

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

Title of meeting: Cabinet member for Children and Families Services
Subject: Annual Adoption Panel Activity Report December 2019
Date of meeting: 31/01/20
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) Update re Portsmouth becoming part of the Regional Adoption Agency -Adopt South.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The previous report was presented March 2019. This report will update the Lead Member on Portsmouth Adoption Service activity for the period April 1 2019 to 31 December 2019 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 adoption 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 the voluntary sector to develop a regional adoption agency (RAA) - Adopt South. The proposal for Adopt South was agreed by Cabinet on 5 June 2018. Subsequently Adopt South went live 1 April 2019. A summary of Adopt South development 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:
- 3.4. '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 to adoption has generally continued to be in accordance with government-led targets. Portsmouth currently has an average of 25 children with a proposed plan of adoption. Some of those children will successfully return to the care of their birthparents or live other family members.
- 4.2. The number of children adopted during the period is 20 and this cohort of children includes a sibling group of three, two sibling pairs, including twins. Two of the children were age 5 or more.
- 4.3. There were 16 children matched with adoptive families whereby applications for adoption orders in the process of application for adoption orders being submitted to court. This group of children include two children with very complex health and development issues who have been waiting for adoptive families for more than twelve months.
- 4.4. For some 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 court decides they need to be adopted. Between 1st April 2019 and 31 December 2019 there were two children matched with Fostering for Adoption families
- 4.5. At 31 December 19 there were 10 children awaiting for adoptive families to be identified. Of those children waiting four have complex health and development issues, two of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME).
- 4.6. In comparison with the year 2018/19 the number of Portsmouth children with a plan of adoption has reduced and reflects the national trend of less children leaving care for adoption. When children come into care reunification birth parents or permanence with a member of the child's extended family will always be explored before an adoption plan agreed. This reflects the legal duty that a children becomes subject of care proceedings the court will only grant an order agreeing for a child to be placed for adoption when it is satisfied the child cannot live with birth family or member of the wider family. Therefore the number of children with adoption plans may have reduced but the number of children moving to other permanence placements - kinship foster care and special guardianship has increased. Children are also returning to parents care with a care order in place to

enable the local authority to share parental responsibility until the family is in a position to fully care for their child.

- 4.7. Many children needing adoption come from families with complex backgrounds where they have experienced trauma due to parental neglect, domestic abuse, drugs 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.
- 4.8. Portsmouth's timeliness for children being adopted has continued to improve. The government threshold measurement in number of days from the date the child entered care to the date the child is placed with an adoptive family is 426 days. For the current period Portsmouth's timescale is 385 days.
- 4.9. The other government timescale is the number of days the court agrees a child to be placed for adoption and the local authority agreeing to the potential match with an adoptive family is 121 days. For Portsmouth the timescale for this period is 204 days. Both sets of timescales compare favourably with the England national average timescales published December for the year 2018/19 by the government Adoption and Special Guardianship Board (ASGLB) at 433 and 173 days. Some children needing adoptive families have very complex needs and identifying the most suitable family for them can take some time. This can impact timescales but once that family identified the positive outcome for the child is relative to the child. For Portsmouth children needing adoption the opportunity to move from foster carer to a suitable adoptive family within timescales is likely to be boosted by the implementation of the regional adoption agency Adopt South that launched 1st April 2019.

5. Adopt South

- 5.1. Adopt South comprises Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Southampton, Portsmouth local authorities with the voluntary adoption agencies Parents and Children Together (PACT) and Barnardo's adoption agencies. The primary functions of Adopt South are to recruit and support adoptive families providing a comprehensive assessment and training service to prepare prospective adoptive parents for adoption and to provide a wide range of adoption support services to those families who have adopted a child/children. The range of support includes one to one support, parenting programmes, specialist therapeutic support, mentoring, and social events.
- 5.2. The regional adoption agency has removed the competitive element of the four local authorities recruiting adoptive families through having a centralised recruitment service which has generated a total of 87 adoptive families being recruited at 31 December. For Portsmouth this has enabled children to be more likely placed with families across the regional area. Those children and their families are supported within a shared ethos of delivering a co-ordinated and high standard service throughout the process of adoption and beyond.
- 5.3. Adopter recruitment is measured against the threshold of a two stage assessment totalling six months. In Adopt South the majority have been completed within timescales and are potentially matched with a child/children within three months of being approved.

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.
- 6.2. Adoption support services have been strengthened by Adopt South. Portsmouth currently has 142 adoptive families eligible for adoption support. Families may request an assessment of their support needs at any time adoptive families can now access training programmes, workshops; mentoring and support groups, one to one support, consultations with educational psychologist and CAMHS practitioner and social activities.
- 6.3. The Government Adoption Support Fund (ASF), also enables adoptive families to have access therapeutic support. For the current period Portsmouth has made 21 applications for specialist support to be provided to families culminating in a total of £85,295 being granted. The ASF has been particularly beneficial enabling those families living outside of the geographical region to receive specialist therapeutic support, for example multi-disciplinary assessments, therapeutic parenting courses and sensory integration therapy.
- 6.4. The Adoption Service continues to learn and improve following feedback provided by adopted adults and birth parents. Between 1st April and 31st December there have been 27 referrals received for birth records counselling, intermediary work. This figure is consistent with last year which culminated in a total of 42 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. There has been an increase in adopted adults seeking reunification with their birth family members, particularly siblings. This may be due to the subject of adoption being more open in the public domain and advances in development of internet and social media.
- 6.5. 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. Post adoption contact with birth family members is encouraged with adoptive families. 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 nationally and Portsmouth has seen a reduction in the number of children with a court agreed adoption

plan (Placement Order), over the past three years .Although the number of children adopted has increased from 2017/18. 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. Children may be placed with kinship (family and friends foster carers) before securing a Special Guardianship order. For the year 2018/19 a total 61 children were placed kinship carers or special guardians. For the current period there is a total of 30 children placed with kinship carers or special guardians. 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. 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. For 2020 the government has given a boost of 4.5million to the ASF which will enable families to access specialist therapeutic support. Adopt South has meant the four local authorities have centralised their ASF enabling the families to access to a wide range of specialist support. The challenge will be for the Adopt South to enhance and sustain the improved adoption support services within a static budget.

8. Areas of development

8.1. The Regional Adoption Agency 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. Adopt South specialises in the recruitment of adoptive families; high quality and expedient family finding for the local authorities and offering comprehensive support for adoptive families.

8.2. Adopt South proposes to recruit 150 adoptive families suitable for matching for a total of 170-180 children likely to need adoptive families from the four local authorities by April 2020. The government is providing £650,000 investment to regional adoption agencies to boost adoptive family recruitment, particularly for those children with complex needs and deemed harder to place i.e older children, sibling groups and children of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority heritage.

8.3. In summary the strengths of Adopt South to Portsmouth are:

8.3.1. The removal of local competitive recruitment for prospective adoptive families.

8.3.2. Immediate access to a wider pool of adoptive families for Portsmouth children across the region.

8.3.3. Adoptive placements more localised within the local regional area, promoting efficiency in adoption support, particularly specialist local service providers for adoption support.

8.3.4. 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.

- 8.3.5. Early indications regarding Adopt South show an increase in the number of adoptive families available for those children needing adoption and that the timeliness for Portsmouth children leaving care for adoption continues to be on an improving trajectory.
- 8.3.6. Regionalising adoption support enables adoptive families being able to access robust comprehensive support packages to mitigate risk of disruption for children with complex needs.

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Signed by (Director)

Appendices:

- Adoption activity 2014-2020
- PCC Adoption Scorecard December 2019

Appendix 1

Adoption activity 2013 – 2020

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	1
2018/19	15	30	29	25	15	5	0
2019/20* 01/04/19- 31/12/19	20	20	13	16	87 Total Adopt South	2	2

Appendix 2 - PCC Adoption Scorecard

Government thresholds for timeliness

A1: 426 days - from date child enters care to moving in with adoptive family

A2 : 121days -from date the court agrees to local authority placing a child for adoption to the date the local authority agrees the match for the child with an adoptive family

Government Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB), figures for year 2018/19

A1 National England average 433 days

A2 National England average 173 days

Please see Portsmouth's Adoption Scorecard December 2019 below

Adoption Team Report - December 2019

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

3yr average	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
A1	386	384	385	385	379	392	394	397	396	391	388	385

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	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
A2	191	190	188	187	183	201	201	202	206	200	200	204

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

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Number	76	81	76	72	67	64	67	69	67	66	62	62
%	61.79%	63.78%	62.30%	59.02%	59.82%	59.26%	60.36%	62.16%	60.91%	60.55%	60.78%	63.27%

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

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Number	83	87	81	81	74	77	78	77	76	77	75	75
%	18.57%	18.91%	17.53%	17.20%	15.61%	16.14%	16.25%	15.75%	15.32%	15.52%	14.56%	14.42%

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

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Number	15	12	12	14	16	18	20	19	19	18	20	19
%	10.87%	8.70%	8.70%	10.37%	13.18%	14.17%	15.15%	14.50%	14.62%	14.06%	16.00%	15.57%

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

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Number	6	6	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
%	3.82%	3.66%	2.40%	2.31%	1.69%	1.67%	1.65%	1.60%	1.55%	1.55%	1.48%	1.44%

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

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Number	13	14	12	12	10	11	11	10	10	10	9	9
%	4.10%	4.26%	3.57%	3.50%	2.88%	3.14%	3.14%	2.77%	2.72%	2.72%	2.33%	2.31%

A8: Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
A8	20	20	21	21	20	20	21	21	21	21	21	20

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

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
A9	44	44	43	41	38	33	35	37	36	34	29	25

Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board Quarterly Data Report: Q4 201819 - England New data on the performance of the adoption system in Quarter 4 of 2018-19 (January to March 2019) has been published by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB). The data is derived from the quarterly ASGLB adoption survey and other government statistical collections, and the report, produced by Coram-i, includes the following figures:

- At 31 March 2019 there were 2800 children with a placement order waiting to be placed with an adoptive family (a 4.4% decrease from 31 December 2018). □ 41% of children waiting at 31 March 2019 had been waiting 18 months or more (compared to 37% at 31 December 2018).**

- The number of new ADM decisions and placement orders have continued to fall with both decreasing 8% in 2018-19 compared to 2017-18.**

- The number of new registrations, prospective adopters awaiting approval and adoptive family approvals have all increased between 2017-18 and 2018-19 - by 14%, 27% and 1% respectively.**

Links to the ASGLB Business Intelligence report and full agency level data are provided on the Coram-i website.

