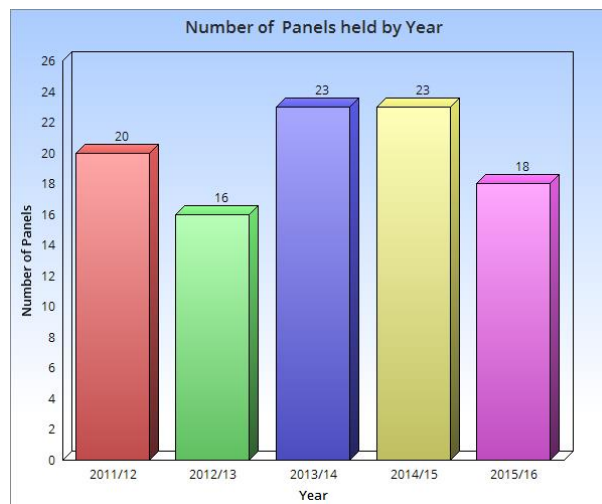
Adoption Support Fund packages agreed for adoptive families - Table 4

	No of applications	Total ASF
May *2015/2016	15	£87,271.91

Appendix 2

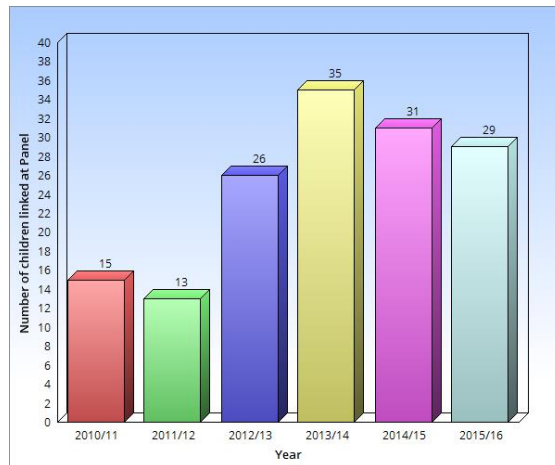
**REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE ADOPTION PANEL
FOR THE YEAR APRIL 1ST 2015- MARCH 31ST 2016**

- Panel membership remains a rich blend of long serving members with either personal and professional experience of adoption. There have been additions to the Central list of panel membership, including further social worker members, which has ensured quorate panels throughout the year.
- Panel has a ‘sword of Damocles’ hanging over it as we anticipate our demise with the impending reorganisation into a Regional Adoption Authority. This is unhealthy as it stifles developments. It is ironic that against this uncertain background we are involved in planning permanency for children.
- This year has seen a reduction in the number of panels, each of which have tended to have more business than previously. This has put pressure on completing the Annual Appraisal programme for Panel members and upon training, as both these events tended to happen on panel days after meetings.

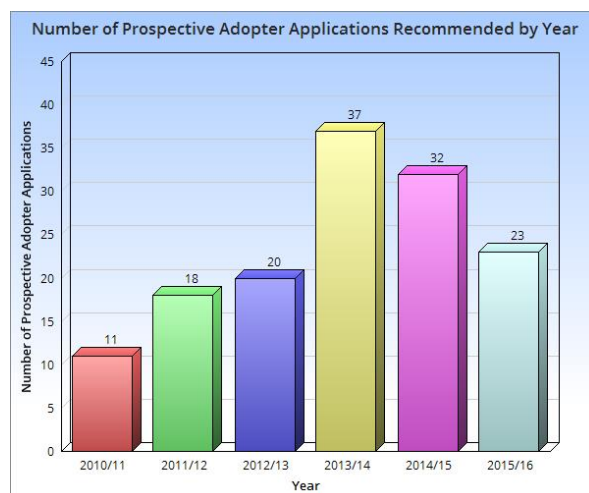


- With the relatively new system of calling only a section of panel members to each meeting, the previous opportunity to train all panel members together has been lost. It is important that at least one day per year is arranged for joint training for all panel members together with adoption staff.
- The quality of reports remains good but the stresses referred to in my last report continue. The pressures of meeting time deadlines has impacted on the depth of some assessments and probably been a significant contributor to the four disrupted cases we have seen over the last two years. We have had excellent Disruption Reports about these cases which have been of great value to panel in informing their future decision making.
- We have welcomed an increase in Inter Agency Placements for the children with more complex backgrounds. The Government reimbursement fund ,for the

interagency fee for children from complex backgrounds, would appear to have a positive impact for children. The number of children linked with Adopters at panel throughout last year was broadly the same as the previous year.



- The number of prospective adopters recommended for approval has continued to decline, in line with National trends. The Government initiative to increase adoption recruitment led to a peak of applications in 2013/14 but since then approved adopters' growing frustration with not being able to find a placement has possibly had an impact on further recruitment.



- The Chair and Vice Chair have attended the 6 monthly Adoption and Permanence Forums with managers from the Department and have welcomed these opportunities to learn of Portsmouth's plans for Adoption and to have opportunities to give feedback.

Maura O'Reilly
Chair of the Adoption Panel June 2016