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Title of meeting: Cabinet member for Children and Families Services
Subject: Annual Adoption Panel Activity Report April 2018
Date of meeting: 06 July 2018
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.
- 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.
 - (c) The Adoption Panel annual report by Maura O'Reilly the independent panel chair.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The previous report was prepared October and presented December 2017. This report will update the Lead Member on Portsmouth Adoption Agency performance for the year April 1 2017 to 31 March 2018 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) - Adopt South. The date for the RAA to go live is April 2019. A proposal for the RAA was accepted by Cabinet on 5 June 2018.

4. Areas that are doing well

- 4.1. The timeliness and number of Looked After Children leaving foster care through adoption has generally continued to be in accordance with government-led targets. Portsmouth has an average of 31 children needing adoptive families at any time over the course of a year. For the year 2017-2018 30 children have been adopted and at the time of writing applications for adoption orders for four children were pending in court. Subject to the court granting those adoption orders, the number of children adopted this year is fairly consistent with the previous year which was 35.
- 4.2. During this year 20 children were matched and placed with their prospective adoptive families and applications for adoption orders are generally made to the court after ten weeks of being placed. Of those children placed with adoptive families there were five pairs of siblings, including twins and children with developmental delay, an eight year old child and a child with very complex health and development issues. At the end of March there were 17 children waiting for a prospective adoptive family to be found, including a sibling group of three and two children with disabilities.
- 4.3. Whilst Portsmouth has experienced a reduction number of prospective adoptive families coming forward (in line with a national trend), we have continued to use a range of means to identify the most suitable adoptive families for children. 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 identity of the adoptive placement. Of the children matched 55% percent were matched with Portsmouth approved adoptive families and 45% 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. The number of Adoption Panels held for the year has reduced due to the reduction in number of prospective adopter assessments having reduced but the panel has remained consistent in hearing applications for children being matched. It is anticipated that one of the benefits of being in the RAA will be to reduce the numbers and costs of placing children with other agency adoptive families.
- 4.4. Many children needing adoption come from families with complex backgrounds where they have experienced ongoing neglect and parents involved in domestic abuse, 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, resilient and stable families able to care for the child through to adulthood and sometimes beyond. 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.
- 4.5. For some very young children unable to live with their birth family it is possible for them to be placed with Fostering for Adoption Placements (FfA). These are adoptive families who are also approved temporarily as foster carers. It can offer the best opportunity for the child if the carer decides on a plan for adoption. Last year there have been five children placed and/or adopted through FfA placements.
- 4.6. 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 March 2017. This compares favourably to the national England average number of days between 2014 and 2017, which is 520 days.

4.7. There are a number of reasons why the timescales can vary for children who are adopted. Below is a synopsis of 9 children who fell outside the target timescale for adoption. (A2 indicator on page 12).

- 1 x initial prospective adoptive placement disruption.
- Siblings x 2 were still at home when the Placement Order was granted. Therefore work on preparation for adoption could only start once there was separation and various applications to revoke by the birth family delayed the process.
- 1 child with complex health needs required additional medical investigation and reduced number of potential families.
- 1 child - initial family placement broke down and first potential linking did not progress.
- Siblings x2 with complex health needs and first potential linking withdrew.
- 1 child with complex health needs. Prospective adopters withdrew due to further knowledge of extent of disability

5. Adopter Recruitment

5.1. Adopter recruitment has fallen again this year while the number of children with placement orders has increased which reflects the national trend. Recruiting prospective adopters is very competitive as each local authority is seeking adoptive families for their Looked After Children. If a child is placed with another local authority's adoptive family or voluntary adoptive agency family the local authority responsible for the child incurs a government set universal fee.

5.2. Portsmouth had a total of **167** enquiries this year which resulted in total of **63 potential adoptive families** attending information sessions which led to **45** initial assessment visits culminating in **17** assessments in process over the course of the year leading to **11** adoptive families being approved as prospective adopters.

5.3. Of the remaining initial assessment visits 20 potential adoptive families were deferred due to the time to make an application to become an adopter not being right for them due to a number of reasons, for example, house moves; employment changes, health issues. However, the service retains a link with these potential families and have booked follow up appointments with them. The remaining seven potential applicants either withdrew from the enquiry process or were counselled out due to not being in a position to apply to become an adoptive family at that time or very near future.

5.4. To maximise opportunities to recruit adopters much of 2018/19's marketing strategy will be to have joint recruitment events with the Fostering Service. This was trialled at an event in January and the initial outcome was positive - leading to two families being assessed and a further two will be assessed pending some personal issues that have now been resolved.

5.5. Two further recruitment events are scheduled for May at the Spinnaker Tower and July at the Solent Hotel Fareham. All recruitment events are publicised through local radio and social media. It is anticipated that from September 2018 the competition for adopter recruitment between Portsmouth, Southampton, Isle of Wight and Hampshire will begin to reduce as each local authority will be recruiting prospective adopters as part of a regional adoption agency strategy.

6. Adoption Support

- 6.1. 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. Over the course of the year there have been 32 Adoption Support Needs Assessments (ASNAs) completed. The themes for adoptive families needing support are managing children's challenging behaviours resulting from the impact of early trauma and neglect.
- 6.2. Portsmouth currently has 142 children placed with adoptive families eligible for adoption support. Of those families 32 have had an assessment of their support needs culminating in support being provided by either direct work with child/family and or specialist therapeutic support. Adoptive families can refer for an assessment of their needs at any time, others may receive support through attending learning workshops, the adopters support group or direct work with an allocated worker.
- 6.3. 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, sensory integration guidance, life-story work, regular adopter 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. Adoptive families continue to access monthly consultations with our adoption CAMHS practitioner; virtual school education worker and education psychologist.
- 6.4. The service has been boosted as 36 families have been able to access specialist therapeutic support through funding created by the Government's Adoption Support Fund at a total cost of £114,091. This compares to 12 successful applications £51,828 granted for the year 2016/17. The ASF has been particularly beneficial enabling those families living outside of Portsmouth to receive specialist therapeutic support, for example therapeutic parenting courses, sensory integration therapy, Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR).
- 6.5. 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 in school. Many adopted children need support to make sense of their birth history and adoptive history and appear to have enjoyed sharing their thoughts and feelings with other adopted children. The feedback from adoptive parents and their children has been very positive and led to the introduction of our adopted children's social activity days which will be held at least once a term.
- 6.6. The Adoption Service continues to learn and improve following feedback provided by adopted adults and birth parents. For 35 referrals received for birth records counselling, intermediary and tracing 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. Many adopted adults will be successfully reunified with their siblings as adults.

6.7. Adoption birth-parent counselling is an open offer to birth parents losing a child to adoption. 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. The majority of adopted children will continue to have indirect contact with birth parents up to the age of 18 through a letterbox exchange co-ordinated by the service. This year there were 250 letterbox exchanges.

7. Areas for consideration

7.1. Nationally, the number of children needing adoption has reduced and Portsmouth did see a reduction from an average of 42 to 31 children since 2015/16. 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, endorsing a child's plan for adoption, 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 relatives, long-term fostering or adoption. For the year 2017/18 22 children left care to live with relatives via special guardianship compared to 13 the previous two years. Special guardians are entitled to support for three years from the local authority placing the child and for Portsmouth the special guardian support service sits within the Adoption Support Service and is a high demand service for carers supporting children with complex needs.

7.2. Currently, there are seventeen 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 when there has been a national reduction in potential adoptive families, particularly for children with complex needs, in a competitive environment with neighbouring local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies.

7.3. 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 introduced in 2017 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.

8. Areas of development

8.1. A Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) project team has been established to drive the development of Adopt South, which is expected to go live in April 2019. Adopt South 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.

8.2. The benefits of a regional adoption agency to Portsmouth will be:

- 8.2.1. The removal of local competitive recruitment for prospective adoptive families.
- 8.2.2. Immediate access to a wider pool of adoptive families for Portsmouth children across the region.
- 8.2.3. Adoptive placements more localised within the local regional area, promoting efficiency in adoption support, particularly specialist local service providers for adoption support.
- 8.2.4. Adoptive families being able to access robust comprehensive support packages to mitigate risk of disruption for children with complex needs.
- 8.2.5. 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.
- 8.2.6. The RAA adoption expertise to contribute to each local authority children's social work learning and development programme to promote and improve early permanence planning for children in care.

Signed by Alison Jeffery, - Director of Children, Families and Education

Appendices:

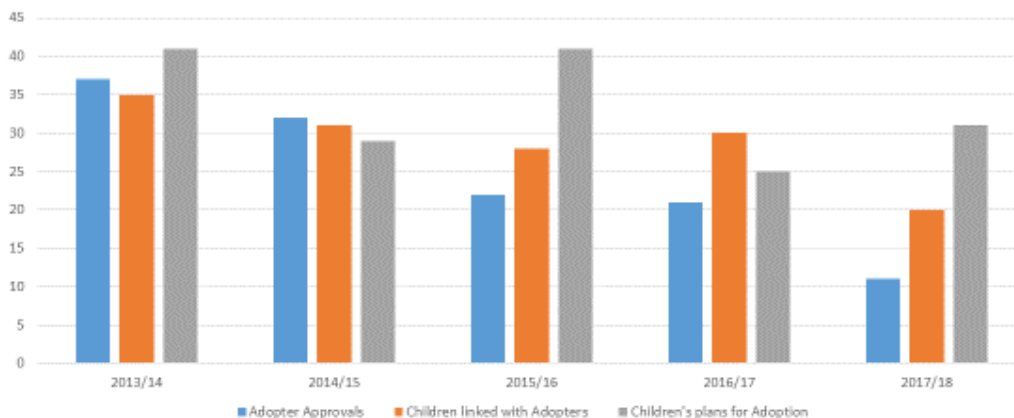
- Adoption Panel Chair Report Appendix 1
- Adoption activity 2014-2018 Appendix 2
- PCC Adoption Scorecard Appendix 3

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:

- This report covers Adoption Panel activity during the period April 2017- March 2018
- During the year, 24 fortnightly meetings are scheduled with the understanding that some may be cancelled. Until this year we have averaged 21 panels per year. This year we have held 13 panels, of which 2 were additional panels organised to meet social workers time schedules, and 13 panels were cancelled.
- So the most significant issue this year, and in particular since July/August, has been the number of cancelled panels. This drop in activity is reflected in the figures for this year as shown below.
- The most significant drop has been in the 50% reduction in the number of adopters approved and this is reflected in other agencies on a national basis. Children's plans have broadly held up but placements with adopters are down by 30%.
- The only disruption to placement was a Fostering for Adoption placement which technically is a foster placement but with approved adopters. Panel has had an opportunity to discuss the disruption report and learn from it.
- It might be helpful to include statistics on F4A placements in future reports.

ADOPTION ACTIVITY 2013-2018



ADOPTION ACTIVITY 2013-2018 in FIGURES

	Children adopted	Adoption Plans agreed	Children linked with Adopters	Adopters approved	Disruptions
2013/14	27	41	35	37	0
2014/15	34	29	31	32	2

2015/16	25	41	28	22	2
2016/17	37	25	31	22	0
2017/18	30	31	20	11	0

- The quality of most of the Portsmouth reports remain good and panel give feedback on areas where additional information would have been helpful if it had been included in the report.
- Panel have requested that in certain circumstances ASI assessments are completed for prospective adopters with more complex backgrounds and we are pleased that this is now being done, although panel has asked that fuller information be shared with them about the outcomes of these assessments.
- Panel members feel that they have sufficient time to read the papers (a week) and can access them securely on their laptops.
- This year we have appreciated full written reports from the Medical adviser regarding her meetings with prospective adopters when discussing children to be placed.
- All panel members' appraisals have been completed for 2017/18. As always, they remain enthusiastic about their membership of panel and conscientious about their responsibilities.
- Throughout the year Panel have alerted the senior managers to their concerns about two particular children, whose welfare appeared to be compromised for too long before action was taken. Panel have been grateful and appreciative of the speedy and considered responses received.
- It would be helpful if training could be organised for panel about the realities of safeguarding children in the community. Whilst we have benefitted from brief presentations at panel on assessment and support and we have had some on line learning, panel members would like more opportunities for face-to-face training for the whole panel together.

Maura O'Reilly March 2018

Appendix 2

Adoption activity 2013 – 2018

Year 1 April - 31 March	Adoption orders No. of children adopted	Children's plans for adoption agreed	Placement Orders granted	Children linked with adoptive family	Prospective adoptive families approved	FfA placements	Placements disrupted
2013/14	27	41	30	35	37	0	0
2014/15	34	29	27	31	32	1	2
2015/16	25	41	41	28	22	4	2
2016/17	35	21	19	31	21	5	0
2017/18	30	31	30	20	11	5	0 (1 FfA placement ended)

Table 2: Placement type

***OLA other local authority *Voluntary adoption agency**

From	To	PCC	OLA*	VAA*
2014	2015	14	6	11
2015	2016	22	2	4
2016	2017	19	5	6
2017	2018	11	7	2

Appendix 3 - PCC Adoption Scorecard

Portsmouth Adoption Service Scorecard - March 2018

Government thresholds for

A1 426 days

A2 121days

Government Adoption Leadership Board figures for year 2014-2017

A1 National England average 520 days

A2 National England average 220 days

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

3yr average	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
A1	493	484	482	474	481	482	488	454	460	429	429	410	414

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	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
A2	241	242	238	242	252	250	253	228	239	213	213	207	211

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

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
Number	74	73	73	68	68	71	71	71	72	73	75	77	78
%	56.5%	56.6%	57.5%	54.4%	55.3%	56.8%	57.3%	59.2%	59.5%	60.8%	61.5%	63.1%	63.9%

A4: Adoptions from care (number adopted and % leaving care who are adopted)

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
Number	96	99	96	94	97	96	95	93	96	98	98	98	92
%	24.1%	24.3%	24.2%	23.5%	22.9%	22.8%	22.9%	22.2%	22.5%	22.5%	23.0%	22.6%	21.6%

A5: Number and % of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
Number	19	19	19	16	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
%	12.5%	12.7%	12.8%	11.2%	9.4%	9.2%	9.3%	9.6%	9.4%	9.6%	9.4%	9.4%	9.4%

A6: Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds (number adopted and % of BME children leaving care who are adopted)

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
Number	6	6	6	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
%	8.6%	7.9%	8.1%	6.8%	6.3%	6.3%	4.8%	4.3%	4.4%	3.9%	3.8%	3.6%	3.5%

A7: Adoptions of children aged five or over (number adopted and % of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted)

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
Number	20	20	20	19	20	20	20	19	20	19	19	18	17
%	8.1%	7.9%	8.1%	7.5%	7.4%	7.5%	7.5%	7.0%	7.3%	6.7%	6.9%	6.5%	6.2%

A8: Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
A8	25	24	24	23	23	22	23	23	23	23	23	23	23

A9: Number of children awaiting adoption (as at Month end)

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
A9	38	33	34	34	29	32	32	30	28	26	28	28	34

Choose Local Authority	Portsmouth
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Children			
	A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)	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)	A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)
LA's 3 year average (2014-17)	488	241	75 (57%)
Distance from 2014-17 performance threshold (426 and 121 days)	62 days	120 days	n/a
1 year trend - Improvement from 2016 to 2017	Average time in 2017 was shorter than in 2016	Average time in 2017 was shorter than in 2016	n/a
3 year trend - Improvement from 2013-16 to 2014-17	Average time in 2014-17 was shorter than in 2013-16	Average time in 2014-17 was shorter than in 2013-16	n/a
England 3 year average (2014-17)	520	220	11120 (53%)