

THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY
(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Equality Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

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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: 18th December 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 progress of Portsmouth becoming part of a regional adoption agency.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The previous report was prepared 1st April 2018 and presented July 2018. This report updates the Lead Member on Portsmouth Adoption Agency performance for the period April 1 2018 to 31 October 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 have worked with the voluntary sector to develop a regional adoption agency (RAA) - Adopt South. The date for Adopt South to go live is April 2019. A proposal for the RAA was accepted by Cabinet on 5 June 2018 and a summary of the progress to date is provided within this report.

3.3. Portsmouth Children and Families Service were subject to Ofsted inspection September 2018 and the service was graded as 'Good' . With regard to the adoption service the Ofsted report stated:

"Children who need adoption benefit from timely decision-making and effective planning. Good assessment, training and support is available for prospective adopters. Children move quickly to live with their adoptive families and they enjoy stability. Good use is made of the adoption support fund to meet children's therapeutic needs. Close work with CAMHS, the virtual school, educational psychologists and play therapist holistically supports carers to meet their children's needs."

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 period 1st April-31st October 2018 seven children have been adopted and at the time of writing applications for adoption orders for two children were pending in court. This figure is a significant reduction from the number of children adopted over the same period last year (16); however the number of children with court orders as the court has deemed them needing prospective adoptive families is 22 which is double the number of children during the same period last year (11). Therefore this year there is an increase in the number of children needing adoptive families.

4.2. During this period 12 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 two pairs of siblings age 0-6yrs, one child with developmental delay, and one child of black African heritage. There are currently 18 children waiting for a prospective adoptive family to be found, including two children with disabilities, three children of black and minority ethnicity, and six sibling pairs including a pair where one is over the age of five. Sadly, despite a robust support package in place one adoption placement ended for an older child with emotional and behavioural issues.

4.3. Whilst Portsmouth has experienced a reduction in the 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 (but not within the city) in order to protect the identity of the adoptive placement. Of the children matched 75% percent were matched with Portsmouth approved adoptive families and 25% 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. One of the benefits of Portsmouth becoming part of the RAA is reducing the number and costs of children placed with other agency adoptive families.

- 4.4. 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. Since 1st April there have been two children placed and/or adopted through FfA 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 March 2017. This compares favourably to the national England average number of days between 2014 and 2017, which is 520 days.

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 has an adopter recruitment strategy in place for 2018/19 and to date there have been events at Portsmouth Football Club and at the Spinnaker Tower .
- 5.3. 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. Since 1st April 2018 there have been 132 potential adopter enquiries leading to 31 initial assessment visits with a total of 23 applicants in the process of being assessed as prospective adoptive families.
- 5.4. The Government timescale for the adopter two stage assessment is a total of six months . Last year the average timescale for assessments completed was six months. The timescale for the assessments completed to date is 6.4months. Factors that can impact timescales are DBS checks and the timing of the formal medical examination and report - both are legal requirements as part of the prospective adopter assessment report (PAR).

6. Adoption Support

- 6.1. Many children needing adoption come from families with complex backgrounds where they have experienced trauma due to ongoing neglect , families characterised by 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. As children are matched with prospective adoptive families it is imperative to those families they are able to access support. In recognition of their support needs the Government introduced the Adoption Support Fund for adoptive families in 2015 and Pupil Premium for adopted children in school.

- 6.2. 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. The themes for adoptive families needing support are managing children's challenging behaviours resulting from the impact of early trauma and neglect.
- 6.3. Portsmouth currently has 142 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.
- 6.4. 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.
- 6.5. Last year the service was boosted as 36 children accessed specialist therapeutic support through funding created by the Government's Adoption Support Fund (ASF) at a total cost of £114,091. From 1st April this year there have been 14 families supported via ASF funding totalling £51,404. The ASF has been particularly beneficial enabling those families living outside of Portsmouth to receive specialist therapeutic support, for example specialist psychological assessment, multi-disciplinary assessment, therapeutic parenting courses and sensory integration therapy.
- 6.6. In response to feedback from adoptive parents and their children over (?) this period the support service has provided three adopted children's activity sessions during the school holidays. Many adopted children need support to make sense of their birth history and adoptive history so there has been a workshop for parents to help them discuss their child/ren's history,
- 6.7. The Adoption Service continues to learn and improve following feedback provided by adopted adults and birth parents. Between 1st April and 31st October there have been 19 referrals received for birth records counselling, intermediary and tracing work. This figure is consistent with last year which culminated in a total of 35 referrals being made. There is an increasing number 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 the detail in decisions made to separate them from birth parents and particularly if they were separated as siblings. Many adopted adults will be successfully reunified with their siblings as adults.
- 6.8. 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 adoption service. Over the course of the year there are 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 18 children waiting to be matched to adoptive families. 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 142 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.

The agreed model for the RAA -Adopt South is a centralised recruitment and marketing team with each of the local authority adoption teams delivering prospective adopter assessment, training and support and post adoption support service for adoptive families, children and birth family members.

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.

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Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families and Education

Appendices:

- Adoption activity 2014-2019 Appendix 1
- PCC Adoption Scorecard Appendix 2

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

Appendix 1

Adoption activity 2013 – 2019

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)
2018/19*	7	22	20	12	7	2	1

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 2 - PCC Adoption Scorecard

Portsmouth Adoption Service Scorecard - October 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

ADOPTION TEAM SCORECARD - OCTOBER 2018

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

3yr average	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
A1	454	460	429	429	410	414	416	415	414	413	410	412	400

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	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
A2	228	239	213	213	207	211	211	212	211	211	208	211	199

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

	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
Number	71	72	73	75	77	78	78	78	75	75	75	80	79
%	59.2%	59.5%	60.8%	61.5%	63.1%	63.9%	63.9%	65.0%	63.0%	61.9%	61.5%	63.5%	64.8%

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

	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
Number	93	96	98	98	98	92	88	87	86	85	83	83	83
%	22.2%	22.5%	22.5%	23.0%	22.6%	21.6%	20.6%	20.6%	20.2%	20.0%	19.5%	19.5%	19.5%

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

	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
Number	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	14	13	12	12	12	15
%	9.6%	9.4%	9.6%	9.4%	9.4%	9.4%	9.4%	10.3%	9.4%	8.7%	8.7%	8.7%	10.9%

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

	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
Number	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
%	4.3%	4.4%	3.9%	3.8%	3.6%	3.5%	3.4%	3.4%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%

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

	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
Number	19	20	19	19	18	17	16	14	14	14	13	13	13
%	7.0%	7.3%	6.7%	6.9%	6.5%	6.2%	5.8%	5.0%	5.1%	5.1%	4.8%	4.8%	4.8%

A8: Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)

	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
A8	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	21	22	22	22	22

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

	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18
A9	30	28	26	28	28	34	38	37	37	40	44	47	43