

**Title of meeting:** Cabinet member for Children and Families Services  
**Subject:** Annual Adoption Panel Activity Report November 2017  
**Date of meeting:** 5 December 2017  
**Report by:** Jackie Clark, Service Leader, Adoption  
**Wards affected:** None

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## 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.
- 1.2. The Lead Member is asked to note the performance of the Portsmouth Adoption Agency in terms of:
  - (a) Reducing waiting times for children being placed in permanent families.
  - (b) Sustained number of children adopted in contrast to the national picture

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1. The previous report was prepared March 2017 and presented July 2017. This report will update the Lead Member on Portsmouth Adoption Agency's performance between April 1 and September 30 2017 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.
- 3.2. Government grants have been made available for local authorities to develop these agencies and Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council, Isle of Wight Council and Hampshire County Council are working with the voluntary sector to develop a regional adoption agency (RAA) - Adoption South Central. The proposed date for the RAA to go live is October 2018.

## 4. Areas that are doing well

- 4.1. The number of Looked After Children leaving care through adoption has generally continued to be in accordance with government-led timescales. Last year 35 children were adopted and between April and September this year there have been 16 children adopted. A further 12 children have been matched and placed with their prospective adoptive families and it is anticipated their applications for adoption orders will be submitted to court within the next three months.

- 4.2. Nationally there has been a reduction in the number of prospective adoptive families coming forward and Portsmouth has experienced a reduction in the number of adoptive families being recruited. The vast majority of adoptive families recruited and approved by Portsmouth live within a 50-mile radius of the city, as Portsmouth children need to be placed outside of the city in order to protect the security of the adoptive placement. Fifty percent of the children matched in the first two quarters this year have been with Portsmouth approved adoptive families and fifty percent with other agency adoptive families. This reflects Portsmouth being proactive with wide-scale family finding for children particularly with complex needs, which may take time, but has secured the most suitable families for those children. Family-finding social workers are proactive in family finding for children needing adoption. They work closely with the adopters' social workers identifying those children and adoptive families that may be the most suitable match. They also refer to the government National Adoption Register, the national family finding website Linkmaker, national adoptive family exchange events and children's adoption activity days.
- 4.3. In Portsmouth the children placed with adoptive families between April and September 2017 include four pairs of siblings and one child with significant lifelong health issues. Many children needing adoption come from families with complex backgrounds where they have experienced ongoing neglect and parents involved in domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse. Research shows the impact of those experiences can have a significant impact upon the child's development and these children need nurturing, robust and secure families able support these children through to adulthood. Prospective adopters undertake a six-month assessment to enable them to develop the knowledge and understanding related to adoption preparing them for a child/children to join their family.
- 4.4. For some very young children unable to live with their birth family it is possible for them to be placed with prospective adoptive families, rather than go into foster care whilst the courts decide the child's long-term future care. These adoptive families are approved as adoptive parents, but also temporarily as foster carers. Birth families and the courts are fully informed of these placements and can be supportive, as it means the child can stay in one placement whilst care proceedings take place - the court may decide the child returns to birth family or remains in the placement, whereby the placement becomes an adoptive placement. These placements are known as Fostering for Adoption Placements (FfA), currently there have been six children placed and/or adopted through Fostering for Adoption placements.
- 4.5. Portsmouth's timeliness for children being adopted has continued to improve. The government measurement in number of days from the date the child entered care to the date the child is placed with an adoptive family has improved from 541 days in March 2016 (average over three years) to 488 in September 2017. This compares favourably to the national England average number of days between 2013 and 2016, which is 558 days.
- 4.6. In order to support adoptive families and minimise the risk of adoption breakdown, the adoption support service has continued to develop offering therapeutic parenting strategies, support with child-on-parent violence, life-story work, as well as offering group workshops for specific issues related to adoption. The adoption support service in conjunction with special guardianship support is a relatively high-demand service for families. The service has been boosted - between April and September 2017 18 families have been able to access specialist therapeutic support through funding created by the

Government's Adoption Support Fund at a total cost of £75,279. This compares to £29,327 granted during the same period last year. The ASF has been particularly beneficial enabling external providers to support those families living outside of Portsmouth.

- 4.7. Adoptive families are supported by the adoption support service for three years after the making of the adoption order and thereafter they are entitled to support from the adoption agency local authority in which they live until the child reaches the age of 18. Therefore, Portsmouth is responsible for those children they placed with adoptive families and those placed by other adoption agencies within the city three years after the adoption order. The Adoption Support Service has continued to develop in order to provide a range of support to families. Between April and September 2017 19 Adoption Support Needs Assessments (ASNAs) have been completed. Common themes for adoptive families are children's issues with identity; managing transitions - particularly in school leading to risk of being excluded and child-on-parent violence.
- 4.8. In response to feedback from adoptive parents and their children this year the support service has provided the third adopted children's group, which focuses on supporting those children with issues related to understanding and feeling positive about their adoptive status, developing peer relationships, supporting children with transitions - particularly school. Feedback from the adoptive families includes "A group of children he interacted with without trouble, angst, anxiety... somewhere where he wasn't the 'naughty boy'...". For one child it was the first time he was able to join a group activity that was after school.
- 4.9. The Adoption Service continues to learn and improve following feedback provided by adopted adults and birth parents. For the referrals received for birth records, counselling and intermediary work there is an emerging theme of younger adults who were adopted requesting their adoption records. Younger adults adopted are more likely to have been adopted through care proceedings and it is evident that adopted adults need to understand how and why decisions were made to separate them from birth family and that they have full and accurate information recorded in their adoption files pertaining to local authority and court decisions where they are separated from their siblings. Therefore the adoption service work informs children's social work practise working closely with the Portsmouth Children and Families Academy and children's social work teams to support them in preparing children's assessments and documents that children may later access as adopted adults.
- 4.10. Adoption birth-parent counselling is an open offer to birth parents involved in care proceedings leading to their child being adopted. Many birth parents are not ready to access this service in parallel with or just after care proceedings and will access the service months, or years, later. They may also join the quarterly birth parent support group, which comprises birth parents having relinquished children many years ago and birth parents having children removed from their care to adoption.

## **5. Areas for consideration**

- 5.1. Portsmouth has approved five adoptive families between April and September 2017 and a further two families have been approved since the beginning of October this year, which in line with the national trend, is a reduction in prospective adopters going forward. This year a recruitment event held at the beginning of Adoption Week in October at Marwell Zoo, promoted via radio advertising, was attended by 18 potential adoptive families generating one immediate adopter applicant assessment. A further ten potential

adopter families are preparing to submit applications within the next six months to be assessed.

- 5.2. Nationally, the number of children needing adoption has reduced and Portsmouth did see a reduction from an average of 42 to 32 children at any one time over the course of a year. However the number of Portsmouth children with plans for adoption appears to be at an increasing rate in comparison to last year, as is the number of placement orders granted by the court. Portsmouth continues to maintain a robust permanence tracking process to ensure children becoming Looked After have a clear, timely permanence plan appropriate to their needs. This may be placement with birth parents, special guardians, with extended family, long-term fostering or adoption. Permanence tracking will continue to monitor the number of children becoming Looked After to ensure early identification of those children needing permanence outside of birth families.
- 5.3. Currently, there are nine children waiting to be matched to adoptive families. This includes a sibling group of three, two children aged seven plus and a child with special needs. The majority of Portsmouth children need to be placed outside of the city in order to maintain security of the adoptive placement. The challenge for the service is recruiting adoptive families in a competitive environment with neighbouring local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies.
- 5.4. The adoption support service is available to an average total of 104 families each year, which includes adoptive families transferring from other local authorities. The availability of the Adoption Support Fund has been invaluable in bolstering the support needs. Whilst there have been some restrictions newly implemented by the ASF criteria for applications, Portsmouth families to date have not been adversely affected by these. The challenge will be for the regional adoption agency to develop and sustain the improved adoption support services once the ASF ceases in 2020, within a static budget.

## **6. Areas of development**

- 6.1. A Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) project team has been established to drive the development of Adoption South Central, which is expected to go live in October 2018. Adoption South Central comprises Portsmouth City Council, Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council; Southampton City Council the voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs), Barnardo's, Parents and Children Together (PACT) and Adoption UK. With the contributions from the VAAs the four local authorities will come together to provide a regional agency specialising in the recruitment of adoptive families; expecting high quality family finding for the local authorities and offering comprehensive support for adoptive families.
- 6.2. The benefits of an RAA to Portsmouth will be:
  - 6.2.1. The removal of local competitive recruitment for prospective adoptive families.
  - 6.2.2. Immediate access to a wider pool of adoptive families for Portsmouth children across the region.
  - 6.2.3. Adoptive placements more localised within the local regional area, promoting efficiency in adoption support.
  - 6.2.4. Adoptive families being able to access robust comprehensive support packages to mitigate risk of disruption for children with complex needs.

6.2.5. Building on local authority good practice, skills and expertise to enable prospective adopters to be fully prepared and suitably matched and supported with those children placed - securing that child's future throughout their childhood and beyond.

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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:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
Adoption activity 2011-18	Appendix 1
PCC Adoption Scorecard	Appendix 2

## Appendix 1

Table 1: Adoption activity 2011 – 2018

<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Adoption orders No. of children adopted</b>	<b>No. of children's plans for adoption agreed</b>	<b>Placement Orders granted</b>	<b>No. of children linked with adoptive family for adoption</b>	<b>No. of prospective adoptive families approved</b>	<b>Placements disrupted</b>
2010	2011	14	21		15	11	0
2011	2012	16	42		13	18	0
2012	2013	13	30		26	20	0
2013	2014	27	41	30	35	37	0
2014	2015	34	29	27	31	32	2
2015	2016	25	41	41	28	22	2
2016	2017	35	21	19	31	21	0
2017	2018*	16	14	11	12	5	0

\*April 1<sup>st</sup> -Sept 30<sup>th</sup>-Qtr 1 and 2

Table 2: Placement type

From	To	PCC	OLA*	VAA*
2014	2015	14	6	11
2015	2016	22	2	4
2016	2017	19	5	6
2017	<b>2018</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>

*\*Other local authority*

*\*Voluntary Adoption Agency*

## Appendix 2 - PCC Adoption Scorecard

Portsmouth Team Report - September 2017

A1 National England average 558 days

A2 National England average 226 days

### Adoption Team Report September

**A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)**

3yr average	Sep-16	Oct-16	Nov-16	Dec-16	Jan-17	Feb-17	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17
A1	492	490	482	482	486	493	493	484	482	474	481	482	488

**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)**

3yr average	Sep-16	Oct-16	Nov-16	Dec-16	Jan-17	Feb-17	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17
A2	235	235	230	230	236	239	241	242	238	242	252	250	253

**A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)**

	Sep-16	Oct-16	Nov-16	Dec-16	Jan-17	Feb-17	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17
Number	81	80	79	77	79	78	74	73	73	68	68	71	71



